NORFOLK
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The Norfolk NATTERJACK

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Toad-in-the-hole....

Whether you are an active naturalist champing at the bit to get out and survey an area or an armchair one content to read others exploits, *Natterjack*, has something for you.

Thanks to all contributors and may 2004 be a great year for all NNNS members.

FF

Congratulations

In the February 2002 issue (No. 76) I congratulated Ernest Daniels who had celebrated his ninetieth birthday during the previous November. I mentioned that he was our longest serving member having joined the Society in 1928.

This means, of course, that at some time during 2003, Ernest completed an unbroken seventy-five years membership of the Society. This record is believed to be unique in our history. I am sure that I speak for all members once again in sending him our congratulations and Best Wishes on this achievement.

David Paull, Chairman

NATIONAL BREEDING NIGHTJAR SURVEY 2004

The next 10 year national survey is scheduled for 2004, having been postponed from 2002. The previous survey, in 1992, estimated 3,400 males, representing an increase of 50% since the 1981. This sizeable increase represented a partial recovery following a long period of decline in breeding range, which qualifies the nightjar as a red-listed species of conservation concern.

The nightjar is a breeding visitor to the UK, wintering in Africa. In the UK, their historical distribution extended across the whole of mainland Britain, although it was most numerous in southern England, Wales and the Marches (Holloway 1996). It underwent a substantial decline during most of the twentieth century. Similar declines occurred across much of Europe.

There were estimated to be 3400 churring males in 1992, a substantial increase compared with the estimated 2100 males in 1981 (Morris *et al.* 1994). Whilst 38% of churring males were associated with lowland heathland, especially dry heath; 54% were recorded in forestry plantations. Much of the recovery to date has been attributed to afforested heaths in young plantations 15 years, although breeding densities tend to peak 1-4

years after planting and 3-5 year restocks are often used for foraging. However, they will forage up to several kilometres from the nest, including over farmland.

Since 1992, there have been continued regional and local surveys of nightjars on a regular basis, which indicate further increases in numbers and range expansion, at least in southern England.

Volunteers are required to help with the survey. The survey will involve two evening visits to record churring males in the period end of May to mid July in calm and warm weather conditions. Survey areas will be identified by the BTO and recording cards produced for each survey site. Additional survey data will include some habitat data for sites. Full details of the survey methods will be with the survey card.

Apart from the chance to watch nightjars it is a good excuse to get out in the countryside at an unusual time for most people and to see all those other interesting things that appear at dusk (or dawn for the really keen!) such as woodcock.

Anyone interested should contact: Ian Henderson or Greg Conway at the BTO on 01842-750050 or Nick Gibbons at the Forestry Commission on 01842-816019.

Nick Gibbons

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The quarterly bulletin
of the
Norfolk & Norwich
Naturalists' Society
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Wymondham Nature Reserve

Construction of the A11 Wymondham Bypass resulted in the reduction and loss of habitat for the protected Great Crested Newt. To compensate for this, Wymondham Nature Reserve was created and the Newts relocated "across the road" in a newly adapted environment, where they are continuing to thrive along with the Smooth Newt, and other species of "Wildlife" including birds, butterflies, dragonflies & damselflies, other insects and mammals etc.

With the imminent rapid expansion of Wymondham and the subsequent pressures being placed on all its "wild" areas, some degree of recognition and protection is necessary to prevent these areas being overwhelmed by human habitation.

To this end, and to assist Norfolk County Council in managing this

reserve for as wide a diverse number of species as possible, the newly formed Wymondham Reserve Environment Group (WREG) is co-ordinating a full survey of all the species present within the Reserve.

It is envisaged the survey will take three forms:-

- 1) Volunteers who periodically (e.g. once a month or quarter) walk a specified route around the whole of the Reserve, noting anything they see and can positively identify, thereby creating an overview, but not necessarily needing an in-depth level of knowledge and expertise.
- 2) Volunteers with a greater depth of knowledge over a fairly broad spectrum of species who would be willing to survey each separate area, recording all they can recognise.
- 3) The "Experts" who can identify and advise on the needs of their

specialised subjects and species, hopefully recording seasonal changes and differences.

To achieve this, it requires organisations and/or individuals willing to plan and give some of their time, after all the more there are, the less pressure there is on any individual. It could also provide an opportunity for those wishing to increase their awareness and experience, by accompanying others with that knowledge.

Therefore please help us and give your support to this venture, contact Eunice Phipps (01953 605273) or E-mail: eunice.phipps@macunlimited.net

Under the terms of Norfolk County Council's Insurance cover, all survey work should only be carried out with the knowledge and awareness of WREG.

Eunice Phipps

NORFOLK BIRD ATLAS

By the time you read this, the fifth winter of fieldwork for the Norfolk Bird Atlas will be well underway. Indeed some of the tetrads will have already had the two required set visits this winter and the counts will have been entered on the database.

In early January 2004, a significant milestone was passed when the 100,000th record for the current Atlas was entered onto the computer. This figure includes both winter and summer counts, but compares very favourably with the 61,000 records that were submitted in total for Geoffrey Kelly's Norfolk breeding atlas covering the years 1980 to 1985, and published by the NNS in 1986.

By the end of four years of fieldwork, completed recording forms had been received from almost 50% of the Norfolk tetrads for the winter period and 40% for the breeding season. This has only been achieved by many thousands of hours of fieldwork, undertaken by almost 300 observers. As a means of expressing our gratitude and in the hope of encouraging more participants, the Atlas Working Group has decided to offer a complimentary copy of the new Norfolk Bird Atlas, based on the current project, to the ten observers (excluding members of the Working Group), who have carried out the most set visits by the time that all the fieldwork has been completed.

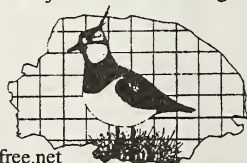
As the project is expected to run for at least another 3-4 years, there is still plenty of time for new observers to finish up in the 'Top Ten'. Perhaps surprisingly, it has proved more difficult to obtain adequate coverage during the summer months, and I would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to get involved this summer. Fieldwork for the breeding season runs from the beginning of April to the end of June, and observers are requested to visit their allocated tetrads on just two occasions, counting all the breeding pairs that they encounter on their visits.

For administrative purposes the county is divided into five main sections and anyone offering help would be put in touch with the appropriate local organiser.

We are particularly looking for additional help in the south and west of Norfolk, as well as in the central swathe running north-west to south-east across the county.

Do please get in touch with me if you would like to become involved in Norfolk's major current ornithological project.

Moss Taylor,
4 Heath Road,
Sheringham, NR26 8JN,
tel: 01263-823637,
email: mosstaylor@care4free.net



Living Fossils

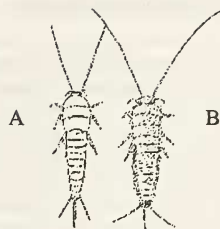
Most people who have reason to visit their pantries in the early hours of the "mornin" I should imagine very rarely take a look on the floor, but this is just what a recent caller had done and this brought him, hot foot, to my door on January 1st. On answering the door there he stood with a small bottle in his hand which he thrust towards me enquiring "What are these?" Then in good old Norfolk said. "I never sin the like on em before, they don't arf shift whooly quick they do, there were dozens on em." He had returned home in the early hours and, switching oil the kitchen light, saw a host of silvery white creatures fleeing in all directions across the pantry floor. He took quite a time to catch the three he had in the bottle, I have no doubt that the liquid part of his festivities and the creatures considerably small size had not given him any assistance.

I jokingly told him that they were his unpaid night staff clearing up his pantry floor for him. They were, in fact, members of an extremely primitive order of wingless insect whose bodies are covered with minute scales. The order is known as Thysanura (three pronged bristle tails). There are 23 species in this country and many more abroad. Fossils prove them to be the most primitive of all insects surviving today. In the upper Devonian period, some 350 million years ago, there were very similar species on the land when the first fishes crawled out of the water. They certainly crawled around the legs of the dinosaurs and they have remained practically unchanged. They are in fact living fossils. They are just as common today as they were all those aeons ago yet, for most of them, we know very little regarding their lives, they are all nocturnal.

Two species are to found in our homes, the most common of which is the silver fish *Lepismar saccharina* (fig A): These were my caller's specimens. They are harmless and feed on minute particles of starchy food such as flour, bread or cake that the vacuum cleaner has failed to find. They can digest cellulose and will attack paper if it is left in a damp situation (hence the need to keep books and stamp collections in dry areas). They will also eat up their own dead and, as in my case, if precautions are not taken will devour dry preserved insects in collections.

Rarely seen during daylight hours, they are sometimes found in wash basins or baths where they have slipped during their nocturnal wanderings in search of water. I recently found one in a plastic bucket that I had used to carry some carrots indoors from the garden; their dampness had apparently attracted it. Silver fish can live for at least five years, but the females will only produce about twenty eggs during her lifetime. There are no different stages between this newly hatched young and the adult, no metamorphosis; the young are minute replicas of their parents who are themselves only 8 - 10mm in length. They are covered in minute silvery scales like a fish. The two antennae are shorter than the body length, the central tail is longer than those of either side.

The other species is the Fire-Brat *Thermobia domestica* (fig B). These are often found in the older bakeries or restaurant kitchens, especially near the ovens. Unlike the silver fish, they can survive in extremely dry conditions and prefer it hot, up to 37°C. They are covered in brownish scales and are also



hairier. They are approximately 12mm in length with two long antennae, much longer than the body length, and have three tails of equal length. They do not live as long as silver fish however.

Most of the remaining species exist in moss on moors or stone walls or behind the bark of trees and have rarely been studied. The two species found in homes where they are sometimes as common as those of my caller and yet are seldom seen can be kept in check with a squirt of insecticide along the base of the skirting boards or on the back of the shelving. But, believe me, having survived until now they are not going to disappear without a fight, despite their size.

Living in my early years beside a bakery, I was familiar with both of these species and made some of my first microscope slides of their scales.

Ken Durrant

Please note:

The NNNS
Annual General Meeting
will be held on
Tuesday March 16th
at 7.30pm, Room 7, Easton
College Conference Centre.

The meeting will be followed
by
'Half a century of France'
an illustrated talk by
Paul Banham



JEWEL WASPS

Last June, I was staying in Pembrokeshire in a friends farm cottage, and with very sunny weather all week, found Ruby-tailed Wasps (*Chrysis ignita*), sometimes called Jewel Wasps, very common on the stone walls of the cottage that we were staying in. My previous encounters with this fabulous little insect have always been with single insects, but here I was able to see and watch six or seven at any time, darting about on the sunlit walls. Watching them and trying to photograph them became a daily pursuit, and it became apparent that these little fragile looking insects were in fact, far from fragile.

As they ran about looking for holes in which solitary bees or wasps were nesting, they frequently encountered spider webs, which caused them to stop and clean the webs from antennae, legs etc. This pause in their activity allowed close-up photography, and more importantly very close observation of a very magnified insect in the cameras viewfinder. The magnified view also allowed me to see just how many strands of spiders web cluttered the surface of the stonework, making the rapid progress of the Ruby-tails that much more amazing. In fact, on five occasions Ruby-tails became completely entangled in webs, and on each occasion spiders rushed out of their holes in the mortar, appeared to touch the Ruby-tail and retreated back into their holes. After only a few seconds, during which time the Ruby-tail appeared to shake rapidly, it would break free of the web and calmly clean itself, before carrying on with its search of the wall. My magnified view revealed that the webs did not appear to stick to the insect as well as I would have expected. A search of webs on the walls revealed the remains of a number of insects both larger and smaller than the Ruby-tails that had been less fortunate, but no sign of any Ruby-tail that had fallen prey to the spiders.

I am told, by those much more knowledgeable than myself, that Ruby-tailed Wasps possess an extra thick cuticle that enables them to pursue, what would otherwise be a very hazardous lifestyle, safe from the stings of solitary bees and wasps whose nest chambers they invade, and the bites of spiders whose webs they may get caught in. Watching these lovely little insects, I could not help thinking that here is nature's answer to Teflon armour-plate.

Hans Watson

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

I had been sitting in the tower hide at Strumpshaw Fen, watching, and trying to catch on film some of the many birds there, it had been very enjoyable. As I walked back along the river wall I passed two anglers fishing for pike from a small boat, they did not seem to be having much sport, as I heard one say to the other as I passed by, "What a *!#!****+!* waste of time this is".

This remark made me consider my own interests, especially natural history over the years, and I cannot recall a single instance when I was bored, and considered it all a waste of time, I think the over riding sense of pleasure is from just being out there, looking, listening, and learning. There is always so much going on, every day is an Aladdin's cave of new experiences, no two days are the same.

It brings to mind some thing I read recently, written by a native American,

*"The birds of the air are my brothers,
all flowers are my sisters,
the trees are my friends,
all living creatures, mountains
and streams I take into my care,
for this green earth is our mother,
I share one life with all that are here,
to every one, and every creature
I give my love"*

Sums it up nicely I think.

Tony Howes

MARSH WATCHING

As I have had to give up cycling (I hope only temporarily) I have had to look out for places which I can get close to by car, and which afford a worthwhile view. One of the best has turned out to be quite close to home: the beginning of the coast path just east of Wells, where it follows the top of the sea wall. One of the many memorial seats which we now have (an excellent idea) has been placed there, looking north across the salt marsh and its associated creeks.

At low tide a lot of mud is exposed in Stonemeal Creek alongside the wall, where I have regularly in winter seen nine species of wader, sometimes at the same time: Oyster Catcher, Curlew, Redshank, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Turnstone, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ringed Plover and Knot. To these can be added Greenshank, on migration.

Not far away on the marsh there will be Shelduck and Brent Geese, the latter often in family parties, the birds of the year recognisable by their stripy backs. Large flocks of Lapwing and Golden Plover will often rise up in the distance, especially when disturbed by low-flying jets. Early and late in the day incredibly large numbers of Pink-footed Geese fly over, on their way to and from their roosting and feeding areas.

At high tide the whole area is sometimes completely submerged, but more often the sea fills the creeks, leaving the marsh surface above water. This is the best time to see our latest addition to the regular bird-list: the Little Egret. At low tide they are mainly invisible as they prowl along the smaller creeks. I have seen as many as six at the same time, though they don't seem to appreciate company, and feed singly. Each will be a highly recognisable pure white dot to the naked eye, even when half a mile or more away. When flying close to, their unique legs show up: black, except the feet and the lower few inches, which look as if they have been standing in a pot of yellow paint!

Paul Banham



THE WILD GOOSE CHASE

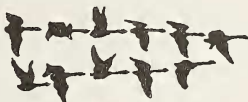
The last day of 2003 dawned cold but sunny, ice covered the puddles as I went down the track to the Hall Farm at Postwick. I had come this way two days previous to do my annual bird count on the farm, and had seen a leucistic grey lag goose, this bird has been around this area of the Yare valley for a few years now, but like all geese it prefers being right out in the open, making it difficult for a close approach, and hopefully a photograph or two. On this occasion it had been near the river wall, very close to some farm buildings, among about three hundred of its normal coloured brethren.

I hoped to find them in the same general area today, I parked the car and walked the last half mile to the river, and there they were. I had to do a detour to get the sun behind me, but all went well, and after a stealthy approach I was close enough to take a few shots of the white bird. By this time all the geese were on the alert, with heads up, and a nervous murmuring going through their ranks, then, like an explosion, they were up and away in a crescendo of sound that only grey lags are capable of. I stayed crouched in the reeds hoping that they would wheel around the marsh before heading further along the valley, this they fortunately did, giving me the opportunity of a couple of shots as they passed close by. An azure sky behind them with a nice white cloud or two, I hope there is a perfect end to this tale, I think I had some film in the camera.(?).

As the fine weather was holding I continued on across the marshes to see what else was about, in the summer months cattle would be out here, now all was still and quiet, just the odd lapwing calling, but all is not as it seems. Many water deer live out here, and in the next three hours or so several are seen as they go bounding off ahead of me, taking seven foot dykes in their stride, a sight marvelous to behold. Three foxes were put up from some rough sedge, a barn owl was out hunting in the bright sun light, and both marsh

and hen harriers were seen over by the river wall.

At the far end of Hall Farm land I turned and came back along the tree line that separates the marshes from the arable, it was then that I first heard, then saw, a large v formation of Bewick's swans, very high, and heading west, their calling is to me one of the most evocative sounds of the natural world, I stood in awe as they passed over.



By now, early afternoon, the light was beginning to go, the brilliance of the morning had been replaced by lead coloured clouds, but I had enjoyed the last few hours, a walk through these marshes is always interesting. Back in the 1960 period when I first knew them, coypu were the dominant mammal, we never saw water deer then. Neither were barn owls seen, now, with several nest boxes put up for them they are doing well, five more youngsters this year alone, but our world is always changing, who knows what will be here in another forty years.

Tony Howes

A charm of goldfinches

Over the last few years there has been an increase of goldfinches coming to the feeders in my suburban garden. Particularly popular are niger seed and sunflower hearts.

Originally appearing for the winter months, some now remain in the area and bring their young to the feeders.

In 2002 a holly tree in my garden was chosen for a winter roost of upwards of 40 goldfinches accompanied by a few chaffinches. At dusk they homed in from all points of the compass. They remained until the breeding season when they dispersed.

In late November 2003 some returned and by December there

Tetrad Surprise

At the start of any New Year you wonder what will come your way, what 'new' record or sighting will be observed. Anyway, usually with the natural world things happen, which are not consciously thought about.

Take my first visit to my 2004 tetrad area for the Norfolk Bird Atlas survey near Worstead in early January. The area was mostly open fields and I finished with the expected total of 30 odd species. As my second tetrad was adjacent to the one I had just walked I decided to drive around it to check out the area. Just as I had almost completed the tour I noticed a large bird of prey heading west over a field. I stopped and checked it out through the binoculars. Too my surprise and delight I saw it had a long forked tail and was of course a Red Kite. It crossed the field and disappeared behind a wood - a few seconds later and I would not have seen this magnificent bird. A great start to the New Year. I wonder also what other tetrad surprises are in store?

Francis Farrow

were, again, similar numbers to the previous winter. I am surprised at their chosen tree as it is within a few yards of my neighbour's house and close to my own - there are, to my mind, more suitable trees in the area.



Since losing all house sparrows and starlings over a decade ago, the gap appears to have been filled by chaffinches and goldfinches. At one time I would have been delighted to see the occasional goldfinch; now I long to see the humble sparrow.

Janet E. Smith



A PHEASANT VALLEY MONDAY

It was one of those dark November days that did not really get properly light but I thought I would have walk around one the RSPB's quieter reserves in the Yare Valley at Strumpshaw in Norfolk. It is a very rich reserve with much to occupy the naturalist. I just took my time and recorded anything that came to my notice and by diligently searching I had a very good day indeed.

I had not even left the car park before I heard the familiar call of Siskin. There right above me was a good eight birds, foraging in the Alders. Back on the ground I saw a melanistic male pheasant in the horse field. There seemed to be a lot of pheasants about today. I then passed by the two gates by the railway and was immediately greeted by the shocking pink fruit of the Spindle tree, this certainly brightened up the day. First stop was as usual the brick hide, the view from here was very winter like with volunteers tending a smoky bonfire of reeds and scrub to my right and over a hundred Coot were observed taking it in turns to dive under the water surface. This species seems to have the monopoly of this pool, as I could not locate anything else. Up in the dead trees the regular Cormorants were there. One was seen in the characteristic wings open pose. Suddenly out of the gloom a fine female Marsh Harrier came towards me, hardly daring to take another sip of my Bovril as the bird passed in front of the hide.

As I entered the wood I waited patiently for the Goldcrests to appear from the Pines but they were so well hidden I had to be satisfied with just hearing them. The familiar "kick, kick" call of the Greater Spotted Woodpecker alerted me to a male bird high up in a beech tree as I continued into the wood. By now Pheasants were all over the place with both sexes either feeding or

running around the floor. I passed some shooting markers just outside the boundary of the reserve so it looks like a large release has been made for that very purpose. As I went deeper into the wood I was joined by a small flock of Long-tailed Tits and the odd Robin and Wren were heard to sing along too.

Once out again and onto the path to the pump house I stopped to look at a very bright Hawthorn adorned with so much fruit there had to something feeding in there. I raised my bins to see mostly Blackbirds and a single Redwing, but to my right I could see various birds commuting between a copse and the Hawthorn. By looking at the copse I could see that there were a few Redwings and Fieldfares along with some dark billed continental Blackbirds. It seemed that they were taking the haws from the tree and flying back to the safety of the copse to eat them. I must admit the Hawthorn was rather exposed to predators. Anyway I ambled on in the mild but overcast conditions until I arrived on the banks of the River Yare. I stopped here for a while to have some more Bovril from my flask and sat quiet and listened to the life of the reserve. As a party of Mallard squabbled up stream, small flocks of Redwings passed overhead calling as if to greet me as they carried on toward Buckenham, save for the call of the Pheasants and the distant song of the Cetti's Warbler it was a peaceful still day which just had to be appreciated to its full. As I walked parallel to the river four Great Crested Grebes swam past and Two fisherman in boats bid me good morning as we passed each other in the distance I could see the rich red berries of the Guelder Rose and yet more Spindle which lifted the spirits yet again. Small tit flocks were starting to appear now and each one would hold different species Blue Tits, Great Tits, a Marsh Tit and a Robin were in this one feeding around some Privet berries and on the twigs and grounded branches. The next would yield Long-tailed

Tits, a Wren, Blue Tits and a Dunnock or two.

The walk to the tower hide was long but unfruitful save for the berry bearing bushes. Once in the hide I was pleased to see a variety of water levels leaving some great expanses of mud. Four green Sandpipers were a wonderful surprise, one that I shall remember for a long time. Eight Snipe, 108 Teal, a few Shoveler and a family group of three Grey Herons were of note. In the distance a pair of Marsh Harriers tumbled down to the reedbeds. I spent a good hour in here and although the birding was not brilliant the views from here are outstanding. On leaving the hide I turned back towards the railway line passing a long line of Guelder Rose bushes again heavily adorned with berries. I found five Bullfinches in one of the trees and great views were obtained. These again brightened the day with their pink plumage. The last tit flock of the day produced a Treecreeper.

I had the most wonderful winters birdwatching and cannot wait to return.

I also recorded 15 plants in flower and 12 species of fungi.

Colin Jacobs

SMALL REDS

In the last *Transactions* (Vol. 36 - Part 1, page 75) Geoff Nobes talks about small red damselfly records at Scarning. I visited Scarning on 8th July last year at 5 pm and within five minutes had recorded a male small red damselfly. It was the first damselfly I saw and as conditions were overcast it allowed an extremely close approach (5cm!). It showed a bright red abdomen but less bright red legs perhaps indicating it had only just left the teneral stage.

I did no further searching but the rapidity with which I saw the first might indicate that many adults were present on that day.

Dougal McNeill



The absence of Bleached Pug from Norfolk

The Bleached pug, *Eupithecia expallidata* Doubleday is a moth found in many of the counties in southern and eastern England (and north and south Wales) but traditionally it has not been recorded in Norfolk. However, in 2000 a specimen was captured at Holme which some thought could be a Bleached pug and in 2002 another example at North Walsham gave cause for similar speculation. After much deliberation both were identified by Gerry Haggett, from excellent digital photos, as the similar Wormwood pug, *Eupithecia absinthiata* which is found across Norfolk. The only known larval foodplant in the wild for the Bleached pug is the wild Golden rod, *Solidago virgaurea*, and to find its larvae would be a much more positive way of confirming the presence of the moth.

Gerry and Mike Hall were anxious to know the up-to-date presence of wild Golden rod, *Solidago virgaurea*, in Norfolk. So Mike asked Bob Ellis if the Norfolk Flora Recording Group could make this one of its survey priorities for 2003.

Bob Leaney led the team that carried out the survey and co-ordinated the fieldwork and correlated the results ensuring many sites of the older records were covered.

Bob Leaney's summary based on 53 records since 1780 reads:

17 records erroneous
15 locations found at 8 sites.

Bob's list of current locations is shown below:

15 locations no plant found
13 locations not surveyed being unlikely survivors

Sheringham Common	336 plants
Beeston Common (3 locations)	277 plants
Sheringwood Green Lane	10 plants

Holt Lowes Country Park (5 locations)	65 plants
Holt	8 plants
Hunworth (2 locations)	64 plants
Briston	4 plants
Hainford	29 plants

These eight sites for *Solidago virgaurea* were thus confined to the area of Holt-Briston-Beeston plus the outlier at Hainford. The relevance of the survey for Bleached pug is that only the Sheringham/Beeston site would be likely to support a continuously resident population of the moth, with Hainford as an outside possibility.

Mike therefore arranged with Ken Durrant for himself, Gerry and Stephen Ward to collect samples of flowering and seeded heads of *S. virgaurea* from that location on 25th September. The plants were at the perfect stage for larvae and were just as Gerry had seen them in cleared broad-leaved woodlands in Kent and Sussex in 1950s and 1960s where the larvae were abundant, so we had high hopes of finding Norfolk specimens. Alas within a week the only larvae to appear were a couple of *absinthiata* and one Double-striped pug, *Gymnoscelus rufifasciata*; (*expallidata*, like most larvae enclosed on host plants in a suspended linen bag, would start to sit on the sides of their bag from the second day).

This survey, both of plant and its negative samples of flowering heads, supports the view that Bleached pug is not resident at the current time in Norfolk. But locations of the plant at Holt Lowes, Hunworth and Hainford might still be worth checking for larvae.

We are grateful to Bob Ellis, Bob Leaney and the Norfolk Flora Group for their records and field work and Ken Durrant for guiding us round Sheringham & Beeston Common.

Mike Hall and Gerry Haggett

A FINAL (?) WORD ON STOATS IN ERMINE

So, stoats in white winter overcoats are not so uncommon in Norfolk after all. A trawl by John Goldsmith through the Norfolk Biological Records Centre database has produced 58 records of ermine among the 2306 sightings listed.

The books tell us that it is temperature which determines whether a stoat's winter coat will be brown or white. The next step was to take a random dip into the records and compare them with the weather reports in the Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report (BMR). Is there a consistent correlation? Very definitely not!

Take February 1979: severe weather, reported the BMR, and an ermine sighting at Culton. Yet January 1981 was the wettest for two decades and mild, but there were sightings at Roydon Common and Carbrooke. Severe weather in January 1982 produced a record from Gooderstone yet by the time another ermine was spotted at Ovington in February the weather was much milder.

"The extremest of weather" was recorded in January and February 1985, with sightings at Cranwich Heath, Ringstead Downs, and Hilborough. By contrast, the first three months of 1986 had a mixture of weather. January was predominantly mild and wet, with cold snaps, but ermine was seen at West Harling Heath. February – "the coldest

since 1963", reported the BMR – brought a sighting at North Creak. The legacy of that bitter weather possibly accounted for sightings at Strumpshaw and Cockley Cley.

Not surprisingly, the severe weather with heavy snowfalls in January 1987 brought records from Hockham, Wood Rising and Bradenham, yet January and February 1989 were mostly mild but produced a crop of sightings from various parts of the county.

One record left me puzzled: 1998, Lady Anne's Drive, Holkham: "One male in half-ermine fighting another with a normal coat." Who started it, I wondered, and why?

David Paull

Sea-flying Seed

While out at sea many of us have enjoyed the effortless planing of shearwaters as they skim the waves. I was enjoying just such a sight this August off Mull on board my parents' boat, sailed up from Breydon some weeks before, when I saw something else flying just above the waves.

It was a seed - or, more accurately - a pappus, the 'parachute' of *Cirsium vulgare*, the spear thistle.

The sea wasn't big: the waves were only a couple of feet high, but they were enough to give the seed a rollercoaster ride; up one wave front, tumbling through the air over the crest to the next front, always just an inch or two above the surface, and away to sea.

As my father - a former RAF pilot - observed, the air just above the waves provides considerable lift. We watched the shearwaters fly at a small angle to the swell; they stay as

long as they can in the air being pushed up by the wave, then curve away, amazingly never wetting a wingtip or catastrophically cartwheeling into the water as many an aircraft has done when turning steeply at low level over the sea.

The seed wasn't using such elegant aerodynamics, just getting enough lift to speed along, unwetted, to its unknown destination.

The seeds of most plants, even wind-distributed ones, fall almost entirely very close to the parent. It is the odd escapee that gets carried away, potentially to start a whole new colony - an excellent strategy in self-fertile, colonising 'weeds'. How far might this sea-going seed travel?

And how did it get out to sea? Its journey may have begun in a thermal, taking it up several hundred feet. Perhaps it was blown out to sea when the katabatic wind (the land-breeze) started up, and gradually lost height until its whiskers touched the water. Surface tension prevented it being taken in, and it bounced off.

Now the wind gets up and turbulence lifts the seed again, tumbling it, snagging a whisker and rolling it until it bounces up again. Rain's coming. Will this force it down? Will waves break and catch it in their spray? Or will it travel on to another shore?

It made me wonder how many sea-side plants might get around this way. We are used to thinking about those with floating seeds making their way along shores and across oceans, but what about the wind-borne ones?

There is one possible problem here: the pappus may not have actually borne a seed. I couldn't tell for certain through the binoculars. Quite a few of the 'seeds' blowing around a thistly field in late summer are in fact just parachutes, I have found.

But that caveat was not on my mind as I watched the sea-going seed whirl and skate away among the shearwaters. I wonder where it is today?

Wanderer

100 Years ago from NNNs Transactions (Volume VII. 1899-1904)

METEOROLOGICAL NOTES (From observations taken at Bradstone House, Brundall, Norfolk.)
by Arthur W. Preston F. R. Met.

Read 23rd February, 1904

JANUARY

The year entered with a continuance of the mild weather which had characterised the latter part of the previous December. On the 3rd there were heavy hailstorms ill accompanied by thunder and on the 5th and 6th maxima of 53.4 and 52.5 were attained by the thermometer. On the 12th a drop occurred in the temperature, and a week's somewhat wintery weather ensued, with a little snow, but the frost was at no time severe and on the 20th milder weather again set in, and continued till the end of the month, the thermometer reaching 54.8 on the 26th. On the mean the temperature for the month was 3.3 above the average, and much the same as that of the previous January. The rainfall was .21 ins, deficient and the prevailing direction of the wind was from westerly quarters. It blew strongly on many days. Owing to the continued mildness some of the earlier spring flowers, such

as violets, primroses, aconites and snowdrops came into bloom early in the month.

FEBRUARY

Great mildness prevailed throughout the month maxima of 57 degrees being recorded on the 8th, 20th and 21st and on the 9th the thermometer touched 58.6. There were but few frosts, and on the mean the temperature of the month was 6.1 degrees above the average. It was a very dry month, only 34ins of rain being recorded, and the first three weeks were practically rainless. There was no snow whatever, and by the close of the month vegetation was forwarder than in any year since 1882. Early wall fruit, such as apricots, began to blossom before the close of the month, and the whitethorn commenced to leaf at an unusually early date. Going back 130 years it would seem that February was warmer only four times, viz., in 1869, 1850, 1794 and 1779, but in 1846 it was about as mild. The wind was almost continuously from the west, and blew hard at times, particularly between the 19th and 27th.

It seems that winters years ago were not all hard after all and the signs of spring were early even then as shown by this except from 1903. FF

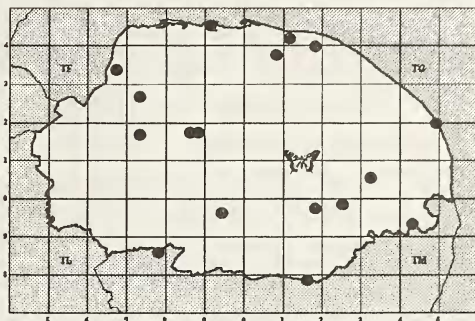


Excursion Reports

Featuring:

East Walton Common

● 2003-04 Field Meeting location
Easton College
Indoor meetings



Joint NNNS / Norfolk Fungus Study Group Foray to East Walton Common

Sunday, October 12th 2003.

In common with every other Fungus Foray during this very dry autumn, Fungi were very much at a premium. In fact, the meeting had been designed to coincide with the emergence of the many species of *Hygrocybe* and other grassland fungi, but not a single specimen was found on the open grassland. The party made its way to the wet woodland and clumps of scattered trees along the south west side of the open grassland, and spent the morning searching this area. Lunch was taken on the leeward side of one of the chalk ridges, and afterwards, we went to the north side of the common and examined that part of the common on either side of the stream through which the permissive footpath leads to the East Winch road. Though most finds were of common species, we did find one or two rather special fungi. In the morning, whilst working alongside one of the pingoes which was partly under the alders, a small knoll, almost an island of slightly higher ground was found to be covered with a mixture of mosses and the fairly thickly scattered fronds of Marsh Fern, *Thelypteris palustris*, and amongst the fern were possibly a dozen caps of a bright yellow *Hygrocybe* which was found to be slimy on both cap and stipe. One or two caps were taken home

by two of our number, and both commented that by the time they came to examine the specimens that evening, the fungi had gone completely and startlingly white, apart from the gills, which stayed yellow. Using David Boertmann's monograph of the genus, we were able to identify this as *Hygrocybe vitellina*, thought by Boertmann to be rare in Europe, with the proviso that this was not entirely clear due to different interpretations of the species by different authorities. In Denmark it grows in grasslands and fixed dunes, almost always with Juniper-which we do not have. However, a single Danish collection was from a *Carex* (Sedge) marsh and in association with *Dryopteris* (Male or Buckler Ferns.) Our specimens were from the latter habitat-more or less!

One of our number found some Inkcap shaped caps which gave the appearance of being covered with dark brown velvet, the lower part of the stipe being the same. We were baffled at the time, but the penny dropped later when it was remembered that the outer rim of the cap was dripping with moisture which had presumably run down to the edge of the cap from the gills. These were two young and unexpanded caps of *Pleuteus umbrinus*.

Highlights of the afternoon session near the stream involved one or two patches of bare mud under trees with good numbers of the little cup fungus, *Tarzetta cupularis*, and amongst one of these groups, Trevor spotted the uncommon *Helvella macropus*

which the Fungus Study Group members saw in a similar situation in 2002 at Sculthorpe Moor. Among less often noted fungi seen we identified *Melanoleuca excissa*, a very pale member of this genus, a trio of *Tricholoma* species in *T. lascivum*, *T. scalpturatum* and *T. fulvum*, *Leccinum varicolor* with the flesh in the stipe blueing on exposure to the air whilst the flesh in the cap went pink, as well as *L. scabrum* with unchanging flesh.

Although we were not overwhelmed with fungi to be looked at when we got home, it was felt that we had quite a good day given the dry conditions, with a final list of 47 species.



Alec Bull

Bless my cotton socks!

I was interested to read in Bill Mitchell's account of the excursion at Thompson Common (*The Natterjack* page 4, no. 83, Nov. 2003) that in parts of the country, bog cotton was used for stuffing pillows and making candle wicks.

The Orkney Museum in Kirkwall has a display of delicate socks woven from bog cotton. This was traditionally done by a bride for the socks to be worn on their wedding day.

Peter Burston

Books: Reviews & Sales

Bringing the outdoors indoors

I am sure that many of you, like me, enjoy the regular nature column in the *Eastern Daily Press*, which carries on a great tradition started by the late Ted Ellis. One of the present correspondents, Moss Taylor, has produced a book of his writings first published in the EDP between 1999 and 2001. Called *'In the Countryside'* the 120 page book contains a wealth of interesting and diverse subjects regarding the natural history of Norfolk and beyond.



The book has an attractive cover by Robert Gilmore and contains a selection of coloured photographs taken by Moss. I find the one of a North Sea gale at Weybourne particularly striking.

It is book that you can dip into at a moments notice, especially during the winter months. You can be transported from your armchair to any season as the book is conveniently divided into writings that are associated with particular times of the year. If your wish, however, is to escape from these shores Moss has included some excerpts from his travels and North America, the Caribbean, South America and Ireland are all visited.

It is a collection of writings that should give pleasure to naturalists and country-lovers alike. One piece I liked sums up the descriptive and at times evocative writing *'Delights*

along the coastal footpath'. I can feel the wind, smell the gorse and hear the redshanks!

'In the Countryside' is published by Wren publishing (ISBN 0-95425445-1-1) and is available from Moss at 4 Heath Road, Sheringham, NR26 8JN. Price: £9.95(+£1 p&p).

Francis Farrow

Flying off the page

The arrival of Douglas Hammersley's *"A Butterfly Notebook"* was a rare treat. This is a book of pure pleasure, a true reflection of the author/illustrator's love of his subject. How lucky we were to have this retired medical illustrator and animation artist decide to settle here in Norfolk! Why did he come? Simply, for the easy access his home in East Harling gave to so many prime butterfly sites.

The main joy lies in the paintings. All of our species, plus a few from the Continent, are included. All are shown in several attitudes to give an "all-round" view. And there is not a laid out museum type picture in sight! In fact, you feel you must be careful not disturb a single one in case they all lift off from the page. High grade paper and superb colour reproduction of the originals make this possible.

Each page of illustrations is given a facing page of text. Here Douglas gives us basic information about the butterflies, together with anecdotes about his quests over this country and parts of Europe over a period of years to track down and record the more elusive species. His enthusiasm and pleasure burst through and we cannot help but share with him.

A Butterfly Notebook is published by The Book Guild Ltd.

ISBN 1 85776 722 5. Price: £25.

Rex Hancy

ANY OFFERS?

For sale: a copy of *'The Flora of Norfolk'* by Petch and Swann 1968, published by Jarrolds, in good condition with a complete dust cover. We would be happy to receive offers for this book, either by telephone on 01245 471463 or by email to:

danglading@aaug.net.

Proceeds from the sale will go towards the cost of flowers in Chelmsford Cathedral.

Dan and Jean Glading,
Great Baddow, Essex.

For Sale:

Arthur H. Paterson

'Nature in Eastern Norfolk' 1905.

Illustrated by Frank Southgate

'A Norfolk Naturalist' 1930.

Illustrated by the author

Ex-library bound copies.

£15.00 each.

'Notes of an East Coast Naturalist'

1904. Illustrated by Frank Southgate £30.00

Oliver G. Ready

'Life and sport on the Norfolk

Broads in the golden days' 1910.

Ex-library bound copy. £15.00

Please contact:

Janet E. Smith (01603-433919)

Would all contributors please send your notes etc. to the editor as soon as possible by April 1st, 2004 to the following address: Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham, Norfolk NR26 8QD or by e-mail to: francis@virgin.net

