



## BADCOG NEWS.

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### The Chairman Writes

Already half way through the second month of 2021 and the present lockdown due to Covid continues.

Our first work party in January is always Lingwood pond but unfortunately not this year. However, Darrell Starkings who cut Howes Meadow hedge for us in January has also cut the hedge on the south side of Lingwood pond, and we are waiting for a contractor to coppice the sallow in the NW quarter and carry out a safety survey on the oaks at the same time, so management is in hand.

On Saturday January 30th we should have carried out aftercare and any replacements on the hedges we planted last year, an important job, and still time to do it!

Nationally, large tree planting schemes are being planned, and bodies like The Woodland Trust are at the forefront to try and help mitigate the effects of climate change. While there is scope for large scale tree planting in many upland areas in our small and overpopulated country it's not quite the case in food producing counties like Norfolk, especially when it's taken into account that many city dwellers are thinking they can now work from home and would like to live in the country. Land is at a premium.

In Norfolk hedge planting has long been thought the best option to link important wildlife areas, thus many miles of grant aided new native hedges have gone in the last 30 years or so. Of course, grants were available, not so long before that, to pull hedges out.

As for boundary trees, they are the opportunity to maintain the character of our countryside. It's been said historically that there were so many

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hedgerow oaks that to visit the county was like entering an oak forest you never actually reached. Those days are long gone as fields have been enlarged to take modern machinery but I believe, where ever possible we should be planting oaks as a new generation to replace our existing mature trees, many of which are 200years old. Try and visualize a road or lane you know without the old trees and a bleaker view will come to mind.

BADCOG has been involved with such schemes over the years and I'm sure will continue to do so. The first step is to achieve cooperation and agreement with the farmer or landowner. Banks need to be wide enough. Trees planted N-S will shade crops less in the future than those planted E-W. I don't plant along southern boundaries of fields and also not on the inside of bends or near junctions on roadsides, or under overhead wires. Best also to concentrate on minor roads or green lanes There's much talk now of ELMs, environmental land management which is replacing some of the wildlife friendly schemes farmers have been used to. Grants will be available for farmland management which aids our depleted wildlife.

Finally, there are re-wilding plans taking place at Ken Hill estate, Snettisham in the west of the county overlooking the Wash, and on the Somerleyton estate in the extreme east. I'd like to think the future is optimistic.

Ernest Hoyos  
February 2021

### **Norfolk's roads**

William White's History, Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk 1845. Turnpikes and public roads in Norfolk are better than those of most other counties in England being generally raised higher than the adjacent lands, well drained by trenches on each side, and having a firm bottom composed of gravel, flint and chalk.

Charles II "Who never said a silly thing, nor ever did a wise one," said, when on a visit to the Earl of Yarmouth, at Oxnead in 1671, that "Norfolk ought to be cut out in strips, to make roads for the rest of the kingdom," alluding no doubt to the surface being generally level.

## Jaws Hans Watson

Many members will be familiar with the Woodlouse spider *Dysdera crocata*. This rather pallid looking spider often finds its way into our houses, where it occasionally meets an untimely end, either at the hand of an alarmed house-owner, or simply because our modern centrally heated homes are nothing like the environment that the spider is accustomed to, and they dehydrate and die.



Recently, I found one hiding under a box that had been left overnight in my lounge, so I scooped it up in a plastic container and took it into the garden to liberate it in a suitable spot where it could hide. Upon liberation, instead of running to the nearby cover, it began to run in the opposite direction across a paved path, and when I tried to redirect it by blocking its path, it stopped and opened wide its chelicerae (jaws) in threat. Seeing these jaws open made me understand why a friend of mine who specialises in spiders, said he would not handle one. Apparently the spider is quite capable of inflicting a painful bite, but this is not generally harmful to humans, however it certainly is for a Woodlouse.

### **Farming; past, present and future -an insider's perspective**

I recently heard a reading on BBC Radio 4 from a book entitled "English Pastoral" by James Rebanks, a farmer. He recalls growing up on his father's rented farm in The Eden Valley and that of his grandfather in The Lake District which he farms today. He chronicles the story of farming from the old traditional methods to modern factory farming. He describes the social, economic and environmental impact of these changes. He is convinced that this progression has produced a radical and ill thought-out experiment which he is trying to put right.

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His grandfather taught him the rhythms of the farming year in which "the farm dances round the plough". He recalls walking the fields to collect stones or walling material, watching for and rescuing curlew eggs as they rolled the seedbeds or loading steaming manure from the byre to spread on the fields. At this time as a lad he was in conflict with his father who was intolerant of his father's "softness". However his truculence changed to growing enthusiasm to accompany his grandfather in his farm work, cold early winter starts notwithstanding.

He takes us back to the malnourished times of the early twentieth century and the war years. Food cannot be taken for granted hence the push for food security in the 1950s by increasing food production and providing it at an affordable price. Attempting to repeat crop without rotation would lead to loss of soil nutrients and a build up of pests. The discovery that nitrogen from the air could be harvested to produce artificial fertilisers was widely accepted as the way forward and this movement, originating in America, became a worldwide revolution. This, aided by pesticides, weed killers, DDT, hormones and antibiotics in feeds, was the driver behind the great leap in "efficiency". Thus food chains were freed from natural restraints and the future for food production and farmers looked rosy.

The rallying cry of efficiency led to increased mechanisation with bigger plant taking less time, employing fewer people and intolerant of obstacles. So fields had to be enlarged by removing hedges and trees, meadows fertilised and reduced to enriched grassland. Food was becoming cheaper and pressure was on for farmers to maintain their income by producing more. New breeds of cattle were brought in which could produce greater yields but were not as tough as the old ones and the increase in scale of herds meant that they could not be put out to grass but were fed in barns. This intensive environment made them prone to stress and disease. The latter countered, especially in America, by the routine addition of antibiotics to feeds. Breeding programmes increased meat milk and yields for cattle and were especially significant for pigs and chickens which became big business.

Farms no longer produced manure to spread on and rejuvenate the land. The slurry produced by cows fed on silage is too rich and acidic and soils suffer when it is spread on them. James and his father became aware that gulls no longer followed the plough. There were no worms for them.

There is no doubt that the figures confirm the efficiency of this revolution;

In 1995 the number of dairy farms was 30,000, it is now 12,000, the number of cows in the past 20 years has fallen by 50% but milk production is the same.

In 1950 the average household spent 35% of its income on food, it is now 10%. People are now free to spend the savings on consumer goods and foreign holidays.

However at what real cost has this been achieved? We must acknowledge the setting and effect such farming has had on the environment. There has been a catastrophic collapse of the ecosystem with farmland impoverished of wildlife such as birds, mammals and insects. Major surveys relentlessly confirm this and show Britain as one of the most nature depleted countries on the planet.

What then for the future? We must look back and make a balanced judgement. We must learn what we can from new methods as we face the need worldwide to feed a growing population. And we must find from the old what is sustainable and adaptable. Traditional methods are still being used worldwide and could provide a source of new and improved crops or stock. This balance needs to recognise that efficiency is not all. We must opt out of the cheap food dogma, return to mixed farming and use enlightened land stewardship. James has done this on his farm. He has used no artificial fertilisers for five years, introduced wild flower meadows, undertaken tree and hedge planting and waterway management. For the latter he has taken advantage of a sponsored programme which has returned his becks to their natural profiles, planted trees on their margins and left wild areas beside them. He has been rewarded by the return of voles, barn owls, badgers, otters and roe deer. He does not resent the fact that losing some efficiency and income means he also has to supplement it by other means; worth the price many times over!

David Pilch

## Nature Notes

**Nurturing turtle doves.** East Anglia is one of their few remaining strongholds. The RSPB is testing a pilot scheme with Norfolk and Suffolk farmers who will be asked to create feeding plots for the birds, seeding the vegetation they like to eat and creating habitat for them to nest in.

The birds rely on the seeds of fumitory, knotgrass, chickweed, oilseed rape and cereal grains and they thrive on untrimmed grassland.

Because much of this grassland has been used for housing and agriculture their habitat has dramatically contracted. Turtle doves also nest in hedges so farmers will be encouraged to plant thorny species and climbers.

In 2016 it was estimated that only 3,600 breeding pairs remained in the UK.

These doves are a priority species for conservation in the UK. This trial could give a valuable insight into the most effective way to recover birds whose long term decline remains a cause for concern.

**Common cranes** are best seen in winter in the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Hickling Broad and Marshes reserve. They can be spotted at sunset between November and February coming in to roost at the raptor roost point at Stubb Mill. In spring and summer they are very vulnerable to disturbance at breeding sites but can regularly be viewed flying and feeding in the Hickling, Horsey and Martham areas of the broads.

### What is ivy for?

A native, evergreen climber ivy has enormous benefits for wildlife. During the cold winter months it provides shelter for a wide array of mammals, birds and invertebrates and it is also an important food plant for many species.

Its autumn flowers are followed by ripened berries in late winter to early spring providing a good food source for many insects and birds when other natural food supplies have been consumed.

### Restoring land adjacent to Norfolk's 124 hectare Foxley Wood.

A 5.2 hectare arable field abutting Foxley Wood has been secured. A thousand years ago this land would have been ancient woodland.

Over the next twenty years it will be restored to establish specialist woodland species.

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Foxley Wood is one of Norfolk's richest woodlands for native plants from the wild service tree to the beautiful greater butterfly orchid.

In spring it is carpeted with bluebells, early purple orchids and wood anemones. Summer sees displays of common spotted orchids, fleabane and water-avens. Woodland birds include the green and great spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, tree creeper, willow warbler and jay.

A hotspot for butterflies those to be seen include the white admiral, speckled wood, ringlet, purple hairstreak and silver-washed fritillary.

Only 2% of the UK today is covered by large ancient woodlands. 80% of Britain's ancient woods are smaller than 20 hectares and fewer than 500 on the scale of Foxley Wood survive nationally.

### Recent unusual local sightings

**Wild Boar;** I was contacted recently by a lady who confidently asserted she had seen a wild boar on a field/woodland near Norwich. She was unable to photograph the creature but took photos of the "footmarks". These were sent to Matthew Jones of Wild-Boar.co.uk who confirmed that that there was a wild boar population in Norfolk. In particular he said "The prints are excellent and distinguish themselves from deer by the dew claws (indentations to the rear).



**Cranes;** Prints found at Cremers Meadow, Brundall, were identified by an ornithologist as those of the common or Eurasian crane. This bird could be one of the resident Norfolk population visiting the site.

**Common (Brown) hare;** Ernest noted these prints of hares. Let's hope we shall soon see them soon "boxing" in spring sunshine.



## Spoonbills in Norfolk after 300 years

Norfolk's breeding population of Eurasian Spoonbills continues to grow

### A **Holkham** success story

Long legged white birds appearing in Norfolk in the 1980s were initially little egrets followed by cattle egrets and then came the spoonbills named because of their spatula-like bill. By 2010 a colony was established at Holkham Nature Reserve and they have thrived there with 28 pairs



breeding in 2017, 2018 and in 2020 when 56 young were reared.

A total of 244 have fledged at Holkham since 2010.

Although they bred in East Anglia during medieval times and were recorded to be nesting in Suffolk in 1668 they had been absent for about 300 years. Populations in the Netherlands having done well, birds began to appear on our shores and settled at NWT's Cley marches within the Cley and Salthouse Living Landscape and at Sufflok's Havergate Island.

With long slender legs, thin on the lateral plane, they can walk through water with little resistance. Similarly, the bill is flattened and thin. As the bird walks slowly in sheltered shallows it sweeps its slightly opened bill from side to side. Surfaces of the bill are highly sensitive to touch so that any fish, crustacean, mollusc, worm, frog or toad brushing against it can instantly be caught.

Feeding by touch means they can seek their food in the dark and sleep at times in the daytime.

A good place to see them pass overhead is Lady Anne's Drive at Holkham.

### **Planned** BADCOG Work Party Dates

**13th March: Holly Lane Pond**

**27th March: Walsham Fen**

**10th April: Howes Meadow (Bridge work)**

**24th April: Buckenham Woods**

**These are the planned dates, but work parties are still on hold until it is safe to resume. Please keep checking the website and an email will also be sent out once we know its safe to resume, hopefully soon!**