



The Norfolk Natterjack

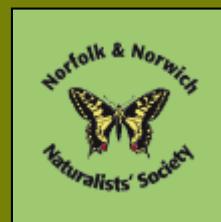


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Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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NB: Please check <https://norfolknaturalists.org.uk/wp/recording/county-recorders/> for updates

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Head Gardener: Sarah Butler. Email: sarahbutler4@gmail.com

Toad-in-the-hole...

It's autumn and the leaves are in full colour. Where did the summer go? Well it is still here within these pages as accounts of excursions and events bring those memories back. The articles also have a summer feel with butterflies, reptiles, grasshoppers, wasps and birds, although there is also hint of autumn with spiders and galls. My thanks to all contributors for the varied and interesting accounts. It is time to look forward to those winter days and a New Year. Warmest wishes for the festive season and a Happy New Year to all members. Hope you are out and about making lots of new discoveries and observations.

FF

Marbled Orb Weaver

Janet Negal

When I was washing the side of my greenhouse, a very large spider dropped down from under the gutter onto a plant in a nearby pot. I thought at first that it must be a Garden Spider, then realised that it had a cream-coloured body with a plain dark wedge shape running down the back half. I checked under the gutter further along in case anything else was living there and found a second large spider, similar in size to the first but an entirely different colour. I had never seen either species before. The field guide, *Britain's Spiders*, soon revealed that they were, in fact, the same species, Marbled Orb Weaver but different varieties, and there they were on page 182, side by side, *Araneus marmoreus* var. *marmoreus* and *Araneus marmoreus* var. *pyramidalatus*. One was described as rare and one uncommon and it was said that occasionally they are found in the same place - just like mine - how exciting!



Araneus marmoreus var. *marmoreus* and *Araneus marmoreus* var. *pyramidalatus*

Reference:

Britain's Spiders – A Field Guide (WILDGuides of Britain & Europe) 2017 / 2020
by Lawrence Bee, Geoff Oxford, Helen Smith

Images / Janet Negal

When I took this photograph of the Common Field Grasshopper *Chorthippus brunneus* I could see what I thought were damaged antennae. The result of a closer inspection was quite unexpected – the antennae were, in fact, an extra pair of legs. David Williams, author of the FSC AIDGAP volume “Orthoptera and Dermaptera” and verifier of Orthoptera for iRecord, stated that it was “astonishing, I have never seen anything like it”.

The deformation is well known under laboratory conditions in Fruit Flies (*Drosophila*) where it is utilised by geneticists for research purposes but, as far as I can find, it is not known in the wild.

It can be seen that the first few segments of the antennae have developed as normal and then a mutation, in what is known as the *antennopedia* gene, has taken over and produced legs.

Grasshoppers have numerous other sensory receptors – eyesight, sound, taste, touch and pressure – so the loss of the antennae does not seem to have affected its survival. In fact it may confer an advantage since it can now, presumably, stand on its head.



Common Field Grasshopper with deformed antenna which are, in fact, an extra pair of legs (see inset).

On the afternoon of 31st July, I walked slowly through what used to be the Lifeboat car park, near the west sea-front. This has, since being left undisturbed, grown an interesting variety of wild and escaped plants and I had been finding some uncommon insects here. Imagine my pleasure, therefore, when I glimpsed a lemon-yellow butterfly resting in a Michaelmas Daisy *Symphyotrichum* sp.: it was a Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus* (below). I found it roosting here on several subsequent occasions and consider the colours are wonderfully complementary:



The UK has had quite an influx this year (now into four figures), with a marked increase in numbers from the end of July, and I'd been hoping to encounter one – something I'd not done for many years. Luckily, I also managed to secure a shot of it in flight (below left), which revealed it to be a male (solid black margins to the upperwings). It was still being seen on 6th August. Then, at almost midday on 10th August, I flushed a different one, a female, who immediately resumed what she

had been doing: egg-laying. Again, I captured a flight shot (below right), clearly showing the pale, yellowish spots on the outer marginal borders.

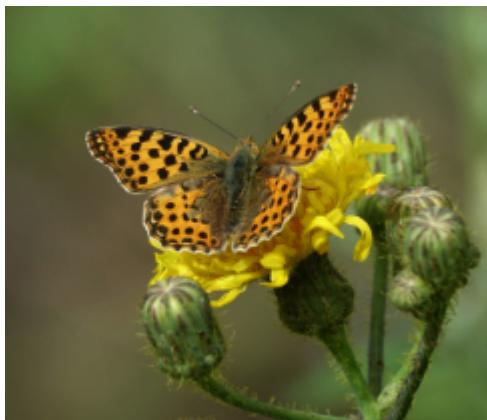


We have to hope that Frohawk's 'fifty-four days from egg to imagines', written in the first half of the twentieth century, holds good here. If so, we could see fresh adults at the start of October.

It is highly unlikely that any eggs will survive into next year (although it does happen from time to time), as they need the winter to be frost-free. Nonetheless, in these uncertain times, when our weather is so highly unpredictable owing to the changes in our climate . . .

Butterfly Highlights 2025

Queen of Spain Fritillary - John Furse



A Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia* was recorded from a field edge at Sidestrand in July 2025. The sighting was made by Megan Crewe while clearing Alexanders from a verge and first reported on BirdGuides on 19th July. I managed to see it the following day and it was last reported on 22nd July. The Queen of Spain Fritillary is a scarce migrant to the UK from mainland Europe.

Image / John Furse

Camberwell Beauty - David Harper

I'm a fairly indifferent golfer; I love the exercise, camaraderie and views of wildlife at Royal Cromer Golf Club, but I never expected this - a "lifer". On 19th August I'd hit my ball into a bunker approaching the 14th green, under the lighthouse and when I went to play it, I dropped my club into the sand in surprise (a penalty!). I thought I knew what I was looking at, but since I'd never seen one before in the wild, only in pictures, I had to check on my phone.

This Camberwell Beauty *Nymphalis antiopa* was wonderful to see, albeit bedraggled with colours rather faded. A long journey across the North Sea, I am sure. It was, however, a great prize for poor golf!



Image / David Harper

Finding something new or not seen before, is one of the great pleasures provided by an interest in nature. Sadly, as one gets older, these events seem to occur less often. However, the changing climate is beginning to influence these events, by allowing species to spread to new areas, and so provide more opportunities to see new things.

At the beginning of June 2025, I was walking round the far end of my garden, when I noticed a number of small black wasps flying round a dead apple tree stump. This old stump is about 2 meters tall and 30 centimetres in diameter, and has been left in place for insects. The bark fell off long ago and the surface is peppered with the holes of wood boring beetles, probably *Anobium* or *Ptilinus* species, and it was these holes that were attracting the attention of the small wasps. Many of these holes were surrounded with beautiful little rings of little resin spikes about 5 to 6mm in diameter. These almost looked like little crowns. As this was something new to me, I spent quite a lot of time over the next few weeks, watching all the activity. Subsequent enquires revealed that these distinctively decorated nests were the work of *Passaloecus eremita*, one of the aphid hunting wasps, and a relatively recent colonist, the first record of the species in the UK taking place in 1978. The wasps are between 6 and 8mm long, and seemed to favour holes that were no larger than 2mm in diameter. The wasps were stocking the holes with aphids caught amongst the needles of a large



Passaloecus eremita next to its ornate resin 'crown' and a close-up view of the structure

Scots Pine a few yards away. An egg was then laid in the nest before the hole was sealed with resin from the pine tree. The purpose of the ring round the nest hole is still not clear to me, although I did witness marauding black ants diverted around the still unsealed hole, by the projecting resin spikes. All activity had ceased by the second week of August, at which time I counted 347 of these beautiful little ringed nests. My sincere thanks to Nick Owens for all his help in identifying these lovely little wasps.

Images / Hans Watson

Imagine a tiny wasp lays an egg under your skin just below your knee. In your cheek a species of mite lays an egg and a specific fly species lays an egg in your neck. Your body reacts to these eggs and forms a very specific structure around the egg according to the species that laid it. Below your knee is a soft, purple-veined swelling. On your cheek is a yellow, banana-shaped lump of hard flesh and on your neck is what looks like a white WWII mine with spikes! The larvae hatch and feed upon the structure until mature and then leave via a hole and fly off to mate and repeat the process.

Don't worry, this is just by way of an explanation of what a Plant Gall is and how it is formed. Galls only happen in plants, fungi, lichens and algae ... but I enjoyed imagining! In short, galls are formed when a specific Gall-causer causes a specific plant to make a specific shaped gall. Wasps, flies, aphids, mites, sawflies, midges, psyllids, fungi and mycoplasma-like organisms are all Gall-causers.

Sometimes another specific species will live within the gall, feeding upon the matter caused by the Gall-causer; sometimes starving it. These are known as Inquilines. These in turn, can be parasitised by yet another species. And so there may be several species found within a single gall.

Some of the 2,000 or so British galls are fantastic and truly interesting to find and study. The English Oak by itself is host to many particularly interesting, unusual and spectacular galls. The study of galls is called Cecidology.

Here are some galls from Norfolk. The plant and the Gall-causer are named with each photo.



White Willow - *Salix alba*

Midge - *Rabdophaga rosaria*
Strumpshaw Fen

English Oak - *Quercus robur*
Wasp - *Andricus quercuscalicis*
Buckenham



Dog Rose - *Rosa canina*
Wasp - *Diploleptis nervosa*
Woodbastwick

It was the most active I have ever seen Adder. Previously I had mainly had sightings of individuals tightly coiled in either natural suntrap or at the base of thick gorse, whereas this time under the rattling calls of swooping Sand Martin there was a female fresh from brumation being closely guarded by a vigilant male. As the pair effortlessly slipped through the dry grasses of the Suffolk coast a further

young male appeared and took his chance to interfere which instigated the amazing dance of the Adder. I have been privileged enough to see Adder several times over the years but never thought I would be fortunate enough to see this amazing display. The males intertwined in the bright March sun, trying to force their opponent down to exhibit their strength. The challenger was soon chased off and the pair moved off to the deeper vegetation at the crest of the shallow hill. Directly behind the well known bank at RSPB Minsmere is a large pond which has been home to a very showy Water Vole but also



The 'dance' of the Adders (above) and a Common Lizard 'sunbathing' (below right)

that morning a Grass Snake. I spent some time round the reed-fringed edges but to no avail. The thought crossed my mind of how amazing it would have been to see two of the five reptile species that call East Anglia home in a morning. I may have been being greedy having witnessed the incredible Adders and left happy but with a redefined goal to find them all over the summer.

There are four native reptile species (Adder, Grass Snake, Common Lizard and Slow Worm) and one colourful continental visitor (European Wall Lizard) that can be found throughout Norfolk and Suffolk. A series of sites across North Norfolk have a broad range of suitable habitats and on the right day the four native species can all be found, so on a bright April morning I set off for Beeston Common. The pond near the start of the path was alive with tad-



poles and the exposed dry earth on the other side of the path provided a lovely Common Lizard. The sun was heating the earth for them to bask and enjoy the warmth of spring. Further explorations of the pond didn't reveal any hungry Grass Snakes and the heath was devoid of obliging Slow Worm. I set off for Norwich with another species in the bag.

I have always found Grass Snake to be the most variable and challenging species to find. Having missed them now on two occasions they became my primary focus. I initially tried a pre-work walk along the forest and field verges of Ladybelts Country Park. Circumstances meant that I did visit on more overcast days or when I had short amounts of time and as expected peering into the margins did not result in any Grass Snake sightings.

As Grass Snake remained elusive I temporarily changed strategy and instead of going for a species that could be anywhere across our reserves and country parks, went for one whose distribution is much more contained. First observed in



European Wall Lizard - Felixstowe

2007 the origins of the Felixstowe Wall Lizard are unknown but due to their proximity to the port, the chance of some vibrant green stowaways seems most likely. When I arrived at the Seafront Gardens I set my bag down to sort my camera and saw a young individual straight away, in a fluster I threw my camera together, knowing I wouldn't forgive myself if I missed the opportunity. I managed to get a record shot of the very patient (and possibly bemused) lizard, however I should not have worried as a quick walk through the gardens shows the population is

doing very well. I found male, female and young (and witnessed breeding behaviour) totalling at least eight individuals across two separate parts of the seafront. The nearest wild population of native reptiles is almost a kilometre away with a town in the way the assumption is they've found a niche for themselves and have limited impact. That being said, as their introductions increase and the temperature rises they are definitely a species that needs monitoring in future.

It will come as no surprise that when I finally saw my first Grass Snake of the summer I was out looking to photograph something else entirely. My aim for the day was to photograph another Norfolk native, the Swallowtail butterfly, the sun

was out but the wind was up. As I was traversing the edge of the marsh, looking at some hopeful Flag Iris or potential Red Campion, I looked down at the condensed, old rush and found a small Grass Snake enjoying the sun in a sheltered patch. The angle meant it was curled up in a challenging position to photograph (right), but there it was *Natrix natrix**. A sigh of relief and a real result, four down, one to go.



Images / Lee Slater

When I started this herpetological quest, I thought Grass Snake would be the biggest challenge, but thus far it has actually turned out to be Slow Worm. I initially thought I would naturally come across them when looking for the other species, having visited Ladybel Country Park, Hickling Broad, Beeston Common, Minsmere and a range of other smaller sites who have Slow Worm records they have thus far avoided me. At the time of writing there is still plenty of summer left to find them and although they are temporarily missing from the list, the mission wasn't to tick them off but to enjoy the wonderful reptilian diversity that can be found around us (noting that we have four of the six native reptiles species right here). I'm off to the woods to find my final target, happy herping all!

*Since 2017 the British Grass Snake is now known as the Barred Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica* and *Natrix natrix*, now refers to the Grass Snake found in mainland Europe, Asia and N. Africa - Ed

Out and about around Norfolk

Elizabeth Dack

Recently lots of the nature reserves I have been too have been fairly quiet, although I did see a very young Chinese Water Deer and a Grey Wagtail at Strumpshaw Fen. Often there has been more to see along the North Norfolk Coast, usually several different waders, many still in their breeding plumage, looking very handsome. Since the hot dry weather many of the scrapes have dried up so it was nice to see Curlew Sandpipers from the Iron Road, Cley, among



Curlew Sandpiper at Cley

other birds enjoying an oasis of water in the middle of a field surrounded by cows. Several Dunlin, Snipe, Little Ringed Plovers, Teal and a Pectoral Sandpiper were all feeding there. Although distant and a windy day I did manage to get a fairly descent photo of a Curlew Sandpiper but only a record shot of the Pectoral Sandpiper. That was after two attempts as the cows came and stood in front of me the first time. There were several Curlews in a field at Salthouse. Whilst I was watching them they



Curlew and Cattle Egret in flight

suddenly all flew off! I don't know if they were spooked as I couldn't see anything around, maybe they just wanted a change of meadow. Cattle Egrets seemed to have been around for most of this year as I have seen them hanging around the cattle in lots of places, inland and at the coast.



Greenshank

have also seen them in many places. Disappointingly though, I heard from a member of the BTO that Barn Owls haven't had a very good year at all. I was very pleased therefore, that in South Norfolk where I live, they seemed to have done better than other parts of the county. I have helped with the ringing and recording

A lonely Greenshank was busy feeding at Morston Quay at low tide alongside Redshanks and Little Egrets. Kingfishers seemed to have done very well this year as I



Young Barn Owl that had just left the nest box

Images / *Elizabeth Dack*

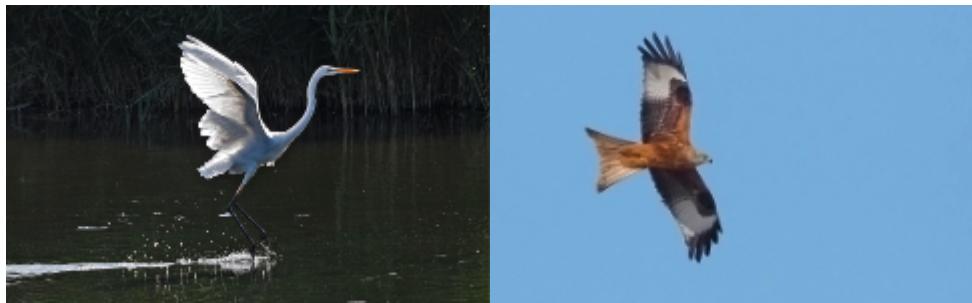
of some local Barn Owls by photographing eleven owlets from three nest boxes. Watching a box close to my home, which had four chicks in, I was lucky enough to see one after it had 'branched' and managed a photo in daylight.

I recently saw my first sightings of skeins of Pink-footed Geese arriving, heralding another season of changes, such as darker mornings and less daylight hours. The trees are starting to shed their leaves and acorns, conkers and chestnuts are falling to the ground. Our visiting birds are coming to spend the winter with us. I love our changing seasons and the surprise of what wildlife may turn up in our beautiful county.

Due to lack of my own transport I am limited mainly to local outings now, fortunately my local woods at Thorpe St Andrew are within a welly chuck of home, and there is much to keep me occupied there, then once a week a good friend takes me down to Strumpshaw fen for a more varied assortment of wildlife, as you all know, every day is different, and you never know what might turn up.

Two pairs of Lapwings nested just outside the fen hide this year, but I fear the chicks were predated by crows, the same thing happened just down the road at Buckenham with the nesting Avocets, great shame, but that's Nature for you.

Two pairs of Mute Swans raised families at Strumpshaw this year, and during one visit there in late August ten Great White Egrets were seen together at the tower hide.



Great White Egret and Red Kite

The lane between Strumpshaw and Buckenham is always of interest, Red Kites and Buzzards are often seen over the fields there, and the horse paddocks are always a good place for Mistle Thrushes, Fieldfares, and Redwings during the winter months, I was watching a Pied Wagtail there recently catching flies round a horses feet and head as it fed on the short grass, it showed no fear of its larger neighbour.

The Norwich Cathedral Peregrines had just one visit this year, the two juveniles had just fledged and I was lucky in that one of them had taken up residence on a much lower part of the cathedral, I would have liked to see them again when they were flying



Pied Wagtail feeding amongst the horses



Peregrine at Norwich Cathedral



After 250 years Ospreys have again successfully bred in Norfolk

Finally, it looks like a bumper year for wild berries, fruits, and nuts, good news for all the wildlife that depends on them through the autumn and winter months.

Images / *Tony Howes*



NB. In my previous article (*Natterjack 170*) I named the Cardinal Beetle incorrectly - it should be *Pyrochora serraticornis* not *P. coccinea*.
Thanks to Martin Collier (Norfolk Beetle Recorder) for the correct ID.

Tony Howes

I came across some wonderful Sand Martins when on an evening walk on Happisburgh beach and unusually for me I didn't have my camera. So early the next morning I returned, and from a distance was able to capture these incredibly busy, noisy birds. There were two fledglings eager to take their parents catch.



Sand Martins feeding juveniles

I continued walking along the beach and watched, from a distance, three young Little Terns being fed on the coast line. Sadly they were chased off by two dogs running loose.

I also spotted a Drinker moth caterpillar walking on the sea wall, Gatekeeper butterflies, a Stonechat and Whitethroat on the same bush with fledglings as well as plenty of seals on the beach and in the sea. A lovely morning.

The evening before, when I didn't have my camera, I witnessed a Sparrowhawk fly into the colony, which was slightly alarming. The fledglings had already disappeared into the rear of the nest for safety, and there were no Sand Martins to be seen whilst it was there. I was relieved to see the youngsters there the following morning.



Clockwise: Little Tern feeding juvenile, Juvenile Grey Seal, Gatekeeper (male) and Drinker moth caterpillar

Images / Lyn Hawes

Excursion & Event reports:

Roydon Common - 12th July, 2025

Leaders: *Nick Owens / Tim Hodge*

Roydon Common forms the major part of the extensive NWT reserve in west Norfolk that also embraces Grimston Warren and the Tony Hallat Memorial Reserve. Nine of us gathered at the car park at 10.30h including two new members of the Society. We had a quick chat with Anne Simpson, a Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserves manager for the region, who was keeping a watch on the behaviour of dog walkers (none of us!). We carefully read the NWT safety issues within the site, though noted that adders were not mentioned.

As ever, we moved at a very slow pace, looking at almost every insect that moved. The entrance through the woods produced several shieldbugs including Red-legged, Hawthorn and Tortoise, as well as a Heather Ladybird, procured from the branches of a birch tree by co-leader Tim Hodge. Specimens were passed around in plastic spy-pots, identified by anyone who could do so, then released.



Naturalists in action / *Hans Watson*

Out on the open heath a fine Forester Moth was soon spotted. Hans Watson informs us that it changes colour from its typical bright emerald green to a rusty red colour at night. Apparently this is the result of the scales on the wings becoming damp as darkness falls. As we walked down the wide sandy track we became aware of many small insects flying in circles very close to the sandy ground. These turned out to be of several species: Small Sandpit Mining Bee *Andrena argentata*, its exclusive cleptoparasite the Bear-clawed Nomad Bee *Nomada baccata* and a species of satellite fly, probably *Leucophora grisella*, also a brood parasite of the bee. *Andrena argentata* specialises on *Calluna* heather pollen and this was just coming into flower. There were uncountable numbers of the bees burrowing into the sand to form their nests, especially around a group of molehills and on the edges of a wide erosion gully. Sand Wasps *Ammophila sabulosa* were also seen.

Burrowing insects such as these benefit from ground disturbance by the Trust's livestock – British White Cattle and Dartmoor ponies.

Our next move was off the path onto nearby marshy ground. We left the *Calluna* heather behind and entered a damper zone of Cross-leaved Heath, inhabited by Heath Bumblebees and large numbers of Keeled Skimmer dragonflies. This graded into wetter parts supporting sphagnum moss, much of it topped by Round-leaved Sundew. This carnivorous plant was inviting hoverflies to pollinate its tiny white flowers, held on thin stems about 15 cm above the sticky leaves that might otherwise trap and consume them. Francis Farrow pointed out Cranberry, displaying minute leaves on trailing stems but with large round red berries. Further out we found Sharp-flowered Rush, White-beaked Sedge and Bog Asphodel, all in flower, while drier islands were occupied by willows and Bog Myrtle.



Above. Plant zonation looking from wet to dry showing White-beaked Sedge, Bog Asphodel and Cross-leaved Heath in the fore-ground and *Calluna* heather in the distance. *Left.* Hoverfly *Sphaerophoria* sp. visiting Round-leaved Sundew / *Nick Owens*



Above. Keeled Skimmer - male and Cranberry / *Hans Watson*

Some members of the party followed a longer circular route and were rewarded by the sight of a large patch of Harebells. Others headed more directly back for lunch at 13.30h. All were impressed by the beauty and interest of the site. Our thanks to Sarah Butler for coordinating the event.

Nick Owens

Please Note

Our AGM will be held at 7.30pm on Tuesday 24th March, 2026
at St. Andrew's Church Hall, Church Lane, Eaton, Norwich NR4 6NW

With the threat of thundery showers predicted the proposed walk over Beeston Common was attended by an intrepid 10 members. We set off in reasonable conditions and soon faced a dilemma with a slightly worn brown butterfly that could be either a Brown Argus or a female Common Blue. Later photographic scrutiny pronounced it to be a Common Blue. A female Pantaloona Bee was observed on Fleabane with its characteristic large pollen baskets giving it its English name showing well. One member of the party was

highly delighted with this sighting as it has intrigued her for many years. A Lattice Heath moth was also enjoying the Fleabane's nectar. We passed a small patch of Tansy which contained an interesting flask-shaped gall made by the midge *Rhopalomyia tanacetifolia*. When we reached the main pond a Little Egret was present as well as a Moorhen family with two chicks.



Top: Pantaloona Bee (f)

Middle: Lattice Heath

Bottom: Great Sundew

Images / Hans Watson

and Dodder (a parasite of woody plants such as Gorse). While admiring the small pink flower clusters of the Dodder a Cinnamon Bug was found and on the Fleabane many a



Bog Bush-cricket (f) (above)/ *Hans Watson* and finally in the pot (left)/ *Janet Negal*

With the threat of thundery showers predicted the proposed walk over Beeston Common was attended by an intrepid 10 members. We set off in reasonable conditions and soon faced a dilemma with a slightly worn brown butterfly that could be either a Brown Argus or a female Common Blue. Later photographic scrutiny pronounced it to be a Common Blue. A female Pantaloona Bee was observed on Fleabane with its characteristic large pollen baskets giving it its English name showing well. One member of the party was highly delighted with this sighting as it has intrigued her for many years. A Lattice Heath

NWT Sweet Briar Marshes, Norwich - 2nd August, 2025

Leaders: *Nick Owens, Vanna & Jeremy Bartlett, Tim Hodge*

First planned as a general survey of the site by NNNS members, the walk was later billed as a bee walk and became combined with a walk for Norfolk Wildlife Trust members. I had to miss a planning meeting with Mark Hoar, the Sweet Briar Engagement Officer and was not too sure what would happen on the day, though Vanna Bartlett had kindly given me a guided tour a few days earlier. Attendees from the two sides, numbering about 20 in all, eventually coalesced at the main gate at 11 am, where Mark was waiting. The time and venue given for the two societies had been somewhat different. Further NNNS folk, who had been exploring on their own, materialised from the undergrowth as Mark was giving his introduction, but he kept admirably calm and welcomed us all, though he was possibly not originally expecting more than the 15 NWT members who had signed up with him (he also had a waiting list). He was a great support and help throughout the morning.

This was the first cool, slate-grey morning for some time, as had been noticed by the bees. The first half hour produced just one bee: a Common Carder Bumblebee worker, taking nectar from St. John's-wort flowers. The bee was passed around in a pot for inspection and thorough discussion. After some time a single Short-fringed Mining Bee turned up, setting us on our way to a total of five bee species for the two hours. Over 70 bee species had been recorded on the site by Tim Strudwick and others in the past five years, and prospects for the walk were not great. Luckily the day was more than saved by the three co-leaders and other NNNS specialists who had turned up in force and kept everyone entertained with all manner of invertebrates, swept from the herbage and

knocked out of trees. No rain was seen and there was a lot of excitement and interest. As the punters departed the sun came out, along with plenty of frolicking Pantaloons Bee females, taking pollen from Catsears. Just one (rather nice) male of this species had bothered to turn up for the visitors. Perhaps 200 invertebrate species were identified on or after the walk. Thanks to all who helped to make this a success. Nick Owens



Some of the many NWT/NNNS members at Sweet Briar / Hans Watson

Upton Fen - 23rd August, 2025

Leader: *Bob Leaney*

NNNS / Norfolk Flora Group Walk at Upton Fen (NWT Reserve)

With thanks to Bob Ellis for his botanical input and to Dr Bob Leaney
for his fascinating account of the development of Swamp Carr.

Plant names follow David Streeter et al 2018.

There's something magical about Upton Fen, with its mysterious Upton Broad, isolated and unreachable, hidden in the middle of unspoilt fenland. Apart from this late August day when a sizeable group from NNNS and Norfolk Flora descended to survey plant species, there's seldom anyone here. The Fen is visited by means of a series of green pathways, often wet and bouncy underfoot. On our visit these paths sported trails of the tiny leaves of Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, with occasional patches of yellow Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and purples flashes of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*. Some paths were lined with Hemp Agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, head high in places, a few flowers still pink but mostly flowing banks of white fluff, interspersed with Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*.

Entering the reserve, just beyond some mossy logs of deep green, there is an area of Greater Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata*. These distinctive mounds, often a couple of feet tall, are the long accumulation of short scaly rhizomes incorporating much of previous years' leaf sheaths. Nearby are swathes of light green Marsh Fern *Thelypteris palustris*, the fertile form of which appears in early summer, although further on, the sterile form which appears earlier was also in evidence.



Mound of Greater
Tussock Sedge with
Common Reed
growing on top (left)

Marsh Fern (right)



Further on to the left, beyond the reed bed, there is an extensive area of boggy Alder Woodland known as 'Swamp Carr'. The largest Carr Woodlands in Britain are found here in the Norfolk Broads, often unreachable except by boat. Carr woodland began developing in the interwar period, with the cessation of grazing of the water edge. This allowed the narrow fringe of Common Reed *Phragmites australis* to begin spreading across the broad, often as floating rafts known locally as 'hover'. As the Reed moved outwards, the Carr species, Hairy Birch *Betula pubescens*, Grey Sallow *Salix cinerea* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa* spread out behind from the old broad edge, producing two Carr 'associations'. This process is still occurring.

Where Greater Tussock Sedge is present in the drying out reed as at Upton, Alder can establish earlier in the succession by seeding onto the dry summits of the Tussock Sedge stools, then shading out the Reed to produce 'Swamp Carr', with standing water present throughout most of the year and hosting a very special rich flora. A marvellous example of Swamp Carr can be viewed from the boardwalk of Ranworth NWT Reserve. When Tussock Sedge is not present, a relatively species-poor Carr composed of Grey Sallow, Hairy Birch and Reed develops, often more patchily distributed, as at Upton.

I asked the experts from the Norfolk Flora Group what they considered were the botanical highlights of our tour. Their list included species we saw much of, including the Marsh Fern mentioned above and the Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus*. One particular very damp area, a little off the main path, was especially rich in the more rare species: Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans*, Bog Pimpernel *Lysimachia tenella*, Long-stalked Yellow-sedge *Carex lepidocarpa*, Knotted Pearlwort *Sagina nodosa*, Flea-sedge *Carex pulicaris*, Few-flowered Spike-rush *Eleocharis quinqueflora*, a few plants of Fen Orchid *Liparis loeseli* in seed and in a small drying ditch within the mire, some strands of Lesser Bladderwort



Utricularia minor. Many of these are scarce in Norfolk with highly restricted distributions, although they might be frequent sightings elsewhere such as in the north-west.

I picked up many identification tips on this memorable morning, in particular the features to look out for with your magnifying lens when distinguishing different grasses, sedges or reeds. You were left wondering how did the Reed Sweet Grass *Glyceria maxima* gets its bumps, or the Common Reed acquire its hairy ligule.

Fen Orchid in flower earlier in the year. In UK this is only found at a couple of Broadland sites and near Cardiff, Wales.

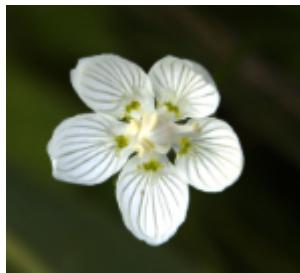
Images/ *James Firebrace*



Beautiful bumps on Reed Sweet Grass (*left*)
Distinctive ligule of Common Reed (*right*)



Upton Fen is damp fenland habitat, so it is no surprise there were many species recorded with names beginning with Bog or Marsh such as the wonder-fully named Marsh Grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*. It has striking, elegantly green-lined white five-petalled flowers. The name it seems goes back to classical antiquity and indeed the plant can still be found on the slopes of Mount Parnassus, the giant limestone massif that rises above the site of the ancient oracle of Delphi.



Marsh Grass of Parnassus (*left*)

First known illustration of the Marsh Grass of Parnassus by the German herbalist Valerius Cordus (1515–1544) (*right*)

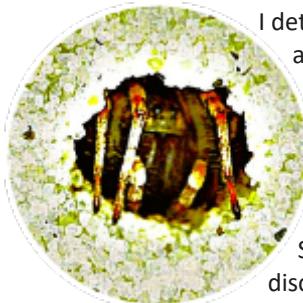


But back to Upton. It is well recognised 'that you only see what you are looking for', even down to the size or colour that you are focused on. With head down looking at plants, it is easy to be oblivious of all the other rich wildlife around. On this day there were profusions of white butterflies (mainly Green-veined Whites), the occasional late Damselfly, a couple of beautifully marked Orb spiders, and finally a well-hidden Water Rail identifiable only from its pig-like squeals and grunts from deep within the vegetation. A great ending to a most rewarding day.

James Firebrace

Five naturalists joined me for this trip.

Before setting off I discussed the various 'micro-habitats' to be found within the Winterton Dunes area. This was because many species of spider can be found in very specific habitats using very specific search techniques. I felt that this information might be useful and produce some interesting finds.



I detailed some of the species that might be found in each habitat and showed pictures of them. Searching through Marram stalks is highly productive and targets there were *Marpissa nivoyi*, a rare Salticid and *Tibellus maritimus*; a beautiful relative of the 'Crab Spiders'. *Arctosa perita* (left), a sand-dwelling Lycosid species, with its burrow with a silken 'door' which it closes against parasitic wasps, was also a target.

Salticid and Thomisid spiders on Heaths and Heather were discussed, as was the shaking of Oak twigs into a canvas net for Oak specialists. Other micro-habitats' and their likely denizens were Gorse thickets for the orb-weaving *Zygella atrica* and *Metellina segmentata* and bare, lichen-covered ground for two rare species, the Lycosid, *Alopecosa barbipes* and the Thomisid, *Xysticus sabulosus*.

We set off in fine weather to a spot where Julie had previously found the 'Wasp Spider', *Argiope bruennichi*. There we encountered many female spiders and I was pleased to be able to point out how each spider had spun her orb-web in a hollow in the grass of her own making.



Wasp Spider (f) in a web showing the zig-zag stabilimentum

The various theories, none of which are proven, upon the purpose of the web's zig-zag stabilimentum were talked about. I was surprised at how small these specimens were as was the one egg-sac that we found. They were about two thirds of the size of specimens that I've seen at other sites.

As is always the way with natural historians we moved very slowly across the landscape! One could spend a day spider hunting within a few square feet in this marvellous place and, I have to admit, I felt quite daunted at the prospect of trying to find the 'targets' I had set.

In the end we found a few species which were studied in tubes with lenses prior to release. A female *Tibellus oblongus* was an exciting find by Martin. Other species were a female *Pisaura*

mirabilis, a female *Philodromus dispar*, a female *Araneus diadematus* and a female *Theridion pictum*. Males of most spider species are rare at this time of year and often much more difficult to find at any time.

It was the insects that distracted the party from its purpose...but who cares! Male and female Long-winged Conehead, *Conocephalus discolor* and Mottled Grasshoppers, *Myrmeleotettix maculatus* were photographed. Two Fox Moth larvae, *Macrothylacia rubi*, which was a new species for me, were discovered. Graylings, *Hipparchia semele* flitted around us and I think all had a most enjoyable time; but barely scratched the surface of the invertebrate fauna of Winterton Dunes.

Garth Coupland



Nursery-web Spider *Pisaura mirabilis* (f)



Fox Moth larva (above), Grayling (left) and a view over Winterton Dunes (below)

Images / *Garth Coupland*



Litcham Warren Fungus Walk - 27th Sept. 2025 Leader: Geoff Kibby

A reasonable number of us gathered on a fine Autumn Day at Litcham Warren (by kind permission of the local hunt and thanks to Norfolk Farm Produce's Farm Manager for arranging car parking). Our number allowed us access around the experts without creating a crush.

The expertise came from Geoff, Yvonne, Steve and Trudi (a visiting knowledgeable fungus person from Essex), then there was myself, Lissie from Natural England and Jenny who turned out to be a great find as she is up for helping me manage our, NNNS's, new, child

mentoring programme. Other attendees included 10-year old Logan from Litcham village who came with his Grandfather. This lad was such a joy with his pure engaged interest in every new find - taking it from Geoff, looking at it under his lens (that he had liberated from Geoff) passing it to other people, offering 'his' lens then taking the fungi back and doing the same with other people. Later I saw he was perplexed and it turned out he was hungry and thirsty so with his grandfather's permission water and a snack was found. And yes Logan would like to come to other events.

Fungus-wise the Warren had not been surveyed which meant that every find would be recorded. The following highlights are from Geoff:

Despite the wood looking very dry and at first unpromising a surprisingly good list of fungi began to emerge, with a total of around 77 species being found. Several of these were of interest including the following:

1. The Green Elfcup, *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* was fruiting and displaying its electric blue-green tiny cups on a rotten oak log.
2. *Homophrone spadiceum* is an uncommon and unusually robust species in what used to be called *Psathyrella* but has now been divided up into smaller genera. I have not seen this for some years.
3. The beautiful and large peach-orange cups of the Hares Ear, *Otidia onotica* were forming a large clump in the leaf litter by the side of one of the main paths; not uncommon but always a pleasing find.
4. *Russula parazurea*, one of the Brittle Caps was found in abundance. It is a common associate of oak trees and distinguished by its bluish grey to greenish grey caps, which often have a fine, almost powdery appearance.
5. Another blue-green species found several times was the beautiful *Clitocybe odora*, which reveals its identity by its amazing odour of aniseed.

The wood shows great potential and I am sure that following some heavier rains a much larger range of species will be found.



We never take for granted having Geoff Kibby, one of the very few top UK experts and fungus authors, available to lead these events and thank him for both his time and generosity.

Sarah Butler

An example of Green Elfcup

Image / *Francis Farrow*

Sawfly Workshop - Andy Musgrove

Sawflies are a species-rich group of insects, with over 350 species known from Norfolk to date. However, identification can be challenging due in part to a lack of up-to-date books. I took on the role of county recorder in 2017 and step-by-step have tried to increase our knowledge of the group within the county since then.

On 21st September, 2025, a workshop was held at Sheringham Park to share some of this experience and thus help to build up skills and capacity for recording in the future. Five keen members attended for the day. We started with a presentation covering a range of topics around sawflies, and then moved on to practising using keys and microscopes to identify a range of pinned specimens, initially to family level, and later to subfamily, genus or species level. We used a range of published works (some of them rather old now), as well as trying out some new draft keys I had been working on.

The day was helpful for me, in terms of understanding which parts of the keys were most difficult for people new to sawflies (and I have made some adjustments already as a result). It was also hopefully useful and interesting to everyone who came along. The autumn date meant that we did not have a field element to the day, but leaf-mines of two sawfly species were noted on trees just outside the room we used.



Sawfly workshop participants

Example sawflies *Tenthredo maculata* (top left) and *Ametastegia equiseti* (bottom left) / *Andy Musgrove*

NNNS Events Programme - November 2025 to March 2026

Please check the events listing online at www.nnns.org.uk for up to date information and any other events/excursions. Wear suitable clothing/footwear for the conditions and bring your own refreshments for excursions. **Please try to car share or arrive by public transport.** **Winter Talks** - second Tuesday of the month at St. Andrew's Church Hall, 31 Church Lane, Eaton, Norwich, NR4 6NW (7.30pm start). **(P)** - Photographic group.

Sunday 9th November 10.30am – lunch (optional pm)

Dersingham Bog. Generalist and Mosses. Two unsurfaced car parks are situated along the minor road to Wolferton village to the west of the A149. We will meet at the Scissors Cross car park TF66822804.

Tuesday 11th November 7.30pm start

Conor Mark Jameson 'Finding W.H.Hudson the writer who came to Britain to save the birds'

Sunday 23rd November 10.30am - lunch (optional pm)

Wymondham Abbey. Generalist and Mosses. NR18 0PH/pixies.shelving.bill. Parking suggested at Market Street car park NR18 0BE (7 minutes walk away).

Tuesday 25th November - **(P)** 7.30pm start.

Wildlife of Belize and Guatemala (**Hans Watson**)

Saturday 6th December 1pm.

Cranes and Raptors coming to roost. **Hickling NWT Centre**, Stalham NR1 2OBW, TG427221, w3w diverged.oldest.pounds. Visitors carpark. £5 for non members. Wear wellies. Check before coming as its possible flooding may have closed the site.

Tuesday 9th December 7.30pm start

Christmas meeting with festive refreshments.

Carl Chapman - 'Norfolk's Whales and Whaling' (Carl's new book)

Sunday 21st December 10.30am until lunch (optional pm).

Coastal walk maybe sighting Snow Buntings etc. **Cley**. Meet at the NWT beach car park. Please note NWT members park free

2026

Saturday 10th January 10.30am until lunch (optional pm).

Lichens **Holkam Hall**. Led by Rob Yaxley Norfolk's Recorder for Lichens. Parking to be announced later to suit the Hall's events at that time.

Tuesday 13th January 7.30pm start (To be confirmed)

January ? 10.30am until lunch (optional pm) (Date to be confirmed)

Generalist walk including identifying mammal tracts **Pensthorpe**.Parking in the car park.

Saturday 24th January 10.30am until lunch (optional pm)

Litcham Warren. A Generalist initial rough survey of this mostly wooded area. It turns

out that this is quite possible mostly ancient woodland/Warren. So a day of discovery. Blow away the festive cobwebs! Postcode for the village of Litcham is PE32 2NS. Drive through Litcham towards Gressenhall and past the fishing lake on your left there are some woods, when you pass these pull in, very carefully, into the field adjoining these there will be NNNS signs to show that you are in the right place.

Tuesday 27th January - (P) 7.30pm start.

Wildlife With My Camera (**Tony Howes**)

Sunday 8th February 10.30am until lunch (optional pm)

Lichens **Houghton Hall** grounds. Rob Yaxley Norfolk's Recorder for Lichens. Parking to be announced later to suit the Halls events at that time.

Tuesday 10th February 7.30pm start

Stuart Newcom - How acoustic modelling of Nature can help how we visualise and record our world.

Tuesday 24th February (P) 7.30pm start

Wildlife of a Country Churchyard (**David Bryant**)

Tuesday 10th March (P) 7.30pm start

Members Show Your Own

Tuesday 24th March 7.30pm start

AGM - Chaired by **Tony Leech**

Followed by: **Vildan Acar** Gut Microbes in birds, what they tell us and how they can inform our actions.

All the best for 2026

Nominations

If you're passionate about natural history and want to play a part in shaping the Society's future, we'd love you to join our Council. It's a chance to share your enthusiasm, spark new ideas and make a difference to Norfolk's nature - whatever your skills or experience.

*For more information or to submit a nomination, please email
secretary@nnns.org.uk*

Nominations close on 9th January 2026

Contributor Notes



The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' will be
February 2025

Please send all
articles / notes and photographic material
to the editor as soon as possible by
January 1st 2025 to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road,
Sheringham, Norfolk, NR26 8QD or
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 NNNS membership year runs from the date of payment, currently £25.
During this time members will receive copies of the quarterly newsletter, '*The Norfolk Natterjack*', 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 each year.

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

'Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society' can be sent to:

NNNS Treasurer, 2 The Dial, Reepham, Norwich, NR10 4LX

Membership is £25 for a year (£37 for individuals living overseas).

If you would like to know the date of your membership renewal or for any membership enquiries, email: membership@nnns.org.uk

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