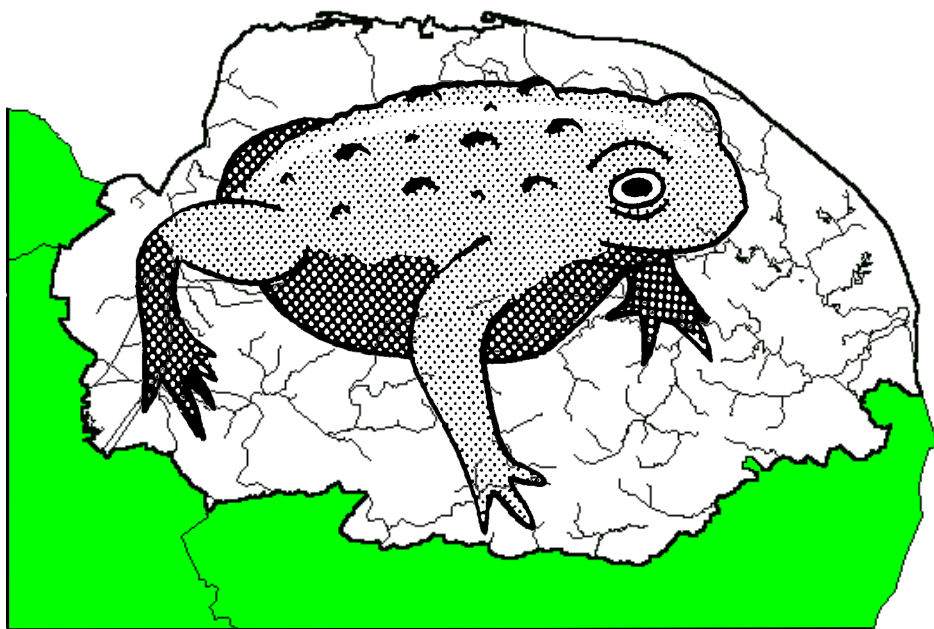


The Norfolk



Natterjack

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Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

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Articles with the camera symbol have associated photographs in the Nats' Gallery (centre pages)

Toad-in-the-hole....

In this edition subjects cover algae, shield-bugs, ants, moths, a shrike's diet, an interesting fish, a beetle that eats wasps, stoats and harvest mice and some general observations. In addition there is a winter programme list for those of you that like to get down on the ground and hunt for moss and liverworts also some excursion reports. Last but not least are tributes to two great Norfolk Naturalists - the 19th Century John Smith and 20th Century Michael Seago. My apologies to those members that sent in further reports on the proposed introduction of White-tailed Sea Eagle to Norfolk, however, I felt that the subject had been quite fully debated and with the score a draw on the pros and cons it was not furthering the debate. Those members that have particular views should write to the RSPB and Natural England if they haven't already done so. Many thanks to all contributors for both text and photo submissions.

FF

Records of Trentepohlia

Hilary Belcher (Dr)

The subaerial alga *Trentepohlia*, which forms rust-red patches on trees and rocks (including concrete) used to be scarce or unrecorded in the counties of East Anglia, but in the last few years has become more common. It has recently become plentiful on and around Westleton Heath in Suffolk (Michael Kirby, *White Admiral*, summer 2009), while this June we found an extensive growth of *T. umbrina* on a Tulip Tree we had planted in the garden of Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, only 30 years ago. The only other Cambridgeshire record of *Trentepohlia* is of another species, *T. aurea*, in Clare College Garden in 1929 (unpublished). In Essex Ken Adams of the Essex Field Club told us that the alga has extensively colonised the bark of Beech and Hornbeam trees in Epping Forest in the last 3 or 4 years, while south of London it is common.

Will members please keep an eye open for rust-red patches on bark or gravestones etc., and let me know at:

23 Pepys Way, Girton, Cambridge CB3 OPA.



Norfolk and Suffolk Bryological Group Meetings 2009/10.

Beginners are always very welcome, the only equipment needed is a handlens (x10 or x20) and some paper packets for collecting specimens. Meetings begin at 10.30am and will only be cancelled if there is snow or hard frost.

Sunday 13th December 2009. Swannington Ugate Common. Survey requested by Natural England following restoration management since previous Bryo Group visit and concerns about possible air pollution from nearby poultry farm. Park beside gravel track leading from road at TG 142 182.

Saturday 9th January 2010. Holkham to Gunn Hill dunes and Pinewoods. Park at Lady Anne's Drive, entr TF 891 440 **parking £4 per car!**

Sunday 24th January 2010. Joint meeting with Cambridgeshire Bryological Group. FE woodland between Feltwell and Weeting. Conifer plantations with forest rides, felled/replanted areas and gravel pit. Park just inside Fire Route 49 at TL 752 880.

Saturday 6th February 2010. Decoy Carr SSSI, Acle. Spring-fed wet Alder/Ash woodland and Reed-bed. The citation states that "Arctic-alpine mosses have been recorded indicating that the plant communities have remained relatively undisturbed since post-glacial times". Dense vegetation, ground wet & soft, numerous dykes - but we will have a guide. Adrian Gardiner of Natural England has obtained permission from several land-owners for this meeting but today will mainly be with the co-operation of Mr. Stephen Wright. Parking depends on ground conditions at the time, contact Pat Negal for details.

Sunday 21st February 2010. Sexton Wood SSSI by permission of Mr. R. Youngs. Ancient Oak/Hornbeam wood on boulder clay, part coppiced. Turn S off B1332 imm SE of Mermaid PH then R into Sexton Rd. Entr to wood at TM 301 916. Follow concrete rd & park at TM 300 917 by two nissen huts.

Saturday 6th March 2010. East Lexham woods by permission of Mr.N.Foster, Meet at East Lexham church TF 859 171 for churchyard and Grooms Wood. Move on to Great Wood Cottage (permission of John Phelps) at TF 864 174 for Great Wood.

Sunday 28th March 2010. Adcocks Common SSSI & Walton Warren, by permission of Mr.H. Birkbeck. Adcocks Common has depressions separated by chalky ridges with areas of fen, grassland and scrub. Park beside the track, just over the cattle grid from the road at TF 750 152.

British Bryological Society Recorders:

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Insect Surprises



Hans Watson

This year has provided some pleasant insect surprises, and for some people, no doubt, some unpleasant surprises. We have had spectacular numbers of Painted Lady and Large White butterflies, aphids, and 7 spot Ladybirds, and a more than usual numbers of other butterflies and some moths. In my garden we have had a bit of a hawkmoth year, with Hummingbird and Elephant hawkmoths, and in June four Privet hawkmoths were found roosting together in the greenhouse. Shieldbugs have also provided me with some pleasant surprises, mainly in the large numbers that have appeared. Most common have been Gorse Shieldbugs *Piezodorus lituratus*, and in March on sunny days dozens could be counted sunning themselves on some gorse bushes at the top of my garden. Next most common have been Hawthorn *Acanthosoma haemorrhoidale*, Bronze *Troilus luridus*, Common Green *Palomena prasina* and Woundwort Shieldbugs *Eysaoris venustissimus (fabricii)*. The carnivorous Bronze Shieldbugs have been most welcome, as they have been busy reducing the large numbers of Large White butterfly caterpillars that have been shredding our broccoli plants. I cannot recall a previous year when I have been able to walk round the garden and see four species of shieldbug nymphs at various stages of development.

Although I have never been a 'Twitcher', I suddenly feel the urge to look for other species of the shieldbug group to add to my list of 9 species seen in my garden. Perhaps I should look for the address of Twitchers Anonymous.

A Fish found far from home

It was reported in the Eastern Daily Press (11th October, 2009) that a Sheringham fisherman, Mr Rob Brownsell had caught a strange fish that was identified by Christine Pitcher of the Gt. Yarmouth Sea Life Centre as a Grey Trigger Fish (*Balistes carolinensis*). It could be that this is the first time such a fish has been recorded from the North Sea as it is considered a very unusual find for the area. Typically the fish is found in the western Atlantic around Bermuda and Argentina although it could also be found in the Mediterranean Sea, and the eastern Atlantic from the English and Irish coast down to Angola. As oceans warm it is likely that such fish could become more common around our shores.



Great Diving Beetle Larva

Tony Howes



Early last summer while feeding the fish in my garden pond I saw a glint of orange laying in among the plants in deep water, I got the net out and brought it carefully to the surface and rested it on silkweed in the margin. It was indeed a goldfish, attached to it were two creatures that had either killed it (most likely) or found it dead, and were making a meal of it, they turned out to be larva of the Great Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus marginalis*). Both they and the adult beetle are fiercely carnivorous, this was the first sighting of the larva for me, but I had seen the beetles before in the pond, usually as they surface to take on air by sticking their rear end just above the surface. So far no more fish have died as far as I am aware, but I am keeping an eye on the situation. * I once had one of these beetles come crashing down on to the roof of my car (silver) as I stood talking to a friend, no doubt mistaking it for water.

At last – something that eats wasps!

Rob Coleman



On my return from a summer holiday last year I found a clutch of dead Common Wasps *Vespa vulgaris* on one of our windowsills. They had entered the house from a nest in our roof-space but had been unable to find a way out again. Clearing away the bodies, I found a two other insects which I did not immediately recognise. On closer inspection, I realised they were beetles and identified them as *Metacoelus paradoxus*, a wasp parasite.

M. paradoxus, is indeed a strange-looking beast, and might easily pass incognito as a member of another insect Order. The bright yellow abdomen is swollen and fly-like and the hind-wings are visible behind the reduced wing-cases which are narrow and pointed. Males have prominent serrate antennae (see photo), which are reduced (and asymmetric) in the female.

M. paradoxus (as the latin name suggests) posed difficult questions for Victorian entomologists, and was described for some 130 years prior its life history being elucidated. It is now known that adult females lay their eggs on dead wood that is likely to be frequented by wasps seeking the raw materials for nest building. The hatched larvae resemble Oil Beetle triungulins; these attach themselves to the visiting wasps and are carried back to the nest.



Once in the nest the triungulin seeks out a cell with a wasp grub and pierces and enters it, living for a while as an internal parasite. During this time it grows very rapidly, but the wasp larva remains alive. Once it reaches a certain size (presumably the wasp is becoming quite uncomfortable at this point!) the beetle larva bites a hole in its host and emerges and moults. It then winds itself around the thorax of the wasp larva, bites another hole in its body, and sucks out whatever substance is remaining. The beetle then pupates in the wasp cell (which the host had the decency to close in the initial stages of parasitization). Adults then emerge and disperse to mate. As many as 500 individuals have been recorded as emerging from a single nest, although average numbers quoted in literature are nearer 20-30.

Old records of *M. paradoxus* suggest it was confined to underground wasp nests but in recent times most records come from ones in roof spaces. The beetle has been recorded at least 6 times in Norfolk in the last few years, with the most recent record in 2004. Previously considered a National rarity, this species is now known to be rather more common and widespread and is probably still under-recorded as a result of both its obscure appearance and unusual life cycle.

My thanks go to Martin Collier (County Recorder) for information on old records and encouraging me to report my findings!

The wonderful world of ants

Doreen Wells

On my travels around the county I have, on several occasions, come across the ant species *Lasius fuliginosus* busy at their daily activities. I am always captivated and spend more time watching them than perhaps I should.

Lasius fuliginosus is quite large and shiny black with a heart shaped head, so it is quite distinctive. It is also easily identified by its habit of following scent trails from its nest (at the base of a tree, underground in tree roots or in rotting wood) to the top of a large tree, where the workers tend aphids. Two or three columns of ants can often be seen crossing a path or area of woodland, climbing up high in a large tree and down again, each worker returning to the nest with its gut full of a sweet substance secreted by the aphids.

There is a colony in Brundall, which I observe when I am walking to Strumpshaw Fen to record dragonflies. On my way back in the late afternoon, a scavenging party of worker ants has been out and is returning with the booty; bumble bees, hover flies, moths and any other insect which has fallen by the



wayside. There is usually a problem getting the booty back, but it is solvable with so many ants to hand. I observed them dragging the prey up a one metre wall, along the top of the wall and over the earth bank with its numerous obstacles. All are taken in their stride and eventually the insects will be taken into the carton nest in the roots of the Ash tree to feed the queen and her colony. Sometimes the process is stalled and one ant is left halfway up a wall, holding onto the prey for all its worth. Sooner or later help is at hand and the journey up the wall continues with many workers sharing the load.

The strength required to move an object much greater than themselves is incredible, but together all things are possible!

The Plight of the Humble Bee

Ian Johnson



Recently the media made a feature of the serious decline in the population of our Honey Bees, *Apis mellifera*, and the possible effect on the pollination of our horticultural crops and fruit. As usual they treated it like a news “scoop.” This decline is mainly blamed on infestation by a parasitic mite, *Varroa destructor*, which attaches itself to the bees and their pupae, weakening them by sucking hemolymph and spreading viruses. The mite is also suspected to be a factor in colony collapse disorder (CCD), where worker bees just disappear.

This is not just one of those media-manufactured scares. The commentators urge more people to take up bee-keeping, which is easy for them to say. That takes skill and dedication, especially now there are these other threats. However, they also suggest that we should encourage bee-friendly plants in our gardens, which is what environmentalists have been saying for years and not just to save honey bees. The benefits for all kinds of wildlife are obvious and easier to achieve.

My wife and I have been wildlife gardeners for years, greatly increasing the variety and numbers of many species, especially insects. This was well before the remarkable year of 2009, with its huge influx of Seven-spot Ladybirds, *Coccinella 7-punctata* and migrant butterflies, like Painted Ladies, *Cynthia cardui*, Small Whites, *Artogeia rapae*, and Large Whites, *Pieris brassicae*. Butterflies all make a “bee-line” to our Lavender, *Lavandula angustifolium*, Garden Marjoram, *Origanum laevigatum*, and the Butterfly Bush, *Buddleia davidii*. So far this year we have seen more than 20 species of butterfly in our garden, (which is not unusual), even before other insect favourites come into bloom, like Michaelmas Daisies, *Aster novi-belgii* etc., Ice Plant, *Sedum spectabile*, and Ivy, *Hedera helix*.



These butterfly plants are also good for a host of other insects, especially the hoverflies and bumble bees, which seem to do most of the pollination in our garden. Yet honey bees are still largely absent. Perhaps there are no nearby hives, though honey bees foray over great distances. We must hope that the honey bee population recovers, but the gloom and doomers are surely overstating the threat to agriculture when there is always pollination by wind and rain, as well as by other insects. This year my apple trees are laden and so are the runner beans, on which two Brimstone butterflies, *Genopteryx rhamni*, were feeding among the busy bumble bees.

There are many other garden plants which encourage insects, especially in the big families of mints, *Mentha* and sages, *Salvia*. However, a superb garden plant for insects is *Polygonum amplexicaule* "Firetail." From June onwards it is covered with a bewildering range of species, including hoverflies and many different flies with shiny, jewel bodies. As I write it has hundreds of Common Wasps, *Vespula vulgaris*, a really beneficial insect and also one of nature's pollinators. They ignored me as I photographed them gnawing into our "Discovery" apples, but I can spare a few.

So there is a down side to wildlife gardening, as anyone who tries to grow cabbages or organise a drinks and barbecue party can testify, but the results are well worth it. Do not assume that once the right plants are in place, nature will do the rest. All the plants mentioned are strong growers and spreaders, so have to be managed and controlled. Once that is done, your care and attention deserve a celebratory drink at day's end, but make sure there are no wasps in your glass!

Request for Ant Records

Your county needs your records! Please could anyone who has recorded ants this year (or before) and who has not already sent these to me, or to Pat Lorber at NBIS, send their records to me (e-mail address below). Biological records need to contain the minimum of **What, Where, When and Who**:

1) Species; 2) Location and Grid Ref.; 3) Date Recorded; 4) Recorder's name. Additional information such as habitat details is also very useful. If you need your specimens identified, or confirmed, please contact me and I will be happy to help.

Many thanks,
Doreen Wells

County Ant Recorder

e-mail: wells_doreen@hotmail.com



An unusual form of Burnet Moth.



Francis Farrow

Late afternoon on 11th July 2009 I was walking the dog over Sheringham Common, when my eye caught a pale moth fluttering about 4 metres above the ground. I continued to watch it as it gained height then suddenly it swept downward to rest upon a rush stem. As I approached I was surprised to see that it was a Five-spot Burnet (*Zygaena*) but not the typical blue-black colouration with red spots but an attractive brown with reddish orange spots on semi-transparent wings. I have seen many five-spot burnets over the years at this location but never one with such colouration.

The photos were passed on to Mr W.G. Tremewan, a leading expert in the burnet group by Mark Tunmore, editor of *Atropos*, where I had sent them for information.

Mr Tremewan replied that the burnet moth was a rare aberration (*eboracea* Prest.) in which the usual black ground colour etc. was replaced by a beautiful violet-grey coloration. Mr Tremewan also said that the moth is almost certainly *Z. lonicerae* even though spots 3 and 4 are confluent as is usually found in *Z. trifolii*. This was confirmed by his friend, Axel Hofmann, who is also a *Zygaena* specialist.

This was a bit of a surprise as I didn't think Beeston and Sheringham Commons had Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnets, however, looking at the Norfolk Moths website (www.norfolkmoths.co.uk) there is a dot nearby (Weybourne recorded by Martin Preston post-2000) so I suppose it is possible that the moths may have 'moved in' since the 1990s when Mr Tremewan confirmed the moths on Beeston to be the rare marshland Five-spot burnet *Z. trifolii decreta* (*Norfolk Moth Survey Newsletter No 38 - April 1993 P4*). Our 'elder statesman' of entomology, Mr. Ken Durrant who has known the Commons since the 1930s, has never encountered *lonicerae* on the site.

Is this occurrence then due to species movement possibly influenced by climate change or have we simply overlooked it, as both species are so very similar. I remember thinking that there were a great number of burnets this year and that they were unusually nectaring on bramble and tufted vetch when normally in previous years the burnets appear to prefer plants lower down, which may indicate the presence of Narrow-bordered in some numbers. This would account for the aberration as such forms are more likely in large populations. If possible could members who have photographed burnets on this site please check to see if they can discern any Narrow-bordered Five-spots among them and let me know.



Another strange moth

Francis Farrow



On 17th June my daughter, Ellie, called me to come to the garden as there was a large hornet-like insect on the path. I thought possibly a horntail as they have occasionally turned up but this proved to be much more interesting – it was a Hornet moth *Sesia apiformis*, one of the 15 clearwing species that live in Britain. Its larvae live in Poplar trees for up to three years where they feed on live wood inside the trunk at a low level and also in the upper roots. This was the first I had seen for many years.

Strumpshaw Fen

Brian Macfarlane



At the beginning of September I thought I would try a new tactic, well for me anyway. That is sit in the outside area of the Brick Hide, which is the Reception for the reserve.

I have been going to Strumpshaw for over 30 years, but never really spent time studying what visits the water in front of the hide. That area is roughly 350 yards (in old money) front to back, and 100 yards wide in places. It is flanked by reed beds on three sides.

So I made a point of sitting from 6-30am for up to 3 hours each time I went, full of anticipation at what might appear. Obviously starting times got later as the month progressed. At the time of writing this I have been 18 times out of 26 days. I don't see many people there for more than 15 minutes looking, as they get their tickets and move off round the reserve.

The Kingfishers were the most regular visitors, of the rarer variety, coming several times each day. As I sit in the hide 6 feet above the reed bed it is amazing how close I have been to some animals. One day a Fox appeared 10 feet in front of me and took no notice. It was so close I could only get head and shoulders in as I was using a long lens for more distant images. Another time a Muntjac appeared briefly, not an animal normally associated with reed beds, more woodlands and fields. On three occasions Chinese Water deer came and actually stayed to browse for up to 20 minutes. I have never seen the three above animals



from the Brick Hide in all the years I've been going, but of course I have seen them elsewhere on the reserve.

The most exciting animal I have seen at a distance across the water is up to four otters on several occasions. The most unusual happening was about 35 Red-Legged Partridges flew across the hide and disappeared into 6 foot high reeds to my left. Now what on earth were farmland birds doing getting their feet wet?

Every morning for the first 2 weeks several hundred Greylag geese flew over the hide to land on water on the other side of the reserve. There were many ducks flying in and out along with 40 plus Egyptian geese. There were numerous other birds seen regularly such as Herons, Little Egrets, Coots, and Moorhens. One time a couple of herons flew and landed on a dead tree. One landed on top of the upright while the other also tried, but managed to land on the chest of the first one. (see photo)

Cormorants were very active and sometimes fished together 6 at a time. This proved successful on several occasions as seen in the photos. It was disappointing not to see an Osprey this year on it's way to Africa, as there have usually been more than one in past years. I was lucky enough to see one over Barton Broad. I'm glad I have stuck with the brick hide for it has been very rewarding. It's proved to me that perseverance pays off staying in one place I hadn't thought worthwhile!

A FEW OBSERVATIONS

Tony Howes



Cormorant in danger

This image of a Cormorant was taken at Strumpshaw on a recent trip there, what appears to be a length of line/wire is hanging from its legs, a key, or something similar is on the other end, it could so easily get caught up on a tree branch or other vegetation, a bird in real danger.

A fine beetle

While peering into bushes near my home recently, looking for anything that moved I had a tap on the shoulder, it was somebody up the road from me, who thought I was picking blackberries, and was surprised to see a camera instead of the expected container. When I told her I was looking for spiders and other 'creepy crawlies' she went pale and legged it up the meadow pulling her dog along behind her. I digress.



Very often it's a movement that catches your eye, and so it proved on this day, some thing was climbing a hogweed stem, by parting a few grass stems I could see it was a lovely lesser stag beetle. He soon had his portrait on record.

Juvenile adders

Adders, being Britain's only poisonous snake are feared and shunned by many people, with good cause, as an adder bite can make you very unwell for a time, but they are a very beautiful creature and worthy of study and protection. Adders come out of hibernation in early spring, males first, followed by the females and juveniles some time later. Young adders are orange/red in colour, at one time they were thought to be a different species altogether, (see photo). This little fellow was observed as it basked in the sun alongside adults.

Diet of the Great Grey Shrike - Kelling Heath 2008

Nick Owens

This article is a rather belated response to the interesting notes about shrikes by Hans Watson, in the August 2008 edition of *Natterjack*. Whilst watching the great grey shrike on Kelling Heath in April 2008, James McCallum pointed out some pellets from the shrike beneath its favourite rowan tree. A few days later the pellets were still unclaimed, so I collected about 20 for analysis.

The contents of the pellets was mostly insect material, comprising parts of a minimum of 12 Minotaur Beetles *Typhaeus typhoeus* and 7 queen bumblebees *Bombus spp.* There were also the remains of one lizard, including limb and jaw bones. No bird remains were present. However, it is likely that the shrike would impale, pluck and pull flesh from avian prey rather than swallowing it whole, in which case no evidence would appear in pellets.

John Wagstaff had an unconfirmed, second hand report of one dartford warbler seen impaled on a bush on the heath, so it is possible that the shrike had an impact on the founding population of dartfords. John tells me that just one pair of dartford warblers bred in 2008, a slight decline from 2007. However, there is no hard evidence that the shrike was responsible for harming the dartford population. John also reports that the shrike was seen with the tip of a lizard's tail trailing from its bill. He suggests that the presence of insects and lizards in the shrike's April diet probably reflects the warm spell of weather at that time. Subsequently the weather became cooler, perhaps triggering the shrike to turn to birds (and mammals).

The favoured rowan tree referred to is in the centre of an area cut short under the heath management programme. It would seem an ideal position for the bird to spy out beetles and lizards on the ground, and to seize bumblebees crossing



open territory. The shrike also used roadside shrubs as a lookout, where any insects crossing the tarmac would be easily picked up.

Whether the shrike had an adverse affect on its prey species is open to question. One queen *Bombus jonellus* was present in the pellets, recognisable from its orange pollen-basket hairs. This is a scarce heathland species and the predation of large numbers of spring queens over a period of several weeks might make an impact. When heathland extended from Norwich to the coast, predation by a few shrikes would not be an issue. With scarce wildlife now often confined to small habitat fragments, depleted populations may not be replenished from elsewhere. The answer is for the excellent management of Kelling Heath to be continued, and where possible for heathland remnants to be connected through habitat recreation.

Four harvest mice and a stoat

Adrian Martin

We had gone to Hickling Broad NNR on the penultimate day of last year in ample time to get to Stubb Mill to watch the Harriers and Cranes collect at dusk. Part of the reason was to leave time to walk round the reserve itself beforehand, ever optimistic for a Bittern. Looping round anti-clockwise we had reached the south-western corner of the reserve and were debating whether we should go into the nearby hide or start making our way to Stubb Mill. We were disturbed by a rather loud rustling from the undergrowth adjoining the path. Initial thoughts of a foraging Blackbird were put aside as the noises very rapidly traversed back and forth across several metres, and frankly no Blackbird was ever this noisy. The problem was solved when a furry ginger head popped up like a periscope from the brambles, peered keenly at us and descended again. The thicket stampeding immediately resumed. Clearly a Stoat was making a rather noisy attempt to find a meal. Every now and then, the head would reappear, or we'd get a glimpse of tail, as it snuffled back and forth. It was then that my partner drew my attention to something much smaller shinning its way up a reed out of the thicket. A Harvest Mouse was quickly making its way upwards until it stopped, tail twined around the stem several feet above the top of the thickets. Shortly after, like a row of flags being raised, three more Harvest Mice ascended neighbouring reeds until we were faced with a row of gently waving 'mice on sticks'. Meanwhile the noisy exploration of the undergrowth continued unabated. After several minutes, the Stoat crashed off to pastures new and the mice descended. The only conclusion we could come to was that Harvest Mice use their light weight and climbing ability to escape upwards from ground predators such as Stoats. Topped off with the eerie elephantine trumpets of the Cranes coming to roost and having over ten Marsh Harriers in view at one time as dusk fell made for a superb day's wildlife - despite the unobliging Bittern.



Ten Years on from Michael Seago's death

Peter Allard.

It does not seem like ten years ago that Michael Seago, the well known local bird watcher, author and conservationist passed from our ranks. On July 4th, I was invited to attend a family gathering at Berney Arms to mark the ten years following Michael's untimely death on July 9th 1999. Michael has a suitable plaque there alongside the RSPB information board which in itself is alongside the tall Berney windmill, one of Michael's many other interests besides ornithology. Michael's ashes are additionally scattered here in a very suitable marsh that contains many breeding waders in summer and attracts hordes of wildfowl in winter. Additionally, the largest of the viewable flooded marshes is now suitably named Seago's Flood and contains one of the largest winter gatherings of Pink-footed Geese in east Norfolk. Michael would have certainly enjoyed the thought of this.

As family members laid flowers from his garden in Thorpe, at least four Marsh Harriers were in sight close by and a Little Egret flew past as in a fly past salute to one of Norfolk's famed ornithologists. Afterwards, the family members and myself retreated to the Berney Arms tea room for refreshments followed by a short walk along the Breydon wall and around the reserve stopping at the screen hide to observe the increased numbers of Egyptian Geese using the area.

Since Michael's time, many changes have taken place in the birding scene around Breydon Water, his chosen favourite birding haunt since he began watching birds the early 1940's. Gone are the numerous small birds that were so much a regular sight along the walls and on the marshes. There used to be flights of Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Buntings and others in abundance, but these are all but a memory. Other birds like the Hooded Crow are also a memory, but what would Michael think of all the Little Egrets, Marsh Harriers, Avocets and other watery birds that have increased within the last ten years. He would certainly be smiling and pleased. Waders and wildfowl were his favourite birds and he would have loved to have seen the now increased Wigeon numbers using both Breydon Water and the Berney marshes in their thousands as well as the 15,000 or so Pink-footed Geese on the adjacent marshlands in winter. One hundred Little Egrets in a flock was unimaginable in Michael's time. I don't know what he would have made of this having only seen one or two on the estuary in his time.

Also, Michael was initially involved with others in setting up the Little Tern protection scheme on Yarmouth north beach and how proud he would have been to have known it has become Europe's largest colony of Little Terns with over 300 breeding pairs in summer. He would have been delighted to say the least.

It is very sad that Michael is not around to see all of this, but his memory lives on in many ways and somehow I feel he is still around caring for the birds he loved to watch in this corner of Norfolk he got so much enjoyment from.



Sir James Edward Smith – the other Norfolk scientist

Jit Thacker

“At the distance of Norwich you will be quite buried alive.”

We are overrun with anniversaries at the moment. It is Darwin's 200th birthday this year; the father of modern taxonomy - Carl Gustav Linnaeus - celebrated his 300th birthday in 2007. Nicely sandwiched in between these two august scientists is our own local hero Sir James Edward Smith, whose 250th birthday it is this year.

James Edward Smith was the eldest of seven children of James Smith, a wealthy textile merchant. Smith developed an unquenchable enthusiasm for botany at an early age. According to *The Worthies of Norwich* (1892), he ‘longed to possess the delicate blue flowers of the wild succory as a small child...’ At that time, Norfolk, and in particular Norwich, was a hotbed of botanical enthusiasm. Smith became one of half-a-dozen or so botanists in Norwich who were ‘among the first to study the writings and adopt the system of Linnaeus.’ Smith wanted to study botany formally but in 1771 was sent to Edinburgh University to study medicine instead under John Hope, who as luck would have it was a proponent of the Linnaean system. When Smith moved to London two years later to study anatomy, Hope gave him a letter of introduction to give to Joseph Banks, that great patron of science. At a breakfast together one day, Banks revealed that he had been offered Linnaeus' biological collection, but had refused it. He encouraged Smith to buy it himself. It would be no exaggeration to say that this was an extremely significant moment in the history of science in Britain.

The contribution of Linnaeus himself to botany and taxonomy (the naming and classification of living things) is immeasurable. His binomial (two name) system of describing plants and animals has been used ever since (familiar examples being *Homo sapiens*, people, and *Rattus rattus*, the black rat). His classification was the first attempt to apply structure to the bewildering array of wild things in the world. There were mistakes (like whales classified with fish), but Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* as his classification was called was the template for the biological classification scientists rely on today. The *Systema Naturae* was built upon a vast collection of plants and animals – and it was this, after its originator's death and that of his son, which had suddenly become available to buy. It was the foremost store of biological knowledge in the world at that time. and a vital contributor to British science, Sir James Edward Smith deserves to be remembered.



Smith was lucky in his negotiations for the Linnaean collection (or Linnaean Cabinet, as it was known). The executor of Linnaeus junior's will was determined to conclude negotiations with Smith before entertaining any other offers for the collection – those behind Smith in the queue including Catherine the Great of Russia. As luck would have it, Smith, by having first refusal, was certainly able to purchase the collection for a bargain price – although for what was still a vast some of money at the time.

In an excited letter to his father (who was funding the purchase), Smith listed the collection as including: 3198 species of insect, 1564 shells and another 200 “not arranged,” 2424 mineral specimens, including 108 of silver, 31 of gold, and 45 birds in glass cases. “Baron Alstromer is to have the small herbarium, and I am to give 900 guineas for the rest.” The collection set sail from Sweden on the 2nd of October, 1784, in 26 cases on *The Appearance* under Captain Axel Sweder. Smith remarked that the cases must themselves be vast, since the nearly 3000 books in the collection took up only 6 of the 26 cases.

At 1000 Guineas, the biological collection of Linnaeus was a steal. At least, King Gustavus III of Sweden thought so. Gustavus had been touring in Venice and France, and on his return to Sweden was incensed that the collection of Linnaeus had been sold to an outsider. The King even dispatched a ship to intercept the collection on its way to England, a chase immortalized in an etching by royal artist John Russel. But it was too late: by the end of October the collection was safely in store in a British customs house.

When his friend and colleague the Bishop of Carlisle, Rev. Samuel Goodenough, heard of Smith's purchase, he wrote: “Your noble purchase of the Linnaean Cabinet most decidedly sets Britain above all other nations in the Botanical Empire; and it were much to be wished that the studies of individuals with respect to the science at large would become so animated, that she might be induced to *fix* her seat among us.” His words were an accurate assessment of the importance of possibly the greatest collection of natural history in the world at that time. With the collection as its cornerstone, Smith founded the Linnean Society, which is still the foremost society of taxonomists in the world. Smith's personal contribution was impressive. He described numerous new plants from Britain, Greece, America and around the world, as well as insects and lichens.

Smith was later also elected to the Royal Society “without a single black ball,” and had the honour of instructing the queen (Charlotte, wife of George III) and the royal princesses – although Smith's ‘warm admiration’ for Rousseau



(whose ideas may have influenced the French Revolution) “scandalized her Majesty too irrecoverably, and he was dismissed from this occupation.” It is not known whether Smith shared Rousseau’s politics – he probably admired the French philosopher’s work in other fields. Despite the scandal of his dismissal, Smith was knighted in 1814.

When Samuel Goodenough heard that Smith was leaving Soho Square to return to Norfolk, he immediately rode over to try and prevail upon him to stay in London. Goodenough was too late – Smith had already packed and gone. As Goodenough wrote to Smith: “Directly I began grieving for you and the Linnaean Society. At the distance of Norwich you will be quite buried alive.” But as Lady Smith commented in her collection of her husband’s letters, “In the city of Norwich he found himself among those who knew and esteemed him.”

The Linnaean collection came to Norwich with Smith, where it resided for the next 30 years until Smith’s death in 1828, when Lady Smith sold it to the Linnaean Society for £3150, a purchase that left the society in debt for many years. More than 200 years after its purchase, the Linnaean collection is still a vital resource for modern taxonomists.

It is arguable that no greater scientist has his home in Norfolk. But what is Smith’s legacy? There is a brass plaque in St. Peter Mancroft dedicated to him and his wife; his house (29 Surrey Street) has a small plaque informing passers-by that he lived there. And that is all. Not for Smith the immortality of bronze that Sir Thomas Browne enjoys. A fascinating man, a real Norfolk hero

“He found the science of botany, when he approached it, locked up in a dead language; -he set it free by transfusing it into his own. He found it a severe study, fitted only for the recluse; -he left it of easy acquisition to all. In the hands of his predecessors, with the exception of his immortal master, it was dry, technical and scholastic; -in his, it was adorned with grace and elegance, and might attract the poet as well as the philosopher.” - from Obituary in Philosophical Magazine, May 1828.

250th Anniversary Event at the Norwich Castle Museum

Dr. Sandra Knapp of the Natural History Museum, London, will give an illustrated talk in the auditorium at 2pm, Saturday 5th December, on the importance to today’s science of collections such as that which Smith brought to the Linnaean Society. There is a charge of £5 and booking is required - Please ring 01603 495897 for further information.



iSpot – a wildlife website looking for new naturalists

iSpot is a new website designed to bring people with an interest in nature together. Billed as ‘your place to share nature’, iSpot draws inspiration from the success of ‘social networking’ websites such as Facebook to provide a forum for people of all ages to share observations and experiences.

Created by the Open University and funded by OPAL (Open Air Laboratories) iSpot was originally conceived as an educational resource to assist with biological identification. Users can post observations; pictures or descriptions of things they’ve seen and others can respond – suggesting identifications or providing information. Albums of observations can be created, tagged and searched and sightings are linked with locations provided by Google Maps. The website is designed to be simple to use but with some powerful underpinning features that can be expanded as the project develops.

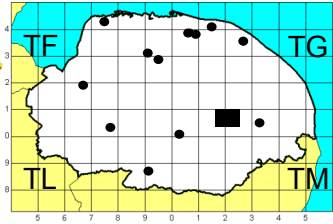
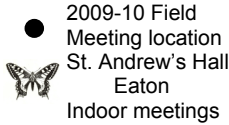
Whilst many groups cannot be readily identified to species level without a specimen, it is hoped that iSpot will become a useful biological recording tool in the future. Links with the NBN (National Biodiversity Network) species dictionaries and distribution maps will help to identify unusual records worthy of further investigation and information from iSpot can be exported to other organisations for recording or survey purposes. This will also be linked with the OU’s ‘Bayesian Keys’ project – aimed at applying computing power to traditional identification keys so they can be accessed rapidly in the field via handheld devices.

The success or otherwise of iSpot will ultimately be decided by whether or not it is able to deliver useful information to its users – be it assistance with an observation by a novice or an interesting new record for a biological recorder. To this end iSpot is appealing for new users – whatever their background or experience, to become involved with the new community. So log on to www.ispot.org.uk and have a go!



*Rob Coleman
Biodiversity Mentor
East of England*





Southrepps Common

NNNS and Research Committee Excursion- Sunday 2nd August 2009

On a pleasant Sunday morning a select number of members of the Society met at Southrepps Common to explore its various parts and record certain groups of species. After a brief introduction to the different habitats on the Common, one group decided to explore the SSSI – stopping to search for the tiny Dioecious Sedge, (*Carex dioica*), Fragrant Orchid, (*Gymnadenia conopsea*), only just still in flower and the newly emerging flowers of Grass of Parnassus, (*Parnassia palustris*), among the Eyebright. Bypassing the massed seed heads of the parasitic Marsh Lousewort, (*Pedicularis palustris*), the group crossed Fox Beck to look for Adder's-tongue, (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), and Tawny Sedge (*Carex hostiana*). The latter was almost over, so very hard to find, as was the Adder's-tongue. This unlikely looking fern tends to masquerade as the leaves of the abundant Marsh Valerian (*Valeriana dioica*) and was only found by virtually standing on it! Slightly easier to find were the fruiting heads of Saltmarsh Rush (*Juncus gerardii*), a plant usually found closer to the coast and sometimes mistaken for Round-fruited Rush, (*Juncus compressus*), when inland.

Bob Ellis, meanwhile, was busy counting the spikes of Tubular Water-dropwort, (*Oenanthe fistulosa*), for the threatened plant project. This plant (among 15 other still extant plant species) has been known from the Common since the Reverend E.F. Linton recorded it there in 1886. After avoiding the three young and one adult Common Lizard, (*Lacerta vivipara*), which were basking on the boardwalk, the group returned to the others for lunch.

They had been busy. Despite early August being a relatively quiet time for spiders and the orb-web spiders not usually maturing until a few weeks later, Pip Collyer had seen a number of immature *Araneus quadratus* and *Larinioides cornutus*. It was not just young Common Lizards that were occupying the boardwalk, but numerous immature wolf spiders as well. On the basis of an earlier visit to the site these were most probably *Pardosa prativaga*. Amongst the mature spiders, Pip had found the crab spider *Tibellus oblongus* and the so-called buzzing spider, *Anyphaena accentuata*. On a previous visit in June the nationally scarce Linyphiid (money spider) *Entelecara omissa* had been seen, but not this time.

The spider's prey – insects were been looked at by Francis Farrow – who visited Southrepps and School Commons during the morning. On Southrepps Common



a Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* was noted as well as the scarce hoverfly, *Volucella inanis*. The umbellifers provided a good 'table' for a number of striking hoverflies, which included the common drone flies, *Eristalis tenax* and *E. pertinax* but also the large *Sericomyia silentis*, which was also present on School Common along with *Chrysotoxum bicinctum*. Other hoverflies found on Southrepps were *Scaeva pyrastris* and *Helophilus hybridus*. A male parasitic Tachinid fly, *Phasia hemiptera* was present necturing on flowers on School Common. The female lays eggs directly into Shieldbugs, which become a host for its young. The iridescent green frog hopper *Cicadella viridis* was found in good numbers on the margin of Southrepps Common. Twelve species of butterfly were also recorded.

After lunch, an intrepid few carried on recording and ventured further afield. As the flowering plants on the Common have been well documented in the past, two members decided to record plants in the tetrad covering Lower Southrepps and Gimingham, with particular emphasis on plants, growing on arable margins. The first interesting find was the thalloid liverwort, *Reboulia hemisphaerica*, a few thalli, with their purple edges, clinging onto a steep roadside bank. Hiding in another, steeper hedge bank was a large population of Soft Shield Fern, (*Polysticum setiferum*) and later on along a track, some flowering Hawkweed, (*Hieracium umbellatum*).

The arable edges, however, were a bit disappointing. It was good to see Long-headed Poppy, (*Papaver dubium* ssp. *dubium*), growing with Green Nightshade, (*Solanum physalifolium*), and Bugloss, (*Anchusa arvensis*). This Poppy was very scarce last year, may be as a result of the unseasonable weather. The day ended, however, on a high, with the last arable field, containing two plants of the pink-flowered Weasel's-snout, (*Misopates orontium*). It was worth a late finish!

Meanwhile Doreen Wells had combed Southrepps Common and other smaller outlying commons for ants. School Common appeared empty until the western road boundary was reached. Two *Lasius niger* dealate (mated & wingless) queens were observed on Mill Common. One was injured and the other was digging into sandy soil to create a new nest. The most surprising number of nests, however, was found not on the commons, but in the grounds of Gunton Station - a fairly secluded and undisturbed environment. Here there were very large *L. flavus* anthills and several *M. scabrinodis* nests. In all a total of 5 species of ants were recorded: *Formica fusca*, *Lasius flavus*, *Lasius niger*, *Myrmica rubra* and *Myrmica scabrinodis*.

Although not plentiful, there were dragonflies on the commons as well. Southern Hawker (*Aeshna cyanea*) was recorded at Southrepps Common, School Common, Bradfield Road and Pit Common Pond. The latter also had Azure Damselflies (*Coenagrion puella*).

In all it was a varied and interesting day's recording and our thanks go to the trustees of Southrepps Common for allowing us to record there. *Mary Ghullam*



Titchwell and Snettisham R.S.P.B. Reserves



Thursday 20th August 2009

Despite a not entirely encouraging weather forecast, and two participants experiencing delays on the journey, we explored and enjoyed both reserves. My choice of those reserves was determined primarily by factors they have in common. Both are coastal and are partially man made. In addition both give an excellent opportunity to show the relationship between the factors determining an environment, and the interactions between it and its wildlife. Our small group had between them a range of knowledge, and enough pairs of eyes and ears, to yield a very pleasant experience. By mid August, the passage of birds returning from their breeding grounds, plus their offspring, makes for excellent encounters both in range of species and the numbers involved. This does however create additional recognition problems, with large numbers in juvenile plumage; plus the fact that quite a number of male ducks are still in 'eclipse' plumage. I will now look at two significant aspects of the encountered habitat and its wildlife.

Very obvious at Snettisham is the abundance of feeding birds, mainly waders and wildfowl. As the tide rises and the flocks leave the inundated mudflats, their numbers bear testimony to the variety and quantity of food to be found in what, at first glance, appears to be an expanse of mud. The importance of the Wash as a habitat cannot be overstated and the numbers and range of birds to be encountered there makes an autumn spring tide visit to say the least memorable.

Equally obvious at Snettisham is the combination of beach and salt marsh, plus the handiwork of man. The result is a distinctive pattern of vegetation, ponds, and beach, as a contrast to the salt and brackish marsh of the coast at Titchwell. Experiencing these two reserves together, they combine to give a clear picture of the delicate and highly interactive factors that create habitats. Interestingly when the R.S.P.B. purchased Titchwell they were criticized for the fact that they modified the habitat there substantially to create a greater variety than just dune and salt marsh, and the exceptional popularity of this reserve suggests that the management of the reserve was, in fact, successful. Unfortunately the whole of that area is now threatened by climate change and so this reserve (like most coastal lowlands) is endangered. This means that at present, as a result of work currently being undertaken, most of the lagoons are largely devoid of water, the main hide has gone, and the numbers of birds there are much reduced. This is a dramatic reminder of the threat to Norfolk's coastal habitats, and of the considerable amount of thought and expenditure needed if we are to succeed in overcoming the complex problems produced, or at least, contributed to, by our own species impacting on the natural world.

Barrie Sullivan





The next issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' will be February 2010. Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by

January 7th 2009 to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,
Norfolk, NR26 8QD Email: francis.f@virgin.net

Please send all photographic material to:
Simon Harrap, 1 Norwich Road, Edgefield,
Melton Constable, Norfolk, NR22 2RP Email: harrap@onetel.net

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.

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

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

New memberships should be sent to:

- David Paull, 8 Lindford Drive, Eaton, Norwich, NR4 6LT.

Current rates are £12 for individual and family memberships (£15 for groups, £18.50 overseas).

Cheques payable to: Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.

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