



# The Norfolk Natterjack



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*... Researching  
Norfolk's Wildlife*

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The quarterly bulletin  
of the  
Norfolk & Norwich  
Naturalists' Society



# Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

Founded 1869

Reg. Charity No. 291604

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Retiring 2018: A Edwards, J Emerson, S Neal, A Tegala

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

Retiring 2020: Teresa Frost, Tim Frost, T Hodge

Co-opted Members: To be invited following the first meeting of the new council.

**Hon. Independent Examiner:** Position vacant

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

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**Cover image:** *Polecat at Weybourne Camp* (Moss Taylor) - See page 8

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## Toad-in-the-hole....

Welcome to the summer edition of '*Natterjack*'. I think we can say that this year we have had a good start to the summer. Certainly in my part of north Norfolk there has been good numbers of butterflies and dragonflies around, although I will concede some butterflies have been scarce - such as the Brown Argus.

My thanks to those of you who have contributed articles and images, especially if its the first time. We have a varied edition ranging from unusual flowers, polecats and some uncommon species that have been seen so far this year. Finally do not forget to read the note from Carl Chapman - our new chairman and if you can contribute to some of the requests made that will be great. **FF**

### A note from your new chairman - Carl Chapman



When I was voted in as the new chairman of our society at the AGM in March my first duty was to thank the retiring chairman. Tony Leech has given no less than a part of his life to the NNNS, and as a member of our governing council he continues to do so. Without his guidance for the past 3 years the society wouldn't be in the healthy state it is today. I have some big shoes to fill.

To start off my chairmanship I wanted to say a few words, a few musings even, about this wonderful Society to which we all belong and it's place in the world today.

The Society has been around a long time. It's founding was steeped in the recording, study and protection of the county's wildlife. It has been associated with many eminent names throughout its history; Patterson, Gurney, Long, Stevenson, Southwell to name but a few. The very first meeting of the NNNS was on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1869. The 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Society will be in April 2019 and plans are already underway to celebrate this landmark. It must be a great celebration to match the greatness of the Society. It would be useful to have some members to help. Step forward if you are willing!

Although we have our feet placed firmly in the past our minds must be in the future. There are a dedicated few at the centre of the Society who give a lot to its administration; sometimes at great personal expense. We must utilise today's modern technology to work for us and make the administration of the society much easier. Attention needs to be freed to focus on areas of real need.

I was conducting a tour in the line of my business last year when I heard a fourteen year old ask her parents if the tadpoles in the pond we were staring into would bite. That very comment chilled me. Gone are the days when children disappeared out of the door first thing in the morning to explore the natural world and they would not be seen again until it was dark or they were

hungry. Now, many young people sadly see the world through a computer screen. The curiosity of developing minds all too often takes a route away from the natural world. Understanding the connectivity of all living things came as a first-hand experience to me as a schoolboy. Sadly that experience is now being lost and we are becoming a species detached from its environment.

We can be lulled into thinking we all understand the natural world because we as wildlife enthusiasts have a tendency to interact with others of the same ilk. The truth is a high percentage of people in Norfolk have never heard of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalist's Society let alone some of the good work it does. We need to bring our society to the attention of those outside our immediate circle.

I would like to request each member to introduce someone new to the society in the next twelve months; preferably a young person, but not necessarily so. Now is a good time to remind you membership of the Society makes an ideal gift! We all have a chance to broadcast the courses, events, outings and talks our society offers. Spread the word. They are good worthwhile events; and they are enjoyable.

Our website has been refreshed and renewed to make it clearer and concise ([www.nnns.org.uk](http://www.nnns.org.uk)). Membership application and renewal may now be done online. It is now easily viewable on smaller devices such as mobiles and tablets. We have an interactive Facebook page where queries and photographs may be posted. These are all things that may help accrue a pool of developing naturalists.

I look forward to meeting you at one of our events soon. Please make yourself known to me.

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## **Wanted: A Freshwater Fish Recorder**

The Society has been without a Freshwater Fish Recorder for some time and is looking for someone to fill the role. There are many waterways - lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and ditches throughout our County - what do they hold in terms of fish species? The County Recorder would endeavour to discover the species of fish present and their distribution. The appointed person could possibly be a keen angler or have ties with angling clubs to invite the submission of annual records. Some fish are of course not rod caught and may require specific surveys. If you have an interest please contact Tony Irwin, chairman of the Research Committee: [dr.tony.irwin@gmail.com](mailto:dr.tony.irwin@gmail.com)



# Not Giant Hogweed!

*Mike Padfield*

Last year an over-enthusiastic local councillor in Wisbech went to press slating Highways England for not doing enough to control the 'killer plant' Giant Hogweed. After a long front page rant in the Wisbech Times he proposed we all went out with our scythes and chemical sprays to control this evil menace before it took over our green and pleasant lands (well not quite, but you get the general idea!). The plant in question was in fact the Giant Fennel (*Ferula communis*) which had been growing quite happily for a number of years on the roadside embankment by the A47 near



**Giant Fennel**

Images: *Mike Padfield*



Wisbech adjacent to the River Nene. Despite notifying the council it was still duly cut down, but has come back this year in defiance. The first record of this plant was in 1956 in Northamptonshire with more recent records in West Suffolk (1988) and South Essex (2004). There are no records in the last Norfolk Flora, but it might have been recorded since. Although the Wisbech colony is currently about 1km outside the Norfolk County Boundary, a new patch has sprung up a bit closer to Norfolk, so it could be added to our county records soon.

# Small-flowered Catchfly

*Cornel Howells*

Peter Marren in his book “Britain’s Wild Flowers” observed that of all endangered plants it was the arable weeds rather than say, the showy orchids, that would disappear without anyone noticing. He cited Small-flowered Catchfly, *silene gallica*, as a candidate for this fate. I was therefore delighted last year to come across a previously unrecorded colony of this plant. It was flowering on the field side of a railway embankment on the farm where I live near North Walsham.

This prompted me to look at two other sites in north east Norfolk where the catchfly has been recorded, namely Knapton and Felmingham railway cuttings. I hoped that these attractive little annual plants, having retreated from the field margins under intensive farming, might have found safe havens on railway embankments. But of course it is not that simple. Rabbits are the farmers now as the photograph of a recent landslip caused by their excavations at Felmingham show. This is both a good and a bad thing. It helps to disperse the seed but it also buries plants and seeds under mounds of sand. This is probably why the number of flowering plants is substantially reduced this year, both at Felmingham, down from perhaps a thousand to a few hundred, and on the farm where the rabbits have also been busy, down from fifty to a handful.



Small-flowered Catchfly



Landslip caused by Rabbits

Images: *Cornel Howells*

So here we have a plant whose numbers will fluctuate with changes in the rabbit population, that is vulnerable to the spread of more vigorous plant competitors, particularly bramble, and is on the northern edge of its climatic range. Recent mild winters do not preclude a return of harsh frosts to which the seedlings are vulnerable. Fortunately these sites are in the hands of local conservation groups and a wildlife friendly farmer who will keep the scrub at bay. The rest we leave to nature.

One cannot but wonder whether other colonies of Small-flowered Catchfly and other rare arable weeds are flowering undetected on our working railway lines.



# ***Quieter Springs***

*Hans Watson*

Many years ago, I read a book entitled 'Silent Spring', written by an American biologist, Rachel Carson. This classic book was written in 1962, and is credited with alerting the world to the alarming effects that the widespread, and increasing use of chlorinated hydrocarbon and organic phosphorus type pesticides, was already having on the natural world. Claims by the manufacturers of these pesticides, that they were harmless to birds etc., were proven to be false, with many reports of sick and dead birds, mammals, fish and even livestock. One report mentioned in the introductory pages of the book, is of special interest to Norfolk naturalist, and states that a survey count on the Sandringham royal estate in 1961, found 142 dead birds in eleven and a half hours. Hundreds more were found in the weeks following, and included Sparrowhawks, Brambling, Tree Sparrow and about 20 other species.

Thankfully these awful chemicals are no longer being used in Britain, but nevertheless other biocides are used, and I cannot be alone in noticing that dawn choruses are not as loud as in years past. The scarcity of many once common birds has been a gradual, almost creeping event, and it is only when we visit other lands, that it dawns on us, just how bad the state of the British bird population is. I spent two weeks in Andalucia in April, and two species made a big impression, because they were especially common. These were Corn Buntings and Nightingales, and although I did not count them, my daily



**Corn Bunting**



**Nightingale**

Images: *Hans Watson*

notes indicate that I heard at least 50 Nightingales in song over the two weeks travelling around the region. Alas, to see either of these birds in Norfolk nowadays, requires quite an effort. The one big difference between Norfolk and Andalucia, is that in Norfolk, we have a massive area of arable land devoted to cereals, and in Andalucia relatively little, with much of the land used for olive, almond and citrus groves, or evergreen oak woodland that is used for pig rearing. No prizes for guessing which of the two countries uses the most herbicides, fungicides and insecticides.

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## SOME SPRING BIRDS

*Tony Howes*

I just love wandering about the Countryside with a camera, you never know what might turn up next, or what you might see. There are some days of course when very little is photographed, but that doesn't bother me too much, it's the being out there in the Countryside, watching the Seasons unfurl one into another. The different creatures that accompany those Seasons, the changing light, sounds, and colours, every day is a magical experience, different from the one before and the one following.

Sadly, it is a fact that over my long lifetime and 'love affair' with the Natural World many of the creatures I knew in my youth, that were regarded as common, have now gone, and others are on the verge of doing so. The reasons for this are complex, but certainly the changes made in the way we grow crops now has a large bearing on these declines, and of course the huge growth in '*homo sapiens*' numbers is having a big impact also, but enough 'doom and gloom', let's move on to the 'good bits'.

An outing to Minsmere in Suffolk in May was interesting, young birds everywhere. I like to walk all round, calling in at each hide in turn. There are always swallows flying round the sluice area, they nest under the brick arches, the wooden signpost at this point is a good resting spot for them, seen in good light swallows are beautiful birds, a gorgeous metallic blue. Walking on the beach photographing sea kale in flower I came across a family of ringed plovers, the little chicks were no bigger than a golf ball, little bundles of down, after a quick snap I left



**Swallow** and **Ring Plover** chick

Images: *Tony Howes*



them in peace. Further along the sand ridge a kestrel was hovering, probably looking for grass hoppers, it too had its portrait taken.

**Kestrel**



**Mistle Thrush**



**Marsh Harrier**



Much nearer home at Strumpshaw Fen I had the good fortune to come across a family of Mistle Thrushes, two adults and five juveniles, all feeding together on a short cropped meadow frequented by horses. This is a bird I see much less of these days, so it was good to see this family doing well, I managed a few photographs of them. Also at Strumpshaw the Marsh Harriers were giving lessons on how to hunt

flying against very strong winds, it looked effortless, jinking first one way, then the other, always scanning the water below for suitable prey items, beautiful to watch, 'Poetry in motion' comes to mind.

Then more recently I had a walk along Fleet Dyke to see how the great crested grebes were getting on, the last time I went there were two pairs sorting out territory. The first pair had now started nest building, the spot they had picked was a small clump of reed close in to the near edge, and they were busy bringing in twigs and bits of reed, but every now and again they would break off work and mate on a low platform of reeds close by. From my viewpoint this small platform was visible, so a few images of their 'Intimate moments' were possible, I wish them every success.



**Great-crested Grebes**

Images: *Tony Howes*

# ***Polecat on Weybourne Camp***

*Moss Taylor*

I visit Weybourne Camp on most mornings, arriving at about 6am to record migrating birds, both offshore and inland. On most days I also see an interesting variety of mammals, including Grey Seals, Rabbits, Brown Hares, Foxes, Roe Deer and Reeve's Muntjac. I also had my first Harbour Porpoise of the year on June 20<sup>th</sup>. However, nothing prepared me for my first ever sighting of a Polecat the following day. While walking inland of the coastal footpath, a large stoat-like animal ran across the track, passing close to a totally unfazed Rabbit, and disappeared behind a patch of brambles. As I

slowly moved forward, the head of what turned out to be a Polecat popped up only ten yards away before it ran into the entrance of a Rabbit burrow, where it partly concealed itself apart from occasionally peering around. It remained long enough for me to take a series of photographs of its head, before it scampered off, and was not seen again. This was at eight o'clock in the



morning, which would appear to be a strange time of day, for an animal that is largely nocturnal. Needless to say, I shall keep an eye out for it in the future, as it remains a rare mammal in Norfolk. From the photographs it appears to show the features of a pure Polecat rather than a Polecat x Ferret hybrid.



**Polecat**

Images: *Moss Taylor*

# My Norfolk Nature

*Elizabeth Dack*

Firstly I went to see how the Little Terns were doing at the colony on the beach at Eccles. The RSPB are doing a great job keeping predators away. Also putting signs up and talking to the dog owners who don't seem to think their dogs are capable of any damage or spooking the nesting birds when they are not on a lead! Whilst I sat watching them in a shallow lagoon bathing, preening offering fish to each other and copulating, I was saddened to see one Little Tern in trouble. It was flying caught up in a long ribbon with the neck of a balloon on it. Not only was it affecting that tern but it was spooking the other around it as it was flying out to sea. After several minutes it came back to shore tugging at the ribbon and eventually managed to release it. Unfortunately it was out by the rocks so I was unable to pick it up to stop it happening again but a happy ending on this occasion. Something we all need to be aware of when we let balloons go up, up and away!!



Secondly, Whilst out walking at Sea Palling doing my #30 days wild (NWT) I stopped at a meadow watching Swallows collecting mud and nest building in a nearby shed. My attention was drawn towards the Blackbirds away off as one off them looked to have a lot of white on it. As it turned my suspicions were right, it was Ring Ouzel. First one I have seen this year. Feeling happy to have seen that and also several Linnets I spotted a brown colour

along the edge of the joining paddock. I lifted my binoculars thinking maybe Pheasants fighting to see three beautiful Fox cubs playing. I was thrilled to watch and photograph them, maybe others won't be so pleased! I have seen them three more times but guess they have now left to pastures new.



What a fabulous display we have been having around Norfolk with the butterflies, moths and dragonflies. Fabulous Norfolk Hawkers one of my favourites and the Swallowtails have been stunning. I saw four flying together at



Norfolk Hawker



Swallowtail

Strumpshaw Fen, sitting on nettles, reeds and Yellow Flags. Hicking Broad also had lots filtering along very fast. At Wheatfen Reserve I photographed one on some lovely Meadow Rue. They all seem to be in pristine condition. I met a visitor from Somerset who was hoping to see one at Strumpshaw Fen as he had never seen them before, not only were we lucky enough to spot one settled, we also found the caterpillar on some Milk Parsley. It made his day and he can't wait to return to Norfolk in a week or two.



**Silver-studded Blue** and **Humming-bird Hawk-moth**

The Silver Studded Blue was taken while visiting Buxton Heath and the Humming-bird Hawk moth was in my garden at Stoke Holy Cross.

Images: *Elizabeth Dack*



# A Nature Miscellany

Images: John Furse



First summer male Pied Flycatcher,  
Gramborough Hill, Salthouse  
06/05/ 2017.

Ichneumon *Rhysella approximator* - a  
parasite of *Xiphydria* woodwasps.  
Salthouse Heath 14/05/2017  
(Det. Tony Irwin).



A wetland beetle *Actenicerus*  
*sjaelandicus*, Catfield Fen  
02/06/2017  
(Det. Martin Collier).



Lesser Emperor dragonfly,  
Selbrigg Pond, Hempstead  
19/06/2017.



Current Clearwing, Wiveton Hall  
04/06/2017

## A Nature Miscellany (2)

Images: Francis Farrow



Red-veined Darter, Beeston Common  
11/06/2017.



Four-spotted Chaser f. *praenubila*, Blakeney  
Freshes 13/06/2017.



Lunar Hornet Moth, Sheringham 07/07/2017  
(Det. Jim Wheeler).

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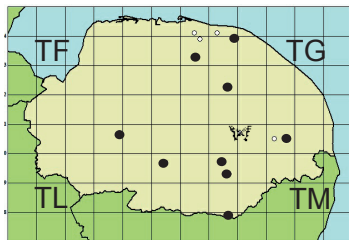
Bracken Sawfly, Beeston Common  
02/06/2017.

Images: Mark Clements



Roesel's Bush-cricket f. *diluta* (Macropterous  
form), Beeston Common 10/07/2017





## ‘Wild Flowers Revealed’: Tas Valley Walk, Forncett-Hapton 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2017

Seventeen NNNS & Norfolk Flora Group members and friends parked alongside Forncett St. Peter Church on a pleasant Sunday morning for this May walk along paths and lanes of this part of the Tas Valley (and return), mainly for the spring flora. We were led by Bob Leaney who, with Jo Parmenter and Bob Ellis of Flora Group, had reconnoitered the route a day or two previously.

The seemingly-unpromising narrow roadside verge between car park and churchyard proved unexpectedly instructive in that the grasses thereon enabled Mary Ghullam to point out the differences between adjacent clumps of Great and Sterile (or Barren) Brome *Anisantha diandra* and *A. sterilis* and, a yard or two further on, Soft Brome *Bromus hordeaceus*. The party then paused in the churchyard itself, containing Sweet Vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* which often indicates and accompanies the flora of the better Norfolk country yards. We were informed that the nineteenth-century French novelist Balzac once described Common Cornsalad or Lamb's Lettuce *Valerianella locusta*, also present at St. Peter's, as 'the salad of the poor', and others of the many interesting plants seen in the grassy yard included lemon-flowered Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, Sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre*, and Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, which apparently grows prior to its point of flowering mainly in late winter and very early spring.

The public footpath running more-or-less east from St. Peter's crosses the River Tas almost immediately before accessing the Tas Valley Way path. What most caught my attention botanically before we turned north onto the Way were the many patches of Crosswort *Cruciata laevipes*, not because plants are at all uncommon in England and Wales, but partly because their flowers and leaves seemed more of an acid-yellow colour than I remembered them to be, a little reminiscent of one or two garden spurge as well as the plant's later-flowering relation, Lady's Bedstraw. But also patches of the plant were particularly plentiful and recurrent in a pathside buttercup meadow and alongside the path itself. We also saw Small Teasel, Water Figwort, a water crowfoot, Ragged Robin, Lady's Smock, Angelica, Marsh Thistle, Water Mint, Bittersweet, Pendulous Sedge, Swine Cress, Black Bryony, Dog's Mercury and many more species on our way to our lunchtime halt on the eastern

valley slope alongside the Upper Tas Valley Walk, with a stunning view across to Forncett St. Mary Church. Among birds seen and heard *en route* had been Green and Great-spotted Woodpecker, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Buzzard and fledgling Blackcap and Magpie, and a Marsh Frog was heard just south of Somerset Farm.



**Marsh Frogs** in N. Norfolk

After lunch the party continued up to Horsenford Bridge via a series of damp, spring-fed valley edge meadows where several spikes of Early Marsh Orchid, *Dactylorhiza incarnate*, Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*, and the pinky-white flowers of Large Bittercress *Cardamine amara* with Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta* were found.

The return route took us through a series of minor country lanes, where we found an abundance of Bush Vetch *Vicia sepium* and a small patch of Zigzag Clover *Trifolium medium* along with other laneside specialities such as Greater Stitchwort or 'Soldier's Buttons' *Stellaria holostea*, the bright blue flowers of Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, Bulbous Buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus* with its downturned sepals, and

Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*. After a brief foray into Forncett St. Mary Churchyard we admired a mown verge outside a cottage which is clearly being managed as a miniature wildflower meadow and had densely spotted rosettes of Common Spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, tall purple spikes of Southern Marsh Orchid *D. praetermissa* and the seedheads of the early-flowering Fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris* (which we suspect may have been planted).

At the end of the walk, some of the group went up to Flordon Common where Peter Aspinall kindly showed us a sizeable population of Adderstongue Fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, numbering hundreds of plants. In the soggy parts of the fen we saw large tussocks of Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* and a few plants of Flea Sedge *Carex pulicaris*, Lesser Tussock-sedge *Carex diandra*, Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and after about half-an-hour of diligent hunting, a single plant of the much rarer Broad-leaved Cotton-grass *E. latifolium*. On the way back up to the cars we also found Broad Blysmus *Blysmus compressus* growing alongside a shallow drain.

Many thanks to Bob Leaney and others who organised and made this an enjoyable outing, in particular Jo Parmenter for her account of the second part of the walk taken after lunch and for allowing me to reproduce it extensively in this report.

*Stephen Martin*



**Broad Blysmus**

Images: Francis Farrow

## BILLINGFORD & MELLIS COMMONS

11<sup>th</sup> June, 2017

In the region of 20 people, including some local residents with a special interest in the Common and a group from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, gathered on a pleasant early summer morning at Billingford Common for this latest joint meeting of the Society, the Norfolk Flora Group and the Lowestoft Field Club. Arthur Copping led the party, and I have drawn extensively on, and quoted freely from, his account and plant list in this brief report, and on information also from Bob Ellis.

Billingford Common, lying in South Norfolk immediately south of the village and A143 road, and north from the River Waveney and county boundary with Suffolk - and easily located thanks to the prominent presence of Billingford Mill - is extensive and provides a variety of habitats including oak woodland, open grassy areas and reed swamp. The short turf of the track leading to the windmill was immediately rewarding, with Slender Trefoil and Bird's-foot Clover both present. The party then spread out to examine the varied common habitats including rough grassland, reed swamp and young secondary woodland. Noteworthy finds were Brown , Oval and Prickly Sedge, Musk -mallow, Dwarf Mallow, Three-nerved Sandwort, Narrow-leaved Meadow-grass, Hybrid Fescue, Skullcap and Common Meadow-rue. In all, 147 plant taxa were recorded, with 83 in flower and 13 in fruit. Billingford is noted for its population of Large-flowered Hemp-nettle, usually an arable weed, and a rarity in East Norfolk, but this flowers later, in July to September. On the other hand, Graham Peak pointed out to Arthur a rose at Billingford which could well be Round-leaved Dog-rose *Rosa obtusifolia*, not recorded anywhere in East Norfolk and noted at only 3 West Norfolk sites in the 1999 *Flora of Norfolk*: further confirmation of its identity may perhaps be sought.

The party that transferred to Suffolk and that section of Mellis Common lying east of the railway line for the afternoon session had reduced to 8 participants. Mellis Common is a large 59-hectare NNR looked after by Suffolk Wildlife Trust where Adderstongue Fern, Green-winged Orchid and Great-crested Newt have been recorded, and part of the Common west of the railway line had been explored during our previous visit in 2014. This time, heading east, the rather unpromising vegetation initially changed significantly once the road to Thrandeston had been crossed. Arthur reports a sizeable population of Dropwort as the 'find of the day' and also seen in the grassy areas were Quaking-grass, Lady's Bedstraw, Meadow Barley, Downy Oat-grass, Rough Hawksbit, Meadow Fescue and Smooth Tare. Arthur further reports that two ponds yielded a great variety of aquatic and marsh plants including seven *Carex* species, two Marsh Bedstraw subspecies, Creeping-Jenny, Common and Pond Water-crowfoots, Tubular Water-dropwort, Great Yellow-cress and Marsh Speedwell. Near the Railway Tavern are three planted trees: Large-leaved and Small-leaved Lime and the common hybrid between them. Study of the easternmost extremity of the Common was prevented by shortage of time, but even so 128 taxa were recorded, 88 of which were in flower and 7 in fruit.

Thanks to Mrs P Bullock for permission to use the Mellis Village Hall car park, and of course to Arthur for organising and leading the visit.

*Stephen Martin*

## WALK AT MANOR FARM, BRISTON

18<sup>th</sup> June 2017

'A scorcher' and 'flaming June' were the time-honoured epithets both truly applicable to the weather conditions for this farmland walk on the hottest day of 2017 to date, so the shade offered initially by the farmyard barn, and the welcoming tea and coffee kindly provided within by Richard and Dorcas Waddingham, were much appreciated by the large number present, drawn from the Society and from other bodies, including local residents: I counted 30 and more arrived subsequently.

Mr. Waddingham has received much-deserved awards for his conservation efforts and achievements at Manor Farm over many years, and he welcomed the party before our principal guide for the day, Carl Sayer of University College London, added some remarks mainly on the maintenance and restoration work carried out to many of the 40 ponds scattered over the farm's considerable acreage. The continuing work together of Richard, Carl and others over more than 10 years was formalized in 2014 by the setting-up of the Norfolk Ponds Project under the banner of the NWT and UCL, supported by various partner bodies:

([www.norfolkfwag.co.uk/norfolk-ponds-project](http://www.norfolkfwag.co.uk/norfolk-ponds-project) ).

The estate is of a good size, and two tractors towing roofed trailers apparently designed normally to transport shooting parties transported us in two groups along a narrow lane and then farm track to the starting point of our walk close to 'Pond Three', the first of many we saw, though not the total complement. Though the Briston ponds are very varied, some are 'steep and deep' former marl pits, and we mostly remained on the upper rim of Number 3 as Carl descended with a shallow tray to re-ascend in no time with some Crucian Carp for us to view.

This, together with the throwing of a grapple, was to be repeated as we visited further ponds, resulting in the viewing of a fascinating treasure-trove of aquatic fauna and flora illuminated by Carl's knowledgeable comments, with some identifications confirmed or supplied by other experts present. The small Crucian Carp *Carassius carassius*, with goldfish probably its closest relations and very different from the



Crucian Carp

Image: Jim Froud

larger carp species one normally recalls, were described by Carl as 'the hardest fish you can think of' capable of surviving in the shallowest or murkiest water, though ceasing to breed in such conditions until better times come! They may be native or very old introductions, almost certainly eaten by medieval country folk. Finding these fish surviving in near-derelict tree-shaded ponds drying out or sometimes choked with alien plants must have been most rewarding. Also seen was the elusive Hairlike Pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides* and the aquatic liverwort, Floating Crystalwort



*Riccia fluitans*. Another fish species fished temporarily from another pond we visited was the uncommon Nine-spined Stickleback *Pungitius pungitius* and 30 ponds have the Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, though not Pond Number 3, which does however contain 25 aquatic plants - slightly fewer than Pond 17, the most diverse on the farm for these aquatics. Otters are found in and around the Briston ponds, with Carl remarking that their cross-country peregrinations between unlinked ponds at Briston rather give the lie to our tendency to see them only as a river species.

Among the more interesting plants seen on our progress from pond to pond were Small Pondweed, Common-spotted Orchid, Branched Bur-reed and Gypsywort. Red Admiral, Ringlet, Large and Small White, Brimstone, Tortoiseshell Speckled Wood and Large Skipper Butterflies were seen, and also Four-spotted Chaser, Black-tailed Skimmer, Emperor Dragonfly, and Blue-tailed and Large Red Damselflies. We saw Whitethroat and Swallows, with Carl remarking that the latter move from pond to pond depending on exactly when the large mayfly-hatch occurs in each one.

Before returning by tractor and trailer to our parked cars, lunch was taken in a field barn, this time remote from the farmyard, but not too distant for Dorcas Waddingham to reach with more flasks of coffee and a piece for everybody from a choice of three delicious sandwich cakes, of which we were extremely appreciative and for which we thank her sincerely. Many thanks go also to Richard for allowing us to visit Manor Farm and to Carl for arranging the walk and for his ever-instructive-but-entertaining guidance.

*Stephen Martin*



**Members and local residents viewing Pond 3 Manor Farm, Briston**

Image: *Jim Froud*

## Wild about the Wensum

6<sup>th</sup> May 2017

The NNNS was represented at the 11<sup>th</sup> 'Wild about the Wensum' held at the Pensthorpe Conservation Trust, near Fakenham. This year's theme was "Endangered Species: Children in the countryside". It was opened by Norfolk's own Jess French, the CBeebies presenter of 'Minibeast Adventure with Jess'. Although the weather was far from perfect - cold, wet and windy, an estimated 3000 people attended. Joe Hubbard and Francis Farrow



Joe manning the NNNS stand at Pensthorpe

children who were, more often than not, better than most of their parents, which gives a glimmer of hope. Along with the displays were a number of Society publications for sale - none of which sold however. It is hard to judge whether the Society gained any members from the day - about a dozen membership leaflets were handed out, however, it does give a presence to the County's oldest natural history organisation and a number of people seemed genuinely interested in what the Society does.

manned the stand, which featured the new pop-up banners giving a 'more-up-to-date' look to the display. The table featured a number of fungi, including some large bracket-types. These proved to be a draw for the public and enabled Joe to engage and pass on his expertise. Once the attention of the people was obtained it was fairly easy to ask them to test their knowledge of a collection of common wildflowers. This proved to be a revelation as many fell at the first hurdle in failing to identify Primrose or Bluebell! Basically the older generation (over 60s) were better than the



Images: Francis Farrow





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

Please send  
**all articles / notes and photographic material**  
to the editor as soon as possible by  
**October 1<sup>st</sup> 2017** to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,  
Norfolk, NR26 8QD. Email: [francis.farrow@btinternet.com](mailto: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 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> 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 **1<sup>st</sup> 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](http://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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