



BADCOG NEWS.

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President: Richard Hobbs

Chairman: Ernest Hoyos, Sunny Cottage,
Buckenham Woods, Lingwood

Norwich NR13 4HG.

Tel 01603 712913

www.badcog.co.uk



Pink Pearls and Conchie Joes

Back in the 1960's I was fortunate enough to find myself working in the Caribbean for two years – a not unpleasant experience for someone in their early twenties with no attachments and a sense of adventure! Just to place the reader in time-context, these were the days of blue air-mail letters, a six-day working week and a telephone call from family back home only at Christmas and on birthdays – and even then, the calls could only be made at an odd hour as the system required night-time over-the-horizon radio communication between the islands and Miami before onward transmission by undersea cable.

The Bahama Islands lie approximately two hundred miles east of Florida, the capital is Nassau set on the island of New Providence, just twenty miles long and seven miles wide. Today the harbour in Nassau is a busy cruise port with three or four giant cruise ships regularly docked close to the heart of the city, much changed from the 1960's when there was just the overnight ferry from Miami together with the weekly liner Oceanic coming down from New York plus the very occasional luxury liner.

The quays that now welcome these new giants of the sea previously hosted the many small wooden boats that came in daily from the islands with romantic names such as The Abacos, Spanish Wells, North and South Eleuthera, The Exumas, etc. These islands supplied Nassau with fresh fruit, vegetables, fish and shellfish – both the latter in considerable quantities as would be expected in view of the maritime nature of the Bahamas. The fish too had romantic names, King Mackerel, Amberjacks, Ocean Robins, Barracudas, Mutton Fish, Snappers (Reds, Greys and Yellowtails) but the leading seafood brought daily to the quays was Conch (pronounced Conk). Continues over page.....

The Conch is a mollusc which weighs around a kilo and can be best described as a sea-snail with an extraordinarily attractive shell – the pink lip of the shell was the prime source for Victorian cameos. The conch itself was of course edible and would be prepared live on the quayside then taken home and made into Conch fritters, Conch Salad, Scorched Conch, Cracked Conch and many other dishes. The unusable but very pungent waste material from the conch was popular as fishing bait and the empty shells were tossed into the harbour forming huge banks of shells that had to be regularly dredged by the authorities.



Very occasionally a conch would form a pearl in the same manner that an oyster pearl is formed i.e. an irritant within the shell such as a grain of sand being surrounded by a calcareous concretion thus creating a pearl with a pink hue similar to the pink shell of the conch. These pearls are quite rare and are likely to become rarer still as overfishing for conch has sadly resulted in alarming declines in the population for these attractive molluscs.

Conchie Joes? This was the local name given to the Loyalist settlers who fled the American War of Independence and made Spanish Wells their home – and Spanish Wells was always claimed to have the best conchs in the Bahamas!

Peter Mackness

Puffins at risk of being wiped out

The conservation group Birds on the Edge has highlighted the dangers posed by increasing numbers of "alien predators" such as rats and ferrets.



The problem is particularly acute in the Channel Island of Jersey where the numbers of breeding pairs has fallen to four compared with hundreds a century ago. As the birds lay only one egg a year nest predation added to other hazards has a big impact. The organisation is looking at ways of protecting the cliffs from such predation.

Plant Galls

Galls are abnormal growths that occur on various parts of plants. Most are caused by irritation and/or stimulation of plant cells due to feeding or egg-laying by insects such as aphids, midges, wasps or mites. However, fungi, bacteria and viruses can also cause galls

I have found two examples on Cremer's Meadow in Brundall. Firstly a bright orange rust fungus (*Triphragmium ulmariae*) Picture right.

Formed on meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) - It causes meadowsweet rust gall, which develops as a chemically induced orange swelling on the underside of the leaf along the veins.



Secondly, spangle galls found on the underside of young oak leaves (*Quercus robur*). They are formed by the larvae of Cynipid wasps. The females lay eggs in the developing tissue of the leaves and chemicals released cause the gall to form. The changed tissue is then more edible to the larvae; the leaves fall from the trees in the autumn and the larvae develop into adult wasps in the spring. The wasp is called *Neuroterus qucusbaccarumer*.

Oaks appeared in Britain after the last ice age 12,000 years ago. There are many types of galls on British Oaks. Of 450 Oak species worldwide, there are only 2 UK native species. The Red Oak on the meadow, which is native to North America, does not feature these galls.



The names of both these gall forming agents are related to the host and are highly specific to the species. Identifying the host is instrumental in identifying the gall and the agent.

Judith Robertson

Local weather

Ernest Hoyos

Rainfall in the first 8 months of 2020 totalled 345mm against an average nearer 400mm so we could have been expecting a dry year, however the last four months of 2020 produced 372mm which turned things around. We ended the year with 716.4mm or 28.2 inches well above average and the wettest year since 2014.

Meteorologically speaking Winter is regarded as the three months December, January and February. December's rainfall of 122.4mm was more than double our average making it the wettest Dec. for us in at least 50 years going back to 1971.

As for temperatures, although only 0.4c below average it was the coldest December since 2010.

January was also very wet with 93mm or 166 %. Who remembers the almost completely submerged car in the flood water under Green lane railway bridge where two elderly occupants were successfully rescued? EDP report 16th January.

Although February was only a little wetter than average last Winter's total rainfall was 263mm making it our wettest Winter for at least 50 years. The next wettest was inter '78-'79 with 243mm. Hence farmers struggling to harvest root crops and our wetland site, very wet!

Despite the cold, snowy week 7th- 14th, February ended slightly milder than average due to the mild second half of the month.

Spring is recognised as the three months March to May. The final three glorious March days, 29th, 30th and 31st all in the high teens or low 20s C seems a far cry from the cold April this year. The maximum temperature on the 31st of March was 21.5c and on the 1st April we only managed 8.3c and in fact, as I write, the first 17 days of April have

been considerably colder than March. With a mean minimum temperature so far of only 1.5c the same as I recorded in February this year. The long-term figures we can expect for April are: -maximum 13.8c, minimum 5.0c. So far, we've had a Maximum 9.5c, minimum 1.5c.

Finally, our Spring rainfall seems to be reducing by the year. Our long-term average for April is 41mm. We've had 6mm so far and that maybe it for April '21. In fact, in the last 10 years our April rainfall average has gone down to 35mm.

'Mrs Vicar'

Back in the summer of 2018 our family from Zimbabwe were visiting us and enjoying visits to Norfolk beaches. On several occasions we encountered groups of seals either swimming or hauled up on the sand. One particular seal caught our attention and anxiety as it had something tightly round its neck.

A phone call to the Friends of Horsey Seal Group gave us the answer that the plight of this adult grey seal was known to them but it could not be caught. We pondered how anyone could catch the creature in order to remove the ring from its neck.



Approaching it would certainly send it back into the water and a tranquilising dart would not work before it got back into the sea became unconscious and drowned.

We were therefore surprised and gratified to read recently in a national newspaper that 'Mrs Vicar', so named because of her prominent white 'dog collar', had been captured by volunteers at Horsey Beach. A vet had cut away the disc to reveal a 7cm deep wound which had become badly infected. The plastic ring which had become embedded in her neck seemed to be a part used in large scale pipe works. With antibiotics, pain relief and salt baths to the wound area plus some months of treatment it is hoped that she will recover.

Barbara Pilch

Additional articles

Unfortunately, due to the limited space available in the News Letter, we are unable to include two articles by one of our members, Lee Coby.

However, these interesting articles entitled: Bradwell B Case Study and Catfield Fen & Sutton Fen Case Study, can be found on the BADCOG website on the News Letter page.

Tortoiseshell Air Show

I have previously thought that the flight pattern of the butterfly was generally rather haphazard and although no animal behaviour is aimless its purpose was elusive and easily dismissed as the flutterby. Of course a different pattern must be discernible in migratory flight but I am referring to the casual observation such as occurs in a garden.



I was therefore very surprised to witness a very different behaviour pattern in that warm April spell when so many hibernating butterflies emerged. Other more observant nature lovers will no doubt say "oh yes, often seen it" but nevertheless I shall relate what was to me a novelty.

I was walking across the lawn when two small tortoiseshell butterflies flew across it. They were in tandem about nine inches apart with one slightly behind the other. In every twist or change in direction this relative position was retained and continued for nearly a minute before I lost sight of them. It was a display of which the red arrows would have been proud.

Presumably this was pairing behaviour possibly initially triggered by a pheromone trail but all in-flight variations required an amazing amount of eye and wing coordination.

I should be interested to know how frequently this occurs and whether mating follows.

Seals and Gulls Hans Watson

The Grey Seal breeding colonies around the Norfolk coastline, are growing bigger each year, and one wonders how much bigger they can get. The winter of 2020/2021 looks like being another bumper year for the number of pups born. As these colonies grow bigger, so they become more and more attractive to the larger wintering gulls, and birdwatchers regard the colonies as good places to look for the scarcer wintering large gulls, such as Glaucous and Iceland Gulls. In large colonies such as the Horsey/Winterton colony, there are always going to be still-born pups, and pups that get lost, or are abandoned by the parent. There are also casualties caused by squabbling mothers or boisterous bull seals, trampling or otherwise squashing pups. These, together with all the after-births, are what the gulls come to scavenge.



Great Black-back (Juv)



Iceland Gull (Juv)

Last Christmas morning, Sue and I went to Winterton for our customary walk to see the seals, walking north from the car-park. We only walked for about a mile and a half along the marked path at the top of the dunes, but

the weather was pleasant, and there were not too many other people about. We were able to see many gulls of several species, including a first winter Iceland Gull that had obviously enjoyed a big meal from a nearby dead seal, and was laying down and having a doze. Many visitors that come to see the seals, think that the actions of these gulls are unpleasant, some even using words such as “disgusting”. They fail to consider what the beaches and dunes would be like if these birds, and the night visiting foxes, did not provide their efficient clean-up and recycling service. In fact, they are providing the same service that vultures, hyenas and jackals are providing on the plains of Africa.

Main Work Party Report

Apr 10 – Howes Meadow – Area C – 2 willow and a lime pollarded. North boundary dyke – some sallow coppiced. Wire mesh attached to refurbished stream bridge. Some hedge maintenance carried out. Burning carried out at fire site.

Additional Work Party Report

Apr 10 – Howes Meadow – Further burning carried out at fire site.

Work carried out individually by members – Jan to Mar

Jan 03 – Howes Meadow – Oak tree planted on N boundary close to fallen veteran.

Jan - Lingwood Pond – Some minor maintenance when required. Litter pick. General tidying up and raking vegetation into piles following major clearance of sallow and vegetation at north (School Rd) end of site.

Jan 08/09/11/30 – Howes Meadow – Sides of stream cut and cleared to fire sites. From E end of site approx 15metres on S side and 50 metres on N side

Jan 29 – Walsham Fen – Viewing platform by stream – replaced rotted plank

Feb 01/04/09to17inclusive/19/20/22/23to26inc/27/28 – Howes Meadow – Cutting meadow side of the S boundary hedge. Chainsaw used to cut up large pieces. All cuttings cleared to fire site. Useful timber removed from site, other cut to length and placed on log pile.

Mar 27— Lingwood. - Some replacement planting and maintenance carried out on hedge north of Lingwood Church.

Mar 29 – Howes Meadow – Main bridge over stream – The refurbishment of bridge completed. Majority of old slats replaced by new.

BADCOG Work Party Dates

8th May—Jary's Meadow

22nd—Walsham Fen

5th June—Buckenham Woods

19th June—Hemblington Church

3rd July—Howes Meadow

17th July—Blofield Church

20th July—Blofield Church with Green Gym

Work parties start at 10.30am and finish at about 1pm.

All welcome!