



The Norfolk Natterjack

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*... Researching
Norfolk's Wildlife*

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The quarterly bulletin of
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Norfolk & Norwich
Naturalists' Society



Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Toad-in-the-hole....

Some more of your amazing 'lockdown' observations and a variety of invertebrate species are on offer in this edition, plus a vision for Cromer. There is also an update on a remarkable Black-headed Gull, a look at the UK's most commonest bird and a small quiz which I hope is not too galling! My thanks to all contributors and seasons greetings to all members. **FF**

Due to government guidance for the control of COVID-19 we have made the difficult decision to cancel all face-to-face events until the New Year; please check the NNS events on the website (www.nns.org.uk) for the latest information and our online (Zoom) talks programme.

A Note from the Chairman

I hope you are well in these unprecedented times.

As you will realise all our meetings and outdoor events this year have had to be abandoned. It has been a lot of work for the Programme Committee unpicking what had been organised and reconstituting venues and guests for a future date. Most if not all events will be carried forward to next year when hopefully the situation for us all will have improved. Fingers crossed.

Despite the pandemic the operations of the Society must go on. Meetings of council and the various committees needed to be rethought. Technology came to the rescue. At the time of writing we have been successfully holding meetings via 'Zoom' for a couple of months.

The benefits are tremendous. Normally we hold four council meetings each year along with four meetings for each of the six committees. Twenty-eight meetings a year is a lot of travel to venues and a large carbon footprint which has now been cut considerably. The saving in personal expense and time of travel to meetings is also greatly appreciated by trustees. We will no doubt be holding a good percentage of our meetings 'virtually' long after the pandemic is a distant memory.

It remains to be seen how we hold the AGM next year but a 'Zoom meeting' can't be discounted. We'll keep you informed.

Another effect of the 2020 lockdown has been the benefits to wildlife. Disturbance to vulnerable breeders has been minimised. Birds and mammals have been much more evident. Long may that continue.

The desire to connect with nature this year has increased exponentially. The calming effect that nature has on all of us cannot be underestimated. What better way than a walk in the country or when confined to the limits of our gardens to revel in the insects and the birds around us. Time has been available to many of us to a greater extent than it has ever been. I am expecting many members that haven't submitted articles to Natterjack previously to take the leap and send in something for publication.

Every cloud has silver linings.

Carl Chapman

Some lockdown wildlife observations from a Norwich garden

James Emerson

During the spring of 2020 most of my time looking at wildlife was spent around Norwich, indeed the first two months almost exclusively in my small urban garden. The extra time at home afforded by lockdown allowed my wife and I to introduce our daughter to some of the same wildlife experiences I had as a child, such as searching through the leaf litter for woodlice, watching Blue Tits raise a family in our bird box and observing a Large White butterfly laying its eggs. In total I recorded around 210 species of plant, fungus and animal, mostly just through visual searches although I did put out an actinic moth trap on several occasions too.

One of the first species of interest found in the garden was a Juniper Shieldbug (*Cyphostethus tristriatus*). This species was initially found in southern England where Juniper was found, but has since spread across the country, helped in part by its ability to also feed on Lawson Cypress, which we do have in the garden. A week later I noticed on social media that several other Norwich-based birders were hearing Wigeon fly over their garden after dark. Heading outside I only had to wait about ten minutes before I heard my first flock calling to each other as they headed eastwards. The sound of Wigeon is a common background accompaniment when out on the marshes in winter, but somehow it sounded even more evocative when flying over our housing estate!



Juniper Shieldbug

Everyday activities continued to produce notable sightings as the month wore on. Having gone back into the house from the garden I noticed a small green weevil on the wall that had presumably hitched a lift inside. There are two common families of small metallic green weevils, *Phyllobius* and *Polydrusus*, but I was intrigued by the look of this one, in particular the large jaws. Eventually I was helped out online where I found out it was a member of the third 'P' genus, *Pachyrhinus lethierryi*. Whilst putting the recycling bin out later the same day I noticed one of the inconspicuous ladybirds on top, which county beetle recorder Martin Collier confirmed as *Rhyzobius chrysomeloides*. Both of these beetles are relative newcomers to the county, being the 7th and 3rd



Pachyrhinus lethierryi



Rhyzobius chrysomeloides

On 21st April I had a frustrating encounter with a groundbug. Having noticed it caught up in a cobweb I removed it and placed it on top of a nearby storage box. I took several photos before a gust of wind caught the bug and blew it off into the garden. I came inside and checked it on the excellent British Bugs



Eremocoris fenestratus/E. abietinus

website, where it looked like it could be *Eremocoris fenestratus*, a species with no confirmed Norfolk records. There was however a very similar species that could only be ruled out by inspecting the leg hairs. I went back out to try to locate the windblown specimen, with no luck. Tristan Bantock confirmed on Twitter that it was indeed *E. fenestratus* or *E. abietinus* -

either of which would be new for Norfolk! I have since spent time sorting through the dry cypress litter (and through cobwebs!) in the hope of finding another, but to no avail so far.

Three more particularly interesting garden sightings happened in June. Firstly whilst watering the plants I noticed some young mirid bugs on our Snapdragon plants. I checked back a few days later and found an adult bug, which I was able to identify as *Dicyphus escalerae*, a species particularly associated with Snapdragons. County bug recorder Rob Coleman confirmed that this was a new Norfolk record, although it might well be lurking unrecorded in other naturalists' gardens! Another pleasing find was Denticulated Leatherbug (*Coriomeris denticulatus*), a fairly common Coreid bug with a spectacularly bristly pronotum when seen up close. Finally despite not catching many moths, my actinic light did attract a spongefly (a close relative of the lacewings), *Sisyra nigra*. The name relates to larvae, which feed on freshwater sponges. Presumably it had wandered from the River Wensum around a mile away.



Dicyphus escalerae



Denticulated Leatherbug



Sisyra nigra

Images: James Emerson

Not Just Moths.....

Yvonne Mynette

I decided this year to put out our moth trap on a more regular basis. Continuing restrictions on conservation work and other group activities meant that I had more time to examine and identify my catches.

Unfortunately this didn't seem to increase the number of moth species trapped in the garden but I did manage to find two insect species that I had never seen before.



Eared Leafhopper (*Ledra aurita*)

On 18th July an Eared Leafhopper (*Ledra aurita*) turned up. Despite working on leaf and planthoppers at university this was one species I always wanted to see but never had. Although large, 13-18mm, it's strange outline with ear-like projections on the pronotum camouflages it really well. It is normally found on lichen covered trees,

particularly oaks, but I expect a number of records are from moth traps. Whilst in it's pot I was also pleased to hear it's very loud stridulation!

In September another insect on my wish list turned up in the trap. This was a specimen of the Lesser Earwig (*Labia minor*). I first realised that there was more than one species of earwig about 50 years ago and since then I have diligently examined many specimens but with no luck. This time it was obvious what I had found. They are tiny, only 4-7mm long with slender forceps and a dull brown colour rather than the red/brown of the Common Earwig. They are usually found in dung or compost heaps but again I expect most records are from moth traps.



Lesser Earwig (*Labia minor*)

Neither of these insects are particularly rare but both were new to me and species that I have been looking for for years - a positive outcome from the lockdown!

Images: Yvonne Mynett

Tansy Aphids

Collin Littlewood

On one corner of our garden next to the herb patch stands a bay tree. Next to this a giant appears every year, well not a real giant but a huge stand of Tansy. It grows to over six feet tall and is quite a sight. As you may be aware Tansy attracts many flying visitors. Its yellow flowers appear irresistible to many insects. For this reason I water and tend it as best I can to ensure its growth and safety.

This year during one rather windy period I found myself grappling with it and armed with garden twine and metal stakes I tried to secure it from the strong damaging gusts. I managed to save it and hoped that my rather Heath Robinson stake and string fixture would keep it upright.

On returning to the house I was keen to wash my hands. Looking down as I cleaned them under the running water, I could see what I initially thought was blood. My hands were dotted with red streaks. I must have cut myself with the twine I thought. After drying my hands, however, there were no sign of any cuts.

This is very strange I thought, there must have been something red on the Tansy itself. On close inspection I found the answer. There were clusters of little red insects hidden on the underside of some of the leaves. Eager to find out what they were, pictures were taken, books came out, and google consulted.

I found them.....Crimson Tansy Aphids (*Uroleucon tanacetii*). I have never noticed them before, which doesn't mean that they haven't been there of course. I was so pleased to find them, another small creature that is benefiting from my giant Tansy.



Crimson Tansy Aphids (*Uroleucon tanacetii*) -
a new insect for the garden

Images: *Colin Littlewood*

The White Admiral Story

Steve and Karin Hale

Our youngster, Marcus, found three tiny White Admiral caterpillars on wild Honeysuckle near our house on 3rd August 2019 and we began watching them. On 28th December 2019 he did a check and re-found them. By April 2020, the caterpillars were growing well and munched foliage was noticeable. By May 2020, the instar changes were fascinating to observe.

Part 2... and the saga continues ...come June 2020, one of the three caterpillars could no longer be found and we presumed it may have been predated, but the other two remained and had changed into "dragons". The saga was completed on 3rd July 2020 when we were privileged to see a White Admiral butterfly take to the wing. We have had subsequent sightings in the woodland since then and look forward to more! What an amazing life cycle.



A tiny caterpillar - 3rd August 2019



Checking caterpillars - 28th Dec 2019



One of the small caterpillars - 28th Dec. 2019



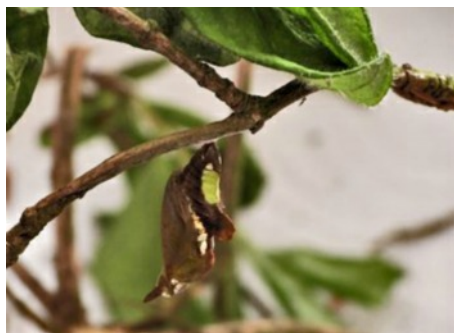
A small caterpillar feeding - April 2020



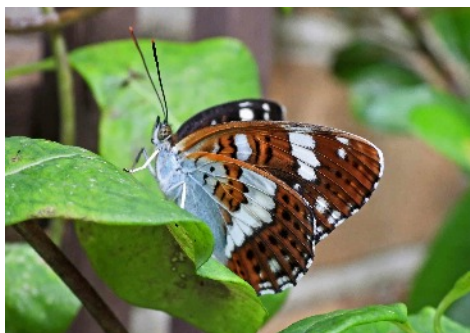
Instar changes - May 2020



Full grown 'dragon' - 8th June 2020
(known as Mr. Chunky)



Pupa - 2nd July 2020



Adult emerged - 3rd July 2020



White Admiral

Images: *Steve & Karin Hale*

Silver-washed Fritillary Gynandromorph?

Carl Chapman

I was doing one of several wildlife tours in July of this year and circumstance took us to Holt Country Park. It is a good place to give an all-round Natural History walk as there are noteworthy species to be seen here of several taxa; and importantly for my guests there are toilet facilities!

We were watching several butterflies picking out good ones to photograph. One in particular didn't warrant a lot of attention given it was quite 'tatty' however I noticed something quite odd. It was a Silver-washed Fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*) but it appeared to be sporting wings of different sexes. I took a couple of quick photos and moved on.

I later sent a copy of the photo to Andy Brazil, the Norfolk Butterfly recorder for his comments and with his permission I repeat below his reply:

"I'm confident that the left forewing is female and the right-hand side is male so it's gynandromorph. It looks like the genitalia are different on the two sides which makes it a bilateral gynandromorph (even though there's not enough of the left wing to be sure that's female. But I don't think it's *valezina* just because of the patch of orange on the upper edge of the left hindwing. It's possible I'm misinterpreting the genitalia, and there's either a part of the hind wing showing behind the posterior, or that the right genitals have been bitten off, in which case it might be a partial gynandromorph where only the upper left wing is female and all the rest is male. (In which case the left forewing could be *valezina*). What a fascinating insect"

I asked Andy to let me know if he had any other thoughts and a few days later I received the following email.

"Just had another photo sent in by someone else - and the genitalia don't appear different in their angle. So I think it's partial. I suspect that the mutation occurred during the initial cell division from a 'left wing' cell into 'upper' and 'lower' cells. In butterflies the sex chromosome (just one) is designated Z and ZZ is male and Z is female (The reverse of humans) So one copy of the Z got lost in the cell that would go on to form the upper left wing, so it (and all the cells it divided into) developed the female pattern. (probably - so much of the hind wing pattern is missing that it's hard to be certain.)"

Something to look out for in our future encounters with butterflies.



Silver-washed Fritillary (partial gynandromorph)

Image: Carl Chapman

***Mallota cimbiciformis* at Whitlingham Marsh**
- Another scarce hoverfly species in Norfolk
Anne Crotty

This follows on from Dave White's article in the last Natterjack about *Epistrophe melanostoma* that that both he and I have recorded recently that could potentially have a population to the south of Norwich.

The *E. melanostoma* that I recorded were seen at Whitlingham Marsh, which is located to the east of Whitlingham Country Park. This small local nature reserve is bordered on 2 sides by the A47, but despite this, from my recording experience, it appears to be a hidden gem for both hoverfly and fungus species.

On 21 June, whilst photographing a Red-tipped Clearwing *Synanthedon formicaeformis* (these have been present regularly this year at Whitlingham Marsh, the first year I have seen them here in 20 years), I noticed a hoverfly on a nearby bramble flower that I didn't recognise. It allowed me a few photos before disappearing!

Having pored over books and hoverfly websites, with no certainty on ID, I happened to see a post on the UK Hoverflies Facebook page that looked just like 'my' hoverfly. I posted my photos and it was confirmed as *Mallota cimbiciformis*. I had dismissed this species, described as nationally scarce, when searching for an ID initially, because the distribution map in Stuart Ball and Roger Morris's book 'Britain's Hoverflies' shows that Norfolk is outside the species range.

However Chris Sellen helpfully pointed me towards the Hoverfly Recording Scheme's latest distribution map that showed one Norfolk record just north of Brandon from 2007 and one near Halesworth in Suffolk before 1960. There are, however, more recent records around Cambridge, Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds. Norfolk's hoverfly recorder, Tim Hodge, is not aware of any other records in Norfolk so this may only be the second time it has been recorded here.

Mallota cimbiciformis is a woodland and parkland species, associated with large and old trees such as Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) where its larvae filter feed in deep water filled rot-holes.



Red-tipped Clearwing

Image: Anne Crotty

In terms of identification, this large hoverfly is a honey bee mimic, looking at first glance similar to a *Criorhina* or furry *Eristalis* species, with chestnut hairs on the thorax and a dark abdomen. It has enlarged hind femurs and a slightly greenish hue. My specimen had dark marks across the centre of the wings, similar to *Eristalis horticola*.

So, where old trees with cavities are present, it may be worth checking nearby nectar sources between June and September for this elusive species to see if we have a breeding population in Norfolk.



Mallota Cimbiciformis Male - Whitlingham Marsh

Images: Anne Crotty

Unanswered Questions during a Summer Afternoon's Observations in the Garden

Mary Ghullam

I didn't really expect to spend a late lunchtime in my garden fascinatingly watching my bird bath!

The weathered concrete bath is situated under a large Hazel and was in partial shade on a hot afternoon towards the end of July. The mature garden supports a wide range of invertebrates including butterflies, hover-flies, soldier-flies, bee-flies, ladybirds, bumble bees, wasps and ants. Over the course of a period of close observation, extending to almost 90 minutes, it was, with two fleeting exceptions, only wasps that visited the bird bath. (I was seated too close to the bath for birds to use it, although a Sparrowhawk did streak along the hedge boundary). Some of the water in the bath had split onto the flat edge and into a crack providing a small damp area. It was here that was the focus of activity. Only occasionally, during the period I watched, did more than one wasp at a time visit the bath and there were never more than two wasps present at any one time. Virtually all the wasps individually and only visited the same damp place.

Each wasp would spend a few seconds either drinking or possibly obtaining minerals and then leave. Some flew up onto the leaves of the heavily honey-dewed Hazel above and seemed to groom. Others flew directly high over my head, perhaps to their nest elsewhere. A few wasps came in and out again immediately or explored and then left. The behaviour didn't seem to alter, even when the sun went in or moved around somewhat. It was still the same area of the bath that was favoured. Almost none ventured down the slope to the water's edge and only one flew over the water, breaking its surface. During the whole time of observation only two other invertebrates visited the bath. A black ant climbed up from below and a small fly landed, but neither stopped to drink or went to the damp patch.

This behaviour raised a whole host of questions. Why was it almost exclusively wasps that visited the bath? Were all the wasps Common Wasps, as I assumed? Did the other invertebrates in the garden at the time have no need to obtain what the wasps were getting? Did they not drink? Were the wasps behaving in such a way as to prevent them coming? Why were other damp areas or the water itself not being used by the wasps? Why did wasps only come individually for the most part? Had previous wasps left some sign as to where to go? If so, was this only to wasps from possibly the same nest, given that many wasps flew off in the same direction? I'm sure there were many more questions that could be asked. But who would have thought bird bath watching could be so fascinating without a bird in sight!

Name that Gall

Judith Leek

While my husband and I were walking along the edge of the Winterton dunes last September, I noticed that there were a large variety of Oak galls on the small trees. I took several images of them and combined some for a photographic competition at my local club because I was interested in all the different shapes, colours and types.

When I received Judith's picture I thought part of it might make an interesting ID competition so can you name the four galls shown?



Answers on page 19 - Ed.

Images: *Judith Leek*



This sawfly *Aneugmenus coronatus* was found on Beeston Common 19 May and turned out to be the 5th record for Norfolk.

Image: *Mark Clements*



A very yellow-coloured Green-veined White was present at Fairhaven Water Gardens 12 July.

Image: *Trevor Tabenham*



The first record of Red-tipped Clearwing at Gramborough Hill, Salthouse 15 July.

Image: *John Furse*

An unexpected visit by a White Stork at Ludham 29 May. The blue leg ring GB46 ID'd it as a Knepp Estate (E. Sussex) female that left last September.

Image:
Elizabeth George



Astata boops taking Shieldbug prey into its nest burrow on Beeston Common 10 July.

Image: *Mark Clements*



A pair of Silver-washed Fritillaries spotted beside Great Wood, Shotesham 20 July.

Image: *Janet Negal*

*Nature
Gallery*

2020

Nature Gallery

2020

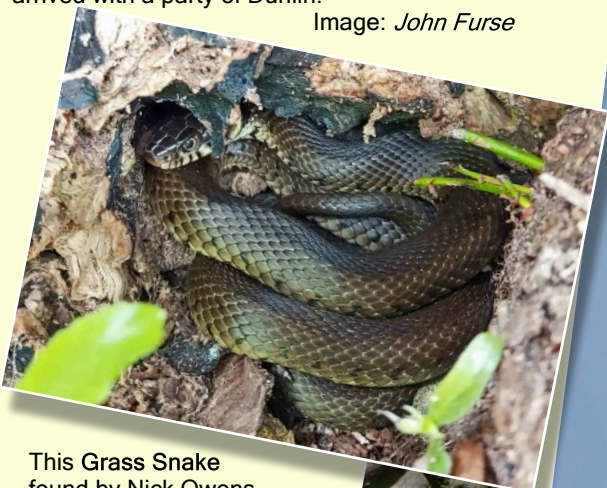


Purple Sandpiper near Gramborough Hill, Salthouse, 22 September, which seemingly arrived with a party of Dunlin.

Image: *John Furse*

For the second year running a white Marsh Helleborine 'var. abiflora' turned up on Beeston Common, 03 July.

Image:
Francis Farrow



This Grass Snake found by Nick Owens son-in-law is a bit unusual as it was curled up at about head height in an Alder at How Hill, 23 August.

Image:
R. Gomez de la Cuesta

The appearance of a Southern Migrant Hawker on Beeston Common 28 July was the 25th Odonata species for the site.

Image: *Francis Farrow*



Among the migrants seen on the Norfolk coast this autumn was this delightful Spotted Flycatcher at Sheringham cemetery, 07 October.

Image: *John Furse*

Identification Correction - *Scymnus interruptus*: a tale of two beetles or maybe three...

Vanna Bartlett

In the last issue of Natterjack (no. 150) I wrote about my recent findings of inconspicuous ladybirds and how one in particular had caused confusion over its identification. This was *Scymnus suturalis* and after reporting it in Natterjack I wrote more on my blog. This was seen by Andrew Jewels who has been studying inconspicuous ladybirds for over ten years and he told me that it was most likely the pale form of *Scymnus interruptus* which regularly gets misidentified. Both the pale and normal forms are easily confirmed by having a red edge to the front of the epipleuron (the underside of the elytra). As I still had the specimen I was able to check this feature and confirm that it was *S. interruptus*. I contacted Martin Collier with an update and he was eventually able to collect the specimen and find two more in our garden, one of each colour form and confirm that they were indeed *Scymnus interruptus* and that they were the first records for Norfolk.



Above: pale form of *S. interruptus* compared with *S. suturalis* (below).



Above: normal form of *S. interruptus* with the red spots reaching the edge of the elytra, compared with *S. frontalis* (below) where they do not.



S. interruptus is a relative newcomer to Britain and has increased its range quite dramatically in a short period so wasn't on our radar as a potential species. The lack of knowledge over its current distribution combined with the

fact that the unusual pale form is very like *S. suturalis* means that it probably gets misidentified on a regular basis. It doesn't help matters that the normal form is similar to the widespread *Scymnus frontalis* (a mistake I also made in the previous Natterjack). Andrew has put together an excellent website on these wonderful little beetles with comparison of the confusion species (see <https://www.andrewjewels.com/>).



Images: *Vanna Bartlett*

Underside of *S. interruptus* (pale form) showing the red epipleuron present in both colour forms. This is black in *suturalis* and *frontalis*. *S. frontalis* is further distinguished by having a groove along the centre of the underside (metasternum), visible with a x10 lens.

This shows that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing and that it can be difficult to keep up with distribution trends of some species, and that even the experts can get caught out sometimes. It also shows the importance of retaining specimens and recording species via our county recorders (or iRecord) to greater increase our knowledge and awareness.

Yellow-faced Blowfly - *Cynomya mortuorum*

John Furse

In the rank grass of Gramborough Hill, Salhouse on a couple of occasions in August (08 & 11) I saw a fly which I couldn't recall ever seeing before so sent images to Tony Irwin.

Tony replied: "*I think I've seen it in Norfolk about six times (in 45 years), so not a common species. I saw it once in my garden in Norwich, otherwise usually on the north coast and the Wash.*"

First met with it on St Kilda - where it has a surfeit of seabird and Soay sheep carcases to eat . . . this one has been christened the "Yellow-faced Blowfly", which suits it well. In Germany it's known as the "Fly of the Dead"."

I didn't notice any dead bodies !



Yellow-faced Blowfly Image: *John Furse*

Praying Mantis

Bernard Webb

On our visit to Cyprus last Autumn, our apartment had a few Lantana bushes in the vicinity one of which had a profusion of red and yellow flowers. We found Green Praying Mantis (*Sphodromantis viridis*) common throughout Europe and the variety that is popular as pets. There were at least ten of various sizes on the bush or at least there were some of the time, they are so well camouflaged they seem to come and go without moving! We found this particularly large female quite early in the morning consuming a Painted Lady Butterfly so shot I back, collected camera, tripod and cable release, set it all up and captured the shots of her catching her next victim. Over a period of about few hours she ate three Painted ladies and a hover-fly.



Green Praying Mantis capturing Painted Lady and hoverfly

We hoped to see her lay her eggs and create an Oothaca (shown right) sadly not to be, three days later the owner of the bush returned and pruned it hard back. Very disappointing, destroying the “bait” for the Mantises. The small mantis also captured a Painted Lady at much the same time, quite a large prey for a smaller creature but once you’ve Mantised you stay Mantised, it took at least four minutes for the butterfly to be overcome and the Mantis was still munching away 15 minutes later.



Images:
Bernard Webb



A smaller Green Praying Mantis also capturing a Painted Lady

The large Brown and White spotted Mantis (*Blepharopsis mendica*) comes from hotter climes, and is camouflaged to hide in dry vegetation. We found it in Tenerife and it had made its home on a stanchion, under a street lamp on some steps, so I would imagine when the light came on every night supper turned up shortly afterwards.

Fascinating creatures, we love them.(but don't have one as a pet!)

This article is of course not Norfolk related but very interesting and may help to explain the low numbers of Painted Lady butterflies seen in the county this year! Another good reason for this one off is that some members may have missed out on their holidays due to covid-19 and this will bring a little Mediterranean warmth to the winter months - Ed.



Blepharopsis mendica



North Norfolk Wasp Spiders

Francis Farrow

Having been shown Wasp Spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*) a couple of years ago at Gramborough Hill, Salthouse I have been waiting for them to arrive on Beeston Common (6 miles east). Last July on a visit to Morston (5 miles west) I found a Wasp Spider in a rough grassy area busily wrapping up a Lesser Marsh Grasshopper (*Chorthippus brunneus*). This only raised my expectation that these spiders would arrive on the Common in due course. On September 20th I



Wasp Spider egg-sac

received an email from Mark Webster (NT) to say that he had found a female Wasp Spider on Beeston Common. Having got the

location I went over the next day to find it - no luck but did find an egg-sac and a different Wasp Spider so at least two individuals were present. Hopefully next year there will be a lot of spiderlings emerging from the egg-sac and maybe some at least will stay.



Wasp Spider (female)
Images: *Francis Farrow*

Midwife Toads (*Alytes obstetricans*) in North Norfolk

Carl Chapman

I had been told that Midwife Toads had been heard at Aylmerton by several friends over a number of years, but it wasn't until the summer of 2019 that I had the opportunity to see if I could locate them. Sure enough, I could hear several toads calling from a private garden. The call is a distinctive steady staccato whistle. Common Midwife Toads are found throughout most of Western Europe. Adults are about 5 cm in length, while the tadpoles can reach 6 - 7 cm. Eggs are laid in strings by the female and carried by the male around his back legs, from the time of fertilisation until hatching.

The toads had apparently been present in Norfolk for a number of years. Ian Prentice estimated that they could be heard calling from mid-May to mid-August and possibly into Autumn. He reported that they normally call from dusk and can keep going all night long, something he knew well as one in his own garden had kept him awake at times! Apparently, they also call during daylight hours on particularly warm days. They tend to cease calling when approached and are therefore difficult to locate. Apparently, the introduction was inadvertently made by the late Harold Hems. He was a teacher at a local school and a keen wildlife photographer, who in 1990 along with his wife Margaret found the West Runton 'Elephant'. He collected various animals and brought them back to his house for controlled photography. One such subject was Midwife Toads which he kept in an outdoor enclosure in around 1967, from which they escaped. It was not therefore a deliberate release.



Male Midwife Toad carrying eggs.
France. Image: Bernard Dupont*

Apparently, the toads were sourced from Hertfordshire, where a colony has existed since 1903. The Hertfordshire colony apparently originated from French stock, accidentally introduced as eggs on a shipment of ferns and aquatic plants. Ian visited the Norfolk site in 2014 and heard at least three calling. It appears that the Toads have spread only approximately half a mile from the original site in over 40 years. The species is now present in several counties throughout the UK; notably Bedfordshire.



Midwife Toad
distribution in UK

NBN Atlas website at

<http://www.nbnatlas.org> :

Accessed 15 October 2020

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An Oldie returns to Seaside Resort

John Furse

In the February *Natterjack* (no. 148) I wrote about a Black-headed Gull that was feeding on the grass of the Esplanade, Sheringham during November and December 2019. It was ringed and after many photos I managed to read the number - ST141436. On 29 September 2020 I noticed again a Black-headed Gull pitter-pattering on the grass of the Esplanade. So after dozens if not hundreds of shots I was able to confirm the ring number and it was the same bird I had seen last year. Previously I had received a ringing log from Finland which stated the gull had been ringed as a nestling some 27½ years earlier at a place called Parainen 1500km WSW of Sheringham. It has also been seen in Germany as shown by the following extract.

	Date	Country	Place	Coordinates	Recovery method	Weight	Wing	Ring	Ref.no	Ringer
R	12.06.1992	SF	PARAINEN	60°11'N 22°11'E				ST 141436		167
L	09.04.1993	DE	MECKLENBURG-VOR	53°36'N 11°28'E	28			ST 141436	348081	
L	12.04.1993	DE	MECKLENBURG-VOR	53°36'N 11°28'E	28			ST 141436	348082	
L	21.12.2016	GB	NORFOLK	52°57'N 1°13'E	28			ST 141436	7012274	
L	06.11.2019	GB	NORFOLK	52°57'N 1°13'E	28			ST 141436	7028997	



Black-headed Gull - 28 years old and looking good

Image: *John Furse*

Name that Gall (Answers. Top (L to R) 1. Knopper - *Andricus quercuscalicis* 2. Knopper and Cherry - *Cynips quercusfolii*. Bottom (L to R) 3. Artichoke - *Andricus fecundator* 4. Silk Button - *Neuraterus numismalis*

Our Commonest Bird

Hans Watson

Many of my friends and family members, find it hard to believe that the Wren is now the most common bird species in the country, with 11 million breeding pairs. There is, of course, a big difference between what is the most common, and what we most frequently see or encounter, and which influences our perception of what is common. The life-style of Wrens, makes them much harder to see or watch, compared to Wood Pigeons for instance. And yet there are more than twice as many breeding Wrens, as there are breeding Wood Pigeons. Very often the only indication that Wrens are present, is the sudden burst of their beautiful song.



Earlier this year a pair of Wrens nested in ivy about 20 meters from my conservatory, from where I was able to watch their progress with binoculars. The nest was deep in the ivy and completely hidden, but the birds obligingly perched on a twig about half a meter from the nest when they visited. During the period some refer to as 'lockdown', I decided to erect a hide about 3 meters from the nest, in order to both watch and photograph the parent birds from a closer distance. I had

not used a hide at a nest for over 30 years, and it proved to be quite an education. I had quite forgotten that the frequency of parents visits to feed the young, varied so much over the period between hatching and fledging. In the 10 day period that I watched the Wrens, the frequency of visits increased from 7 visits per hour

when the chicks were about 2 days old, to 24 visits per hour, when they were 12 days old. During the nesting period, the parent Wrens completely ignored me, and I began to wonder if I actually needed the hide to watch watch them from close range. However, this changed when the youngsters left the nest, and for the next two days I was scolded loudly every time I walked anywhere near 'their' part of the shrubbery.



Images: *Hans Watson*

NNNS Research Programme

The Society's work at Buckenham Carrs over the past three years is drawing to a close and the Research Committee will soon begin to collate the results with a view to publication. As a first step, would all County Recorders and other naturalists who have information about Buckenham Carrs please register with the Secretary to the Research Committee at the address below. Once we know who has material available, a template for the compilation of results will be drawn up and distributed. The results are expected to be published in *Transactions* in 2021.

Looking ahead, the Committee would also be pleased to hear about any ideas for future research projects in line with the Society's objects, particularly surveys and studies of important sites and habitats that have not been widely or recently studied. Again, please register your ideas with the committee Secretary, whose details are below. Thank you.

Dr Mark Collins, Secretary, NNNs Research Committee
Email: collinsmark@gmail.com; message: 07941248100.

Ashes from Ashes

Readers of *Natterjack* will be all too familiar with ash dieback. Norfolk and Suffolk are two of the worst affected counties in the UK, with many trees being slowly killed or needing to be felled to protect people and livestock. This will have destructive consequences for the landscape, wildlife and people's enjoyment of the natural environment, unless we take action to enable the ash population to recover from the dieback epidemic.

During our research at the John Innes Centre, we have discovered that a significant minority of ash trees, perhaps 5-10%, seem to have good resistance to ash dieback. This means there is a good chance of UK's ash population recovering by natural selection for dieback resistance, but this is a slow process. In a new project, we are setting up a nursery of healthy male and female parental trees which will be allowed to intercross and produce seed which is likely to have natural genetic resistance to ash dieback. This will greatly speed up the process of producing a new, disease-resistant population of ash. Seed from this nursery will be distributed to anyone who wishes to sow it to produce the next generation of ash trees for East Anglia.

We would like your help to identify trees in Norfolk and Suffolk which may have good resistance to ash dieback. We need you to tell us about trees which are obviously healthier than other ash trees nearby of similar size. They don't need to be completely healthy but they should have a fuller crown than other trees nearby, with little damage to the main stem or branches. We need

trees which are mature or nearing maturity, at least 10 feet / 3m high, with at least one branch less than 15 feet / 4.5 m from the ground from which we can take cuttings. A good place to look is any area with a dozen or more ash trees, such as hedgerows and woods. We are interested in native trees, so please avoid areas where trees have been planted in the last 30 years, such as housing estates and verges of major roads, which may have used imported stock.

The photos show you the kind of contrast in symptoms we're looking for. As the healthier tree in each picture is close to other, much sicker trees, it's likely to have more effective genes for resistance to ash dieback.

When you find an ash tree which is obviously healthier than others nearby, please report it on the internet at: bit.ly/healthy_ash. The information we need is: your name and email address, where the healthy tree is (ideally with a What3Words location or GPS coordinates), how far it is from the nearest diseased ash tree, how tall the healthy tree is and whether or not it has seed, and the name of the landowner if you know it. Please take a photo of the healthy tree and the nearest sick ash tree, which will help us decide if we should add the tree you've identified to our collection.

Thank-you!

James Brown and Elizabeth Orton - John Innes Centre, Norwich



We are looking for healthy ash trees such as those in these photos. As they are close to trees with much more severe dieback, the healthier trees are likely to have more effective genes for disease resistance.

WILD OLD CROMER -

An Outline of the Natural History of the Town

Eddie Anderson

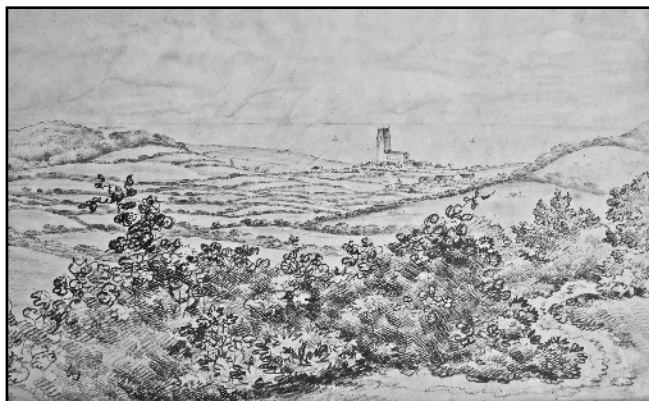
The Social history of Cromer is richly recorded in writing, painting and photographs, but by comparison the Natural history of the town was seldom noted, beyond its vulnerable location. From the earliest records of the original settlement of Shipden-Juxta-Mare, washed away by the waves nearly 700 years ago, every visitor refers to the encroaching North Sea.

In 1600 Sir Henry Spelman wrote *"Now returning to the shore I pass over Cromer, a market town that has suffered Neptune's Violence."*

Eighty years later Daniel Defoe wasn't over impressed either *"Cromer is a market town close to the shore of this dangerous coast. I know nothing it is famous for - except good lobsters"*.

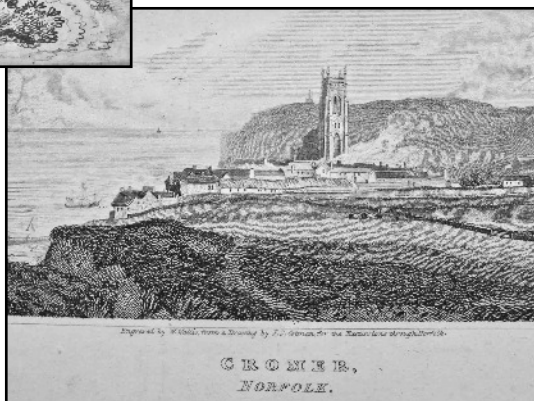
Records always suggest that the commonest wild creatures in the town must be crabs, as other wildlife is so little referenced.

Early illustrations during the 18th and 19th Centuries show a tiny fishing community dominated by its enormous church.



Above: Priscilla Gurney's sketch of Cromer countryside 1810.

In 1810 Priscilla Gurney sketched a view of scrubby heath and tiny fields with stunted trees bent at right angles by the blast of cold spring winds. The size of the church tells of great wealth in medieval times exporting sheep's wool to the continent.



Right: View of Cromer looking east along the cliffs by John Sell Cotman 1850

In 1885 B.A.F. Pigott* published *Flowers and Ferns of Cromer and its Neighbourhood*. She sums up the landscape “Let us pass over the open fields which have been unenclosed since the days of the Domesday Book. Each different field is marked out by a strip of rough grass, brilliant with Red Poppies, Yellow Ragwort, Blue Viper's Bugloss, Purple Corn Cockle and Wild Carrot.”



*B. A. F. Pigott - Blanche Anne Frances Pigott was president of the Young Woman's Christian Association and was photographed in the 1900s by Olive Edis and her sister Katherine Legat. The photograph is in the National Portrait Gallery.

Blanche Pigott mentions many plants as common, which have since been 'lost' from the light sandy soils around Cromer: - Striated Catchfly (*Silene conica*), Small-flowered Catchfly (*S. gallica*), Viper's Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*), Corn Cockle (*Agrostemma githago*) and various Poppies. She notes in particular “A field by the cemetery used to have Pheasant's Eye (*Adonis aestivalis*)”.

Francis Farrow, warden of nearby Beeston Common Reserve recalls some other recent plant losses last seen in late 20th century.

Sulphur Cinquefoil (*Potentilla recta*)- waste places

Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) Cromer cliffs

Wild Tulip (*Tulipa sylvestris*) Cromer Hall woods (known to be present since 1831).

Francis adds, “*Chicory (Cichorium intybus)* is another plant that I actually remember growing along the coast road at Suffield Park.”

That old landscape was likely brimming with wildlife that we only know as extreme rarities, or extinct, today. During summer nights, bubbling Nightingales and creaking Corncrakes were known to have kept visitors awake. Nightjars and Stone Curlews were then numerous too. By day, Cuckoos, Turtle Doves, Corn Buntings, Grey Partridges and Quail were all commonly heard. Red Backed Shrikes and even Montagu's Harriers would have been regular if not common summer migrants. In short, a modern naturalists' paradise.

Back then, attitudes were different; wildlife was either edible or a pest. Migrant wildfowl and waders were nature's bounty to be reaped by coastal gunners, for sale.

Since the 14th century Halibut, Herrings, Cod and Ling were being caught commercially. And by the early 19th century, the town was famous for crabs and lobsters, at its peak 150 boats launched from the beach.

Geographically Cromer was always remote from the major cities. From the late 18th century this isolation attracted a few wealthy families to this otherwise timeless place. In particular the Quaker banking families of Gurney, Barclay and Buxton many of whom were early ornithologists, collecting rare birds' eggs and shooting birds for stuffing, but as collectors they were also recorders, and in 1869 largely responsible for backing the *Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society*, with its detailed wildlife records.

Early data give a picture of a rich biodiversity during the 19th century. The Transactions of the N&NNS for 1874 record Small Blue and Large Tortoiseshell butterflies were still present in Cromer.

Then in 1877 the first railway line arrived and everything changed. The crumbling cliffs and wildflowers were romanticised by Clement Scott's poetic description of *Poppyland* in nearby Sidestrand, so that thousands of people desired to holiday and live here. The demand was met by neighbouring landowners who sold their unproductive fields and heaths for urban development. And the cliffs were stabilised to protect the new town from *Neptune's Violence*.

At least 95% of modern urban Cromer was either heath or low impact farmland less than 180 years ago. The last remnant of an ancient field hedge in Suffield Park, a group of intertwined hawthorn bushes known as "The Three Graces", were chopped down in 2019 - to ease the mechanical mowing of the road verge.

The cliffs either side of the town continue the natural geological process of erosion, where some unusual plants like the parasitic Broomrape cling on. Fulmars and Sand Martins still manage to nest on the north facing cliffs - when left undisturbed.

Today only ghosts of the previous wilderness remain in Cromer; like Warren Woods, the Golf Course and the heath-like Runton Gap. But roadside verges throughout the town still contain remnant seed banks of previously rich native wildflowers in the soil, which can be vastly improved for nature by knowledgeable management, rather than regular close mowing.

*Cromer Green Spaces** aims to identify and survey the few remaining wilder corners, to offer advice on appropriate protection from further development, and work with volunteers to increase the range of wild flowers throughout the town.

Plants produce pollen, which feeds insects, which in turn, feed larger creatures up the scale. They are the best hope for improving the biodiversity of Cromer.

**Cromer Green Spaces is a new voluntary group re-wildflowering the town with native species for the benefit of pollinating insects, and therefore all wildlife up the food chain. (<https://www.facebook.com/CromerGreenSpaces>)*

75 Years Ago - From the 'Transactions'

VOLUME XVI (1945) - FLORA AND FAUNA OF NORFOLK MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS

COMPILED BY E. A. ELLIS

IMMIGRANT DRAGONFLY - Specimens of the Yellow-winged dragonfly *Sympetrum flaveolum* L., Were taken by Mr. J. A. Riley at Barton Broad (with *S. sanguineum* and *S. striolatum*) on August 3rd and at Alderfen Broad (with *S. striolatum*) on August 19th, 1945. Previously only one example of this species had been recorded "off the Norfolk Coast" in 1912, although the insect is an occasional immigrant in fair numbers in southern England. Mr. A. E. Ellis made the following observations on *S. flaveolum* at Alderfen in late August: "*Sympetrum flaveolum*, though closely resembling *S. sanguineum* in appearance, except for the orange or yellow patch at the base of the hind wings, has more habit of *S. danae* in flight, and is fairly easy to recognise on the wing. According to my observations at Alderfen, it prefers the *Juncus subnodulosus* fen away from trees and does not wander far. All the individuals I saw were on a small area of fen on the northwest side of the broad. *S. flaveolum* likes sunning itself, especially on patches of rushes which have been beaten down, but does not seem to share with *S. sanguineum* and *S. striolatum* the habit of perching on trees. These last two species frequently fly up into alders, and are fond of basking on bare twigs, dead branches, fences, gates and bare ground, but I did not observe *S. flaveolum* doing this."

MEDICINAL LEECHES - On September 26th, 1945, Mr. R. P. Libbey and I visited Derby Fen, Grimston, where shallow water was lying in a boggy part supporting a growth of bladderworts, sundews, sphagnum, etc. On wading through the shallows, we disturbed a number of leeches, which became violently agitated and began swimming about; two of them attached themselves to my gum boots and were found to be *Hirudo medicinalis* L., Now a rare animal of moorland pools in this country. The fen is regularly grazed by horses and sheep and no doubt the leeches get an occasional feed from them when they go down to drink.
E.A.E

TOAD'S LATE SPAWNING - On October 25th, 1945, I heard common toads croaking by the lake at Heathersett Hall, during a spell of mild weather ("St. Luke's summer"). In the third week of November I found numbers of the tadpoles in the lake and some were removed and taken to Norwich Castle Museum on 25th November, where they went on developing slowly through the winter; I fear that herons probably ate the rest.

H. W. Back



The next issue of *'The Norfolk Natterjack'* will be February 2021

Please send
all articles / notes and photographic material
to the editor as soon as possible by
January 1st 2021 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.

New memberships and renewals can be made by credit card or 'PayPal' by visiting the Society's website at www.nnns.org.uk

Alternatively a cheque payable to
'Norfolk & Norwich Naturalist's Society' can be sent to:

Jim Froud, The Membership Secretary, Westward Ho, 4 Kingsley Road,
Norwich NR1 3RB

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

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