



The Norfolk Natterjack



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**The quarterly bulletin
of the
Norfolk & Norwich
Naturalists' Society**



Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Retiring 2019: J Hubbard, D Nobbs, Dr P Taylor

Retiring 2020: Teresa Frost, Tim Frost, T Hodge

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Hon. Independent Examiner: Position vacant

The Newsletter, *The Norfolk Natterjack*, is published quarterly.

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Cover image: Small Tortoiseshell ab. *semi-ichnusoides* (Francis Farrow) - See page 6

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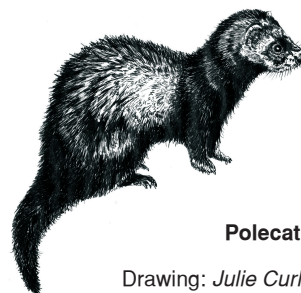
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Toad-in-the-hole....

The spring started well and it is promising to be a good year. Many butterflies were on the wing early and bird migrants also returned early. With lots of sunshine insects were buzzing in the hedgerows which were white with Blackthorn blossom. Lets hope the weather is kind this year without the cold and wet disastrous June we had last year. My thanks to all contributors (articles & pictures) and I am sure members will find something of interest in this edition. There are alerts for another invader - an ant species, calls to join a pond bioblitz and if you are feeling particularly dedicated check out the county recorder /independent examiner vacancies or write up a paper for 'Transactions'. **FF**

County Mammal Recorder

Francis Farrow has been the Mammal Recorder for Norfolk for five years and is standing down at the end of 2017, although the report for 2017 will be edited by him. If County Recorder for Mammals is something that you would like to take on from January 1st 2018 then please let your interest be known to Tony Irwin, chairman of the Research Committee
dr.tony.irwin@gmail.com by the end of June.



Polecat

Drawing: Julie Curl

The position entails that:

- queries on mammals from various sources including the public are answered. (Many of these have been Polecat ID related in recent years.)
- records are collated, verified where necessary and reported annually in the *Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report*.
- close liaison is kept with various mammal data collecting/research bodies (NBIS, NT, BTO, VWT etc) in order to maximise the number of Norfolk records available.
- a verified mammal listing is returned to NBIS at the end of each year and to assist NBIS when necessary with requests for data on specific mammals for ongoing monitoring purposes.

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

We are seeking an independent examiner to report on the Society's accounts at the end of each year. The task involves a review of the receipts and payments records kept by the Society and a comparison of those records with the formal end-of-year accounts statements. The examiner may be a member of the Society or a friend or work colleague, but cannot be related in any way to any member of Council. A small honorarium is paid. If you would be willing to take on this role or know of a suitable candidate, please contact Carl Chapman (address details on inside front cover).

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Please note that the deadline for papers is October 31st, however, the editor would be pleased to receive wildlife reports and articles at any time before then.

An Unusual Slime-Mould

John and Christopher Bingham and James Brown

Christopher found this curious organism on an SSSI owned by the Bingham, known as Rosie Curston's Meadow, near Dereham, on 31st October 2016. On



an area about 75cm across, almost all leaves of at least two dicot herbs and a grass species were covered with what looked like small fruiting bodies of a fungus, about 1mm in diameter.

We only found one affected area in the five acre meadow, described as meso-trophic grassland by Peter Lambley in *A Flora of Norfolk* (Beckett, Bull and Stevenson), which has a photograph of the meadow on p.30. The meadow is

Physarum mutabile fruiting bodies on slightly damp and has been managed by cattle grazing since 1940, including in 2016.

John approached staff of the John Innes Centre, Norwich for their advice. The organism did not appear to be a pathogen because it was present on leaves of plants in several families and the leaves appeared healthy. Anna Jordan at JIC identified it as a Myxomycete (slime mould) and James Brown identified it as *Physarum mutabile*. This was confirmed by John Robinson from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, a Myxomycete enthusiast.



A close-up of a fruiting body
Image: John Robinson



P. mutabile has a world-wide distribution and has been found on five continents, in both temperate regions and the tropics. Nevertheless, it is rare and this is only the fourteenth record of it occurring in Great Britain. It is noteworthy that one of the previous records was at Costessey, only a few miles away, where it was found on dead stinging nettles on a straw heap in 1930.

A cross-section of a fruiting body showing a black mass of spores
Image: John Robinson

Myxomycetes are a little-known but very important part of the ecosystem. They feed off other microorganisms, particularly bacteria, and play a crucial role in the carbon cycle. They are especially common in dead wood, rotting plants and soil. It is less usual to find them on living plants.

The common name of slime mould is something of a misnomer because the fruiting bodies of many Myxomycetes can be preserved easily by drying for a few days. They are more often found in dryer areas because in humid locations, the fruiting bodies cannot dry out to release spores.

Despite their appearance, Myxomycetes are not closely related to fungi and their nearest well-known relatives are amoebae. They are especially interesting to biologists because they have some of the largest cells in nature and some Myxomycete species are widely used to investigate the internal structure, movement and death of cells.

This unusual organism is a reminder of the diversity and beauty to be found in the smallest members of the natural world, as much as in the more obvious ones like flowers, birds and insects.

The False Morel

Will Fitch

I discovered a strange fungus at the end of March whilst working at Holt Country Park along one of the paths. Taking a few photos I researched it and concluded that it was The False Morel *Gyromitra esculenta* and sent the images off to Tony Leach for confirmation. He agreed and said that it is



The False Morel

Images: *Will Fitch*

quite widespread but commonest in Scottish pinewoods. It is apparently absent from the Midlands and scarce in East Anglia and far from common in Norfolk with only two previous records - from 'woods at Kelling' and from south of Norwich about six years ago.

Tony added that despite the specific epithet *esculenta* meaning 'good to eat', it isn't! It can be very poisonous although curiously some people are more sensitive than others. Despite this, it is widely eaten, but only after boiling (for up to an hour!). The fungus contains gyromitrin which, in the stomach, breaks down to monomethylhydrazine, the true toxic agent. This simple compound is used as a component of rocket fuel!

Woodland in Springtime

Hans Watson

Norfolk still has some wonderful areas of ancient woodland, albeit fragments of what existed in times past, and these are well worth a visit in spring for the wonderful displays of woodland flowers. A walk through Wayland Wood recently, drew my attention to the variation in flowering times of the same species at different sites. Wood Anemones in Buckenham Wood close to where I live, were still in bud, whilst in Wayland Wood they were in full flower, and at their best. I get the impression that these differences appear to be getting more pronounced in the last few years, and wonder if these

differences are simply the plants response to different micro-climates. The average temperature at Buckenham Wood, which is only 11 miles from the sea, is most probably higher than the average temperature at Wayland Wood, and



Wood Anemones (above) and
Yellow Star of Bethlehem (right)



Images: *Hans Watson*

I would have thought that earlier flowering, and not later flowering, would occur at the warmer site. Perhaps I am missing something obvious. Certainly the management of Wayland Wood by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust deserves praise, as this has resulted in fantastic displays of flowers, particularly in early May. The Yellow Star of Bethlehem also seems to be prospering, and I now see it at several other parts of the wood, in addition to the traditional south east corner. But perhaps these other patches are also longstanding, and I have not noticed them before. Wayland Wood is definitely my favourite wood, but where have the Golden Pheasants gone?

False Oxlip?

Nick Owens

I have a mixture of Primroses and Cowslips on the edge of my garden. This year a plant produced flowers in mid-March which were similar in form to Primrose flowers, with one flower per petiole, but a much richer yellow, as dark as a cowslip and intermediate in size between the two species. I thought it must be a Primrose-Cowslip hybrid, but it did not look like the usual False Oxlip, which in my (limited) experience usually has an umbel and paler flowers, between Primrose and Cowslip in colour. However, on returning from holiday on 8th April the plant had produced umbelled flowers and the original single flowers had withered (see images).



Primrose/cowslip hybrid
Weybourne 15th March 2017

Images: *Nick Owens*



Same plant (on right) 8th April 2017 with possible parents to its left. The first simple flowers have withered and are still visible, but flowers with umbels have appeared.

When I first noticed the plant in March I wondered whether the form of Primrose-Cowslip hybrids differed according to which was the male, pollen-providing plant and which produced the seeds. I guessed it might be more

common for the Cowslip to be the male parent and the Primrose to produce the seeds because Cowslips flower slightly later than Primroses and both are protandrous. By the time Cowslips produce flowers the Primrose pollen could be largely finished. So I guessed that this might be the rarer version in which a Primrose provided the pollen and the Cowslip produced the seeds. I convinced myself that this was a clever idea, but when the form of the flower changed I was mystified. Perhaps a botanical member of the Society will be able to provide an explanation. I don't think it's two plants side by side.

A Strange Tortoiseshell and a New Bee

Francis Farrow

On 5th April 2017 I was walking across Sheringham Common when a Small Tortoiseshell butterfly flew past me. As I had seen around a dozen such butterflies this morning I was ready to dismiss it as a rather worn individual -



Image: *Francis Farrow*

how wrong I was for as soon as it settled nearby and spread its wings it revealed itself as a very strange - looking Small Tortoiseshell. For starters it was a bright orangey-red colour and lacked any white spots along its top wing edges. Checking the internet I found that there were some 150 named aberrations for Small Tortoiseshells. The one this individual closely resembled was *Ab. semi-ichnusoides*, although the hind wings are normally black with very

little orange present on the typical form. From information supplied by Andy Brazil (County Butterfly Recorder), two aberrations of this type were sold for £2 5s and £2 10s in 1909, which is approximately £200 in to-days money.

John Furse went to the Common the following day to try and find the aberration and although he did not see the butterfly he spotted the Common Mourning Bee *Melecta albifrons*. This bee is the cleptoparasite of the Hairy-footed Flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes*. Although it is widespread in Norfolk this was the first recorded sighting of this cuckoo-bee for the Common.



Common Mourning Bee

Image: *John Furse*

Primrose Sprites

Hans Watson

The arrival of spring is announced by a variety of heralds. For some nature lovers, the herald will be a bird, such as Chiffchaff or Swallow, for others it will be an insect such as Brimstone butterfly or Bumblebee. For yet others it will be a Primrose, Daffodil, or other flower, and so on. As a youngster who was fascinated by nature, I remember one little insect that drew my attention in spring, mainly because of its shape, with long pointed front end and rounded furry back end. This was the Bee-fly (*Bombylius major*), referred to by some country-folk as the Primrose Sprite, presumably because it appears at the same time that Primroses are in bloom. For me, this is one of many heralds of spring. There are several other scarcer species of Bee-fly that I have yet to see.

Although some people find this insect rather a weapon-like proboscis, it is harmless to humans. It does however, have a more sinister side. It's nests of mining bees, and so the undoubted good flowers, is cancelled out by the mining bee that also have been a pollinator. Probably an even more like to think that there is a place for every creature.



Bee-flies

Images: *Hans Watson*

Ant Alert

Doreen Wells

March 29th 2017 was Invasive Ant Awareness Day in Norfolk! This campaign was launched during invasive species week with a specific focus on the invasive garden ant *Lasius neglectus*.

Until 2009 no invasive ant species had successfully established itself in the UK. That situation ended when a colony was discovered nesting at Hidcote Manor in Gloucestershire. Fast forward to 2017 and we now find that there are six known colonies, with the nearest one to us being in Cambridge. National organisations are taking this threat very seriously and we wanted to do the same.

We would like your help to stop this ant invading Norfolk. I am providing details here which will help you with identification together with photographs. *Lasius neglectus* looks very like our common brown garden ant *Lasius niger*, but there are significant differences in behaviour and social structure. They do occupy the same habitats and so their behavioural differences may alert you to their presence.

If you see large numbers (hundreds) of small brown ants climbing up and down trees, then specimens should be taken for examination. Trees are crucial to their existence because dense populations of workers will be almost continuously active in tending aphids for their honeydew. *Lasius neglectus* nests in the ground, under stones and paving, as does *Lasius niger*, but they have also been reported nesting in buildings. They are attracted to electrical fields, causing failure and damage by fire in fuse boxes, electrical plugs and electro-mechanical equipment. Any such infestation should be reported immediately.

Lasius neglectus forms super-colonies by occupying many interconnected nests with many queens. These ants do not show territorial aggression to their own species, as do our native species *Lasius niger* who have separate individual nests and single queens. This invasive species may also be active for longer in the year, so has a shorter hibernation period. Look out for large numbers of workers which appear to be unusually active in early spring or in late autumn.



Lasius niger worker (left)
Lasius neglectus worker (right)
Images: Phillip Buckham-Bonnett

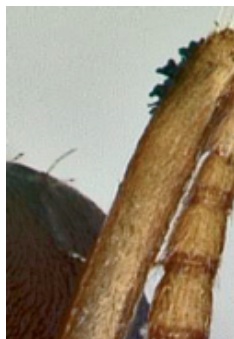


Lasius neglectus head showing absence of hairs on antennal scape
Image: April Nobile from www.AntWeb.org

When examining specimens for identification you will see from the photographs that *Lasius neglectus* is slightly smaller (3-6mm) and lighter brown in colour, than our dark brown garden ant *Lasius niger* (5-8mm), but the most obvious identifier is the fact that *Lasius neglectus* lacks erect (standing) hairs on the antennal scapes and on the hind tibiae, unlike *Lasius niger* which has numerous hairs.

Please report any sightings to:

Doreen Wells, County Ant Recorder,
E-mail: wells_doreen@hotmail.com or
Tel: 01493 332274 (Answer phone)



Left:
Close-up of ***Lasius neglectus*** scape.
Image: April Nobile from www.AntWeb.org.

Right:
Close-up of ***Lasius niger*** scape.
Image: April Nobile from www.AntWeb.org

North Norfolk Ponds ‘Bioblitz’

A Norfolk Ponds Project “Bioblitz” of four overgrown ponds will take place at Bodham on 24/6/2017 at the “Church Farm” Ponds, Lower Bodham. The aim will be to survey 4 small overgrown ponds for any species that might be living in the water and in the overgrown pond margin (largely willow scrub and thorn). Thus aquatic and terrestrial species are of interest. It will be an all-day event and people can just drop in when they like. A barbecue will taking place at 2 pm (free food and drink). If people want to moth trap we could set things up the night before. The meeting place will be TG 1165 3890. All those that are interested should e-mail Carl Sayer (c.sayer@ucl.ac.uk) who will send on an instructions sheet and map in due course. A comparable event will take place in a one year after the restoration (in Sept 2017) of two of the ponds by major scrub and sediment removal. Note this is lovely old style Norfolk countryside. A bit like travelling back through time. Small fields and lots of hedges. Bodham is of course close to the centre of the universe!

RECENT BIRDS

Tony Howes

I always try to get a trip to the North Norfolk coast during the winter period, mainly to find, and hopefully, photograph the beautiful little Snow Bunting. This year they turned up in the Cley area in good numbers and I was



fortunate in having good light the two days I went. These little birds tend to be very erratic, coming down to feed in a shower of fluttering wings, then off again moments later.

Whitlingham Country Park can also be interesting during the winter months, more so if there is ice on the Broad. People feed the ducks, swans and geese, this in turn tends to keep these areas ice free, and anything could turn up,

all dropping in to these small, ice free strips of water. Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Pochard, Golden-eye, along with Great-crested Grebe have all turned up at various times.

More recently I have had a few outings to the Buckenham marshes, the Wigeon are still there as of last week, always very photogenic in flight as they move from one area to another. Vast numbers of Golden Plovers and Lapwings have also been a feature, the latter are now pairing off and



going into display mode, it's incredible how they can dive and twist as they plummet to earth without harming their wings. The distinctive calls of displaying Lapwings, are for me, the sounds of Spring.

Top: Snow Buntings at Cley

Middle: Feeding time at Whitlingham Broad

Bottom: Lapwings displaying at Buckingham marshes

Images: Tony Howes

Then, in the last few days, with lovely bright weather, I have spent some time down in the South Walsham area, mainly for Barn Owls late in the afternoons. Sometimes up to three could be seen hunting over the grazing



marshes, but on two occasions, despite staying until well after usable light had gone, I was out of luck, and saw none at all, that's Nature for you. Fleet Dyke, bordering the marshes can be interesting, there are several Great-crested Grebes on there at the moment in the process of pairing up and sorting out territory. Just yesterday I was following one pair hoping for some interesting behaviour, possibly even the 'Weed Dance' but I think I was a few days too soon. They were, however, catching fish including Perch, Roach and

cocky Ruff, some of these fish looked far too big to be swallowed, but eventually they did go down.



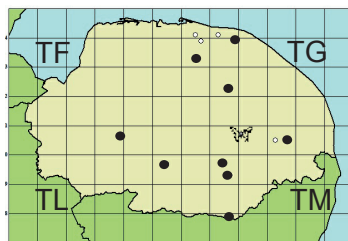
It has been very noticeable for some time now that Common Buzzards are now well spread over our County, over the last week or two my outings have been accompanied by the 'mewing' of buzzards where ever I have been, great to see them.

Top: **Barn Owl** at South Walsham

Bottom left: **Great-crested Grebe** (pair), Fleet Dyke

Bottom right: **Great-crested Grebe** with **Perch** at Fleet Dyke

Images: Tony Howes



Lichen walk, Sparham Pools

5th March, 2017

Eight people ignored the weather forecast and met at the Sparham Pools car park for the first NNS field meeting of the year. Our focus was on lichens, and led by county recorder Peter Lambley we set off on a circuit of the reserve. Our first stop was an open area, where we looked for lichens growing on the ground. Mosses dominated, but two species of lichen were still hanging on, *Cladonia rangiformis* and *Peltigera lactucifolia*. Some fungi were growing near the back of the clearing, and having taken a specimen home I was able to determine that they were Fragrant Funnels (*Clitocybe fragrans*), which when dry has a strong smell of aniseed.

Retracing our steps we then walked around the perimeter of the lakes, paying particular attention to the communities of lichens that could be found on the mature Oaks. Peter showed us how testing the lichen surface with drops of potassium hydroxide (the K test) or bleach (the C test) can be used to separate otherwise similar species by looking for colour changes.

The rain had set in, wetting notebook pages and steaming up hand lenses, but we carried on regardless and detoured to have a look at a row of mature poplars that held five new species for the day. Having finished our circuit of Sparham several participants decided to call it a day, but the remaining five of us went back to Peter's house to eat our lunch in the dry, accompanied by a welcome cup of tea and scone. Before setting off for our afternoon destination we had a walk round the garden, the highlight of which was *Usnea subfloridana* growing on a bird table roof.



Usnea subfloridana

Image: James Emerson

Whilst the morning session had been focused on lichens on trees, in the afternoon we moved on to Lyng church and graveyard. After examining several yellow lichens on the gravestones we moved on to the church itself, where the most



Bilimbia sabulatorum

Image: James Emerson

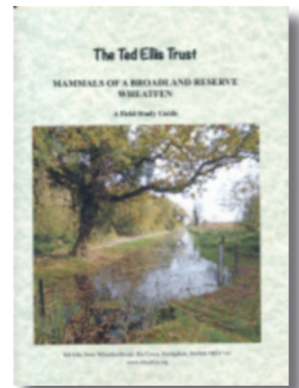
interesting lichen was *Bilimbia sabulatorum*, a small brown lichen that grows on moss rather than directly on the stonework. After working our way around the church we observed several more species growing on tombstones before calling it a day. Despite the inclement weather we had seen over 45 species of lichen across the three sites.

Thanks to Peter Lambley for leading the walk and for his hospitality in allowing us round for lunch.

James Emerson

A Field Study Guide

The Ted Ellis Trust has published a booklet "Mammals of a Broadland Reserve - Wheatfen". This is in recognition of David Nobbs, the reserve warden for the last 25 years, who retired in May this year. It relates to his observations together with Ted Ellis's of earlier years, to the mammal fauna of Wheatfen. The Field Study Guide provides an overview of the life of the mammal communities at Wheatfen. When Roy Baker and Keith Clarke set up the estate as a charitable trust they never thought it would be so successful and much of this success has been due to David Nobbs. May he enjoy a long, happy and fulfilled retirement.



From the booklet:

Otters have been at Wheatfen for some time. The first record we can trace was in 1936 (Ted Ellis) "An otter form on top of a floating mat (*Carex paniculata*) tussock on which was growing a young alder. Several runs noted, one in particular crossing the Avenue. Otters were heard whistling in the Pool swamp at low tide"..... The last record was January 1969 "Two otters racing about apparently making over and around a fallen ivy-covered tree trunk at the back of the island." (Ted Ellis). With increasing problems of pollution affecting water quality, fish numbers and vegetation in the Yare valley the otters disappeared from Wheatfen until the 1990s.....

The booklet can be obtained from: The Ted Ellis Trust, Wheatfen Broad, The Covey, Surlingham, Norfolk, NR14 7AL. Cost £3.00 (£4.00 including postage)

Heroic Volunteering

Suki Pryce

Southrepps Common is a well-known, highly attractive small SSSI in the village of Lower Southrepps (Lower Street), designated in 1990 because it supports a variety of damp grassland and calcareous valley fen types now rare in East Anglia. Some of the key indicators of the diversity found there include Grass of Parnassus (*Parnassia palustris*), Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Common Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), and Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*). A number of rare and

notable Diptera (true flies) have been recorded from the site, and the conditions are favourable for nesting sites of Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler. It lies at the heart of a wider commons area (all now designated a Local Nature Reserve) which is managed by the voluntary group Southrepps Commons Trust (SCT, founded 2005), with advice from Natural England, and funding mainly from the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and Southrepps Parish Council, who currently own the site.



Marsh Helleborine



Bogbean



The central mire area of Southrepps Common

Images: Duncan Westlake

Physical Conservation Work

A wide range of vegetation types and wildlife habitats have developed at the Common which - if left unmanaged - would be severely compromised. Much of the management needed entails cutting reedbeds and rough grassland in winter in quaggy conditions, plus controlling seeding alder and Himalayan Balsam, and 'disposing of the arisings' (as land managers like to put it.) It is the latter in particular which is tough, heavy, physical work, and work which is hard to mechanise without damaging the vegetation or substrate. Yet this is what the SCT volunteers have been doing since 1990, and this is why I've called their work heroic – for without their regular, dedicated labour this SSSI would long ago have succumbed to the plant 'thugs' of the site. Outside the winter cutting season, working parties also meet for other sorts of maintenance – pruning along paths, Himalayan Balsam pulling etc.



I'm just an occasional labourer, having got involved with the site firstly through helping to compile the flora list for the SCT website, and then through participating in the NWT's Norfolk County Wildlife Action survey on another part of the site. But I've been so struck by what the Trust manages to achieve mainly through voluntary effort alone, that I thought it merited a write-up, for here a pint-sized village conserves and enhances a first class SSSI to professional standards, and it must be worth asking, 'How?'
Ima

The management plan for the SSSI is specified and overseen by Natural England in order to best preserve the plants and wildlife habitats listed in the designation, and it is this plan which is then carried out by the SCT volunteers. Typically, about a hectare of reedbed and rough grassland are cut each year, rotating over the site, and this is how they do it. The group meets on Sundays once a fortnight in winter, from 10 am to 12 am. A reciprocating mower (previously an Allen Scythe, now an Agria) is used for cutting, and sections are usually cut in advance as well as during the session. This is tough work in itself, and mowers quite often have to be extricated from bogholes. On the north



Mower stuck in the mud
Image: Duncan Westlake

side of the Common, alder seedlings are also a menace, and need to be removed before mowing. In the past, cutting and stump treatment was tried, but now the Trust have bought a Tree Popper manual extractor to remove saplings completely – more hard work, entailing severing roots below ground before the lever is engaged.

But by far the main and most daunting task is the removal of ‘arisings’ – many tonnes a season. These are heaped on to large tarps or (formerly) a wheeled handcart, using pitchforks; and in the past these were manually pulled to the edges of the site – an exhausting job for volunteers, many of whom are retired or women or both. However, a vast improvement has come onto the scene since 2013 when the Trust bought a small motor which is now used to winch the tarps to their destination. Members are vociferous in describing the difference this has made, although the filling and up-ending of the tarps is still pretty tough work. But overall, an effective system has been developed which works smoothly and safely, and has revolutionised the whole process:



Winch pulling well loaded tarp
Image: Duncan Westlake

“The winch has made a huge difference, and it shows in people’s faces. Hauling the loaded drag sheets was simply too hard. We did it, but the strain showed. I’m proud of the techniques and team-work we’ve developed,” says Chairman John Houlgate.

You may ask, ‘Why not use contractors?’ and the Trust has utilised them on occasions in the past. However, SCT grew concerned that they weren’t always cutting at the best time to allow key flowering plants to set seed, and were also costly. In addition, larger machinery can’t access the main area of the SSSI, plus might do too much damage to the small, sensitive and very wet areas involved at Southrepps. So manual cutting and disposal it remains, involving some 600+ volunteer-hours annually.

The Human Factor – Conserving the Conservationists

But finding physical techniques that work for volunteers is only part of the challenge: even greater is the issue of arousing and sustaining enthusiasm for the conservation enterprise – not just fortnight after fortnight, but year after year. Here people-management comes in, and SCT seems to have found a

formula that works, as around fifteen plus people turn up to each working party - a remarkable number of regulars to commit, regardless of weather, from such a small village (population around 800, with some volunteers also coming from further afield.) The average age is around 50, with many over-60 s, and occasional children welcome too. The group works for an hour and then breaks for coffee and biscuits (brought to the work location) and a natter, before completing the two hours. This doesn't seem a long time in which to do much work, but it's surprising what is accomplished – many hands definitely making light work. And the key thing is that volunteers are willing to keep turning up; in fact, many have been spending their Sunday mornings like this for decades - most admirable behaviour, and a credit both to them and to the site's and SCT's inspirational abilities. Here the John Houlgate plays a crucial role – sending out splendidly exhortatory emails (no two ever the same!) in advance of working days in order to mobilise and enthuse participants, and grateful thank-you messages afterwards. Here's Christmas 2016's to give you a flavour: *'Hello All, What a delightful morning on which to finish before having a well-earned break. We've broken the back of this season's programme, and nearly a few other backs as well! Although it became slightly easier as we progressed, the reedbed was very heavy work as shown by the fact that we broke both the original wooden draw-bars. We worked equipment to its limits and achieved something quite impressive; the view across the whole Common is to be treasured. All in all thank you for a job well done that you can be proud of. We start again on Sunday 8th January, 2017. In the meantime I extend the compliments of the season to you and your loved ones. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from John'*

SCT also hosts a late spring garden party and a December mulled-wine-and-mince-pie evening as an extra thank-you to volunteers, and is notably welcoming to newcomers, no matter how sporadic their attendance - a warm vibe which helps to recruit and retain new people.

Also key to retaining participants' enthusiasm is the Trust's good organisation of the work, which ensures that each session is well planned in advance, and that all tools and equipment are waiting on site ready for volunteers to get stuck in. The planning is mainly done by Chairman John, in consultation with SCT Trustees; and this core group – though lacking any specific environmental or conservation knowledge - have developed the innovative techniques now being used (it helps that many have serious practical skills.) All necessary health and safety procedures and paperwork are also dealt with conscientiously on-site. And a new factor that has helped to make everyone's life easier is the recent purchase of a shipping container, discreetly located on-site, which houses all the Trust's equipment and tools (previously kept at a Trustee's home nearby).

Other Successes

The Trust is also rightly proud of its many other successful projects over recent years, which include: boardwalk replacement and provision of observation point and seats on the SSSI; bridge replacement over Fox's Beck; provision of information point and donations box adjacent to the car park; comprehensive wildlife and plant surveys; ongoing 'species of the month' feature; re-design and production of publicity leaflet and information signs; boardwalk extension and pond-dipping platform at Bradfield Road crossroads; securing long-term maintenance funding under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme; and negotiating diversion of the main Southrepps sewer away from the Common. The Trust's website (sctrust.org.uk) has also recently been revised: this took a great deal of work, and SCT are rightly proud of the very smart and professional resource which this now comprises, offering much scientific data, history, maps, news, photos, and a blog. For their varied efforts, SCT have won many awards, including the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, and the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership Award (twice - no-one else has!)

These projects show the enterprising nature, range, calibre and expertise of the Trust's work – largely done in-house and by self-taught volunteers alone – and demonstrate what even a very modestly-sized community can achieve if they have that special X-factor which Southrepps evidently does. Conversely, they also demonstrate that a small, local group can run a complex nature reserve long-term in a most competent way: here is not only heroic maintenance, but highly intelligent landscape management too. "It's a great site, but not by accident," as the Blog says.

To find out more, please go to the SCT website at: **sctrust.org.uk**



Site Map



The next issue of ***The Norfolk Natterjack*** will be August 2017.

Please send
all articles / notes and photographic material
to the editor as soon as possible by
July 1st 2017 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 membership secretary:

- Jim Froud, Westward Ho, 4 Kingsley Road, Norwich, NR1 3RB

New memberships should also be sent to:

- Jim Froud at the above address or online via the website:
www.nnns.org.uk

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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