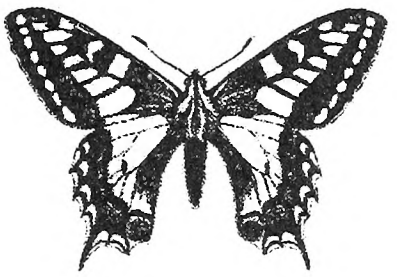
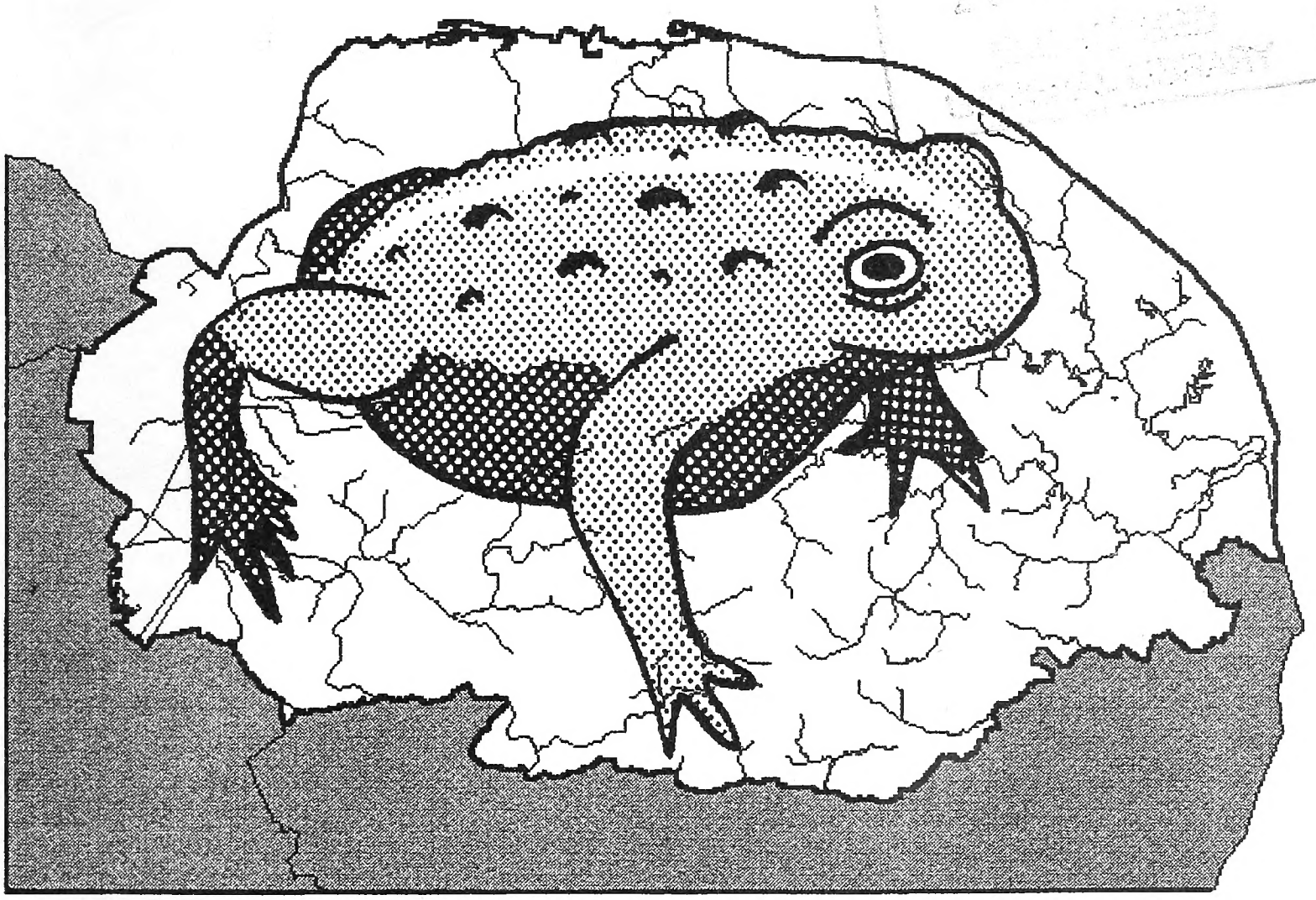
The Norfolk



Natterjack

The quarterly bulletin of the Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society



Number 100 ***February 2008***

www.nnns.org.uk

Norfolk & Norwich Naturalists' Society

Founded 1869 Reg. Charity No. 291604

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

Toad-in-the-hole....

With this the 100th issue of '*The Norfolk Natterjack*' it has had a 25 year uninterrupted run. Ernest Daniels edited the first issue in May 1983 and went on until Colin Dack took over with edition no. 15 in November 1986. With the untimely death of Colin in 1998 I took on the editorship. Two years ago the format was changed from A4 sheets to an A5 booklet including Nats' Gallery (centre pages of members photographs) and Simon Harrap came onboard as picture editor. None of these of course could have been produced without your contributions. Many thanks. **FF**

Nostoc Mysteries

by Hans Watson

It was only about five years ago, that I was introduced to Nostocs, and it is with some embarrassment that I have to admit, that inspite of having been interested in nature for some 50 odd years since childhood, I had previously never heard of Nostocs. It is highly probable that I had seen them, and possibly dismissed them as jelly fungi, a mistake that many people have made. My efforts to learn more about Nostocs have revealed that I am not alone in having neglected to show an interest in this group of organisms, and there is very little published literature to encourage such an interest. For instance, I have so far been unable to discover if any published identification key exists.

For the benefit of those who are unfamiliar with Nostocs, they are quite a diverse group of Cyanobacteria, also sometimes referred to as simple algae of the blue-green group, and are commonly found in gelatinous patches or colonies on the ground surface. Some species are found in or under water. When on the ground, a Nostoc colony is ordinarily not seen, but after rain it swells into a gelatinous dark olive or brown mass. Depending on the species, this mass may be of bubble-like spheres about the size of peas, a slimy scum, a dark hair-like mass, or a wrinkly gelatinous blob several inches across. Other species commonly appear in concrete bird baths. Nostocs are able to live in the extreme environments of deserts and Polar Regions, can fix atmospheric nitrogen, and are capable of photo-synthesis without the benefit of chloroplasts. Indeed, current studies indicate that their importance as nitrogen fixers in soil, has been greatly underestimated.

Some Nostoc species maintain symbiotic relationships with ferns (*Azolla*), hornworts, mosses, and fungi. In China, a blackish hair-like species, *Nostoc flagelliforme*, is regarded as a delicacy and known as "Fat Choy". It is mainly eaten during festive seasons such as the Chinese Lunar New Year.

In past ages, the sudden appearance of masses of Nostoc in damp weather, led to many strange beliefs and legends. It was called Star Jelly, or Star-shot, and for centuries it was believed to fall from heaven during meteor showers It was also called Witches' Butter, and this may explain part of the confusion experienced by people, who mistake Nostocs for jelly fungi, as the name Witches Butter nowadays is given to the fungus *Exidia gladulosa.* There is considerable similarity in appearance, of some Nostoc species, and both *Exidia* and *Tremella* fungi.

One of the strangest mysteries of Nostoc, is the name itself. The genus was given the name Nostoc in the eighteenth century, although the word had been in use for some of the species also known as star jelly, for hundreds of years previous to this. There seems to be no record of where the word Nostoc comes from. Unless of course, you know differently.

Ghostly Doings on the Catfield Hall Estate

by Mary Ghullam

As the Research Committee project on the Catfield Hall Estate drew to a close, it was decided to fit in a last minute moss meeting, in order to try to fill any gaps. September was not an ideal time with vegetation still rampant, so not much was expected. After a glimpse of a couple of Common Cranes, a small group started to work its way through an area of wet woodland. Because of the nature of the woodland -Downy Birch with *Sphagna* humps beneath, Bob Ellis started to search deep in the base of the humps, looking for any liverworts hidden within, while others in the group examined paths and trees. Almost immediately Bob found a few odd looking small white bits, nestling deep within the humps of *Sphagnum squarrosum*, Spiky Bog-moss. The rest of the group immediately abandoned what it was doing and started to see if they could find any more, not totally convinced that they weren't bits of fungus. Assiduous searching revealed a thallus and the beginnings of sporophytes, making it Ghostwort -*Cryptothallus mirabilis*. This is an unusual subterranean, parasitic liverwort, only discovered in 1948 by a Glasgow University Zoologist. It lacks chlorophyll and obtains its carbon from a basiomycete fungus, associated with birch.

It occasionally pushes its capsules above the moss humps, in order to release its spores. After various photos were taken the sample was carefully packeted and labelled, as it was a new vice County record.

The group then carried on, eventually braving the metal ladder across the dyke into Mill Marsh, recording as it went. The group was eventually rewarded for its perseverance, by another interesting liverwort find. This time it was Irish Ruffwort, *Moerckia hibernica*, a thalloid bright green liverwort, rare in Norfolk, but found in fens and coastal dune slacks. It is unusual in its persistent strong smell and is usually covered with feathery outgowths on the upper surface of the thallus, giving it a strange appearance.

The Ghostwort was carefully carried back, air dried and sent off to the liverwort referee for confirmation as a new VC 27 record. Interestingly enough, almost immediately it was exposed to the air the creamy white thallus took on a green tinge, and by the time it was sent to the referee was a very insignificant indeed. However it was enough to be accepted as a voucher for the new record.
In all 48 species of moss and liverworts were recorded for the day, some of them new to the Estate. It was certainly a worthwhile 'extra' meeting.

WINTER MARMALADE

by Colin Dunster

On 5th January 2008 I was with members of the Norfolk Bryological Group having lunch at Booton Common NWT Reserve when a small fly settled on my lunchbox and began feeding on crumbs of (appropriately enough) Norfolk shortcake. It was with considerable suprise that I recognised it as Episyrphus balteatus, the Marmalade Hoverfly, (photo) that same species which often arrives on our coast in millions in summer and which the press loves to refer to as a "plague". Although many are migrants from the continent, there is a substantial resident population which is able to survive quite low temperatures and, because of this, the species has received some scientific attention as a potential predator, in larval form, of aphids on winter wheat. In Norfolk it is not unusual to see a few adult Marmalade Hoverflies in the garden on sunny days in late February but it is very rare indeed to see an adult in early January.

Tony Irwin posted this record on the Hoverfly Website and it generated some lively discussion. The striking feature is how little we know about the habits of what is certainly our commonest hoverfly. The consensus is that some adults of both sexes do hibernate throughout he winter although it is uncertain what

proportion of the population adopts this strategy as opposed to over wintering in pupal form. Only two correspondents could positively confirm records in the depths of winter and in both cases these were in the relatively confined environment of cemeteries where ivy appears to be the preferred hibernation site. The Booton specimen, which was a male, was found in the much harsher environment of valley mire on the edge of Alder carr. The hibernation site here was probably the large heap of logs on which we were sitting.

Of course, this may simply be an aberrant occurrence but it is possible that it is another example of the increasing trend of ever earlier appearances of many of our common insects attributable to global warming. Only many more records can provide the proof and it is therefore most important that all occurrences of even the commonest species out of normal season should be sent to the recorders.

Thanks to Dr. Tony Irwin and Francis Farrow for their comments.

Ray's Bream

by David and Jo Lester

Having read the "30 years ago" note in *Natterjack* number 99 about Ray's Bream we thought this might be of interest.

This Ray's Bream was discovered along the strand line in the western part of Holkham Bay on 4th November 2007. A few specimens turn up on the Norfolk coast each year, if the note by R B Williams (*Natterjack* no 99) is anything to go by, but this is certainly the first that we have ever encountered. The photograph does not really do the animal justice - darker above, it was a beautiful iridescent light blue on the sides and belly. The boot is 26 cm long.

*****

There have been quite a few reports from around the Norfolk coast lately as specimens have been found from Snettisham to Gt. Yarmouth. The EDP (January 5th) carried a picture and a request for information. Anyone who has found a Ray's Bream should send details to Helen Nott of the local Seaquest group:

Tel: 07749 07593 or via the website: www.norfolkseaquest.co.uk

Other interesting fish have also been reported recently including a Sunfish at Sea Palling and a rare Cornish Blackfish at Overstrand - Ed.

Bitterns at Strumpshaw

by Brian Macfarlane

I hadn't been to Strumpshaw for three weeks, and decided to give it a look on a perfect morning for photography for a day in early November. There was a good mist with the sun burning it off fairly rapidly. The reeds were a brilliant orange in the low sunshine, and it was magic. There were very few birds in view until a Kingfisher briefly dropped in to kick start the day. About 8am I noticed two Herons as I first thought a long way away, and they past the hide and out of sight. A few minutes later two birds were approaching from my right head on. They definitely were not herons even at a distance. I then realised they were Bitterns. I could hardly believe it as seeing one Bittern flying is quite rare, but two was unbelievable. They almost glowed orange in the low morning light, and I started shooting as they came by. Then it happened, the battery ran out!! Luckily I had got several pictures in the bag. That was a relief as missing that prize shot would have been devastating. One of the bitterns came back from the opposite direction about half an hour later.

Nothing much happened after that, so I moved on, basking in the knowledge I had got a real cracker for the scrap book.

A Bittern at Beeston !

by Francis Farrow

My daughter Ellie, returning home after taking the dog over Beeston Common, near Sheringham on January 16th 2008, paused by the local pond. She heard some rustling in the marginal vegetation and saw what she first thought was a female mallard. After a few minutes the bird showed itself clearly and she couldn't believe that she was looking at a Bittern, let alone at such close quarters! As our house is close by she ran home to get her camera and although by now the light was fading as it was around 4:30pm she did manage a few shots, which proved her identification.

As far as I know this is a first for the Common and the pond just 30m diameter seems such an unlikely place for this type of bird. Unfortunately when I went over the following morning it was not to be seen. The marginal vegetation is very dense at present and I was hoping that contractors would have done some clearing, however, I am quite glad that such work has been delayed as we may not have had such an unusual and rare visitor.

Woodpeckers

by Tony Howes

Great Spotted Woodpeckers tend to come to our garden only during the breeding season, and then only males, I have never seen a female or a juvenile at the feeders in the twenty odd years that I have lived here. Shredded vegetable suet is very much to their liking, and if I am planning to photograph them I have an old log which has suitable holes drilled out and these can be filled with suet. This keeps them busy for some time without the food being obvious, I like to stain the white suet with a little gravy browning or tea, this makes it look more natural when they have a beak full.

These woodpeckers tend to be bullies, and like Mistle Thrushes on a berried bush, try and keep the goodies to themselves, but they are great characters and I enjoy their antics.

Skirmish on the lawn

by Carol Haines

A Green Woodpecker is regularly seen in winter searching for insects in our lawn. One morning in January I was watching the bird when I noticed a Grey Squirrel loping down one side of the lawn. It became aware of the bird, changed course and charged the woodpecker which took off just as the squirrel leaped at it. Both creatures took refuge in different trees, the squirrel then left the garden and the woodpecker returned to continue feeding.

Did the squirrel thing its buried acorns were at risk? What would it have done if it had caught the bird?

AUTUMN JAYS

by Trevor Ellis

For a couple of weeks at the beginning of November I had been seeing more Jays than usual even for the time of year. Many had been flying over our garden which is quite close to Holt Country Park. They always took the same route. North from the park and back again a few minutes later, their crops bulging and one acorn in their beaks. Perhaps some of them were part of the northern population which migrate south during some autumns.

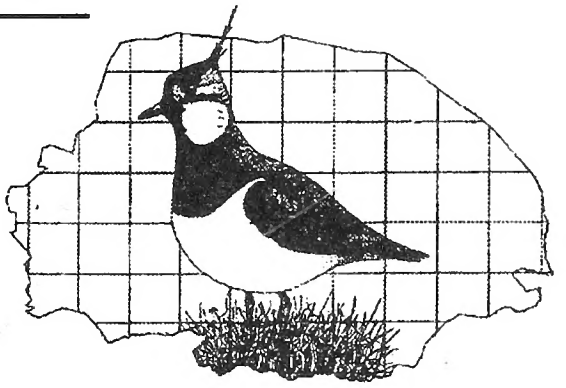
Then on the 22nd November I was surprised to see one taking whole peanuts from a feeder I had modified and placed in an old apple tree in our garden. As I looked through the window it was joined by a much smaller Jay, less than three quarters of its size. The smaller bird watched as the original bird filled its crop and flew off towards the park. It then made several unsuccessful attempts to land on the feeder before giving up and flying off in the same direction as the bigger bird.

After about 15 minutes they both returned. The smaller bird stood on the ground beneath the feeder whilst its bigger companion perched on the feeder and proceeded to drop nuts for the other bird to pick up. The feeder bird then filled its crop and they both flew off.

I thought I had witnessed a random act but for the next six mornings, at about twenty minute intervals, the whole process was repeated with almost military precision. Each time peanuts were dropped for the small bird and then between eighteen and twenty nuts were taken by the other before they flew off together. Their last visit was on 28th November.

I presume the birds were an adult and juvenile but I have been unable to find any information about such a marked size difference or similar feeding behaviour in Jays.

NORFOLK BIRD ATLAS



(From: *Newsletter No. 9 - December 2007*)

Progress with publication

Good progress is being made on the book, the first drafts having been completed for around 150 species. The actual design of the book and the presentation of data on the maps is being developed, so that the final publication will be a suitable tribute to all those who undertook fieldwork. It is planned to make it hardback, A4 in size and about 480 pages long. Publication is expected in 2008 or 2009 and a full retail price of £45-50. A special price will be available to everyone who helped with timed visits, and it is likely that a general pre-publication offer will also be made. To help us assess how many copies to print it would be extremely helpful if everyone who plans to buy a copy could email me or if not online send by letter, or telephone me, their postal address so that I can contact them with publication details. You are not committing to purchasing a copy by letting me know. Moss Taylor, 4 Heath Road, Sheringham, NR26 8JH
E-mail: mosstaylor@care4free.net /Tel: 01263 823637

FALLOW DEER

by Tony Howes

Fallow Deer have always been much favoured by mankind, in earlier times the species was one of the main quarries for hunting by the nobility. Nowadays they are often seen in large parks, and are kept as an ornamental attraction.

Fallow Deer are very beautiful animals, the normal pellage being tan coloured with white dapples and spots along the sides and on the back, a very distinctive white rump edged with black, and unlike all other British deer the antlers are palmated, altogether a very attractive animal. They are by nature a woodland loving creature, venturing forth into open glades and farmland to feed.

Over time many different colour forms have emerged, in the last few months I have seen pure white specimens at Houghton Hall in the north-west of the county. They have large numbers there with this colouration and during the rut the bucks tend to get very grubby from thrashing about, and can look very dark at times, especially around the head, but at other times of the year they look very dapper.

In Richmond Park near London there are examples of black fallow, these are very handsome creatures, the bucks with their pale antlers are very smart indeed. Different variations are also to be found at Holkham Hall in North Norfolk, probably the best place to observe these deer in the county. Large numbers roam about the expansive grasslands there and can be seen readily from the road that dissects the park.

There are still examples of fallow deer living wild in the county, mainly in the brecklands and the far west, but of course in more recent times Fallow Deer have been extensively farmed for venison.

NNNS Exhibitions 2008

Thursday **27 March 2008** 9 - 3.30
'Spring Fling' at the Norfolk Showground
Theme "The Year of Food and Farming"
(Tickets required)

Saturday **17 May 2008** 10 - 5
'Wild About the Wensum'
Pensthorpe Nature Reserve
Free entry

Saturday & Sunday,
6 & 7 September 2008 10 - 4
'Wild about Norfolk'
Notcutts Garden Centre, Norwich
Free entry

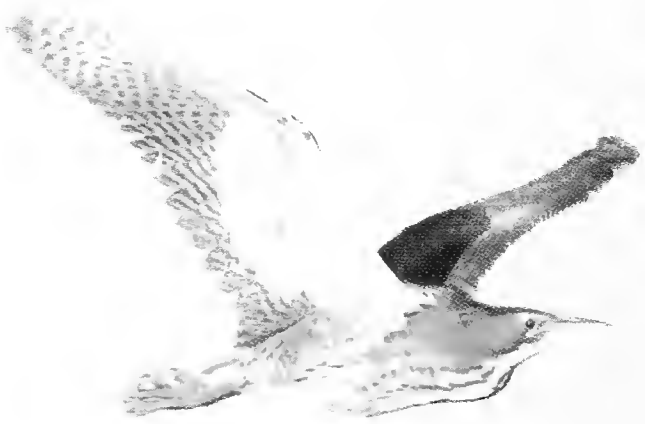
If you would like to help with manning the stands or by providing material please contact:
Dilys Jones (Membership Committee)
Tel: 01603 454683
E-mail: dilys.jones@btinternet.com

NATS' GALLERY: February 2008

IRISH RUFFWORT *Moerckia hibernica*, Catfield Hall Fen, September 2007. This bright green thalloid liverwort of fens and coastal dune slacks is rare in Norfolk. It is unusual in its persistent strong smell and is usually covered with feathery outgrowths on the upper surface of the thallus. See article. *Photo:* Colin Dunster.

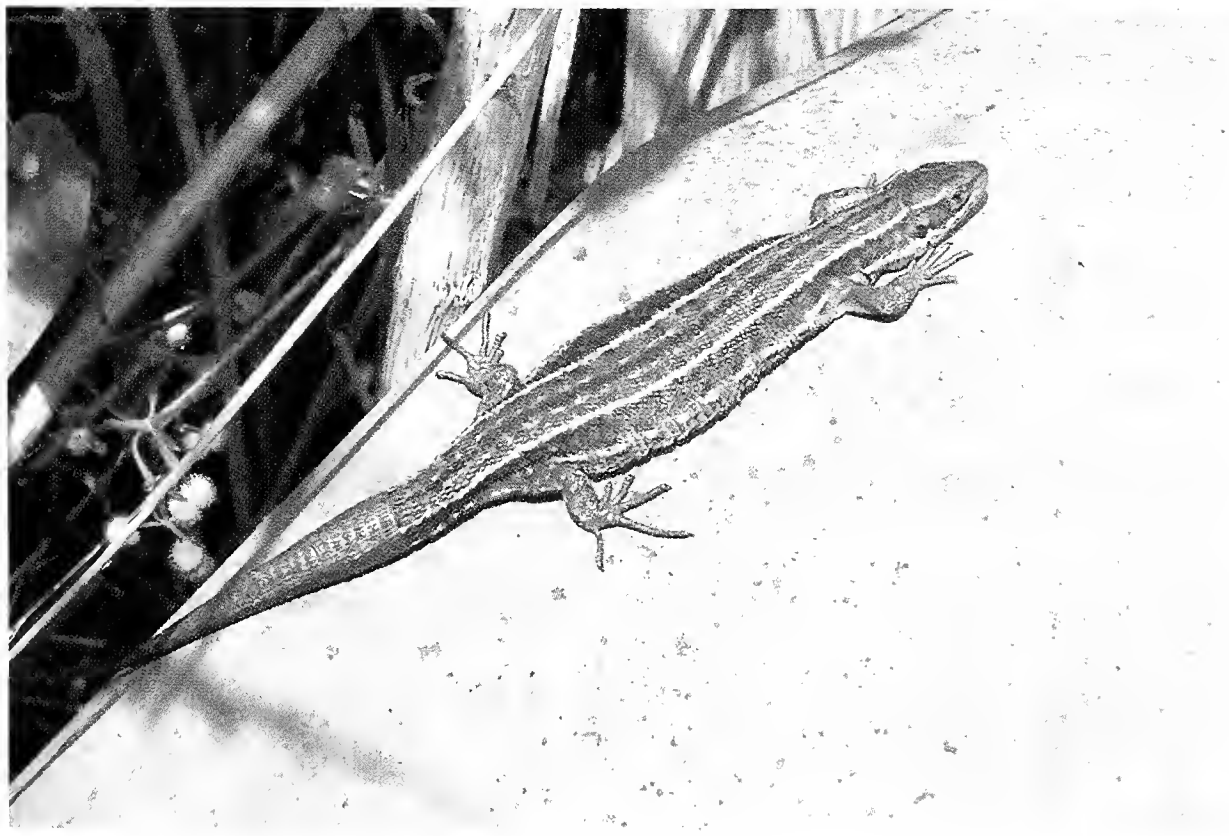
GHOSTWORT *Cryptothallus mirabilis* Catfield Hall Fen, September 2007 - a new vice-county record. This subterranean, parasitic liverwort lacks chlorophyll and obtains its carbon from a basidiomycete fungus associated with birch. See article. *Photo:* Colin Dunster.

BITTERNS
at Strumpshaw Fen RSPB reserve, November 2007. Seeing one in flight is lucky enough, but two...? See article.
Photos: Brian Macfarlane.



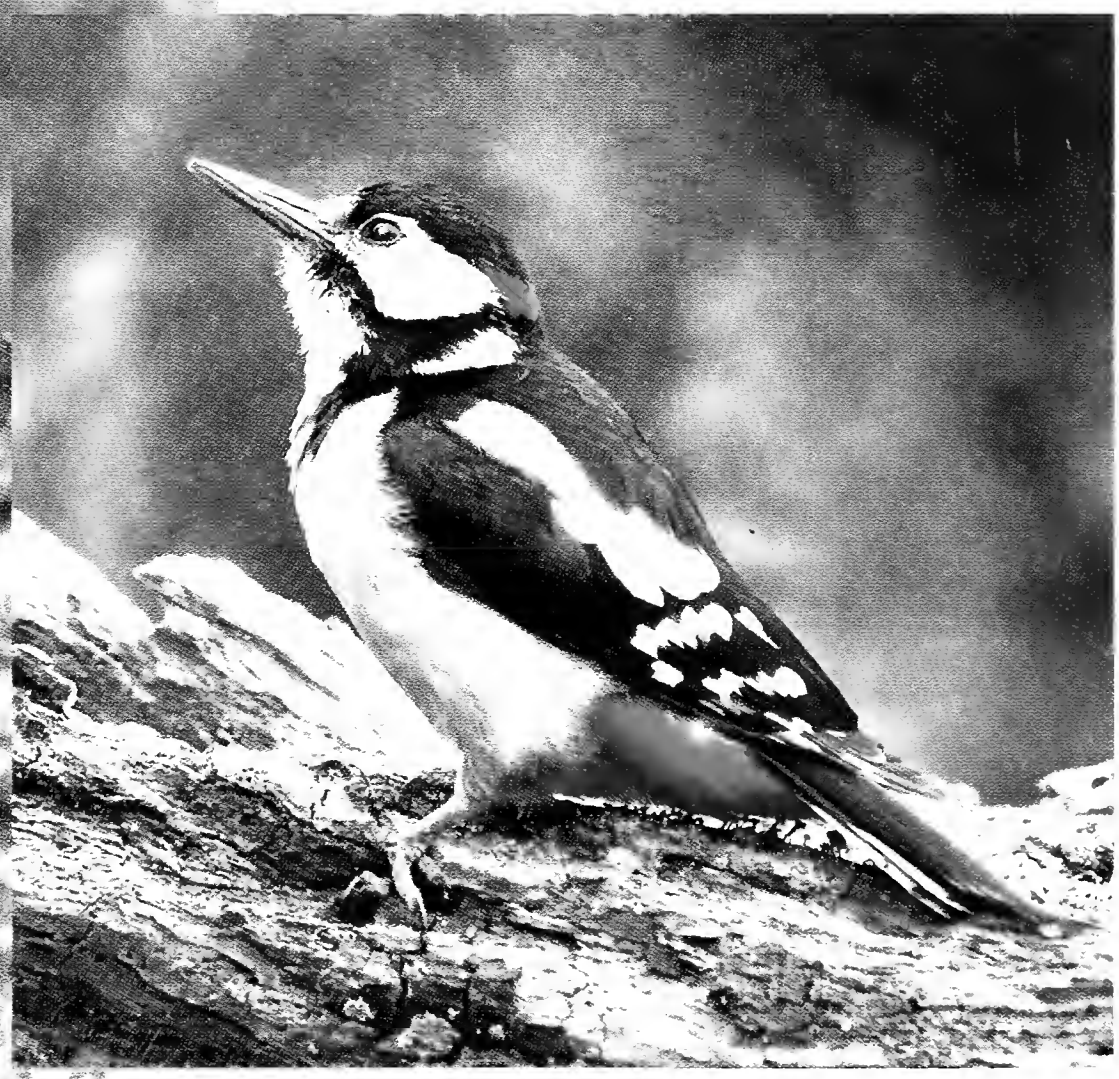
WATER VOLE is Britain's most endangered mammal. The Broadland Flood Alleviation Project has generated large numbers of records, and significant efforts are made to reduce the impacts of the works on Water Vole populations. See article.
Photo: BESL.

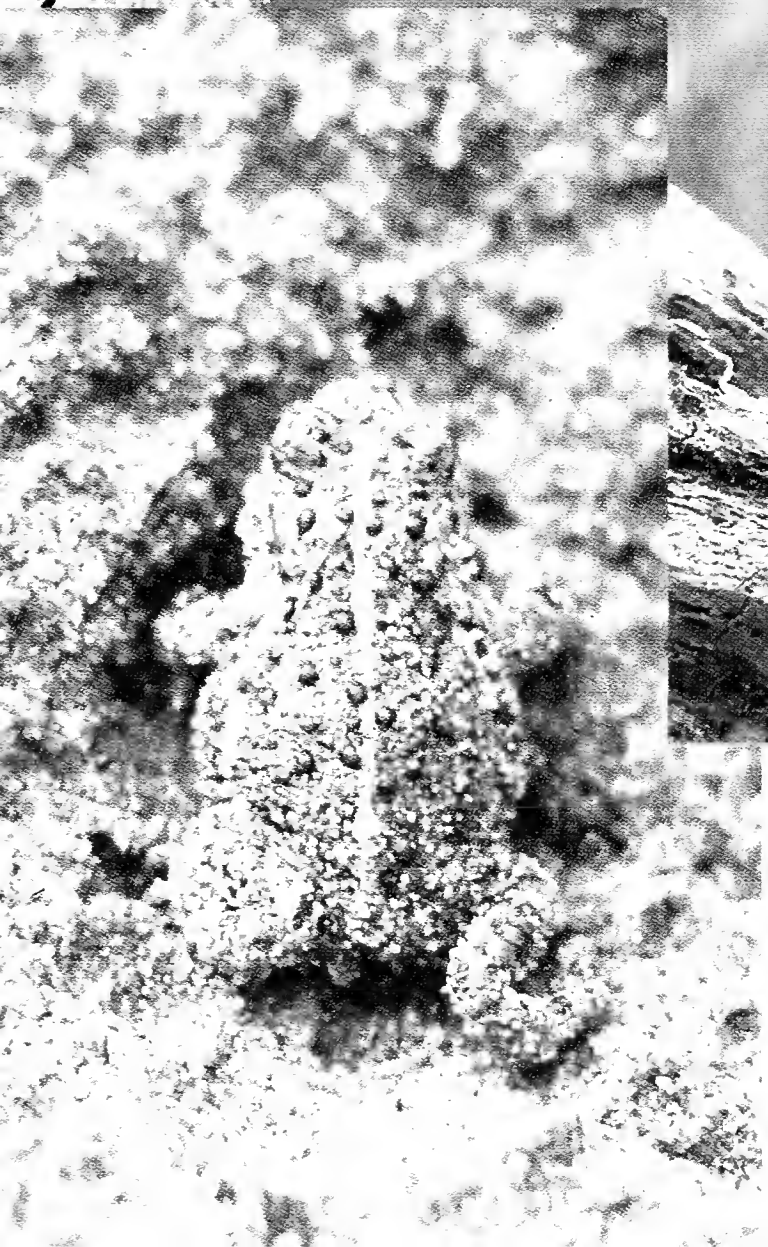
NORFOLK HAWKERS in tandem. This species benefits from the ongoing protection of freshwater grazing marshes by the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project. See article.
Photo: BESL.



COMMON LIZARD is not usually considerred to be a 'wetland' species, but Broadland flood banks can support good numbers and flood defence works can be structured to take this into account. See article.
Photo: BESL.

GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKERS are regular garden visitors, but can be bullies. See article. *Photos:* Tony Howes.





NATTERJACK TOAD or 'Runn'n tood' is confined to three sites on the Norfolk coast and just about clings on inland at Syderstone Common. Members should note that this species is now specially protected, and cannot be handled without a licence See article. *Photo:* Paul Banham.

WINTER SCENES Thompson Common in December with grazing ponies (above) and Wretham Heath with Langmere half-frozen (below). *Photos:* Bob Blandford.

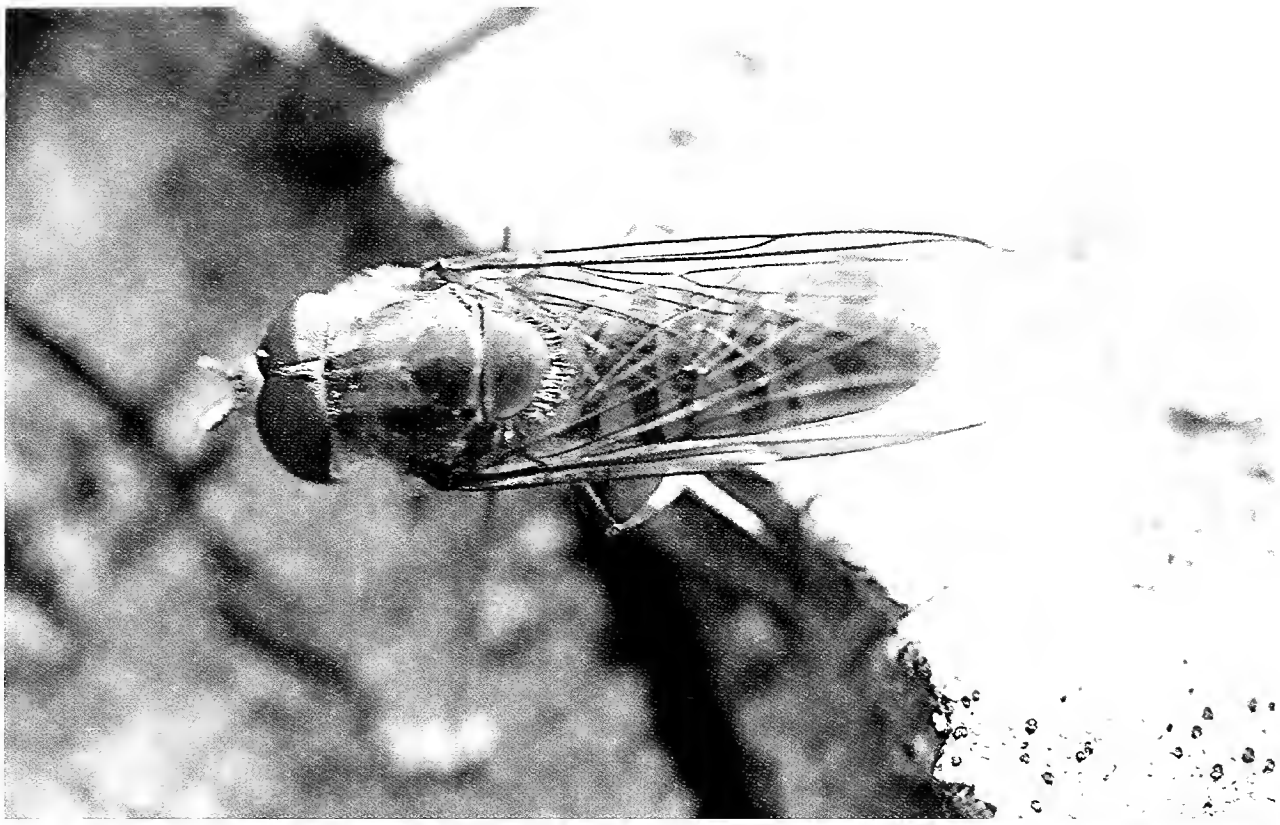
BROADLAND FLOOD ALLEVIATION PROJECT (BFAP) Left: Excavating material for floodbank strengthening from a new dyke at Cantley Marshes. Below: New soke dyke one year after construction. See article. *Photos:* BESL.

STUDENT radio-tracking Water Voles (below) and **WATER VOLE** with radio-collar (right). See article. *Photos:* BESL.

FALLOW DEER come in a variety of colours; introduced by the Normans, most are still effectively domesticated. See article. *Photos:* Tony Howes.

BITTERN (right) a surprise find at Beeston Common's Newt Pond on 16 January 2008. *Photo:* Ellie Farrow.

RAY'S BREAM Holkham Bay, 4 November 2007; the boot is 26 cm long (see article). *Photo:* David & Jo Lester.



MARMALADE HOVERFLY
Episyrphus balteatus
5 January 2008, Booton Common NWT Reserve.
An unseasonal record of Britain's commonest hoverfly, perhaps reflecting the relatively mild conditions.
See article. *Photo:* Colin Dunster.

NOSTOC PRUNIFORME Cantley, July 2007. Nostocs are colonial cyanobacteria, often mistaken for jelly fungi. They can assume a variety of forms, this species forming pea-like spheres. See article. *Photo:* Hans Watson.

***NOSTOC* sp.** Cantley, July 2007.
The more amorphous forms are easily overlooked,
See article. *Photo:* Hans Watson.

Broadland Flood Alleviation Project

Further to the note in *Natterjack* no. 99 about Norfolk mammal records, members may be interested to know that a considerable amount of biological data is being collected by the Broadland Flood Alleviation Project (BFAP). The BFAP is a 20-year programme of flood defence improvement and maintenance works being carried out by Broadland Environmental Services Limited (BESL) on behalf of the Environment Agency. The design, planning and implementation requires ecological surveys to be undertaken in order to identify potential damaging impacts, evaluate the need for actions to avoid or minimise impacts

With respect to mammals we have over 1,000 records on the database, 930 of which are for Water Voles in Norfolk. This compares to a total of 1,252 Water Vole records currently held by the County Mammal Recorder. Water Voles are frequently found in the dykes bordering the floodbanks so, given that long lengths of dyke have to be in-filled as part of the works, a considerable amount of time and effort is spent displacing animals and restoring habitat on completion. A comprehensive procedure for dealing with Water Voles has been developed by BESL with input provided from the Environment Agency, Broads Authority, Natural England and Norfolk Wildlife Trust. The efficacy of the methods was reviewed in 2007, including a student research project that involved radio tracking and tagging animals at Cantley Marshes. A paper summarising the results of the research will be submitted for publication in next year's Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report. All BFAP mammal records to 2006 have previously been sent to the County Recorder and Norfolk Biological Records Centre.

The other large ecological datasets that BESL has cover aquatic plants, terrestrial plants and reptiles. As with Water Voles, great care is taken to ensure that populations of notable plants (e.g. Flat-stalked Pondweed *Potamogeton compressus*) and other species are not lost as a result of the works. To give you an idea of the scale of some of the mitigation work, in 2008 we will be starting the first phase of floodbank improvements over a 16km length of bank along the River Bure between Acle and Yarmouth. The floodbanks support populations of Common Lizards so the works have now been phased over 4 years rather than the original 2. This will allow some sections to remain undisturbed until adjoining lengths of bank that have been worked have re-established suitable vegetation cover. The mitigation methods also include provision of reptile fencing and capture of animals to remove them from the works corridor.

If you would like further information on the Project there is a dedicated website at www.bfap.org. Alternatively contact Jeremy Halls, BESL Environmental Manager on 01603 226161 or hallsjm@halcrow.com.

Dragonflies in Focus

Dr Pam Taylor – Norfolk Dragonfly Recorder

Spring 2008 will see the launch of a new national distribution atlas project by the British Dragonfly Society (BDS). The BDS has secured funding, initially for three years, to employ a Dragonflies in Focus (DiF) Project Officer, Steve Prentice, who will manage the atlas project with the help of volunteers.

The aim of DiF is not only to produce a new distribution atlas in 2013, but also to create a sustainable dragonfly recording system. Too often an atlas project leads to a massive recording effort that is unsustainable after the atlas is published. This results in a comprehensive atlas, but does not produce the kind of regular recording that is needed for conservation purposes. For this reason the atlas is only one aim of the DiF project, the others being to improve data collection, improve data management, provide access to reliable data and to increase the involvement of BDS members and other wildlife enthusiasts (such as members of the NNNS).

The main recording period for the new atlas has been identified as 2008-2012, although past records will also be included. The hope is to compare post-2000 records with those from the previous period in order to map distribution change. Hand-in hand with the national atlas project, this would be an ideal opportunity to produce a new atlas for Norfolk. This is where I need your help.

I was under the impression that Norfolk was a well recorded county. It certainly is compared to many other areas, but there are still several hectads (10km x 10km) that have no dragonfly records post-2000, all of which are in West Norfolk. The main hectads in question are TF50, TF51, TF52, TF60, TF73, TF80, TF82 and TL69. A further ten hectads in the whole county have recorded fewer than ten species in the past eight seasons and there are also a handful of part squares around the county boundaries that lack Norfolk records.

If a national atlas is to be meaningful, then these under-recorded hectads need to be surveyed in the next few years. For a Norfolk atlas to work effectively these, and all other areas, must be recorded on an even finer scale. The preferred scale for a revised Norfolk atlas would be at the 1km level or better (using two letter, four figure, grid references as a minimum).

If you can help with any part of the forthcoming project, then please do. Further details about under-recorded areas and the atlas project will appear on the BDS website in due course (www.dragonflysoc.org.uk). I can be contacted by email if you have any questions (BDSPamTaylor@dragonflysoc.org.uk). Recording forms can be printed out from the BDS website or obtained by post from me. My address is Decoy Farm, Decoy Road, Potter Heigham, Norfolk, NR29 5LX. All completed forms should be returned to me for inclusion in both the Norfolk and national databases. Let's ensure that Norfolk plays its full part in putting dragonflies in focus!

Natural Connections – Connecting People with Norfolk's Wildlife

Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) with support from Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Social Fund began an exciting new 3-year project in June 2007 entitled Natural Connections. The project is designed to give people new opportunities to become actively involved with Norfolk's wildlife.

So, what has been achieved so far?

1) A free wildlife information service aimed at answering public enquiries about Norfolk's wildlife

This service includes a telephone line called Norfolk Wildline (01603 598333) which went live in December 2007; wildlife information pages on the NWT website (www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/naturalconnections) and an NWT web photo gallery which gives people the opportunity to display their photographs on Norfolk's wildlife. Already there are over 50 species profiles, over 60 frequently asked questions and over 500 photographs on the new wildlife information pages.

2) Innovative wildlife surveys encouraging people to observe and record local wildlife

In September 2007 NWT launched a 'Notable Trees of Norfolk' survey and in December a mistletoe survey. Each survey could be completed through the NWT website or by filling in a survey card in the form of a postcard. All the surveys chosen will be done in partnership with the Norfolk Biological Records Centre who will be producing maps of the results and will be linked, if possible, to other local and national surveys.

In 2008 we will be running another three surveys on phenology, garden wildlife and farmland species. The phenology survey which begins in February is being run in partnership with NNNS and the Woodland Trust, further information can be found at www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/naturalconnections
or by telephoning 01603 598333.

3) Work with two rural communities encouraging interest and involvement with local wildlife and producing after two years a best practice guide

During 2008 and 2009 we will be working with Saxlingham Nethergate and Briston/Melton Constable to encourage the local communities to survey the wildlife in their parishes. After the two years we then aim to produce a best practice guide, using these two villages as case studies, to promote the idea of parish wildlife audits to other parish councils.

Volunteers wanted:

As part of the Natural Connections project we are seeking to recruit a small team of volunteer speakers who will give talks about Norfolk's wildlife. If you are a confident public speaker, are passionate about Norfolk and its wildlife and would like to help then please contact Gemma Walker, Wildlife and Community Officer on 01603 598318 or by email, Gemmaw@norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk.

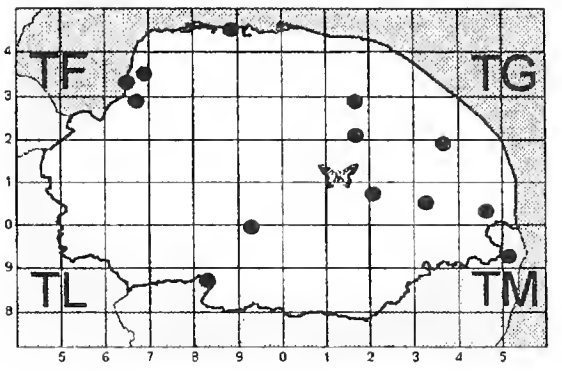
100 Years Ago from the NNNS Transactions

ESTUARINE SHELLS FROM LUDHAM

On 28th April, 1908, I sent for exhibition at the Meeting specimens of shells found in mud dredged out of the River Ant near Ludham Bridge in the summer of 1906. This mud was found to contain immense quantities of Molluscan shells of all sizes belonging to the species *Scrobicularia piperata, Cardium edule* and *Tellina balthica.* Mixed with these were a few shells of the Oyster and freshwater species such as *Unio pictorum* and *Paludina vivipara.* The first three species mentioned are Molluscs commonly found between tide marks and in estuaries, and their occurrence at this spot is an interesting reminder of the estuarine conditions which must have prevailed in the Bure and its tributaries as late as Roman times. The excellent preservation of the specimens, the two valves being often not separated, and the minute size of some individuals show that they were not the refuse from St. Benet's Abbey, but must have lived where they were found. - ROBERT GURNEY

Excursion Reports

2007-08 Field Meeting location
Easton College Indoor meetings



Introductory Bryophyte Meeting in Wayland Wood

Sunday 18th November 2007

On one of the coldest and windiest days so far this winter, with a promise of rain to come, 15 members and guests turned up for an introduction into the complexities of mosses and liverworts, led by Robin Stevenson.

We were pleased to welcome three members of the Northumberland Botanical Society, who were friends of Joyce Humphries.

Wayland Wood is one of the few remaining ancient woodlands in Norfolk, having been managed in the traditional way as coppice with Oak standards. The coppice is mainly a Hazel/Bird Cherry mixture with some Ash and Field Maple. There are many remaining medieval boundary banks. The wood was mentioned in the eleventh century Domesday Book .

The flora is typical of boulder clay but it appeared to be overlaid, in places, with sandy loam.

Robin, who is the British Bryological recorder for West Norfolk, took the five learners, who were mostly female, whilst the more experienced members, went off to record more seriously, and to scout out interesting species for Robin to show the beginners. A total of 41 species were found.

There were two good finds: *Anomodon viticulosus*, which had only been previously recorded in three ten-km squares in West Norfolk, and *Fissidens exilis*, which had previously been found in only four squares. The former was growing on the bole of Ash and Bird Cherry. It is a strong calcicole, and was found by Richard Fisk, the Suffolk BBS Recorder. It appeared to be quite common in this wood. One of the main features of this robust pleurocarp moss is that it quickly changes from its dry state to its wet state when sprayed with water. When dry, the leaves are crisped up and look dull; when wet the leaves open up into a vivid green colour.

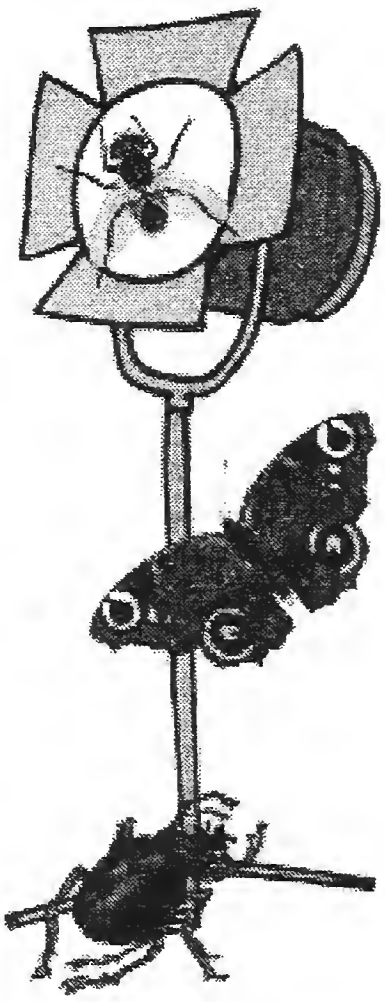
Fissidens exilis, is a tiny plant growing on bare clay soil in the shade. Its minute stem has only 2-4 pairs of leaves and is usually recognised by the erect capsules, often produced in abundance, on orange-red setae 5-6 mm tall.

Six of the mosses found were typical of boulder clay woods: *Anomodon viticulosis*, *Cirriphyllum piliferum*, *Eurhynchium striatum*, *Homalia trichomanoides*, *Neckera complanata* and *Thamnobryum alopecurum*.

A very successful day sheltered from the wind and it did not rain after all.

John Mott

Survey Spotlight



A change in the weather?

As I write, us bird ringers are yearning for bitter cold and snow to entice visiting Brambling, Siskin and Scandinavian thrushes to our feeding stations. Most sane folk, however, are longing for the warmer temperatures and longer days that herald the start of spring. As someone who spends much of his time monitoring nests, I tend to focus on the changes in bird behaviour triggered by the rising temperatures - the fact that a male Robin has been singing from the same perch every time I've walked into town this week, for example, or possible glimpses of the first Blackbird collecting nesting material.

Such observations have traditionally been considered interesting to naturalists but little scientific value has been attributed to them. However, as the earth's climate continues to change at an ever-increasing rate, the value of studying phenology, the relative timing of events in the annual cycle, is becoming more apparent. Through comparison of recent information with historical datasets, many collected by amateur naturalists, scientists have been able to demonstrate climate-related shifts in the timing of a diverse range of phenomena, from trees coming into leaf to butterflies emerging to take their first flights. So those of you who read this column regularly will know what's coming next – a plea for you to get involved in collecting your own phenological data!

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As part of their Natural Connections project, sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund and European Social Fund, Norfolk Wildife Trust (NWT) are running a series of short, accessible surveys, specifically designed for those of us who have not had much experience taking part in such things before. In order to take part in their latest survey, 'Make A Date With Wildlife', you simply need to record the first date this year on which you observe:

- The first frogspawn of the year
- The first male Orange Tip butterfly
- The first fully open Oak leaf
- The first Hawthorn flower
- The first Swallow

The survey runs form February until mid-May and you can either take part on-line by visiting the website at www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/naturalconnections, or telephone NWT on 01603 598333 to request a survey form.

These events have been specially selected under consultation with Dr Tim Sparks at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, who has a wealth of experience in analysing similar datasets garnered from county reports, bird observatories and national surveys. All results will be fed into the Woodland Trust phenology survey and sent to both the N&NNS and the Norfolk Biological Records Centre. If you're interested in learning more about phenology, NWT will also be running a series of workshops for adults and organising a number of guided walks aimed at 'Putting A Spring In Your Step' – for more details visit www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.ukor look in the latest edition of the Tern newsletter.

Don't forget that the N&NNS will also be hosting the Robert Marsham anniversary event at Stratton Strawless on 7th June, at which some preliminary results from the survey will be displayed and David North, NWT's Education Manager, will also be on hand to discuss the findings – hope to see you there!

Dave Leech

A previous subject of the Survey Spotlight was the Harlequin Ladybird (Natterjack no.97) and over this winter there appears to have been an increase in the ladybirds entering houses around the Cromer - Felbrigg area. One lady has reported to me of 'a great many' inside her house and I have seen others in sash window frames in the same area. In America the ladybirds enter houses in considerable numbers and can be so prolific that windows are jammed.

Francis Farrow

SYDNEY LONG MEDAL WHO'S WHO

In the last issue of Natterjack, we reported the presentation of the Sydney Long Medal to Rex and Barbara Hancy. This 100th issue is an appropriate occasion, especially for our many newer members, to look back at the origins of the award and the previous ten recipients.

The award was created in 1986 to commemorate Dr Sydney Long*, for many years secretary of the society and founder-secretary of the Norfolk Naturalists (now Wildlife) Trust. It is presented jointly by the society and the trust roughly every two years, with each taking it in turn to nominate a recipient – someone who has given notable to service over many years to natural history in Norfolk and beyond.

Hardly surprisingly, the first to be honoured in 1986 was Ted Ellis, a great supporter of both organisations and guardian for four decades of his beloved Wheatfen, described as one of the world's most intensively studied wildlife habitats. Sadly, Ted died before the medal could be presented to him but he knew that he had been chosen as the first recipient.

Two years later, the award went to Christopher Cadbury in recognition of his great generosity to conservation bodies, including major support for many NWT acquisitions. In 1991, insect-man-extraordinary Ken Durrant received the medal. Past-chairman and past-president of the society and Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society, Ken has been collecting and recording Norfolk's insects since he was a boy and for many years has played a major part in the conservation of Beeston Regis Common.

Michael Seago, founder of the Norfolk Bird Report in 1953 and editor until his death in 1999, was honoured in 1993 for his immense contribution to ornithology in Norfolk. With Moss Taylor, Don Dorling and Peter Allard, he was co-author of the encyclopaedic *The Birds of Norfolk* but died a few weeks before its publication.

In 1995 the medal went to Dr Martin George. Long after his retirement as regional officer of the Nature Conservancy Council (now Natural England), his book, *The Land Use, Ecology and Conservation of Broadland*, is still a valuable work of reference. Two years later, the trust and society honoured Phyllis Ellis, principally for her tireless work in establishing the Ted Ellis Trust at Wheatfen.

Alec Bull, for many years secretary of the society, received the medal in 1999. With Gillian Beckett (with whom he was joint president of the society) and Robin Stevenson, he was co-author of the magnificent *A Flora of Norfolk* and for many years was east Norfolk vice-county recorder for the Botanical Society of the British Isles. Two years later, Philip Wayre, founder of the wildlife park at Great Witchingham and the Otter Trust at Earsham and a pioneer of natural history broadcasting, was the recipient.

In 2002, the medal went to another co-author of *The Birds of Norfolk*, Don Dorling, who played a major role in the Norfolk Bird Report for 40 years. He was treasurer of the society for 26 years and has served both the society and the trust as chairman and now vice-president. The 2005 medal went to Lord (Aubrey) Buxton, a long standing member of the trust and founder of Anglia Television, whose contribution to natural history ranges from the internationally esteemed *Survival* programmes to the creation of a wetland reserve near his home at Stiffkey.

David Paull

and finally.....

Natterjacks

by Paul Banham

It seems appropriate, for the 100th edition of *Natterjack,* to say something of the eponymous beast (*Bufo calamita*) itself, as I am one of the probably small number of members who have handled and photographed them. We have a thriving colony near Wells - well, when I say "thriving", what I mean is that if they get, say, one good season in three when the pools don't dry up, they can keep up the numbers, being fairly long-lived animals.

The noise of their "singing" in the breeding season is very noticeable, and a number of adults can normally be seen running around in daylight near the pools. They have a yellow line down their back, and are somewhat smaller than the Common Toad. "Running", by the way is a reasonable description of their gait. In fact, their name in the good old Norfolk was "Runn'n tood" (that rhyme with "wood"), to distinguish it from the "Crawl'n tood" *(Bufo bufo)* and the "Hopp'n tood" *(Rana temporaria).*

We are pretty short of batrachian species in Norfolk, though a few decades ago, when I was keeping the herpetological records, a colony of Edible Frogs *Rana esculenta*, or possibly a closely related species, was "rediscovered" on a central Norfolk common, still surviving from an artificial introduction in (maybe) the 19th century. To see a much larger range of species you only have to cross the Channel. Over much of France you can find the Midwife Toad *Alytes obstetricans* and the brightly coloured salamander, and in the south you can add several more, including the Western Spadefoot *Pelobates cultripes,* which is a sort of "froad" or "tog".

At one of our many family *gite* holidays we were kept awake at night by the noisy calls of the Marsh Frog *Rana ridibunda* in the garden pond, and in the obligatory pool proper our swimming was in the company of a population of handsome Marbled Newts *Triturus marmoratus*, as big as our Great Crested Newt. At another *gite* we had snakes: a Western Whip Snake *Coluber viridiflavus* lived in the garden, and in a nearby field I disturbed a Montpellier Snake *Malpolon monspessulanus,* which I swear looked angrily "over its shoulder" at me as it slipped away!

The next issue of ***'The Norfolk Natterjack'*** will be May 2008. Please send all articles and notes to the editor as soon as possible by **April 1st 2008** to the following address:

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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

Contents