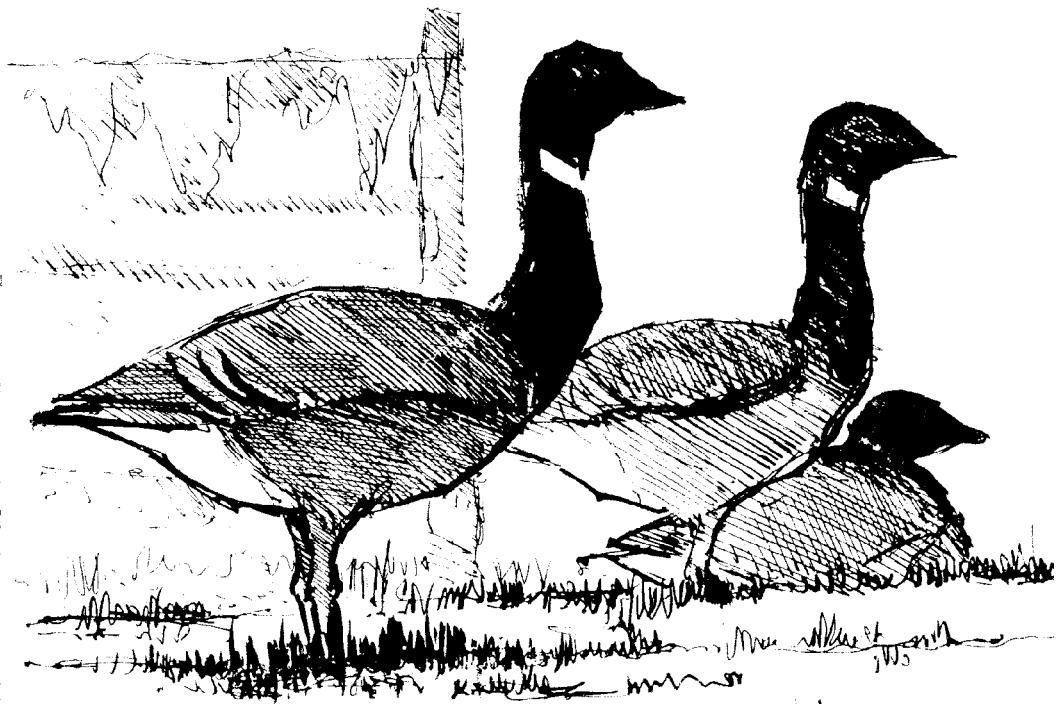


THE DONCASTER NATURALIST



Frederick W. Mearns
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EDITORIAL September 20th, 1983

Autumn is here again and time for a new edition of the Doncaster Naturalist. Thanks to the continued enthusiasm of contributors, we are able to bring you what we consider to be an interesting publication.

Apologies for the incorrect numbering of the previous issue- the pages were numbered from 1-32, and should in effect have started at 33. This could cause problems when and if an index is prepared when Volume I is completed. Numbers in this issue therefore start at 33 and the index-compiler will sort out the difficulty with issue no. 2 at a later date!

Thanks to the contributors again, and particularly to Betty Rivett for the typing, and David Gagg for the cover and illustrations.

D. M. Bramley
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Doncaster

THE RIVER DON

Maurice Hanson

My first recollection of the Don was when, as a child, I lived in Hexthorpe and used to visit the Flatts. Even then, from being one of the best rivers in England for salmon, it had been reduced to an evil-smelling mess. I suppose that the Industrial Revolution was to blame. As I grew older, it was considered to be great fun to go swimming in the muddy river. We went in near the railway bridges not far from the Flatts. We used to throw the thick black mud at each other, and it is a marvel to me that we did not all die of typhoid fever! However, I cannot recall any ill effects after our frolics - we must have had strong constitutions.

Looking back, I do remember that the river had some weed in it, growing for about a yard or more from each bank - perhaps Fennel-like Pondweed. It was very difficult to swim through as it clung to your arms. Later, even this weed vanished and the river was completely dead. The same situation occurred in the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation Canal. I can remember there being thousands of dead fish seen at the River Trent end of the Canal.

Passing over the North Bridge daily on my way to work from home in Sprotborough Road, I had more opportunity to see (and smell) this tribute to man's folly. The detergent foam used to build up to a height of ten feet or more, causing a nuisance to traffic as it was blown across the road. Walking along the banks of the Don I have observed many times the objectionable effluent discharged by factories and sewage farms; I have seen it red white and blue - very patriotic! After rain especially it seemed a good excuse for these industries to get rid of extra gallons of waste.

As an angler and naturalist I have been looking forward to the time when the Don would be clean. I used to look at the river and think to myself "by the time you retire, Maurice, there will be fish in there and you will be able to walk over the field and enjoy yourself!". Thirty years ago we were promised clean water in ten years, but we are still waiting for it. In 1968 the Doncaster Evening Post ran a campaign to try to improve the Don. I wrote to the Editor and my letter was published. I am reproducing it here as it applies as much now as it did then.

River is a Sad Joke

May 30th 1968.

Dear Sir,

I wish to congratulate you on your articles regarding the pollution of the River Don.

For too long it has been accepted that we have to put up with the disgusting mess and stench because it is easier for industry, councils and others, that their rubbish be dumped in the nearest river.

The river could be a wonderful source of pleasure for the local population, to fish, boat or walk by the side of, instead of being a local sad joke!

I am the representative of the Doncaster Naturalists' Society and on their behalf I am willing to support you in your campaign against the pollution of the Don, and will look forward to drinking your health with water straight from the river at the Mill Bridge.

Yours etc.

Time passed and I kept walking along the banks, then one day about twelve years ago, I pulled a stone out of the river and I was very surprised to see many live creatures on it - fresh water crabs and snails among others. Later I noticed that leeches had re-appeared, and also familiar water plants - flags, potamogetons, water

plantain, duckweed. Sticklebacks returned - one which we caught and took home laid eggs, so it must have been in good condition.

This is it, I thought, soon we shall have fish in the Don, but alas my joy was short-lived, Britain had entered the Common Market and was offered money to clean up our rivers. The Prime Minister of the day declined the offer, saying that our rivers were wonderfully clean - washed twice a day by the tide. (He must have forgotten about the non-tidal sections). Within days of this statement I am sure every sluice gate along the river was opened up and all the accumulated filth was poured into the river, returning it to its normal state - horrible!

However, gradually the river improved so that birds began to re-appear searching for fish. One year a Black-Crested Grebe appeared on the Canal in October and stayed until February of the following year. I watched it fishing by the lock gates in Marshgate; I could not identify the fish it caught - about 2½ inches long and silver in colour. Great Crested Grebe bred near Newton Farm in 1982. I have also seen Little Grebes and we have resident Kingfishers. The latter tried to breed on the Plant Works side of the Canal, but I do not know whether they were successful. Grey Heron can be seen fishing in the shallows, I saw four herons flying together over Bentley Common this year.

Sand Martins nest in the banks of the river, but have been in short supply lately owing to droughts in Africa I understand. Swallows nest under the railway bridges where they are undisturbed.

Mallards breed - I saw a female with five young last June. The river banks are also a haven for birds. The Common Sandpiper is a regular visitor, also Snipe.

In the riverside areas I have seen the following birds:

Woodcock	Sedge Warbler	Wagtail - Yellow, Grey, Pied
Pheasant	Linnet	Kestrel
Partridge	Goldfinch	Redshank
Lapwing	Greenfinch	Tits
Wheatear	Reed Bunting	
Moorhen	Redpoll	
Coot	Skylark	

During the cold spell in 1982, I saw Pochard, Tufted Duck and Teal on the town stretch of the Don.

In 1979 my neighbour reported seeing a fish about a yard long moving sluggishly through the shallows below St. Mary's Bridge. I was too late to see it, but I have always presumed from his description that it was a salmon.

My son and I saw a fish in the Don up to about a foot long last June (1982). They were golden in colour, something like a Chub. A couple of months later in August I found the remains of a fish in the side of the canal. Colin Howes of Doncaster Museum did some detective work on the corpse and decided it was a Common Carp. In September, from the bank of the canal near the Plant Works I saw two large Carp swim by with their dorsal fins out of the water. I followed them and eventually they were joined by two others. What a welcome sight! Unfortunately they were disturbed by the pleasure boat 'Achilles' as it passed.

So you see, the Don is improving; may it continue to do so, and my worst wishes to the polluters (past and present) of the river.

MAURICE HANSON.

PIP'S PASTURE

P. Seccombe

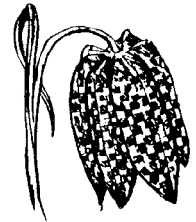
April 24th 1974 was a very special day for me, although I didn't realise its significance at the time. We had moved into the Vicarage at Owston eighteen months previously, and that afternoon I was walking down the lane to the bus stop, en route to the dentist, when I noticed a deep maroon 'something' amongst the vegetation in one of the fields. I thought it was probably an emerging hogweed, which sometimes has a purplish hue, but it didn't look quite right, so I made a mental note to investigate further. My mental processes being what they are, it was another couple of days before I went into the field for a proper look.

To my surprise and delight, there was a perfect, solitary fritillary flower bobbing about among the grasses. I recognised it from having seen it in a park as a child and realised that it was a rarity in the wild. So I made my first visit to the Natural History Department at the Museum and reported my find to Peter Skidmore.

He understandably treated it with a certain amount of scepticism but was interested enough to come and look at the field. He then became really enthusiastic because even so early in the year he could recognise a potential traditional hay meadow. He asked me to make a flower list of the plants I could recognise and mentioned some species that might appear later in the year. Sure enough, most of them did, and the list for the three acre field now stands at 114 different species, including:-

Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>
False Oxslip	<i>Primula veris</i> x <i>vulgaris</i>
Ragged robin	<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i>
Twayblade	<i>Listera ovata</i>
Common Spotted Orchid	<i>Orchis fuchsii</i>
Adders Tongue	<i>Ophioglossum vulgare</i>
Water avens	<i>Geum rivale</i>
Betony	<i>Stachys officinalis</i>
Meadow rue	<i>Thalictrum flavum</i>
Yellow rattle	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>
Pepper saxifrage	<i>Silene silaus</i>

Devil's bit scabious	<i>Succisa pratensis</i>
Great burnet	<i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i>
Self heal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>
Bird's foot trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
Quaking grass	<i>Briza media</i>
Meadow sweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>
Lady's smock	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>
Wood anemone	<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>
Hoary plantain	<i>Plantago media</i>
Hemp agrimony	<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>
Bugle	<i>Ajuga reptans</i>



Since 1974 I have been watching and guarding the fritillaries with increasing interest. They have proved to be very vulnerable particularly to human predation.

For the last three years there has been a management agreement in operation, the main points of which require the tenant farmer not to fertilize, to delay mowing until after June 30th, to graze his cattle on the aftermath and to allow the hedge to grow to a minimum height of six feet. In return, the Nature Conservancy Council pays half his rent.

Over the years I have seen the small colony grow from one solitary flower to a total this year of 9 flowers and 20 non-flowering plants, covering an area approximately 24 x 4.5 yards.

The following table shows the progress of the fritillaries as far as is known from 1974 to 1982.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Buds & Flowers</u>	<u>Non-flowering Plants</u>	<u>Dark</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Went to Seed</u>
1974	1	?	1		?
1975	4	10	2	2	
1976	5	?	3	2	?
1977	4	?	2	2	
1978	4	?	3		
1979	3	?	1	2	
1980	3	17	1		?
1981	8	8	5	2	1
1982	8	25	4	4	1
<u>Totals</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>2 + ? 3</u>

In addition I have met someone who admitted picking three flowers in 1969. So, over ten years -

Total number of flowers	43
Picked	30
Animal damage	4
Broken by harrow	3
Known to have produced seed	2

This year results have been encouraging and vigilance rewarded. In January I just managed to prevent a contractor employed by a local landowner from cutting the hedge. This factor, together with the exceptionally wet spring which kept the human predators away, meant that not one of this year's nine flowers was picked, although a slug felled one and a rodent another. Three of them were completely waterlogged and withered without setting seed. Of the remaining four, three have successfully produced and shed their seeds, the fourth becoming another slug victim. However, had I not been around on June 18th and stopped the same contractor from mowing the field, all the seeds would have been lost.

Over the three years during which the management agreement has been in operation, I have noticed the fritillaries spreading, a marked increase in the distribution of the betony and the meadow rue has flowered, which it has not done previously. The agreement runs out next spring and is about to be re-negotiated, but I know the farmer wants to re-introduce some form of fertiliser. Experience has shown that even the agreement can be meaningless unless the farmer is really interested.

Anyone who would like to visit the fritillaries, which are in flower at the end of April and beginning of May, is most welcome, but I would ask that you contact me first and arrange for a guided tour!

South Yorkshire has long been known as the most northern outpost of the fritillary and until recently colonies had been known in the Thorne, Barnby Dun, Askern and Sykehouse areas. A resident of Owston remembers a colony in a nearby field in the mid 30's prior to its being ploughed during the war.

Currently, there is a national interest in these fast disappearing meadow habitats, so perhaps it is not too much to hope that someone else may find one lurking on the doorstep.

PUPA DIGGING

Albert Wright

Squatting and kneeling around trees to dig pupae may not be the most appealing way to many people of obtaining moths. After attempts with little reward you will be convinced that there are easier ways. Persistence is certainly needed, often leading to new discoveries. For example, the spread of the Lime-hawk moth has been emphasised by pupa-digging.

Earlier digging in the 1930's did nothing to improve on the single record of the Lime-hawk moth in Yorkshire as given in Richard South's "Moths of the British Isles". In fact, June of 1950 was my first recording of the species, when a young friend brought a male moth from a lime tree near Owston Park gates. By the late 1960's, however, things were much different for, from Doncaster southwards, in the light and sandy areas, I was able to dig pupae or pupa-cases from most of the lime trees which were suitable for digging. Again, the 1970's gave further evidence of expansion, as pupae and cases were found under limes and elms north of Doncaster, where digging was continued as far as the West Yorkshire border.

The pupae are now more readily obtainable than those of the Poplar-hawk moth, with me, and the Lime-hawk moth is now considered a common species in this part of South Yorkshire. Incidentally, recent reports of the moth from Hull and the larva from York City give added emphasis to the spreading of this fine insect.

On the lighter side of pupa digging and having evaded rocks, rags, broken glass - even soot or worse - there are fringe benefits. My children early learned that a little sauce rubbed on copper coins which had been turned up soon put them back into circulation. One day we found a well-tarnished rolled gold ring which they rubbed. Before its disappearance, perhaps back into the soil, it came in handy for ring-testing the sexes of cocoons.

Searching around trees has given me the opportunity to observe adaptations in moths. Pupae of hawk moths which normally lie face downwards, adopt an upright position at times. Also Puss moth cocoons were upside down on a poplar tree, as evidenced by exit holes. This was due to the tree growing through a dark hedge - enclosed above, open below. In another case, it was interesting to note a foodplant adaptation. It was reported from London that Lime-hawk had emerged from near ornamental cherry tree stumps; six weeks later, I dug pupa cases and subsequently pupae from this tree at Benfleet, Essex and, finally, at Doncaster, near the same type of tree.

As to the process of digging - the same trees will naturally produce the same kind of pupae, to a large extent. Poplars, willows, limes and elms seem to give the most pupae. Fern trowel and widgeon (a digging and bark-prising tool) are advertised for digging, but a sheath knife or any strong-bladed knife suits me best. This can be used for cutting through turfs where this is permissible.

There are some species which go deeply into the ground to pupate but, generally speaking, pupae are not more than two or three inches down, or even just below the surface - some are merely under decayed leaves and litter.

The north and east sides of the tree, away from driving wind and rain are the best places for pupae, but the proximity of trees, hedges, walls and buildings will influence the direction of travel of the larvae. These tend to move away from deep shade or otherwise to the shelter of lower cover. Close to the tree, beneath moss or loose bark within eighteen inches of the tree may be the first place to search, but on hard ground or in yards, larvae may have to be content with more unusual sites - leafy gutters, accumulated dust at wall bottoms can be congregating places for them.

With some of the noctuids, the earth-covered cocoons often partly conceal the pupae, and these can easily be missed. Blackbirds seem to be aware of this, as on two separate occasions I have

been followed round the tree by a male bird. "Pupa tickling" can be done when digging is out of the question. By reaching with the fingers into the leaves behind brush, or into cavities and crevices of lime trees, hawk moth pupae can often be located. South refers to records of these pupae being found high up in the crevices of elms. My own record is of two pupae found in a forgotten gardener's coat, a mere five feet up in a vicarage elm. Another unusual occurrence, this time of the poplar hawk, was of a water-logged pupa in a milk bottle, showing that not only small mammals are open to this hazard.

On tree trunks, cocoons of the puss moth and kittens are not often seen until exit holes break their camouflage, but a pocket knife will be needed to remove cocoons from the trees of poplars and willows when found. Mature black and white poplars have armour-plated bark, and even a mallet and chisel may not remove cocoons from these without the upper portion of the cocoon becoming detached. If this happens, a strip of paper wound round the cocoon top will keep the pupa enclosed and comfortable; the moth on hatching will emerge through both cocoon and paper.

Although cocoons of the puss moth and kittens will be mostly seen three or four feet from the ground, some can be found at ground level or high up out of reach. Particularly in the case of the puss, the larvae will cocoon almost anywhere - in adjacent woodwork, posts, fences, other trees, loose wood, sticks etc. One cocoon at the foot of a telegraph pole was across a busy highway from the nearest poplar tree. Other cocoons were on grass, one on cardboard laid flat on the ground and yet another which turned up with digging was formed of earth.

Hibernating queen wasps, bumble bees, ichneumon wasps, cocoons of ichneumons, sawflies, brachionids and a small stag beetle - all have been encountered whilst digging, and above or below ground various larvae of moths including garden tiger, drinker, northern egger, antler, large yellow underwing.

I had a remarkable experience in 1945 in Northern Italy. In khaki then and having come off P.O.W. Camp Guard in the early morning, I went to dig an isolated forty-foot Lombardy poplar near a small farm. On arriving at the tree, bricks were found lying around the base and the situation seemed very unlikely for pupae digging. But on removing two or three bricks, a ginger coloured mound of gipsy-moth eggs was revealed on the bottom of the tree. Not so surprising as could be imagined, as I had previously seen eggs in a stop-tap well and a pupa in a tree cavity. What followed, however, was more amazing. Apparently, tin cans had been dumped by the tree and later bricks and, finally, earth soda and composted rubbish. The dump was sealed except for an opening at the tree.

As work proceeded, ova, cocoons with pupa cases and remains of both sexes of the gipsy-moth were found in the tin cans and among bricks and cavities. A few of the ova mounds had been attacked, and the softer parts of the moths removed, presumably by the centipedes and other soil population encountered when excavating. These moths may not have been more than ten to fifteen inches below ground but were certainly breeding as far as six feet from the point of entry into the underground retreat. The humidity of the ground and the refuge from the fierce Italian sun had provided a suitable breeding ground.



—AND WOT IS A PUPA SIR?

PORPOISES IN THE DON

Colin Howes

The stage-managed pre-election frenzy which dominated the press, radio and television during early June was itself up-staged by the appearance in the Don at Bentley of a four foot long female porpoise calf. Apart from being highly interesting natural history phenomenon, this well timed visitation together with the saga which surrounded it, succeeded in ousting much of the electioneering ballyhoo from the front pages of many a newspaper. The event caught the imagination of South Yorkshire people and over the weekend of 4th and 5th June thousands of sightseers crowded the banks of the Don downstream of St. Mary's Bridge to watch this misguided vagrant from the North Sea. The fact that visitors to the spectacle outnumbered attendances at any of the political rallies perhaps demonstrated where people's priorities lay.

This young porpoise, which was able to ascend so high up the Don due to flood water levels caused by heavy and prolonged rain during late May, was first seen downstream of Willow Bridge Caravan Park (SE/5704) on Friday 3rd June 1983 by Mr Peter Coulthard. He spotted what he thought was 'huck bobbing in the Dirty Don....' he then realised it was 'the dorsal fin of a porpoise.'. The police and R.S.P.C.A were informed and attempts were made to capture the animal. R.S.P.C.A. staff Terry Snamer from Doncaster and Kathy Groves from Barnsley judged that their boat was too flimsy to withstand the swift current in that stretch of river so police divers launched their outboard powered craft. The noise of the motor, however, frightened the porpoise which evaded capture by diving deeper and further attempts at capture were postponed.

Advice was sought from Dr Horace Dobbs of North Ferriby - described in the press as being 'the world's leading authority on sea mammals' who suggested the setting up of a 'porpoise watch' to guard the animal from undue disturbance, harm and the possibility of 'some idiot coming along with a gun'. Ken and Margaret Dale of Willow Bridge Caravan Park, helped by local children and neighbours maintained a constant watch over the welfare of this new celebrity.

On Tuesday 7th June two experts from Flamingo Park near Pickering, Neville Wilby (Curator) and Jackie Golder (Animal Trainer) joined Terry Spamer and local police in a bid to remove the porpoise from the Don to return it to the sea. After pursuing the porpoise in a hand paddled rubber boat for about three hours, at one stage travelling two miles down stream towards Barnby Dun, the animal was captured, carried by stretcher to a waiting suitably padded van, coated in skin-nourishing lanolin, and taken on a 90 minute journey to Bridlington from where it was released into the sea three miles out from the south beach.

The initial sightings and final capture were 'splashed' across the pages of numerous local and national newspapers ranging from the Doncaster Advertiser to the Times (for a full record of the events a list of newspaper references is given below) and film of the animal both in and out of the water featured on B.C.C T.V's Look North on 6th and 7th June.

HISTORICAL RECORDS

David Spalding (1966) in his review of whale records from the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire coasts noted that porpoises occur in Yorkshire waters throughout the year but are most frequently reported during the months of July and August. He also shows that over the years there have been numerous reports from the Humber and its major tributaries, some animals penetrating many miles up stream

In the river Hull several have reached Beverley (TA/0539) and one ascended to Hempholm Lock (TA/0749) some 20 miles from the Humber. Many have been seen in the Ouse, some reaching as high as Naburn Locks on the outskirts of York and about 80 miles from the sea. Clarke and Roebuck (1881) mention porpoises ascending the Ouse as far as Cawood (SE/5737) and the Wharfe as far as Kirby Wharfe near Tadcaster (SE/5041). Max Peacock (1901) noted that porpoises came 'up the river Trent every year after the salmon' and that he had 'seen three shot with rifles at Butterwick (SE/8305) in 1891, one specimen measuring 5'6" '. Spalding (1966) adds a further historical record from the Trent at Owston Ferry (SE/8100). More recently there were 'several' in the Trent during August 1971 one reaching Morten (SK/8091) near Gainsborough (Doncaster Evening Post 1/9/1971). In 1966 one even got into the River Idle, a dead male about 4' long was found on the embankment east of Idle Stop (SK/7996) on 24th May. The body was inspected by Mike Clegg, Peter Skidmore and Chris Devlin.

In the Don, records have been traced back to an entry dated 1687 in 'The Diary of Rev. Abraham de la Pryme' (Surtees Society 1870) which reads 'And at Fishlake.... there came up thereto in the river near fifty miles from the sea, sea dogs, a hee and a shee, and a purpose, the last of which I s'w'. An anonymous, post 1935, annotation in a published check list of British mammals (Doncaster Museum Files) notes that porpoises 'formerly occurred in the Don at odd times'. Further confirmation comes from the minutes of the Doncaster Scientific Society A.G.M. 13/10/1897, which records that '...the skeleton of a porpoise captured in the Don has been purchased by the Society for preservation in the Museum. Unfortunately, this specimen was immature and consequently the bones have not macerated, but it is still hoped that an interesting preparation may be made of them'. How much was paid for the specimens and to whom is not clear but Society's accounts for 1897 show an entry for 'Purchase of Specimen 5/-'. Sadly the accession books of the old museum make no specific mention of this specimen though there is an

undated pre 1911 entry for a Dolphin Skull (Specimen 571X).

Currently two complete porpoise skeletons and three separate skulls are housed in the museum collection but there is no dolphin skull and none of the cetacean section bears the code number 571X. However, one of the porpoise skulls is smaller (from a juvenile animal) and much more 'museum worn' than the rest. A further clue is that at some stage in its museum life this specimen has been used to demonstrate the osteology of the cetacean skull, the component parts being painted different key colours. Two other skulls in the collection, a dog and a sheep, have also been coloured in this manner and it may be significant that listed together in one of the old museum zoology stock books (not used after 1921) are the skulls of a dog, sheep and dolphin. Could what is referred to as a dolphin skull in fact be this small porpoise skull? The final clue which suggests that this might be the long lost river Don specimen is that according to a card index compiled during the early days of the old museum and based on the contents of the old accession and zoological stock books, the dolphin skull (which is probably a young porpoise skull) cost 5/- the same price as that entered in the Doncaster Scientific Society accounts for 1897..... the plot thickens!

Clearly, despite their size, whales are elusive animals both in the wild and in museum collections! For anyone wanting to see illustrations of the many and often beautiful marked species, these can be found in the Handbook of British Mammals (Corbet and Southern, 1977), British Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises (Fraser 1969) and Sea Guide to Whales of the World (Watson, 1981). A poster on British Whales is available from Messrs Frederick Warne and, of course, there is the display featuring models, illustrations and whale teeth and bones at Doncaster Museum.

Newspaper references to the Doncaster Porpoise:-

The Doncaster Star "Percy the Porpoise is all at sea"
4.6.83 P.1 (photo)

Sheffield Morning Telegraph "Playful Porpoise swims up Don"
4.6.83 P.1.

Sheffield Morning Telegraph "Dolphin Minders on 24 Hour Watch"
6.6.83.P.1 (Photo)

Yorkshire Post "Ripples Over Porpoise"
6.6.83.P.16

Daily Mail "Percy puts on the Style for his Public"
7.6.83.P.12 (Photo)

Sheffield Star "Back to School for Percy"
8.6.83 P.1. (Photo)

Sheffield Morning Telegraph "Whale of a Tale, Perils of Pauline"
8.6.83.P.1 (Photo)

Yorkshire Post "Percy the Porpoise proves catch of the day"
8.6.83 P.1. (Photo)

Daily Express "P-p-pick up a porpoise"
8.6.83.p.5 (Photo)

Daily Telegraph "Porpoise back in the Swim"
8.6.83 p.3 (Photo)

The Guardian "Back Stroke"
8.6.83 (Photo)

The Times "Porpoise that Swam to Fame is moved on"
p. 3 (Cartoon and Sketch Map)

Doncaster Advertiser "Porpoise popped a poser"
P.1 (Photos)

Literature references:-

Clarke W.E. and Reebuck W.D. (1881) A Handbook of Vertebrate Fauna of Yorkshire Lovell Reeve, London.

Clegg T.M. (1968) Yorkshire Naturalists Union Mammal Report for 1967.
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Corbet G.B. and Southern H.N. (1977) The Handbook of British Mammals Blackwell, Oxford.

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Peacock M. (1901) Mammalia of Bottesford and the neighbourhood,
Naturalist 165-172.

Surtees Society (1870) The Diary of Abraham de la Pryme, The Yorkshire Antiquary

Watson I. (1981) Sea Guide to Whales of the World Hutchinsons. London.

MY LOVE AFFAIR WITH A BIRD

David Gagg

At very short notice I booked myself into "digs" with some very dear friends in Portsmouth. Leaving Shirley, my wife, with her Valentine Card, I set forth into the snowy wastes. First of all, into Lincolnshire to spend a couple of days with our daughter. Then on to Northampton to spend a night with friends there. And then on to "Pompi". The days were very cold but dry and bright, and all the way south there was the snow, quite deep in Lincolnshire on top of the Wolds and yet again on the North and South Downs. Looking back I think the South Downs were most beautiful, the long rolling hills and all the snow clean and bright against the blue of the sky.

On my first weekend in Portsmouth, Alan asked if I would care to go down with him to Farlington Marshes. And, yes, I would. The Marsh is quite a large area of sea marsh "kept in" by a high sea wall. It is also a nature reserve. Quite a large part of it is surrounded by a ditch some few feet deep and seven or eight feet wide. Enough to keep folk like me out! I am sure it only offered a challenge to the more athletic types.

"Wrap up well" I was told, "there is nothing to stop the south east wind". So, armed with binoculars, I was soon to find that I had not wrapped up well enough. Within thirty yards of getting on the sea wall I was cold. Within another thirty yards I was frozen! As Alan had said NOTHING stopped that wind! It started, I feel sure, in the Urals, came straight across Europe, turned left up the English Channel and its first obstacle was Farlington Marshes. Even the waters sheltered by the sea wall were covered in thick ice. Walking our shivering way round the outside of the marsh we saw dunlin, knot by the score, redshank, herring and blackheaded gull, teal, mallard, a pair of shelduck. Then, it happened, about twenty brent geese winging low out of the marsh "Haven't you seen these before?" was asked. "There are thousands here". "Thousands, I thought, a likely tale! But, humble pie for tea! There were thousands! (About six thousand I read later on a notice of sightings.) By now we were about

half way round the reserve and the wind was across our starboard quarter, so we decided to press on. We would soon have the wind to our backs. And still there was no end to these small chattering geese. Always cropping at the short grass, such as it was. This is the way of life, I thought, never seen a Brent before and then you see thousands. And with those thousands of birds the teal, redshank and shelduck paled into insignificance. Oh, it was so cold. So home for dinner and a fire to warm by.

Two days later I was back. Cold or not. This time I walked the opposite way round the marsh and for the first few hundred yards the hawthorn scrub gave some protection from that cold wind. This time, I had both camera and binoculars and lots of hope! I found a sheltered spot (ha! ha!) on the leewards side of the wall, planted my body, set up my camera and watched these geese which had fired my imagination and enthusiasm. Suddenly up they went in one large cloud, about six hundred of them, "honking" loudly. From inland came a hawk flying very low and very fast. I felt sure it was the peregrine which had been seen on the marsh. It certainly put the "frighteners" on these birds. Then up went the next flock and the next, until there must have been something like two and a half thousand birds in the sky. (How can you estimate the number of birds?)

When they settled again I took my photographs (that is what the "hope" was about in the previous paragraph). And again, frozen through, I moved on.

I had in mind to do some painting but I think my water colours would not have stood up to that cold.

On my next trip to the marsh, to watch the geese, I was clad in two pairs of trousers, tee shirt, shirt, two jumpers and anorak and the old "wellies" and that just about beat the wind. By now I had become quite accustomed to that wind and even had time to watch the other birds on the marsh. The knot and ringed plover were quite easy to study, too busy feeding on the shore line to worry about me - but the redshank, now there is a nervous bird. Very suspicious of this clown with time to sit and watch.

The morning I was to leave there was a dramatic rise in temperature. The wind had stopped and so up came the fog. I felt this would keep the birds (well, the geese) grounded, as I had heard it said they don't like to fly in fog. So, back to the marsh I thought I must go.

Packed up and ready to go I took my leave of Pat and Alan and...back to the marsh. "his time with points and pencils. It was about 9.30 a.m. and high tide and, there in the shallows, was a flock of sixty five birds (no estimate that, I counted them) plus two mallard and one teal. The Brent were upending in the shallow water, obviously feeding off the bottom. I was surprised how much aggression was being shown. Birds with necks outstretched would have a "go" at a near neighbour. I wondered if this was the "pecking order" or were they starting to pair before their long trek back to the Arctic. It also struck me how "seeable" the birds were. The overall effect of them was black and white. When the birds were upright in the water the white rump and the white neckband were very easy to see, and against the snow the dark head and body also could be seen at a good distance. Being flock birds, did they not need to merge into their background as much as single types? There always seemed to be one bird on look-out duty in the flock, all the other birds would be upending to feed and yet one birds always seemed on the alert, upright and looking round. With eyes placed on the side of the head, you only need one bird with a full range of "seeability" to look after the welfare of all the others. I also noticed that as the one on guard went off duty another one took over immediately. If they were disturbed they all came upright as if on the strings of a puppeteer and start to swim away from the intrusion. No cowardice - just an organised retreat. When they did this it made quite a delightful picture, no hotch potch of black and white but much like the fleet of Henry VIII did in those waters in 1545. It also crossed my mind that the forebears of these birds that were giving me so much pleasure could have spent that winter here on these marshes.

I did my sketching and painting and as if they knew it was time for me to go, the flock I was studying was joined by another of about the same size. Then, as if by an order from some unseen Admiral, they all turned about and swam out to sea, into the fog.

They took their leave of me, as I did of them. And that, for the present, was the end of a short, sweet love affair.

FIELD TRIP TO AUSTERFIELD 17.7.83

I. McDonald

On July 17th we had a field meeting at Austerfield. The area covered was between the Study Centre and King's Wood. The largest section was the disused sand and gravel pit. Also included was the lane by the disused railway, derelict land adjacent to the 'Refractories' works, mature oak/birch woodland and the pond/marsh area. About 170 species of plant were seen and recorded by Colin Howes and Ian McDonald. A full checklist including plants recorded by Peter Skidmore in 1978 has been forwarded to Austerfield Study Centre.

Some of the more notable plants were:

Norway Maple, Common Birdsfoot, Garden Everlasting Pea, Least Evening Primrose, Small Bugloss, Vipers Bugloss, Gipsywort, Canadian Fleabane, Lesser Reedmace, Spotted Deadnettle and Prickly Lettuce.

Prickly Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*) or Compass Plant, so called because the upper leaves are held vertically and in full sun are oriented north/south, is a new record for the Doncaster area. It is recorded in the Flora of Nottinghamshire 1963, by R.C.L. Howitt and B.M. Howitt, at Newark in 1949. It is also recorded in The Flora of Lincolnshire, E.J. Gibbons, 1975. Lincs. Natural History Brochure No. 6. Published by I.N.U. It occurs at Scunthorpe 1950, Lincoln 1952, Tallington 1956 and Temple Bruer 1957.

In 'Weeds and Aliens', Sir Edward Salisbury 1961, he says, "It is recorded for the earlier half of the 17th Century in England, possibly earlier. Its distribution increased with the need for more Gravel Pits, in association with road making, in the third decade of the present century".

AN "ADDERED" ATTRACTION

George Chapman

We were staying at Otterburn and the itinerary for the weekend was - Hadrian's Wall on Saturday and Keilder Reservoir on Sunday. On the face of it stacks of time and space, also the promise of countless sightings. No doubt, for the really knowledgeable, they were all there, but with our inexperienced ears and eyes the limitations were also there.

It was our second visit to Housesteads, so we didn't spend much time at the fort but walked on the wall for a mile or so just taking in the splendour of the surrounding countryside. Wildlife and flora were conspicuous by their absence - the two main sources of interest being rooks and sheep. Whilst we were eating our packed lunch the rooks hung around just biding their time for the pickings. We also had constant visits from a very tiny lamb which had strayed too far and was looking for its mother - it kept coming within a few feet of us and scampering away after realising its mistake. My wife was wearing a sheepskin hat at the time - no wonder the poor little thing was confused! However, just a short while later we were pleased to see it had found its mam.

We returned to Otterburn for the evening and after dinner went for a short stroll. In the gathering dusk we saw a hare stroll across the road about 50 yards ahead of us. At breakfast next morning one of the ladies in our party told us that, on looking out of her bedroom window she had seen a fox - I just hope the fox had not met up with the hare - if so it had crossed the road for the last time.

As the travel brochures say - after breakfast to Keilder Reservoir, the largest in Europe.

Although on the Saturday the weather had been overcast there was a distinct improvement on the Sunday and the sun shone bright and warm. Ambling along the lakeside for about a couple of miles we were more fortunate than on the previous day. Whilst watching some mallard going about their daily chores we observed, in the background, a solitary heron - it was almost motionless at the water's edge and, but for the sunlight catching the lighter area of its plumage, I doubt whether we would have seen it. At one stage of our walk we stopped on a bridge overlooking a tributary to the lake and, whilst leaning on the parapet, we sighed some dippers - they appeared to be gathering food and then flying off to feed their young.

On the way back to the village of Keilder my wife was busy exploring the embankments and hedgerow bottoms - the prim-roses were in abundance and from time to time coltsfoot was in evidence. Whilst doing this she made, what was for us, the 'sighting of the weekend' - an adder. There it was neatly curled up at the bottom of the embankment taking full advantage of the fine weather and basking in the sun.

No doubt there are many people who have seen adders on countless occasions but for us it was a 'first' and we took full advantage of the fact that for quite a while it did not stir. From a distance of just three or four feet we were able to have a good long look - it was about two feet long and in the sunlight its distinctive colouring and zig-zag markings were a joy to behold. Eventually, it decided to move and with deceptive rapidity moved a few feet to a position higher up the embankment from which vantage point it slowly waved its head to and fro - almost as if it had taken on the role of observer. Not wishing to disturb it any further we moved on and left it to settle down again.

Although this was our first acquaintance with an adder, for me it was the second time I had seen a snake outside of captivity. The first occasion was not notable for the rareness of species but more for the unusual location of the finding - it was in the gutter at the side of Carr House Road. It was covered in filth and to my untrained eye, coupled with more than a little imagination, it looked quite deadly. Fortunately, not far from where I made my discovery, there lives a chap who knows a thing or two about the world of nature, so I asked him to come and see what I had found. He took one look, calmly picked it up, gave it a wipe to reveal the distinctive marking at the back of the head and said, "Oh yes, a grass snake" whereupon he took it home to help it revive so that on the next day he could return it to a more natural habitat.

There are three species of snake native to Britain and up to now I have yet to see the smooth snake - this is a comparatively rare specie so maybe I have quite a wait before completing my hat trick.

By most standards our record of observations during the weekend was very modest - not for the first time. The main purpose of our visit to Northumberland had been to gaze upon two of man's great achievements - the second century Roman Wall and the twentieth century Keilder Reservoir, but the thing we most talked about when we got home (out with the reference books) was the thrill of seeing our first adder.

G. CHAPMAN
April 1983



OUR HERITAGE (Part 2)

Peter Skidmore

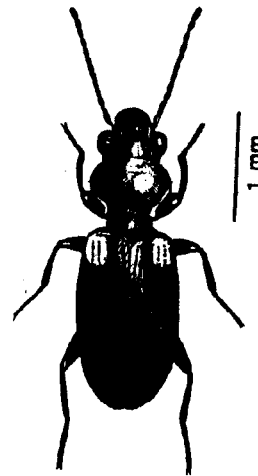
"THE THORNE MOOR GROUND BEETLE" Bembidion humerale

In 1975 Roy Crossley, a prominent northern entomologist of the Leeds area, and Adrian Norris of Leeds City Museum rocked the British entomological fraternity with the discovery of a new British ground beetle on Thorne Moor. This insect, despite its diminutive size, can be immediately

recognised in the field by anyone familiar with this group of beetles, by the dark bronze-black colour relieved by two bright yellowish "shoulder spots". It was suggested by Carl Lindroth of Lund, Sweden, who confirmed the identity of the first specimens taken at Thorne, that it was probably a recent coloniser imported from the continent. There is little reason, however, to assume that this is correct, it being more likely that the beetle has long been on Thorne Moor but that it has only become apparent through habitat changes wrought there by peat-digging operations. It appears to favour areas of set peat devoid of vegetation, or is it merely that it is more easily found in such places? The beetle is a very local peat bog insect

on the continent where it ranges from Austria to the Baltic area.

Since its initial discovery on Thorne Moor many visiting entomologists have seen it, and armed with the knowledge of its ecological requirements, have diligently searched for it elsewhere, but without success. Repeated searches



have been made for instance on nearby Hatfield Moor, but to no avail. We must assume that insofar as the British Isles is concerned, the beetle only occurs on Thorne Moors, where it is certainly common enough in suitable places. It was found, for instance on the Doncaster Naturalists' Society visit there in July 1983.

Strangely enough, another "new" British beetle was found at Thorne Moor on 15th April, 1977 by Colin Johnson of Manchester University Museum, whilst searching for B.humerale. Another denizen of Baltic peat bogs, this beetle, Curimopsis nigrita has not yet been found again in Britain, but Dr.P.C.Buckland of Birmingham University informs us that he found remains of this beetle, confirmed by Mr.Johnson, on a Bronze Age track way, on Thorne Moor which had been uncovered by Fisons during excavations of a new drain. Thus, C.nigrita is certainly not a recent coloniser and we await with interest the finding of B.humerale in Bronze Age deposits on our moors.

These two beetles emphasise yet again the national ecological importance of our local peat moors.

References:

- Crossley R. & Norris A. Bembidion humerale Sturm
(Col.carabidae), New to
Britain.
Entomologist's Monthly Magazine
111: 59-60
- Johnson C. 1978 Notes on Byrrhidae (Col.)
with special reference to, and
a species new to, the British
Fauna.
Ent.Rec. J.Var 90 (5) : 141-147

A NATURE RESERVE AT HAXEY

Mr Snow, of Windsor Road, has supplied details of a Lincolnshire Naturalists' Trust Reserve at Rush Furlong, Haxey. He also sent in a plant list for the Reserve which may be consulted at any time (see the Editor).

Permission to visit the Reserve is obtained by writing to:-

The Secretary,
Lincolnshire and South Humberside Trust for Nature Conservation
The Manor House,
ALFORD. LN13 9DL

RUSH FURLONG
HAXEY
OS: 112 (104)
GR: SE 781005
0.5 hectares (1.35 acres)
Freehold 1978

Location and access

The reserve lies to the east of the Isle of Axholme's main road, the A161, just north of Haxey. Access is by special permit.

Description and Management

A fragment of the once extensive system of strip farming in the Isle of Axholme which has by chance survived. The adjoining land is now arable, but this small meadow grassland strip has been managed only by hay-cutting for as long as can be traced. This regular, unchanging management and lack of disturbance, combined with a soil derived from the rich Keuper Marl, has resulted in a rich flora. Over sixty species of flowering plants have been recorded including yellow rattle, ox-eye daisy, rough hawk's beard, agrimony, meadow oat-grass and primrose. The speciality of the site is the uncommon green-winged orchid of which several hundred spikes are to be found in most years. Adder's-tongue fern also occurs. The Trust makes sure that the traditional mowing management continues.

FIELD REPORTS

'BAT-ING' FROM THE CUSWORTH END!

C. A. Howes, Doncaster Museum and Art Gallery.

The elegant lakes and majestic landscaping of Cusworth Park (the handiwork of Richard Woods of Chertsey between 1761 and 1765), having had over two hundred years in which to mature, now features a rich aquatic ecology and many magnificent and venerable trees, their huge canopies, sculptural forms and gnarled bark providing habitats for vast assemblages of organisms which substantially enrich the local fauna. With such ecological amenity, the area is ideal for a wide range of Britain's fifteen species of bats. The hall and associated buildings and the older trees form vital roosting, breeding and hibernation sites, and the park itself - the tree canopies, shrubberies, lush lakeside vegetation and rough grassland - provides a rich harvest of flying insects on which the bats depend for food.

Watching bats 'hawking' for insects around the tree canopies or skimming low over the lakes is a speciality of a summer evening's stroll through Cusworth Park. The observant visitor may notice bats of different sizes and with different flight patterns and may speculate as to their species; however, without the use of an 'ultra-sonic bat detector, the identification of these fascinating little mammals is only possible by detailed examination in the hand.

Very occasionally a dead bat or tell-tale scatterings of tiny black dry droppings may be found in an attic, on a window sill or beneath an outside wall. Such finds, if made between May and September, usually indicate the presence of a nursery colony and have shown that the common pipistrelle breeds at Cusworth Hall.

On 13th March, 1978, having felled several large beech trees - part of the original 18th century landscaping - park keepers discovered that one of the trees which housed in a series of rot holes, generations of jackdaw and starling nests, also contained the winter hibernaculum of ten large bats. Some of the bats escaped but most were taken to unknown fates by local

children. One specimen which later died from its injuries was retrieved by Mrs Julie Lane. This proved to be a female noctule, a large species as British bats go, though weighing a mere 26 grammes. (A full write up of this event together with a review of noctule bats in Yorkshire can be found in Naturalist (1979) 104: 31-38).

Similar unfortunate accidents have shown that both whiskered and brown long-eared bats also occur in the vicinity. Provided that the old timber and old buildings can be maintained in their present mature and 'rustic' state, Cusworth Park should continue to be an important haven for some of Britain's declining bat species. The destruction of roosting sites (besides being illegal under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act) can eradicate the entire bat population from a wide area.

At 9 o'clock on the evening of Saturday, 18th June 1983 - the Grand Finale of Doncaster Naturalist's Society's visit to Cusworth Park - twelve members of the Society assembled to look for bats. It was a clear cool evening after a hot sun-baked day and we walked down the lawns to the lower lake watching the screaming swifts 'trawling' their last mouthfuls of 'aerial plankton'. At about 10 o'clock we turned towards the sunset and began making our way back towards the walled kitchen garden and there in the distance the first few bats of the evening could just be made out, flying amongst the swifts over the beech trees between the hall and the gatehouse. Shortly after, bats began to appear over the canopies of the larger trees in the arboretum, the walled garden and around the 'cascade', then out over the main lawns and the upper lake - they seemed to be everywhere. The assembled group watched in amazement, the spectacular aerobatics and prey pursuit sequences impressing everyone. It was difficult to assess the number of bats in the fading light, but at one

count eleven were visible together above the horizon though clearly many more were present. Although a few small bats, presumably pipistrelles, were seen hunting low amongst the trees and shrubs (in the spotted flycatcher zone) most were large in size, presumably noctules, the chestnut colouration on the plump bodies of those which flew close enough, being quite noticeable.

This night, at least, the Cusworth bats had justifiable claim to being one of the most exciting and unusual zoological spectacles in the Doncaster area.

Good accounts of the lives and ecology of bats are given in Corbet, G.B. and Southern H.N. (1977) The Handbook of British Mammals Blackwell, Oxford and Yalden, D.W. and Morris P.A. (1975) The Lives of Bats David and Charles, Newton Abbot. An excellent guide to the natural history and conservation of British bats is Stebbings, R.E. and Jefferies, D.J. (1983) Focus on Bats: their conservation and the law Nature Conservancy Council and a list and distribution maps of Yorkshire bats is in Howes C.A. (1983) An Atlas of Yorkshire Mammals Naturalist 108 41-82



FRED! YOU'VE NEVER BEEN THE SAME SINCE YOU SAW THE 'RED ARROWS'

MOTH TRAPPING AT CUSWORTH HALL AND PARK, 18th JUNE, 1983

Harry Beaumont

In preparation for the first event of the Doncaster Naturalist's field day at Cusworth Park, 18th June, 1983, Doncaster Museum's light trap had been placed in the courtyard behind the hall's west wing and left switched on overnight. At 10 o'clock on Saturday morning a small but eager group gathered to see the opening of the trap and examine the species the warm evening had produced.

The catch turned out to be unexceptional, consisting of only 23 moths of 14 species, the most interesting being Nomophila noctuella, a migrant not often recorded around Doncaster and not usually found so early in the season.

Species in the moth trap:-

Epiglema cynosbatella (L.) 1
Nomophila noctuella (D & S) 1
Cilix glaucata (Scop.) CHINESE CHARACTER 1
Timandra griseata (Peterson) BLOOD VEIN 1
Xanthorhoe montanata (D & S) SILVER-GROUND CARPET 1
X.fluctuata (L.) GARDEN CARPET 1
Hydriomena impluviata (D & S) MAY HIGHFLYER 1
Eupithecia vulgata (Haw) COMMON PUG 2
Dasychira pudibunda (L.) PALE TUSsock 2
Diarsia rubi (view) SMALL SQUARE SPOT 4
Lacanobia oleracea (L.) BRIGHT-LINE BROWN EYE 1
Agamea sordens (Hufn) RUSTIC SHOULDER-KNOT 5
Caradrina morpheus (Hufn) MOTTLED RUSTIC 1
Autographa pulchrina (Haw) Beautiful GOLDEN Y 1

Species swept from tall grass and herbage under trees between the hall and the gatehouse:

Tischeria marginata (Haw) 1
Adel reamurella (L.) 1
Anthophila fabriciana (L.) A few among nettles
Glyphipterix simplicicella (Steph.) Abundant among grass.

INTERESTING FIELD RECORDS from the area. Summer 1983

From Ian Macdonald A record of Potentilla norvegica found by the side of the railway near the entrance to the Potteric Carr Nature Reserve. Norwegian Cinquefoil has smaller petals than most others of the same family, not a native plant, but often found growing in waste places.

From I. Macdonald and Colin Howes.

A record of Lactuca serriola - Prickly Lettuce- see notes on the Ansterfield Trip.

From Mr. & Mrs. Whetton, Tickhill Rd.

A record of Acanthus mollis Suddenly and mysteriously arrived in the herbaceous border!

Also -An interesting display of Field Madder -Sherardia arvensis in profusion on the lawn! This very dainty plant occurs only sparingly in the Doncaster area.

From Mr. Woodward of Wheatley.

A record of Aeshna mixta Latr.

A large male Dragonfly was found in Mr. Woodward's garden on 31.8.83, subsequently identified by Colin Howes at the Museum. This is a well-known Mediterranean species which migrates and is usually found in the South-East of England.

This is only the second Yorkshire record -- the first one being a specimen found at Shirley Pool 10.10.71 by J. Flint (The Naturalist 1972 p.54)

From Derek Allen.

Alder Moth at Sandall Beat Wood

During the field meeting of Saturday 3rd. September a larva of the Alder Moth -Apanteles alni L. was discovered feeding on the lower branches of a beech tree adjacent to the Wood House (SE 614035). The specimen was collected and is currently being reared by Peter Bullock.

The moth is generally regarded as scarce as the Doncaster district records show. It has been taken in Wheatley Wood in the 1870's, Edlington Wood in 1882, Roche Abbey 1896, Wadworth Wood 1919, Cantley 1942, and more recently at Martin Beck. (Thanks to Colin Howes for the use of the Museum records)

THE DONCASTER NATURALISTS' SOCIETY

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DONCASTER NATURALISTS' SOCIETY EVENTS Autumn 1983.

Indoor meetings commence October 12th. Room C 19 D.M.I.E.E. Waterdale
from 7.15 - 9.00 p.m.

Oct. 12th. Short Extraordinary General Meeting followed by a talk by
Mr. R. Taylor "Starting with Fungi".

Programmes for the rest of the winter will be available at the above
meeting.

Photographic Competition.

The Committee suggest a photographic competition for members. Many of the slides shown at previous meetings have been very good, and it was felt that a competition could be conducted and the entries shown at the 'Members Slide Evening' during the year. Details later.