



Summer into Autumn 2010 Chairman's Notes

It's morning and it's pouring outside and I am writing this at a most unusual time of day for me. The ground is gratefully soaking up the water with the same appetite as we all have for this summer's sun. It has not done much for painted lady butterflies, however, none have been seen here at Hazels Lodge compared with the hundreds last year; have you been more fortunate?

All our outings have been favoured by fine weather. Axe Estuary, Roliphants, Braunton, Aylesbeare, Marsland and the event reports appear later.

The new laptop and projector are now up and running and will be used when needed at our meetings. As members of the Society, don't forget you may use them as well.

While on the technical stuff don't forget to look regularly on our website for latest noticeboard information, items of interest and of course our programme. The indoor season starts on Friday Sept 17th at St George's Hall.

Our library list is now complete, through the work of Gill Hopkins and is (or will appear shortly) on the website. A list will be displayed at each of our meetings together with a request sheet so you will be able to order at one meeting and collect at the next.

Very sadly, both Bill Elmsall and Carol Cooke died recently. In their different ways they contributed much to the Society's wellbeing. Please do read the tributes to both which appear later in this issue.

Last but by no means least we offer a warm welcome to our new members David Brabban, Helen Fensome, Peter and Joan Gardiner, and Beth Millier who have all joined us since the last newsletter this year and we hope their membership will be a long and happy one.

David Leader

Features

Feeding Time

We have tried a variety of food recommended by the experts for bird feeding but with very little success. Niger seed hasn't attracted Goldfinches as it is supposed to and no other birds will take it: so there's a bag left on the shelf! Biscuit, cake and breadcrumbs go quickly enough and the rooks will willingly take leftover table scraps thrown out into the garden. They even know when it's our lunchtime because they will sit in the rowan tree and just stare in at us. We've hung strips of suet up in trees hoping our much missed woodpeckers will turn up but the Rooks get there first and help themselves. The greediest one will even take the string!

Seedballs are a take or leave it thing and freshly dug up worms don't seem a great attraction to passersby. Sunflower seeds and peanuts are always popular but we have known



"I wish they'd hurry - -up I'm hungry!"
(sketch by Brenda Randle)

them to go rotten in the holders when other bugs and grubs are about. Flaked oats moistened with a little water is always appreciated by parents and this never fails. The poor things must be worn out with all the flights back and forth and they never seem to stop for their own food first. Perhaps they stuff themselves when the chick feeding is over?

Of course, for dessert there are always Raspberry and Blackberry bushes to raid, not forgetting the redcurrants but they always leave us enough to eat, frozen or fresh. We thought Rowan berries were tasty for all birds but it appears they are more appealing to the Blackbirds only. The same with Cotoneaster berries but once again they don't care for ours.

Occasionally I make a cake for them from leftover cooking fat, a little suet, cake crumbs, a few flakes of oats, dry cheese, crushed peanuts, coconut, left over boiled potato and chopped cooked vegetable. I mix well together and put in the microwave oven for a couple of minutes then leave to cool in the fridge. For water we think trays are better than bowls in the winter as the ice is thinner and can be easily broken up.

Well we've taken care of feeding so in return perhaps this is why we have two nest boxes in use this year instead of one. They are Blue tits again and watching them flying backwards and forwards would say the chicks are well into mixed feeding and almost ready to go. Nesting was late this year, as it seems to be for a lot of things, and it was the 20th April before we noticed the first signs. We breathed a sigh of relief as we quite thought there were going to be empty boxes this time.

We can always rely on Rooks, Blackbirds, Woodpigeons, Collared doves and Chaffinches dropping in daily but there is no sign of Nuthatches, Goldfinches, Greater spotted woodpeckers, Treecreepers, Coal tits, or Long-tailed tits. Where are they? Also I haven't heard the Tawny owl at night yet.

Through habit we still look out for Hedgehogs last thing and always hope they will turn up.

Stella and Harold Collister

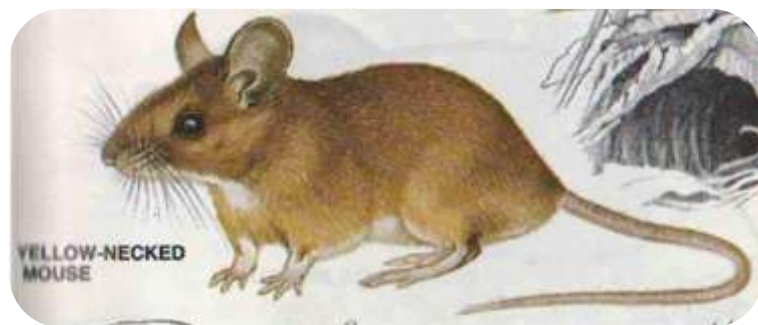
Peanut Treats

In late spring, after dumping bits and pieces in our large garden shed I decided I could not put off tidying it any longer.

As I sorted I found lots of evidence of visitors to the shed, and then when I moved my size 10 Wellington boot found it was a bit heavy. On examination I found the foot and half the leg full of uneaten peanuts. As I continued my task I finally reached the back of the shed where Shelia's Wellies were hanging from a hook, again one seemed heavy so on examination, I found that the foot of one was also full of peanuts. (see photograph)

Whoever was the culprit they were obviously quite fussy about their storage, as apart from both stores being in Wellies, both were in the right foot.

I was sure the visitor was some sort of mouse, but which sort and how many I did not know. I put down two live traps, one of them being brand



The Mouse ?



The Boot

(photo P Richardson)

new as it was recommended by a friend who had a similar problem, but as the shed is so large I put down 3 conventional traps as well.

I did kill one mouse and have had no problems since. This turned out to be a Yellow necked mouse, but much bigger than any of the textbooks say by about 20%-30% and in fact so large it would not have fitted in my new super humane trap.

One question remains, was the mouse so large because of this giant food supply, or did it need so much food because of its size.?

Peter Richardson

Caspar, the Otter and a Hippo (all photos by Stephen Powles)

By now you have probably met the poo hunters Itchy and Scratchy (two poodles belonging to Chris Packham of Springwatch fame) but now meet my yellow Labrador version, Caspar. Here he, or more accurately his nose, is:



Caspar's nose

The cuts on his nose I suspect were delivered by an otter!!! Whilst setting my camera up late one evening to photograph the otter, rather fearful that the otter might come downstream any minute (as seemed to be the pattern, travelling downstream at about 10.15pm having gone upstream two days earlier) a loud squeal came from 30ft away where Caspar was patiently sat. Whilst contemplating the potential damage, fearing he had been kicked by a horse, an otter "flew" into the stream 10ft from where I was standing and shot off upstream.

Suspecting that Caspar had chased and bitten the otter (as the otter had taken an overland detour around me in the stream and bumped into a dozing lab), I made clear my displeasure and "told" him not to do it again.

Two days later, seeing the two marks on Caspar's nose I began to wonder if it was, in fact, Caspar who had squealed as the otter bit him

on the nose!! The squeal seemed too high pitched for a large dog but, maybe, we would all go up a couple of octaves if an otter sank its teeth into our nose!??

Following the encounter, I was concerned for the otter's health so I tracked a series of wet trails up various stony parts of the stream as he/she headed upstream and was pleased not to find any blood. Playing back the video footage of the stream the following morning, I was very relieved to see him/her (probably the same individual) travel back down river 1 ½ hours after meeting Caspar.

The following night when I returned to the river Caspar was unusually reluctant to join me. Was it the thought of the otter's canines or my (undeserved?) reprimand that was deterring him?

Was all the time and effort to get the photo I was after and the anxiety for both the otter and Caspar worth while? May be, as last night I managed to get the photo that I had been after for 6 weeks!



Notice how the eyes, ears and nose can all remain above water level

as the otter swims along. This is very similar to the hippo now that really would frighten both Caspar, the otter AND I if one of them appeared out of the stream!!!



It's not only dogs that have their noses scarred by otters. This photo illustrates a probable scar that could well have been caused by a dispute with another otter.

Otters are known to have fierce territorial disputes, inflicting horrendous injuries on each other. Notice the damaged ears of this individual which could well have been caused in such a fight. Both the frayed ears and nose scars are likely to be useful in identifying individual otters (an ongoing project by myself and others involved with otter research).

Stephen Powles

Norfolk Encounters (all photos by Malcolm Randle unless indicated otherwise)

Early in June, together with Brenda and our son Jon and his family we spent a week cruising on the Norfolk Broads. Although intended primarily as a holiday we also had a particular interest in the wildlife of which we had quite a bit of previous experience. We knew that the time of year we had chosen would offer the best chance of seeing Norfolk's specialities, namely Swallowtail butterflies (*Papilio machaon*) and the Norfolk hawk dragonfly (*Aeshna isosceles*) but little did we expect what we eventually came to see.

We had a brief encounter with Swallowtails, Britain's largest and most exotic butterfly, when we visited during the same week in 1997. This had been in the Hickling reserve area and entailed hiring a boat which could

negotiate the very low medieval bridge at Potter Heigham. We had therefore hired such a boat and commenced our cruise from Horning on the River Bure which is on the northern side and not far from several other notable reserves such as Hoveton Great Broad, Ranworth Broad, Barton Broad and the How Hill Trust reserve. As most of Norfolk's rivers and broads are tidal for a considerable distance inland the first thing to do was to check with the pilot at Potter Heigham for the best time to travel under the bridge. We were very disappointed to learn that we would not be able to get under the bridge at any time during the week as the tides were neap and would not fall low enough for our boat which was just about the maximum height that could negotiate it in any case. At that time we thought it had put paid to any chance of seeing the Swallowtails but, as we were to find, we were under the mistaken belief that Hickling was the only place that they could be seen.



Reed warbler

singing away. Presumably, because of the number of Reed warblers, we continually heard cuckoos, every day and many times a day, so although they may be in decline elsewhere we certainly didn't get that impression in Norfolk.

The following day we headed up the River Ant towards Barton Broad which in itself is a Nature reserve. The River Ant is one of the most beautiful rivers as you are never far from both banks and it is reed and tree lined most of the way. Alder and willow are predominant and in places there were hedges of Dog roses right down to the water's edge. The Yellow flag irises (*Iris pseudacorus*) were also prolific and made a lovely contrast. We headed across Barton Broad which is quite shallow so you have to keep to the marked channels. At the far end at around midday we came across a small lagoon like area at which some boats were moored. This was Gay's Staithe (staithe being the name used in eastern counties for a landing stage or wharf) near Neatishead. It is the location from which Ra, a solar powered boat, is operated by the Broads Authority. Named after the Egyptian sun god, it takes up to 12 people including wheelchair users on a 1¼ hour trip around Barton Broad. Because it is so quiet and has such a shallow draught it can go where other boats can't, there is a much greater chance of having wildlife encounters.

Later the same morning we were heading up the River Bure towards Wroxham when suddenly we spotted a Swallowtail flying towards us. It landed on the front of the boat for a second and then flew off. We were all very excited about this as it meant that if we had seen a Swallowtail in this location, several miles from Hickling, we might well see them anywhere. As we travelled we saw several Great crested grebes with their young, some being carried on the back of the parent bird and numerous goslings of various species, although mainly the Greylag. This is a good time of year to go as most of the water birds have their newly fledged young with them. Coots, as usual, were in very good numbers and it was interesting to note an increase in Egyptian geese numbers since our last visit in 2003. We also noted an apparent decline in the number of Mallard ducks. Everywhere there were reeds and Reed warblers and we often saw Reed buntings. The warblers tend to stay low down in the reeds and are heard more than seen whilst the buntings were often seen sitting high on a piece of sedge



Reed Bunting



Our Otter

Having said that, we have always noticed how little attention most wildlife pays to the boats, which can be quite numerous, especially in the holiday season. We were just about to get a most exciting example of this because as we entered the area some people in a boat told us they had just seen otters there. We found this difficult to believe as there were several boats moored there and people standing around talking, some with dogs. However we moored up and started searching the banks, which were heavily wooded with dense foliage, with our binoculars. Suddenly Brenda announced that she had seen one swimming in and out of the foliage and then we all saw it and then another. To our surprise an otter then commenced to swim across the lagoon towards

us so we were quickly getting our cameras and camcorders into action. When it was half way across it dived and the next we saw was the two of them swimming in and out of the foliage on the opposite side. We could then hear them calling to each other and they had obviously emerged into the woodland and fens. Sadly we did not see them again despite mooring there that night. The following morning I spoke to the solar boat operator who said that he often saw otters in the area around Gay's staithe and it was a popular fishing spot for them. We realised there were plenty of fish there as when we threw some bread in for the ducks the fish demolished it long before the ducks ever reached it. However it was an unforgettable experience as it's not every day you see wild otters in broad daylight.

We spent the following day and a half visiting other parts, away from most of the reserves but when we returned to the River Ant we moored at the How Hill reserve. It was late afternoon when we started walking into the reserve and one of the first things we spotted were numerous Garden tiger moth caterpillars which are not found so often in our own area now. They were on a variety of food plants and did not seem to be fussy at all. Most were fairly advanced in their larval stage. At last we saw our quarry, several Swallowtails mostly on the wing but then we spotted one on a yellow flag which put paid to our belief that they were only attracted to flowers in the red/blue range. It was obvious that this was a good location for them as we could see their food plant, Milk parsley growing. The caterpillars will only eat the foliage of plants in the umbellifer group that includes carrot, fennel and angelica, but they show a marked preference for milk parsley. Once it used to be prolific throughout the fenlands of eastern England but gradually disappeared as the fens became drained. The Swallowtail's last known location outside Norfolk was Wicken Fen (just north of



Cambridge) but it disappeared in the early 1950's. Attempts to re-establish it have failed as although Wicken Fen has not been drained the surrounding fens have and the water table is not high enough to allow the milk parsley to grow tall enough to satisfy the rather choosy female Swallowtails. It was quite a thrill to be able to study this spectacular butterfly at close quarters and it was so intent on feeding we were able to get very close indeed. A local farmer who was interested in what we were looking at told us that at this time of year the Swallowtail was the most common butterfly in his garden also that they had been on the wing for two weeks and would be around for another two weeks.

The following day we were joined by our other son Dave and his wife Julie who were staying nearby in their camper van. We had been informed that there was another part of the How Hill reserve where we could see the Swallowtails and as we headed there Dave spotted a large dragonfly at rest and took a couple of photos. It then took wing and didn't rest again, disappearing out of sight before anyone else could get a shot. However when we looked at Dave's photo I realised it was the Norfolk Hawker, something we had looked out for on previous visits to Norfolk but which had always managed to evade us. The male and female are very similar in appearance and it derives its scientific name from the yellow triangular mark which is located on the second abdominal segment. It can be distinguished from the commoner Brown hawker by its clear untinted wings and green eyes. It is basically a Mediterranean species that is widely distributed in lowland areas of North Africa and Southern and central Europe but in Britain has always been a scarce and local insect. It is listed under Category 1 (endangered) in the British Red Data Books on Insects. Currently it is confined to fens and grazing marshes in the Broadlands of Norfolk and Northeast Suffolk. It requires clean and relatively unpolluted water, a rich aquatic flora and space to hunt. We showed the photo to one of the wardens who confirmed immediately that it was indeed the Norfolk Hawker. We were quite excited about this as he also said that he



Norfolk Hawker (*Aeshna isosceles*)
with identifying feature inset
(photo by Dave Randle)

had not seen them very often and usually they were in fairly poor condition when he had.



**Swallowtail
butterflies at
How Hill Trust
Reserve**
(also previous
page)



Continuing on to the area where we were hoping to see more Swallowtails we were rewarded by coming across several, mostly at rest feeding on thistles. Again we were able to get very close and they were in fact so unconcerned that we were able to get a series of beautiful photos from all angles. In fact they were so amenable Jon was able to get one to perch on his finger and it remained for several seconds before flying off. It was just a lovely unforgettable experience which we were reluctant to leave.

The next morning we went over to Ranworth Broad Reserve one of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's beautifully managed reserves with numerous walkways through the fens and an excellent visitor's centre. There was a magnificent Royal fern on the way to the viewing platform and we also spotted Milk parsley but no Swallowtails. We were informed that Swallowtails can be seen there but they are not as numerous as at How Hill. (Ranworth is very close to where we had seen the first one on our second day). From the viewing platform we witnessed a delightful sequence involving a pair of Great crested grebes feeding their single chick. The male would dive and come up some distance away with a small fish and then swim towards the chick who remained close to the female but when it saw him coming would swim over to receive it. Nearby were several Black-headed gulls (always to be seen in all parts of the Broads) and whenever they flew, making their raucous calls, both parent Grebes would make their alarm call. However, more of a threat was a Grey Heron hiding nearby in the reeds and watching for anything edible that came within reach, which would certainly have included a young grebe. In fact we were told at the visitor centre that it had taken most of the young Mallard ducklings in the vicinity. Interestingly, whilst we had seen numerous Grey herons in our week's travel we had not seen one Little egret although they do exist in Norfolk, more commonly on the coast such as at Cley marshes. Suddenly the heron moved position to stand on a small mound. Not only did the grebes become agitated at this but the gulls became extremely lively and took to the air to commence an aerial bombardment of the heron who just ducked and weaved and stabbed at them but didn't shift from his new position.



**Great-crested grebe feeding young
at Ranworth Reserve**

Later in the afternoon we returned to How Hill where a Barn owl was seen hunting in broad daylight and Dave saw a group of five Bearded tits, of which he also got a good photo. Unfortunately as our group had split up a bit no-one else saw these. Also in evidence was a Marsh Harrier, one of several we had seen since our arrival. We had also seen a lot of Common terns at various locations throughout the week.

The next day we returned home having had a very enjoyable holiday and an extremely successful wildlife experience with some really great encounters. If you have never been to Norfolk and you feel like making the journey as (it can be a bit arduous) then treat yourself. Most of the reserves are easily reached by car so you don't have to hire a broads cruiser but a very good way to get close to it all is to hire a small day boat. We would always recommend late May or any time in June (avoiding the bank holiday period) as it is much less crowded then and the wildlife is at its best.

Malcolm and Brenda Randle

Seaton Tramway

About two years ago, Shelia and I went on an evening birdwatching trip on the Seaton tramway. It was a bit of a disaster as the rain was so torrential that we could not use an open top tram and the smaller antique single decker was packed tight and leaked like a sieve. The windows were so wet outside and so steamy inside that we could see virtually nothing, and only knew there were lots of birds because of the drivers commentary. We made up our mind to go again when we were sure of good weather.



Seaton Tramway

(photo by Peter Richardson)

not far from the main road was a large heronry with every nest occupied, about 50/50 by Grey Herons and Little egrets. To my regret no decent photo due to me pressing a wrong button on the camera.

It so happened that my birthday on 15th April this year dawned bright and crisp, so we decided to take a day out on the trams. Despite this being a regular service, not a birdwatching special, we had a great time travelling from Seaton to Colyton station on a single decker and back on an open top tram. We can thoroughly recommend it. On the trip we saw 38 species of birds including very large numbers of Little egrets as well as much other wildlife.

After the trip we had lunch at a great pub on the other side of the estuary at Axmouth where I took the photo opposite, which gives some indication of the amount of bird life around. On turning around I looked up the hill and to my surprise realised that

Peter Richardson

Stoat Encounter

Although quite common my experience of stoat behaviour has always been infrequent and usually unexpected. An afternoon in Mid June was such an occasion. My attention was drawn to a commotion in a Lawson Cypress near the big garden pond. Standing close to the trunk and looking up I could discern through the dense branches two chattering agitated magpies dashing about on either side of their large domed nest near the tree top about 25 feet above. If these were the parents why the commotion? Were the young fledging? A few moments passed and a stoat appeared scrambling headfirst down towards me carrying a fat almost fully fledged magpie and dropping the last 5 feet to the ground still with its prey in its jaws and stood motionless in front of me. My collie bitch suddenly appeared on the other side of the fence. This was too much and the stoat dropped the squab and dashed past me into a woodpile. I placed the body near the woodpile where I speculated the stoat might well have a den, and took the dog away. 25 minutes later it was gone. How I wish I could have caught this on video! The magpies' nest fell silent. Was this youngster the last of the brood? The parents certainly deserted the nest and I have not seen the stoat since.

I have always assumed that stoats hunted on or near the ground in spite of their renowned agility, but this one had no difficulty in locating a nest high up in a tree. Those of you who are able to view our website may recall my recording of nestbox predation where the most likely culprit was considered to be the equally resourceful weasel.

The domed nest of the Magpie is unique among Corvids and is considered to provide some protection against crows and other birds of prey. Whether this is true or not, neither this or the nestbox was protection from these canny Mustelids.

Alan Hopkins

Migration of Painted Ladies

At our December meeting I spoke about the migration of Painted Lady butterflies from North Africa to Britain and even further to Scandinavia and Iceland. At that time nobody knew what happened in the autumn; did the butterflies fly south? In the spring issue of "Butterfly" came the answer, and here it is printed in full with the kind permission of Butterfly Conservation.

Painted Lady winter riddle is solved

One of nature's long-standing butterfly mysteries appears to have been solved. Every year Painted Lady

butterflies arrive in the UK from North Africa and the Mediterranean and breed here during the summer. But they cannot survive British winters and what happens to them during the winter remained a mystery. Did they attempt to “tough it out” and die trying? Or was there a return southward migration to warmer climes, as is the case with Swallows, Cuckoos and Red Admiral butterflies? Part of the problem was that, unlike these other well-known migrants, there was very little evidence of Painted Ladies flying south in the autumn.

Last summer was a bumper migration year. Butterfly Conservation started monitoring Painted Lady movements as soon as the northward migration began at the start of last year, with members of the public being able to report sightings online at www.butterfly-conservation.org There was a huge response. The survey received over 12,700 records of Painted Ladies submitted by 9,152 people. In 2008 only 1000 sightings were logged.

October brought some particularly exciting developments with reports from the Channel coasts of Cornwall, Devon, Sussex and Kent of sightings of Painted Ladies heading straight out to sea towards continental Europe. Then reports were received of butterflies arriving back in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Richard Fox, Butterfly Conservation’s Surveys Manager, said: This is exactly the evidence needed to lay this enduring mystery to rest. Some Painted Ladies do return southwards from Britain in the autumn enabling the species to continue its breeding cycle during the winter months.” Recent research by Rebecca Nesbit and colleagues at Rothamsted Research and York University reinforces the southward migration theory.

They reared Painted Lady caterpillars in the lab and found that the adult butterflies that emerged in August showed a strong inclination to fly southwards, as we would expect if the species returns to warmer climes for the winter.

The scientists also revealed something of the butterfly’s navigation mechanism. When they assessed butterflies flying in overcast conditions, the clear southerly orientation disappeared. This suggests that Painted Ladies use the position of the sun in the sky to navigate when on migration.

Doris Leader

Water Voles *(photos by Dave Randle)*

You may remember my article on the Brown Hare, well I thought this time I'd keep up with the mammal theme and do an article on water voles as a close encounter with one that I had was particularly memorable.

During my travels around Britain I had only ever seen a few water voles which usually amounted to nothing more than quick glimpses of them swimming in the distance. Then one day as I was exploring a new area around the Humberside estuary I heard a nibbling noise. I looked around but could see nothing then suddenly a brown hairy soggy little critter swam across a drainage ditch and within a few strokes submerged. Intrigued by this encounter I sat myself down on the bank and nestled in amongst the reeds and waited. After a while my sustained patience and stillness paid off as he re-emerged and was swimming back towards me. Camera in hand I got off a few good shots as luckily the light was coming down the line of the drainage dike. I continued to sit there and observe this little fellow for as long as I cared. I noticed how he could swim under the water just as well as he could on the surface. He spent most of the time gnawing right through the bases of the reeds and then transporting them individually to areas just above the waterline amongst the reed beds where he'd sit and eat them. Once consumed he'd slip back into the water resuming his harvest of the localised vegetation.



The distinctive 'plop' sound you'd expect from a water vole as it enters the water is not the only noise to listen out for if you want to see water voles as many things around water make a 'plop' sound! The noise to listen out for is that of his bright yellow/orange incisors

working away on the vegetation. Although this gnawing noise is subtle quite often when they select a reed

for consumption the tops of the reeds shake as they tug at it. This is a much more distinctive sound with visual signs too as the single reed is the only one moving amongst its fellow reeds in the bed. This also tells you exactly where the water vole is. As I gain more experience at observing wildlife I have learnt the importance of recognising sounds and other signs animals leave behind that show they were present. And thus if you know it's there, or has been there, it makes the waiting around for hours for the chance to see it far more endurable.



After a bit of 'post event' research I learnt that adult female water voles occupy territories of around 70 metres of banking during the breeding season of March-September. They can produce up to four litters of between

three and nine young.

These are born naked and blind in an underground nest of dried vegetation gathered by their mother. Males usually patrol a territory of about 170 metres of banking containing multiple female territories. When the young are fully weaned at approximately 4 weeks, they disperse to find their own territories, a factor which can be a problem in isolated water ways. Water voles mark their territories with faecal latrines which are clearly visible in the summer months. Armed with these facts I realised that if I returned to the same area I may have the chance of seeing this water vole again as more than likely he'd be patrolling the same patch. My assumptions were right and I went back to the same site many times and was usually able to see a water vole every time.



The home of the Water vole

Water voles usually live in underground burrows which have submerged entrances but sometimes their burrows may be above the waterline or the water level drops exposing the entrance. (See photo)

Dave Randle

Brown Argus and Small Blue butterflies

On 25th July we went on an outing with Butterfly Conservation to Braunton Burrows. The target species were Brown Argus and Small Blue. John Breeds was the leader and we soon saw all the common butterflies. On the close cropped dune turf we spotted the lovely – but tiny – Brown Argus, only 29 mm. Its flight is swift and low and not very far each time. On we went to the area where a small colony of the Small Blue was known. Due to lack of management this area was getting smaller, the scrub is encroaching, it is now only half of what it was a few years ago. The larval food plant is Kidney vetch which gets choked by brambles and willow. The area left with Kidney vetch is only 30 x 30 m which makes the survival of the colony very fragile unless urgent scrub clearance is undertaken. We saw the lovely Small Blue and also spotted eggs on the underside of the flowers of Kidney vetch. Let's hope we can see them again next year.

Doris Leader

Tiverton Hospital Wildlife Garden (photos by Chris Nadin)

In April 2005, several members of the Exe Valley Rotary Club with an interest in natural history and a desire to serve the community, designed and created a wildlife garden in the grounds of the newly built Tiverton Hospital.

Measuring approximately 40m x 10m the garden is separated from the High School sports field by a stretch of Devon bank - itself a valuable habitat - and is adjacent to medical wards whose windows overlook the area.

Native trees, including, guelder rose, blackthorn, wayfaring tree, hawthorn and holly have been planted along the Devon banking, providing year-round interest and habitat for birds, insects and small mammals.



The level garden has been planted with nine island flower-beds, delineated by honey-coloured hamstone, which contain a mixture of native plants, wild flowers and herbs known to be attractive to wildlife. These include meadowsweet, lungwort, dame's violet, hemp agrimony, oxeye daisy, rosemary and lavender. Early purple orchid, snowdrop and cowslip enhance the margins of the garden in spring.

Two live willow sculptures grace the area, one an arbour with seating, and the other representing a tree trunk in which blackbirds have nested for the past two years.

A magnificent black poplar tree, the centrepiece of the garden, has been used to fix 4 different types of nestbox in the hope of attracting a wide range of creatures. Robin and spotted flycatcher favour the open-fronted box and Mason bees have colonised the insect nestbox. The hole fronted box is an ideal home for members of the titmouse family and there is also a high nesting box for bats. Hedgehogs have been seen in the garden at dusk, and a purpose-built hedgehog box is situated close to the base of the tree.



One of the flower beds

attract grassland and meadow butterflies such as meadow brown, speckled wood and gatekeeper. Other foodplants include sorrel for the small copper butterfly and hedge garlic which is foodplant for the orange tip. Alder buckthorn and holly bushes are attractive to the brimstone and holly blue butterflies.

Dead wood is known to provide food and shelter for amphibians and reptiles as well as mammals, so two dead wood piles have been provided in the hope of attracting slowworm and grass snake as well as frogs, toads and small mammals such as bank vole. There is also a slate area under which beetles and slowworms can find refuge.

An abundance of stinging nettle on the bank provides foodplant for small tortoiseshell, peacock and red admiral butterflies and the coarse grasses - cocksfoot, yorkshire fog and sweet vernal -

A well illustrated and informative signboard welcomes visitors and explains the importance of maintaining wildlife areas in our increasingly pressurised environment.

Gavin Haig

The Queen Hornet



Queen hornet approaching her nest
(photo by Stephen Powles)

The only hornet to survive the winter is the queen. She appears from hibernation in May/June and can be seen searching around buildings looking for a cavity in which to nest, creating a loud buzzing sound as she does so. She is significantly larger than the worker hornet. Once a suitable site is found, she then sets about building a nest and starting the new colony. This year a queen hornet chose to nest under a grass tussock in a nearby field. Watching on a surveillance camera, she could be seen working late into the night (as late as 2am) then starting again well before dawn. She was making a round trip about every 20 minutes. With the worker hornets now active she remains in the nest.

Stephen Powles

A Visit to the Axe Estuary Lagoons.

David, Doris, Jeff and I went on another Devon Association expedition on June 19th - this time to see the flora on the salt marshes. It didn't start until about 2pm so we went in the morning and had a wander round first and had our picnic watching the birds on part of the Lagoons.

It was all very different from when we last went in May about 4 weeks before. (See article below under Meeting and Event Reports). The digger had been very busy making a bank about 7+ feet high to protect the birds from the people who will be using the cycle track, which will run alongside the edge of the lagoons. The soil had been dug out of a nearby field, which will eventually end up as ponds. One had been dug quite deep about a week before and had water in it. Already there were damsel flies there and a dragonfly, a broad bodied chaser (*libellula depressa*). It is the intention to plant a hedge on top of the bank which will make a great screen and there is an entrance into the lagoon area from which there will be a raised walkway over the water to an octagonal hide, giving wonderful views of the bird life there.



Lesser sea spurrey
(photo by Chris Nadin)

While we had our picnic by the lagoons we saw a greater variety of birds, more than the previous time and they seemed prepared to stay. We then went back into the village to meet up with the Devon Association people. Kate Tobin was leading the group. We didn't see a lot of wildlife that day apart from the birds but Kate did explain how the land was being managed with Ruby Red cattle grazing there between April and October. Also how the walkways had had to be adapted to cope with the sea coming in and the cattle wandering over the area. She was very interested in finding out if there was anything unusual in an area at the northern end of the reserve which is very borderline between the salt marshes and non salt marshes. We didn't seem to find anything really unusual. On our two forays out that day we saw about 60 different flowers. Again some of the DA members were very learned and used the latin names. A couple of the memorable ones for me were sea milkwort, celery leaved buttercup, lesser sea spurrey, ivyleaved crowfoot and fools watercress.

All in all a good day. I found the new earthworks and what it all entailed quite exciting and it will be very interesting to go back next year and see what has been happening - how the area has evolved etc. Also to see how the vegetation is taking over the bank and the effect that it has on the birdlife. Also to see the other newly dug ponds with water in them and see what pondlife has been attracted to them.

Chris Nadin

MEETING AND EVENT REPORTS

The Exe Estuary and Jurassic Coast Rod Lawrence - April 16th

As an ecologist and naturalist Rod Lawrence's enthusiasm is boundless and his intimate knowledge of the area over a lifetime is extensive, in particular of a region he cares so much about i.e. the Exe and the Jurassic Coast.



Avocet feeding at Exe Estuary
(photo by Malcolm Randle)

Climate change is a special concern, and he used the Exe estuary to illustrate some of the changes that had taken place and are likely to occur in the future. Aerial photographs, old and recent, illustrated the dynamic changes that had occurred to the course of the navigation channel and sandbanks. Lympstone was once a fishing and whaling port! Eel-grass (favoured by wintering Brent geese) and the Hydrobia snail (wintering Avocet food) are critically affected by changes in the estuary environment. Avocet numbers have shown a decline recently and this could relate to food availability, whilst the geese are more adaptable and seem content to graze golf courses and similar fine turf. However if the predicted rise in sea level occurs Dawlish Warren will be breached and the estuary environment will change rapidly. We can expect similar changes to affect all our estuaries which are so important to migrants, and the coast will also feel the effects of increased erosion. In this scenario there will be winners and losers. Already some continental species have moved in (little egret, cattle egret harlequin ladybird, median wasp, etc.) others (seabirds dependent on fish dependent on coastal plankton) may move away. Visible changes will not be confined to coasts and estuaries. Urbanisation, industrialisation and agriculture affect native flora and

fauna profoundly. The Living Landscapes initiative by the Wildlife Trusts aims to create and enhance wildlife corridors to link areas of habitat that are blocked or impeded. River valleys are the natural wildlife corridors into a country but also logical places for human settlement. How we cope with this challenge in our densely populated country could be a model for developing countries. In Africa for example many migration routes are already blocked, and we may be seeing the effect of some of that here.

Rod was enthusiastic about the proposed Exmouth visitor centre just inside the mouth of the estuary, which he urged us to support, but it will need to be built on stilts. This and other similar attractions along the Jurassic Coast stretching from Orcombe Point to Studland should have positive economic benefits. This coast is of course a World Heritage Site [4th in importance ahead of the Galapagos Islands!].

This lecture was beautifully illustrated with images of many of our local treasures, including numerous waterfowl and waders, osprey catching grey mullet in the estuary, kittiwake colony at Straight Point, Sunfish being cleaned of sea lice by a gull, the Seaton Tramway, the Geo Needle at Orcombe Point, Chesil Beach and the Fleet, Bearded Tits at Radipole, and Lulworth Cove, to mention but a few.

Alan Hopkins

The Axe Estuary & Lagoons with Kate Tobin – 15th May

We were met at Colyford by Kate Tobin (Project Coordinator for East Devon District Council), who was to be our leader for the morning part of the visit. This was, in effect, a follow up to Kate's talk to the Society last October. Kate took us via Colyford marshes to the newly created lagoon at Blackhole Marsh. On the way we were shown various aspects of the marshes and how the habitat varied at the edges as the land gradually increased in elevation. A Cetti's warbler was heard near here, also a Blackcap and at different locations



Little egret at Blackhole marsh
(photo by Malcolm Randle)

Sedge, and Reed warblers were singing as well as Reed Buntings. Blackhole Marsh was not fully flooded but the small artificial islands were becoming more natural in appearance and one had been colonised by a pair of Oystercatchers that had nested there. We spent an hour or so in this location and Kate pointed out the planned route for the cycle path, which with suitable screening was designed to cause minimum interference to wildlife. Apart from some Little egrets, Shelducks and a pair of Mute swans there were not many other birds to be seen but one of our members did spot a female Sparrowhawk in a nearby tree. When Kate left us we made our way back to the hide at Colyford marshes and on the way a female Greater-spotted woodpecker was heard from low down in the hedge who then flew away into a tree when we

got too close. In the meadow beside the brook Green-veined white butterflies were seen and on the hedge nearby a Large Red damselfly was resting.

Lunch was taken at the hide from where a number of Shelducks could be seen. After lunch the group moved on to Seaton Marshes to spend some time at the hide and here a Whimbrel was seen as well as a Curlew plus a juvenile Grey heron. These were the only variations from the morning session but there were more Shelducks also three Moorhens one of which was a juvenile. The only other butterflies noted were an Orange tip at both sites and a Peacock at Seaton marshes. We were impressed with the conservation work carried out at Blackhole marsh and all in all it was a very good day in pleasant spring weather.

Malcolm Randle

Roliphants Farm Saturday 29th May 3pm

This was an outdoor event where members were encouraged to focus attention on the hedgerows and to list the species of trees shrubs and other plants and flowers which caught their eye. Most of our hedgerows are ancient and may well predate the farmhouse which is approximately 400years old, so they are of archaeological as well as natural history interest. Devon hedgerows consisting of a stone and earth bank with shrubs and trees on top are particularly significant as wildlife corridors nest sites and refuges for a wide variety of flora and fauna. This Spring we have also been participating in the farmland bird survey the results of which are expected early Autumn, so any bird observations were also encouraged.

Participants split up into small groups and were asked to select a named section of hedge to record. Eight groups returned lists and several remarked on the variety of species. This confirms the view that hedgerows

in general are well worth closer observation whilst their management is critical for many species. On good agricultural land in the lowlands which must be productively farmed if we are to remain at least partially self supporting in food, our hedgerows provide much of the biodiversity we must retain whilst also being a unique feature of the British landscape. At Roliphants all our fields are small [less than 6 acres] and bounded by hedges, many Km in extent. Much hedgerow management demands manual labour as well as expensive mechanisation. Manpower on the land is in short supply. Income can be obtained from tree planting schemes but hedgerow maintenance? It would cost a great deal and take a long time to reconstruct a Devon hedgerow. Can we afford to maintain all of them as we should? I hope so.

29 members and friends attended. Cream tea refreshments were provided.

More information is available from www.devon.gov.uk

Alan Hopkins

Visit to Braunton Burrows - 8th June (photos by Chris Nadin)

As the Tuesday for our Braunton Burrows visit approached we kept an anxious eye on the weather forecasts which promised heavy thundery showers. We considered cancelling but as Marion our expert guide was coming from Budleigh Salterton we decided to go. We were prepared and dressed for the worst the weather could throw at us.

From the car park we went along the main track and identified many wild flowers on the way and when the sun came out so did the butterflies; so many beautiful common blues.

We stripped off one layer after the other and when we reached the little pond where our lunch break was planned we all envied Chris who had defied all bad weather forecasts and had come in shorts. It was a glorious spot, the pond was teeming with wildlife and as we sat next to the water the dragon flies came closer and closer and settled on the reeds and ground, in fact too close to watch through binoculars.



Moonwort



Six spot Burnet moth caterpillars

We saw far in excess of 120 varieties of plants but the crowning glory was a Moonwort which is the rarest plant on Braunton Burrows. This is a minute fern with yellow "moons" up the stem. Jeff was definitely "over the moon" to see it again. I had last seen it 16 years ago when Rod Lawrence showed it to us on a visit to the Burrows.

We saw numerous (don't step on them!) Six Spot Burnet caterpillars, four varieties of butterflies, and also found a snake skeleton. It was a very successful outing and made even better when we saw 16mm of rain in the water gauge at home!

Highlights: Moonwort and Sand Pansy

Caterpillars: 6 spot Burnet and Lackey

Dragonflies: 4 spot chaser, Blacktail skimmer, Emperor, Large red damselfly, Azure damselfly, Blue tailed damselfly – males and females of all varieties

Fungi: Fairy ring champion, Yellow fieldcap, Inocybe species

Butterflies: Common blue, Speckled wood, Argos, Small heath

Birds: Willow warbler, Whitethroat, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Magpie, Crow, Herring gull, Kestrel, Buzzard, Reed bunting

Doris Leader

Visit to Witheridge Moor – 24th June (photos by Malcolm Randle)

Roger Crouch led our expedition and very good it was, too! He has worked this Moor for 20 years and produced for us a large scale plan to show and explain some of the extensive work he carries out; reclaiming culm pasture, creating low flight paths for butterflies, encouraging the growth of devil's bit scabious which is the larval food plant of the endangered marsh fritillary. Seeds of this plant don't survive long in the ground so

they must be spread by hand to secure success. *Rhododendron ponticum*, so attractive in flower, is the woodman's nightmare, but so difficult to eradicate. It is cleared along with mature birch and willow scrub and bracken. The recovery here of the marsh fritillary over the years has taken hard graft and patience but it has been rewarded. Using the same methodology since 1995 - same areas, half hour time counts and on various days in June which is the only month it flies - he recorded 67 on 3rd June this year in one half hour survey. He was mighty pleased!



A Marbled white settles on a member's hand

This being 24th July we wouldn't see them of course. They were hatching from egg to larva stage which would last another ten months, then a fortnight as a pupa then June and another butterfly. The fully grown larva is black, an inch long, and suffers greatly from attacks by parasitic wasps.

As we were about to start our walk some saw a sparrowhawk carrying prey. Suitably informed we set off across the Tractor Field. It is a large hay meadow full of orchids and wild flowers which attract numerous species of insects and butterflies. We saw 15 species in all including our main target of purple hairstreak whose usual home is high up in oak trees.

The afternoon saw a split in the camp. Some stayed put, the more able explored other more difficult terrain and came back reporting a roe deer with fawn, a dozen red deer, plus the expected woodland birds. Two Devon Reds and their calves were chewing the cud, taking a rest from shortening the tough moorland grasses upon which they thrive. Their sites and numbers are carefully chosen, for they are part of the management system, too. The ashes of a bonfire had been scraped by deer to get minerals. Roger pointed out a specially constructed "concrete drainage system" which led nowhere; it was an old, disguised, secluded, artificial sett used for badger baiting.



Small copper in the Tractor field

Back to the Tractor Field which is best in June but still showed a great variety of plants.

As we heard from Suzanne they can never have a holiday in June because Roger is out almost every day counting butterflies!

Roger was thanked profusely for a really splendid day.

David Leader

PROGRAMME NOTES

On 17th September our autumn programme begins again at St. George's Hall. Formerly resident teacher at Rainham Marshes in Essex, Steve Hall will tell us about his experiences in seeing a marsh converted from a relative dump to a project to be proud of. He used to live on the outskirts of London but is now very happily settled in Oakford.

The following month, on the 15th, Richard Ball of the National Bee Unit will explain exactly how indispensable bumblebees are and the dangers they and we face.

Barn Owls are a subject that has been requested several times before and November 19th will see it take place. David Ramsden from the Barn Owl Trust will delight us with both commentary and superb photography

Round Table appears as usual as the last meeting of the calendar year. Bring anything of interest, especially if it's provocative. Any skeletons in the cupboard most welcome.

David Leader

NOTICES

New Logo, Car Sticker and Lapel Badge

Following a period of consultation and discussion within the committee a design by Peter Richardson has been accepted as a new logo for the society. A car sticker has been produced which can be purchased at a price of £1.50 each. These are available from the chairman, David Leader, but will also be available at our evening meetings when they commence. Should you wish to purchase one (or more) before that please contact David (01398 351359). It is hoped that as many members (and hopefully members of their families) will display them in their cars thus helping to promote the identity of the Society and create interest with a view to increasing our membership. Peter has also had a small number of lapel badges made at his own expense and if these prove popular they may also be made generally available. The car sticker is reproduced here.



John Greenslade's Memoirs

John has just had his memoirs published under the title of *"T'was a Proper Job"*. It recounts 70 years of life on his farm at Bickleigh. Members will recall past visits to his home at Way Farm where John has lived and worked all his life. John has had an interesting and varied life having been very involved with the launching of the Mid Devon Show and having spent 20 years as a magistrate on the Cullompton bench. It sounds like a good read and can now be obtained from bookshops at a price of £12.99.

OBITUARY

Memories of Bill Elmsall

I am sure many of you will have fond memories of Bill Elmsall, who passed away peacefully early on Saturday 10th July 2010 at Tiverton Hospital. Bill had been suffering with a number of medical problems in recent years.

Bill was a man of many interests. He trained in agriculture at Bicton College in the early fifties and then followed a career in farming before changing to work for a civil engineering company.

Bees were Bill's passion which kept him busy right up to his last few weeks. A keen competitor in local shows but in particular showing bees to the public in his observation hive. At the 2009 County Show, Bill found himself pointing out what was going on in the hive to Sophie, Countess of Wessex. Bill was a true countryman always observing what was going on around him, be it a bird song or an interesting pebble. The latter led him into his other great interest of Geology and Palaeontology of which he had a considerable collection of rocks and fossils.

Whatever Bill was doing, be it bees or natural history, if volunteers were called for Bill would be the first to offer assistance. A great enthusiast pleased to pass on his knowledge to others but also keen to learn more himself. Bill, a regular attendant at winter meetings and a great friend will be truly missed.

(Bill told me his ancestors arrived with William the Conqueror)



William De Cardonnel Elmsall 1926 – 2010

Carol Cooke 1927 - 2010

Longstanding members of MDNHS will remember with great affection Carol's many years of service to the society in her capacity as secretary, newsletter editor and distributor and indefatigable wildlife enthusiast.

Carol joined the society in the mid-eighties, becoming involved in the production of the newsletter after her retirement from Blundell's, where she was for many years PA to the Headmaster.



Carol at our Christmas dinner in 2003

She brought many of her formidable administrative skills with her, and used them to great effect in encouraging members to contribute to the newsletter, pay their subscriptions on time, attend meetings and join field trips.



Carol at one of our Roliphants meetings with Roger Crouch

Her knowledge of natural history was deep and wide-ranging. She was a botanist at heart, but her ornithological knowledge, too, was encyclopaedic, and though offered tentatively, was invariably accurate and interesting.

My abiding memory of Carol is of an indomitable Englishwoman in motorcycle helmet, bombing around on her scooter - they don't make them like that anymore.

Our lives have been much enriched by the privilege of knowing her; we shall miss her friendship and sense of fun and adventure enormously

Gavin Haig