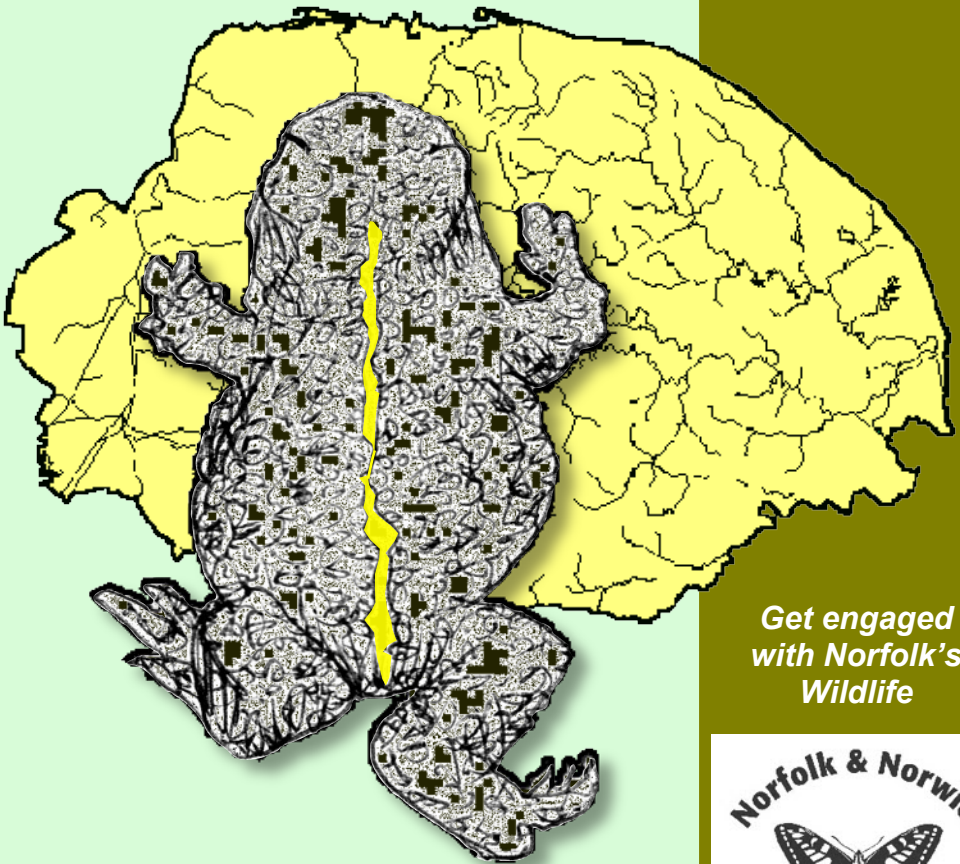


The Norfolk

AUTUMN 2011  
Number 114

# *Natterjack*



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

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

Welcome to a bumper edition of The Norfolk Natterjack, which appears to be mainly concentrating on a series of articles on birds and plants, with the exception of one note on a mammal. In addition there are three comprehensive excursion reports and a chance to help with urban fringe nature around Kings Lynn with the Gaywood Valley Project. Also as the nights grow longer the Geological Society of Norfolk has a series of lectures that may be of interest to some members. (see page 17).

My thanks to all the contributors, to our illustrators and those of you that have sent in photos for Nats Gallery. If you feel you have an observation or picture to share please send it along - see inside back cover for details

**FF**

## Two Stately Plants

*Tony Howes*



Roadside verges are often very good places to find flowering plants, one such is the Southern bypass near Norwich. In the spring vast swathes of Cowslips cover the banks like a yellow carpet, now in June and July another yellow flowered plant catches the eye, the tall, elegant Hoary Mullein (*Verbascum pulverulentum*). It stands out proudly, towering above lesser blooms, it's brilliant yellow flowers glowing like beacons on the steep slopes, a fine plant indeed.

The second of these stately plants was seen in June on a visit to the 'Devil's Ditch' near Newmarket, several Lizard Orchids (*Orchis hircina*) were growing on the grassy slopes. This was my first ever sighting of these strange but intriguing plants, one could see how they acquired their common name, as they certainly look a little like a host of lizards hanging from the main stem. This plant was reputedly first recorded by Thomas Johnson in 1641 "Nigh the highway between Crayford and Dartford in Kent". Standing up to 20 inches or so high, they certainly catch the eye, unfortunately also the nose, as they smell of billy goat. Despite the rain and wind I managed a few photographs to record what was, for me, a special new plant.

*(See also the Excursion Report for Devil's Dyke on page 21)*

# Only a rose I bring you

Laurie Hall

In the previous issue of *Natterjack* I outlined the occurrence of one of the two genera that were particularly well represented in Felthorpe. In this article I shall outline the records of the other genus so represented, *Rosa*, comprising the roses. As before, I shall list a verifier in many cases and N refers to the number of occurrences in East or West Norfolk in The Flora of Norfolk. As to the verifiers, as before ALB is Alec Bull, RWE is Bob Ellis, AP is the Rev. Dr. A Primavesi, previous national referee for the genus *Rosa* (and now unfortunately deceased) and RM is Mr. Roger Maskew, current national referee for the genus. Again as before, species or hybrids are listed in order of discovery with some eight full species and four hybrids recorded.

1997 *Rosa canina* (Dog Rose) found widely in the village.

2002 *R. x toddiae* (*R. canina* x *R. micrantha*) (ref.AP) (N EN=0, WN=0) in a road hedge.

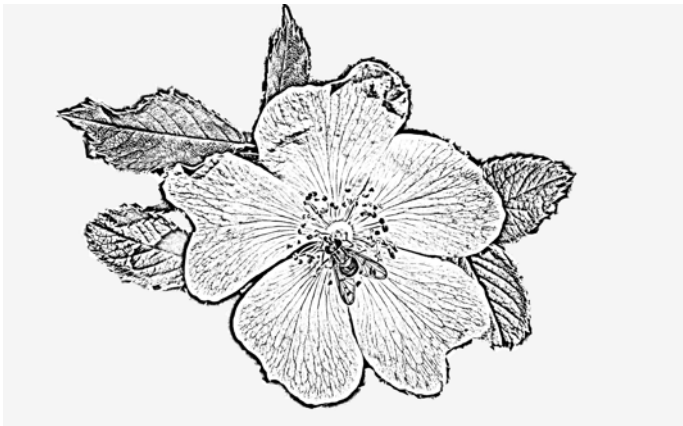
*R. x dumetorum* (*R. canina* x *R. obtusifolia*) (ref. AP) (N EN=2, WN=1) in a lane hedge.

2003 *R. obtusifolia* (Round-leaved Dog Rose) (refs. AP and RM) (N EN=0, WN=3) in a lane hedge.

*R. luciae* (Memorial Rose) (ref. AP) (N EN=0, WN=0) in a farm hedge having escaped from a plant near a barn.

*R. rubiginosa* (Sweetbriar) (ref. AP) in three separate hedges.

*R. rugosa* (Japanese Rose) on a verge having escaped from a cottage in a lane.



2005 *R. micrantha* (Small-flowered Sweetbriar) (ref.RM) The first plant of this species to be confirmed by a referee for East Norfolk and subsequently found in four hedges.

*R. caesia caesia* (Hairy Northern Dog Rose) (ref. RM) Only recorded in the county in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century at Sprowston. Although confirming the plants, the referee is unhappy that this rose is native in the county. Two plants found in a farm road hedge in the village.

*R. x andegavensis* (*R. canina* x *R. stylosa*) (ref.RM) Confirmed by the referee as this hybrid, though probably not an F1. hybrid. In a farm hedge in a lane. Not in the Flora for East Norfolk nor recorded by the recorder for that vice-county, but with one E. Norfolk record shown in the BSBI rose handbook (joint author AP.)

2008 *R. multiflora* (Many-flowered Rose) (ref.RM and RWE) (N EN=2, WN=2) In a hedge in an ancient meadow.

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## Broomrape

*Peter Moore*



Paul Banham (*Norfolk Natterjack* No. 113) rightly points out the interest of the Wells sea wall, but concentrates on the marine life. The terrestrial botanical interest of the wall has long been recognised, but this year has been enhanced by the spring drought, which has led to a profusion of deep-rooted flowering plants at the expense of grasses and smaller herbs. Particularly apparent this year is the parasitic Common Broomrape (*Orobanche minor*), which has evidently avoided water stress by relying on the root systems of its hosts. One very robust individual (seen in the pictures) gave me particular cause for concern because it strongly resembles the rare Thistle Broomrape (*Orobanche reticulata*), which is restricted to Yorkshire in its British distribution. The most obvious indication in this direction is the host species, the Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*), which is a regular host of the Thistle Broomrape but, as far as I have been able to ascertain from the literature, has not been recorded as a host species for the common broomrape. It is also very robust in stature for the common broomrape and has a very dense inflorescence. But on close examination, it lacks the dark glands on the upper lip of the corolla, so it does indeed belong to the commoner species. Its occurrence as a parasite of a thistle, however, seems to be a rare, possibly unique, and certainly confusing event! Perhaps the drought has caused it to exploit a species that is able to remain productive even under water stress.

# Norfolk Willowherbs

Simon Harrap



Willowherbs are easy to ignore. True, Great and Rosebay Willowherbs are tall, showy plants that demand attention, but the rest are much less conspicuous and worse, tainted with the spectre of 'hybridisation', a spectre that causes most botanists to throw up their hands in despair. I do not have that option. I am working on a photographic field guide to British wild flowers and have to find and photograph all the willowherbs, AND be sure that I am photographing the right thing, AND be able to write some coherent text. In fact, this is just the kind of challenge that I enjoy, and I have even come to like them!

Nine species of the genus *Epilobium* have been recorded in Norfolk, and seven of these are widespread in the county. Their seeds have a parachute of fluff and are spread far and wide by the wind. They can be found wherever there is bare ground for seeds to germinate, although each species does have its own subtle habitat preferences. Willowherb identification requires careful examination of the shape of the stigma (either club- or cross-shaped), the presence and type of hairs on the stem, leaves and flowers (hand lens essential), and the shape of the leaves and stems.

## **Great Willowherb** *Epilobium hirsutum*

One of the commonest willowherbs, tall and easily identified by the combination of a cross-shaped stigma, dense soft hairs on the stem and leaves, large purplish-pink flowers and subtly clasping leaf-bases. Its old name, 'Codlins-and-Cream', may refer to the flowers, which are said to smell of cooked apples (codlins is an old word for apples, either cooking or unripe), but I have not been able to detect this (has anyone?). It is found in a variety of damp places, but also on drier sites.

## **Hoary Willowherb** *Epilobium parviflorum*

A smaller and slenderer version of Great Willowherb, sharing its four-lobed stigma and dense covering of soft hairs, but separated by its smaller, paler flowers, with the petals 5-9 mm long (rather than 10–16 mm), and stalkless or very short staked leaves that do not clasp the stem. This species seems quite variable in its general appearance: some appear greyish or even reddish overall. The one catch is the four-lobed stigma, because the lobes are usually held erect and may be so sticky and pollen-covered that the stigma appears club-shaped. It is similarly found in both wet and dry habitats, and is more likely to be a garden weed than Great Willowherb.

## **Broad-leaved Willowherb** *Epilobium montanum*

One of the commonest willowherbs, identified by the combination of a 4-lobed stigma, sparsely hairy stem, and leaves that have a rounded base that contracts abruptly into a 1-6 mm long stalk - this is most obvious on the lower leaves. Look for it in slightly shady places.

### **Spear-leaved Willowherb** *Epilobium lanceolatum*

A rare plant in Norfolk, being most at home in SW England and South Wales. Look for it in churchyards, gardens and plant nurseries - it may be imported into the county in plant pots. Rather like Broad-leaved Willowherb, with a four-lobed stigma, but the leaves are narrowly oval and all of the leaves taper at the base into a relatively long stalk (3-10 mm long), while the flowers are white when first open, ageing to dark pink.

### **Pale Willowherb** *Epilobium roseum*

Another rare plant in Norfolk as we are on the northern edge of its British range. Identified by the combination of a club-shaped stigma, erect gland-tipped hairs on the upper stem, flowers and young capsules, and toothed, broadly oval (almost egg-shaped) leaves that tapering to a pointed tip at one end and a 3-20 mm long stalk at the base. Flowers small and very pale pink (whitish in bud). This is another species that may be found in churchyards and other damp, often shaded places.

### **Marsh Willowherb** *Epilobium palustre*

A rather slender, small-flowered willowherb of damp, usually acid, marshy habitats. Identified by the combination of a club-shaped stigma, round stem, lacking raised ridges, rather sparse erect gland-tipped hairs on the upper stem, flowers and young capsules, short leaf stalks and more or less untoothed leaves that are rather narrow (4-10 mm wide).

### **American Willowherb** *Epilobium ciliatum*

Introduced from North America, it was first recorded in Britain in 1891 and spread rapidly from c. 1930, being first noted in Norfolk in 1952. It is now amongst the commonest aliens and indeed is one of the commonest willowherbs, especially in urban areas. Identified by the combination of a club-shaped stigma, hairless leaves but numerous erect gland-tipped hairs on the upper stem, flowers and young capsules, and short leaf stalks. The flowers are sometimes white.

### **Square-stalked Willowherb** *Epilobium tetragonum*

A common willowherb, identified by the combination of a club-shaped stigma, four raised ridges on the stem (most obvious towards the base), relatively narrow, shiny green hairless leaves that are stalkless with their bases running into the stem ridges, and complete absence of erect glandular hairs, although the stem, flowers and young capsules have a more or less dense covering of flattened hairs.

### **Short-fruited Willowherb** *Epilobium obscurum*

Easily overlooked. Identified by the combination of a club-shaped stigma and dull green, hairless, more or less stalkless leaves (the lowest may have a very short stalk). The stem, flowers and young capsules have a dense covering of flattened hairs, and there are a few erect glandular hairs on the calyx and sometimes also on

the capsule. The glandular hairs on this species can be hard to see as the oil-glands at their tips are very small, and I find that I need a 20x dissecting microscope to be sure of them, and to confirm their absence in Square-stalked Willowherb. The capsule is relatively short, at 40-60 mm long (extremes 30-65 mm), and the stem is more or less rounded (especially at the base) with 2-4 raised ridges, at least towards the tip.

Late summer is the time to look for them, and I would be pleased to receive any comments on the above text, while the county recorders (and I) would no doubt be pleased to receive any records of Spear-leaved or Pale Willowherbs.

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## **Waveney Forest rises like a phoenix from the ashes!**

*Tim Gardiner*

The ongoing fight to save Waveney Forest in East Norfolk from the dangers of gravel extraction appears to be being won, thanks to the sterling efforts of amateur naturalists, the Fritton Action Group (FAR), and the general public who have registered their protest through an online petition (more than 20,000 signatures). Interestingly, Norfolk County Council have twice listed the Forest as surplus to requirements as far as gravel extraction is concerned (rejecting the most recent proposals in early April 2011), hopefully meaning that it will not now be included in the revised allocation of sites required to meet the future aggregate needs of the county.

My interest in the Forest in recent years has been heightened by the threat of gravel extraction, particularly as it was a childhood haunt of mine. As a professional ecologist I thought that the most useful way I could contribute to its preservation was to document the wildlife found there to ensure that it would be impossible for the planners to ignore its natural history value. Being an entomologist, I naturally chose to study insects, bringing together my observations (but also those of others) of butterflies, dragonflies and grasshoppers in two articles on the Forest (Gardiner 2008; 2010). The total of 26 butterfly species for the Forest is extremely notable, while the list of 12 grasshopper/cricket species is also good due to the dry and wet heathland that remains in the non-wooded parts of the otherwise dark and shady conifer plantation. With this in mind, I visited the Forest on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May 2011 to see how it was faring. I had heard that a 20 acre area (approximately 8 hectares in new money) had been felled during the winter of 2010/11 to harvest the timber, so was interested to see how the wildlife may respond to this opening up of the canopy.

I was pleasantly surprised to see that in the felled plot, the flora was responding quite nicely, with small patches of Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) and plenty of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) fronds appearing

to like the warm and sunny conditions produced by the clear felling of such a large swathe of conifers. It appears that seeds of some of the original heathland plants (as the Forest was planted on the heathland of Fritton Warren in the 1950s) can persist in the seedbank for several decades, biding their time, waiting for the sunlight to flood in to initiate germination. No doubt the heavy forestry machinery used churned up the soil also causing germination of the long dormant seeds of heathland plants. Apparently, heather seed can lie dormant in the soil for at least 60 years. Therefore, this tree felling, far from having a devastating impact on the ecology of the site, may actually be a good method of encouraging the original heathland flora to re-establish.

The second reason why the felling may have a positive impact comes from observations of heathland insects in the felled area. I watched with interest a Green Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela campestris*) scamper along the bare earth among felled conifer stumps. I had seen this beetle in 2009 on the heathland under the pylons directly to the north of the felled area, so it appears to have immediately colonised the devastation, perhaps because its stated habitat preference is for unvegetated ground at an early stage of succession. Also on the northern edge of the felled area, I found late instar nymphs of the localised Mottled Grasshopper (*Myrmeleotettix maculatus*), an insect of habitats with a large amount of bare ground. It appears to be venturing into the felled area due to the warm and sunny conditions favourable for basking and egg-laying. I had seen it in 2010 on the dry heathland under the pylons; however, much of its preferred open ground habitat is being lost due to the encroachment of birch and oak trees. The felling of the conifers has created an area of sparsely vegetated ground for it to spread into as its former habitat under the pylons disappears due to unmanaged encroachment of trees. Unwittingly, the felling of the conifers may have given the mottled grasshopper a stay of execution in the Forest!

On the southern edge of the felled area, a small patch of conifers and heather was damaged in a fire on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2011, with the scarred trees and ground being very evident on my visits. Given that a high proportion of not green (often black) forms of the Mottled Grasshopper appeared on the black scorched earth present after a fire at Kelling Heath in the previous year (Owens 2010), an interesting comparison could be made at Waveney Forest. Initial results from a survey of late instar (3-4) Mottled Grasshopper nymphs on the 30<sup>th</sup> May in the Forest showed that in areas damaged by the fire (e.g. scorched earth and ground covered in dark-grey ash away from the blaze), 94.7% of nymphs (total counted = 19) had no green colouration on them, whereas, in the greener unburnt heather (c. 50 m distant) under the pylons, only 16.7% had no green (total counted = 12). This indicates that there has been immediate colonisation of scorched and ash covered ground by darkly coloured late instar nymphs and not the green forms which have

remained in the unburnt heathland under the pylons. Therefore, I believe that the black/mottled forms in a population may be attracted to the dark earth of the fire sites, being at a substantial advantage in this habitat than lighter coloured forms (with green on them) which may be more easily picked off by avian predators.

Other insects recorded in the felled area included late instar nymphs of the Common Green Grasshopper (*Omocestus viridulus*) in Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) tussocks on the northern edge bordering the pylons. It seems that clear felling may encourage the growth of purple moor-grass in the damper locations, ensuring that this grasshopper, which is rare in East Norfolk, can move into the previously wooded ground. It too is threatened by tree encroachment underneath the pylons so will be favoured by the re-establishment of heathland flora due to extensive tree felling. While observing grasshoppers in the felled plot on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, I also saw a Small Heath butterfly (*Coenonympha pamphilus*), the first sighting for the Forest.

So it really does seem that the ‘apparent’ devastation of clear felling and a fire may allow the insects of the Forest to rise from the ashes. Given the new lease of life for the heathland flora and insect fauna of the Forest by the creation of an 8 hectare area of re-establishing vegetation and bare ground, it seems a little concerning that proposals to replant the felled plot are being considered by the landowner. I suggest that it would be better to retain at least some open areas during any replanting scheme to ensure that the re-establishing heathland flora and fauna benefits in the long-term from the felling and creation of open habitat so desperately lacking under the shady pine canopy. Perhaps the landowner could be persuaded to leave wide rides (at least 10 m without trees on either side of paths) unplanted along the paths that run along the edge and through the middle of the felled area. This would establish a system of heathy rides similar to those currently being lost to tree encroachment under the pylons. There really needs to be an appreciation that the Forest, although noted for its peaceful woodland walks in the deep shade of the conifers, is about more than tree planting, with the heathland wildlife in desperate need of conservation. The future of the Forest, if it survives the threat of gravel extraction, should be about finding a balance between maintaining woodland and open heathland habitats. Perhaps a suitable strapline for its conservation in the International Year of Forests should be 'Let there be light!'

## References

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Owens N. (2010) The chameleon grasshopper. *The Norfolk Natterjack* 111: 10-12.

## A Summer's day at Wheatfen

*Nick Emsley*

Having an interest in the study and recording of some of the abundant wildlife of the Ted Ellis Trust nature reserve, it was proposed by members of the Wheatfen Partnership that the Water Boatmen group, along with Whirligig Beetles, needed to be re-recorded.

So it was on a rather overcast mid-June morning that Tim Kemp and I launched 'Little Ted' onto Home Dyke. As soon as we entered Fen Channel we were greeted by an abundance of flowering Yellow Water-lily which in places was so dense that paddling became quite difficult. We soon realised that trying to take notes, photograph interesting specimens and steer in the right direction are skills we need to improve upon.

Red-eyed Damselflies alighted upon the floating leaves and, on our approach, skimmed the water's surface to another resting place. A Grey Heron glided close-by and an iridescent Kingfisher zipped across the dense vegetation.

Further along, there was a small island measuring about 6 feet in circumference. The distinctive leaves of Marsh Sow-thistle stood proudly in the centre. On one side there was the impressive Cowbane, along with several flower heads of Great Yellow-cress showing well on the other. A single Himalayan Balsam had taken a hold close by. This triggered us to seek advice as to the possible control management of such a plant before it becomes invasive to the waterways of the reserve. Pushing on, having passed the footprints of an Otter, we came across a likely patch of water lily to search for our quarry. On the underside of one of the lily leaves, our attention centred on a dark area. Having gathered up our specimen we headed back to base for lunch, passing two Grass Snakes basking on the warmth of some litter piles.

Using a microscope, we viewed a 2 square inch piece of the leaf, where an animated world revealed itself. The majority of the dark patch was a colony of moss animals, which filter the water in the same way as corals on a reef in the tropics. Nearby, the larva of, possibly, an aquatic moth was grazing, whilst sheltering amidst a woven lining of plant material. Its' pulsating green and red striped body with gold rings would every now and then emerge a short way out of its' home.

Even though there was no sign of any Whirligig Beetles, and Water Boatmen still appeared to be in their nymph stage, we discovered forms of life that we were not aware of.

Oh well, until next time....



# Strumpshaw Diary

*Brian Macfarlane*



Half way through the year already. It seems a distant memory since the water was frozen for weeks on end, and winter seemed an eternity. Then the weather changed to warm sunny days, and all the flowers suddenly flowered at once! The overlay of early and spring flowers was most noticeable.

The bird numbers seem to get less as the years go by. Five years ago the water in front of the Fenn hide was awash with birds at 6am, and if you arrived later they had moved on. Nowadays you can get there at 8am, and still there is only the odd Coot, Moorhen and a couple of Greylag Geese. Once in a while you get some excitement ( I'm easily pleased ) when three Swans swim into view and one male will attack the paired male and try and chase him away. It appears that walking round the reserve one can observe more activity.

Recently after spending three hours in the hide I decided to take a walk. On arriving at the junction of the main sandy path, three young foxes were romping on the path a mere 20 yards away. The three immediately disappeared over the small fence alongside the path, but one turned round and decided to have a conversation. (see photo) Then to my amazement it leapt back over the fence and ran towards me until it was too close to focus with my camera! It did not take long to realise that I was not one of his clan and made a run for it. A magic moment!

I walked on to the Tower hide where there is usually a little more action. 'For me that is the name of the game.' My camera needs to be firing often otherwise the shutter might seize up. I like to see lots of movement. ( It's my one weakness. )

I saw my first Little Egret of the year, and nearby a Lapwing was parading it's four chicks feeding on the water line. The sunlight on the back of a Lapwing is wonderful. A bird often overlooked as fairly drab. Probably one of more colourful in the right light. There was a pair of Canada Geese swimming with what looked like a hybrid Barnacle Goose. They stayed very close all the time I was there.

On the way back from the Tower hide I suddenly spotted a Chinese Water Deer walking down a path to my left. I kept hidden and then took a few shots, and hearing the shutter clicking it melted into the reeds. There have not been so many about this year, and it could be the hard winter took its toll.

Swallowtail butterflies were on the wing earlier this year than in previous years as I recall, and are still flying as I write this in late June. I have just come back from two weeks holiday so I need to get back in the groove again.

## **Observations at Cley**

I occasionally visit Cley for a change from Strumpshaw, and I am not usually dis-

appointed. There always seems to be much more bird movement. I saw my first Spoonbill fly over since last year. A Spotted Redshank was swallowing a minnow among the short reeds. A Stoat was seen from the Daulk hide running along the bank straight into some snoozing mallard ducks. Well! can those birds shift when surprised like that. It was nought to 30mph in 2 seconds, even a Ferrari car would be hard pressed to match them over a short distance. Needless to say on this occasion the Stoat carried on regardless. There were a few Black-tailed Godwits about, Avocets disputing their territory. The Marsh Harriers seem to keep their distance, and makes it frustrating to get any decent shots. I spent some time in the Bishop hide, and had a Snipe feeding for some time in front of me. A wonderful example of camouflage. Well I feel I will have to ration my visits to other reserves like Cley if the petrol keeps getting dearer. Still wherever it is, there is always something to enjoy in nature.

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## **Dunkin' Dunnock**

*Sylvia Fairhead*



I spotted one of the Dunnocks in my garden attempting to get into a small red dish of water that is used for bird's drinking water. It hopped in and out several times before I realised what it was trying to do. The dish was obviously not big enough and it flew off. I then quickly went out and replaced the little dish for a larger one filled with fresh water. The bird must have been watching as I had hardly got back indoors than it was back, straight in – without any hesitation. This time it was really enjoying its bath. I quickly got my camera and fired away. (See Nats' Gallery for all the action!).

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## **'White' Dove**

*Cherry and Francis Farrow*



This summer our garden has been blessed with a beautiful Collared Dove that has 'white' plumage rather than the usual greyish-fawn with a pinkish flush. It has paired up with a normal coloured bird and has attempted to nest behind a neighbour's satellite dish twice but so far appears to have been unsuccessful. They may be a young 'couple' as their nest building skills are a bit wanting. The 'white' colouration is not dramatic and as it still has the black collar it is not an albino. The term for these light coloured birds is leucistic, an unusual condition whereby a genetic mutation prevents the pigmentation cells to develop properly. Usually this means melanin (a dark pigment) has not been deposited properly within the bird's feathers. The degree of leucism will vary depending on the bird's genetic makeup and a more common form is often seen in Blackbirds, which have white patches or sections of leucistic feathers. These birds are often termed pied or piebald. If our dove's manage to have young it will be interesting to see if any are leucistic in any way.

## The Birds Have Flown

*Ian Johnson*

After more than 20 years in Binham we decided to “downsize,” before it was too late to face the trauma of flying the coop. Our previous house was only two miles from the coast, with a greater chance of migrant birds. Since July 2010 we are ten miles inland, on the edge of Stibbard village and farmland. At Binham we were pleased with our list of 102 species, but that took 20 plus years and we never hoped for a good list after the move. Many birders keep a list of their garden bird species, but only purists insist that the bird must be seen actually in the garden. For us a flyover counts and even birds seen at long range, but it must be a certain ID. We have our standards!

Our new house is smaller and more convenient but the garden is nearly half an acre and needed a lot of work before we could relax and enjoy our new surroundings. First on the new list was a resident pair of Moorhens, which spend most of the day grazing on the lawn and gleaning underneath our bird seed feeders. They drink and bathe regularly in our bird baths but, if disturbed, they fly or clamber to the top of our high cypress hedges, where they also roost overnight.

We knew Moorhens wander far from water and that they clamber around in trees, but this pair have been here for years. Just like us, it is where they live. They have to compete for the seed with Collared Doves, Wood Pigeons and a cock Pheasant from the adjacent farmland, which also use the bird baths. Water for drinking and bathing is as vital for garden birds as food and cover. Our bird baths attract an increasing list of birds, just like the feeders.

However, many species are just flyovers, some unidentified, like a group of mid-sized waders and the noisy parakeets that were too small to be ring-necked. Every day we see flocks of the local Rooks and Jackdaws, as well as gulls commuting daily from and to the coast, Common Buzzards often soar and mew overhead, as many as four at a time; great, when they were once so rare in Norfolk. In winter there are small flocks of Redwings and Fieldfares, as well as occasional Pink-footed Geese. In summer there are Hobbies. So, the list grows steadily and has reached 66 at the time of writing, even before the first year was out.

“Time to stand and stare” is the answer. That’s how we added Cormorant, Heron, Marsh Tit and Brambling. When you spend as much time relaxing as gardening, you are bound to see species that you might easily miss. A Woodcock flew over and back again at dusk last winter. A Barn Owl occasionally hunts the field and has even flown over the garden, but Tawny Owls have to be counted by calls so far. We even had a distant, treetop sighting of a Waxwing during last winter’s invasion.

Our predecessors told us there is a regular, winter roost of Linnets in our neighbour's laurel hedge. For half an hour at dusk they circle round, settling briefly on distant ash trees and even our own fruit trees, before dropping in small groups into the hedge's safety. About 300 are involved at the peak, but there was a handful still roosting in late April.

Our list of rarer birds began then, with a Black Kite beating North on 17th April. A birder once told me "There are times when you don't identify a bird; you recognise it." Then an adult Mediterranean Gull in summer plumage flew over on 27th. An Osprey made us jump up with excitement. But a special joy came when the Siskins that had visited the nygar seed feeder all winter stayed on into spring and eventually brought their young in early June.

For birders such sightings add spice to a regular diet. Once common, we now have House Sparrows again in good numbers and nesting very successfully. With the busy-busy Starlings, pugnacious Blackbirds and over-sexed Collared Doves and Wood Pigeons, they keep us entertained all year. As a bonus, Goldfinches and Greenfinches eat the Dandelion seeds on our so-called lawn.

However, like most people we look forward to the arrival of the summer visitors. Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps, swallows and House Martins nest nearby, but we need the Swifts to prove that summer is really here. The village still has a thriving population, with no need for the nest boxes we installed. Disappointing, perhaps, but in the brief time the Swifts are here, we enjoy their thrilling, aerial displays, as groups of ten or more go screaming past, so close we can hear the rush of their wings. Just like the old days. We are going back to how our bird watching began.



## What is in a Name!

*Keith Dye*

I read with much interest Mike Sweeney's article 'What's in a name?' in the September 2011 *Norfolk Natterjack* where he is not particularly enamoured by the new recommended English names of some, if not all, of our birds. I fully appreciate some, if not all, of his thoughts but cannot agree with all of them. The object in giving all the birds of the world one unique English name was to standardise

English-language nomenclature for all living birds based on the rules and principles developed by leading ornithologists worldwide and endorsed by members of the pre-eminent International Ornithological Congress (IOC), see *Birds Of The World – Recommended English Names* 2006 by Frank Gill and Minturn Wright. The idea is to help make any species instantly identified by its English name. Granted, each species and sub species/race already had its own unique scientific name, but to be fair who carries all that information around in their head, particularly a non-scientific person or less committed birdwatcher or ornithologist. Would most of us know what I was referring to if I called out “There is a *Troglodytes troglodytes*” or “There is an *Oenanthe oenanthe*”? But if I called out “There is a Winter Wren” or “There is a Northern Wheatear” there is a good chance, in time, anyone from anywhere in the world would know what specific bird I was referring to.

Bearing in mind how many of us now bird the world or a good proportion of it, and remembering that all but one of Britain’s bird species, 592 at the time of writing this are also other country’s bird species (the exception being Scottish Crossbill) unique English names do make sense. No one suggests that we shouldn’t or won’t keep calling our more common and familiar local species by the names we have always called them. I am sure the same applies in other countries, but as time progresses and our scientific knowledge of the natural world increases, things will continue to change and names too will change, but the historical names will remain in the records in the literature. Many of the younger generation may not be familiar with a lot of the older common and local names for our bird species. It makes a great deal of sense to me that if there is more than one member of any species group, for example wheatears and wrens, each should have its own unique common English name. Wheatear and Wren is no longer appropriate as currently there are six species of wheatear on the British List. At present there is only one wren, Winter Wren, but in an age where avian racial identification and species separation is coming to the fore Britain could eventually have at least four different species of wren. We could be looking at ‘the Doddy Wren’ or ‘Stag’ much more closely before too long.

Another thing to consider is that with the vast amount of ornithological literature adorning our bookshelves and computers on the subject of the World’s birds, we would certainly benefit from having a standard international species name database, both scientific and English for ornithological publications worldwide. I am not entirely convinced this is so necessary for the rest of the World’s flora and fauna species *etc* but I am sure it would prove very useful.

(Keith Dye is co-author *Checklist of Norfolk Birds* 2011; *Birds New to Norfolk* 2009 and one of the Species Text Drafters for the *Norfolk Bird Report* Systematic List.)

## **European Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) suckling young above ground.**

*Gary Smith*



On the mornings of the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2011, I was photographing European Rabbits, (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) from my photographic hide on my allotment. I was surprised so see them suckling young above ground in daylight, albeit quite early morning, between approximately 6.00am and 7.00am. The behaviour included the youngsters chasing the adult female and attempting to suckle, in one instance the mother was completely smothered in youngsters attempting to feed whilst others turned themselves upside-down beneath her looking most comical. The young rabbits seemed to me to be quite different in size and therefore age. I managed to obtain some images under rather difficult light conditions but was never the less pleased with my results. I have tried numerous times since but have not witnessed the behaviour again, I am looking forward to the next batch of kittens to see if this instigates a repeat of this spectacle.

I am wondering whether any readers have witnessed or photographed this activity themselves? I certainly have not and have yet to speak to anyone who has.

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## **Some over the border notes** (from London and Suffolk)

### **Yellow-billed Moorhens**

*Hans Watson*



The London Wetland Centre has enjoyed enthusiastic praise from several well known naturalists, and after my first visit to this WWT site in May, I must say the praise is justified. Walking round this large site and listening to the many Reed, Sedge and Cetti's Warblers and other song-birds, it would be easy to imagine oneself at Hickling or Strumpshaw Fen. Only the surrounding urban buildings and the occasional Ring-necked Parakeet screech spoil the illusion.

The most noticeable species of bird at the centre is the Moorhen, and I certainly saw many more here in a single visit than on a dozen visits to places like Hickling, Minsmere or Strumpshaw. It was therefore probably inevitable, that it was Moorhens that provided the highlight of the day, when I spotted a very unusual bird swimming across a pond, with a completely yellow bill and frontal shield, instead of the normal yellow tipped red bill and frontal shield. This was quite a surprise as I had never seen a Moorhen with a completely yellow bill before. My surprise

turned to amazement when, as the Moorhen near the far side of the pond, another Moorhen with a completely yellow bill, accompanied by two chicks, swam out to meet the first Moorhen. Later a third chick appeared. When one of the Moorhens came out of the water it could be seen that it lacked the red “garter” at the top of its legs, that is present on Moorhens with red bills. When I later searched the internet I found that one of these yellow billed moorhens is quite famous, and has been named Daphne. Daphne has been present at the London Wetland Centre for at least two years, and is apparently quite aggressive toward other Moorhens. Various theories have been put forward regarding the reason for the Moorhens unusual bill colour. These range from diet deficiency, which seems unlikely as so many other Moorhens in close proximity are normal coloured, to a genetic cause such as xanthochroism where there is an excess of yellow pigment or a loss of a darker pigment allowing yellow to show through.

It remains to be seen if this pair of unusual Moorhens produce more similarly coloured Moorhens, and start a new fashion among their kind.

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## **A Suffolk Trip: Memorable Minsmere**

*Tony Howes & Brian Macfarlane*



Recently we spent three days at Minsmere which proved very interesting, with good weather for some bird were photography. On arrival we were greeted by five Spoonbills on the east scrape and they were still about when we had to leave. These strange looking creatures seem unreal, their huge beaks looking more suited to knocking in nails than for gathering food. Watching closely when they were feeding, it could be observed that excess water was expelled from the front of their massive long bill, which swung from side to side detecting, by touch, small fish and other aquatic creatures.

Fiona, the resident Flamingo (escapee from Marwell Zoo) showed most of the time we were there. With some joker writing on the 'sightings' board a Rhino Hornbill had been seen, we began to think maybe we were in Africa with all these exotic birds. Not only that but three Bar-headed Geese flew over the scrape, although they are of Himalayan origin not African - more escapees. It was nice to see a flock of Knots flying around the scrape as well.

The beautiful Mediterranean Gull, both adult and juvenile were seen and photographed, common enough on the Yarmouth beaches during the winter months, but in full breeding plumage they look glorious. Much fun was had in the Bittern hide trying to capture the elegant Hobby on camera, they are so fast in their movements as they twist and swirl through the air capturing dragonflies. Getting one in the frame is a feat on it's own, to get the image crisp and sharp is another thing

completely, more luck than judgement. We also had good views of Harriers and Bitterns. Also a Heron dropped in for a meal right in front of the Bittern hide.

We wondered about the Dartford Warblers up on the heath, had they succumbed to the harsh winter, or had their secret world down in the heather protected them from the frost and snow? After only a short walk we were delighted to find two, typically sitting up on heather stems surveying their domain, almost as if saying, 'We made it, we are still here'

The Little Tern colony was absent from the beach, yet again, but avocets seem to have done well on the scrapes, and we saw many juveniles, tiny replicas of the parents, doing their relentless scything through the shallows in the quest for food. A very enjoyable three days, especially as the weather was kind to us - some lovely memories to look back on - and it was so much more enjoyable staying in the area, without the thought of travelling home each evening.



# The **GEOLOGICAL** Society of Norfolk

## Winter Lectures 2011/2012

### **The Origin of Our Species**

Professor Chris Stringer  
(The Natural History Museum,  
London) 8pm, Wednesday 26th Octo-  
ber 2011 The Music Room, Assembly  
House, Theatre Street, Norwich, NR2  
1RQ

### **James Frederick Jackson (1894-1966): boy genius of Hunstanton. The story of an extraordinary geologist**

Cindy Howells, (National Museum of  
Wales, Cardiff) 7.30pm, Thursday 17th  
November 2011 LGMAC Seminar  
Room, School of Environmental  
Science, UEA, Norwich, NR4 7TJ

### **The Paul Whittlesea Lecture: Forensic Geology**

Dr Haydon W. Bailey (Network Strati-  
graphic Consulting Limited) 7.30pm,  
Thursday 19th January 2012 LGMAC  
Seminar Room, School of Environ-  
mental Science, UEA, Norwich, NR4  
7TJ

### **Cannibalism in Palaeolithic Britain**

Dr Silvia Bello (The Natural History  
Museum, London) 7.30pm, Thursday  
16th February 2012 LGMAC Seminar  
Room, School of Environmental  
Science, UEA, Norwich, NR4 7TJ

# Groundtruthing the Valley

May 2011 saw the official public launch of the Gaywood Valley Project, which will run until Autumn 2012 and is designed to improve the usage for the Gaywood River Valley by enhancing green spaces, making the area more accessible and increasing awareness about the valley.

The map below shows the project area we will focus on primarily. This is based on the catchment area for the Gaywood River.

The countryside in the project area is of extremely high quality, with a mixture of woodland, farmland wetland and heath. This creates a truly distinctive landscape which is home to equally distinctive habitats and species. The result of this complex landscape arises from the drift deposits of sand and gravel, clay and peat. Silica sand, a precious resource, has been quarried here and the land and river have had a long relationship with local communities over the ages that have lived and worked here utilising the valleys natural resources.

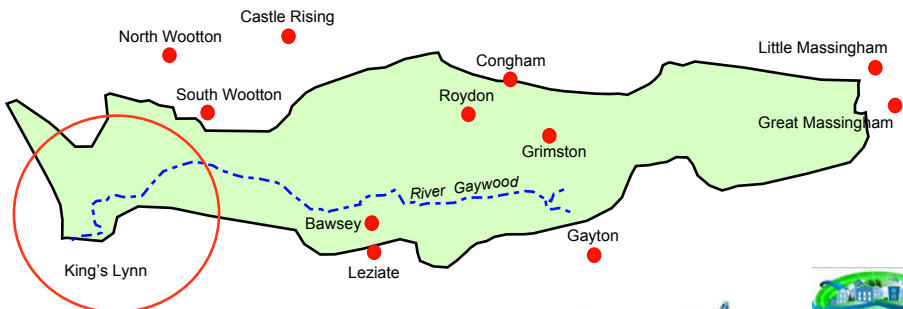
It is hoped that this unsung natural asset will finally gain recognition through the project and can be protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy.

As we are now embarking on a phase of groundtruthing ie looking at the habitats and species within the valley we would be pleased to receive any species records or offers of survey work, you may wish to undertake, within the Gaywood Valley Area.

If you are able to help or require further information please contact me:

**Gemma Cousins, Gaywood Valley Project Officer**, Climate Change Section, Environment, Transport and Development, Direct dial tel no: 01553 778024  
E-mail: [gemma.cousins@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:gemma.cousins@norfolk.gov.uk)

## Gaywood Valley Project Area

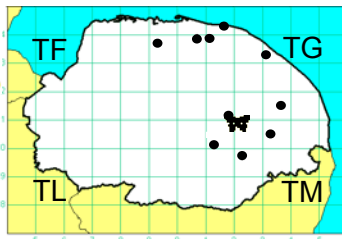


# Excursion

## Reports



● 2011-12 Field Meeting location  
St. Andrew's Hall  
Eaton  
Indoor meetings



## Marriott's Way / River Tud / New Cotessey

5<sup>th</sup> May 2011

Ten members enjoyed a leisurely evening on this short walk. Although birds were somewhat scarce with 16 species identified (including only three summer visitors), compared with 31 species last year, numerous Rabbits were observed busy feeding and one Pipistrelle bat was seen. Many of the wild flowers were already in seed following the warm dry spring.

Probably the most interesting thing was finding some fat beetle larvae on Cleavers, which were later identified by Robert Maidstone as those of the Bloody-nosed Beetle, so called as it exudes a drop of what looks like blood from its 'nose', which is done, it is believed, to frighten predators. There are two species in the UK and as two members took larvae to feed up and to eventually pupate we should learn which one this was.

The area is diverse in wildlife and I hope this trip will become an annual event. Marriott's Way is the long gone track of the old Midland & Great Northern Railway – affectionately remembered by some as the “Muddle & Go Nowhere”.

### Bird List

Robin	Blackbird	Wood Pigeon	Swallow	Chiffchaff
Starling	Mallard	Chaffinch	Heron	Collared Dove
Blackcap	Magpie	Carrion Crow	Tawny Owl	Wren
Egyptian Goose				

*John Butcher*

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## Beeston Regis

5<sup>th</sup> June 2011

Despite a strong breeze and a forecast of cloudy conditions, north Norfolk sunshine greeted 22 members and guests who gathered among suburban bungalows in Beeston's Priory Close to search the grass verges for small clovers and dry grassland plants, including some unusual species known to grow there. This, the

23<sup>rd</sup> gathering in the NNS 'Wild Flowers Revealed' series, was also advertised as a Norfolk Flora Group meeting, so all present benefited from the considerable botanical expertise on hand.

The grass was short and sere, parched by the prolonged drought of early 2011, and some had feared that the small clovers and the like would be similarly withered, but Bob Leaney, our leader, assured us that it had actually been a good year for such species, though they had progressed more quickly than usual through their growth cycle to setting seed. We were soon shown the nationally-scarce Toothed Medick, *Medicago polymorpha*, with its netted pods usually coiled 2.5 times in Norfolk, very similar to the more common Spotted Medick, *M. arabica*, which we saw later in a different location. Only 7 Norfolk tetrads yielded *polymorpha* at the time of the Beckett, Bull & Stevenson *Flora of Norfolk*. More common medicks, all native, also occur at this site and Bob speculated on where they all grew long ago before nibbling rabbits and grazing sheep (and then Council and household lawnmowers) were present to provide the conditions they demand: they must have been pretty rare. One or two other species found, such as Buckshorn Plantain, *Plantago coronopus*, were instances of coastal natives which also now appear inland – on salty roadsides, for example - and behave like casuals, though our Beeston site was admittedly not far from the sea. The other nationally-scarce plant seen at this site was Musk Storksbill, *Erodium moschatum*, positioned within a couple of feet of a plant of the more assertive Common Storksbill, *E. cicutarium*, thereby enabling comparisons to be easily made. Similarly, Fern-grass, *Catapodium rigidum*, and Sea Fern-grass, *C. marinum*, were both to be seen, as was Knotted Clover, *Trifolium striatum*, in lawns.

Our large, slow-moving party, having aroused mystification (and, in one case, hostility) in some adjacent local residents, returned to the cars and re-parked in the A149 layby at the entrance to Beeston Common. We crossed the main road to the Top Common into lush grassland, which Francis Farrow explained had been left uncut as part of the conservation programme. Though no bee orchids were found on this occasion, it was pleasant to see Common Spotted and Southern Marsh in flower. The drought had ensured that no water remained in the pond and it was too dry for Mudwort, *Limosella aquatica*, though Mary Ghullam found and showed us the Cavernous Crystalwort, *Riccia cavernosa*, a liverwort recorded only quite recently at this, its first East Norfolk station. Lunch was taken near a stream enlivened by bright plants of Monkeyflower, *Mimulus guttatus*, and the distinctions between Lesser Water-parsnip, *Berula erecta*, and Fool's Water-cress, *Apium nodiflorum*, were noted before we made for Beeston Bump, with Bob demonstrating *en route* the differences between Honeysuckle, *Lonicera periclymenum* and the garden hybrid, *Lonicera x italica*, and pointing out different leaf-forms in plants of the Duke of Argyll's Teaplat, *Lycium barbarum*, which became more frequent in garden and roadside hedges as we neared the sea.

On our emergence onto the Bump from Nelson Road, a fair number of spikes of Purple Broomrape, *Orobanche purpurea*, were seen, admired and photographed. More individual plants and clumps of this endangered species, also known as

'Yarrow Broomrape' after the plant it mainly parasitizes, and justly claimable as a Norfolk speciality, occurred as our walk proceeded towards the Bump. Bob Ellis found Flixweed, *Descurainia sophia*, in a barely-penetrable tangle of vegetation, Lady's Bedstraw, *Galium verum*, was nearly flowering, Kidney Vetch, *Anthyllis vulneria*, was on its way to going over, and Wild Clary, *Salvia verbenaca*, occurred ever more frequently. Crested Hair-grass, *Koeleria macrantha*, was also seen. Before the steepish final climb to the summit, a plant of the nationally scarce Sand Catchfly, *Silene conica*, not in flower, was spotted at the pathside, which encouraged us to hasten up over the summit to the well-known colony growing in a sandy hollow by the cliff edge, near a good spread of Dittander, *Lepidium latifolium* (not common in Norfolk). Catchfly plants were indeed locally plentiful here, but again it seemed we were fated not to see any in bloom until another patch further on was seen to retain a couple of the small but intensely bright pink flowers atop the rather disproportionately inflated bladders.

We then returned to the cars, though a number of people took a rather looping course through the Common to the south of the A149, where interesting plants seen included Marsh Arrowgrass, *Triglochin palustre*, Bog Pimpernel, *Anagallis tenella*, Common Butterwort, *Pinguicula vulgaris*, Common Gromwell, *Lithospermum officinale*, and even a naturalised garden Siberian Iris, *Iris sibirica*.

Many thanks to Bob Leaney for preparing and leading a most rewarding day's botanising and to Bill Mitchell for his contribution to arranging it.

Stephen Martin

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## Devil's Ditch, Newmarket

12<sup>th</sup> June, 2011

Members of the Society and of Lowestoft Field Club met our leader for the day, Arthur Copping, in the car park near the entrances to the July Course and National Stud and conveniently adjacent to Cambridgeshire's Devil's Ditch or Dyke, a 7.5-mile bank and ditch, probably Anglo-Saxon, which runs as a chalk barrier, still 11 metres high at its tallest, between Reach and Woodditton. The ditch is a linear SSSI, carrying possibly the richest chalk flora in the region as well as interesting insect species including the Chalkhill Blue butterfly.

The first drops of rain, unfortunately destined to intensify later, were falling as the decision was made to botanise the stretch of the Ditch running north-west to the A14 road. This part of the Ditch has the irresistible lure of hosting the Lizard Orchid (*Himantoglossum hircinum*), but the party was nevertheless rather spoilt for choice, as covering instead the stretch running south-east would have yielded Bloody Cranesbill (*Geranium sanguineum*) close to the railway and B1061 road, as well as Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*) elsewhere. The 'Lizzies' were indeed present in full flower and fair numbers, though one always seems to recall there having been rather more spikes to reward visits in earlier years. On this, their furthest north

current site, I think, since the demise of the colony at Suffolk's Maidscross Hill a few years ago, they are of course a great attraction to botanists and photographers, as attested by the trampled pathways to the better specimens through the grass on both sides of the crest. (See Tony Howes images in Nats' Gallery) Other species absent from or uncommon on chalky sites in East Anglia were found, including Bastard Toadflax (*Thesium humifussum*), Pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*) – no longer in flower in June of course, Squinancywort (*Asperula cynanchica*), Yellowwort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*), and Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*).

Pasqueflower



So many more plant species of dry chalk grassland were seen that it seems better to select and list the more characteristic of them here rather than attempt a narrative of our slow but productive progress along the slopes and crest of this part of the Devil's Ditch. In this,

I am indebted to Arthur's extensive and meticulous plant list which reveals a total of 112 taxa recorded including: Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*), Welled Thistle (*Carduus crispus ssp. multiflorus*), Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*) and Chalk Knapweed (*C. debeauxii*), Hound's-tongue

(*Cynoglossum officinale*), Common Spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii ssp. fuchsii*), Eyebright (*Euphrasia agg.*), Dropwort (*Filipendula vulgaris*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*), Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*), Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Wild Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*), Fairy Flax (*Linum catharticum*), Common Restharrow (*Ononis repens ssp. repens*), Mouse-ear Hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*), Burnet-saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*), Hoary Plantain (*Plantago media*), Common Milkwort (*Polygala vulgaris*), Salad Burnet (*Poterium sanguisorba ssp. sanguisorba*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Wild Mignonette (*Reseda lutea*), Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), Small Scabious (*Scabiosa columbaria*) and Lesser Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum minus ssp. saxatile*). Thanks in good part to Arthur's expertise in the *Poaceae*, some 20 grasses were identified, including species particularly associated with calcareous habitats such as Downy Oat-grass (*Avenula pubescens*), Tor-grass (*Brachypodium rupestre*), Quaking-grass (*Briza media*), Upright Brome (*Bromopsis erecta*), and Crested Hair-grass (*Koeleria macrantha*).

Many thanks to Arthur Copping for organising and leading this meeting at such a rewarding and botanically alluring site.

Stephen Martin



The next issue of *'The Norfolk Natterjack'* will be November 2011. Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by **October 1<sup>st</sup> 2011** to the following address:

Francis Farrow, 'Heathlands', 6 Havelock Road, Sheringham,  
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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 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March. During this time members will receive four copies of the quarterly *Natterjack* newsletter, and annual copies of the Transactions of the Society, and the Norfolk Bird & Mammal Report.

**Membership renewals** are due on *1<sup>st</sup> 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:

- Mike Stew, 'Sandpipers', The Street, Kelling, Norfolk, NR25 7EL.

**Current rates are £15 for individual, family and group memberships** (£25 for individuals living overseas).

*Cheques payable to: Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society.*

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- Dog Rose (page 3) *Computer / Clipart*  
Grass Snake (page 9) and Swifts (page 12) *Nick Owens*  
Pasqueflower (page 21) *Thelma Macfarlane*