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Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke
Newsletter Number Five
May 2002

Our First Annual General Meeting
at the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn
April 10th, 7.30pm,

Present: Committee: Sam Agnew, Jane Fenton, Julia Napier, David Seilly and 35 members of the society. Apologies were received from Robert Finch, Rob Mungovan and Sharon Hearle. Sam Agnew summarised the achievements of the society and Julia added a bit of detail, but we missed Sharon's expert knowledge and capacity to answer on any aspect of the two linear sites. Perhaps this is the point at which we should announce that Sharon is taking maternity leave for six months from the end of June. Her work on the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke will be taken over by Iain Webb. Iain is a very good all round naturalist, who has done a great deal of voluntary work for the Wildlife Trust and works part time for the City Greenways Project.

A Successful First Year

On the 1st February, 2001, at a meeting of 78 people in the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn, it was agreed to set up The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. A meeting was held on 5th April, to appoint officers: Chairman, Sam Agnew; Secretary, Julia Napier; Treasurer, Jane Fenton; Sharon Hearle, Green Belt Project Officer; David Seilly and Robert Finch. Rob Mungovan, Conservation Officer for South Cambridgeshire Council, was invited to join us. A bank account was set up with the NatWest Bank and Sharon swiftly produced the first newsletter. During the year, we organised two wildlife walks, and two very successful scrub-clearing events for Friends, following which Mike Albutt spent several winter Sundays cutting back the overgrowth on the path from Fulbourn to Mutlow Hill, which has made it more pleasant for walkers. Three more newsletters were published and to celebrate our first year, we held an Anniversary Meeting in the Gilmour Building of the Botanic Garden at which Roger Clarke gave a fascinating talk on Birds of Prey and their Prey. Cue for a picture.



Roger Clarke and Sharon Hearle, our speakers at the Anniversary Meeting held in the Gilmour Building, C.U. Botanic Garden

Records and Recorders on the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

During our first year, Graham Jones and Ivan Scurll have been recording the birds on both sites. Gigi Crompton, the former Cambridgeshire Vice-County Flora Recorder, helped to establish a monitoring system on the newly cleared section of Fleam Dyke. Jo Darlington has offered to survey the Fleam Dyke for insects. Julia Napier visited key parts of both sites several times to record the butterflies in 2001, and now Roger Lemon has offered to record the butterflies on the Roman Road from the A11 to the eastern end. Charles Turner offered to map the surviving rare plants on both sites. Coincidentally, Mark Hill, Robert Finch and other bryophyte experts surveyed the Fleam Dyke for the National Bryophyte survey. We hope to recruit more recorders in time.

Money and Management

The existence of the Friends helped Sam Agnew, District Councillor on the Environment Committee of South Cambridgeshire Council, to persuade the Council to contribute to the purchase of a better and safer mowing machine for use on slopes: the famous Bank Commander. Anglian Water shared the total cost of £4,000. In December, we applied for and were granted £5,000 from the Awards for All of the Lottery for Conservation work on Fleam Dyke and volunteers' expenses. The money will mostly be spent this autumn on scrub removal in selected areas. Sharon Hearle has found a Grazier who is willing to pasture his flock of Norfolk Long Horn sheep on the Fleam Dyke near the Bedford Gap, which is the ideal way to manage chalk grassland. English Nature will provide money for the necessary fencing, and we are planning a work party on Sunday May 26th to pull up ragwort and dig out white bryony, both of which are toxic to sheep if eaten in quantity. The handsome, curly horned sheep will arrive in September.

Meanwhile, Sharon Hearle has continued to carry out conservation work on both sites as part of the Green Belt Project, a scheme funded by Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. She has engaged and supervised contractors to do major clearance work, using grants which she obtained from various sources. This is not as easy as Sharon makes it seem. The Mid-week Conservation Volunteers visited each site ten times for scrub clearing, mowing and raking.

Approval of Accounts

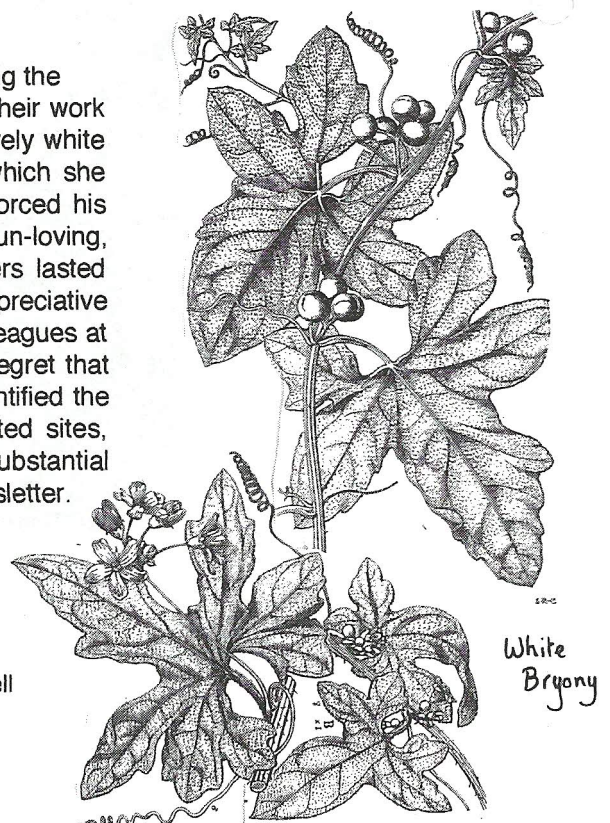
Jane Fenton submitted the accounts of the society from April to December 2001. Our income of £365 sufficed to cover all our costs, which consisted almost entirely of postage, stationery and photocopying, leaving a surplus of £238 on December 31st 2001. This is largely because the local Wildlife Trust Office charges us very little for photocopying. Roger Clarke very kindly prepared and signed our accounts.

Election of Committee Members

The committee then stood down, but were soon re-elected. Jane Fenton has agreed to continue as a fund raiser and John Ady has taken over as Treasurer. The meeting agreed to retain the membership fee at £5 per household, if possible by Standing Order.

Sam closed the business by warmly thanking the members for joining the group in the first place, and all the members of the committee for their work during the year. He then presented Julia with a large bunch of lovely white chrysanthemums mixed with stems of some interesting foliage, which she has been meaning to ask him the name of ever since. He reinforced his thanks with a bottle of Italian red wine made by 'high-spirited, fun-loving, hard-working, slightly naughty wine-makers' in Puglia. The flowers lasted over three weeks. The wine vanished a little faster. Such an appreciative Chairman is a pleasure to work with. I am sure many of Sam's colleagues at Homerton College and in the District Council would agree, and I regret that this was not said publicly at the AGM. Moreover, it is he who identified the need for a group to support conservation work on these neglected sites, after the Lottery committee rejected Sharon's application for substantial funds. I should like to record an unofficial vote of thanks in this newsletter.

Flower drawings by Stella Ross Craig,
Drawings of British Plants in 9 vols. Bell



Butterflies of Chalk Grassland,

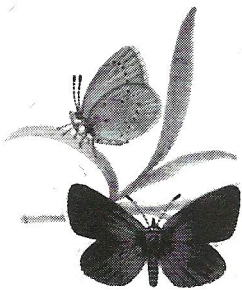
a talk by Dr Val Perrin at the AGM

Val Perrin is the butterfly recorder for 'modern' county of Cambridgeshire (Vice-County 29 + 31), and an expert on dragonflies, but in addition he is a remarkably good photographer. Those present will recall a photograph of a perfect green-veined white on a perfect green-veined orchid! The main purpose of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke is to find the means to restore the once abundant chalk grassland with its characteristic small, bright, flowers. This is the habitat of a number of butterflies, some quite common and some increasingly rare. As we admired a series of beautiful slides, Val described the behaviour and habitat requirements of each species. My notes begin with one of the less common.

The **Grizzled Skipper** looks rather like the Common or Latticed Heath, small day-flying moths. It lives in very small colonies and the caterpillar feeds on plants of the rose family, such as agrimony, creeping cinquefoil, tormentil, and wild strawberry. There is just a chance that it might have made its way to the Fleam Dyke in the areas full of chalk grassland flowers near the A11. If you see one, let us know!



The other butterfly which we would all dearly love to see is the smallest blue in the business. For years I used to refer to the Common Blue as the Small Blue. Well, it is small, isn't it? But not as small as the male **Small Blue**, which is not much bigger than a blue-bottle, and looks almost black in flight. The butterfly flits around low in the grass, and colonies are often just a few square metres in extent. It does not usually travel far, and therefore is not able to disperse over a wider area, as some larger butterflies can. To compensate for its scarcity and diminutive size, the Small Blue has the nicest Latin name of any insect. It is *Cupido minimus* or the Little Love. It survives in sheltered areas, on thin grassland where the larval food plant, kidney vetch can seed itself; but that is the only plant it will eat. The insects live only two to three weeks, usually have only one brood, and the little caterpillars tend to eat each other. Not a recipe for success. Sharon and Val saw one Small Blue last year on a site just outside Cambridge, but the chances of a return to the Roman Road are not high.



Other butterflies that we should all like to see in Cambridgeshire are the Fritillaries, (from Latin, *fritillus*, the chequered pattern on a box of dice). Unfortunately, their preferred type of habitat, such as coppiced woodland carpeted with violets, has mostly disappeared from this area, but the **Dark Green Fritillary**, a powerful flyer with greenish underwings, which is found nectaring on flower-rich chalk grassland, has been seen very occasionally on the Devil's Dyke, so as our restoration work proceeds, we can live in hope. In passing, Val Perrin pointed out that the smaller, darker, Duke of Burgundy fritillary has been discovered to be the only British example of a Metal Mark and not a fritillary at all. It requires the sort of scrubby chalk grassland, which has largely disappeared from East Anglia, taking the Duke of Burgundy with it.

Time for the Good News

The handsome **Brown Argus** is on the up. (Both male and female look rather like the Common Blue female, but the the rich chestnut brown upper wings have no trace of blue.) It was doing very well from 1997 to 1999, but recently it has dropped back a bit. Unlike the Small Blue, it has moved with the times and the larvae are now to be seen feeding on plants other than its usual diet of rock roses and dove's foot crane's bill. A decade of scrub clearing and mowing, organised by English Nature with the Cambridge and Essex Butterfly Conservation group, has led to a significant increase in the amount of horseshoe vetch on the Devil's Dyke, resulting in an explosion in the number of **Chalkhill Blue** butterflies, from less than a dozen in 1986 to over 700 in August 2001. Next question: will they find their way back to the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, where they were once common?



Another possible arrival is the **Marbled White**, a 'great wanderer' as Val Perrin put it. He saw it on the Devil's Dyke in 2001, and a couple were reported in last year's Cambridge Garden Survey. It appears to be moving into East Anglia, so with luck, we might see this handsome black and white butterfly visiting and even breeding in Cambridgeshire again. Like the Ringlet, the Marbled White female is quite unfussy where she

lays her eggs. In fact they are scattered in flight over an area of suitable grassland. The little caterpillars are equally unfussy, eating fescues, Yorkshire fog, Tor grass and others.

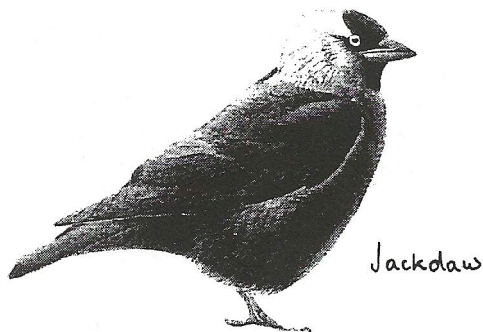
Moral: picky eaters finish last.

As you can see from this paraphrase of parts of Val's excellent talk, the Butterfly records which he co-ordinates are an invaluable source of evidence about fluctuations in butterfly populations: real decline in some cases and steady expansion in others. Butterfly recording is not something reserved for established experts. Cambridgeshire is very under-recorded and anyone can help to add to the statistical picture.

Butterfly Conservation are doing a **National Garden Butterfly Count**. Do join in. For more information write to: Garden Butterflies Count, Butterfly Conservation, PO Box 232, Melksham, Wiltshire, SN12 7SB

Memories of the Roman Road

by Ivan Scull



I came to Cambridge in 1948, at the age of six. My father, who worked for the Norwich Union, had been transferred to the Cambridge office, so we left our home in Norwich and moved to our new one in Perne Road. My brothers and I went to the Morley Memorial Primary School, and were considered rich kids then, because Father had a car, which was paid for by the company. He was allowed very limited private mileage, so on four or five Sundays in the summer, we could have a day at Clacton. The journey in the black Ford 8 took about two and a half hours. All other Sunday outings consisted of driving up past the Beech Woods, parking at the start of the Roman Road, and having a long walk and a picnic.

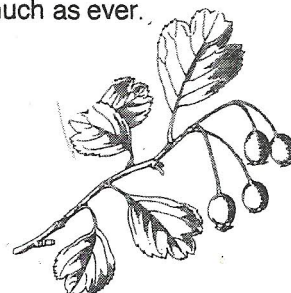
The Roman Road then was very quiet, with few visitors. There was very little low growth for the first half mile or so. There was also no litter! Father sometimes took a spade and a sack, and would dig up leaf mould (for potting) from beneath the beech trees in that first section. Many jackdaws nested in the holes in these trees, and in the ivy. Like all country boys of the time, I was a keen collector of birds' eggs. It was not illegal then, and some of us had excellent collections. Funny that despite all these young egg collectors, there were many times more birds then than now! We would only take one egg per clutch, and we noticed that many birds replaced the missing one to make up the original clutch number. I am sure that habitat destruction and pesticides have had a far greater effect on numbers than we could ever have had.

In those days, many more species could be found along the Roman Road. Lapwings and skylarks were very plentiful. I even remember a Stone Curlew in the fields near the back of Wandlebury. Red backed shrike and wryneck were also occasional visitors. Wandlebury was still private, with no official access, but in the school holidays we would cycle along the Babraham Road to the old Hill Trees Pub, leave our bicycles in the small chalk pit at the back, climb the cliff, run fast across the golf course and climb into Wandlebury to go bird nesting. We were often chased out!

Where the Roman Road adjoined the Golf Course, we would search the base of the hawthorn hedge for golf balls, (some stray and some not so stray) and sell them to Mr Turpin in his second-hand shop, then known as a junk shop, in Mill Road, just in front of the old wood yard. We only got a pittance for them, but it helped to pay for a pair of wooden-based Fen Runners, old fashioned ice-skates, which he used to sell.

The main difference between the Roman Road then and now was that there was much less intrusive shrub growth, and more grassland growing over the chalk, so that there were open areas between the trees. From Wandlebury down to the A11, the landscape was very much the same then as it is now, except that the wheat was much taller than the present varieties, and was often laid flat in wind and rain.

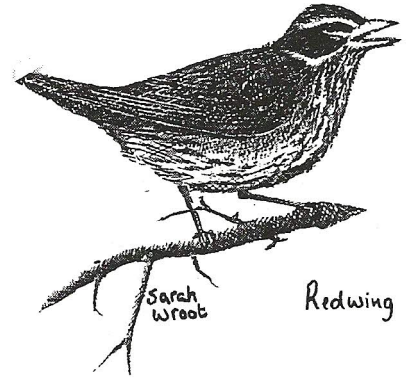
In later years, as a teenager, the Road became a regular place for my old BSA to take me and a friend for what we then called courting! After marrying in 1966, we would take our two children to walk from the top, round Wandlebury and back, and they seemed to like it as much as I always have. Nowadays I frequently walk the Road from Linton to Fulbourn, and apart from the appalling litter dumping, I enjoy it as much as ever.



Fleam Dyke Bird Survey, Winter 2002

by Graham Jones and Ivan Scurll

Ivan Scurll writes: The days that we picked for the bird surveys on both sites were awful, with very little seen. I have, therefore, decided to note birds seen on other, less formal visits to Fleam Dyke during the winter, using the Section numbers marked on the map in the February newsletter. I will miss out the obvious common species, which one would expect to see. We will pick another day during the nesting season.



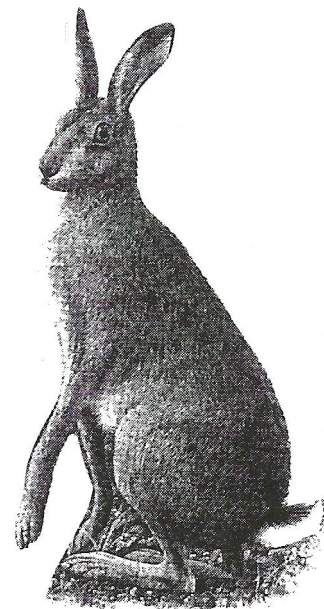
Fleam Dyke

Section 1	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	1
	Fieldfares	many
	Redwing	10 plus
	Reed Bunting	2
Section 2	Short-eared Owl	1
	Gold finches	many
	Brambling	6 plus
Section 8	Blackcap	2
	Green Woodpecker	1
	Stonechat	1
Dungate Farm	Greater Spotted Woodpecker	2
	Red poll	3
All sections	Wrens. More than for many years.	
	Long Tailed Tits " "	
	Linnets " "	

Lost Property?

As you may have seen in the Cambridge Weekly News, a Roman ring was dug up in September near the Fleam Dyke at Fulbourn. The ring, which has a carnelian engraved with the figure of a hare, was found by a treasure hunter using a metal detector. It has been declared Treasure Trove, and sent to the British Museum for valuation. It must then be offered to museums in Cambridge, which would have to pay the finder and the landowner. If the museums do not want it, or cannot afford it, the ring will be sold at auction. Many thanks to Helen Chubb, who sent me the article. The treasure hunter is delighted, of course. But who lost it, 1,800 years ago? Did it fall between the floor boards of a Romano-British house? Did a child take it to show a friend, coming back crestfallen to an awful scolding?

What does the hare mean? Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable says hares were feared as being somehow magical and dangerous. A witch could change herself into a hare. If a hare crossed the path of a pregnant woman, the child might have a cleft lip. Hares are famous for speed, and mad acrobatics in the spring, but they are also unreliable, and arrive late. Ben Jonson and Shakespeare refer to hares as melancholy animals. In Hindu tradition you can see a hare outlined in the moon. The Bushmen of the Kalahari say the moon asked the hare to carry an urgent message to the first men, and it rushed off, eager to please. But in its hurry it became confused, got the vital message wrong, and was punished with a cleft lip for the mistake. None of these ideas seem quite what you would pay a jeweller to put on a ring for your true love, or to wear yourself. Can an archaeological Friend enlighten us? Meanwhile, Brown hares can be seen from both the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke. They are more visible in spring before the crops grow tall. Has anyone done a recent count? Hare enthusiasts, can we hear from you?



Metal Detecting and the Law

Metal detecting is totally illegal on scheduled monuments such as the Roman Road and the Fleam Dyke. If you know anyone who enjoys this fascinating and occasionally lucrative hobby, please remind them that although it is not illegal in other areas, the user should have the permission of the landowner. If not, there are problems when a treasure hunter finds something good and does not want to admit that he or she had no permission to be where they were. As the archaeologist concerned said, "You would be surprised to learn how many things are found in roadside ditches"!

The County Sites and Monuments Department offer an identification service, and advice on how to clean the object. If you know anyone who has found something interesting, respectably or otherwise, do tell them to report it. The County Archaeological Service are keen to add any finds to their records, and will advise on safe methods for cleaning pottery and antique metal objects. Telephone 01223 717312

Fly Tipping and Undesirable Activities on the Roman Road

In March, a friend of a Friend rang to say that the bollards at the Beechwoods end of the Roman Road had been moved, again. I duly rang the man in charge at Cambridgeshire County Council, Southern Highways Department, who put it on his list of Things to Do. Southern Highways are considering whether to give up replacing bollards, expensively, and put in a more solid kind of barrier. The Roman Road also suffers at various access points from fly tipping and garden-rubbish dumping. Litter attracts litter, and Leylandii cuttings act as a magnet for other Leylandii cuttings. **Friends can help by ringing South Cambridgeshire Commercial Services on 01223 235468.** The contractors undertake to remove up to two cubic metres of rubbish, which is quite a good-sized pile. If there is more than that quantity, the responsibility passes to the County Council.

Conflict of Interest: Travellers

As members will have seen, so-called Travellers have arrived on the Roman Road near Balsham. The usual procedures are under way. They will be evicted in due course, and then the County will have to use a thousand pounds or so of taxpayers' money to clean up the mess left behind. The council officer who deals with this sort of thing commented that, in his experience, traditional Travellers never stayed long in one site and left very little behind. I have found the officers concerned with these problems remarkably helpful, and surprisingly cheerful, under the circumstances, so if you are in touch, do say a Thank you from all of us.

A Change of Use?

This constant rubbish dumping is bad enough, but four-wheeled vehicles and motor bikers also churn up the surface, making huge ruts which cause problems to walkers. At a meeting called by Balsham Parish Council for landowners and other interested parties, the problem was discussed in detail. Sam Agnew, who attended the meeting, suggested that we get a Traffic Restriction Order for this section of the road, similar to the one covering the rest of the road. This would prohibit four-wheeled traffic except by designated users, who would have a key to the bollards or gates. Sam suggests that The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke make a statement in support of this order, particularly with reference to the damage to the surface of this historic road and to the chalk grassland flora for which the road is registered as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. A previous attempt to get a Traffic Restriction Order failed, because it was deemed that there had not been physical damage to the road. There is now. If you have any evidence which we could use to prove our case, could I have it immediately, please. We could submit photographs of litter, damage to the surface of the road, vehicle registration numbers, or a brief description, with dates and times if relevant. Our thanks to Balsham Parish Council, and especially Mrs Savage, the Parish Clerk, for their efforts to find a solution to this problem.

Good News from the Roman Road

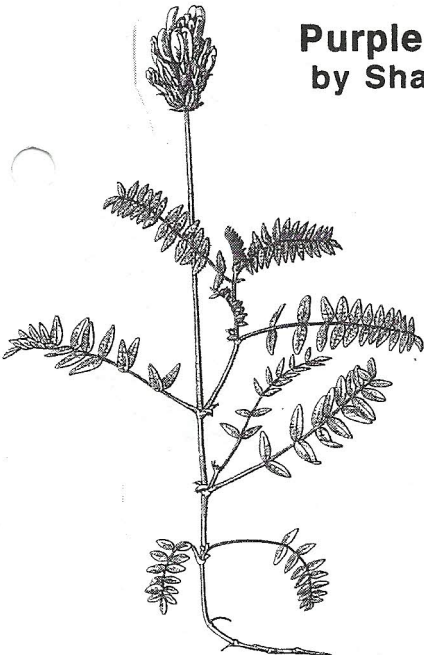
The conservation management organised by Sharon Hearle over the last few years is clearly showing results. The Roman Road from Wandlebury to Copley Hill is a sea of Hawthorn and Queen Anne's Lace, which is beautiful in itself, if not quite what this SSSI should contain; but from Copley Hill to the A11, the road is

looking very much more like a chalk grassland SSSI, with far less scrub along the verges. The recent close mowing of certain stretches is intended to encourage the spread of the surviving chalk grassland flowers. Selective cutting back of overhanging branches has also brought light onto the verges in many areas, and there is a marked increase in the quantity of wild flowers. The yellow rock roses, which edge the path in many places, are just coming into flower. There are blocks of yellow rattle in bud on the western verge nearer the A11, and the pretty pink and white budded umbellifer, dropwort, is increasing in quantity. (Look for it in July.) The little blue and purple milkwort is in flower, tucked down in the turf. Later there will be good quantities of the black and greater knapweed, for the bees and butterflies. The overgrowth of trees and scrub has destroyed the rare chalk grassland flowers in many places, but it is still a pleasure to see lots of the little bronze-leaved purple-flowered ground ivy, splashes of true blue germander speedwell and massed ranks of white garlic mustard, the food plant of the Orange Tip butterfly.



Germander Speedwell

Purple Milk Vetch by Sharon Hearle



This plant is unremarkable for much of the year, until it flowers in late May. The bluish purple flowers are much larger than the leaves. It is apparently known as Purple Milk Vetch from a country belief that eating the plant would increase the milk yield of goats.

Like so many of the rarest chalk grassland plants, it occurs in the shortest turf on anthills or banks. On Fleam Dyke it is confined to a few small patches less than 20cm wide on the top bank. On the Roman Road there are nine very small clumps scattered along the verge edge between Worsted Lodge and the A11. All of these clumps are highly vulnerable to accidental damage by vehicles or other means. At present the sites are kept well mown and clear of encroaching scrub.

Plant life history is critical in determining whether populations of individual species succeed or fail. Much of this type of information, including details about Purple Milk Vetch, is not available and long term monitoring over tens of years is required.

Cambridgeshire Bryophyte Group Visit to the Fleam Dyke

On 23rd March, a small group of experts, including Robert Finch, visited Fulbourn Nature Reserve and the Fleam Dyke to update records of mosses and liverworts. David Seilly and Julia Napier joined them, inexpert but enthusiastic! March 23rd was the beginning of nearly a month of sunshine, and arctic gear was not required. We picnicked on the bank cleared by the Friends on February 10th, and enjoyed the new view over the farmland.

Most people regard mosses as much of a muchness, and not something they expect to know about. Indeed the precise differences between similar species can only be seen with a hand lens, or a microscope, by someone who knows what to look for; but any nature lover will have noticed the golden yellow of some mosses, the deep green of others, the fern like pattern of a golden-green frond creeping across a piece of dead wood, or the neat little silvery mound that forms on the coping stones of a brick wall. I have found that merely beginning to identify a few mosses has the effect of lighting up the winter. On the dreariest day, you can spot mosses quietly greening the corners of a tarmac car park, or a patch of boring concrete. However, if you do not have time to devote to learning about mosses and liverworts, you can still indulge in a little light one-upmanship. As scrub is cleared from the Fleam Dyke, it is burned at the bottom of the ditch. About a year later, the grey circle of ash is transformed into a vivid green, which then turns bright yellow and finally orange.

It is *Funeraria hygrometrica*, the water measuring moss. In botanical terms, it is a cosmopolitan moss, found at burn sites all over the world. The yellow phase is caused by the eruption of masses of yellow "seed heads", called seta, which turn orange as they age. The little capsules stand erect when it is dry and bend down when it is wet.



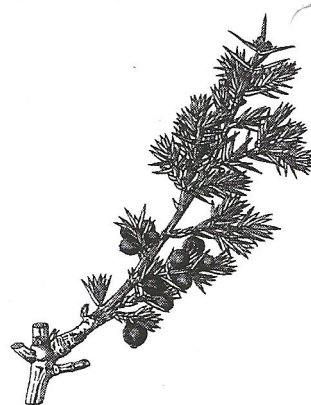
Robert Finch, one of our Committee members, is going to write more about mosses for the newsletter in the autumn, but he offered a few preliminary comments on the mosses recorded on 23rd March.

- *Seligeria calicyna*. This very small moss grows on fragments of chalk, under trees. This one was growing half inside a fox hole - very hard to photograph. *Seligeria calicyna* is a European species which is fairly common in South East Britain where there is chalk, but it is very rare outside Britain.
- *Tortella inflexa*. This is a nationally scarce species. The only other Cambridge record is from the Devil's Dyke. This tiny moss grows on chalk nodules below a sheltering clump of grass. This example was found on the path in Section 9, presumably having been thrown up by scrub clearance or weeding activities.
- *Microbryum rectum* and *Microbryum curvicolle*, which live in sheltered corners and cavities on bare chalk. The experts were pleased to see a good quantity of both of these, confirming their impression that it has been a good year for these relative rarities.

These findings illustrate another way in which the restoration of chalk grassland is vital if we are to maintain the biodiversity of this area. Further clearance of scrub in the area of the disused railway line will improve habitat for other rare bryophytes, including the minute *Lophozia perssonii*, the rarest bryophyte in the United Kingdom, and a European endangered species. Many other small plants will also benefit, as can be seen at the top of the bank bridging the railway line, where the arrival of light and sunshine has helped the germander speedwell to spread a band of pure sky blue flowers alongside the path.

Juniper News

The damaged juniper tree, one of two female trees, was looking rather disastrous, but Sharon reports that it is sending out new shoots, and should recover. When I looked at the six seedlings on March 23rd, it seemed to me that only two were alive. What sad news, but what a headline for this editor: **Death on the Dyke!** Almost irresistible, but fortunately not true. Sharon says there are four seedlings with new growth.



The Wild Juniper, *Juniperus communis*, in Cambridgeshire, by Dr Max Walters

Nature in Cambridgeshire, the journal of the Natural History Society, is now available from the Herbarium, The Department of Plant Sciences, Downing Street, Cambridge, CB2 3EA, price £3 50 including postage. Dr Max Walters has studied the Fleam Dyke junipers since 1960, and in this essay he covers their history from the year when the famous Cambridge botanist, John Ray, recorded them in 1660 until 1975. This article is of particular interest to the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, but all the articles in this excellent little magazine are full of interest both for specialists and non-specialists. There is an article by Roger Buisson and Will Kirby about the plans for the management of the new RSPB farm at Knapwell. If, last spring, you saw the bushes on Girton Road or Granham's Lane, Cambridge, swathed in the sort of sheets of spiders' webs that belong in Dracula's Castle, you will want to read the article by Erica Swale about the Small Ermine Moth. I had never heard of *Nitella tenuissima*, but I was very cheered to read that changes in the management of ditches at Wicken Fen have led to the resurgence of dwarf stonewort, thought to be lost to Cambridgeshire. This is the sort of thing we hope to see following scrub clearance on Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road. There is a particularly interesting series of four articles on the Milton-Chesterton Railway Sidings, which is a classic 'Brownfield Site'. That is to say that it is scheduled for building, and absolutely bursting with wildlife: over 400 species of vascular plant, including bee orchids and the very rare Jersey Cudweed; 23 species of butterfly, dragonflies, masses of other insects and, wait for it, nightingales. I must declare an interest in this publication, but to find out what it is you will have to buy a copy.

Membership Numbers

Congratulations all round. We now have 157 members, including three Parish Councils: Fulbourn, Horseheath and West Wickham. The star of this recruiting drive is Margaret Rishbeth, who has recruited 15 members from her friends and acquaintances. Please continue to nobble your friends. Two hundred members by December 2002 would enormously strengthen our claim to a grant of £25,000 from the Heritage Initiative Fund of the Lottery. If you want to see what can be achieved with this money and good management, go and visit the Devil's Dyke near the July race course. Scrub clearing, along with a consistent programme of mowing and raking has resulted in sheets of golden horseshoe vetch interspersed with rock roses, both just coming into full flower now. On May 17th, when it was hot and almost windless, Val Perrin saw dozens of Green Hairstreaks all along the banks and lots of Dingy Skippers.

Mid-Week Conservation Group

Meet at the Barn , behind Bidwell's, Trumpington Road, Cambridge.

Please ring 01223 712410 if you intend to come, in order to check the meeting place.

The programme for mid-week dates was not fixed at the time of going to press, but the volunteers will be going out as usual to work on the sites managed by the Green Belt Project, including Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road. Good exercise. Nice people. Interesting places. One date so far:

Wed 14th August Mowing and raking on the Roman Road

Other Events for your diary

Sun 26th May Ragwort and White Bryony weeding on Fleam Dyke at the Bedford Gap. These plants are poisonous for sheep. Meet at A11 layby at 10.00am. No skills required. Wear old clothes, walking boots or tough shoes. Bring waterproofs, **gardening gloves, a small hand fork**, if you have one, and a packed lunch. Please let Julia Napier know if you plan to come. 01223 213152

Fri - Sun 28th - 30th June, Bourn Airfield, 10.00 - 5.00pm The East Anglian Flower and Garden Show, Conservation Exhibition. This has been a feature of this very good flower show for three years. Come and learn more about the work of national and local groups which are working for the conservation of badgers and otters, bats, bees, birds, butterflies, dragonflies, hedgehogs, hoverflies, mushrooms, and wild flowers. Real bats, bees, caterpillars, hedgehogs and mushrooms! This is an opportunity to buy British wildflower plants for your garden. I hope to have a stand representing the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. **Wanted: Six Friends to do one three hour shift.** Reward? A free pass to the show. Tickets are cheaper in advance: £6 adults, £5 concessions, children under 16 free. Ring Sheila Davenport on 01359 268614

Sun 7th July, Chalk Grassland Flowers Come for an afternoon walk, and see some of the flowers which you are helping to restore. The walk will be led by Professor Grubb, the recently retired head of the Plant Sciences Department, University of Cambridge. At this season, the Fleam Dyke from the A11 to the Bedford Gap is bright with flowers. The rock roses will be past their best, but there should be plenty of other chalk grassland flowers with wild thyme, dropwort, and squinancy wort at the top of the banks. Lower down, there is a great deal of lady's bedstraw, greater knapweed and black knapweed, etc. Beyond Mutlow Hill, the dark blue clustered bell-flowers should be in bloom. Wear suitable clothing, bring waterproofs or parasols as needed. Meet at 2.30 at the A11 layby.

Friday July 12th, 9.30pm Moth-trapping on the Roman Road

John Dawson, Moth recorder for Cambridgeshire, will set up moth traps on and near the Roman Road. The moths are attracted to a powerful light and settle around it. They are not hurt at all, and they fly away when the light is turned off. Unlike butterflies, moths do not mind damp or even drizzly nights.

Meet at the Roman Road end of the very straight drive, labelled "Babraham Road" on the Explorer Map 209. This is the farm road which runs from the Cambridge to Fulbourn, just after the junction with "Shelford Road", the road that runs over the hill from the Beechwoods. There is a Pick Your Own fruit farm on the corner. The farm drive runs straight as a die towards Copley Hill. Still confused? Explorer Map 209 TL 51 535, or ring Julia.

Contacts

Iain Webb
Cambridge Green Belt Project
3b Langford Arch
London Road
Sawston, Cambridge, CB2 4EE

tel: 01223 712410,
e-mail: iwebb@cambswt.cix.co.uk

Julia Napier
Secretary, Friends of the Roman
Road and Fleam Dyke
30a Hinton Avenue
Cambridge, CB1 7AS

tel: 01223 213152
JN1@napierj.freeseve.co.uk

