



# Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke,

June 2009

Newsletter Number Twenty Nine

## Plant notes by David Barden

In March or April, violets are a pleasing sight on our two linear sites, at a time of year when few other flowers are showing. However, until recently, I have to admit that I enjoyed their beauty without being aware of exactly what sort of violet I was looking at. With a little effort, though, I've got to know the various species better, and I hope to show here that this can be worthwhile.



The first of the violets to appear in the spring is the familiar species of gardens and churchyards, **Sweet Violet** (*Viola odorata*). The key feature of this species is its large heart-shaped leaves, patch-forming habit, and leaf-stalks with short (about 0.5mm) downward-pointing hairs. It comes in many varieties, about half a dozen of which can be found in the wild in Cambridgeshire. On our sites, it is commonest on the the Roman Road near its eastern end and the wooded part of the Fleam Dyke. The purple-flowered variety, var.*odorata*, is familiar and common, but almost as abundant,

are ones with white flowers, var. *dumetorum*. This has tiny 'beards' near the centre of the flower on the lateral petals, which distinguishes it from the otherwise similar var. *imberbis*, which does not. This variety is rarer – I've only seen a couple of plants on the Roman Road near Horseheath.

Finally, among this group, there is a little-recorded variety with rather dusky pink flowers, var. *subcarnea*, can be found on the cleared NW end of the Fleam Dyke. All these violets have, of course, the typical violet smell - but this can be rather elusive, so one should be careful in identifying Sweet Violet by smell alone!



The next violet to appear is **Hairy Violet** (*Viola hirta*). This is more-or-less the only violet that grows in the open grassy sections of both sites, and is usually readily distinguished by its bluish flowers, clump-forming habit and leaf-stalks with long (about 1mm) hairs pointing straight out, a character that is more obvious later in the season. This species is very variable, and historically several forms had Latin names rather optimistically applied to them – modern Floras tend to lump them altogether, which is

probably a sensible idea. However, I found one quite distinct variety with pretty pale pink flowers on the A11–Bedford Gap section of the Fleam Dyke in late March this year. Looking in a monograph on British Violets by E. S. Gregory, I found that this is called var. *rosea*, and had been seen on the Fleam Dyke in about 1910 by a Mr Wilmott, when it was described as “plentiful”. There is reason to hope that the six small clumps I found will spread, now that the vegetation in that area is more open than it used to be.



I also noted a Hairy Violet in the same area with much smaller flowers and an unusually pale and delicate ‘spur’ (this is the pointy bit at the back of all violet flowers, and is actually a modified sixth petal). This was still flowering well in mid-May, and may well be the rare subspecies *calcareia*, last recorded from the Fleam Dyke in 1933 by J. E. Lousley, but well-known by the Victorian botanists on the Gog Magog Hills.

Hybrids amongst violets are not uncommon, and can add to the difficulty (or fun, depending on how you look at it) of identifying them. A small clearing by the footpath south-east of Dungate Farm has a form of Sweet Violet clearly intermediate between var. *odorata* and var. *dumetorum* (mentioned above), as it has mottled purple-white flowers, and is growing with both parents.



A hybrid that I suspect is overlooked is that between Sweet Violet and Hairy Violet. This can back-cross with its parents, sometimes forming a baffling range of intermediates. However, typically it has flowers like those of Hairy Violet but with a *weak* violet scent, the patch-forming habit of Sweet Violet, and hairs on the leaf-stalks intermediate in length. This hybrid is only rarely recorded, and was last noted on the Fleam Dyke by Gigi Crompton in 1960. However, in late March this year I found one large patch near the ‘first’ Juniper. This was a remarkable sight, with about 500 flowers in one square metre as the photo shows!

Finally, I’ll mention briefly the two native dog-violets, so-called because they (like Hairy Violet and unlike Sweet Violet) have no scent. These are typical woodland species, and so it is not surprising that they are rare on our two sites. There are no records of **Common Dog-Violet** (*Viola riviniana*) at all, and I’ve only seen **Early Dog-Violet** (*Viola reichenbachiana*) on the clayey part of the Roman Road, opposite Borley Wood. These two violets are easy to tell from the others you might find because of their pointed (not rounded) sepals and hairless leaf-stalks. Common Dog-Violet has rather large dumpy-looking flowers with a spur that is *paler* than the petals, and Early Dog-Violet (photo) has smaller flowers with narrow petals, with a spur that is *darker* than the petals.



I hope that these brief notes might have inspired you to get to know the violets of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke and to make sure that you go for a springtime violet walk in 2010!

## **Eighth Annual General Meeting, 23rd April, 7.30pm**

The meeting was held at the **Cambridge Masonic Hall**, Bateman Street, Cambridge.

**1. Present:** Chairman, Edmund Tanner; Treasurer, Mike Albutt; Secretary, Julia Napier; Membership Secretary, Jane Robson; David Seilly, work parties, with committee members: David Barden, Nigel Copeman, Peter Grubb, Roger Lemon, and about 45 members of the Friends. Apologies were received from committee members: Rob Mungovan and Iain Webb and other members.



### **2. Chairman's opening remarks**

Edmund Tanner introduced himself to the meeting as the new Chairman of the Friends by saying he was a plant ecologist at the University of Cambridge. He said, "I am lucky enough to get paid to study and teach plant ecology. I grew up in Cambridge and learned my chalk grassland plants on Fleam Dyke, because it was close enough to reach by bicycle." He pointed out that as well as containing some of the last remnants of chalk and chalky boulder clay grassland in Cambridgeshire, the Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road also have substantial amounts of shrubland and some woodland, these being important for birds and insects in Cambridgeshire, which has relatively few hedges and woods. He went on to say that while there has been a good deal of interest in the conservation of ancient woods and wetlands, there is a need to keep up the conservation of grasslands, hedges and small wooded areas of which the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke are prime examples.

The two sites are important for a reason that is not always appreciated: they are close to Cambridge, and thus relatively easily accessible by car, bike or public transport. In addition, although they are less impressive than the Devil's Ditch (or Dyke), the two sites have many of the species that make the Devil's Ditch interesting.

### **Achievements over the last year**

- There is now a management plan for the Fleam Dyke as well as for the Roman Road. The committee are immensely grateful to Professor Peter Grubb who checked both documents in detail, and provided many suggestions for improvement.
- There is an excellent and informative leaflet about the Fleam Dyke, planned by Julia Napier, designed by Tina Bone, and paid for with a grant from South Cambridgeshire District Council obtained by Rob Mungovan.
- Thanks to the efforts of John Gibbs at Wandlebury, all-year round ferreting was begun this winter on the Roman Road, and will start soon on the Fleam Dyke.
- It was with great sadness that those of us who knew her, learned of the death of Ann Bicknell in December 2008. Her husband John has kindly donated £500 in memory of Ann's love of the natural world. We shall need to reprint the Fleam Dyke leaflet in a few years and this will now be possible; the reprint will include a dedication to Ann. The Friends are most grateful for this donation.
- Karen Whymark of the Countryside Access Team is anxious to help us secure a seasonal Traffic Restriction Order on the eastern end of the Roman Road. Members were urged to write letters and/or sign the petition forms on tables around the room.

- A new contractor has been appointed to mow the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke in spring and autumn. There should not be a cut in July 2009, but members are encouraged to be vigilant and report any inappropriate mowing.

### **Needed**

A website and someone to create and maintain it. Those present were asked if they or someone they knew might like to volunteer to take on such a task.

**Volunteers** to take over positions on the committee. Most of the committee members have been there since the group started eight years ago. If you know someone who you think would do a good job, please let us know.

### **Looking to the future**

Edmund Tanner said that he thought that the aims of the Friends should be:

- to promote the conservation of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke;
- to keep an eye on what is actually happening on them;
- to carry out active conservation measures under the guidance of our excellent field manager, the Green Belt Project Officer Iain Webb;
- to seek funding to manage the sites and promote appropriate use of them;
- to do our best to maintain and improve the sites for the benefit of wildlife;
- to plan for the future.

**As a part of a much larger vision, he said that the Friends should aim to expand the scope of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, and look to make them part of a joined-up network of conservation sites across the country.**

**£...£...£...£...**

Finally, he urged members to **pay their subscriptions**, because more money allows us to do more work. All the money received has gone into conservation management, the newsletter, the information boards and the leaflets. No-one is paid anything for their committee work. In addition, because we are a local charity, the Friends were not paying for use of the hall and bar of this handsome building with its pleasant courtyard and very convenient car park. Edmund Tanner thanked the Cambridge Freemasons warmly for their help.

## **2 Report on work parties**

David Barden, standing in for Iain Webb, reported first on the work carried out on **the Roman Road**. Over the winter, there have been a total of four days of volunteer work, two of these by the Friends. In particular, the area just south of Worsted Lodge had not been cut-and-raked for several years and had built up a substantial thatch from the regular highways cut. Iain said that some sections of the Roman Road north of Worsted Lodge were looking the best that he had ever seen them in the 14 years that he has worked there.

**On the Fleam Dyke**, there had been a total of seven days of volunteer work, including two by the Friends: clearance of elder and grass cutting south of the A11; mowing and raking on Mutlow Hill; scrub clearing, mowing and raking near the disused railway and at the Fulbourn end of the dyke.

Over-grazing by rabbits is a major problem near the Bedford Gap. We hope ferreting will help. Iain will be monitoring the results. Both there and on the Roman Road, Iain will be trying to control the spread of Hemlock, which can be very invasive. Finally, despite our best efforts, Wild Clematis on Mutlow Hill is still in places forming a 2ft thick blanket over the ground, preventing chalk grassland from re-establishing itself. David said that we hope to carry out

selective poisoning to protect the existing flower-rich areas, and then to embark on a major programme of clematis reduction.

### **Wildlife Observations - recent highlights**

- **The four juniper seedlings** within the rabbit-proof fences are looking healthy, one is almost two feet high!
- Two **Long-eared owls** were disturbed on Fleam Dyke, and a **Marsh Harrier** was seen during the winter south of Gunner's Hall on the Roman Road. Later it vanished, reported to have been shot. ( PS Marsh Harrier reported over Fleam Dyke, June.)
- David said that he had found a **pale pink form of the Hairy violet** on the Fleam Dyke, which was last recorded there in about 1915! He had also seen a little-recorded **hybrid violet**, forming a patch a square metre in size completely covered in flowers.
- **Stoats** have once again been seen on the open section of the Roman Road.
- Following last year's preliminary examination on the Fleam Dyke, it is hoped to do a careful survey of **Field Fleawort** and **Purple Milk-vetch** this year.

Please report any interesting wildlife sightings, especially those of insects (other than butterflies) and birds, to add to the annual survey conducted by Iain Webb.

Finally, on behalf of the committee, David thanked everyone who had helped out on work parties over the year. He also made an appeal for more volunteers for next winter, especially as we have increasing areas to manage.

### **3 Report on the butterfly recording scheme**

Roger Lemon reported that in 2008, using a team of 8 volunteers, weekly transect counts were conducted on sections of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke as part of the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme, which is organized nationally by Butterfly Conservation. He said that for many species, numbers were down on previous years, but that there were some encouraging signs.

On the Fleam Dyke, the area recorded was from the pumping station to Bedford Gap, a length of 2,250 metres or 1.4 miles. In terms of weekly coverage, partly because of poor weather, transects were conducted on only 19 out of the 26 weeks, and unfortunately some of those missed were at critical times for our two most interesting species, the Green Hairstreak and Chalkhill Blue. Nevertheless, a total of 23 species were recorded, with Meadow Brown, Small White and Gatekeeper being the most abundant. Green Hairstreaks, which have a short season, are holding up quite well with slightly increased numbers recorded compared with 2007. Roger said that numbers of Chalkhill Blues, although low, were up on 2007 and similar to those recorded in 2006.

Roger then went on to talk about the Roman Road. Here better coverage was achieved, with only 2 weeks out of the 26 being missed. The section covered here was from Worsted Lodge to a point between the Wandlebury footpath and Wort's Causeway, a distance of 3.225 kilometres or just over 2 miles. Twenty-one species were recorded, the Gatekeeper being the most abundant, followed by Green-veined White, Meadow Brown and Small White. Roger said that it was a good year for both Ringlets and Brimstones, but not for Marbled Whites. These were recorded in low numbers in 2007, but were not seen during the transect walks in 2008, although one was recorded separately. Small numbers of Chalkhill Blue and Green Hairstreak have been seen in previous years by casual observers, but none were recorded in the transect counts in 2008.

Roger reported that work is continuing this year, and that the first counts have already been done. He said that trends in populations of the less common species like the Green Hairstreak,

Chalkhill Blue and Marbled White will be watched, but that the work in recording changes in the populations of the more common and widespread species is equally important.  
Roger Lemon.

### Time for a picture



With thanks to Derek Andrews, who, an embarrassingly long time ago, sent me several David Shenton cartoons featuring the Blue Adonis, a long extinct variety of the Adonis Blue, which had been found in a piece of amber. These now appear digitally remastered by Mike Albutt.

### 4 Long-distance Walk Booklet

Roger Lemon has also done most of the work involved in producing this booklet and applying for a grant of £4,872 from Awards for All. Since the A.G.M. we have heard that the application has been successful. We are grateful for the help of Janet and Roger Moreton of the Ramblers Association, and of officers from Cambridgeshire County Council.

The booklet will include reference to landscape, history/archaeology and wildlife, as well as the route description, and will also contain maps, photographs and short descriptions of places and sites of interest on or close to the walk. We hope to publish the book in September with a **Launch on the Roman Road on 13th September** with press coverage, photos and lots of walkers setting off along the route. See back page.

The route will be waymarked with a version of our logo, and the grant will make it possible to have a website about the walk with reference to the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke.

### 5 Treasurer's report

Mike, in a departure from his usually brief reports, talked for very nearly two whole minutes about the state of the Friends' finances, although all of the news he had to relay was good. In particular, the generosity of members in paying more than the required £5 subscription has kept our finances healthy and will enable us to carry out more management work on the two sites. Mike thanked our Membership Secretary, Jane Robson, for dealing with membership matters and subscriptions over the year.

**NB The subscription is £5 or £10 if you are feeling rich. (Or more, no amount too large!) Please send subscriptions to Herring's House, Wilbraham Road, Fulbourn, CB1 5EU**

### 7 Election of committee members

All the members of the committee were unanimously re-elected.

## Saving Ely's Wildspace

by Andrew Balmford,

Professor of Conservation Biology,  
Zoology Department,  
University of Cambridge



Photograph by Derek Andrews

It is easy to think of Ely as a comfortably unchanging place. Pleasant streets cluster round the northern side of the great cathedral while meadows studded with fine trees descend to the riverside streets. The reality is a bit different. The District of East Cambridgeshire, of which Ely is the major city, has experienced a population growth rate in the last 10 years of 27 per cent, second only in the whole country to the City of London. Ely is the fastest growing city in Europe, which is very good news for people who need houses and jobs, but possibly very bad news for wildlife.

As its habitat comes under pressure from intensive agriculture, housing developments and new roads, wildlife has moved into derelict buildings and abandoned clay pits and quarries. In addition to the flood meadows to the south east of the cathedral, there are two lakes and a large area of reedbeds, which can be seen from the train.

**The settling ponds** dug for the sugar beet industry have slowly become reed beds. Five Marsh Harriers use the area. Bearded Tits have nested there and 2 male bitterns have established territories among the reeds. Kingfishers are regularly seen from Cuckoo Bridge. Barn owls hunt at dusk. Herons thrive on the eels which live there, contrary to the generally disastrous trend. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUCN, has declared the European eel to be a Critically Endangered Species. Ely, whose name means Eel Island, can help to save the species.

**Roswell Pits** were created as the Galt clay was dug out to build flood defences for the area. Most visitors to the town and the famous cathedral cannot know that these two beautiful lakes lie so near to the south west side of the cathedral. The terns, safely back again from Africa, are a joy to watch. Great Crested Grebes do their disappearing tricks, and one big otter has been seen there regularly. Among otter watchers, Roswell Pits are known as Otter Central, because the otters using the Great Ouse visit the clean spring-fed waters so frequently. Their presence appears to have driven out the mink, and the water voles are returning. The area is visited or used by 202 species of bird, 38 of which are Schedule One, and 340 plant species have been recorded.

### Protection

It is therefore astonishing that the whole of this remarkable wildlife area was not, until recently, legally protected, apart from Roswell Pits which is a Geology SSSI for its fossils from the Jurassic era. On 11th February 2009 Natural England designated the whole of the Ely Pits and Meadows as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. This is an important recognition of the

national importance of this area not only for its spectacular fossils, but for wildlife. The area is included in the Cambridgeshire Green Vision, but this does not give legal protection.

### **Why is Legal Protection Needed?**

The land was formerly owned by the Thomas Parsons Charity, which was established in the fifteenth century to help the poor. In 2006, the lakes were quietly sold to the owner of a local marina. He set about cutting several large ash trees and clearing bushes all along the side of one lake in order to make a track. Hard core and rubble were used at access points. He had not asked or received permission to do any of this work.

The planned marina would have moorings for 50 boats. The entrance to the lakes is through a narrow channel. There is no current in the lakes to carry away pollution from engines or from the toilets, which are still allowed to discharge into the water. The disturbance and pollution would pose an immediate threat to the bitterns, the otters and the water voles: all three listed species.

### **The Local Campaign for the Protection of Rural Ely**

The LCPRE was set up in response to this threat and, as always, a few local people spent a great deal of time spreading the word and working out how to respond. In a survey of local opinion on the proposed marina, there were 450 respondents only 4 of whom were in favour of a marina. Walkers, runners and anglers were asked for their views. A few people felt a marina would increase their enjoyment of the lakes, but the majority disagreed. A public meeting was held on 15th June 2007. Three hundred people came, and even more would have attended the meeting but for fire regulations. The LCPRE was set up with a membership fee of £1. By April, membership was over 1200.

### **When is People Power not Enough?**

What the new owner has done is clearly wrong, but East Cambridgeshire District Council is unwilling to take action for fear of incurring legal costs when the owner fights back. The local MP is in favour of the marina, and the Bishop of Ely does not answer letters, or had not done so by 23rd April. Work was stopped by means of a Planning Contravention Notice, but the infrastructure which had been put in has still not been removed.

### **So What do You Do Now?**

Think big! Andrew Balmford said he was tired of the negative stuff, and wanted to plan for better things. The LCPRE have designed a green plan which would buffer the eastern corner of Ely. The establishment of an integrated plan would prevent the repeat of another sudden destructive development. It specifies among other things that future development of housing, industry, road building should be confined to areas not rich in wildlife.

### **More Bad News since April 23rd.**

Ely Common had also been sold by the Thomas Parsons Charity. The plan was that part would be used for 'development' and part would be mowed every fortnight. LCPRE applied for a retrospective declaration that Ely Common was a Village Green, which would protect it from excessive mowing. In May 2009 the case was lost on a curious technicality. If people had not walked across it at all seasons, then it was not a village green. Because people had not walked across it when it was being mowed for hay, it could not be seen as being used all the time. This is an ambiguous legal area and has been subject to appeals by other groups seeking Village Green status. The County Council will make a formal decision on our application in July. For more information, if you have access to a computer, look at <http://www.elywildspace.org.uk>

## Miscellaneous News and Information

**To report rubbish dumping** or obstruction of a path by fallen branches, please contact the Cambridgeshire County Council Countryside Services Team at County Hall. 01223 715558, or email Julia Napier at [frrfdjin@freebie.net](mailto:frrfdjin@freebie.net)

### Traffic Restriction Order Appeal

We have already sent 3 sheets of signatures from the AGM and other meetings to Karen Whymark. Carolin Gohler, Chief Executive Office at the Cambridge Preservation Society has collected several pages of signatures. Caroline Wingfield at Saffron Walden Museum is doing the same and will be writing to Karen Whymark. Alisoun Hodges, Countryside Access Team, will present them to the South Area Joint Traffic Management Committee when it considers the proposed Order on 13<sup>th</sup> July.

**Local landowners who need to use the Roman Road for farm work will, of course, have a key.** Needless to say, farmers have used and maintained the Road for hundreds of years, and are astonished and angered by those who enjoy driving there in the worst weather and churning up the track with no thought for other users, let alone the farmers who repair it.

### Money to Conserve the Junipers

Tim Pankhurst from Plantlife, Edmund Tanner, Iain Webb, Sharon Hearle and Julia visited the Fleam Dyke in order to discuss ways to increase the number juniper seedlings. There is a Natural England grant available for such a project which we hope to get. The fund is called Countdown to 2010, because that is the year when the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 2002 required Natural England to ensure that all SSSIs were in 'good or improving order'.

This was the reason for the drastic clearance of the Gunner's Hall end of the Roman Road. A lot of people tell me they like the open spaces. Cyclists have taken to the route in substantial numbers. Whenever I walk there 2 or 3 cyclists race past me in any one hour, oblivious to the wildlife, but improving their health. There was an obvious reduction in the number of birds using the hedges but that is changing, although there must still be a dramatic loss in winter food for migrant birds. In places where there was a residual amount of calcareous flora there has been a moderate increase in the few surviving species. The highest point, Deadman's Hill, has a total of about 8 yards of Lady's Bedstraw spreading inwards from the trodden tracks for a depth of one and sometimes two yards. In addition there has been a small increase in the tougher calcareous flora: a few plants of Burnet Saxifrage, Hoary Plantain, Spring Sedge, Salad Burnet and Dwarf thistle. There is an abundance of Agrimony and the purple knapweeds, both Greater and Common. The recent rain will have brought substantial growth in the tall, yellow Wild Parsnip, and Wild Basil, with pretty whorls of the pinkish purple flowers characteristic of mints. Further back off the path, the cleared soil is dominated by Barren Brome and other rough grasses, common trefoils, lacey white Hedge Bedstraw, White Campion, some St John's Wort, and a variety of thistles and other ruderal species. It seems to me that although there has been an increase in the small range of target flora, the same result could have been achieved by setting the hedges back in stages, allowing the flowers we want to see there to spread over the cleared land as was done with our LHI money. It is now three years since the big clearances on the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke. It would be useful if the results could be assessed for future reference.

### Error, error, error, error .....

You will have to do the Sci Fi voice for yourself, but in Newsletter 28, I said that 12 Chalkhill Blueshad been seen on the Fleam Dyke in August 2005. Alas no, it was only two males, but they had brought a friend or friends, and the colony has been there for the subsequent three years. Remember to come and look in late July, August and early September.

### Generation Gap!

I must also apologise to Dulcie Cornwell for getting the generations of her family quite wrong. Ann Waldock is her grand daughter and John Dawson, her great grandson. In addition, I was not able to fit in the rest of the story she told in a letter she sent me, so here it is.



### Memories of the Roman Road

By Dulcie Cornwell

When I was a girl living at Hill Farm beside the Roman Road, (Cambridge end), the Roman Road was our playground. In those days we couldn't go far, so a picnic on the Roman Road holds happy memories for me. We had our favourite Beech trees to climb and I'm told my great grand children enjoy climbing the same trees.

My father kept bees in the bushes at the end of the trees. He never wore a veil and one day, when he was working them, my husband went to watch. Dad told him if the bees attacked him to back through a bush. Well, as soon as a few bees buzzed around him, my husband made for some bushes and tried to back through them. I'm sure the bushes did him more harm than the bees!

## Work parties and Events

### Sunday 13 September. Launch of the Long Distance Walk booklet.

Meet at 9.30am in the Wandlebury car park and walk through the reserve to the Roman Road, where there will be a **Small Celebration at 10.0am**. We hope that lots of people will then join Roger Long, Sam Agnew, Janet and Roger Moreton and others on a shortened version of the Long Distance Walk - along the Roman Road to Balsham and back along the Fleam Dyke.

**Sunday 20 September.** Work party on the Roman Road, south of Worsted Lodge. Mowing and raking the other half of the band of flowers and grasses where we worked on a very hot morning last year. Meet at 9.45am at Worsted Lodge. Bring suitable clothing and a picnic.

**Sunday 18 October.** Work party with members of **Plantlife** on the Fleam Dyke, south side. Meet at 10.0am in the car park of Wandlebury Country Park, 2 miles south of Cambridge, on the A1307. (I have been hoping to get help from Plantlife members in East Anglia, and thanks to Tim Pankhurst, it has finally happened. Julia)

**Sunday 22 November.** Mowing and raking on the Fleam Dyke. Meet at Stonebridge Lane at 9.45am for transport to the Fulbourn end of the Fleam Dyke.

### Winter talks run by the Cambridge Group of the Wildlife Trust

7.30pm in the hall of St John's Church, Hills Road. Opposite Homerton College

September 24<sup>th</sup>      **Galapagos – the Enchanted Isles**, Illustrated talk by Christine Newell

October 24<sup>th</sup>      **Ladybirds of Britain and the impact of an Invader, the Harlequin.**  
Illustrated talk by Peter Brown of the Ladybird Research Project

November 25<sup>th</sup>      **Small Mammals in Cambridgeshire.** Illustrated talk by Sheila Pankhurst, Zoology Department, Anglia Ruskin University

**Contact:** Julia Napier, Secretary of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke  
30a Hinton Avenue, Cambridge, CB1 7AS tel: 01223 213152

## Ten Million Painted Ladies!

On 24<sup>th</sup> of June, I took a friend to visit Wood Walten Fen. As we began to leave, We noticed Painted Lady butterflies flying fast and low over the nearby potato field in ones and twos. Some photographers near us said they that they had just phoned friends in Rutland and that the Painted Ladies were there already, travelling steadily northwards. This was the beginning of the event which has been described in the media.



Heavy winter rains in North Africa can lead to an explosion of these butterflies. Using the south winds, they migrate in their millions across the Mediterranean and travel northwards, covering 150km in 24 hours or so. The females will have already mated, so when they land they are ready to lay eggs. Thistles are the favoured food plant. When a similar migration landed in Maldon, Essex in 1996, a farmer with a field of thistles watched the hordes of prickly black caterpillars strip his field of thistles and move on across the road and up the walls of his house. That was the year when every buddleia had its ration of Painted Ladies. With luck, 2009 should be the same. Recent research shows that the Painted Lady, like the Red Admiral, attempts a reverse migration. Photo: Painted Lady on Osteospermum by Nick Ballard.



Aquilegia or Columbine on Mutlow Hill. It was probably introduced and is spreading. There is also a pink form.



A Morel on the cleared bit of the Fleam Dyke just NQ of the old railway.



Purple Milk-vetch on the Fleam Dyke. A careful search has revealed nine patches in the A11-Bedford Gap section, and three patches in the section between the disused railway and Mutlow Hill. Only a few were flowering.



The photo on the right shows a Juniper bush. Mutlow Hill is in the distance taken on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2009. All four photos were taken by David Barden.

## Rosewell Pits – three reasons to support LCPRE



To contact LCPRE, telephone or write to their secretary Pat Hillman, 28 Juniper Drive, Ely CB7 4TT; 01353 664115, or email [lcpre@elywildspace.org.uk](mailto:lcpre@elywildspace.org.uk)

The reedbeds are home to breeding Marsh Harriers – majestic emblems of the Fens that narrowly avoided extinction last century. At least five birds now regularly use this area.

Otters now regularly visit the biggest pit at Roswell, as well as the Beet Pits. Their return has been associated with the disappearance of American mink, and the resurgence of water voles in the area.



This is the most consistent site in Cambridgeshire for the bittern - nearly driven extinct just ten years ago, and still one of Britain's rarest birds. Between them, the Beet Pits and Roswell support two territorial males. Roswell is also among the best places in England for seeing kingfishers.

### And Finally, Thank You to:

- **Andrew Balmford** for a marvellous talk and to LCPRE for permission to use the photographs on their website.
- To **David Barden** for his photographs and another very interesting article.
- **Roger Lemon** for keeping the Butterfly Transect Scheme going. Very time consuming! And for his expert report.
- **Mike Albutt** for resurrecting another less than perfect original picture.
- To **Mike and David** for patiently explaining, often more than once, how to make Microsoft Word do this sort of thing.
- And to **Mark Bishop at Copy Studio** for similar patience, help and advice on every edition of these newsletters.