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Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Cover image: Swallowtail (*Brian Macfarlane*)

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Toad-in-the-hole....

Welcome to the summer edition of 'Natterjack' - even if the weather has not improved by the time you receive this the varied articles and beautiful images should brighten up the mood. There are exotic Bee-eaters, a pale Pintail, interesting insects and a glowing report of our County. My thanks to all contributors, especially Stephen Martin for the Excursion Reports. I trust the summer improves and you all manage to get out into 'wild' Norfolk and continue to make interesting discoveries.

FF

Mysterious Mistletoe

Grace Corne

When Mr. Neville Turner, orchard keeper and renowned expert on apples, went to work in his orchard during the last week of April he had no idea he was to make a most interesting discovery. During the morning he decided to take a few minutes to have a rest and sit in the sunshine. As he sat there he realised he was surrounded by what appeared to be threads of gossamer, each with what at first sight looked like a spider on the end. Worried that something undesirable was invading his orchard he got up to investigate and to his surprise found that instead of a spider each thread carried a Mistletoe seed and some of these were already sprouting..

He gathered some threads and seeds up and brought them to me in a box. By the time he arrived some of them had stuck so tightly to the box it was almost impossible to prise them off.

I decided to investigate the berries on my own Mistletoe, and sure enough if they were taken from the plant and turned upside down a long thread of 'gluey substance' appeared which quickly hardened in the air.

I have never been totally convinced that birds are major agents at spreading Mistletoe. The fact that the berries on the bushes are still there in April seems to indicate that birds are not very interested, but if these 'threads' swing, or are windblown, and happen to touch a nearby tree branch they will hang on extremely tightly and the fact that some have already sprouted would literally give them a flying start.



Mistletoe

Life on the 'Edge'

Mike Padfield

During the spring there is a profusion of plants starting to flower along the roadside verges, or the case of Alexanders (*Smyrniolum olusatrum*) have been flowering most of the winter in some places. Noticeable species around the roadside verges of North Norfolk in spring include Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*), Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*), Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) and Cow Parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris*). In fact, two-thirds of all British wildflower species occur somewhere on roadside verges, including the endangered Spiked Rampion (*Phyteuma spicatum*) (although not in Norfolk).

Unfortunately the spring growth is often short lived and soon the verge is cut short, particularly on main roads/near junctions. However some species survive the chop including those species living life on the edge of the verge between the bank and the road or around a curb where the mower avoids and where the presence of salt/grit limits the species that can grow there. Most noticeable in April to May is the small crucifer Danish Scurvy-grass (*Cochlearia danica*). Not at all a grass, but an autumn germinating annual to biennial which has spread all along the coast roads as well as major roads where salt has cleared vegetation on the verges with its chemistry allowing it to tolerate salting of the roads and its small seeds spread by the traffic passing by. Other often less obvious species in association with this roadside edge habitat include Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), Lesser Sea-spurrey (*Spergularia marina*), Reflexed Saltmarsh Grass (*Puccinellia distans*) and the nationally scarce Stiff Saltmarsh Grass (*Puccinellia rupestris*).

Danish Scurvy-grass and other *Cochlearia* species were harvested by sailors to be salted down by the vat-load to help stave off scurvy during long sea voyages. It is jam-packed with vitamin C but I can't imagine the sailors relishing their daily dose with the flavour very strong and overpowering. It got me thinking that it is quite possible that Danish Scurvy-grass (and other saltmarsh species) will colonise every salted road in the country and, if not already, cover much larger areas than our current saltmarsh habitat. Based on our road network of 245,000 miles there could really be a huge amount of



Danish Scurvy-grass

Images: Mike Padfield

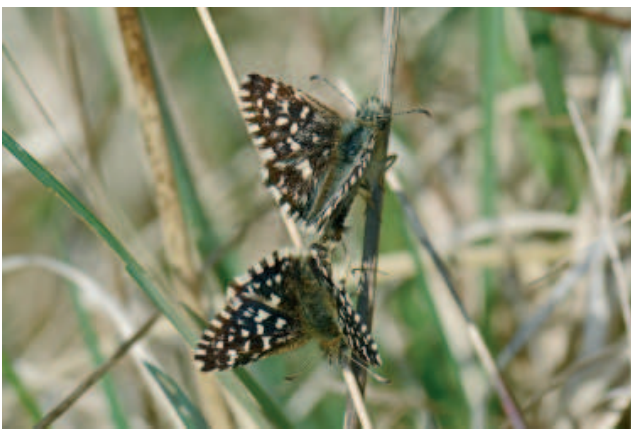
plants in future and scurvy-grass could potential provide a natural source of Vitamin C to our entire nation. However I probably wouldn't advocate harvesting it due to the risks involved collecting it, toxins accumulated from cars and the fact it can taste very bitter, but the potential is there if it could be economically harvested... In the mean time if you can find it off the main road network when the leaves are small (not dark green and fleshy) they are an excellent little snack to tickle the tastebuds!

Plain but Attractive

Hans Watson

Mention the word butterfly, and most people think of brightly coloured insects like Brimstones and Red Admirals, or perhaps Whites if they are gardeners. Only naturalists might think of that small and rather less obvious group of

butterflies, the Skippers. I have heard them described as plain but attractive. These are all fast flying, and change direction very suddenly, almost like some moths. In fact, two of the species found in Norfolk are sometimes mistaken for moths, and these are the Dingy Skipper (*Erynnis tages*), and the Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus malvae*). This confusion is not helped by the fact that a number of day flying and similarly coloured moths, such as Mother



Grizzled Skippers

Shipton (*Callistege mi*), sometimes in large numbers, share the same areas, and flight period.

Although these two species have not fared very well in Norfolk in recent times, I usually make an effort to see them each year, and was very pleasantly surprised to see excellent numbers of both species on Foulden Common in mid May this year. More, in fact, than I have seen for many years.



Dingy Skippers

Images: *Hans Watson*

Whitlingham: 1000 species and counting

James Emerson

Ten years ago I adopted Whitlingham Country Park and the surrounding area as my local patch, and began recording birds there. Having a general interest in natural history I also made ad-hoc observations of other flora and fauna, although often these records went no further than my notebook. In 2013, spurred on by Andy Musgrove's successful attempt to record over 1000 species within his home 1km square, I decided to tally up my species to date and attempt to reach my own 1000 species.

The area that I have used is around 3km², albeit covering parts of eight separate 1km squares (something that I have to bear in mind when submitting biological records from the area). The main area of habitat at Whitlingham is the landscaped former gravel pits, but there are also areas of old and new woodland, wet and dry meadows, and across the river at Thorpe a small area of marshland. I have been able to use prominent man-made structures to define three of the boundaries; the A47 to the south, the road from Bracondale to Trowse on the west and the railway line to the north.

The process of collating my older records together resulted in a number of them being discarded or demoted to genus or family level only. This could perhaps be known as "the curse of the many similar species", a casual statement in the text of a field guide that in one swoop renders all but the best documented or voucher specimen authenticated records unsafe. Off the list went things like Scorpion Fly (although males can be identified from a good sharp photo), Alderfly (need close examination to identify to species level), Black Ant (I knew I hadn't critically excluded similar species) and so on.

At the start of 2013, after the aforementioned list purge, I had recorded 502 species and was just over half-way to my target. Since then I have endeavoured to look more closely, attend local recording events put on by other groups, invest in some better literature and attend workshops looking at species groups that I knew little about. I have also spoken to other local naturalists to see what they were finding, and to county recorders to ask if there were particular species I should be looking for. Some of my highlights and comments from my favoured groups are included below.

Birds (143 species)

For a busy site on the edge of the city, Whitlingham has a good avifauna. The best times for birds are during cold spells in January and February, and during late April and early May. In January 2010 Whitlingham hosted a Great Northern Diver, all five grebe species, Smew, Goosander and Ruddy Duck. My rarest find here has been a female Ring-necked Duck, but one of my best memories was of a day in 2012 when several Bitterns were present and

around the edge of the Great Broad. Other strong memories included warm spring evenings spent listening to Nightingales and Grasshopper Warblers.

Mammals (18 species)

Visits at quiet times such as dawn or dusk have proved to be quite productive, with a single sighting of an Otter and several of Water Vole added to more regular records of Chinese Water Deer and Foxes. Events led by the Norwich Bat Group have helped me see seven species of bat, including my first ever Nathusius' Pipistrelles. Small mammals are poorly represented on my list, as I have only attended one trapping event, seeing Wood Mouse and Field Vole. My favourite mammal encounter however didn't result in a new species. I was sat quietly in Trowse Woods when a Shrew sp., ran out from under a log. It foraged back and forth in front of me, but was too fast for me to completely rule out Pygmy Shrew.

Lepidoptera (138 species)

Twenty butterflies represent a reasonable return, although I suspect I'm overlooking Purple Hairstreak somewhere. Regular moth trapping can significantly boost garden or patch lists, but my moth list here has been restricted to several organised moth evenings in 2009 and 2010, plus the opening of a moth trap as part of the 2014 Bioblitz. A few day-flying species and caterpillars have boosted the total number of moths to 118. Possibly the scarcest moth I have found here is the micro moth *Apodia bifractella*, a species associated with Fleabane. My sighting in August 2015 was the first TG20 record.

Odonata (18 species)

A total of 18 species, most of them recorded from the Thorpe Marsh part of the patch, represents a very productive area for dragonflies and damselflies. Norfolk Hawkers are present at both Whitlingham and Thorpe Marsh, and Willow Emerald damselflies have recently established themselves. I am yet to see a Broad-bodied Chaser although they are present, and along with the possibility of Scarce Chaser or Small Red-eyed Damselfly I hope to eventually reach 20 species here.

Orthoptera & Earwigs (10 species)

It has been interesting to watch the year on year spread of both Roesel's Bush Cricket and Long-winged Conehead from isolated colonies to being present across the site. I've seen Dark and Speckled Bush Crickets, but not Oak Bush Cricket yet. Lesser Marsh Grasshoppers occur at Thorpe, along with Meadow and Field Grasshoppers.

Hoverflies (22 species)

The recent publication of a WildGuides book has been very helpful in encouraging me to take a more detailed look at hoverflies. To date I have



Image: James Emerson

only identified a modest 22 species, but I am confident of increasing that total year on year. The most impressive to look at have been the *Volucellas* (the genus that include *Volucella zonaria*, the Hornet Mimic Hoverfly), of which I have recorded four of the five British species here.

Bugs (30 species)

I have taken a particular interest in Shieldbugs of late and have so far amassed

11 species plus three related ones. This list includes some particularly attractive species, such as Blue, Bronze and Woundwort Shieldbugs. In 2014 I attended an NNNS workshop looking at bugs and beetles to increase my knowledge of the different families and how to find them.



Bronze Shieldbug

Images: James Emerson

Longhorn, Reed and Tortoise Beetles have been recorded, along with Lesser Stag Beetle.

Flowering Plants (279 species)

More than a quarter of my list is made up of flowering plants. The trees posed a particular difficulty in deciding whether or not they had originally been planted and should go on the list. I was able to obtain copies of some old plant surveys of both Whitlingham and Trowse Woods, which were useful in checking for species that I had missed. Of the more interesting species Moschatel and Crosswort are present in Whitlingham Woods, whilst Pyramidal Orchid, Bee Orchid and Common Broomrape have been recorded from the grassland areas.

Fungi & slime moulds (197 species)

Fungi are a particular interest of mine, and I am fortunate in knowing other local mycologists and having attended two Fungus Study Group forays held in Trowse Woods. I have found a few rare species here, including recently a tiny black fungus on birch leaves called *Venturia ditricha*, which was new to Norfolk. Other fungal highlights include the Bearded Tooth fungus (*Hericium erinaceum*) that fruited for several years in Trowse Woods, and two different *Gloeophyllum* bracket fungi in the country park.



Hornet Mimic Hoverfly *Volucella zonaria*



Gloeophyllum trabeum

Using the records

Whilst the main reason for constructing my list was to spur myself on to look closer at my local area, the spin off has been many sightings generated to go into the county records. The ID skills I have learned have enabled me to generate more records on my other wildlife trips, indeed having seen something for the first time I usually go on to see it at multiple locations shortly afterwards. I am also keen to make my sightings available to other local naturalists (and potential naturalists!) My wildlife blog (‘Birds and Beer’) is now in its eighth year, and I have put together downloadable species guides with details of species found at Whitlingham (search online for Whitlingham + for example “ladybirds”). I also write an annual bird report for the area including sightings from myself and other local observers. If you are cataloguing the wildlife of your local area, or are keen to start, then here are a few tips that have helped me:

- Spend some time identifying the common plant species in your area - once you know the plants it will help you find and identify the insects and fungi that are associated with them
- Take photographs of species you don’t recognise - you might be able to identify them at a later date, but if not you might also learn why not, and which bits to look at next time
- There are some excellent free resources available online - check out the NNNS species guides, John Walters beetle guides and the Naturespot website for starters
- Make use of the expertise of others - we are fortunate in Norfolk to have several organisations offering guided walks and workshops, so why not pick one or two that focus on a new group and increase your knowledge?

Incidentally while 1000 species was my initial target, I have no intention of stopping there - as I write this article at the end of May I have moved onto 1021 species, and hopefully I will have recorded many more by the time it is published!



Speckled Bush-crickets

Image: *James Emerson*

Interesting Insects



A dark form of ***Leucozona lucorum*** - Warham Greens, 27/05/2016.



Volucella inflata - Holt Country Park, 28/06/2016



Flecked General ***Stratiomys singularior*** - Walsey Hills, 03/07/2016.



Currant Clearwing - Wiveton Hall, 05/07/2016

Images: *John Furse*

An immature male **Red-veined Darter** in pristine condition was spotted on Beeston Common, 24/06/2016. Seven days later it had darkened in colour but still had no hint of red.

Image: *Mark Clements*



On Beeston Common, 09/06/2016, a rare, but rather worn, **Large Tortoiseshell** was found basking in the early evening sunshine. This was a few days after an influx of Painted Lady butterflies. The butterfly's tatty appearance could be due its age as it would have emerged in July/August 2015 and then hibernated until March/April this year.

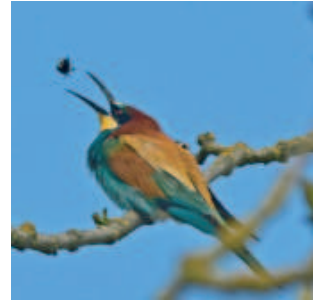
Image: *Francis Farrow*

Birding Highlights

Elizabeth Dack

European Bee-eater. I kept seeing photos of a very attractive bird called a European Bee-eater, as taken by a group of photographers who often go on birding holidays so I assumed this bird was abroad somewhere. A few days later a friend asked me if I had seen this bird at Hemsby? I was told it had been there for days!! My Grandson and I decided to go and see if it was still around, the following Sunday afternoon. We saw it take off from a wire at Hemsby. We then drove to West Somerton where I was told it went to, which is just a couple of miles away. We saw it flying and then land in a tree. The sun overhead was not good, we waited, watching this beautiful bird catching bees and coughing up pellets. After a couple of hours our patience was

rewarded the sun moved round and the bird changed branches. Just so lovely to observe. The colours just amazing. Such a bonus to get some photographs of this stunning visitor.

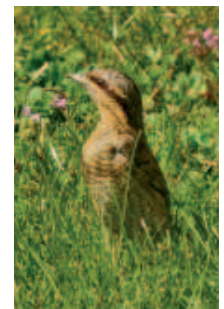


Wryneck. Whilst at Cley with my friend Dave we were asked if we had seen the Wryneck. We had heard there was one around in a garden. We ventured to the place it had been seen. A lady walking towards us with some people



asked if we wanted to see the Wryneck? Silly question!!!, of course we did. She took us into here garden through her house and into the kitchen. There her husband had a scope on the bird in her neighbours garden. She recognised me from working with NWT. I wasn't tall enough to see through the scope, so she lead me upstairs onto the landing, opened the window so I could

take some photos, telling me to take my time! How amazing and kind. It was lovely to see this bird hopping around the shrubs and lawn like a woodpecker. These people had opened their home to let strangers all day to share this rare visitor to all who wanted to see it. I wish I had taken a picture of all the wellies, shoes and hiking boots piled up outside their door!! I couldn't thank them both enough for the experience and their kindness.



Images: *Elizabeth Dack*

Cetti's Warbler. Strumpshaw Fen. These are usually very secretive birds to see but easily recognised by their very loud distinctive call. With all the birds looking for mates to breed with this time of the year, they have been showing more often. Not an opportunity to be missed by a photographer who loves to see and appreciate the wildlife when it comes out and poses for them!!



Nightingale. I had never seen a Nightingale, or rarely heard one sing. Whilst on our way to see a Dartford



Warbler at Dunwich Heath, we stopped at Westleton (Suffolk!) As soon as we got out of the car it was music to our ears!! Beautiful. I just stood closed my eyes and listened, absorbing the incredible trill of nature. I took a few steps into the heathland and there it was sitting on a branch in the early morning sun, about 6.30 am. I don't know about the early bird catching the worm but the early photographer got the photo and the music.

Images: Elizabeth Dack

Cley and Strumpshaw

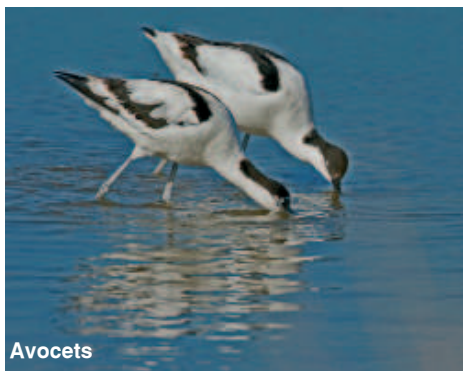
Brian Macfarlane

I was checking my last article for the May issue, and found I finished by saying summer was just round the corner. Not exactly prophetic! Here we are at the end of June, and still enjoying our fair share of rain

I have made several trips to Cley in the hope of seeing more activity than at Strumpshaw. The number of birds seen from the Bishop Hide varies between 30-200 on a good day. Most of them remain on the far side of Pat's pool to avoid having their photograph taken.

The last time I went I was surprised to see the Grey Squirrel again. I saw it for the first time there last year. It came closer closer this time.

The Little Egret flew towards me and obliged by landing less than 25 yards in front of the hide. There were Avocets around, and two came to feed close enough to watch them sweeping the shallow water in unison.



Avocets

Image: Brian Macfarlane

Lapwings are particularly colourful when seen in the angled sunlight. A lot more colourful than when they first appear.



Lapwing

There was no sign of Spoonbills on the occasions I went. I have enjoyed photographing them, although usually they stand motionless with their head under their wing fast asleep. I am always wishing a marsh harrier or some big bird flies over and sends all the smaller birds into the air. At this point the Spoonbills come alive

and take to the air also. This gives good opportunities for a photograph of them in flight. As you can guess the most enjoyable time is not only seeing the various species, but actually taking shots of them to savour later, and a record to show family and friends. I am not a paper and pencil person. (3 P's for short) How can you possibly share a sighting with another person if all you have got is a piece of paper. Still there is a lot of people who enjoy bird spotting so one cannot knock their pleasure.

Strumpshaw Fen still continues to surprise and disappoint. Particularly the bird life which is hard to come by. Now there should be a lot of insects, like dragonflies, etc. It's been good to see the Swallowtail butterflies emerging again, and the Cuckoo calling from across the river at Surlingham. Although I did get one opportunity to photograph one as it flew across the reserve. The Bittern has been booming a lot this year, but I'm not sure if it has nested.



Cuckoo

This last week I had a chance of an unusual shot of a Heron catching a Tench. It carried it off, but came back showing no signs that it had managed to swallow it. It was a very deep bodied fish and too wide for it to swallow.

Well I started this article the previous day talking about rain, and now I am signing off the following day and it's still RAINING! Holiday time is upon us again so everything can only get better.....



Grey Heron with Tench

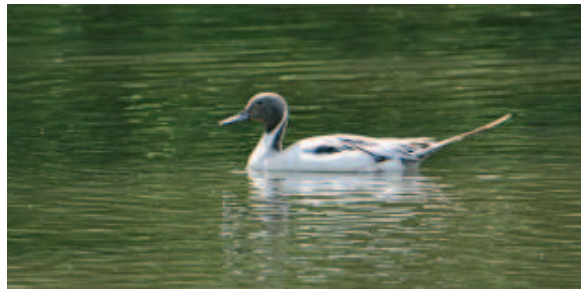
Images: Brian Macfarlane

Pintail Puzzle

Hans Watson

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the unusual coloration occasionally seen in the plumage of birds, and there is no doubt that this subject provides much scope for study. Each year, most bird watchers will come across birds with plumage that is not typical for the species, and in my experience, this is most likely to be birds with various amounts of white or very pale feathers. In the past, I have heard the term 'partially leucistic' used to describe these birds, but more recently, I have been told that there are several causes for these very pale or white plumaged birds, and identifying these in the field is very difficult. Two of these conditions are known as 'Progressive Greying', and 'Dilution'.

Early in May, I was bird watching along the Waveney, and was told that a Pintail drake had just flown into of the lakes at the River Waveney Study Centre. When I went to see this bird, I found a beautiful pale bird, with brown instead of black central tail feathers, and grey under-tail coverts instead of the usual black. The flanks and back were white rather than the normal vermiculated grey. Whether this plumage was the result of 'Dilution' or 'Progressive greying' I leave to my peers to decide.



Images: *Hans Watson*

FREE TO A GOOD HOME...

I seem to have ended up with some duplicates of *Watsonia* and *BSBI News*. If anyone is missing any from their own collection/wants to add to a recently started run, then let me know. I will be passing them on to their new home on a first come, first served basis.

Jo Parmenter 07710 252468

RED KITES

Tony Howes

Last May, Wendy and I had a holiday in North Wales, we stopped on the way up at Gigrin Farm in Rhayader, probably the best known Kite feeding centre in Wales, and certainly one of the first. I had pre-booked one of the raised photographic hides, these have much larger openings at the front, giving more scope for getting the camera onto birds flying overhead.

We got there well before the feeding time of 2.30 pm, but already the Kites were gathering in the area, wheeling in the sky all round the small field that is the feeding place. Just before the allotted time there were probably three hundred birds waiting.

Then the tractor came down the track and into the field, and the small pieces of meat were shovelled all over the grassy central area. Instantly the Kites, Crows, Rooks and the odd Buzzard are there, all trying to grab a piece. The Kites tend to swoop down and pluck meat from the grass in their talons, only occasionally landing, then eat it as they cruise overhead or sit in one of the trees surrounding the field, with great dexterity they manage to avoid one another, I didn't see any serious mid-air collisions.

The Buzzards, Crows, and Rooks eat on the ground until they have had their fill. Within half an hour it's all over, most of the Kites have drifted away, just the odd straggler searching the grass for the last scraps of meat, or sitting about in the surrounding trees digesting their meal.

It was well worth the diversion to go and see such an amazing number of Red Kites all flying together. Here in Norfolk numbers are getting larger each year, but it will be some time before three hundred can be seen wheeling in the sky. Red Kites are very beautiful, elegant birds to watch, it's always a pleasure to see them.



Images: *Tony Howes*

Norfolk - a personal perspective.

James Davies.

My first introduction to Norfolk was in the early 1990s when I was still learning about birds and took the opportunity for a short stay with our local bird club. I remember seeing my first Pectoral Sandpiper and Bearded Tits at Titchwell and visiting several other sites during the week. I also recall seeing many buildings faced with the local flint and beautiful countryside.

From speaking with a birding friend of mine who visits Norfolk every autumn and winter in particular to see the geese flocks the offer was there for me to join him, and so in the autumn of 2015 (December) followed by a second visit in February 2016 I was hooked on Norfolk. Now able to expertly identify birds I was in my element. Everything came flooding back about at how beautiful the county is, the fields with the soil black from the peat, the thick woodlands and hedgerows, the open landscape of the estuaries and reed beds with their unique character and the beautiful evening sunsets particularly when the golds and reds of the skies are gently broken up by hundreds of geese forming long 'skeins'.

Of course the main reason for a visit was to see the diversity of birds on offer and I was not disappointed. During these recent visits I particularly enjoyed searching for and watching Shore Larks and a Pallid Harrier at Snettisham and then staying into the late evening to watch thousands of Pink-footed Geese coming in to roost with thousands of Golden Plovers flying off from the estuary close by. The calls are far carrying and an amazing sound. The shingle beach at Cley gave me Snow Buntings within yards of my feet, how can you not get a decent photo. What an amazing sight considering my only previous sighting of this stunning little bird was on a snow and wind swept Cairngorms hillside in the late 1980s. Lapland Buntings have been one of several lifers I have added to my list since re-visiting Norfolk and the species continue to get better.



Snow Bunting

Image: *James Davies*

For example, during a four day stay in May this year several locals were saying 'its quiet bird wise at the moment, not much about', but on the contrary, from my perspective when you are watching birds such as Barn Owls quartering the fields, Sandwich and Little Terns calling overhead, Avocets and Redshanks nesting on the shingle, Bitterns over a reed bed, Grey Plover and Turnstone in full breeding plumage and many other specialities which I only get to see few and far between where I live, then bird wise this has been spectacular for me.

In June of this year I visited Norfolk again this time to see the Man Orchids at Holme, to catch up with the Nightjars again at Kelling Heath, to re-visit Titchwell, Cley and Chorsely and to visit a few new sights such as Hickling Broad where I watched a Swallowtail butterfly. The diversity of plants in the county is very impressive too. I have recently joined the Cley Bird Club and the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalist's Society and enjoying the newsletters and articles, hence why I wanted to contribute an article for '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' (I have now seen a Natterjack, a species which was also a new one for me along with Norfolk Hawker, Large Red damselfly and Royal Fern).

I must say I am well and truly hooked on the vast flora and fauna and the landscapes and habitat that Norfolk has to offer and will certainly be returning as often as I can. The county's beauty and wildlife is a testament not only to nature but by the huge efforts being put in by reserve staff, volunteers and contributors alike.



A North Norfolk scene for James - Ed.

Image: Cherry Farrow

A Mouse's Tail

Kevin Radley

It took two volunteers and the Warden most of a morning to fill an 8 cubic yard skip to its brim with over twenty years' worth of accumulated detritus from the Wheatfen Nature Reserve's workshop. When the job was complete there was enough room to swing the proverbial cat; and with the floor so clean one could eat their dinner off it - well maybe not!

The unfortunate consequence of all this de-cluttering for our benefit was to destroy what had been a peaceful home to a family of mice. Pulling out black refuse sacks from one corner, stuffed full of who knows what, a mouse's wriggling bottom was observed through the split in the side of a bag, rear legs scrabbling desperately trying not to fall out. Not wishing to deposit the creature into the skip we sifted through the contents of the bag, which included quantities of acorns, mostly with their kernels removed. Presently, two young (though hair-covered) mice were extracted and placed out of harms way by the Study Centre building.

Conversation led us to wondering if the rodents were Yellow-necked Mice (*Apodemus flavicollis*) as they had been recorded in the wood at Wheatfen. Unsure as to whether young Yellow-necked Mice exhibited the full 'yellow neck' found on adults, I concluded that we had the ideal opportunity to find out. Gently holding one of the youngsters belly-up in the palm of my hand (the other mouse had disappeared) sure enough, the telltale full neckband was present.

A pair of adult mice, presumably the parents of the youngsters, were later seen in the shed as things were cleared out; the largest being readily identifiable as being a male Yellow-necked Mouse.



Yellow-necked Mouse

A few hours later, at home, whilst recounting the mornings' efforts to my wife, I suddenly remembered the youngster, which I had intended to repatriate within the workshop when we had finished our task. I cycled back to the Reserve to find the young mouse still where I had left it, sitting upright, waiting patiently. Placing it on an old glove for comfort, it was returned to the shed from whence it was taken, to a corner where we had last seen the adults, and hoped they would quickly become reunited.

Polar Bear skull in Norwich Castle Museum

Carl Chapman

As I was searching through accession records for cetacean material within the castle museum in Norwich I noticed a record dated 1825.

Accession number NWHCM:1825.4 listed 'Skin of a Polar Bear and Skull of a Polar Bear' among other items. They were donated by Capt. Manby of Yarmouth. The entry intrigued me and I decided to do a little more research on Capt. Manby.

Captain George William Manby was born in Denver, Norfolk in 1765 and died in Great Yarmouth in 1854. He was an inventor, author, entrepreneur and an apparent amateur naturalist. It was in 1821 he sailed to Greenland with skipper William Scoresby to test a new harpoon for whaling. The experience of his voyage were published within his 'Journal of a Voyage to Greenland in the year 1821 with graphic illustrations' (which is available online). On page 134 he describes how he shot a Polar Bear ...

Here is his account of the capture:

July 17th - ... Just as we were sitting down to dinner, the man at the mast head, called out that a great bear had just quitted the ice and was in the sea. On hearing this, I instantly requested a boat, and went after him. Seeing he was going leisurely to a large floe of ice at some distance, we got within a hundred yards of him before we were noticed; when he instantly turned to endeavour to regain the ice, and we rowed with all our might to cut him off: finding that he failed in his object, he changed his route to face the boat, and approached it, keeping up a continued growling with other indications of rage, such as shewing his frightful teeth, and elevating his head and much of his body out of the water. Being desirous to preserve the head of an animal represented to be of unusual size, I let him come within twelve yards, when I fired a ball through his shoulder, which deprived him of the use of a fore leg, when he roared hideously, pressed towards us in the most ferocious manner, and endeavoured to board or upset the boat, but failed from the loss of his leg; he was then attacked by the crew with lances, the thrusts of some of which he avoided with astonishing dexterity, and, in the most resolute manner, again he made several attempts to reach the boat, but being repulsed by an overpowering thrust of a lance from the harpooner on his flank, he was unable longer to hold the contest. During its continuance he had bitten a lance with such exasperated rage, as to break one of his long tusks: finding battle fruitless in the water, he retreated towards the ice, swimming most astonishingly

fast, considering the great propelling power which he had lost from the wound in his fore leg; he reached the ice, which he ascended with great difficulty, having only one fore paw to assist him. Determined to injure the skin as little as possible, and to attack him in front, I got upon the ice, and was about to fire another ball to free him from his sufferings, when he uttered a tremendous growl, and fell down dead...



Polar Bear Skull (*Ursus maritimus*) Clearly shown is the broken canine described in Manby's account. Photographed with kind permission of Norwich Castle Museum.

Methodically Manby took measurements stating the length of the 'tusks' in the upper jaw were 2 1/8 inches.

The Polar Bear skull has survived and is on display in the museum. Comparing the upper canine length in the polar bear skull with the measurement in Manby's journal, it is an exact match. The canines having a length of 2 1/8 inches. Given the skull also has a damaged lower left canine as per Manby's account, and he only documents the taking of a single bear during his voyage, it seems reasonable to conclude the skull to be from the animal he described.

Such an act is unacceptable these days of course, but never the less here is a fascinating slice of history involving one of our own county natural historians.

Fungal Threads

John Vincent

I am, we all are, blessed with a Chairman with an insatiable interest in fungi, and the vigour and drive to expand his opportunities by his willingness to share his enthusiasm. Here at The Old Rectory we have a considerable area of grass lawns small and large which have little attention except cutting as required and edging – no chemical treatment of any form, certainly for the last 50 years and probably much much longer. This, to a fungi man, is apparently a prized rarity, which we are only too willing to share. Tony Leech has always responded to our plea for identification when a 'new to us' fungus pops up here or there and we are suitably grateful. I mention three dramatic oddballs:

o Shaggy Inkcap *Coprinus comatus*

Initially emerged as an apparently robust vertical column, like a white inverted test-tube, some 3-4 cm diameter and 8-10 cm in height, decorated with thin dark flakes of mycelial tissue. The sides eventually eroded to reveal a slender bendy white stem, considerably taller by then, with a small white toadstool-like cap, which bore no resemblance to the original structure and deceived into believing it to be a different, intrusive species altogether.



Shaggy Inkcap

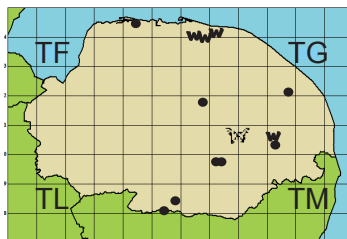
o Cellar Cup *Peziza cerea*

Appeared like an oozing of tar from joints/cracks in paviors and edging brick walls and spread out over the adjoining flats as a smooth dry velvety mycelial cover, non-sticky. Matt black, it has a creepy unhealthily sinister appearance to the uninitiated layman.

o Scarlatina Bolete *Boletus luridiformis*

Essentially toadstool-like in form, sturdy with a robust stem, darkish earthy buff-brown overall externally. If the cap is snapped the newly exposed mycelia! tissue is a pale lemonish-yellow which before your very eyes rapidly turns blue-black (rapidly in the sense of a second or two), a transformation which has to be seen to be believed, suggestive of an apparent manifestation of plant sensitivity to molestation rather than a straight forward much slower oxidation as in a cut apple.

There are several others, and will assuredly be more. Perhaps we will be able to squeeze a *Norfolk Natterjack* article out of Tony, if he can ever find the time in his severely overloaded retirement calendar!?



WEST HARLING & KNETTISHALL HEATHS

Sunday 5th June 2016

On a beautiful, warm sunny morning following a spell of cloudy and rainy weather with northerly winds the previous week, Bob Ellis and six members of the Society and the Norfolk Flora Group joined Arthur Copping and another member of the Lowestoft Field Club for a joint field visit to West Harling Heath. The early-June vegetation was in pristine condition for the group, who headed westwards from the car park to begin a circular walk through short Breck Grassland yielding many plants typical of the habitat. The more notable of the 153 plants recorded (with 96 in flower) included Kidney Vetch, Hairy Rock-cress, Slender and Thyme-leaved Sandworts, Long-stalked Crane s-bill, Common Rock-rose, Fine-leaved Sandwort, Salad Burnet and Common Milkwort, and the more interesting grasses included Silver Hair-grass, Downy Oat-grass in abundance, Crested Hair-grass and Purple-stem Cat s Tail. Thanks are due to Neil Armour-Chelu for allowing parking on Forestry Commission land beyond the Ride 78 barrier for the duration of the meeting.

For the afternoon session at Knettishall Heath across the county boundary in Suffolk, the party was joined by another Lowestoft member and a small number of additional NNNS/Flora Group members who, unfortunately, had failed to locate the morning venue.

The group followed the Icknield Way for about a quarter of a mile before reaching an open area undergoing active management. Initial woodland produced shade-loving plants followed by coarse grassland, but of most interest was the managed land with a curious mix of acid and basic soils bearing Bracken, Sheep's-fescue and Tormential on the one hand and Meadow Oat-grass, Dropwort in quantity, Purple Milk-vetch and Tower Mustard on the other. The afternoon list comprised 106 taxa in all, with 69 in flower.

To round off the meeting, most of the party repaired to The Vine at Hopton and enjoyed refreshment in its sunlit garden.



Tower Mustard
Image: Dr. Ian Senior



Purple Milk-vetch

Image: Dr. Ian Senior

This account of this year's most interesting joint excursion in an annual series is briefer than usual as I was unable to attend, so I am even more indebted than usual to Arthur Copping for his meticulous plant lists and supplementary information as well as his arranging the meeting.

Stephen Martin

CATFIELD HALL FEN

26th June 2016

Both before and since our last previous field meeting at Catfield Hall Fen in June 2007, which coincided with a period of intensive systematic recording by Research Committee members and many associated Recorders under the aegis of Alec Bull and by kind invitation of Mr and Mrs Tim Harris, this outstanding 300-acre (122-hectare) Norfolk Broadland estate of fens, marshes, carrs and woods has figured prominently in the Society's activities. These wide-ranging researches, along with accounts of the history, habitats, hydrology and hydrochemistry of the site formed the comprehensive NNNS Occasional Publication No. 11, *The Natural History of the Catfield Hall Estate* (2008), which at the time of writing the Society's website indicates as being still available in book form: for details and to order, email info@nnns.org.uk

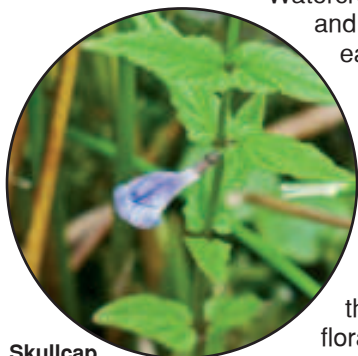
Our 2016 visit, with Bob Leaney at the helm and Bob Ellis and Flora Group members ably assisting, marked the twenty-eighth NNNS excursion, no less, in the Society's 'Wild Flowers Revealed' series. I counted 18 members and friends making up the party. Though many of us had started our journeys in heavy rain, we arrived in front of the Hall in brightening and improving weather, which remained pleasantly warm but never too oppressively hot for our wetland walk. Bob Leaney introduced us to features of the site and its wildlife and vegetation, pointing out its various conservation designations including its status as a Ramsar site. We were lucky also to have Jo Parmenter with us to summarize her extensive knowledge of the estate and its habitats, including the fact that various parcels of surrounding land have been acquired in recent years to counteract enrichment from arable farming which, along with water abstraction, has sometimes threatened the conservation objectives of the core estate.

It is difficult to describe in detail and true sequence the varied route we took - we had been forewarned of the possibility of getting lost and told of an unidentified body once found in the fen many years after its demise! - so it seems best to take refuge once more in listing some of the more notable of the many hundreds of species seen in the various habitats.

As is usually the case when setting out on the first few hundred metres or so from the farmhouse or hall of Broadland estates, the flora differs from that of the wetland if only because it is growing on slightly higher and drier land, so we walked initially past such plants as introduced Meadow Cranesbill and a stretch of Yellow Rattle, and also saw the White Park Cattle and Norfolk Horn Sheep that are features of the estate.

The extensive and species-rich areas of calcareous fen at Catfield are important in not only a British but also a European context, so it was not surprising that these and other marshy stretches yielded most of the commoner and more prominent wetland plant species one might expect to find - Common Reed, Hemp Agrimony, Marsh Dock, Lesser Water Parsnip, Greater and Lesser Reed Mace, Yellow Flag, Marsh Thistle, Meadowsweet, Marsh and Bog Stitchwort, Lesser Spearwort and Purple Loosestrife for instance - but also a good number of less ubiquitous species including Greater Spearwort, Greater Birdsfoot-trefoil, and, of course, Milk Parsley the Swallowtail Butterfly food plant. In and alongside the dykes, Frogbit, Water-soldier flowering in quantity, Greater Bladderwort (with a single plant in flower), Yellow Water-lily, Hornworts, Cowbane, Greater Water-parsnip, Square-stemmed St. John's wort, Water-violet,

Watercress and Skullcap were all noted. As to the ferns, clumps and stands of Royal Fern and stretches of Marsh Fern were easily spotted, but other species included Broad, Narrow and Crested Buckler-fern - Catfield being one of the best UK sites for the two last of these and the cross between them. Bog Myrtle, or Sweet Gale, proved to be agreeably frequent in some less calcareous areas, pleasantly perfuming the air.



Skullcap

Image:
Francis Farrow

Lunch was taken with a decaying upturned boat providing a convenient seat for some of the party, where the adjacent conditions supported a more acid-preferring flora including Tormentil, Cotton-grass and Round-leaved Sundew. The most decorative element was provided by a fair number of marsh orchids including Southern Marsh and Heath Spotted, but also - probably - a number of hybrids, though identification was not universally agreed.

The dull and damp start to the day and reports that Swallowtails had so far been less numerous than in recent years had not augured well, but in fact a number were seen flying at Catfield - I was aware of 3 in close proximity at one point - so we were not disappointed. Other butterflies included Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Peacocks, Skippers and a Painted Lady. Silver Y, Large Yellow Underwing, Six-Spotted Burnet and Cinnabar Moths were also noted. Among various dragonflies seen were Norfolk Hawkers. Notable birds included a Hobby and a Marsh Harrier, a Heron was seen and Cetti's Warbler heard, but the most impressive and closest sighting occurred when a Barn Owl vacated the old mill on our approach and flew low, almost over our heads rather than away from us.

Bill Mitchell listed various probably introduced and exotic plants seen, including Rayed Knapweed, Chamomile (with Marsh Cudweed) and *Gaultheria shallon* from the rhododendron family. Although we had been told at the outset that the estate has a high population of ticks owing to the plenitude of Chinese Water- and Red Deer, a group of more than a dozen of the latter at Rose Fen, comprising three stags with full antlers and about ten hinds, provided the visual highlight of the day when they jumped a five-barred gate at the far end of the fen. Thanks go to Bill for reporting this sighting and for providing me with details of botanical finds made after I had left.

Stephen Martin



The next issue of ***The Norfolk Natterjack*** will be August 2016.

Please send
all articles / notes and photographic material
to the editor as soon as possible by
October 1st 2016 to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,
Norfolk, NR26 8QD. Email: francis.farrow@btinternet.com

All photographs / images are very welcome, especially to accompany an article or document a record, occasionally however, because of space limitations, preference may have to be given to Norfolk-based images, or to those subjects depicting interesting or unusual behaviour, or are less commonly (or rarely) seen in print.

Membership subscriptions

The N&NNS membership year runs from 1st April to 31st March. During this time members will receive four copies of the quarterly *Natterjack* newsletter, and annual copies of the Transactions of the Society, and the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report. A full summer programme of excursions and a winter programme of talks are also organised annually.

Membership renewals are due on **1st April each year** and should be sent to the treasurer:

- David Richmond, 42 Richmond Rise, Reepham, Norfolk, NR10 4LS.

New memberships should also be sent to:

- David Richmond at the above address.

Current rates are £20 for individual, family and group memberships
(£30 for individuals living overseas).

*Cheques payable to: **Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.***

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