

The Norfolk NATTERJACK

Website: www.nnns.org.uk

Number 82
August 2003

Toad-in-the-hole....

Many thanks again to all contributors. This issue highlights more observations on stoats in ermine, unusual fungi and a remarkable blue tit among others. Alec Bull also attempts to understand the trend in wildlife and plant surveys, which can be both a challenge and a chore. A great two days at the Royal Norfolk Show last June resulted both in new members and good sales of NNNS publications. The Society owes a great deal to David Nobbs who once again organised the event and those that visited the display will know what a tremendous effort was made. Thanks again David. Our thanks also go to ALS whose advertisement appears on the back for their goodwill offer of hand lenses in *Natterjack* no. 79. **FF**

100 years ago (1903 NNNS Transactions)

STICKLEBACKS AS MANURE. - In the 'General View of the Agriculture of the County of Norfolk,' by Arthur Young (1804 but referring to a period before 1802), the author writes as follows: "These little fish, which are caught in immense quantities in the Lynn rivers about once every seven years, have been bought as high as 8d. a bushel. The favourite way of using them now, is by mixing with mould and carrying on for turnips. Great quantities have been carried to Marham, Shouldham, and Beachamwell. Mr. Fuller there, is reported to have laid out £400 for them in one year, they always answer exceedingly. Mr. Rogerson, of Narborough, has gone largely into this husbandry, laying out £300 in one year, at from 6d. to 8d. a bushel, besides carriage from Lynn; he formed them into composts with mould mixed well by turning over, and carried on for turnips: the success very great." - T. SOUTHWELL.

NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

My appeal in *Natterjack* 81 for volunteers to fill two vacancies on the Society's Council produced an unexpected but very welcome response: four volunteers!

They all agreed that the quickest and fairest way of resolving a very pleasant dilemma was that their names should go in the hat. The first two out would join Council as co-opted members; the "losing" two would be "in the frame" for next year when there will be more vacancies to fill.

The "winners" were Mrs Tricia Emslie, of Castle Acre, who has recently completed a spell as chairman of the CPRE in West Norfolk, and the ornithologist, author and columnist Mark Cocker, from Claxton, near Norwich.


David Paull, Chairman

Young Norfolk Nature Writer of the Year Award 2003 Closing date 30th September

Are you a young naturalist / country lover with a talent for observation? All you have to do to win yourself the top prize money of £50 in this competition is to write a short article or illustrated diary of no more than 800 words about your observations of nature. The entries will be judged in two categories, aged up to 11 and aged 11 to 16, with a lucky prize winner being picked from each category. The prize is being generously donated by Sylvia Seago in memory of her late husband, Michael, who dedicated 60 years to the writing and study of birds in Norfolk.

Entries should be submitted by 30th September, 2003 to: Young Norfolk Nature Writer of the year, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Bewick House, 22 Thorpe Road, Norwich. NR1 1RY

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The quarterly bulletin
of the
Norfolk & Norwich
Naturalists' Society
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Bureaucracy and Wildlife

I started consciously studying wild life and keeping documentary notes early in 1944. Birds from January, Butterflies from March and plants from mid-May. I joined the then Junior Bird Recorders Club of the RSPB in January and the Suffolk Naturalists Society during the summer, though I never attended any of their meetings due to work commitments and lack of transport. My first works of reference were the *Observers book of British Birds*, the *Observers book of British Wild Flowers* and the *Observers book of British Butterflies*, supplemented by pre-war cigarette and Typhoo tea cards. Eight years later, in 1952, and living in Norfolk at Garboldisham, my notebook lists 139 species of birds, with daily song charts for all birds heard singing regularly, 30 species of butterfly, a total almost unreachable in a local context today, 65 species of macro moths as I had by then acquired the two volume *Wayside and Woodland Moths of the British Isles* by R. South, and also Cynthia Longfield's *Dragonflies of the British Isles* in the same series and had listed 13 species of dragon and damselflies, one of which, I can now see, was definitely wrong. I also listed 20 species of mammals and reptiles and 65 species under 'general' insects. My list of flowering plants totaled 634 for that year, and my accounts of daily happenings in the world of wildlife amounted to over 400 handwritten pages of A5. From then until now, I have continued to follow the path of the all round naturalist, by building on those early discoveries and adding Mosses and Liverworts and Fungi to almost the same level of knowledge and understanding as those earlier birds, plants and butterflies, and I find that I have become something of an anachronism.

Not long before I retired after 50 years of looking after dairy stock, a milk lorry driver told me, "You're one

of the last of the old boys. You still look after your cows the same way as people used to thirty or forty years ago. Youngsters today don't want any of that. They want to clock in and clock out, and that's it."

Things may not be quite the same as that in the world of wildlife, but there is an increasing tendency to try and get grants for what I have always done for pleasure, if someone is offering such carrots, and the study of wildlife as I have always known it, is increasingly being channelled into avenues of so called research which by their very bureaucratic nature are anathema to anyone used to just enjoying the other denizens of their surroundings. So even here, I seem to be one of the last of the old boys.

Not that I have any objection to allowing my own records to be used for any worthwhile project, far from it. At an early stage, I started contributing records, anecdotal at first, to the Transactions of the Suffolk Naturalists' Society, but soon, with the recording under way for the first national Plant Atlas, published in 1962, I was recruited to the card ticking brigade, sending in a number of cards to that project and annual records for Francis Simpson's *Flora of Suffolk*, still a quarter century into the future.

When we moved permanently to Norfolk in 1960, Eric Swann soon started sending me cards to fill in for 'Petch and Swann's *Flora of Norfolk*, 1968, and later on, Bryophyte recording cards as well. In 1968, I changed stream for a while and became Regional Representative for West Norfolk for the British Trust for Ornithology, a post which I held for 14 years, organising the collecting of records for their first breeding bird atlas, as well various other surveys, usually of a particular species in any one year. I also participated in their Common Bird Census on a large arable plot at Cranworth, which I completed for 29 consecutive seasons. Before I had given up doing the latter, I had switched channels

again, Moss Taylor took on the BTO work and I became vice county recorder for East Norfolk for the Botanical Society of the British Isles from 1984 to 1998. During this time, the first Monitoring Scheme came along in 1987/8, recording all species in all A, J and W tetrads in every third 10km (hectad) square north and east of Lands End. This done, work commenced on the *Flora of Norfolk*, which involved organising recording in 723 tetrads in my half of the county and, until further help came along in any quantity, I had to do as much of the recording as I could manage on my own, particularly after I retired in 1992. I have never counted up how many tetrad cards I completed, sometimes visiting only once, more often twice, occasionally three times, but I would think that I visited in excess of 500 of the 723 tetrads. All this has been fairly straight forward, but over the last few years, insidious forces seem to have been at work and recording is no longer straightforward. The fact that the plant, bird, butterfly or dragonfly is present in an area, and if sufficiently remarkable is given a 4 or 6 figure grid reference, is no longer sufficient. A few examples to prove my point. The BSBI is re-recording all the monitoring scheme tetrads under the title of 'Local Change' in 2003/4. The instruction booklet for this scheme runs to 20 pages of A5. Quote:- *Emphasis on recording notable species with 6 or 8 figure grid references using a GPS (Global Positioning System) if possible.* These cost a mere £150 I am told so the old calculated grid reference is now considered unreliable.

The BSBI in association with Plantlife are also doing a national survey of Bluebells. Here, the grid reference problem is taken a step further by suggesting that the participant visits the Ordnance Survey website with details on how to find their site after various manipulations of the mouse on the Streetmap website and, providing that the correct information is fed in, the grid reference will appear on screen, BUT you need a new site location every time you go



100 metres. Therefore, if the site being surveyed has bluebells wall to wall for 300 metres x 100 metres, this is not one site but three and three lots of information have to be recorded for it. After this it is necessary to measure the exact size of the bluebell plot. Find a level surface and step and mark ten paces, then measure with a tape measure. Do this three times and you will then be able to measure your plot of bluebells and find exactly how big it is.

The first side of the form to be filled in is fairly straightforward bearing in mind what has already been written, but the questions thereafter read more like a child's treasure hunt. Question 2. *What does the flower stem do towards the top?* There are nine such. Fair enough if you have a strong interest in Bluebells. One thought though, once all this information has been assembled and published, no doubt on the BSBI and Plantlife websites, will it not make the lives of bulb thieves that much easier. Would it be better if the bluebells were not surveyed?

Another survey to land on my doormat this spring is being organised by the Game Conservancy in conjunction with the BTO, to record the presence or absence of breeding Woodcock in woodland selected at random throughout the UK. With this is a habitat recording form to be filled in for points 50 metres north, south, east and west of the point which has been selected as being the most suitable in the wood to observe the roding flight of the Woodcock. (This is a display flight by the male to advertise his presence to the female) For this, you need a compass rather than a GPS!

The survey also included such questions as: *"How many people were seen within 200 metres of the observation point during the habitat recording visit. Of these, how many had dogs with them and how many dogs were on leads".*

For the National Dragonfly survey which is also being carried on at the local level, recorders are asked to fill in standard RA70 recording cards, one for each visit to each site, each pond or stretch of water to represent a site. This has to include details of habitat on each card and the number of each species present on each visit. We have been recording dragonflies in Stanford Training Area for some years, parts of which include many shallow meres and pingoes. For instance, in 2000 we visited and recorded up to 20 such in a day on an almost weekly basis all through the summer. For one with wider interests than just dragonflies, the paperwork involved becomes a burden rather than a hobby.

The study of wildlife should be seen as an enjoyable hobby, at least, that is what the old boys used to reckon. As I consider myself one of the last of these, I think I will use my declining years to do just that and wave goodbye to bureaucratic paperwork.

Alec Bull

A walk around the fen in June

I had been gardening most of the day and felt in need of a walk so mid-afternoon found me at Strumpshaw Fen, few people were there, which suited me fine. The marshes were looking fabulous, so fresh and luxuriant after the recent rain showers, so many shades of green. Overhead spectacular cloud formations were constantly moving steadily across the sky, giving a superb backcloth to the beauty of the fen, great towering anvils of white gave the impression of mountain ranges on the horizon.

I walked down to the tower hide, probably the best place on the reserve to observe from in the afternoon light. There were three marsh harriers circling over the reed beds, catching the light beautifully as they swung on the wind, the two males especially looked superb. I never tire of watching these magical birds. The pair of

carion crows that nested in the central willow tree now have four lusty youngsters and they seem to take great delight in dive bombing any harrier that ventures too close to 'their tree'. The impression was that they all enjoyed it, they would have a short ariel tussle jinking and twisting but the harrier easily out manoeuvred the crows, just dipping a wing here and there, they out flew them with ease.

A kingfisher was seen several times, it would often perch on a reed stem at the waters edge under the hide, the afternoon sun catching the reed stems and turning them rich gold in the lovely light. Some times it hovered over the water in the manner of a kestrel, it was catching small fish and he, (black lower mandible), seemed to glow, so intense was the light on him.

There was a steady, regular "booming" from a bittern somewhere in the middle of the marsh all the time I was there, every ten minutes or so, three booms each time, the last being the strongest. I love the mystery and magic of these birds, rarely seen, their "song" the only indication that they are there at all. The few times you get a glimpse of one is a red letter day, it's usually one in flight over the reeds, or - if you are really lucky one creeping round the waters edge fishing.

There was a pair of redshanks going through their display flight routine over the fen, with drooping wings and plaintive song, but one sound I miss very much is that of a snipe "drumming". I have not heard a snipe at Strumpshaw, or anywhere else for the last two years. It must be one of the most evocative sounds of our wetlands, that wonderful throbbing, vibrating sound as he dives and expands his tail feathers, I just hope there will be a reversal of their fortunes in the future.

At 8.0 p.m. the dark rain clouds had gathered yet again and looked very threatening, not relishing the thought of a soaking I made a quick dash back to the car park, just making it before the deluge started. It had been a very enjoyable few hours, I felt the batteries had been recharged.

Tony Howes



The Dell

Since the 1970's an area of former shallow quarrying between the caravan site and the Pinewoods in Wells has become a popular "twitching" ground, originally as a sort of overflow from Cley, but now much appreciated in its own right. Many visitors in summer, however, have discovered that it is also a prime botanical site. Although it boasts no acid-bog species such as Sundew or Bog Asphodel it has a surprising range of marsh plants. It never dries out completely even during prolonged drought, and yet has sufficient "up and down" to support plants of varying damp requirements.

The only problem is the development of Birch scrub, but this is cut down to ground level every winter by a team from the Holkham National Nature Reserve (of which it is a part). In early spring there is virtually nothing to see, but during May the first Orchids appear, along with Adder's Tongue Fern. At least six Orchid species have been seen: Early Marsh, Southern Marsh, Common Spotted, Twayblade, Bee and last, in late Summer, a marvellous show of Marsh Helleborine. Tall plants of Marsh Thistle by then are dominating the area, but (for thistles!), they are quite attractive. Several Sedges occur, along with Cotton Grass, while, of the true Grasses, Sweet Vernal Grass dominates in spring. The attractive little Brookweed, not particularly common in Norfolk, raises its small white flowers to a height of 10cm or so. There is a scattering of Ferns, including one each of Crested Buckler Fern and Moonwort, the latter mentioned in a previous *Natterjack* article.

The storm tidal surge of 1978 was high enough to spill into the area. Pines and Birches were killed, and we despaired of the Orchids, but they miraculously (it seemed) reappeared in a couple of years. I

expect their tubers were able to survive the salt water. A few salt-marsh plants turned up: Sea Arrow Grass and Sea Milkwort, for example, and the latter was still present and flowering last year.

Paul Banham

ERMINE IN NORFOLK

I don't know about the winter 2002-03 but ermine can certainly be seen in Norfolk (*Natterjack* - May 03).

The last time we had a fairly severe cold spell, complete with snow unmelted for a couple of weeks, I watched fascinated for several minutes a stoat-in-ermine running around the high ground at Beech Walk, off Low Road, Keswick - just three miles from Norwich and not far from correspondent David Paull's house in Eaton. I cannot remember the year exactly but 8-9 years ago I would guess.

Stoats are the mammal I see most frequently in the Norwich suburbs. Only at the beginning of April, at Whitlingham Country Park I witnessed a stoat chasing a hare, with the former making futile attempts (as far as I could see) to catch the larger animal by the throat. The pair of them lolloped around me for some time - it was almost as though they were playing a game of tag. Interestingly the stoat made no attempt to grab the hare by a leg or attach itself to its victim's underbelly: it was throat or nothing.

Another interesting spectacle involving a stoat was an irate moorhen chasing the mammal across the Yare near UEA last spring: got too near the bird's nest I suppose.

Mike Freer

David Paull asks if it is usual for stoats to develop white fur in Norfolk during snowy weather. The answer is yes, if we have as much as a week of snow and sufficiently low

temperatures, some inner mechanism in the animal's make-up seems to be triggered and the development of at least some white fur follows quite rapidly. We saw a stoat which was white apart from a saddle of normal coloured fur at Little Cressingham on February 8th, a little over a week following the heaviest snowfall for some years.

Of greater interest, on April 23rd, whilst waiting for the sun to come out so I could take a picture of a true wild pear *Pyrus pyraeaster* at Little Langford, Stanford Training Area, a stoat appeared along the track nearby which was completely pale sandy in colour. Though I have seen a good number of white stoats over the years, I have never come across any intermediate colour between white and the normal fur colour in this species.

Alec Bull

Whilst plant recording in Gayton on the 24th April 2003, Young Wood, south of the entrance was examined. Near the entrance was a gamekeepers 'gibbet' displaying the corpses of a variety of vermin, mainly squirrels, but also a normal stoat, and a slightly smaller pure white stoat in ermine. The body was crawling with tiny beetles but was still in good condition, so presumably had not been hanging there long.

Clearly David Paull's sighting was not unique, and ermine *do* exist in Norfolk.

The keeper of the wood said he had also seen stoat in ermine in the Sandringham area, and subsequent enquiries amongst local gamekeepers suggested that ermine are not infrequent. Perhaps the Society ought to instigate some sort of formal contact with the Gamekeeping fraternity since they probably know more about such matters than most of us are likely to?

Robin Stevenson



A note on the parasitic fungus *Sclerotinia tuberosa* in Norfolk

On April 10 1966, my wife and I were walking through Woodrising Wood, admiring the Wood Anemones and Wood Sorrel that were then in full flower, when we came upon a curious little cup fungus associated with the first named. The cups were 1-2 cm across and were home on a stalk up to 4cm long arising from a black underground tuber which was white inside. This proved to be *Sclerotinia tuberosa* a parasitic fungus on the roots of Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), though some books say on the old roots of that plant.

I discovered this record whilst going through some old notebooks, sorting out records from the 1960s to send to Richard Shotbolt, webmaster for the Norfolk Fungus Study Group who is coordinating the records of our county recorder, Reg Evans, and those of others towards the Society's Wildlife 2000 publication on Fungi. As a result of this, I paid two visits to a wood I am studying near Dereham, as it has many acres of Wood Anemones. This first visit, fairly late in March was fruitless as, due to the cold and dry weather, the Wood Anemones were only just beginning to appear. A second visit was paid on April 12, with acres available for searching. Walking slowly through the drifts of nodding white heads, after nearly an hour and a half, I had almost given up hope, especially as I had visited all the damper sites which I thought most likely to hold any of the fungus, the wood-

land floor being relatively dry due to the season. Going up a slight slope, I suddenly spotted some cup fungi in a small bare patch between the Anemones. I did not count them as I was too busy taking photographs, but would estimate there to have been probably between 12 and 20, and all were within the area of a single square metre. As they were growing in a patch where the Anemones were relatively sparse, it could be that they do grow on the old parts of the plants, though then again, do they infect the roots of the young plants this year and produce their own fruiting bodies in the open patch thus created in the following spring? Phillips regards the species as 'rare', though probably under recorded due to their season of appearance. However, they are certainly far from common even where the host plant is abundant.



Alec Bull

Sclerotinia tuberosa.

Three cups *in situ* with wood anemone.
One laying on the surface showing stem and black sclerotia.

Recycling fox

An amusing thing happened on the night of the 8th May: 12.45am walking up Chalkhill Road from Riverside in Norwich. As I passed a side alley I noticed a fox trotting towards me. I stepped aside and waited for it. It had seen me pass but continued to walk towards me. As it got to the end of the alley it realised that I had stopped - it was within touching distance. We stood staring at each other, the fox almost inquisitively. After what seemed like an age, he/she gently turned around and trotted off (a fast walk really) back down the alley.

I continued on my way and turned right into Rosary Road. The fox cut across the open ground at the junction in question to arrive at the top of the alley opening out onto Rosary Road just a little after me.

The same thing happened, we stood and stared at each other. Eventually, the fox turned around and retraced its steps. Amusing as this game of chess would have been to continue, I was keen to get home.

During this sequence the fox remained surprisingly calm. The incredible thing was, that the fox had a mouth crammed full of Morrison's carrier bags!

Ironically, I had earlier watched the film *The Matrix* (for those of you that know it) - had I really seen a fox with a mouth full of carrier bags or was I just part of the matrix?



Paul Westley

New bird for the garden

I have lived at my present address for twenty years, and in all that time we have never had stock doves visit the garden, but for a week or so in May two of these birds have been coming regularly to feed on the mixed seed on the lawn. They have as yet not ventured on to the bird table as the wood pigeons and collared doves do, they are quite nervous, but it's very nice to see them.

These doves are hole nesters, using hollow trees, old buildings etc. I once had a pair nest in a hide I erected in a tall tree for a heron's nest nearby, the doves and I both used the hide successfully, another pair took over a box meant for tawny owls in my local wood a couple of years ago. My impression is that these doves are less numerous than they used to be, probably another reflection on our modern farming methods.

Tony Howes

Excursion Reports

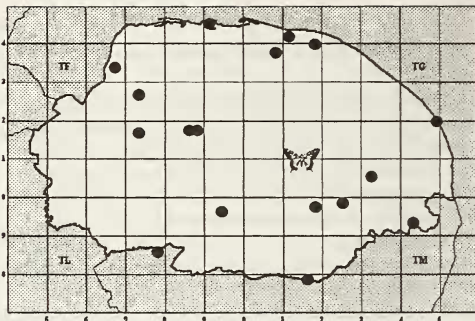
Featuring:

Stiffkey to Wells walk

Holt Lowes evening

Royal Norfolk Show

● 2003-04 Field Meeting location
Easton College
Indoor meetings



A Coastal Walk from Stiffkey to Wells

Sunday, 11th May 2003

In pastel shades of green and grey
For miles ahead the salt-marsh lay
An arc of shoreline where the sky
Gives welcome to the wild gulls' cry.

With Paul's short talk to set the scene

We started off by hedgerow green
And hawthorn blossom scented air
Enticed us on. Fourteen were there.

The botanists looked to the ground;
Bird watchers searching all around,
And insects either high or low
Caught our attention, stole the show.

A stop for lunch in sunny nook
Of light refreshment we partook.
Then slowly on towards Wells Quay,
Where terns and turtle dove we'd see.

The car park at Wells Beach at last
O'erhead the clouds were gathering fast!

In all a very pleasant way
For Norfolk Nats to spend the day.
Janice Grint

Many thanks to Paul Banham for the introductory talk and setting the scene before our walk. Also thanks to Janice who has captured the day so well in verse. During the walk mostly birds were recorded and are listed opposite, along with any butterflies noted. Those of a botanical bent were refreshed towards the end of the walk by the sight of several plants of Pale Flax (*Linum bienne*) on the sea wall at Wells.

Eunice Phipps

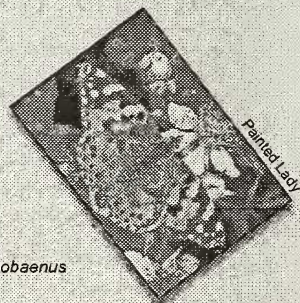
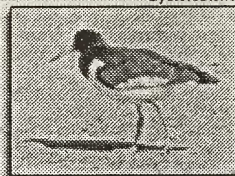
BIRDS

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*
Greylag Goose (plus Donald) *Anser anser*
Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*
Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*
(Common) Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*
(Common) Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*
(Common) Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
(Common) Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Common Gull *Larus canus*
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans*
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*
Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*
Little Tern *Sterna albibrona*
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
(Common) Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*
Stock Dove *Columba oenas*
Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*
(Common) Cuckoo (H) *Cuculus canorus*
(Common) Swift *Apus apus*
(Common) Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
(Common) House Martin *Delichon urbica*
Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Dunnock *Prunella modularis*
European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*
(Common) Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*
Sedge Warbler (H) *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
Great Tit *Parus major*
Blue Tit *Parus caeruleus*
(Common) Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
(Common) Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*
(Common) Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*
European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

BUTTERFLIES

Small White *Pieris rapae*
Green-veined White *Pieris napi*
Orange Tip *Anthocharis cardamines*
Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*
Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*
Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*
Painted Lady *Cynthia cardui*

Oystercatcher



Painted Lady



Holt Lowes Evening

Friday, 20th June 2003

Over 25 people gathered late on a Friday evening to hunt for a variety of nocturnal prey. We started well with up to three Woodcocks seen flying together in their 'roding' flight, well before dusk. Nightjars were equally early, and after some brief and distant views we finally enjoyed some close looks at the goatsucker. Moving on, a session pond-dipping produced a Water Stick-insect from the rather barren-looking Soldiers' Pond. Then, as it became really dark, we found our first Glow Worm, which was admired at extremely close range. Only 2-3 others were found during the evening, perhaps due to the early season, or possibly the cold (it quickly dropped to 6 degrees C!; on other evenings we have found dozens). The chill evening also put a damper on the moths, and despite Mike Halls brave efforts the catch was limited, although a fine Elephant Hawk-moth was a crowd-pleaser.

All-in-all however, it was a great evening, with some truly memorable sightings.

Simon Harrop

The Royal Norfolk Show

Wed/Thurs 25/26th June 2003

The Society was present again this year at the show, in the same county-side area by the lake. The two days could not have been better, sunny with a cool breeze, and the dragonflies were active, emperor, four spotted chasers and azure damselflies in abundance. This was perfect, as our theme for the main display was dragonflies, this in view of the recent Society publication by Dr Pam Taylor. Ken Durrant supplied the mounted specimens and David Lester the exuvia. As a result several copies of 'The Dragonflies of Norfolk' were sold.



Robert Maidstone had a display of caterpillars, which included peacock, brimstone, emperor moth, oak egger

moth, also shown were the tortoise beetle, on thistle and the figwort weevil. These all caused much interest, the only problem was stopping the caterpillars wandering off! Dr Roy Baker displayed the Asiatic clam and the problem it was causing to the rivers of the Broads. To complete our displays, Brian McFarlane loaned us his superb natural history photographs, which were much enjoyed and promoted the Society's photographic group. The new display boards which were purchased this year were of great benefit in showing the Society's aims.

The two days also brought in seven new members and a chance to promote the society to many more people.

Thanks are due also to those who helped on the stand, David and Iris Paull, Brian McFarlane, Roy Baker, Francis Farrow, Janet Negal, Paul Westley and David Griffin.

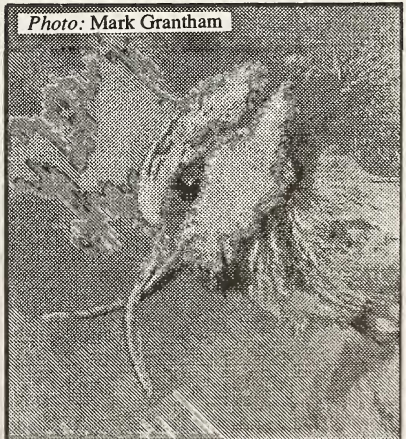
David Nobbs.

Beak of Nature

As many UK bird ringers will tell you, no-one sprints towards a mist net in anticipation of extracting a Blue Tit, one of the most numerous and vicious (don't be fooled by their cute demeanour) members of the Western Palearctic avifauna. However, an exception to this rule was noted on May 15th 2003 near Thetford when the Nunnery Ringing Group, composed principally of BTO staff members, came face to bill with the individual pictured opposite.

Despite first impressions, the bird had not hybridised with a cross-bill or a wader, but was in fact a pure-bred, common-or-garden Blue Tit. The same bird had, in fact, been caught in July the previous year, at which time it showed no sign of the Bergerac-ian extremity that it was to develop. Abnormal bill development is not unusual in many bird species and often occurs after the bill is damaged. However, the extensions to the bill usually break off well before reaching such an extreme length. Perhaps the most surprising thing about this individual was that it was a perfectly healthy weight, suggesting that the bird's ability to feed was not hampered in any way. Presumably, caterpillars and other foliage-dwelling insects could be picked off the leaves by turning the head to one side. With a bit of luck the bird may be re-trapped again in future years – and who 'nose' what it will look like then.

Photo: Mark Grantham



Dave Leech



Creeping Serendipity

We recently bought a discounted copy of Bob Flowerdew's 'The no-work garden'. Reading through the many pearls of wisdom Simon came across the following passage: "One evening I was overjoyed when a visitor asked me: 'What on earth is this?' This was a strange thing, a golden coloured worm, as long as my hand is wide at full stretch and not much thicker than my hair, winding its way up around a tall grass stem. I had no idea but a learned friend identified it as a Mermis, or Thunderworm, a Mermithid nematode; a rare creature only found in old grass-lands that is a parasite of grasshoppers." Simon had never heard of

a Mermis and forgot to mention it to Anne, and this snippet of information was destined to be soon forgotten.

The very next day (June 15) however, just after a thunderstorm, Anne was outside the back door when she exclaimed 'What on earth is this?' It was a thread-like worm around 10 cm long but perhaps just 2 mm in diameter, winding its way up out of the soil. It was overall greyish in colour with a paler and more golden 'head' and 'tail'. Even Simon could not have forgotten Bob Flowerdew's text after 24 hours, and it was duly consulted. We have no other reference to 'Thunderworms', but surely our creature was one and the same. Spooky or what!

Anne & Simon Harrap

Woodland Trust Woods

Michael Ryder, the new manager for all the Woodland Trust woods in Norfolk would be interested to know of any records that naturalists may have made in any of their woods, including a visit, earlier this year, to look for bryophytes in Tyrell's Wood.

If anyone has records for Woodland Trust sites and would like to send them onto Michael he can be contacted at the following e-mail or postal address:

Michaelryder@woodland-trust.org.uk

Michael Ryder, The Woodland Trust,
15 Market Place, Loddon, Norfolk. Tel: 01508 528676



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01606 783371 or e-mail
Jon.clifton@btinternet.com

Proprietors: J Clifton & A Wander

Would all contributors
please send your notes etc.
to the editor as soon as possible
by October 1st, 2003 to the
following address: Francis Farrow,
Heathlands, 6 Havelock Road,
Sheringham, Norfolk NR26 8QD
or by e-mail to:
francis.f@virgin.net

