

Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke Newsletter Number Twenty February 2006



Left to right: Mike Albutt, Cassie Sparks, David Barden, Miri Robinson, Richard Fowling, Helen Chubb and Naomi Brookes. Apologies to Elfrida Heath who missed the photocall.

Friends' Work Party on Sunday 19th February

Unfortunately, the date clashed with a Butterfly Conservation work party, which John Dawson and David Seilly always work on. However, seven volunteers turned up on a very cold, grey morning to help Naomi Brookes rake up. The local landowner had arranged for the mowing of the rough stretches of verge on the southern bank of the Road from Mount Lodge to Copley Hill. As a result of repeated work like this, the best areas of grassland, have increased steadily since 1990. These are mowed and raked by the Mid-Week Conservation Volunteers. Do go and see the flowers, and the Rock Roses in particular. They are now abundant, edging the road on both sides and flowering from mid-May to high summer. The rare Purple Milk Vetch survives in small patches along this stretch of the Roman Road. Apart from 'featuring' two committee members, Naomi Brookes and Mike Albutt, our Treasurer, the picture also shows the 'agger', the bank and ditch structure for which the Roman road builders were famous. Beyond Worsted Lodge, there are only a few sections of agger built by different work gangs. It is clear that the intention was to connect them, but the first century plan was not completed.

Management of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

by Naomi Brookes,
Green Belt Project Manager

This time last year I wrote about some of the works we have had completed on both the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke. Some of the benefits of this ongoing management have been apparent this year and, in particular, the sightings of Chalkhill blues on Fleam Dyke were very exciting. It is always encouraging when the results that you had hoped for actually start to become apparent and its wonderful to see good chalk grassland habitat with its associated species becoming more established across both sites.

Fleam Dyke

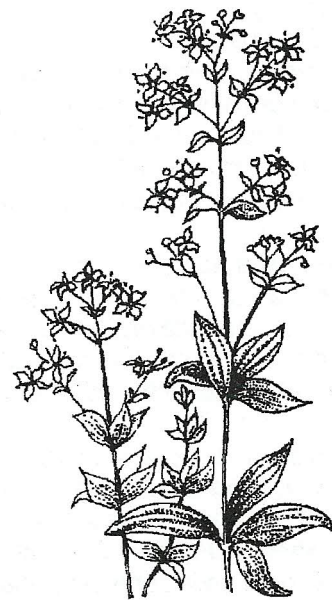
We have continued our work this year on both sites, undertaking more scrub clearance and grassland management. Work on Fleam Dyke has concentrated on some additional scrub clearance on the Fulbourn end of the Dyke. Some of the dense scrub on the end has been removed, which we hope later in the year will help the Cambridgeshire Archaeology team to put in place new steps at this end to improve access. We have cut all of the windows and the footpath along the top of the Dyke from Fulbourn to the dismantled railway. These are sections that we have had cleared over the last few years and they are starting to develop a good chalk grassland sward. We have also continued to mow and rake off the grassland, particularly on the section which runs from the A11 to the Bedford Gap, in order to tackle some of the scrub re-growth.

The Roman Road

Some of you may have noticed the work that has taken place on the Roman Road this winter. We have been working with English Nature and the landowners on the Worsted Lodge to Hildersham – Balsham Road section. A management plan was written with the landowners for this section and has been agreed by them and English Nature. The result has been a better working relationship with these landowners, which will see great benefits to the management of this section, including scrub clearance and grassland management.

Some large sections of the scrub have been cleared this winter. Contractors working on behalf of The Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke undertook some scrub clearance work with money from the Local Heritage Initiative grant. This work was focused on a section of pronounced agger that can be found half way along the section of the road which runs from Worsted Lodge to the Hildersham – Balsham Road. The County Archaeologists were particularly keen to see this cleared, as there are not many lengths of agger along this part of the Road and they are keen to preserve the few which are there. Contractors organised with English Nature also cleared from this bit past the Gunner's Hall path and further towards the Hildersham – Balsham Road.

Although this work may appear quite shocking initially, it will help us to meet the aims of the Management Plan that was written by the Steering Group for the site, which meets under the name of the Roman Road Project. This is an area that was recorded as a good chalk grassland section approximately 30 years ago, and the aim is to restore this section once again to allow chalk grassland species to flourish. We will be undertaking some green hay strewing over the summer to encourage these species to become established along this section, and some young scrub will be allowed to regenerate for additional bird habitat. If you do have any comments about the work that has taken place along the Road please ring Peter Stroh, Conservation Officer at English Nature on 01773 405854.



Crosswort
Lady's Bedstraw

Thank you to all the volunteers that have helped us in the last year to manage both sites. There is one more work party for the Friends on 16th April, but the Midweek Conservation Volunteers meet every Wednesday for summer work on these and other sites within the Green Belt. **Don't forget our AGM on 12th April.** (See back page.) On Wednesday, 14th May, at 7.0pm, there will be a combined archaeology and nature conservation walk. Further information on our website. www.greenbeltproject.org or over the phone.

Roman Road Project Group Meeting, 12th January, 2006

At the last meeting, Mr David Kiddy of Yole Farm on the Balsham to Linton Road, referred to his fields next to the Roman Road as Lammas Land. I thought you might like to know more. Mr Kiddy also told us that his father along with other returning soldiers, had been given a piece of land as a small holding. As the years went by, many men sold their narrow strips of land, and this is how Yole Farm was built up. I am hoping for more details from Mr Kiddy about this and his old farm house and the wildlife friendly system he has followed on his land for many years. Julia Napier

The Season of Lammas tide **by Anthea Robinson**

Since prehistoric times man has cultivated grain, and for countless centuries since, he has watched and prayed over its progress. Too wet a spring and the crop rotted in the ground: too dry and the ears did not swell and the straw was too short to be of use. Either way, starvation and great hardship was certain for the following winter. The beginning of August marked the achievement of another year's sustenance. The first harvesting began on that day and as a sign of thanksgiving every harvester baked a loaf from the first grain reaped and carried it to the church to be blessed – hence the name Lammas from 'loaf mass' – the Old English half maesse.

Lammas, the feast of first fruits on the 1st August, which was a quarter day, marked the beginning of the harvest. When the calendar was advanced by 11 days in 1752, Lammas Day moved to August 12th. Michaelmas, the festival of St. Michael on 29th September, was a quarterly rent-day in England and marked the end of the harvest year.

After the Lammas fields were harvested, they were used as pasturage for cattle. Hay having been made from the summer grass on the village green, that too became common grazing from Lammas onwards. At Yole farm, the land which borders the Roman Road was Lammas Land – private pasture of the Lord of the Manor from Easter to August 1st, thereafter common to all villagers.

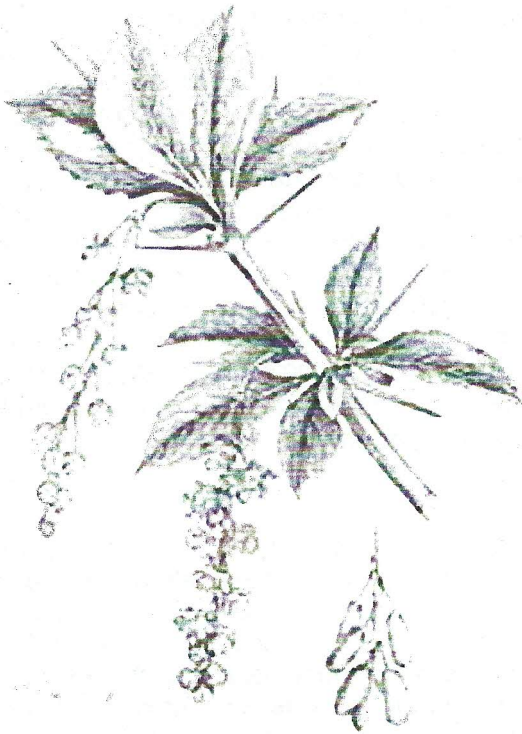
Harvest time is the busiest and most important of the whole farming calendar and consequently is associated with the greatest number of customs and beliefs. It was a time when the whole community joined in the work – the men folk cut the corn with sickles whilst the women twisted ties for the sheaves and helped stack them into stooks to ripen and dry. Women and children also followed the harvesters, gleaning or gathering up the fallen ears of wheat or corn. The children helped in the work, for there was much to be done before the damp mists of autumn veiled the warmth of the sun. In some areas, the farmers believed that the Sunday church bells must ring three times over the fields of stooked corn – that is to say just over a fortnight. The same bells were rung daily at 5am and 7pm to mark the beginning and end of the working day.

Every hand was needed for the harvest and casual labour was employed. A 'harvest lord' was appointed to each crew and he wore a wreath of bindweed and poppy flowers in his hat and was addressed as 'my lord' by his men. It is believed that in days of old a labourer would drink 17 pints of beer a day in the dusty hot fields, but one should add that this was the 'small beer', which was much less strong than beer today. In later times, when water could be drunk safely, the wives would prepare bottles of cold tea and lemonade.

In Balsham at the beginning of the twentieth century, the farmer sounded a harvest bell through the village each morning to summon the labourers to the fields. The bells would ring each day and the harvest would be gathered within the time between three consecutive Sundays. They gathered the harvest by hand and refreshed themselves at noon, drinking locally brewed beer from either of the two brew houses on the High Street or in Back Lane. After the men had finished their work in the fields, the figure of a straw 'policeman' was removed, then the women would glean among the freshly cut stubble. The time to finish gleaning was marked by the ringing of a bell. Mr Gray, of the old bake-house in the yard next to the Bell public house, set aside each Thursday for women who had been gleaning wheat to bring their flour to him to bake bread at a halfpenny per loaf. They would have had their gleanings processed at the mills on Linton Road or at The Black Bull. By the 1970's, women worked on the farms for part of each day and the men folk for 42 hours a week. The national average pay at that time for a labourer was £14.80 a week, with overtime in the summer.

Even today with modern technology there is still an element of luck and risk attached to a successful harvest. Unlike our forefathers, we no longer rejoice at Lammas tide, but in October at Harvest Festival after the harvest has been gathered in.

Barberry Spotters Needed Request from Sharon Hearle



In her work as Butterfly Conservation Regional Officer, Sharon Hearle is trying to establish the status of several rarely seen moths. In 2004, she appealed for news of places where there was a good quantity of Field Bindweed, the pretty pink convolvulus which is the food plant of *Tita luctuosa*, the Four Spotted moth. Richard Fowling found some on one site on the Suffolk border. Please keep looking.

This year Sharon is on the look out for places where the native Mahonia, known as Barberry, can still be found, because it is the food plant of a moth called the Barberry Carpet. If you look at a good moth book, you will see that there are rather a lot of 'Carpets', so named from the variety of subtle patterns and colours on their wings, not because the larvae eat carpets. The carpet eater is usually the Brown House moth, a micro moth about a centimetre long with four darker spots on the wings.

Sharon had heard of a record from 1987 of Barberry growing in scrub on the north-west side of the Fleam Dyke, near Dungate Farm, at grid reference TL 555 534. She would like to know if any of our members has seen it there recently. I asked the expert: Alan Leslie

A lost plant from the Fleam Dyke and Roman Road

by Alan Leslie,

Flora Recorder for Cambridgeshire VC29 ('old Cambridge')

Barberry has always been a scarce plant in Cambridgeshire, usually found in small quantity in hedges in the south and east of the county. Although probably never a native species, it has a long recorded history here and was first listed by John Ray in 1660. It has proved to be very persistent in a number of localities and is, for instance, still in an old hedge at Ickleton where A.S. Shrubbs knew it in 1910/11. It has long been grown as an ornamental shrub, valued for its racemes of yellow flowers in May and the oblong coral red berries in autumn. At one time it was also grown as a source of fruit for candies and preserves and, even earlier, herbalists supposed it had value against jaundice.

On the Roman Road, our only record was made in May 1955 by Ron Boniface and Ron Payne who saw a large bush in the narrow strip of woodland along the north-east side of the road right up at the road's north-west end. There are no subsequent records and there is no sign of it now. On the Fleam Dyke, however, the only record is much more recent – Martin O'Leary reporting at least four bushes on the south-west side of the Dyke in 1987, along the wooded stretch north-west of Dungate Farm and south-east of the juniper zone. It is strange that a recent search could not refind these plants as it seems unlikely that they would have been selectively rooted out, a practice at one time reputed to have occurred when barberry's potential to act as an alternative host for a rust disease of wheat was first demonstrated.

If anyone can provide any later evidence for this species in either site, please let us know. Contact details on the last page.

This is a small, entirely unconnected ^XMilkwort. It has flowers which can be pink, blue, or purple. It is supposed to help cows produce milk and it can only grow on chalky soils where turf is mown or grazed. It has seeded happily into the newly cleared slopes of the Fleam Dyke. Julia



Dwarf
Milkwort

News in Brief, by Julia Napier

Good News for the Pimpinel Pug?

The extensive work done on the Fleam Dyke in the nineties and the more recent clearance of the footpath along the top of Fleam Dyke from the old railway to Fulbourn has allowed the steady spread of the surviving plants of Burnet Saxifrage, a delicate white umbellifer, which flowers from mid-summer until the autumn. The clearance work which was done on the Roman Road in 2004 and 2005 has also resulted in a remarkable increase in the number of other chalk grassland plants. Every native plant has some invertebrate species which depend on it, and Burnet Saxifrage is no exception. Therefore, John Dawson, the moth recorder for Cambridgeshire VC29, is hoping the increased food source will lead to increased records of the Pimpinel Pug. This is one of a large group of little moths which, like the 'Carpets', rest with wings spread out in a variety of camouflage patterns. I find most of them hard to remember, but the Pimpinel Pug is, according to Paul Waring, 'easily confused with the Wormwood Pug' and 'Greatly under-recorded, in part owing to resemblance of adult to more widespread and frequent species.' However, the number of people running moth traps is increasing, and amateurs are now taking digital photos of mystery moths and putting the picture on the Cam-moths email group for identification. The quotation is from Paul Waring's Field Guide to Moths of Great Britain and Ireland. British Wildlife Publishing. £29.95 The excellent text and the marvellous illustrations by Richard Lewington make this reference book worth every penny.

Anyone for the London Marathon?

As we waited at Mount Lodge near the A11 to begin the work party on February 19th, some very lean machine people arrived at the bollards stood jogging on the spot, regaining breath before returning to the car park above Wort's Causeway. They were members of Green's Running Club training for the famous race. So far I have learned that the Barrington Runners also use the old road for practices, as does a runners' club from Haverhill. "Hello" to Ian Pammenter who joined the Friends in spirit, and a few days later in cash, at Worsted Lodge. He was on his way up to Wort's Causeway, before running back to Horseheath. Impressive. Yes, he was literally way laid, like several other members. Our Chairman, Sam Agnew, has also trained for the Marathon on the Roman Road. Are there any other groups you know of?

Rather Less Good News

As the work party started to spread out and begin raking, the unwelcome sound of unsilenced motor bikes came nearer, and two young men on very muddy machines arrived. They circled a bit and then drove off. Helen Chubb guessed, correctly that our presence had deterred them from a trip up the northern end of the Road. I was not able to stay for the morning, so I took some photographs and left. I went over the bridge to the entrance to the southern end of the Road, and yes, indeed, there they were, very muddy indeed but, I thought, about to leave. No number plates, of course. I was considering whether to talk to them, as I have done in the past, about the reason for the No Motorbike sign, when they set off again to do a bit more damage!

Junipers on the Fleam Dyke, a stock check

On a very hot day in August 2005, after watching the Chalkhill Blues happily, I counted the junipers in the two triangles on either side of the entrance to the Fleam Dyke at the A11. This land was provided as mitigation for the loss of parts of the Fleam Dyke when the A11 was widened in 1992. In the eastern triangle, by the A11, there are 17 junipers, 5 of which are female, judging only by the abundant berries. On the south west side, there are 16 junipers, 6 of which are female. This means that about two thirds of the original cuttings have survived, which is encouraging. The only problem is that, because these cuttings are clones of the surviving bushes on the Dyke, they are already rather old. On the dyke itself, I could only see 8 bushes, 2 of which are female. However, 3 of the 11 seedlings found by Iain Webb in 2001 and 2002 have survived, and are making growth, if very, very slowly.

A Fall-back position

Members may recall that in October 2002, a gale snapped off the top of the tallest Juniper on the south-west side of the Fleam Dyke. During the following spring, some regrowth appeared, but then the tree/bush died. However, at the suggestion of Sharon Hearle, cuttings were taken and Christine Newell succeeded in growing three of them. Sharon also had a well-established cutting which she had taken some years before. These have now been planted behind a bench in Hildersham Churchyard, overlooking the Aldercarr SSSI. The idea for this planting came Andrew Westwood Bate, who is on the Parish Council and runs the Hildersham Archive.

Andrew Westwood Bate is a Friend of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, so he knew the story of the cuttings. He also remembered a reference to Hildersham churchyard in Highways and Byways in Cambridge and Ely by the Rev. Edward Conybeare, Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1910. The Rev. Conybeare, (what a superb name!) writes:

“The churchyard here is effectively planted with junipers and fir trees, and the east end of the church is embowered in shrubs of rosemary, said to be the finest in Cambridgeshire.”

Alan Leslie, the Flora Recorder for Cambridgeshire Vice-county 29 and other experts were consulted, and the planting of wild juniper cuttings at Hildersham has been recorded. Given the fragility of the junipers on the Fleam Dyke, it seems a good way to create an alternative reservoir of the old genetic stock.

Why all the fuss?

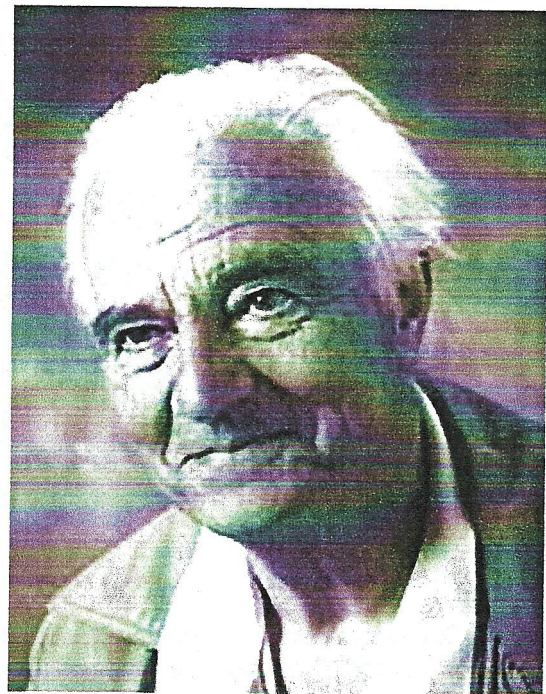
Newer members of the Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke may be a bit mystified by all this counting and planting of junipers. What is so special about them? For a start they are not the junipers found in abundance in the Mediterranean. They are the Northern Juniper, *Juniperus communis*, which has cousins in Scandinavia and northern Europe. Moreover, they are the only junipers left in East Anglia, where once there were several sites in chalky areas. Because numbers are also dwindling in other parts of Britain, the wild juniper has been the subject of a study by Plantlife, the society which is working, successfully, to protect endangered wildflowers and other plants. Plantlife experts were extremely pleased to hear that our bushes had produced seedlings in 2001, because the Northern Juniper is not doing well on many other sites, and we do not know why. The Fleam Dyke seedlings were even more remarkable for being the first seedlings in fifty years. If you walk east along the Fleam Dyke, you will see the protective tree guards put in around the seedlings by Iain Webb, whose sharp eyes found them.

Needless to say, the native juniper is home to a significant number of invertebrates including the Juniper Carpet and the Juniper Pug.

In Memoriam

Writing these regular reports about the junipers, always reminds me of the people who have tried to keep the Fleam Dyke clear of scrub and to protect the dwindling colony of junipers over the last half century: David Clark, John Davison, Alex Sadler, Sean Wylie and many others whose names I do not yet know. Foremost among these was, of course, Dr Max Walters, who died on 11th December, 2005. I hope to include a fuller tribute in the May newsletter. Perhaps for now, I may simply recall this famous naturalist and conservationist as I first saw him in 1999: tall and still handsome, elegant in a white linen suite and panama hat, leaning a little on a stick but the picture of health, and talking with charm and erudition about the flowers and grasses on Magog Down. Unforgettable.

**Max Walters, botanist and conservationist,
11th May 23, 1920 - 11th December, 2005**



The Tale of the Road

In January, Alec Sadler has sent me this poem by Charles G. Harper. It comes from The Road to Newmarket, Thetford, Norwich, and Cromer. Petersham, Surrey, 1904. It is not a description of our Roman Road which is certainly not 'devious' or 'winding' despite the occasional kink, but it contains vivid images of the sort of people who travelled along or lived beside the old roads, many of which were still unmade green ways.

I tell the tale of the road, with scraps of gossip and curious lore,
With a laugh, or a sigh, and a tear in the eye for the joys and sorrows of yore.
What were they like, those sorrows and joys, you ask, O Heir of the ages.
Read, then, mark, learn, and perpend, if you will from these gossipy pages.

Here, free o'er the shuddery heath, where the curlew calls shrill to his mate,
Wandered the primitive man, in his chilly and primitive state;
Unkempt and shaggy, reckless of razor, or comb, or of soap;
Hunted, lived, loved, and died, in untutored and primitive hope.

For what did he hope, that picturesque heathen, hunter of fur and of feather?
For a better land, with weapons to hand, much quarry and fine hunting weather.
Now white runs the devious road, o'er the trackless space that he trod.
Who hunted the heath, and died, and yielded his primitive soul unto God.

Here toiled the wallowing coach, where the highway goes winding away;
Here the highway man lurked in the shadow, impatiently waiting his prey;
There, where the turbulent river, unbridged, rolled fiercely in spate,
The wayfarer, seeking the deep-flooded ford, met a watery fate.

I can show you the suicide's grave, where bracken and bryony twine,
By the four cross-roads on the heath, where the breath of the breeze is like wine;
And bees and butterflies flit in the sun, and life is joyous and sweet,
And takes no care for the tragedy there where the suicide sleeps at your feet.

Dwellers in village and town, each contribute their tale to the store,
Peasants of valley and down, and fishers by river and shore.
Thus I tell you the tale of the road, told with a laugh or a sigh;
Sought with a zest, told with a jest, wrought with a tear in the eye



There are Cowslips all along the Roman Road, often struggling to survive under the scrub to the south east of Gunner's Hall path. However, just beyond Horseheath, they are to be seen all along the bank of the ditch. They are now abundant on the Fleam Dyke as well, especially between the disused railway and Fulbourn. Don't miss them this April.

I see that I have a whole blank page left. How better to fill it than with thanks. First to **English Nature** for the pictures of Lady's Bedstraw on page 1, the Milkwort on p 3, the clump of cowslips on page 6 and for the Restharrow on page 7.

My thanks as always to the photocopying team at

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for unfailing help, efficiency and quality.

And a special thank you to Margot and Derek Andrews who recruit their friends to join The Friends, and who have just given me their copy of A Flora of Cambridgeshire by F.H.Perring, P.D.Sell and S.M.Walters. Published by the Cambridge University Press in 1964, this tribute to the great botanists of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was intended to mark the three hundredth anniversary of John Ray's Flora of Cambridgeshire in 1660. On the dedicatory page states, there is this topical comment.

TO
THE MEMORY OF
JOHN RAY
RICHARD RELHAN
CHARLES BABINGTON

'We would urge men of University standing to spare a brief interval from other pursuits for the study of nature and of the vast library of creation so that they can gain wisdom in it at first hand and learn to read the leaves of plants and the characters impressed on flowers and seeds We are sure that the pursuit of plants can appeal to the young; for we have seen many sons of Trinity College finding in it both bodily exercise and mental satisfaction. Of course there are people entirely indifferent to the sight of flowers or of meadows in spring, or if not indifferent at least pre-occupied elsewhere. They devote themselves to ball-games, to drinking, gambling, money-making, popularity hunting. For these our subject is meaningless.'

JOHN RAY: *Preface to Catalogus Plantarum circa
Cantabrigiam nascentium, 1600*

Restharrow, so called from its rough roots, has pretty pink pea flowers cannot tolerate shading. A small patch which was clinging on beside the overgrown path south of Worsted Lodge has spread out over several feet of newly cleared verge.

It is one of the food plants of the Common Blue butterfly .

Recorded by Ray as a common plant, the 1964 Flora describes it as 'frequent on roadsides, tracks and waste places, on the chalk, boulder clay and sands....' Not any more.



Fifth Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 12th April

7.30pm in the Function Room of the Six Bells Public House, Fulbourn
Short business meeting followed by two illustrated talks:

A Vision for the Conservation of the District's Biodiversity, 2006-2008

Rob Mungovern, Ecology Officer for South Cambs. will talk about the Council's Biodiversity Strategy.

Butterfly Conservation

Sharon Hearle, Butterfly Conservation Officer for this region, will give an illustrated talk about her work.

All welcome, members and non members.
Tea or coffee provided in the interval. No entry charge. Small donation

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Wednesday 29th March Fleam Dyke Mid-week Conservation Volunteers

Please ring Iain Webb, the Green Belt Project Officer, on 01954 713531 in order to check the meeting place.

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.

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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

Thursday 30th March, 7.30pm

The Role of a Police Wildlife Officer,
Illustrated talk by **Barry Kaufman-Wright**, author and environmental consultant

Thursday 23rd April, 7.30pm

Gamlingay Wood - its history, wildlife and management,
Illustrated talk by **Peter Walker**, the Voluntary Warden

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The Fitzwilliam Museum 26th Jan - 32 April, An Exhibition of Wildlife Stamp Designs by Ian Loe.

Tuesday - Saturday, 10.00 - 17.00, Sunday 12.00 - 17.00

Contacts

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