

The Norfolk NATTERJACK

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Toad-in-the-hole....

Many thanks to all contributors. This issue highlights Council, publications and surveys - plenty of opportunity to be more involved if you wish - or just send in your own natural history discoveries and observations. **FF**

SALES HELP NEEDED

Sales of the Society's publications to non-members brings in additional income which can be used to enhance future publications. The publications team would welcome assistance from anyone who can spare a little time to put into action some of our ideas for increasing sales. Please note that this will not involve any cold-calling or junk mail! For more details contact - Tony Leech (Chairman, Publications Committee) on 01263 712282.

Wanted: Council Members

Would you like to play a small part in the running of the Society? We have two vacancies for members of Council because there were not enough nominations at the annual general meeting on March 18.

It is not a particularly arduous or time-consuming role: five Council meetings a year. What else you take on - being a member of one of the Council's committee, helping at exhibitions, etc - is entirely up to you.

Interested in getting involved? Give me a call on 01603 457270.

David Paull,
Chairman



Young Norfolk Nature Writer of the Year Award 2003 Calling all you nature writers! It's competition time!

Do you love watching wildlife and being close to nature?
Do you like creative writing?
Are you under the age of 16?
Do you want to win yourself £50?



Then why not enter our competition to find Norfolk's Young Nature Writer of the Year 2003. All you have to do to win yourself the top prize money of £50 is to write a short article or illustrated diary of no more than 800 words about your observations of nature, and return it to Norfolk Wildlife Trust by 30th September 2003. 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. You could write about the life in your garden pond or a memorable day that you went bird-watching but remember to put your age on it and keep it under 800 words. 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 no later than 30th September and sent in to: Young Norfolk Nature Writer of the year, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Bewick House, 22 Thorpe Road, Norwich. NR1 1RY

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of the
Norfolk & Norwich
Naturalists' Society
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Birds in my small garden

Over the last decade, I have noticed a decline in the birds visiting my back garden and also, a change in the habits of those remaining. I used to have three species of tit visiting my nut containers each morning, all vying for position on the choice perches. During the day, various visitors included greenfinch, chaffinch, goldfinch, robin, wren, hedge sparrow, and the resident house sparrows. Starlings, thrushes, blackbirds and collared doves all investigated their choice corners for food. The garden has not changed, the hedge and the shrubs are still there and each year, it is ablaze with colour from spring to autumn. The containers are still recharged each morning and bread and cake scraps, when available, are left - quartered apples are put out if it gets frosty.

However, the variety of visitors Has declined considerably over the years. We still have about a dozen house sparrows each day, many more starlings and the resident pair Of blackbirds, who are often joined by two pairs of collared doves. Very occasionally, a pair of hedge sparrows are seen picking up the minutest crumbs left by the others. The tits have long since gone, although a single blue tit does sometimes investigate the pyracanthus and cotoneaster - no doubt looking for spiders - it never visits the nut containers, these were taken over some years ago by the house sparrows and it didn't take me long to work out the hierarchy amongst them as they quarreled for perch positions.

I soon noticed one particular starling taking an interest in those feeding squabbles and, before long, he was on the containers with them and,

with his longer beak, was able to quickly get his fill. However, he and his mate raised a brood nearby of four youngsters and when they could fly, they used to sit on the path while he filled his crop with pieces of nut, then joined them and shared them out to the four noisy, open beaks awaiting.

Youngsters soon become adults and next season I had ten starlings all squabbling on the containers. Had I put some of my coloured cage bird



rings on them, I could have identified them. Unfortunately, one starling looks like another when adult. In the morning, the sparrows are the first to arrive but very soon the noisy hoard of starlings take over. But the sparrows have learned new tricks - they all drop to the ground beneath the containers or perch on rose briars near the ground, knowing that he starlings are messy feeders when it comes to extracting nuts from the containers, and many dropped onto the ground. The sparrows, who are awaiting this manna from above, pounce on any piece dropped without having to extract it from the container.

Very recently, I have noticed that our resident female blackbird has taken a great interest in the sparrows' activities underneath the

containers and has also joined them. She usually arrives when the starlings start their noisy squabbles over perch positions and because of her size, she has been able to collect many pieces of nut before the sparrows have had time to move. The sparrows return to the nuts when the starlings move off, as they do, in a group, but the blackbird still sits there beside the path. She has learned that as each sparrow extracts a nut, it flies down onto the path to break it into smaller pieces. When the bird has broken off a piece and is moving it about with its beak before it is swallowed, she rushes at them and, most times, is successful in acquiring the larger part of the nut before the unfortunate sparrow can make off with it. I now notice that the collared doves are taking an interest beneath the nut containers and I am awaiting further developments with interest.

The collared doves who nest in my neighbours holly tree now roam around the ground for any particles left after the other birds have taken their fill, but eyeing them from the roof of the nearby flats are a pair of ring-doves (wood pigeons). Seeing by action of the collared doves that the coast is clear they also fly down and join them in the free feast, and all this takes place within six feet of my french door windows.

The blackbirds are now nesting in the privet hedge nearby and the dunlocks (hedge sparrows) are building at the other end.



Norfolk Amphibian and Reptile Group

For details of Field Visits and events 2003 contact:

Helen Baczkowska at Norfolk Wildlife Trust (01603 598300)



Ermine? In Norfolk?

It was little more than a glimpse of a sleek body, dashing across the road in front of the car as we drove through Guist on the A1067 on February 26. But it was long enough to discern completely white fur – except for a distinctive black tip to the tail.

A stoat in ermine? In Norfolk? On a sunny day in February? My one rather rudimentary mammals book says stoats take on white coats only in Scotland. So I turned to Stefan Buczacki's monumental *Fauna Britannica* (Hamlyn) and found a different story. He quotes a sighting of a white stoat in South Lincolnshire in January 1993 and writes:

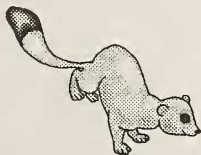
"The process [of becoming ermine] was for long a mystery because the transformation ... may take only a few days. It is partly hereditary and partly controlled by temperature. In the northern part of Britain, all stoats turn white; further south the change is usually at best partial.

"The rapidity of the change is because the new white coat grows beneath the old one and becomes apparent only when the old coat is shed. The shortening of the days stimulates the winter coat to grow, while the temperature determines whether or not it is white."

We had had snow and it had certainly been very cold – but cold enough and for long enough to stimulate the change of coat?

Was our sighting a one-off or has anyone else spotted ermine in Norfolk this past winter?

David Paull



White or Black

In response to the article in 'Natterjack' 80 about Tony Howes sightings of plumage abnormalities I can add an all white black-headed gull that frequented the Mediterranean gull flock at Great Yarmouth a few years back. Also carrion crows with white primaries (a common sight in North Suffolk), a leucistic sparrowhawk, an all-white coot, an all-white starling (not albino), an albino pheasant and a melanistic water vole. I have also seen very sandy coloured rabbits.

I wonder, also, if these Puma sightings relate to melanistic foxes?

Colin A Jacobs.

SISKINS

On a visit to Whitlingham Country Park in January I came across a large flock of mixed tits and finches. They were busy feeding on the edge of the track leading down to the Broad.

The reason for their interest in this particular spot was a fallen alder tree, it had blown down over the track and subsequently been cut up by a chain saw, but left on the grass verge, it was the seeds from the cones that were attracting all the attention.

On watching from a distance I could see blue tit, great tit, chaffinch, greenfinch, goldfinch, redpoll, and siskin. The later numbered about sixty birds, in the sunny conditions that prevailed their colours were vibrant, especially the males, these are a stunningly beautiful little finch.

They seem particularly fond of alder seed, I gathered a few sprigs to take home, I shall hang them in the garden along side the peanut holders, and see if they take a fancy to them, more often than not we see siskins during February and March, some times in fair numbers, I always marvel at their acrobatic skills, not seeming to care if they are upside down or not. But they are always welcome, brightening up the dull days of late winter with their finery of yellow, green and black.

Tony Howes

Norfolk Dragonflies

By the time you read this article you should have received your copy of 'Dragonflies of Norfolk'. As you will see, the survey data from 1987 to 1989 that first appeared in Transactions in 1990, has been republished as an appendix to the new book. The reason for this being the paucity of dragonfly records being submitted during the intervening years.

We now need your help to bring this information up to date. With three species appearing in Norfolk for the first time during the past two years, this county should be at the forefront of dragonfly recording, but we need more people to participate.

Recorders should use the standard RA70 recording cards (available from me) wherever possible. The recording database matches the layout of this card so RA70s are much easier to deal with than casual records sent in other formats. If you don't use the cards, then please treat each site visit as a separate item, rather than lumping all records for the same species together. For further details on recording please send an A5 SAE to me. If you require a batch of RA70 cards for the coming season, please stamp this to the value of 33p.

Dr Pam Taylor, Norfolk Dragonfly Recorder, Decoy Farm, Decoy Road, Potter Heigham, Norfolk, NR29 5LX



I wrote the following poem for a friend who was unable to attend the AGM and talk by Garth Coupland. She suggested it might be suitable (as a thank you to Garth) for printing in 'Natterjack' - (definitely-Ed).

'A question of spiders'

I didn't know this but you possibly might,
Most spiders can inflict a sizeable bite.
But at piercing your skin most are a failure.
Identify them by their weird genitalia.

One spider in a bell underwater is found
so don't think they all crawl along on the ground.
(Webs on bushes and grass are a beautiful sight)
Many hide in dark places and come out at night.

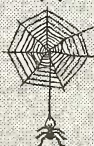
An abundance of eggs huddle close in a sac
The young are carried on poor mother's back
So nothing is wasted webs that were spun
Are eaten with relish before the next one's begun

Spiders come in all colours and patterns you know,
In their own habitat themselves not to show.
They all have their own particular season
Garth kept asking "Why" and "What is the reason"

I learned such a lot I found up my book
Relaxed in my chair for a serious look.
Next time a spider crawls up from the drain,
From drowning the creature I'll surely refrain.

I'm not scientific, worldly wise or clever
But passing a spider again will I never
Without attempting a feel for the "jizz"
I will not feel fear, something more like pure bliss.

Some serious questions at the evening were posed.
Philosophical leanings, to which I'm disposed.
From spiders to humans, we're all here for one reason;
Quite simply TO BE- to live out our season



Janice Grint

A STRANGE FIND IN THE WOOD.

While walking through my local woodlands last January I came across a strange fungus. The overall colour was a bright orange, and it was around 16 inches from edge to edge. It had the appearance of a cauliflower, and was growing from the base of an old scot's pine.

On getting back home I looked it up, and indeed it turned out to have the common name of cauliflower fungus, *Sparassis crispa*.

It's not something I have come across before, so as the conditions were favourable I went back with the camera and took a few shots for the record.

It seemed to me to be very late in the winter for such a delicate looking fungus, especially as there had been several sharp frosts, I had another look at it a few days later, by then the colour had changed to a dirty brown, and the ends of the fronds had a jaded look about them, but it was still firm to the touch, not the slimy mass I had expected.

Tony Howes

FOR SALE

I have in my possession two items of Colin Dack's photographic equipment which are looking for a good home. If anyone is interested please contact me for further details or to see the equipment. These items are for sale at prices to be negotiated with David Richmond. The items consist of:

- a) a Paterson contact Proof Printer in its original box,
- b) a Simon Slide Viewing System, fan cooled, which projects on an 8 x 8 inch daylight viewing screen and can magnify the slide by factors of 5, 8 or 24. The apparatus can be loaded with a stack of up to 40 slides at a time. (original cost £90)

Mike Poulton

(Tel: 01953 603700)

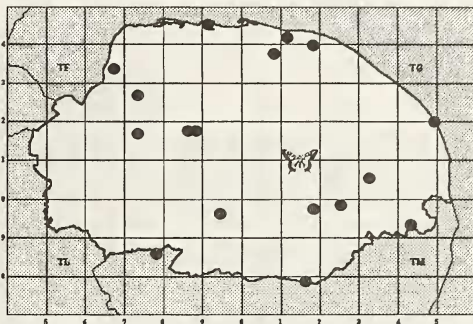


Excursion Reports

Featuring:

Swanton Novers Great Wood

● 2003-04 Field Meeting location
Easton College
Indoor meetings



Swanton Novers Great Wood

Sunday, 26th January 2003

On a damp gloomy day about 20 hardy members met to record the lichens of Swanton Novers Great Wood, by permission of English Nature who lease the wood. This wood does not possess any veteran trees which particularly attract lichenologists but it does have a wide variety of tree species reflecting a tremendous range of soil types in a small area. The soils support a mix of small leaved lime coppice, sessile oak coppice, areas of bird cherry and alder in wet flushes and some high forest. The lichen flora whilst not particularly rich does have a good range of species reflecting this diversity.

The dry bark of the oaks was often covered with *Lecanactis abietina* recognised by small white dots of the pycnidia on a grey background thallus. *Graphis scripta* was relatively abundant on the smooth but acid bark of sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*) in the oak coppice area. Other species which favoured acid bark included *Chaenotheca ferruginea* (a pinhead lichen with a rusty-coloured thallus), *Hypogymnia physodes*, *Pseudevernia furfuracea*, *Parmelia saxatilis* and *Pertusaria amara* (tastes bitter). *Arthonia spadicea* occurred on shady trunks and could be distinguished by its small irregular-shaped dark chestnut coloured fruits, often occurring with diminutive but abundant *Dimerella pineti*. The attractive apple-green *Flavoparmelia* (*Parmelia*) *caperata* was frequent on tree trunks and boughs of both ash and oak. It is a species which had declined in the

days of high sulphur dioxide levels but is now with decreasing level reclaiming its old distribution even into the centre of London. On tree stumps were a number of *Cladonia* species including *C. coniocraea*, *C. macilenta* and *C. polydactyla*. The bryologists noted the ball moss *Leucobryum glaucum*, but it no longer occurs in the very large cushions which were once so prominent in the oak coppice. The reasons for its decline are not known. However, they did find *Dicranum majus* in this same habitat.

Despite the weather it was a thoroughly enjoyable day in good company.

Species list:

Lichens

Arthonia spadicea
Chaenotheca ferruginea
Chrysothrix candelaris
Cladonia coniocraea
Cladonia macilenta
Cladonia polydactyla
Dimerella pineti
Flavoparmelia (*Parmelia*) *caperata*
Graphis scripta
Hypogymnia physodes
Lecanactis abietina
Lecanora pulicaris
Lepraria incana
Melanelia (*Parmelia*) *glabratula*
Parmelia sulcata
Parmelia saxatilis
Pertusaria amara
Pertusaria pertusa
Phlyctis argena
Pseudevernia furfuracea
Punctelia (*Parmelia*) *subrudecta*

Bryophytes

Dicranum majus
Leucobryum glaucum

Some notes on the 2003/2004 programme of excursions.

Coastal Walk (11 May 03)

Please note that we will meet at Wells but take some cars on to Stiffkey and walk back from there. Hopefully, there will be enough cars left at Wells to get us back to collect the ones at Stiffkey!

Flordon Common

In 1910, W.H. Burrell and W.G. Clarke presented a paper to the society on the Flora and Fauna of Flordon Common (Transactions ix 170-186). At Janel Negal's suggestion, we thought it might be a nice idea to survey the site this year and make a comparison, perhaps resulting in a paper for Transactions. Four visits have been arranged (two of which will be evenings for moth trapping etc.). Please note that the site can be wet and Wellington boots are recommended.

Ken Hill (15 June 03)

Directions to Snettisham Common car park (TF672.335): Leave A149, signposted to Snettisham Beach; turn right onto a track just at an awkward left hand bend in the road. The car park is signposted.

Shotesham (12 July 03)

As those who attended last year will remember, the entrance to no. 8 The Grove is actually on the main street just past the turning into The Grove. It is best to park in The Grove itself.

Bob Ellis,
Programme Chairman

Peter Lambley



LAWNS and GOD

As the lawn mowers come out in force.....

GOD: St. Francis, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colours by now, but all I see are these green rectangles.

ST. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers weeds and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colourful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it, sometimes twice a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? It is a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No, sir - just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow, and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

ST. FRANCIS: You'd better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

GOD: Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

ST. CATHERINE: Dumb and Dumber, Lord. It's a really stupid movie about...

GOD: Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St Francis.

(Source: Internet/Mike Hall)

Colin Dack's Slides

After much toil and many tribulations I have, with a great deal of help from a number of experts in the society, reduced Colin's natural history slides to a selection of about 1500 slides. These are now stored in the Natural History Department of the Norwich Castle Museum at Shire Hall. Any member wishing to refer to them should approach Tony Irwin who has a complete list of species included, together with a list giving the location of each slide within the 8 slide boxes in which they are stored. The slides include all those which were shown at the commemorative lecture in October 1999 together with several hundred which could not be shown on that occasion.

Mike Poulton

P.S. There are many more slides, some of which are copies of those mentioned above. These are now in the possession of Robert Maidstone who is selecting ones which he can use. He will not want all of them. Any member wishing to look through the remainder should contact Robert on 01508 531287.

