

RECENT EVENTS

Visit to Cavenham Heath

On Friday 26 August 2009 the Society visited the National Nature Reserve at Cavenham, near Mildenhall, on the south side of the River Lark. It is a lowland heath, much of the site being a typical Breck heathland, with a dry acidic soil supporting heather and bracken and with patches of sand sedge. The river is responsible for a number of damper habitats on the site, making this one of the more diverse examples of Breck heath.

We were conducted around the reserve by the warden, Mike Taylor, who revealed its interesting history and described the management of the site for the various important wildlife habitats. He pointed out experimental plots, where different cutting regimes are being tried in an effort to maintain the heathland sward and eradicate intrusive vegetation such as bracken.

We were blessed with a fine sunny evening and had a circular walk with good sightings of over 30 stone curlews, gathering before setting off on their migration to Africa. They were close enough for everyone to have superb views, especially through the telescopes, and their haunting cries filled the still air. These birds are increasing their numbers in the Brecks, which is now home to over 200 breeding pairs, many of which now nest on farmland owing to the reduction of their heathland habitat over the last few decades. Cavenham represents an excellent opportunity to see these enigmatic birds in their traditional Breckland setting.



Society members enjoying the evening sun on Cavenham Heath

westacre theatre



Call the box office: 01760 755800

Film Nights

New to Westacre Theatre!
Join the film club for just £10 a year to receive regular savings and the chance to choose future films, or just come as a guest.
Members £3 Guests £5

Sunday 8 November 7pm
Regeneration: Behind the Lines

Sunday 15 November 7pm
Amores Perros

Shakespeare's FEMALE PARTS

The Bard's great heroines laid bare,
devised and directed by Andy Naylor
Friday 13, Saturday 14, Friday 20,
Saturday 21 November
7.30pm £12

If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter please contact the Editor at The Breckland Society
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www.brecsoc.org.uk



Campaign to Protect
Rural England



Celebrate Christmas at Houghton Hall....

Carols, seasonal canapés and roaring fires – the perfect ingredients for any Christmas celebration. But add in the sumptuous surroundings of Houghton Hall's Picture Gallery, one of the private rooms rarely open to the public, and traditional carols by local singers Nobodyies Gigge, and you have a very special Christmas celebration indeed.

The event at Houghton Hall is being organised by CPRE Norfolk and held by kind permission of CPRE patron Lord Cholmondeley. All are welcome. With Christmas drinks and seasonal canapés to be served, this is a fantastic opportunity to see behind the scenes of this magnificent Palladian residence, the home of Great Britain's first Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole.

The event takes place from 7pm–9pm on Saturday 5 December, with gates opening at 6.30. Tickets cost £15 per head and numbers are limited, so to guarantee your place please send your name, number of tickets requested and a cheque payable to CPRE Norfolk at 42–46 Bethel Street, Norwich, NR2 1NR.

Further information from 01603 761660.



TRAVELLERS OF THE NIGHT

One of the greatest spectacles of the wildlife world is one that we rarely see in close-up – the nightly movement of thousands of moths going about their business. The Brecks are home to a range of unusual and scarce species and are relatively under-recorded in moth terms, so any sightings are of interest to the Norfolk and Suffolk county recorders. Society member Sue Pennell takes a look at the trials and tribulations of trapping and identifying some of the most beautiful denizens of the dark.

Over this past year I have discovered the magic of “mothing”, and the thrill of finding that these creatures, more beautiful and varied than I could possibly have imagined, visit my garden at night throughout the year. Moths – there are over 2,500 different species found in Britain – are divided into “macro” and “micro”. Micro moths can be minute and, as they are rarely illustrated in field guides, are probably best left to the expert. The larger macro moths, of which over six hundred species are found in Norfolk, are the easiest for a beginner to identify as they can be examined without a magnifying glass.

Some moths fly by day, but the majority are active during the hours of darkness. Some species fly at dusk, others around midnight, and yet others at dawn. Some fly to feed on nectar on flowers or overripe fruit, others simply to mate, lay their eggs and die. Some species live for only a few short weeks, others for months. Some species are resident in Britain, others are



Small Elephant Hawkmoth

seasonal visitors or scarce vagrants. A great number are attracted by light, and it is about these species that I am beginning to learn through trapping them.

A Skinner moth trap consists of a large wooden box with perspex slides to entice the moths into the depths of the box, where a few egg-boxes provide suitable niches for the moths to tuck themselves away (see photo on page 2). A high-pressure mercury vapour bulb, so powerful that I would not be surprised to find aliens or planes from RAF Marham in the garden, surmounts the trap. The light is switched on at dusk on calm, rainless and preferably moonless nights and

WHAT'S ON forthcoming Society events



Friday 11 December

Christmas party at Clermont House, by kind invitation of John and Diana Davies. 7.30pm. Tickets £12, to include wine, canapés, two courses and coffee. Must be booked in advance, please contact Sue Whittleby by 1 December. Clermont House will be signed from the B1108 on the night.

30 January 2010

Natural Inspirations, second workshop. See July 2009 newsletter for details or contact Sue Whittleby.

Mid-February

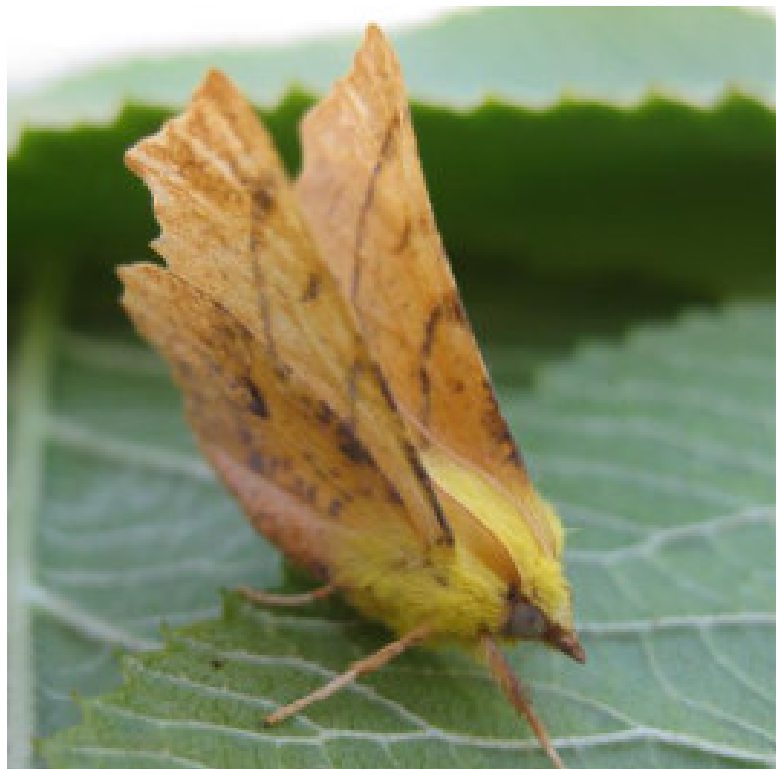
Talk on Breckland insects by Nick Gibbons, former Conservation Officer with the Forestry Commission. Nick will also be leading an insect field trip in spring or early summer. Full details in January newsletter.

If you are concerned about driving in the dark, or simply need a lift to a Society event, please contact Sue Whittleby, as it may be possible to arrange transport with other members.

turned off just before dawn, when the box is covered by a cloth, not only to prevent escapees, but also to dissuade birds from snapping up a hearty breakfast. Robins and blackbirds can be very persistent and soon learn to recognise the trap as a source of easy food, whipping moths away as they are about to be identified or while they are being photographed.

During a warm period in mid-summer I can expect over a hundred different species of moth to be hiding in the egg-boxes at the bottom of the trap. Identification can take a long time. Each moth has to be examined carefully, as the types can vary widely in colour and size, according to factors such as age and availability of food during the caterpillar stage.

Brightly coloured species such as Silver Green-lines, Burnished Brass or Leopard Moth are easily identified, as are the large hawk-moths and the unusually shaped Canary-shouldered Thorn and Rosy Footman. But as the dozens of brown or grey look-alikes are difficult to distinguish, something like the format of TV's *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* comes into play. If *The Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* doesn't help, then I check "Flying Tonight" on the brilliant Norfolk Moths website, phone a friend and, finally, ask the expert who is the County Recorder. The moths are treated gently, rarely touched by me, and are left to fly from the trap unharmed in the evening to continue their nocturnal lives.



Canary-shouldered Thorn

Summer 2009 has brought over two hundred different species to my trap. One hundred and forty of these have been conclusively identified and photographed. My records are submitted to the Norfolk County Recorder, who publishes the data on the website and forwards the information to the National Moth Recording Scheme. As a novice, I see something new every time I run the trap. Mostly I find common moths, but because so few people submit records, occasionally "my" moths are found to be rare or unknown in the locality and have even caused a little excitement among enthusiasts. So, as well as having discovered this new magic in my night-time garden, in a small way my findings are adding to the overall picture of wildlife in Breckland and to the knowledge of moths in Britain.

Information on trapping and identifying moths may be found on www.norfolkmoths.co.uk, www.mothscount.org and www.butterfly-conservation.org. *A Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland* is written by Paul Waring and Martin Townsend and published by British Wildlife Publishing.

All photos in this article were taken by Sue Pennell.



Leopard Moth

Sue's Skinner moth trap



Eyed Hawkmoth

THE ROMANS IN NORFOLK

On the evening of Friday 18 September, Norfolk County Archaeologist David Gurney held an audience of 26 people spellbound as he talked about Roman Norfolk.

David began by setting the scene in terms of historical accounts, with the first being written by Samuel Woodward in 1831. Using a series of clear maps and diagrams, he described the topography as it was in the second century AD, with particular reference to the estuary that stretched as far inland as Acle and was guarded by the forts at Caistor and Burgh Castle. (Breydon Water is a vestige of that estuary.)



Most fascinating were David's detailed descriptions of the Roman finds in the county, which often comprise half the total of about 30,000 objects brought to the archaeologists in any one year. We were shown photographs of a smith's toolset found inside what was identified as his workshop, complete with a pump of metal and leather used to work the bellows. Moulds for brooches have been unearthed in three locations in Norfolk, all the more remarkable because these are the only moulds to be found in the whole of the Roman Empire

Nor was Breckland forgotten. David ended his lecture with the Fison Way excavations in Thetford. It was here that in 1979 the celebrated Thetford Treasure, on show last year at the Ancient House Museum in Thetford, was discovered by a freelance metal detectorist. Just to the north of the buried treasure, also on Gallows Hill, was an important Late Iron Age Icenic religious site. The outline crop-markings of this great rectangular sanctuary, which used a remarkable 60 miles of timber in its construction, were discovered by chance from the air in 1980. Excavations the following year showed that during the time of the famous Icenic queen Boudicca, it was enclosed by ditches, banks, and up to nine rows of closely spaced oak uprights, perhaps with branches still on them. This created what archaeologists described as 'an artificial oak grove'. The fact that archaeological evidence points towards the sanctuary's systematic destruction by the Romans immediately after AD 60, the year of Boudicca's rebellion, substantiates this. Such a dramatic link to the past emphasises even more vividly the rich legacy of artefacts and sites that is Roman Norfolk.

Left: Burgh Castle Roman fort: The walls are built of flint and mortar and the wall faces are made with carefully knapped flints interspersed with layers of red Roman tile.



Right: The importance of the Boudicca Temple in Thetford has now been recognised, and the site has been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

He discussed the patterns of settlements, with dense concentrations along the edge of the Fens, where the heaths of Breckland met the peat wetland. He emphasised the continuity of population, with those living in Roman Norfolk being the direct descendants of the pre-Roman inhabitants, with only the administration being subject to radical change.

WARRENS PROJECT UPDATE

The Society's project to research the archaeological and archival evidence for the warrens of Breckland has yielded far more information than expected. So much so that English Heritage has agreed to an extension of the project end date from November 2009 to March 2010. Anne Mason reports on recent progress.

The project volunteers have almost completed their fieldwork surveys and, for the first time, the surviving perimeter banks of all the warrens have been mapped and their condition recorded. This is no light task, when you consider that some of the warrens had perimeters of between eight and ten miles! The archival research results are also being returned, with documents being discovered among manorial records and estate papers which are giving valuable information about the numbers of rabbits culled, the markets for the meat and skins, and the lives of the warreners and their families.

Oral history interviews are helping to shed more light on the warrening way of life. Society member Teresa Squires recently interviewed two women, the daughters of a Croxton warrener, at the suggestion of Melinda Raker, to whom the Society is very grateful.

Articles in the local press resulted in contact with a former worker in the rabbit-fur processing factory in Brandon and her memories have been recorded as well. The project even made it into the pages of the national press, with a full-page feature on Brandon - "The Town That Grew Rich on Rabbits" - in *The Daily Express* on 3 September.

Meanwhile, James Parry and I have been asked to give a presentation about the project to English Heritage at its regional office in Cambridge, explaining not only the results of the research but also how the project has been organised and the volunteers engaged. We shall emphasise that the project is highlighting the significance of the Breckland warrens in terms of social, economic and landscape history and that the archaeological and archival evidence together are a unique resource for a vanished way of life.