

Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke Newsletter Number Sixteen February 2005

The Work the Cambridge Green Belt Project

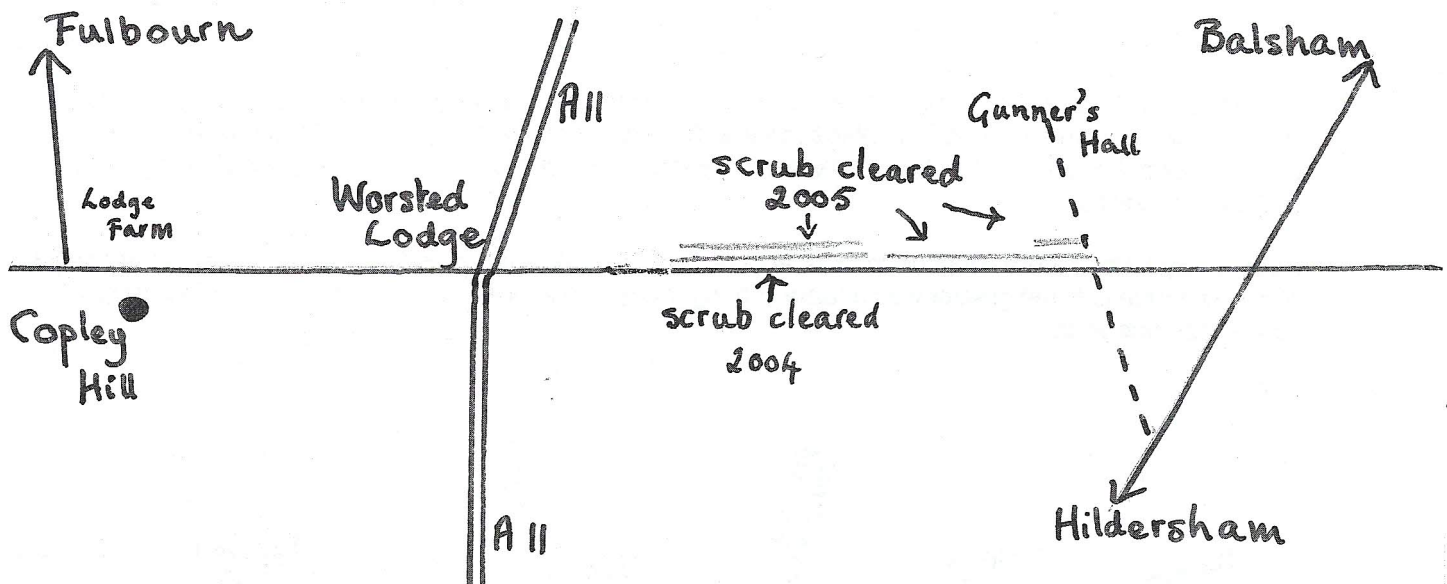
by Naomi Brookes, Green Belt Project Manager

This has been another busy year for the Cambridge Green Belt Project and its work along the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. In areas we cleared in 2004, the chalk grassland flora is beginning to recover, with species including small scabious, salad burnet, knapweeds and a mix of grasses coming through. This year we have completed more scrub clearance in these areas to build on these successes. Thank you to all the volunteers we have had out to assist with our work.

Roman Road

Work under the Local Heritage Initiative Grant has been going well. This work is taking place between Worsted Lodge and the Balsham to Hildersham Road. We continued to clear back scrub from last year's work areas to the hedge line. We also worked further along towards Gunner's Hall by clearing back dense scrub for 1.5m from the path. This should make the Road more accessible to walkers and horse riders but will also allow some sunshine through to the fringe of grass there, and hopefully this area of grass will increase.

A small area of scrub re-growth was also cleared back to the hedge line near to Gunner's Hall. Our contractor, Iain Hysom, completed all this work over the winter period.



North of Worsted Lodge, Paul Stebbings has cleared scrub from a small section of the Road south of Copley Hill. The ditch bottoms have also been cleared of scrub re-growth and areas of grassland which have not been cut were recently mowed and raked. Babraham Farms cut the grass from Copley Hill to Worsted Lodge on the south bank. Over the last few years there has been a good increase in the floristic diversity of this grassland.

The Mid-week Volunteer Teams have also been helping with grass cutting and raking along sections of the Road and clearing scrub re-growth and bramble from ditch bottoms.



Iain Hysom, on the job



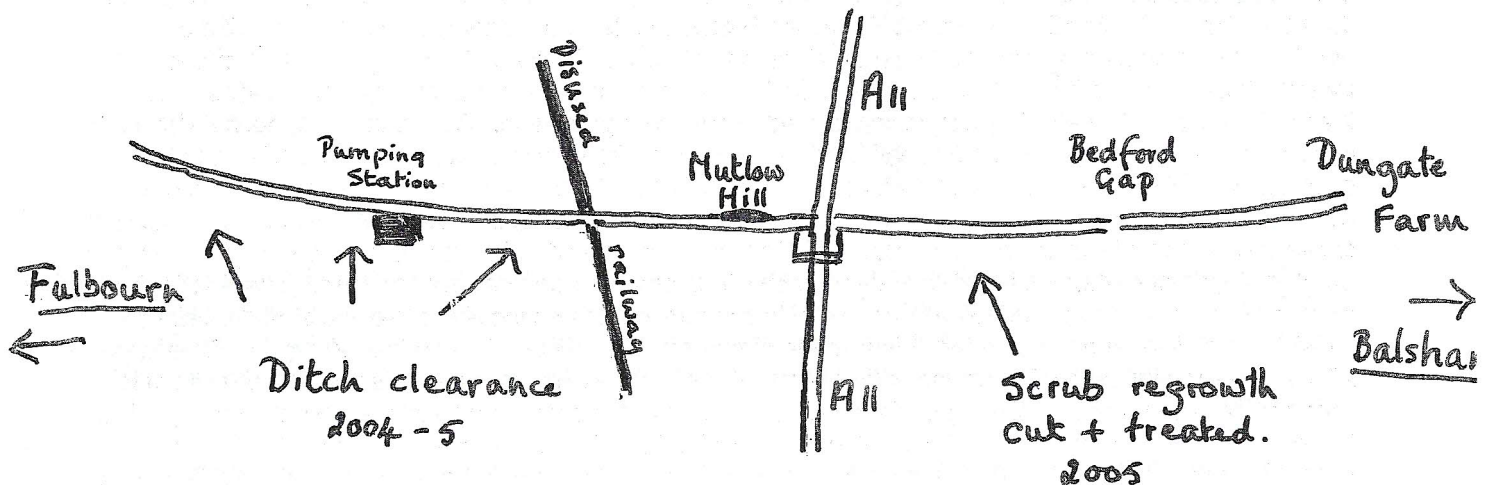
Removal of scrub regrowth on the Roman Road in the area cut back in 2004. The grassy verge has doubled in width since last spring, and there is a marked increase in chalk grassland flora.

Fleam Dyke

Iain Hysom finished clearing the ditch bottom from the Pumping Station, continuing on from last year's work. The ditch has now been cleared for a tractor's width along the section from the Fulbourn end of the dyke to the dismantled railway. This has opened up the ditch bottom to allow us easier access to the slopes of the Dyke for future management work.

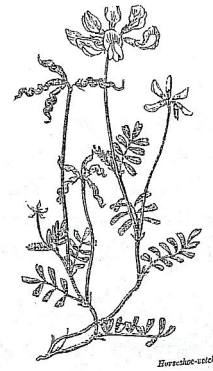
Paul Stebbings has cleared 'windows' along the top of the Dyke in this section. These areas were chosen because they open up the slopes in places where there is already some good vegetation, which can colonise down the slopes. Paul has also cleared vegetation re-growth from the bank sides on the A11 to Bedford Gap section.

The Mid-week Volunteers continue to work across the whole site, cutting and raking the grassland (no small task!). Unfortunately the grazier was unable to bring the sheep to graze this year but we have our fingers crossed for next year.



Our Vision for the Future of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

by Naomi Brookes, Green Belt Project Manager



I would like to thank Alex Sadler for contributing his views to the Newsletter. It is always good to receive the views of the members of the group as to the work we are doing. I would like to take this opportunity to outline the vision we have for the sites and the work that we are doing.

First I would like to point out that the Cambridge Green Belt Project is not undertaking these decisions alone. We work in partnership with a wide range of groups including English Nature, English Heritage, South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council (Archaeology and Rights of Way), The Wildlife Trust, The Friends, and, of course, the landowners. This group meets regularly to decide a vision for management on both the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke and is drafting comprehensive management plans for the sites. Our vision for both sites is as areas of open chalk grassland bounded by hedgerows rich in wildlife and with small areas of scrub.

We have arrived at this vision after much discussion. Alex Sadler is right to point out that both sites were not originally designed for their conservation value, but either as defensive works or as transport routes. But this in part also answers some of his questions. Both sites are designated Scheduled Ancient Monuments (the Roman Road from Worts Causeway to the Balsham-Hildersham Road). This recognises that they are an important remnant of our history on a county, if not national, level. We remove scrub because the roots of shrubs and trees can irretrievably damage the underlying archaeological interest of a site. This is extremely undesirable as both sites would lose some of what makes them special.

However, we are also motivated for conservation reasons. Both sites are also designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), which again is a recognition of their national importance. They were designated for their chalk grassland habitat and the associated species interest that went with this. Chalk grassland was once a widespread habitat across the area and was maintained by sheep grazing. With the decline of sheep grazing and rise of arable agriculture in the area, much of this chalk grassland was lost. It was only marginal sites of little agricultural interest that remained, such as the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. For a time the grassland at these sites would have remained through grazing either by sheep or rabbits. But with less grazing they eventually started to scrub over. It is within living memory that sections of these sites became scrub covered, and therefore we are left with remnants of good chalk grassland across the sites.

Chalk grassland is a nationally declining habitat, with a very diverse and unique flora and fauna. Much of this flora and fauna can not adapt to other habitats. For example, the rare bastard Toadflax found on Fleam Dyke can only grow in short chalk grassland where more vigorous species do not shade it out. This is true for many of the flowers and grasses that make up this type of grassland, and also why many species have adapted to live here. But again Alex Sadler is right. Some scrub adds to this habitat, enriching its wildlife value by providing valuable nesting and feeding habitat for many birds and insects, including bees, butterflies and moths. However, there has to be a balance of such habitats across a site, particularly where those sites themselves are restricted. Very dense scrub shades out chalk grassland, often resulting in such a dense canopy that nothing can grow underneath it. This does not make a good habitat for most birds and other species, particularly invertebrates, which require a mix of habitat types to meet their nesting and feeding needs. We therefore have a programme of scrub removal which aims to balance these needs. We would like to remove the majority of the denser scrub and allow chalk grassland to flourish across both sites once again. Smaller stands of mature scrub will be left on each site to provide good nesting and feeding habitat for birds. New scrub will also be allowed to grow up in patches in rotation across the site to provide a mix of habitats suitable for a wide range of species. It is also the aim to have good boundary hedges along the site edges. Although we recognise the importance of the scrub and will be working to maintain some at each site, it is important to remember that chalk grassland is a rare and unique habitat with its own assemblage of species. Once we lose this habitat it will be impossible to bring it back, as it requires time to develop its structure. Although not as obviously diverse as scrub at first sight, it is a more complex and rich habitat which supports a wide range of species, particularly insects, and therefore adds diversity to our countryside.

But there is a final reason for our scrub clearance, which is on a more human level. Both of these sites also form part of the Public Rights of Way network across the County. The Roman Road in particular is very popular with walkers and horse riders alike. Scrub had made some sections of these sites almost impassable

to users; this is particularly true of Fleam Dyke. There are regulations which dictate the width of path that should be available to users. We are aiming to make these sites attractive to users again and to meet these regulations. Fleam Dyke has been little used as a footpath in the recent past, and although this is good for wildlife, there is also a need to allow people access to the site so that they too can enjoy it. It has been encouraging for us to see people using this site again, and the same is true of the Roman Road.

Managing these sites is a complex and difficult task, as there are so many different needs to be balanced. This is why we have a steering group to assist with the task and why it is valuable for us to receive comments about the work we are undertaking. I hope that I have managed to answer some of the questions raised by Alex Sadler, and others of you who have asked yourselves these questions.



Chalk Grassland Flora, left to right: Salad Burnet, Rock Roses, Bastard Toadflax, Wild Thyme, Small Scabious

Butterflies no longer found on either the Roman Road or the Fleam Dyke, left to right:

Dingy Skipper, Grizzled Skipper, Chalkhill Blue, Small Blue, Grayling

Friends' Work Party

On 16th January, we returned to the Fulbourn end of the Fleam Dyke to, guess what, brush cut and rake off last year's scrub regrowth and an increasing abundance of grasses and other plants. Iain Webb and John Dawson had planned to get to the site early and have 'arisings' ready for the rest of us to start raking, but unfortunately, a gate which was to have been left open was locked, and the farmer had to be summoned to rescue us. Our thanks to Mr Stalley for his help, and for permission to drive up to the Dyke. The alternative is a healthy but time consuming walk carrying all the tools, rakes, hay forks, brush cutters and so forth. While Iain and John began brush cutting, the rest of us pulled up bramble and dewberry shoots, did some hand cutting of scrub regrowth and cleared a bit more scrub. Foolishly, I had forgotten my camera, so I cannot include photographs of the work done, but for those of you who actually keep back numbers of this newsletter, the photographs in Newsletters 10 and 11 will do almost as well. **Many thanks to Richard Fowling and Helen Chubb, John and Ann Bicknell, David Seilly, John Dawson and Iain Webb.**

However, there were two major differences. A photograph of the team picnicking would have shown us all sitting on the bank as usual, but with our backs to the newly cleared slope and the view. The weather was good, for January, but the wind was icy. The other difference was and is in the steady change from bare soil and scrub regrowth to what is beginning to look more like grassland. However, the sad truth is that it bears no resemblance to the chalk grassland turf which was once there. In his Highways and Byways in Cambridge and Ely, 1910, Edward Conybeare uses a quotation from Hughes' Geography of Cambridgeshire to describe the flora and fauna of the Fleam Dyke:

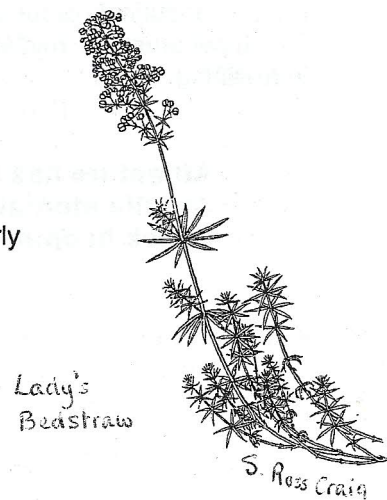
It makes a most fascinating byway to walk along, though it leads nowhere, ending abruptly where it dips down into Fulbourn Fen. The dry chalk is clothed with flowers all the summer through. At Easter time we may here find the glorious purple Pasch-flower, that queen of all the anemone clan; later on "the turf is sweet with thyme and gay with yellow rock-rose, blue flax, milkwort, pink-budded dropwort, sainfoin, kidney vetch, and viper's bugloss and here and there a bee orchis; with a dancing accompaniment of butterflies overhead, graylings, skippers, chalk hill and Bedford blues and a host beside."



A good range of chalk grassland flora has survived between the disused railway and Mutlow Hill, and between the A11 and the Bedford Gap and a decade of work by the Green Belt Project has shown impressive results, but the losses in flora and fauna are extensive. The last Pasch or Pasque flower was dug up in the early 1970's. Perennial flax and viper's bugloss have disappeared from the whole site. I do not think bee orchids have been seen there, although the pyramidal orchids survive in small numbers. The length of dyke between Fulbourn and the disused railway has suffered most losses. There is no thyme, no milkwort, no sainfoin, or kidney vetch between the disused railway and the Fulbourn end of the dyke. Apart from one struggling plant near the breach which was cut in the dyke for the pipeline, the only surviving rock-roses are on the bank and the steps beside the disused railway. There remain half a dozen plants of dropwort, no Carlina thistle, no squinancy wort, no bastard toadflax, and only a few dwarf thistles. Burnet saxifrage is a remarkable survivor and salad burnet is spreading. Hoary plantain should also spread fairly easily, as it is doing on the Roman Road. I think I saw one small scabious in Section One, and there was one on the 'bridge' across the disused railway. Unfortunately, that was mowed before it had a chance to seed. Naturally, with such losses in the flora, the butterflies are few and far between. Butterflies come in twos and threes, not in dancing clouds. There are no graylings, no chalkhill blues, no grizzled or dingy skippers, no Bedford (or Small) blues. All this is also true of large parts of the Roman Road. The extent of the loss of other grassland invertebrates can be imagined.

The following chart is an attempt to record 'survivors' and, in the case of eyebright and horseshoe vetch plant, 'returners'. The figure on the left of each column is the number of distinct plants which I noted in July/August 2003. The figure or word on the right is the number I saw in August 2004. The chart lies somewhere between Mission Impossible and a Useful Record. Some perennials I must have missed. Their roots are too strong to just disappear. Some, like quite a bit of the greater knapweed and field scabious, had been mowed and had not thrown up new flower heads. Ploughman's spikenard, catmint and hound's tongue were the Space Invaders of 2004, and will be abundant in 2005 until the turf thickens up. Many of the flowers are not the chalk grassland ones we hope to see, and not remotely rare or unusual, but they were and are very beautiful in themselves, occupying several yards of bare slope and providing butterflies, bumble bees, bees, solitary wasps and other insects with nectar: Herb Robert, upright hedge parsley, white campion, rough hawkbit, musk thistles, a small amount of toadflax, and ground ivy.

Some things were a complete surprise. There was a solitary patch of round-leaved fluellen on the bare soil near the Pumping Station. Some things I wanted to put a fence round. Surely the little rock rose near the pipeline steps would do better if passing walkers, joggers and cyclists did not have a good chance to squish it? Will the only plant of eyebright between Fulbourn and the disused railway manage to seed itself and reappear in 2005? It seems unlikely. However, I thought the same about the pathetic little scraps of lady's bedstraw which surfaced in 2004, particularly the two minuscule plants near the Pumping Station. Now, having grown a substantial plant in my garden from a few ragged cuttings, I know what a powerful root stock it develops and how much growing and sprouting goes on under the surface, safe from tramping feet.

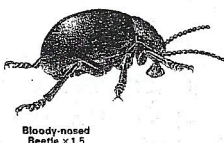




The big success story of the clearance of this kilometre of Fleam Dyke is, of course, the Clustered Bellflower. If you did not see the literally wonderful display of Common Knapweed, Harebells and Clustered Bellflower this August and September, do make sure you go this summer, and if you see some 'returners', please let us know.

I have attempted a similar record of the increase of chalk grassland flora in newly cleared areas of the Roman Road, but that is for another newsletter.

Julia Napier



Roman Diversion: Results of the Christmas Competition

In the November edition of this newsletter, there was an extract from an early edition of Nature in Cambridgeshire which included a quotation in Latin:

**Fortunatus et ille deos qui novit agrestis
Panaque silvanumque senem nymphasque sorores.**

I invited Friends to produce a translation, and almost immediately received this from Patrick Daunt.

'Fortunatus et ille.....' A sweet pair of hexameters from Virgil's Second Georgic (ll.493-494).

For 'sylvanum' read Silvanum. It's not an adjective; he was a somewhat obscure but unquestionably rustic Italian godling. And, though much loved by English poets of yore and still favoured by botanists (witness Geranium sylvaticum; cp. Anthriscus sylvestris), the 'y' is quite bogus. Fowler is withering: 'It is often too late to mend mis-spellings but hardly so in this case.'

'Pana' is a Greek accusative. Unfair.

As Cecil Day Lewis was Poet laureate it would be awful cheek to suppose one could better his version:

**But fortunate too the man who is friends with the country gods -
Pan and old Silvanus and the sisterhood of Nymphs.**

Vale
Patricius Dauntius

Philip Oswald, a former editor of Nature in Cambridgeshire, also sent expert clarification and a translation. He added that he and Philip Hall, still a subscriber to the magazine, had both started out as classicists, which allows the rest of us to feel less ignorant. However, for me the trouble with translations is that I do not feel I am reading enduringly great poetry. Pan and Silvanus have almost lost their significance, and the beauty of sound patterns and rhythm rarely survive translation. It seems to me that three lines by John Clare are closer in meaning:

**All nature has a feeling: woods, fields, brooks
Are life eternal - and in silence they
Speak happiness - beyond the reach of books**



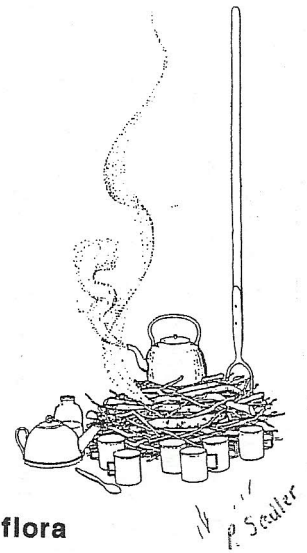
With thanks to the 1993 edition of the Wildlife Trust Guide to Nature Reserves in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire, edited by Sarah Wrooot.

Fleam Dyke flora - an attempt to record changes	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4	Section 5	Section 6	Comments from 98 Survey	
	TL 537-558 bank cleared 02	TL 537-554 bank cleared 03	TL 538-553 bank cleared 04	TL 540-551 Pumping Station	TL 541-549 Pipeline steps	TL 542-547 to disused Railway		
<i>Achillea millefolium</i> - Yarrow		0 1				1 patch 3	occasional	
<i>Agrimonia eupatoris</i> - Agrimony					lots at steps		Rare - Occasional	
<i>Briza Media</i> - Quaking Grass	4 0 Mown?		0 frequent in 98					
<i>Campanula glomerata</i> -Clustered Bellflwr	15 15 0	0 1	10 8	20+ 25	20 or more	abundant 03/04	Rare - Occasional	
<i>C. rotundifolia</i> - Harebell	4 patches 5	1 5 patches	few abundant	few abundant	few 8 patches	4 abundant	Rare - Occasional	
<i>Carlina vulgaris</i> - Carline Thistle								
<i>Centaurea nigra</i> - Black Knapweed	9 abundant	30 abundant	0 2	3 6	15 abundant	10 12	Occasional	
<i>C. scabiosa</i> - Greater Knapweed	2 0	3 15	9 0	30+ none seen	30+ 5	30+ abundant	Rare - Occasional	
<i>Cirsium acaule</i> - Dwarf Thistle	3 2			0 2	3 0			
<i>Cynoglossum offic.</i> - Hound's Tongue	There were plants all along the bank in newly cleared areas. 03.				Abundant all the way along 04			
<i>Clinopodium vulgare</i> - Field Basil	3 0			0 1	3 5			
<i>Euphrasia nemorosa</i> - Eyebright				0 1				
<i>Festuca ovina</i> - Sheep's Fescue	Some fescue all the way along in patches 03, spreading well 04. F ovina?							Locally frequent
<i>Filipendula vulgaris</i> - Dropwort			1 1		8 5	2 3	Rare	
<i>Galium verum</i> - Lady's Bedstraw	2 spreading	3 spreading	1 nr Ash 1	2 spreading	0 present in '98	spreading well	Occasional	
<i>Hel/emum nummularium</i> - Rock Rose					1 small plant	good quantity 03/4	Rare-Occasional	
<i>Hippocrepis comosa</i> - Horseshoe Vetch					1 ?			
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i> - St John's Wort		2 abundant	1 0 0	2	2 0	good frequent	Rare	
<i>Inula conyza</i> - Ploughman's Spikenard	Flowering all along the newly cleared bank 03. Flowers and seedlings abundant 04.							
<i>Knautia arvensis</i> - Field Scabious	2 3	3 4	0 2	1 1	lots - not noted	0 0	Rare	
<i>Leontodon saxatilis</i> - Lesser/Hairy Hwkb	2 0							
<i>Linum catharticum</i> - Fairy Flax								
<i>Lithospermum offic.</i> -Common Gromwell		3 frequent 03/4		frequent 03/4	frequent 03/4	frequent 03/4	Rare	
<i>Nepeta cataria</i> - Catmint	10 0	15+ abundant	0 0	0 abundant	1 5	0 abundant	Noted in Sect'n 2	
<i>Picris hieracioides</i> - Hawkweed oxtongue	1 0				0 3	0 abundant		
<i>Pilosella officinarum</i> - Mouse-ear Hawkweed								
<i>Pimpinella saxifraga</i> - Burnet Saxifrage	6 9	3 10		0 15	4 11	0 15		
<i>Plantago media</i> - Hoary Plantain	3 0	0 3	6 0	0 1	lots at steps 03 ar & 04	2	Occasional	
<i>Primula veris</i> - Cowslip	Present in good numbers all along the path; not flowering much 03. Masses of flowers 04.							Rare
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i> - Selfheal				4 not noticed				
<i>Reseda lutea</i> - Mignonette	2 5	0 4		0 10	0 4	0 6		
<i>Sanguisorba minor</i> - Salad Burnet	4 9	2 0		2 0	2 0	lots at end, 03/4	Rare	
<i>Scabiosa columbaria</i> - Small Scabious	0 1						Rare	
<i>Viola odorata</i> - Sweet violet	There are violets all along. Bloomed abundantly after the 03 clearance, scenting the air in places							
<i>Viola riviniana</i> - Dog Violet	Dog violets present as well.							

The Mid-Week Conservation Programme/Green Gym

The Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers will be working on the Fleam Dyke and the Roman Road this spring, as well as on other areas managed by the Green Belt Project. Good exercise in the fresh air/rain, and pleasant company over a picnic lunch.

Please ring 01954 713531 if you intend to come, in order to check the meeting place.



Wednesday 23rd March Roman Road - mowing and raking to encourage flora

Wednesday 30th March Fleam Dyke " " "

Work Parties and Events of interest to Friends

Sunday 3rd April Fulbourn Nature Reserve, morning work party

Can you find an hour or two to help keep this beautiful reserve in good condition? (Don't forget to go and see the cowslips, which were wonderful last spring. Work Parties last from 10.0 am to 12.30 or so. Meet at Stonebridge Lane.

Contact: Nigel Copeman, e-mail: ncopeman@tinyworld.co.uk or phone Julia Napier.

Thurs 7th April Fourth Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

7.30pm in the Function Room of the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn

Short business meeting followed by a friendly interval and then an illustrated talk by Carolin Göhler, Chief Executive Officer of the Cambridge Preservation Society, Wandlebury Ring, on the work of the CPS and developments at the new Coton Countryside Reserve.

All welcome, members and non members. Tea or coffee provided.

No entry charge.

Sat 16th April Friends' Work party on the Fleam Dyke

Meet at Stonebridge Lane, Fulbourn at 10.0am. Come for an hour or two, or bring lunch and stay a bit longer. The clearance work done under our Lottery grant has produced a significant increase in chalk grassland flora, but we need to maintain the improvement with mowing and raking.

*

*

*

*

Talks Organised by the Cambridge City Group of the Wildlife Trust

These talks are held in the Gilmour Building of Cambridge University Botanic Garden. Please note that the entrance is via the drive beside 47 Bateman Street, **NOT** at the Bateman Street gate of the Botanic Garden. All talks are at 7.30pm. Entry: £1.50 for members of the Wildlife Trust, £2.50 for non-members

Thurs 24th March Environmental Change in Antarctica

Illustrated talk by Jonathan Shanklin, of the British Antarctic Survey. One of the small team which discovered the hole in the Ozone Layer.

Thurs 28th April Insects and Endemics. Conservation in the 16 British Overseas Territories - an opportunity to lower the rate of species extinction.
an illustrated talk by Dr Alex Jones, Cambridge University Department of Zoology

Contacts

Naomi Brookes,
Cambridge Green Belt Project
The Manor House, Broad Street,
Great Cambourne, Cambridge, CB3 6DH
Tel: 01954 713530
e-mail: nbrookes@wildlifebcnp.org

Julia Napier
Secretary, Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke
30a Hinton Avenue,
Cambridge, CB1 7AS
tel: 01223 213152
JN1@napierj.freeserve.co.uk