

THE NATURAL
HISTORY MUSEUM

24 NOV 2005

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The Norfolk

NATTERJACK

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Toad-in-the-hole....

My thanks for all the contributions - another packed edition. Check out Nats' Gallery for an important and very exciting announcement. Relive the heady days of summer(?) with the excellent excursion reports and read some interesting observations such as the drunken frog - funny I thought other amphibians were the alcoholics! Season's greetings to all NNNs members.

FF

NATS' GALLERY

The times they are a-changing, 'Natterjack' is poised to burst into the New Year with a difference - an exciting difference - a metamorphosis - to emerge with added colour! Colour to brighten up the duller days of winter and to compliment the sun-drenched days of summer. A new look 'Natterjack', which with your help, will become a colourful edition to the Society's publications. A colour supplement of Norfolk's natural history is to be added, which will feature your photos of the rare, the beautiful, the not-so-beautiful, the unusual and the plain ordinary that you have snapped. Whether it is a new county record or a common species - if it is interesting set it in. It will also be an opportunity for contributors of articles to illustrate their subject. Pictures from digital cameras are ideal, however, if you are not a digital user no worries, it will also be possible to scan slides or prints so everyone can join the colour revolution!

The first supplement will be in the February edition (deadline January 6, 2006). Digital pictures should be in a suitable format such as a jpeg or tiff file and although the larger the size the better the reproduction small size files can also be submitted. Please include a brief description of the photographs, which should be named, dated and have location details if relevant. Digital photos can be sent on floppy disc, CDrom or preferably as an attachment by email (or slides/prints by post) to 'The Norfolk Natterjack' editor (address on back page).

May all Society members look forward to a very happy and colourful New Year.

A Date for the Diary.....

Tuesday 20th December - 1930 hrs

FESTIVE REFRESHMENTS

Following a presentation by the Norfolk Moth Survey at the John Innes Centre (G34/5)

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CAR STICKERS

We have a new supply of Society car stickers. As before, they are bright yellow and bear the name of the Society and the swallowtail butterfly. But, unlike the previous sticky version which could not be removed in one piece, these are self-cling and can be peeled off if necessary.

They are £1.00 each (£1.20 with postage) and can be obtained at all Society meetings or from David Paull, 8 Lindford Drive, Eaton, Norwich NR4 6LT

A Day at Minsmere

The Island Mere hide at Minsmere is very good for watching the local birdlife from but photographically has much against it. For most of the day you are facing into the light, therefore the subjects are often in silhouette or at best show very little in the way of detail, but despite the problems a friend and I had hopes of getting a flying shot of bittern there. We knew there was a nest close to the hide and that feeding flights were taking place every so often. We did have several chances during the time we spent there and hopefully a few decent exposures will result. It's strange that such a large bird can merge so well into the landscape even in flights, the slow wing beats seem to harmonise so well with the gently swaying reed and sedge beds. Some times the bird would be almost upon us before it was spotted, there is no doubt that two pairs of eyes are better for this kind of project.

Notes on the Eurasian Jay – *Garrulus glandarius*

Whilst conducting a common bird census of Ken Hill Woods during 2003, I heard a pure fluting bird song, slightly reminiscent of the golden oriole. Assuming the songster to be an exotic escapee, I made my way quietly through the pine plantation in an attempt to gain a view of the bird. Upon approaching the source of the sound I saw a tight gathering of 15 jays sitting quietly, attentively listening to another jay in the middle of the group which was producing the 'song' I could hear.

As I moved closer to get a better view the birds became agitated, giving alarm calls before moving off to a position 50 yards behind me before resuming their 'meeting'. In his book entitled 'The Crows', Franklin Coombs notes that such 'meetings' can consist of up to 30 individuals and cites Goodwin (1952) as stating that in such situations jays may issue a low warbling song considered to be mostly composed of mimicking sounds. I have heard jay mimic the songs of other species on a number of occasions but the resulting 'song' is usually coarse and often degenerates into a series of hoarse rasping notes. On this particular occasion the song produced by the jay at Ken Hill Woods was pure and consisted of long unbroken phrases.

Incidentally, shortly after this I was in the same vicinity one morning just before dawn and heard a tawny owl. Instead of the typical gap between repeat calls it blended them into one long call. I assumed this to be coming from a young, inexperienced bird and called back. Almost immediately I saw the silhouette of a bird as it flew into a tree above me. From its silhouette I could just make out that the bird was a jay as it continued to mimic the call of a tawny owl.

At Dersingham Bog this year, I witnessed a similar gathering to the one I had seen in Ken Hill woods, on this occasion consisting of five jays gathered around a single singing bird in the middle. This time, the song was more 'scratchy', resembling a loud Bullfinch.

On each of these occasions, the attendant birds seemed very preoccupied and did not flush until I was very close and even then only flew a few yards further away before reconvening. I would be interested to read whether others have experienced gathering of Jays and whether these were accompanied by such a 'song'.

Ash Murray

At the moment there are several young marsh harriers just learning the ropes of flying. Three youngsters are very unusual in their colouration, the upper wings and back are white with a few darker bars showing through, they are at the moment very distinctive and can be picked out a long way off. Both adults are normal colouring, if these unusual markings remain after the moult they will be spectacular birds indeed.

We also had the company of three hobbies during the day, as usual they enchanted all in the hide with their spectacular flying displays. Despite the strong breeze they were catching dragonflies easily enough, they must have amazing eyesight and reflexes to catch such agile prey at great speed, wonderful to see. Little egret and bearded tits also made an appearance during our stay in the hide, a very enjoyable day.

Tony Howes

AND THEN IT WAS BROWN!

We have had some unusual visitors to our tiny back garden in Norwich: weasel, bank vole, wood mouse, fox. But on July 3 there among the 20-30 sparrows which daily raid our bird table was a pure white youngster. Not albino - there was not a hint of pink. Nor, as it turned out later, leucistic.

One hears of oddities being attacked and driven off by "normal" members of the tribe. But our white sparrow seemed to be entirely accepted among its peers. Initially, on its daily visits, it was fed by both its parents. Gradually it learnt to feed itself - but it never, unlike almost all the other sparrows, mastered the art of clinging to the seed feeders and settled for foraging, with the dunnocks, robins and blackbirds, on the seed dropped by the messy eaters above. If danger - invariably imagined rather than real - threatened, the bird seldom flew off with all the others but scuttled under plants in the adjacent flower bed.

Then, early in August, we noticed that the youngster was beginning to show brown streaks among its feathers. By the end of the month it was almost completely brown, apart from white feathers in its tail, and by the second week of September the only evidence that it had once "done different" was some white in its primary wing feathers. And by then, because it did not have a black "bib", we knew that "it" was in fact "she".

David Paull



Not Only Moths Come To Light (5)

As summer approached I had high hopes of an improvement in the number and variety of insects found in the light traps. However repeated cold spells, particularly at night, meant I was a little disappointed. There were more moths but nothing to compare with the previous couple of years and although the range of other insects also increased virtually all were species that I had mentioned a year ago.

The one outstanding species was a beetle that came to light on the night of the 16th June. Of medium size, some 10 mm long, it was the conspicuous segmentation of its antennae and the dark yellowish elytra that caught my eye. Closer inspection showed it had a fine silky down and my hesitant identification as the darkling beetle, *Pseudocistela ceram-*

boides (L.) was confirmed by Martin Collier (thank you Martin) who told me this was just the second Norfolk record for this Notable B species. The other record also being at mercury vapour light. It is a species of ancient broad-leaved and pasture-woodland where the larvae develop in dead wood. It is a local and wide-spread species throughout the southern half of England and is known to be attracted to mercury vapour light. Martin Collier is sure it is to be found elsewhere in the county and looks forward to more records - no necessarily from light traps.

Hopefully the dearth of insects (also reported by Rex Hancy in his EDP column) this year is just a "blip" and not a sign of things to come.

Mike Hall

Mini Monsters

One of my happy memories of childhood are the Sunday afternoon walks that took place if conditions outside were suitable. The various lanes in the Wymondham area were very quiet, very little road traffic about in those days, you might have to step up onto the verge every now and again, to let a car go by, otherwise you had those glorious country lanes to yourself.

As the adults chattered away about 'grownup things' us youngsters would entertain ourselves by, among other things, counting the lizards we saw on the grass verges. They were more often than not sunning themselves on areas of rough ground or perched on the mounds of cut grass that were left after the verges were cut. I remember the numbers running into dozens during the course of these walks, if you tried to look closely they would invariably scuttle away into the surrounding herbage.

Then there seems to be a blank between those days in the 1930's and the present time. I did see the odd lizard, but never in the numbers

of those far off days, until recently. The 'half moon' boardwalk at Strumpshaw Fen has a thriving population of these charming little reptiles. On warm days they hunt insects and bask in the sun all along the boardwalk, as always scuttling to cover if they feel threatened, but soon back if you keep still. At the moment (August) there are as many young ones as adults, these young are very dark in colour, almost black. Like most of their kind these viviparous lizards have the ability to shed their tails if attacked or threatened, several in this colony have at some point lost theirs and are now growing new ones. Colours vary, some of the adults look very gaudy, with pale stripes running the length of their bodies, or dark blotches on a paler background.

It certainly brought back pleasant memories of my childhood while watching these enchanting little lizards, they obviously thrive in the damp conditions, all around is a watery wilderness, one wonders where they go during the winter months - *Thas a rumun' bor.*

Tony Howes

Spring in hospital

It was sad to see four obituaries in the last "Natterjack", but it could so easily have been five. Without for the supreme surgical skills and dedicated nursing available at Papworth it would have been. However, I am now (incredibly) fully restored to health, and am even cycling again.

It is particularly galling for a naturalist to be confined to a hospital bed throughout the best part of spring. One which I occupied longest looked out on to a corner of woodland, which you might think promising. However, all I saw was the winter branches producing their spring leaves - oh, and a ten second visit by a Nuthatch.

The highlight of my stay there was when they had to take me on a day-trip to Hinchinbrook, for a "procedure" which could not be done at Papworth. I went by ambulance, but was able to sit up. You just could not believe how delightful it was to see the Cambridgeshire countryside in the glorious spring sunshine, beginning with the red-flowered Horse Chestnuts on the village green. Even the not-quite-Fen farmland looked attractive, with odd bits of woodland and nice roadside verges, and we went across that unusual long bridge at St. Ives. I've seen spring in France, and spring in the U.S.A, but it would take a lot to beat our English one!

Paul Banham



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Obliging Dragons

During the summer months it's very enjoyable to take the camera and spend a few hours in pursuit of our glorious dragonflies. These colourful insects are best photographed when they are perched, either resting from flying or waiting for prey to come close. The different species each have their own way of catching prey and it certainly helps to have an understanding of this before attempting photography.

Some are more difficult than others and spend ages in flight before landing for a rest, this applies mainly to the large hawkers. Some species are relatively easy to approach and photograph, one that falls in this category is the four spot chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*), they tend to hunt from a prominent perch and from there make sorties after passing insect prey. They are very tolerant of us and will allow the photographer to approach closely if care is taken.

It's very easy to put a perch of your own choice in place removing all the others and having a good background to set the insect off, with not too much foliage to distract your eye. Ideally a plain colour will look good with, for example, out of focus greenery or brown dead reed. A few hours on a warm, windless day, spent in pursuit of dragonflies is very pleasing, with the possibility of some good photographs at the end for good measure.



Tony Howes

Believe it or Not

Whilst clearing fallen fruit one evening, prior to mowing under apple and plum trees the next day, I was somewhat startled when something hopped away in front of me. It was a full grown frog and did not go very far. I left the plums in that area and particularly a ripe one where the skin was off and the flesh looked to have been partially eaten. As I continued to pick up the fruit, a little away from the "object plum", keeping an eye on it, the frog came back after a couple of minutes and started to eat/suck/nibble the flesh. I watched for several minutes until it had apparently had its fill – about three-quarters of an average sized Victoria plum – and then hopped away. This happened on 1st September towards the end of the hot dry spell at the end of August and I wonder whether the frog was after moisture rather than attracted by the sweetness of the plum. Has anyone else seen anything similar or can explain what the frog was after?

Mike Hall

A change in the law

The provisions of the Drugs Act 2005 came into force on the 18th July 2005. In a nutshell it creates an ARRESTABLE OFFENCE for the POSSESSION, POSSESSION WITH INTENT TO SUPPLY, SUPPLY, PRODUCTION, SALE, IMPORT & EXPORT of ANY FUNGUS containing PSilocin or PSilocybin, in ANY form (fresh or prepared in any way.) The fungi and the chemicals themselves are CLASS A Drugs due to the Legislator's belief that their hallucinogenic properties, which are sought after by drug users, are harmful, particularly to users who suffer from mental illness. Previous to 18 July one could lawfully possess fresh fungi of this type. They only became unlawful once prepared for ingestion.

The effects of this change in the Law are that market stalls and other retail outlets that sold fresh fungi, can no longer do so lawfully. Producers / growers can no longer carry on their business and "Psychonauts", the users, cannot get their supplies and will likely go looking for fungi in the Countryside. The Liberty Cap, *Psilocybe semilanceata* is the principle British species used.

Clearly this leaves the scientific collector of fungi in an awkward position. There are statutory defences and Exceptions to the above offences. I believe only two are relevant to Fungi foragers. The first is that a defendant would have to prove to the Court that they "neither

believed nor suspected nor had reason to suspect that the fungi in question were a controlled drug." The second is that the Secretary of State may issue a Licence in order to allow possession for research purposes.

One would hope that Police Officers would use their discretion and investigative powers to establish from the circumstances whether they were dealing with genuine people or misusers of psychoactive chemicals. But the fact remains that once you have picked a Liberty Cap you commit an offence and are liable to arrest.

Under these circumstances, as a Police Officer, I can only advise that you familiarise yourselves, from books, with the Liberty Cap and avoid possessing it. There are several "Psilocybes" that occur in Britain but they are not potent enough to be used for gaining hallucinations even though their possession would be illegal. Fungi experts within the Society may be able to assist you in avoiding *Psilocybe* species.

As a Naturalist I feel aggrieved that the scientific study of Fungi should cause anxiety because of this change in the Law. The reality of the situation is that it is highly unlikely that a "Fungus Foray" would be raided by the Drug Squad or a genuine student be dragged kicking and screaming before the Magistrates! But be aware that users may try to use the same genuine excuses for possession as you would use!

Garth Coupland



The Crabbes Tale

(Eleanor and Clare found an edible crab lodges under the hedge by our car-space in High Street, Wells)

A crab there was that Crawlle hight by name
Who dwelt hard by the quay in Wells, of fame
That felt a yearning quite uncrabbe-like, I wean
To fishes of that kinde (well, I mean!)

When that Aprille, with her weather drabbe
With constant rain had soaked our poor crabbe,
And flooded both the Quay and nearby roade
(That part of Wells where dwelt our decapode),

Our Crawlle, to the backe teeth fed uppe,
Made sure, as far as any kit or puppe
Could reason in the filthy Wells environ
That he would better off be with attire on.

Such garment groweth not, as alle knowe
Upon a tree. What could he then bestowe
Aparte from his owne shell? Oh Helle!
For he was sick at heart, and bored as welle!

Around the corner, where the Beache roade
To beaches leadeth, there the gillies rode
Upon each other's backe, ever angled
To take such bait as screaming children dangled.

"I've had enow!", said Crawlle, "Let us scarper
Away from the Quay, and nearby harbour!"
To south, where no marsh lay, up several feete,
Our clever crabbe knew, was Staithe Streete.

There was his way, his end, his primal reason
To live beyond a normal crabbe's season.
And quicke as a flash, would you believe it,
He crawled faster than one could conceive it.

Within an hour (or two) at last he staggered
(As much as crabbes can), dead tired and haggard
Across both Station Road and Mille Roade
Where they conjoin, as flakers as a toade.

Before him, in its well acknowledged beauty,
Lay High Street, where his sense of crab-like duty
Requir'd him to remain, for ne'er crustacean
Had lived there before - enough relation!

Author's note: Students of Chaucer will know that, to bring out the full beauty of his Iambic pentameters ("tetum, tetum, tetum, tetum, tetum") it is necessary to ensure that every "E" at the end of a word is pronounced as a syllable. They may also recall that "Bawdeswelle" is the only Norfolk place-name cited in the *Canterbury Tales*

Sightings in the Garden

Most mornings the bird feeders are topped up and a few handfuls of mixed seed are thrown onto the lawn before Wendy and I sit down for breakfast. We overlook the garden and have good views of what is going on and who is visiting.

Yesterday the two regular stock-doves were joined by a third bird, it looked paler overall and is probably one of this years young. The two originals have been coming now for about one year, might finish up with a whole flock of them.

We have many blackbirds that visit the garden and you tend to assume they are resident birds, but yesterday a new one turned up, quite distinctive with just one pure white feather in it's tail. I hadn't seen it before and have not seen it since. I had a similar incident last year, I was working in the shed when I saw water droplets being thrown up from the pond just outside. There was a blackbird sitting on the edge of the waterfall having a really good splash and he had an almost white head, just a few flecks of black in it. Again I had never seen it before or since.

This years starling broods are now looking very smart, the juvenile plumage is now changing to the adult, the heads and necks are very dark, with patches glinting purple and green on the wings. Strange birds, they will descend in numbers on to the lawn, where there is plenty of food, they strut about squabbling among themselves for just a few seconds then they are off again to pastures new.

Tony Howes



Paul Banham



Excursion Reports

Featuring:

Weybourne

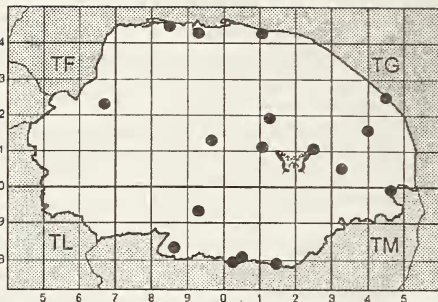
Raydon Common

Wheatfen

Herringfleet | Waveney

Scale

● 2005-06 Field Meeting location
John Innes Centre
Indoor meetings



Wildflowers Revealed at Weybourne

Sunday 29th May, 2005

Around twenty people gathered in the car park at Weybourne on a pleasant May Bank Holiday Sunday, under the leadership of Dr. Bob Leaney. A small breakaway group, eager to get on, spotted Bee Orchid, *Ophrys apifera*, flowering by the ditch leading to the car park. The party soon moved off along the cliff top towards Sheringham, having established the first rule of fieldwork – where lunch would be held! First point of interest was whether the small, whitish clover, covering much of the cliff top, was, in fact, Rough Clover, *Trifolium scabrum*, or Clustered Clover, *T. glomeratum*. Leaves were examined and Floras brought out until it was decided, given the way the veins arched back at the edge of the leaf, that it was Rough Clover. Bob Leaney removed Rich and Jermy's Plant Crib 1998 from his cavernous bag, recommending its key to non-flowering clovers, where differences in stipules and hairs on the leaf between the two species, are illustrated. The hunt was on for other small clovers. Harefoot Clover, *T. arvense*, was abundant. Lesser and Hop Trefoil, *T. dubium* and *campestre* respectively, were found conveniently growing together, showing the clear difference in flowers. The smaller flowered Slender Trefoil, *T. micranthum*, was also nearby, to complete the picture. The final small clover of the day, however, had to wait until after lunch.

Another puzzle was the largish Hawkbit, flowering near the cliff edge. Its size suggested Rough Hawkbit, but after much discussion and dis-

section of the flower head to reveal the outer achenes, Bob Ellis demonstrated that it was Lesser Hawkbit, *Leontodon saxatilis*. Three species of Mouse-ear were also found, allowing comparison of hairs and bracts to identify Common, Sea and Little Mouse-ear, *Cerastium fontanum*, *diffusum* and *semi-decandrum*. Bill Mitchell was kept busy recording the growing list of species, including various birds and insects, while the party enjoyed the eye-catching display of yellow Common Bird'sfoot Trefoil, *Lotus corniculatus*, and the odd Kidney Vetch, *Anthyllis vulneraria*.

As the leading group reached the coastguard cottages, perched precariously on the cliff edge, they were welcomed by the sight and sound of a Corn Bunting, *Emberiza calandra*. Here Bob Leaney pointed out how to distinguish between the grass Great Brome, *Anisantha diandra*, and the smaller Sterile Brome, *A. sterilis*. Passing the cottages, noting the Alexanders, *Smyrnium olusatrum*, and the garden escapes, Bob's keen eye singled out a blue leaved Fescue. He thought it might be Hard Fescue, *Festuca brevipila*, increasingly sown along road verges, but Arthur Copping later identified it as a Red Fescue, *Festuca rubra* ssp. *juncea*. Finding it was almost lunchtime, it was decided to forgo a visit to the Wild Liqueur, *Astragalus glycyphyllos*, growing by the N. Norfolk Railway and return to the car park. Lunch was enjoyed, looking out to sea, watching various seabirds, such as Fulmar, *Fulmarus glacialis*, and Terns perform.

After lunch the group turned up the coast towards Kelling Hard, where some of the seaside specialities were

soon met with, such as Yellow Horned-Poppy, *Glaucium flavum*, a few in bloom, and a substantial patch of the delightful Sea Milkwort, *Glaux maritima*. Skirting the fenced-off area of the Muckleburgh Collection, where the party was assaulted by sight and sound of military vehicles, various ruderal species, such as Bristly Ox-tongue, *Picris echioides*, and assorted Docks were picked up. Early Forget-me-not, *Myosotis ramossissima*, was still just in flower, while one of the Docks, turned out to be the coastal subspecies, Shore Dock, *Rumex crispus*, ssp. *littoreus*. Wet-loving plants, such as False Fox Sedge, *Carex otrubae*, Branch Bur-reed, *Sparganium erectum*, and Sea Club-rush, *Bolboschoenus maritimus*, were growing in the ditch.

Climbing up a small incline, passed a low sand cliff, riddled with Bee holes, the leading group, at last, found Subterranean Clover, *T. subterraneum*. It was duly admired on hands and knees and its white and its sterile flowers photographed. On the way to a wet area, where Sea Arrow-grass, *Triglochin maritimum*, one of the species of Sea Lavender and a rush, probably Saltmarsh Rush, *Juncus gerardii*, were growing, Francis Farrow spotted a couple of moths – White Ermine, *Spilosoma lubricipeda* and the less common, Yellow Bell, *Semiaspilates ochrea*.

A bit further on both Sea Spurreys were flowering, displaying the difference in flower size between *Spergularia marina*, Lesser and Greater, *S. media*. Here a tiny Peartwort was found nestling by the fence. Floras were again removed and it was keyed out to be Sea Peartwort, *Sagina maritima*. Returning, some members climbed the shingle bank,



where much more Sea Pearlwort was growing with Sea Fern-grass, *Catapodium maritimum*.

In all, over 120 species of vascular plants were noted, as well as 12 species of bird and 18 of invertebrates. Thanks should be given to all who made it such an enjoyable day!

Mary Ghullam

Roydon Common

Sunday July 24th 2005

Leaders: Gillian Beckett and
Robin Stevenson

We were back in the west of the county for the latest of the 'Vivid flowers revealed' meetings, to have a look at the plants of Roydon Common.

Roydon Common, a Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve, consists of 190 ha. of dry and wet heath, fen and bog, acid grassland, carr and woodland, and according to my NWT Nature Reserves Handbook is the largest remaining heath in West Norfolk and in the past the eastern section was vulnerable to outbreaks of fire caused by sparks from passing steam trains before the railway running across the heath was dismantled.

Those of us who arrived early were greeted by the sight and sound of about ten skylarks hovering low and singing over an adjacent field. I don't know how many are needed for an 'exaltation,' but it was an uplifting start to the day none the less.

After an introductory talk by Robin, we split into two groups. Robin led a group of the more robust of us to an area he had in mind which could be unpredictable underfoot, while Gillian led a group of the not-quite-so-robust members of the party to slightly easier terrain. We wouldn't usually split into definite groups at this type of meeting, but as we were a little short of new faces it seemed a logical plan. Perhaps the forecast for the day had deterred people from coming along, but we still had about 15 members in the party.

We were fortunate to have the company of Arthur Copping, so we could be hopeful of seeing some interesting

grasses. Not long after we had set off, Arthur showed us Brown Bent (*Agrostis vinealis*) and a little further on Silver Hair-grass (*Aira caryophyllaea*), Early Hair-grass (*Aira praecox*), Wavy Hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*) and Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*).

As we moved into the wetter areas, Arthur and Bob Ellis pointed out the various sedges to be found there including: Star Sedge (*Carex echinata*) a scarce plant of bogs and acid marshes, formerly more wide-spread, Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) another sedge usually found on acid soils, Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*), Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*), Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) another scarce plant of bogs and fens which are irrigated by calcareous water, and Yellow Sedge (*Carex viridula* ssp. *brachyrhyncha*) which was described as common in 1968 but this is no longer the case. Another scarce sedge was found by Mary Ghullam, this was Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*) common in northern Britain, but scarce locally.

While we were looking at the various sedges we also noted quite plentiful quantities of Marsh St John's-wort (*Hypericum elodes*) another plant which is rare in eastern England but commoner in northern and western areas, particularly acid hilly districts. Although three species of sundew are to be found at Roydon, we only noted Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) which was quite abundant, particularly on the Sphagnum mosses. A single sundew plant can catch as many as 2000 insects in a summer. The Sundew is so named because early observers mistook the fly-catching droplets for dew and thought the plant was capable of retaining the dew in full sunlight. The 'dew' was much esteemed by medieval alchemists and herbalists, who claimed that it would burn off warts and excite lust in cattle!

The seed heads of Common Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) could be seen standing above the surrounding vegetation, but a closer look revealed some of them to be Hare's-tail Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) though common on the northern moors it is rare in the lowlands, and only found in two other

sites in Norfolk, both in the west of the county.

Close by, the rushes were well represented including: Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Bulbous Rush (*Juncus bulbosus*), Compact Rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*), Heath Rush (*Juncus squarrosus*) and Blunt-flowered Rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*).

Two species of Spike-rush were also noted, these were: Common Spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris*) and Many-stalked Spike-rush (*Eleocharis multicaulis*) another chiefly western species which in the 1960s was known from 14 sites in the county but is now much scarcer, especially in the west of the county. Another rush-like plant seen in the bog area was Deer-grass (*Trichophorum cespitosum*) yet another common upland species, scarce in the lowlands.

Robin drew our attention to a single specimen of Lesser Butterfly Orchid (*Platanthera bifolia*) which is found at three sites in Norfolk, but only at Roydon in the west. Close by were two other species of orchid: Common Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) and Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) both with few, but white flowers. In the same area there were quite a few plants of Cranberry (*Vaccinium oxycoccos*) which is now very rare in south and east England. The name 'Cranberry' possibly comes from the form of the unopened flower on a long slender stalk resembling a crane's head and neck.

We had lunch sitting on a patch of heather, with a green woodpecker 'yaffling' in the background. Besides Common Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) we also found Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), the genus name 'Erica' comes directly from the Greek *ereike*, which means 'heath' or 'heather'.

We made our way back shortly after lunch as the forecasters were fairly certain of heavy showers in the afternoon, but we found some more interesting plants as we returned, including: Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) in fairly abundant quantities. The generic name *Anagallis* is from a Greek word that can be translated as



'delightful', which it is. Another 'delightful' find was Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*) the seeds of which have a long tail at each end which helps them to float during periods of flooding. As we passed over an area of dry heath, a lone plant of Common Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*) was pointed out. The specific name '*epithymum*' is derived from two Greek words meaning 'upon thyme' referring to one of its hosts.

Despite seeing several locally rare or decreasing plants, only one nationally scarce species was seen when Bob Leaney identified Smooth Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris glabra*) which although generally decreasing is still quite frequent in Breckland.

Setting off again we disturbed a Short-eared Owl which rose slowly and silently to fly nonchalantly away.

The pace returning to the cars quickened as the rain fell harder, but we stopped to have a look at Small Cudweed (*Filago minima*) growing on the track near the cars. The genus name '*Filago*' comes from the Latin *filum*, 'a thread' referring to the plant's hairy covering.

Besides keeping a list of the plants seen on the day, we also make note of other species identified by members of the party with various skills, but I cannot recall seeing any more birds than the three already mentioned; nor any butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies or other insects, which seems unusual for a site such as Roydon, so they must have known what weather to expect!

We arrived back at the cars at the same time as the other party, but we were not inclined to stand around discussing the days finds in the now persistent rain.

My thanks go to Gillian for amalgamating our respective lists and forwarding them to me resulting in a tally of over 160 species seen on the day.

Bill Mitchell



The Natural History Day Wheatfen Sunday 7th August 2005

Well another change in the weather. For the last two years we had very high temperatures whilst this year we had a high of 68°F. My Fungi stall was situated under the shade of a large oak tree and to be honest it was freezing.

As usual we received a good number of visitors and we were pleased to have the Great Yarmouth Naturalist Society with us. Arthur Copping brought along a Polish botanist and her Daughter, so there was a wide range of visitors.

Peter Nicholson had a most interesting display which by all accounts was popular with naturalists and the public alike. Robert Maidstone had his Bees & Wasps nests and was often seen around the garden with something alive in the palm of his hand. Rex and Barbara Hancy brought along some very nice tree books and samples of leaves to promote Rex's new book on Notable Trees. Francis Farrow displayed some photographic examples of Beeston Common records, some good microscopic displays were arranged by Ken Clarke and Trevor Dove and I had our regular Fungi display.

In the cool often-cold wind several butterflies were seen including a tatty White Admiral by the Cottage, which had many clamouring for a photograph, a Comma, Holly Blue, Small White, Large White, Meadow Browns and Green, veined Whites were seen in the garden. Also here were Speckled and Dark Bush Crickets of both sexes.

There were not many visitors but for many of us it is an annual chit-chat opportunity as we are all out doing our own thing throughout the year and it is during this day that ideas are bandied about. Robert Maidstone mooted the idea of a list of those who do illustrated talks so that when requests come in a central body would be able to recommend someone nearby. Also to have a list of those experts in their field who could help with identification and be able to

publicise their work to make the public aware of the importance of studying Natural History.

Finally it was a great day out and much was learnt. Roll on next year and no doubt my first sentence will announce the return of warmer weather.

Colin Jacobs

Herringfleet Hills & Waveney Forest Joint meeting with the Great Yarmouth Naturalists Society Sunday 28th August 2005

A dozen members met at Herringfleet Hills car park at 11am and as is usual with meetings there was much to see in this micro-climate. Several adult and young Common Lizards *Lacerta vivipara* were basking on the wooden fence rails and Common Wasps *Vespula vulgaris* were taking wood from these same rails. Of the plant galls, the Knopper Gall *Andricus quercuscalicis* was common along with *Hayhurstia atriplicis* the aphid gall on Common Orache *Atriplex patula* Also in vegetation around the car park there were several Dark Bush Crickets *Pholidoptera griseoptera* of both sexes and we really had to try hard to leave this rich area. However we did and continued across the grassland towards the woodland where we found a fine Slowworm *Anguis fragilis* basking on the sunlit bank. Down onto one of the paths leading from the school house we found an old Oak *Quercus rober* where along with Smooth Spangle Gall *Neuroterus albipes* Common Spangle Gall *N. quercusbaccarum* and Cherry Gall *Cynips quercusfolii* we also found the Ramshorn Gall *Andricus aries* I believe this is the first record to come from the 10km square TM59.

Well, after that find we were sure that another great find would be out of the question but during lunch we did. Our next stop was the grazing marshes where in one ditch we found Water Soldier *Stratiotes aloides* Lesser Water Parsnip *Berula erecta* Fools Water Cress *Apium nodiflorum* Frog-bit *Hydrocharis morus-ranae* Lesser Duckweed *Lemna minuta* Common Duckweed *L. minor*, Ivy-leaved Duckweed, *L. trisulca* and on the



bank Hairy Buttercup *Ranunculus sardous*. Whilst collecting aquatic plants Robert Maidstone produced a steely blue coloured American Freshwater Shrimp. This area produced many finds and it is here that we lingered longer than anywhere else.

At lunch we sat under the shade of a Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* ssp *scotica* and it is here I found the gall of the beetle *Apion rubiginosum* on Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* which Robert Maidstone had hunted for at the beginning of the walk! Then we found a female Wasp Spider *Argiope bruennichi* on her web! It was a gravid specimen and the stabilimentum in the web confirmed it. Janet Negal and Robert Maidstone photographed the spider and later it caused quite a stir as one or two spider recorders were claiming it as a first for Norfolk but the Norfolk border was 12 metres away from the site!

At 2pm we moved onto Waveney Forest where Dwarf Mallow *Malva neglecta* was noted by the car park. Early fungi included Yellow Russula *Russula ochroleuca*, Earth Balls *Scioderma citrinum*, The Deciever *Laccaria laccata* Shaggy Pholiota *Pholiota squarrosa*, Plumbs and Custard *Tricholoma rutilans* Brown Roll Rim *Paxillus involutus* and Common White Helvella *Helvella crispa* There were great swarms of Common Darters *Sympetrum striolatum* mixed in with Migrant Hawkers *Aeshna mixta*.

The nationally scarce Marsh Sow Thistle *Sonchus palustris* was particularly abundant as was Marsh Mallow *Althea officinalis* on the dead stems of this plant the rare *Pluteus thomsonii* found here in 2000 was searched for but to no avail. Two plants probably hybrids have been sent to botanical referees. The first seemed to be a hybrid between American Willowherb *Epilobium ciliatum* and Broad Leaved Willowherb *E. montanum* and the second Sweetbriar *Rosa rubiginosa* and Dog Rose *Rosa canina*. Common Lizards were seen here too and on the stems of Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* we found one or two long dead Grasshoppers. There was a hole in the side of the thorax but no sign of the fungus *Entomophae muscae*. In conclusion everyone present really enjoyed the

walk through two very different habitats and the amount of new finds were for many a great part of the day.

Colin Jacobs.

Scole Moth Evening

Saturday 3rd September, 2005

The second moth evening to be held for the Society at Scole was a couple of months later in the year in 2005 than the first in 2004 and the expectation for number and variety of moths was not so high. Nevertheless after a pleasantly warm day and with the temperature not falling below 14° C through the evening almost 50 species were recorded, some of which were in good numbers.

Perhaps the most notable was the White Point, *Mythimna albipuncta*. Usually regarded as an immigrant but now probably a colonist (records at Scole every day from the 17th August to the 11th September) the three we saw enhanced this view, at least locally. The most striking was the Red Underwing, *Catocala nupta*, which was spotted resting on a shed wall by Eunice Phipps. Unfortunately when I tried, gently, to disturb it to show the red hindwings to those new to the delights of moths I was not gentle enough and it flew off just giving a flash of its warning mechanism. Stephen Livermore found an equally charismatic but smaller species, the Black Arches *Lymantria monacha*, again away from the lights, which we were able to see in detail. This has been a relatively recent arrival at the site as has the Knot Grass, *Acronicta rumicis*, which was attracted to the lights.

The brightness of the Brimstone, *Opisthographis luteolata* and the Light Emerald, *Campaea margaritata* together with the sheen from a Burnished brass, *Diachrysa chrysis* impressed all who had not seen them before. Equally the contrasting gold and maroon of the Centre-barred Sallow, *Atethmia centrago* was considered most attractive. The larvae of this species feed on the unopened buds and flowers of the ash and climb from the ground every night to feed, returning to rest in the soil litter by day. Large numbers of the Large Yellow Underwing, *Noctua pronuba*, many of them probably migrants,

made a bit of a nuisance of themselves as did Setaceous Hebrew Character, *Xestia c-nigrum*. Whether or not they were migrants is open to question. Equally numerous but less boisterous was the Square-spot Rustic, *Xestia xanthographa*, a typical and ubiquitous autumn species. The delightful patterning of the Angle Shades, *Phlogophora meticulosa*, typically an autumn species but one that is also recorded sparingly in most months of the year, also impressed those present. Both Chinese Character, *Cilix glaucata* and Lime-speck Pug, *Eupithecia centaureata* were present and we could see two different ways in which camouflage as a bird dropping had been achieved. Some surprise was expressed that Mother-of-Pearl, *Pleuropteryx ruralis* and Garden Pebble, *Evergestis forficalis* were both regarded as "micros" whereas the Straw Dot, *Rivula senecialis*, the same size as the Garden Pebble, is a "macro".

Probably the commonest insect to come to the lights was the Autumn Crane-fly, *Tipula paludosa* with many of those seen as pairs in cop. We also saw several different species of caddisfly, the commonest being *Limnephilus lunatus* and there were several green lacewings, *Crysopa carnea* agg. There were two species of shieldbug, the Hawthorn Shieldbug *Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale* and the red-legged or Forest Shieldbug, *Pentatomia rufipes*, an ichneumon *Ophion luteus* and, for me as it is new for the site, an exciting record of the Common Groundhopper *Tetrix undulata*.

Everyone present had a pleasant evening as it was not too cold and nor did it rain. I extend my sincere thanks to John Sutton for ably noting all species recorded (and then sending me a complete list for the evening) which made it so much easier to concentrate on the moths themselves.

Mike Hall



Norfolk & Suffolk Bryological Excursions 2005 - 2006

The following excursions are planned for the Autumn & Spring of 2005-2006. Beginners will be most welcome; the only equipment needed is a hand lens (x 10 or x 20), and some paper packets for collecting into. Meetings will only be cancelled if it snows, or there is hard frost. All meetings will start at 10.30 am, unless otherwise stated. For further information, contact one of the names below.

Sunday 23 October 2005 Thetford Heath NNR. Managed by Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Calcareous grassland. Park in wide entrance road to Gorse Industrial Estate at TL 849 795.

Saturday 5 November 2005 Southrepps Common, by permission of the Southrepps Commons Trust. Valley fen, reed bed, woodland and grassland, part of which is an SSSI. Fox's Beck flows through the common. Park in car park opposite Southrepps Social Club in Lower Street at TG 261 352.

Sunday 20 November 2005 West Hall Wood and Meadow, Suffolk, an SSSI, by permission of Mr David Pettitt. Broadleaved, mixed and yew woodland. Meet in the farmyard at West Hall, TM 029 735.

Saturday 3 December 2005 Mossymere Wood, Mannington Hall Estate, by permission of Lord & Lady Walpole. Turn south off The Avenues into Keeper's Lane. Park on grass verge by Keeper's House, TG 134 314. Parking limited.

Sunday 18 December 2005 Calthorpe Broad, Stalham, an SSSI, TG 412 258. Please ring John Mott for details of meeting point.

Saturday 7 January 2006 Hapton Common and Smockmill Common. Park at Pat Negal's bungalow (iron gates at entrance, caravan in the drive), Inishmore, Greenways, Newton Flotman, TM 198 979. Hapton Common by permission of Mr David Turner, Wymondham Railway Station; Woodland adjacent to Common by permission of Mr D. Thompson, Elm Farm, Ashwellthorpe; Smockmill Common, Saxlingham Thorpe owned by Shotesham Estate but has Access Agreement with South Norfolk District Council.

Sunday 22 January 2006 Oxborough Hythe (am) Nature Reserve by permission of Josephine Brearley. About 1km west of Oxborough church, turn south into Ferry Road. This is tarmac, but then turns into a cinder track. Carry on for about 1.2km until you come to 2 cottages on the right hand side. Park near these at TL 732 998. We are not going to the Hythe itself, but to a parcel of land near the cottages. Foulden Common (pm) Park at TF 764 000, on south side of road.

Saturday 4 February 2006 Poor Fen, Glebe Farm, Low Road, Carlton Forehoe, by permission of Mr John Stapleton. An area of very wet carr with a tuffa spring. Park in farmyard at TG 096 063 (TG0905, TG0906, TG1005)

Sunday 19 February 2006 Bio Norton Fen and other parts of the Little Ouse Headwaters Project. Park on the concrete standing opposite the entrance to the west end of The Frith, TM 035 794.

Saturday 4 March 2006 Raveningham Hall Estate by permission of Sir Nicholas Bacon. Semi ancient wood, arable, shooting, grey partridge, set-aside strips. Derek Howlett has agreed to lead. Park in car park of village hall at TM 394 971, SE corner of crossroads. Wind generator behind hall.

Sunday 19 March 2006 Alderford Common. Chalk grassland. NNNS meeting. Beginners welcome. Leader John Mott. Meet at 11.00 am in reserve car park TG 126 186.

Saturday 1 April 2006 Westwick, Captain's Pond, by permission of Mr John Alexander. We should find *Riccia fluitans* in this eutrophic water. Meet at the side of the road where fishermen usually park at TG 278 271. Space is limited so please join in cars.

Saturday 29 April 2006 Gressenhall Old Carr, by permission of Mr & Mrs J Bullard. NNNS meeting. Meet at 11.00 am at Hill Farm, Gressenhall, TF 969139, via Rush Meadow Road, Scarning.

Robin Stevenson, 111 Wootton Road, King's Lynn, PE30 4DJ, Tel: (01553) 766788.

Email: crs1942@tiscali.co.uk

Richard Fisk, 35 Fair Close, Beccles, Suffolk, NR34 9QR. Tel: (01502) 714968.

Email: richardfisk@onetel.com

John Mott, 62 Great Melton Road, Hethersett, Norwich, NR9 3HA. Tel: (01603) 810442.

Email: jmott@lineone.net

Roy Smith (1932-2005)

Roy Smith of Toftwood, Dereham, a member of the Society for many years, though better known perhaps in Norfolk Wildlife Trust circles having been Chairman of the Mid-Norfolk Group for a number of years, died on August 29th following a long and painful illness, just a week before his 73rd birthday.

Roy became Biology Master at East Dereham High School, later the Neatherd High School at about the same time as our daughter Rachel started at the school, and, in turn he also taught Biology to our daughters Sally and Christine.

From time to time I received requests by way of one or other of the girls such as "Can you tell me a good site for '*Pellia epiphylla*'-a thallose liverwort much used as a teaching aid by Biology masters. Later, he became a Deputy Headmaster.

More recently and the last time I received a request from Roy-could I go round the Old Carr at Gressenhall with him to point out a few of the less common plants as he was leading a walk there for his Trust Group. This meeting introduced me both to the site, and to Mr and Mrs Bullard, the owners and an on going study of the Old Carr which was featured in the 2004 Transactions.

Roy's chief wildlife interest was, however, in birds, and he would often recount some trip to the coast where he and one of his sons had encountered some rarity. Always quiet and self effacing, Roy will nevertheless be much missed in the mid-Norfolk area.

Alec Bull

Would all contributors please send your notes etc. to the editor as soon as possible by January 6th, 2006 to the following address: Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8QD or by email to: francis@virgin.net

