

THE NATURAL
HISTORY MUSEUM

10 AUG 2004

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The Norfolk NATTERJACK

Website: www.nnns.org.uk

Number 86
August 2004

Toad-in-the-hole....

Welcome to this edition of 'The Norfolk Natterjack'. It is a mixture of requests for information - water shrews and harebells - and further information on past subjects - fungi and harvest mice. There are also some recent observations and some from past 'Transactions'. Reports of 2004 excursions and the Royal Norfolk Show are also included. We say an initial farewell to two of Norfolk's older natural historians and look forward to coming events.

My thanks to all contributors and please keep sending in your notes etc., - anytime before the deadline!

FF

HELP!!

So far, no one has volunteered to take over the sale and distribution of our Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report from David Paull, who is having to give up on health grounds. The appointment of a successor is now matter of urgency because the 2003 Report is due to be published in September.

If you think you could help, please phone David on 01603 457270.



Respect - Protect - Enjoy

See page 5 for details of new
Countryside Code

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Bored with school holidays - nothing to do? If you are a parent/grandparent why not suggest the following to the 'little darlings':

Young Norfolk Nature Writer of the Year Award 2004

Closing date: September 30th

Why not try your hand at writing an article or illustrated diary of not more than 800 words about your observations of nature in Norfolk?

You could win a prize in the Young Norfolk Nature Writer competition 2004. Entries will be judged in two categories: Up to 11 years and 11-15 years. There will be a prize of £50 and a trophy in each category.

The prizes and trophies are being generously donated by Mrs Sylvia Seago in memory of her late husband Michael who devoted 60 years to studying and writing about Norfolk's birds and other wildlife.

Entries should be submitted by September 30th, 2004, to: Young Norfolk Nature Writer of the Year, Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Bewick House, 22 Thorpe Road, Norwich NR1 1RY.



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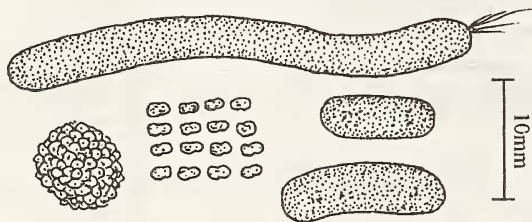
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"The dyke ran with blood"

Recently I received a sample from Keith Clarke which had been collected by the Environmental Agency from the Swan Pit in the grounds of the Great Hospital almshouses in Norwich. At the bottom of the tube was some purple flocculent material, which turned out to be a mixture of several kinds of purple sulphur bacteria, harmless and helpful creatures which use their own kind of photosynthesis to convert malodorous and poisonous hydrogen sulphide to innocuous sulphur or sulphates, thereby deriving energy. They live where the oxygen is low, often because of the presence of rotting leaves.

In 1998 police were alerted when there appeared to be blood in a drainage ditch at Beccles, just over the Suffolk border, and there were photographs in the local paper. Early this year a pond at Fleggburgh was thought to have red diesel fuel in it, and both these occurrences were due to purple sulphur bacteria. In 1640 the River Cam at Cambridge ran as red as blood, thought to be a presage of the Civil War, and no doubt this and many other alarming signs have been caused by these little creatures. In the drawing the short sausages are *Chromatium okenii*, the long one *Thiospirillum jenense*, the rectangular colony *Thiopodia rosea*, and the irregular clusters *Lamprocystis roseo-persicina*. All but *Thiopodia rosea* can swim rather slowly, and all are bright pink under the microscope.

Hilary Belcher



Small Tortoiseshell

Small Tortoiseshell numbers have been poor here in recent years but it is always pleasing to see one or two surviving the winter. The first one seen in my garden this year was on 1st March.



Attending a funeral service at Saxthorpe Church on 11th April and with the rendering of the last hymn 'How great Thou art' many small tortoiseshells were flying near the congregation and onto the windows. After the service 4

were caught and put outside and because of the height of the windows I went home for a long handled net. Another 10 plus 1 peacock were released outside. Some were still out of reach, others were dead on the floor. Apparently at the church service the previous week about 9 were caught and put outside and I was told they only fly when the heat is on!

Anne Brewster

Further note on fungus *Sclerotinia tubrosa* in Norfolk.

Last Autumn Alec Bull wrote about the Anemone Cup fungus *Sclerotinia tuberosa* associated with the wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and I made a diary note to look for this fungus in Wayland Wood in April 2004.

My wife and I did not have to search for long before we started to find the cups among anemones growing in damp soil between coppiced hazels. Having "got our eyes in" we found the cups over a widespread area, growing on patches of bare soil between the Anemones. I carefully collected two of the fruit bodies to examine under the microscope, when reaching home these specimens were kept moist on wet tissue paper in a plastic tub. The next day when I lifted the lid of the tub there occurred a spontaneous mass discharge of spores which appeared like a puff of smoke.

Looking at a small part of the fertile layer inside the cup at X400 magnification, the asci are surprisingly long (170 micro-metre), densely packed in a jelly. The spores are elliptical and have a small oil drop clearly visible at each end.

Tom Pallister

Another update on a fungus

In the February 2002 edition of 'Natterjack' (no. 76) Tony Leech and I described the finding and identification of *Gymnopilus dilepis* (Berk. & Broome) Singer. Since then an Australian researcher, B.J. Rees and her colleagues have carried out DNA tests on samples of the fungus from Beeston Common and Holt Lowes. The conclusion being that although there is a slight difference genetically between the fungi from the two locations they are essentially the same species to those found in Australia and SE Asia!

Francis Farrow



The Lizards

There is a certain post at Strumpshaw Fen which I always have a look at as I enter the reserve. It's entirely covered with ivy except the extreme top which I (and probably other people as well) keep clear because it is a favourite basking place for several common lizards *lacerta vivipara*. I have seen as many as four together, but one or two are the norm, sometimes all adult or sometimes adult and young together. There is no doubt that there are many individuals that use this sun trap.

To get to this vantage point means a scramble up through ivy stems of about four feet, it must be like a maze in there. The top of the post is in bright light from about mid morning until 2 pm in summer. The nearby gate to the rail crossing is being slammed many times each day and a distinct tremor can be felt in the ground as a train hurtles past, but the lizards don't seem to mind, they just continue lazing in the sun – lucky them.



Tony Howes

Wells Sea Wall

In the 1850's the drainage of the saltmarshes west of Wells was completed by building the one-mile-long wall north from the Quay, joining the dunes just west of the present lifeboat house. It was breached by storm tides in 1953 and again in 1978, after which it was completely rebuilt to a height 1.5 metres more than before (making it some 6.5 metres above sea level), and faced with interlocking concrete slabs on the seaward side.

It has always been interesting botanically, with a good variety of plants that you would expect, plus a few that you wouldn't. Of the latter I would single out the pale flax, *Linum bienne*, which is otherwise very scarce in the county. It was certainly there before the 1978 flood, and when the wall was rebuilt we thought we had lost it. However, after a few years it reappeared. How? I suppose it could only be from buried seed. A couple of patches of meadow saxifrage also turned up again.

Quite a lot of soil was imported for the post-1978 rebuilding, and with it came weld (a bit boring) and viper's bugloss, very colourful. I suspect that the soil must have come from the Breckland area, where both species occur. From somewhere there also appeared a single clump of nodding star of Bethlehem, *Ornithogalum nutans*.

Below the level of the footpath the concrete-covered bank slopes down at something less than 20 degrees, shallow enough to absorb most of the wave energy, which of course is considerable in storms. At the base there are lumps of imported rock, to which a number of seaweed species attach their holdfasts, including the channelled wrack, *Pelvetia canaliculata* which elsewhere in Norfolk saltmarshes, notably at Blakeney Point, occurs in its unattached form.

It's strange to be able to admire typical inland plants at one moment, out of sight of the sea, and then with a few strides to be in a marine environment, with crabs and other invertebrates scuttling or crawling through the mud and seaweeds. Nearby there may be common and little terns in summer, while in winter there could be a grey plover calling its plaintive cry, and numbers of brent geese grunting not far away.

Paul Banham

A Small Snack!

Watching from the fen hide at Strumpshaw recently I had a fine view of a heron having a midday snack. It had flown into the pool in front of the hide with something round and dark in its bill, which it then dunked several times in the water. Eventually I was able to make out the form of a young coot, still covered in black fluff and with red threads on its head. After several attempts to get it in the right position the heron began gulping it an

inch or two at a time until just the coot's legs were left dangling, then they too were gone. The bird remained standing for some time and the bulge in its neck was clearly visible, after some ten minutes it decided on a change of scenery and off it flew towards the river.

Tony Howes



Norfolk Bird Atlas - A Personal Plea

It was seven years ago, in 1997, that the first trials were carried out to assess the possibility of undertaking fieldwork for a new Norfolk bird atlas. At that time, a small team of observers visited various parts of the county to see if it was feasible to record the abundance, as well as the distribution, of each species present. The pilot study was successful, and as a result a meeting was held in Norwich in May 1998 to which representatives of the main ornithological, conservation and land-owning bodies in the county were invited. Following this, a working group was set up, further trials of field methods were undertaken, funds were raised and a team of potential observers was contacted. At last in December 1999 fieldwork commenced, with the initial intention of covering the whole county within three to five years.

If this target had been reached, the survey would be nearing completion by now, and we would be preparing the final maps and writing the species texts for the new book. Perhaps we were over ambitious at the start of the project. After all, finding observers to visit all of the 1455 tetrads in the county on four occasions is a mammoth task, although considering the number of birdwatchers in Norfolk, it should not have been impossible. However, at the time of writing, only 63% of the county has been covered in winter, and by the end of this summer, just over 50% during the breeding season. I say 'only', but it is still a remarkable achievement, as it represents about 12,000 hours spent in the field by over 300 observers, and the atlas database currently holds in excess of 115,000 records.

Having been personally involved since the start of the project, and with every hope of seeing it through to the end, I would like to believe that the remaining tetrads can be completely covered within the next three years. The great value of the baseline data that we are gathering decrease the longer the project runs, and so it is

really important to complete it as soon as possible.

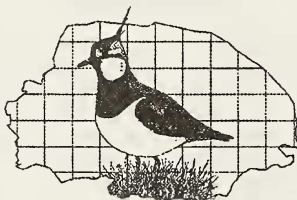
As far as the winter survey is concerned, continuing at the current rate of annual coverage will mean that this should be attainable. However, to achieve this during the breeding season, extra fieldworkers are needed and those already involved will need to take on additional tetrads. It may also mean that the fieldwork protocol during the summer months will have to be amended to ensure that the remaining 50% of Norfolk has been covered by the end of the 2007 breeding season. This will be one of the topics considered at the annual meeting of the Working Group in August.

In the meantime, I would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to become involved next winter (December to February) and/or next summer (April to June). We particularly need help in central, southern and western Norfolk. I have personally carried out counts in almost 70 tetrads in various parts of the county, and have thoroughly enjoyed the fieldwork as it has taken me to parts of Norfolk that I otherwise would not have visited.

Please do help us to complete the project within the next three years by contacting me at:

4 Heath Road, Sheringham,
NR26 8JH, or on 01263-823637
or at mosstaylor@care4free.net

Moss Taylor



Water Shrew Survey

I should like to draw to the attention of members, a new survey on water shrews. Members of the Mammal Society will already be aware of the survey, because it is being organised by that society. Some of us will no doubt have taken part in the preliminary trial.

The survey involves placing baited tubes in potential water shrew habitats and then inspecting them two weeks later for the presence of water shrew faeces. The droppings can be differentiated from those of other shrews, because they contain the remains of aquatic invertebrates. The main survey is due to start on 1st July 2004 and last until 30th September. The winter survey will run from 1st November '04 to 30th April 05.

Anyone interested in taking part should get in touch with:

Phoebe Carter,
Surveys Officer,
2B Inworth Street, London,
SW11 3EP

or e-mail
pcarter@mammal.org.uk

Ian Keymer

Where do Harvest Mice go in Summer?

Note in reply to Alec Bull's article in Natterjack no 85, May 2004

Well at Felbrigg Hall (NT), they nest in the tubes around young trees. However a search of likely spots among cock's-foot tussocks and other grasses this winter revealed no old nests!

Given the number of tree tubes dotting the countryside, and especially along new roads, perhaps harvest mice have learnt a thing or two!

Mary Ghullam



Excursion Reports

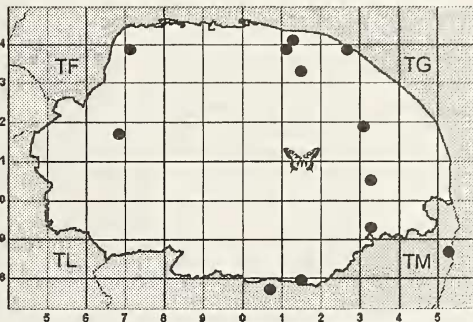
Featuring:

Kelling Heath Holiday Park

Hempstead Woods

Royal Norfolk Show

● 2004-05 Field Meeting location
Easton College
Indoor meetings



Kelling Heath Holiday Park

Sunday, 25th April 2004

On a pleasant spring morning around 16 adults and 1 child met up with Kevin Hart and 2 other members of the 5 strong countryside team, for a gentle stroll around Kelling Heath Holiday Park. First stop was the red squirrel enclosure, where Kevin told us about the successful captive-breeding programme, which had supplied squirrels to such places as the Isle of Wight. One red squirrel was hiding in the roof of the enclosure, while the two barn owls next door, studiously ignored us. The party then moved off through woodland, glimpsing a speckled wood butterfly and admiring the delicate flowers of wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* on the way to the recently scraped, spring-fed Bottom pond. Here Stephen Livermore found a *Rubus* stem, bearing the tiny white ascomyete, *Dasyscypha virgineus*. While some members watched a larged damselfly, others were fortunate to catch sight of a grass snake. Bob Ellis drew our attention to wood speedwell *Veronica montana*, with its distinctive lavender flowers, growing in a damp area of woodland with moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, and a clump of ramsons *Allium ursinum* near the North Norfolk Steam Railway line.

We then moved onto an area of restored heathland, which had been grazed by Hebridean sheep and currently sported an interesting spiral sculpture of red tree tubes. Cuttings of ling *Calluna vulgaris*, taken in October from adjacent area, had

been successfully scattered and produced good new growth. Some discussion occurred about the best way of gathering Ling seed for regeneration, as after cutting the original plants had died. Robert Maidstone suggested the use of a Billy Goat – the mechanical variety! On the way to another area of heathland, managed by rotation cut for silver-studded blue butterflies in conjunction with English Nature, keen eyes spotted the cobwebbed 'nests' of gorse mites, *Tetranychus lintearius*. Some of the group split off, while most walked back to the car park and lunch, enjoying the sounds and sights of Spring migrants such as wood lark, willow warbler and blackcap.

After lunch a much-depleted group decided to walk through the Park to Weybourne Springs. Robert Maidstone immediately pointed out *Andricus quercus corticus*, a wasp gall on Oak, while at the pond we watched a female crane fly *Tipula maxima* ovipositing in the mud at the pond's edge. Alongside the railway line the path was edged with meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, just about to come into flower. We admired the views across the valley to the coast and Weybourne Church, framed intriguingly through holes drilled in wooden posts by the Railway line. At a rather gloomy Weybourne Springs we found a solitary spike of great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* with yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*. Just outside the Park, on the edge of the footpath grew one spike of common twayblade *Listera ovata*.

On the way back a rust, probably the newly arrived *Puccinia distincta*, was

spotted on a daisy leaf *Bellis perennis* and Robert Maidstone's sharp eyes found a gnat gall, *Asphondylia sarothamni*, on a Broom, planted near the car park.

In all almost 150 species of vascular plants, 4 butterfly and 12 bird species and various molluscs, galls, and insects were seen on a very enjoyable spring day.

Mary Ghillum

New Countryside Code

A new Countryside Code to update the original 1950s' country code for England and help prepare for the introduction of the public's new right of access to the countryside was launched by the Countryside Agency last July.

For the first time the Countryside Code includes a special section for land managers as well as messages for the public including:

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people



HEMPSTEAD WOODS

Sunday, 23rd May 2004

Advertised as a 'nature walk with experts', the joint excursion with the Gresham's School Natural History Society to Hempstead Woods, 2km east of Holt, provided something of interest for everyone in the early summer sunshine. Landowners Mr and Mrs John Watson had kindly given permission for the societies to visit these private woods and we were fortunate in having Peter Smith, a local naturalist with an intimate knowledge of the site, as guide. He took us first to the Duck Decoy pond where about ten years ago he had found the marsh violet. At around the same time a sketch map of the site, drawn in 1928, was found in a notebook at Gresham's School marking the exact spot where the plant occurred; it is still there. Another plant marked on the map, hard fern, is no longer at its former site but was recently found about one kilometre away by Bob Ellis who later showed us the plant.

While committed botanists gazed downwards at the marshy perimeter of the pond, a roving pair of eyes caught sight of a common buzzard soaring above, almost certainly one of the pair which has nested in these woods for the past few years.

The Decoy pond is something of an oasis in a plantation of conifers set on former heathland in the 1960s. Sadly the water meadows of the River Glaven, which flows through the woods, were also planted with conifers. Not surprisingly the trees failed to thrive and in these more enlightened times the Forestry Commission has felled them to restore the wet valley. The Watsons have created a large pond a little way from the river which provided us with several of the six species of dragonflies and damselflies seen during the excursion, including large red damselfly, azure damselfly and broad-bodied chaser.

The broad rides through the woods help to maintain biodiversity and gave us good views of tiger beetles flying in the sun, a pair of green hairstreak butterflies, a slow-worm and a somewhat off-habitat brown hare. Indeed, something for everyone.

Tony Leech

Royal Norfolk Show

Wednesday, 30th June

Thursday, 1st July 2004

The Society was again at the Royal Norfolk Show this year, and the theme was 'The Beetles of Norfolk'. Specimens, photographs and text were supplied by Martin Collier, additional specimens by Ken Durrant, plus photographs and text of water beetles by Geoff Nobes. David Nobbs also presented a display of live beetles from Wheatfen, where in particular, the rare musk beetle (longhorn) gave much interest to the public. The stag beetles from Martin and Kens collection also aroused much interest. Geoff Nobes highlighted the rare water beetles, which Norfolk has quite a number. Robert Maidstone brought along a cow pat, to show off dung beetles, and also mealworm beetles. The lily beetle also caused a bit of interest, as recent newspaper articles have highlighted its potential destructive nature as a garden pest.

In all a super display plus Brian Mcfarlane promoted the Photographic group with some great photos. We also had a visit by the show vice-president on the first day.

Thanks to all who provided display material and to those members who came to man the stand over the two days of the show.

David Nobbs



70 Years Ago

Notes from the 1934
Transactions (Vol. XIII)
- editor E.A. Ellis

CEPHALOPODA - the small squid *Alloteuthis media* (L.) Walker was taken from the dreg-netter's refuse on Yarmouth beach, 22-4-1934. The mantle was 2½ inches long, the head with short tentacles 1 inch and the pair of long tentacles 2½ inches (P. A. Rumbelow).

GASTROPODA - *Assiminea grayana* (Leach) Flemming was abundant on salt-marsh "rond" by the river at King's Lynn, the mouth of the Bure at Gt. Yarmouth, and the Norfolk bank of the Waveney at St. Olave's Bridge in the Spring of 1929; in May, 1934, several of these molluscs were seen in the Cockle Bight and Great Aster Marsh on Scalt Head.

LEPIDOPTERA - *Vanessa antipopa* L.: a Camberwell beauty in fresh condition was seen to alight on the road at Dene Side, near St. Georges's Park, Great Yarmouth, at 2.30 p.m., 18-8-1934. Mr. P. E. Rumbelow and several other persons had a clear view of it; two men captured it, but happily it escaped and was last noticed flying over a house-top. Another rested on Corton lightship, August 21st. (S. G. Sharman).

Harebell - *Campanula rotundifolia*.

According to floras, the harebell is quite common, but when Gillian Beckett checked its occurrence in some areas where she recorded it for the *Flora*, it was no longer to be found. This is typical of the fate of many of the smaller, easily smothered species and we feel it would be useful to know where they survive. Members are encouraged to submit records of any finds of the harebell, ideally with a grid reference and a note on the number of plants present (or the area they cover if they are abundant). Records to Flora Recorders please - see below.

FLORA RECORDERS:

East Norfolk: Bob Ellis, 11 Havelock Road, Norwich, NR2 3HQ.
Email: bob@clymus.demon.co.uk

West Norfolk: Gillian Beckett, Bramley Cottage, Stanhoe, King's Lynn, PE31 8QF.
Email: beckett28@tiscali.co.uk



Phyllis Ellis 1913-2004

The Society was represented at the funeral of Mrs. Phyllis Ellis M.B.E., who passed away peacefully on June 24th, a few days before her 91st birthday.

The funeral service took place at St. Mary's Church, Surlingham on July 1st 2004, a church where she used to play the organ. She was later laid to rest with Ted in the old churchyard of St. Saviours, Surlingham. During the ceremony a purple hairstreak butterfly was flitting above the small tree near the grave - a final farewell from nature to Phyllis.

Ken Durrant

Ernest Daniels 1911-2004

It is with great sadness that we record the death of the Society's longest-serving member, Ernest Daniels, who died on June 29th at the age of 91. Ernest joined the Society in 1928 and we recently congratulated him on the fact that he had been a member for 75 years, almost certainly a unique achievement and one that is unlikely ever to be surpassed. Ernest was honorary treasurer for 12 years. He was appointed a vice-president in 1970 and served as president for 1979-80. His contribution to natural history was immense and covered a wide range. He was a keen birdwatcher, joint entomological recorder for a time, and in more recent years his interest centred on botany.

A fuller tribute will appear in the next 'Natterjack' and an obituary will be published in the 2005 'Transactions'.

NORFOLK BIRD RECORDS

Please note change of e-mail address.

Any records/correspondence sent by e-mail should in future be addressed to:

giles.dunmore@tiscali.co.uk

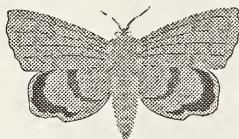
Any photos or sketches should still be sent by post to:

Giles Dumore, 49 Nelson Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8DA.

FOR BEGINNERS

Norfolk Wildlife Trust is running a series of wildlife workshops from July to September, aimed mainly at those who want to make a start on a different natural history subject. The workshops, costing between £5 and £20, cover moths, butterflies, birds, bats, grasses, sedges and rushes, wildflowers, dragonflies and damselflies, and other invertebrates.

For further information, contact:
Gemma Walker at the Trust
(01603 625540).

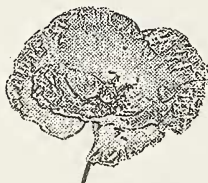


COUNTY FLOWER

Most people will know by now (thanks to the *'Eastern Daily Press'*) that the flower chosen to be Norfolk's emblem in the Plantlife Millennium project is no longer alexanders but the corn poppy.

Many people considered the choice of alexanders as a bad one and the EDP organised another poll with poppy gaining almost half the votes cast. Apparently Norfolk was the only County to reject their chosen flower and Plantlife agreed to the new choice after the EDP's campaign.

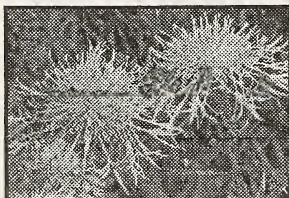
Another case of Norfolk dew different!



A white flower

On July 11th, while out with my daughter, Ellie, she drew my attention to a large white flower at the edge of a field near Sheringham. The plant turned out to be greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*. This is the first time that I have seen a white form. Later in the day I talked to various people on the Ringstead excursion and it seems that it is very uncommon. Although others had seen white flowered forms they were not in Norfolk. Maybe some of you have seen a similar plant at some time and can let me know.

Francis Farrow



Natural History Day at Wheatfen

Sunday 8th 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)
01508 538036

WILD ABOUT NORFOLK

An exhibition featuring local wildlife groups, slide shows and children's activities

Saturday 9th October
10.00 am - 4.30 pm

Broadland High School,
Tunstead Road,
Hoveton

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
(NNNS REPRESENTED)

Would all contributors please send your notes etc. to the editor as soon as possible by **October 1st, 2004** to the following address: Francis Farrow, Heathlands, 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8QD or by email to: francisf@virgin.net.

