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# The Norfolk NATTERJACK

Number 78  
August 2002

## Toad-in-the-hole....

Welcome to the summer edition of the bulletin. A great many subjects are on offer so I trust there is something of interest for all.

Excursion reports are included for some of the recent meetings and I would like to make particular reference to the item on the Royal Norfolk Show - for those members that visited the stand will know what an excellent job David Nobbs did for the Society. David will also be heavily involved with the Natural History Day at Wheatfen (details page 8). Finally my thanks to all artists as well as contributors. Line drawings are always gratefully received for possible inclusion. **FF**

## Reminder:

If you would like to put written questions to the panel at the 'Farming & Wildlife' forum on November 19th please submit them in good time to Stephen Martin (3 St John's Close, Hethersett, NR9 3DQ; e-mail [stephen@smartin.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:stephen@smartin.fsnet.co.uk)) or Bob Ellis (11 Havelock Road, Norwich, NR2 3HQ; e-mail [bob@elymus.demon.co.uk](mailto:bob@elymus.demon.co.uk)).

## WANTED: MAMMAL RECORDER/EDITOR

The society is currently looking for an editor for the mammal section of the Bird and Mammal report, and mammal recorder for the county. If you would like to apply or wish further information please contact me at the address below.

For those of you wish to send in mammal records, The Norfolk Biological Records Centre is happy to accept these records direct, until such time as a new mammal recorder is found. Records should be addressed to:

Norfolk Biological  
Records Centre,  
Union House,  
Gressenhall,  
Norfolk. NR20 4DR.



I am currently changing my phone number so the advertised one is no longer available. Until all changes are complete, if you wish to contact me please use my mobile number below.

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## Contents



<b>page 1</b>	Toad-in-the-hole.....
	Mammal Recorder/editor. Chichester Elm.
<b>page 2</b>	Response to 'Lawn Surprise'. (Meadow Saxifrage). A Problem Shared..... (Weevil roll-leaf gall). The Grey Wagtail.
<b>page 3</b>	The Games we played as Children. (Plant based). Moonwort Night-time collecting years ago. (Mothling). Tales from the garden-1. (Willowherb/Nipplewort).
<b>page 4</b>	Excursion Reports: Breck Spring Flowers.
<b>page 5</b>	A Shotesham Stroll.
<b>page 6</b>	Wells Pinewoods. Royal Norfolk Show. Grass Snakes.
<b>page 7</b>	Jewels on the Marsh. (Scarce Chaser). Oaks under threat. Sundews and May Lily. Tails from the Garden-2. (Weasel/Wood Mouse).
<b>page 8</b>	A comucopia, just waiting to be used. (Museum Nat. Hist. Dept.).

## CHICHESTER ELM PROVENANCE

Mr Richard Smith is trying pinpoint the provenance of the Chichester elm (*Ulmus hollandica* x *vegeta*), which is sometimes confused with the well documented Huntingdon hybrid originally raised at Brampton in about 1750 by nurserymen Ingram & Wood. At present the first record of the tree is identified with George Lindley's nursery at Catton in Norwich (1801) but in the elm section of John Cree's famous *Hortus*, it can be seen that this influential nurseryman was selling the tree in 1829 near London. John Lindley cites the Chichester in the 1823 Cambridge Botanic Gardens catalogue, but John Loudon tends to follow the Huntingdon name in his writings.

Can any Society members help with the name of a plantsman/nurseryman of the early 19th century who propagated this fashion tree? Any information will be very gratefully received.

Richard Smith, Summersbury, Chichester Road, Midhurst, West Sussex GU29 9PS.



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of the  
Norfolk & Norwich  
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## Response to "Lawn Surprise" (Natterjack 77 May 2002)

When we first moved into our bungalow about 50 years ago, the rough part of our garden contained coppiced stumps of oak and elm. The ground between the stools was dense with bramble and nettle, which we painfully cleared away.

As the grass, and other plants, grew back, we began to find Meadow saxifrage, or as we have always called it, Bulbous saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*). As the years came and went, gradually a carpet of these lovely white flowers developed and we noticed some appeared on our neighbours' plots too.



On the lots where the grass was pampered and regularly cut, the flowers became depleted. Ours became vastly fewer in number as the trees grew and created an enclosed top canopy which shaded out much of the ground flora. A few still managed to join in the display provided by the bluebells, periwinkles, crocuses and daffodils.

This year we definitely had more again since some of the trees have been removed or cut back, so allowing more light to penetrate.

Our soil is almost pure sand. These bulbils must have the ability to lie dormant for a good while as none were showing in 1954 when we moved in. A farmer kept chickens on that part of the plot before that. During the first world war the whole area was part of a battle training ground. No houses here then!

Barbara Hancy

### A PROBLEM SHARED.....

Whilst visiting Wheatfen on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May I found some curled leaves in Surlingham wood on Hazel *Corylus avellana*. They were loosely closed hanging vertically from the branches. I opened one up hoping to find it's host but could find nothing. I knew that they are found on Silver Birch *Betula pendula* and are caused by the weevil *Deporaus betulae*. Were they, however, the same species on the Hazel?

Once at home I consulted the Naturalists Handbook on Weevils by M.G Morris, which stated that the Weevils did visit Hazel. Great, my identification was confirmed.

On the following Monday evening I was reading "Tapestry of Nature" by Ted Ellis where, upon page 82, Ted

had written about the same weevil and how he had found them rolling Hazel leaves in Surlingham Wood. Just like myself, Ted was puzzled by the inhabitants of these rolls.

Colin A Jacobs



Roll-leaf gall on Hazel



Roll-leaf gall on Birch

## The Grey wagtail

Tony Howes piece on grey wagtails (May 2002) is "spot-on" in identifying that lowland birds of this species seem to prefer faster stretches of our slow flowing rivers, and particularly mill weirs and pools. In the London area these are where you find them on canals.

However readers may not be aware of another less idyllic habitat where they can be found, particularly in winter. They are frequently seen on the clinker beds of sewage works, as at Holt, Cley, Langham and Wighton, to name only a few that I know. There the only running "water" is that from the rotating arms, distributing effluent onto the surface. Other typical birds include pied wagtails and meadow pipits.

Undoubtedly grey wagtails will search out any suitable niche, even in the most unlikely habitats. I have just returned from a holiday in Tenerife, where the grey wagtail is the only resident wagtail. You will look hard and long without seeing any suitable mountain streams on this volcanic island, where the south is almost desert-like. Even there the species is common enough by any tiny dammed water.

Moreover it also seems quite at home in the vast holiday apartment complexes, wherever there are stretches of grass to relieve the concrete. On Tenerife all such grass has to be regularly watered, perhaps nowhere more than on the increasing number of golf courses. If the grey wagtail is to survive on Tenerife it has had to adapt, and seems to be doing so very successfully.

Ian Johnson





## THE GAMES WE PLAYED AS CHILDREN.

Whilst attending the Grasses & Sedges course at Wheatfen on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> May I happened to mention to the group that as children we played a game of "Cock or Hen" with False Oat Grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*. One would run their clasped fingers up the stem of the grass thus grabbing the spikelets in the hand. If one of the spikelets protruded above the others this constituted the cock and if no "tail was produced then it was announced as the hen.

David Lester had played the game as a child too, but some of the older generation present on this day had never heard of it. This reminded me that blow pipes were made from the dry stems of Alexanders *Smyrnium olusatrum*, Flea Darts were thrown from the heads of Wall Barley *Hordeum murinum*. (the irritating hairs would have presumably been the fleas) & itching powder would be sprinkled down the backs of children from the fruit of the Dog Rose *Rosa canina* agg. The seeds within & the woolly covering could be very irritating indeed.

Can anybody else remember these plant based games?

Colin A Jacobs.

I remember the above and the following games with plants also come to mind whilst growing up in the '50s.....

'Kiss-chase' utilising the hooks of Cleavers/Goose-grass (*Galium aparine*). A length of the plant would be thrown at someone and if it stuck they then had to chase others to deposit the plant on them and so on.

Ribwort Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*). The flowering stem would be picked and bent over behind the 'head' and then pulled forcing the head off so forming a plant gun.

Using a blade of grass between cupped hands and then blowing into them to create a sound. Who needed TV?

FF

## Moonwort

The "Dell", between the Caravan Site and the Pinewoods in Wells, is an area which attracts numbers of birds and bird-watchers, but it is also of great botanical interest, with a many kinds of damp-loving plants - in fact, we have always known it, only partly with tongue in cheek, as the "Orchidetum", because of the variety and numbers of orchid species occurring there.

Six years ago my wife Eleanor's eagle eyes located a Moonwort, *Botrychium lunaria*, which has re-appeared every year since then. This weird fern is related to the Adder's Tongue, found in consider-

able abundance in the same area. It seems possible that our Moonwort may be the only one in the County (we had previously only seen it in France), but I should be glad to be proved wrong!

The accompanying photograph, taken with a temporary artificial



background, shows the typical single pinnate sterile frond and the "spikes" of the spore-bearing fertile frond.

Paul Banham

## Night-time collecting years ago.

In 1931 I was told that a number of large moths were found one morning on the walls of Cromer lighthouse, suspecting a migration of convoluted hawk moths because my informant handed to me a dead specimen.

I obtained permission from the keeper's wife to hunt around the lighthouse and gardens the following night.

It was dusk when I started out with only an occasional hoot of a tawny owl from the nearby Warren Woods, but as I started to cross Happy Valley I suddenly felt cold all over as I suspected I was being followed; when I stopped walking so did the other noise. I was beginning to feel a little frightened with only my net and satchel to protect myself, then the light from the lighthouse turned around and I could then see that a few yards behind me was a large black dog.



My hair stood upright as my first thought was "Old Shuck" and that the mythical hound of the Norfolk cliffs was real after all.

It was not foaming at the mouth though but wagging its tail; I could see that it was more frightened than I was. I pointed with my finger the way we had just come and told it to go home, it just turned and vanished.

Needless to say I did not get many moths that night, I spent too much time looking behind at every rustle in the undergrowth, after all I was only eleven at the time!

Ken Durrant

## Tales from the garden - 1

With the years advancing, we have had the back garden relaid to reduce the size of the flower beds and the amount of work. It has meant moving a lot of plants. Two in particular flourished. We congratulated ourselves on transplanting them so successfully - until we realised, when they came into flower, that we had been carefully nurturing *Epilobium ciliatum* and *Lapsana communis* - American willowherb and nipplewort!!

David Paull

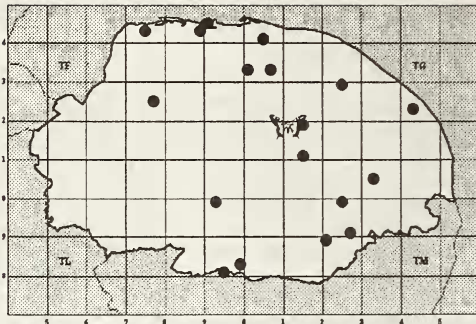


# Excursion Reports

## Featuring:

- *Suffolk Breck Spring Flowers*
- *A Shotesham Stroll*
- *Wells Pinewoods*
- *The Royal Norfolk Show*

● 2002-03 Field Meeting location  
Easton College  
Indoor meetings



## Suffolk Breck Field Meeting for Spring Flowers

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> April 2002

The long spell of dry and cold weather resulted in Spring Flowers being at a premium. Some 30 members made there way to Ramparts Field at Icklingham to find everywhere very dry and with very little new growth showing. However, Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) was just coming into flower, though still very short, while Shepherd's-cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*) could still be appreciated though it had been flowering now for several weeks. In places, the path had a red edging with the tiny plants of Mossy Stonecrop (*Crassula tillaea*) already showing well. The last two species named are classified as Nationally Scarce plants, occurring in less than 100 hectads in the UK. Other common Breck spring flowers found included Early Forget-me-not, (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Thale Cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*) and Spring Vetch (*Vicia thyroides*). Several plants of Russian Cinquefoil (*Potentilla intermedia*) were noticed. This alien plant was first recorded from this site in 1981 so can be regarded as well and truly naturalised. At least two Common Lizards (*Lacerta vivipara*) were sent scuttling into the long grass.

Mr John Browning from Weatherhill Farm joined us for the morning. He owns Ramparts Field and leases it to Suffolk County Council, and he also owns several fields of setaside which we visited next, and we were extremely grateful to him for coming along and filling us in on the management of the setaside which has been down for about 10 years. It was interesting to see how the smallest of

the fields, about 4 or 5 acres in size differs very markedly from the others. When cropped, all the fields had approximately the same yields from the same rates of seeding and fertiliser. After ten years, the other three fields are all well grassed with just a few bare patches for flowering plants to thrive. The small field, however, is almost bare, with just a small amount of things like Early Forget-me-not and Rue Leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*), and with a few rosettes of Ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*). The present management is a single cut in late summer to control the Ragwort. Incidentally, we were told that a pair of Stone Curlew nested on the small field in 2001 but had so far not returned in 2002.

After lunch we moved on to Icklingham Plains where we admired the 11 native Black Poplars (*Populus nigra* ssp. *betulifolia*) this being probably the largest colony in East Anglia, though several of the trees now have branches missing due to wind damage and old age.

We followed the footpath through to the northern part of the Plains and walked across the arid Lichen heath so typical of many sites in Breckland before forestry and intensive agriculture eroded the area of heathland. There was still plenty of Shepherd's Cress in flower here again, and we also saw more Mossy Stonecrop. Making our way to a former sandpit, the party now spent some while grovelling on hands and knees, much to the delight of our resident "staff photographer". The reason for our down to earth approach became

evident when several small plants of Spring Speedwell (*Veronica verna*) were located. This is one of the trio of rare Speedwells that grow in Breckland, and this site is one of its few native sites. Most of the extant sites for this and the other two species, Breckland Speedwell (*Veronica praecox*) and Fingered Speedwell (*Veronica triphyllos*) are now controlled introductions, as at the Tuddenham Gallops site which several members went on to after the main meeting had finished. More Spring Speedwell was found in disturbed corner of the nearby field. There is also an old record for this species on Ramparts Field.

Those who did not go on to Tuddenham Gallop included a number of members who concluded their day by stopping at Wordwell on the way home, beside the roadside nature reserve where a good number of plants of Wild Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari neglectum*) were well in flower, one of the Suffolk sites where it is considered to be native.

Alec Bull





## A Shotesham Stroll

Saturday May 18<sup>th</sup> 2002

Fortunately, the thunderstorms that were forecast failed to arrive and the threat of them didn't deter the twelve members who turned up for a look at the wildlife in the parish of Shotesham. Our leader for the day was Frank Mitchell who, along with his wife Diane, and others in the village have surveyed and recorded the wildlife of Shotesham in a booklet: 'The Natural History of Shotesham in 2000'. A lot of work had gone into producing this booklet, which has the same objective as our Wildlife 2000 project, and we looked forward to seeing some of the species therein.

After walking along the village street, noting wayside plants and garden escapes, we turned onto a footpath beside a stream. The margins of this small stream were full of fool's watercress *Apium nodiflorum* while on the drier areas there was a lot of lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* sub-species *bulbilifer* - this is the sub-species generally found near villages. On the bank we noted common valerian *Valeriana officinalis* and green alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens*.

We were fortunate to have the company of Rex and Barbara Hancy so we could, perhaps, expect to find a gall or two - but along with Robert Maidstone they managed a grand total of 32 species plus a new record for Norfolk: *Diplolepus mayri* - a gall wasp which induces a gall on *Rosa* species, resembling an old Robin's pincushion but smaller.

The footpath led us to Stubbs Green, an area of unimproved grassland. In the wetter parts we noted ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, cuckoo-flower *Cardamine pratensis*, dame's violet *Hesperis matronalis* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. The sedges were represented by lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*, glaucous sedge *C. flacca*, hairy sedge *C. hirta* and false fox-sedge *C. otrubae*. As well as the common soft-rush and hard-rush, we also noted jointed rush *Juncus articulatus* and bulbous rush *J. bulbosus*. Bob Ellis pointed out meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis* and Mary Ghulam drew our attention to a hawthorn in a nearby

hedge which turned out to be the hybrid *Crataegus x media* with both single- and double-styled flowers.

At the top of Stubbs Green there is a pond that had fairly recently been dredged but has quickly recovered with a variety of aquatics including: greater reed-mace *Typha latifolia*, branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, mare's-tail *Hippuris vulgaris*, broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans*, common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* and even some New Zealand pigmyweed *Crassula helmsii* had found its way there. This is an invasive alien from Australasia introduced as an aquarium oxygenator but it is finding its way into even isolated ponds where it can form dense mats, out-competing our native species.

As we walked beside a hedge, Robert Maidstone pointed out a female scorpion-fly *Panorpa communis*. The male's abdomen is shaped like a scorpion's tail. This is not a sting but a genital capsule tipped with a claw used to hold the female while mating. There were numerous black-and-red froghoppers in the grass that Robert informed us were *Cercopis vulnerata*, the larvae of which feed mainly on couch grass roots.

We stopped for lunch just before Shotesham Little Wood. There was much discussion of the species seen so far and we were treated to the songs of two blackcaps and one chiffchaff.

Moving on into Little Wood we noted the delicate heads of wood melick *Melica uniflora* peeping out of the dark undergrowth with three-veined sandwort *Moehringia trinervia* below. The hornbeam, ash and hazel in the wood used to be coppiced but they have not been cut for quite a few years and many of the coppice growths are quite sizeable trees now. Our attention was drawn to numerous hornbeam seedlings. As far as I'm aware, hornbeam seeds rarely germinate this far north but perhaps in this instance the warm April and the wet start to May provided the right conditions.

Among the ground flora in the wood were: bugle *Ajuga reptans*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, wood speedwell *Veronica montana*, enchanter's night-

shade *Circaea lutetiana* and hairy woodrush *Luzula pilosa*. Both narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana* and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata* were recorded. Two more sedges were added to the list with remote sedge *Carex remota* and wood sedge *C. sylvatica*.

Several fungi were seen - among them was a substantial specimen of dryad's saddle *Polyporus squamosus* on the base of an ash, witches butter *Exidia glandulosa* on oak, yellow brain-fungus *Tremella mesenterica* on hazel and cramp-balls *Daldinia concentrica* on ash. A new bryophyte was added to the Little Wood list when Laurie Hall found the liverwort *Chiloscyphus pullescens*.

As it was a dull day, no butterflies were on the wing but Robert pointed out a winter moth caterpillar *Operophtera brumata* on hornbeam and a garden tiger caterpillar *Arcia cja* on nettle.

An area of scrub adjacent to the wood provided more plants of interest with early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, common agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, broad-leaved willowherb *Epilobium montanum*, creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, yellow pimpernel *L. nemorum*, pepper saxifrage *Silene silaus* and Square-stalked St John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum*. Water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* was growing in a small pond in the same area. One plant here had us puzzled until Bob came to our rescue and identified it as common gromwell *Lithospermum officinale*, which is more often seen on the light chalky soils in the west of the county.

As we made our way back to the village the rain that had held off all day started to fall but nobody seemed to notice, as there was still much to see on the hedgebanks, including tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*, bush vetch *V. sepium* and common vetch *V. sativa* sub-species *segetalis*.

Our thanks go to Frank and Diane for agreeing to show us around the parish. We look forward to returning soon to sample more of the natural delights of Shotesham.

Bill Mitchell



## Wells Pinewoods

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2002

Half a dozen members turned out on what proved to be a fine summer evening in Wells. Mainly botanists, they were able to see an area of the dunes which had been flooded by the sea in 1953, and subsequently planted with Monterey Pines, contrasting with the Corsican and Maritime Pines which had survived the flood on higher ground. Though not yet fifty years old, the Monterey Pines are tall, and well loaded with cones.



Nearby, the area known to bird-watchers as the Dell was showing off its wealth of plant-life. The ground here is permanently waterlogged, supporting fen rather than bog flora. We were too early for the Marsh Helleborines, but Marsh and Spotted Orchids were doing well, and the party was able to see W. Norfolk's (we believe) only Crested Buckler Fern, as well as the Moonwort (see page 3).

A new site was discovered for the low-growing Mossy Stonecrop *Crassula tillaea*, which shows up because of its conspicuous reddish colour, but another even lower-growing species (if this is possible) required one of the party to lie prostrate, his lens as it were glued to the eye, to be certain that this was Fenugreek, *Trigonella Foeniculum - graecum*, a tiny clover of bare ground near the sea, rarely found in Norfolk.

As we made our way back in the surprisingly still good light after nine o'clock, the last botanical challenge, not completely resolved, was which species of Small-reed was growing by the path. Even a hand-lens could not clearly reveal whether the upper side of the leaves was pubescent, but the general opinion was that it was the Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos*. All agreed, too, that Wells is not just for bird-watchers!

Paul Banham

## THE ROYAL NORFOLK SHOW

Wed/Thurs. 26<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> June, 2002

After last years absence because of the foot and mouth epidemic, the Society returned to the Royal Norfolk Show. The stand was in the same venue as last time, however, with a great change in its surroundings, with the show committee having altered the front area to our great advantage, meaning many more visitors paid us a visit this year.

The displays were on the history of the Society, with recent finds from the home of Ted Ellis creating interest, Robert Maidstone showed his collection of wasp and bee nests, and how to identify the different species under the microscope; a great pull for the children and school groups and a collection of bracket fungus to promote the Norfolk Fungus Study Group was backed by a visual display provided by Mike Woolner. To promote the Norfolk

grasshoppers and allied insects publication, David Richmond supplied display boards and Ken Durrant kindly loaned his collection of the mounted specimens for added interest. Robert Maidstone also collected live specimens, which were presented under plastic, shown for a while and then released. All the Society's recent publications were on sale and excursion details were also actively promoted.

Thanks to all who helped on the stand over the two days, to make it a great success, along with the fine weather!

David Nobbs

*The display area set up and awaiting its first visitors.*



## Grass Snakes

A trip to Upton Fen in mid June to hopefully photograph a dragonfly or two was unfruitful due to heavy cloud building up. Although it remained warm all the 'dragons' retreated to the vegetation.

But as I walked round the fen I began to see several grass snakes coiled up on the paths and clumps of dead reed piled up at the edges of cleared areas. Once you had 'got your eye in' they could be seen and approached from several yards away if you moved with care and very slowly. These snakes are harmless and don't bite, but if handled roughly can emit a foul smelling substance that is extremely unpleasant and difficult to get rid of.

Seen at close quarters the colouration is a dull grey/green with darker marking down the sides, most have a yellowish

dark edged collar. If disturbed they tend to flick their forked tongues before gliding off into the vegetation, if you are close enough a gentle rustling can be heard, very often they will return to the same spot within an hour or so. Upton Fen has lots of frogs of all ages, so I would imagine these are one of their main food items. The biggest snakes seen were about a metre a length, on hot sunny days they seem less approachable, you just get a quick glimpse of a tail disappearing.

They can swim well with a zigzag motion, keeping the head clear of the water, and they will visit garden ponds for frogs and fish. A friend at Thorpe had one caught up in the net he uses to keep the herons away from his fish. We had to cut the net to free it, but it seemed O.K. and went quickly on its way.



Tony Howes





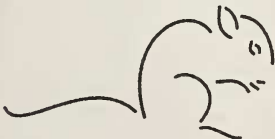
## Jewels on the Marsh

Recently (May 2002) I was given the opportunity to see one of Britain's rare dragonflies; *Libellula fulvar*, the scarce chaser. It is only known in the south eastern parts of the country and in Norfolk it is thinly distributed but it can be numerous in particular locations as it was when I was shown this colony.

All along the dyke system larvae could be seen emerging from the water and climbing reed and sedge stems, many were hatching into the perfect insect, drying and hardening as they hung from the exuviae. There were some already on the wing, flying in the sunny glades nearby or hanging up in surrounding vegetation on the dyke sides. Seen in close detail the overall colour is a rich red/brown with a series of black marks down the abdomen. The wings are beautiful with gold lace veining on the front edges and a triangle of gold netting over black at the base of the rear wing. On first emerging both sexes are similar, the main difference being the dark smudge on the wingtips of the female. The males assume their lovely blue abdomen over a period of a few days.

The following day not one single hatching could be found taking place and most of the adult dragonflies had dispersed into nearby open areas. There they could be seen hanging up on vegetation or hunting for insects with fast flight during sunny spells, a privilege to see them.

Tony Howes



## OAKS UNDER THREAT

Our English oaks are in danger from a fungus that has probably been imported accidentally from America where it has already devastated large expanses of trees in California and Oregon.

The disease is sudden oak death *Phytophthora ramorum*. It has been found, not in oaks so far but in viburnums, in garden centres in several counties, including neighbouring Lincolnshire. Emergency action by the Government has included a ban on the importation of plants from the USA and stringent checks on rhododendrons, viburnums, oaks and beech from the Continent and elsewhere.

So, what should we look for on our field trips? The fungus establishes itself as a canker when a spore lands and germinates. It grows into the bark and feeds on the live cells, killing them as it spreads. It is characterised by dark red to black sap oozing from the trunk as the bark splits and wilts. When the outer bark is removed, mottled areas of dead and discoloured tissue may be seen. Trees can die within months. So far as is known, sudden oak death has not yet reached Norfolk. But it is a notifiable disease and, if we do see possible signs of it, we should report it to DEFRA.

## Tails from the garden – 2

The mystery is where they come from and where they disappear to. Our back garden is small, completely enclosed, and surrounded by other gardens and houses. Yet, as we looked out of our kitchen window, there coming up a flight of steps was a weasel. From just a few feet away it looked so much larger than the weasels you normally see sprinting across a lane a hundred yards ahead. But weasel – not stoat – it undoubtedly was, with not a trace of a black tip to the tail. It spent a minute or two exploring a flower bed, then scampered off down the side way. A memorable “first” for the garden.

Another creature with a distinctive tail also pays us the occasional visit, much to our delight. We see leaves moving on the plants in the border. Then a shiny nose and a pair of bright eyes appear, followed by a golden brown body and finally that very long tail that gave the wood mouse its former name. We have seen one twice this year so far, foraging among the seeds that have fallen from the hoppers on the bird table, then it vanishes for a few more weeks or months.

David Paull

## Sundews

The sundews of Beeston Common have responded well to the three year rotational mowing carried out by English Nature contractors and the last two wet winters. The Common now has a healthy population of both the Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) and the Round-leaved Sundew (*D. rotundifolia*). Last June David Mower was checking out the various clumps of sundews when he spotted an unusual robust form with broad oval leaves. On closer inspection it proved to be the hybrid between the two aforementioned species known as *D. x obovata*. David had last seen this cross at Holt Lowes many years ago and as far as we know it is a first for the Common.

## May Lily

A number of Norfolk botanists trekked to a north Norfolk heath at the beginning of June to view the Red Data Book plant - May Lily (*Maianthemum bifolium*). A patch some 10x20 yds was found by Roger Garrad while walking his dogs. The find was amongst recently cleared scrub and constitutes the third known Norfolk site for this doubtful native.

Francis Farrow



## A CORNUCOPIA, JUST WAITING TO BE USED

Nestling at the foot of the mound of Norwich's imposing Norman Castle is a rather nondescript building. In its heyday, it has had its moments of colour as red-robed judges arrived in horse-drawn carriages, and drama as murderers were tried and sentenced. Then the Crown Court moved to a new court house at Whitefriars and the building lapsed into almost complete anonymity as municipal offices. But today the old Shire Hall in Market Avenue has a new role and it should be a place of pilgrimage for members of this Society. It is now the home of the museum's Natural History Department, previously housed in cramped and inconvenient quarters up in the Castle.

The Society's links with the department go back to its earliest days. Some of the remarkable array of collections of specimens, which include insects, birds, plants and mammals, are the gifts and bequests of Society members. In a survey of biological holdings, Norwich ranked third among non-national museums for the size and coverage of its collections. Also in the department is an extensive library. The Society's own library, which contains some rare and historic volumes, has been incorporated into it but the books are tagged with yellow markers to indicate that they still belong to the Society. And the significance of all this to the Society? The collections and the library are there to be used by members. There is an open invitation from the Curator of Natural History, Dr Tony Irwin, to members who want to study a whole range of natural history subjects – or simply to gaze in admiration at, for example, the astonishing Fountaine-Neimey collection of butterflies, the results of a lifetime of collecting world-wide by a Norfolk vicar's daughter and her companion.

Although there is not a great deal more room than the department had in the Castle, the available space is a much more convenient and much easier to organise. It helps, of course, that the refurbishment budget included specially designed storage cabinets which are a vast improvement in terms of both conservation of specimens and ease of access.

There is now a visitor room where Society members and others can study collections. There is also study space, with microscope, in several of the collection rooms.

So how can members make use of this cornucopia? Visits "on spec" are not really a good idea because, with limited staffing – Tony Irwin, occasional assistants and a few volunteers! – and because of the value and fragility of much of the material, there cannot be open access. Tony may not always be available and feels that it is essential, certainly for initial visits, that he should spend some time showing people how the collections are organised and how they can be accessed.

All you need to do is make an appointment – in one of three ways:

**By email:**

tony.irwin.mus@norfolk.gov.uk

**By telephone:**

01603 493642 - there is an answering machine so that you can leave a message

**By letter:**

Dr. Tony Irwin, Natural History Dept.,  
Shire Hall, Market Avenue, Norwich,  
NR1 3JQ.

David Paull,  
Chairman



Norfolk and Norwich  
Naturalists' Society

**Natural History Day**  
at Wheatfen  
Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August  
starting at 10.00 am

A series of short walks, talks and  
displays with a chance to meet some  
local naturalists

For further information contact:  
David Nobbs (Warden)

## Richard Richardson

An exhibition of RARs  
art and memorabilia  
In association with the  
publication of his biography

*"Guardian Spirit of the East Bank"*  
by Moss Taylor

CLEY PARISH CHURCH  
OF ST. MARGARET'S

Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> August (10am - 6pm)  
Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August (11am - 6pm)



## WILD ABOUT NORFOLK

An exhibition featuring local  
wildlife groups, slide shows  
and a children's theatrical  
workshop

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October  
10.00 am - 3.00 pm

Connaught Hall,  
Attleborough

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC  
(Free Entry - Lottery Grant Support)

Would all contributors  
please send your notes etc.  
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