



Friends of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke

March 2013 Newsletter 40

Fleam Dyke – reflections of an undergraduate bird ringer by Michael Brooke, Curator of Ornithology, Zoological Museum

During the latter part of my 1968-71 undergraduate years at Cambridge, I gained a full 'A' ringing permit from the British Trust for Ornithology. I could set about indulging my latent hunting instinct, catching and ringing birds. This I did at several sites, one of which was Fleam Dyke for which I developed, and retain, great fondness. If the days were short, I would leave Magdalene College before dawn, pedal out to Fleam with the poles for the mist nets slung under the bike's cross bar, spend the whole day ringing, and return after dark. I remember one occasion when I was climbing out of College about 5 a.m. Just as I was about to drop off the wall into Magdalene Street, a police car passed. I retreated hastily to my room, and allowed 20 minutes for any dust to settle. Walking towards the now-open College gates, I met a porter.

"Have you just climbed into College, Sir?"

"No", I replied with total truthfulness, and went on my way.

In summer during pre-exam revision, the pattern was different. I would head out of an afternoon, usually with a blackcurrant-and-apple pie from the Hunt's shop opposite the Magdalene main gate. Following a little evening catching, I would sleep under the stars and then catch the flurry of dawn activity the following morning.

My nets were set between the A11, then a single carriageway, and the old railway line. Since most of the visits were midweek, there was little interaction with the public. Once I poked my nose onto the A11 and a policeman came to investigate. More disconcerting was the occasion when on 11th October 1970, I caught Cambridgeshire's second barred warbler. Whilst I was fretting over its identity, and taking a full description for the adjudicating powers-that-be, some passers-by presented me with a blue tit in a frightful ball of netting. Finding the bird in a set mist-net, they had cut it out but it was now up to me to cut it free.

After Julia Napier asked me to write this article, I tried to find the field notebooks that would easily yield information on daily totals of birds caught. Alas, my drilling down into cupboards and cardboard boxes did not reach the necessary depths, so I will rely instead on recollection and also the located book of species totals.

Overwhelmingly, the recollection is of abundance, compared to present sparsity. Working solo with about seven nets, I could catch 100 birds on a December day, inconceivable today. The winter day's catch would often be topped off by a flurry of linnets arriving to roost.

Some species have virtually vanished. Thus in the spring of 1971, I caught eight different nightingales. Fleam Dyke is the only place I have found a nest of this species, with its barely-marked chocolate eggs. My guess is that the drastic thinning of understorey thicket growth has contributed to the loss of nightingales.

Another species to have virtually vanished is the bullfinch. On 23rd September 1971, I caught 24 different birds, but today several netting days could pass without one catching a single bullfinch.

Remember that this was all before the UK's accession to the Common Market (as it then was) and its immense impact on farmland birds. It was also before the switch from spring-sown to autumn-sown cereals. That change doubtless did not help the stone curlews that sometimes I would hear on a May night as I unrolled my sleeping bag, away from the grind of revision, and anticipated a Fleam dawn.

Michael Brooke is Hans Gadow Memorial Fellow and Strickland Curator of Ornithology at the Cambridge University Museum of Zoology



Bullfinch, male

With thanks to the RSPB for these images.



Nightingale, unisex

Flora of the Roman Road and Fleam Dyke, by Christine Newell

The stimulus for this leaflet came in the form of a collection made at the family funeral of Dr David Clark, the reforming Medical Superintendant of Fulbourn Mental Hospital, who helped to keep the Fleam Dyke footpath open, and did his best to ensure the survival of the Junipers. See www.frrfd.org.uk for Newsletter Number 28, November 2009. We hope this leaflet will enable members to identify more of the flowers on these and other chalk grassland sites, and understand more clearly the importance of our conservation work.

The text was written by Christine Newell, who took all the photographs on either the Roman Road or Fleam Dyke during 2012. Unfortunately, the photographs are not as beautifully sharp and clear as the originals, which you can now see on the website which Christine has redesigned.



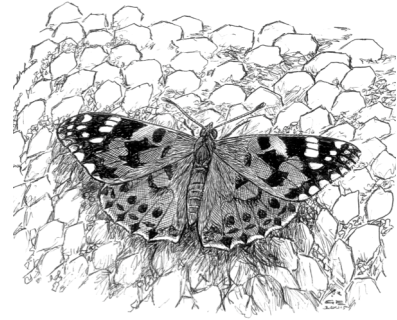
Graham Easy

**With thanks to Dr Clark's widow, Margaret Farrell
and to all their family.**

FLEAM DYKE AND ROMAN ROAD

Butterfly Transect Data 2012

by Roger Lemon



On Fleam Dyke, data were obtained for 23 weeks and on the Roman Road, for every week of the 26-week season. However, weather conditions did not meet the minimum requirements for a further 2 weeks on Fleam Dyke and for 3 weeks on the Roman Road. On the Roman Road, an additional count was done in week 0 on 29th March. A total of 25 species were recorded on Fleam Dyke and 23 on the Roman Road. 2012 was the sixth year of regular transect counts and produced the lowest total counts to date on both sites, continuing a steady decline in numbers since the peak year of 2009.

On the positive side, **Chalkhill Blue** numbers on Fleam Dyke continued to rise from an index of 249 in 2011 to 507 in 2012, making it the most abundant species on the site. This species also did well on the Roman Road, increasing from 1 in 2011 to 26 this year.*

After an excellent year in 2011, the numbers of **Green Hairstreaks** on Fleam Dyke decreased from an index of 34 to just 8. This may not be a true reflection of the actual numbers present but more to do with the contrast in spring weather conditions between the two seasons. Green Hairstreaks are very difficult to see unless they are first spotted flying, and this requires warm, sunny conditions.

Our third habitat specialist species, the **Dark Green Fritillary**, which appeared on Fleam Dyke for the first time in 2010 with 1 sighting, showed a modest increase from 9 sightings in 2011 to 12 in 2012. None were recorded on the Roman Road after 2 sightings last year.

Another positive result was a very significant increase in numbers of **Small Heaths** on Fleam Dyke with the index increasing from 30 in 2011 to 80 this year. On the Roman Road, where numbers of this species have been much lower, a modest increase was seen in 2011, followed by a slight decline in 2012.

After a steady decline in numbers between 2009 and 2011, the **Meadow Brown** showed some recovery this year on both sites. The **Gatekeeper** showed a further decline on Fleam Dyke but a slight increase compared with 2011 on the Roman Road. Numbers of **Ringlets** were up significantly on Fleam Dyke but showed a slight decrease on the Roman Road. The **Speckled Wood** fared badly on both sites. The **Marbled White**, which had 5 sightings on the Roman Road in 2010, was absent in 2011 but reappeared this year with just 1 record. Two were recorded on Fleam Dyke, the first to be sighted in Transect counts on this site.

The **Common Blue**, which had such a good year in 2010, showed a dramatic decline in 2011, which continued into 2012 with only 3 recorded on Fleam Dyke and just 1 on the Roman Road. **Brown Argus** numbers showed some increase on Fleam Dyke but only 1 was recorded on the Roman Road. The **Holly Blue** was seen in lower numbers on both sites. One **Small Copper** was recorded on the Roman Road, none on Fleam Dyke.

Generally, Vanessids occur in only small numbers on both sites. The very low numbers of **Small Tortoiseshell** were maintained and **Peacocks** showed a very slight recovery. There was a reduction in numbers of **Commas** and **Red Admirals** but the latter continued to do better than in 2010. Only 2 **Painted Ladies** were recorded, both on Fleam Dyke. (Drawing by Graham Easy)

The three whites declined in numbers but the **Small White** continued to be the most abundant species on the Roman Road, having been replaced by the Chalkhill Blue on Fleam Dyke. After a steady increase from 2007 to 2011 on both sites, the **Orange-tip** showed a significant fall in numbers in 2012. The **Brimstone** also declined on Fleam Dyke but showed an increase on the Roman Road after a decline in 2011, following the extensive spring scrub clearance.

Finally, both the **Small/Essex Skippers** and the **Large Skipper** occurred in lower numbers than in 2011.

*Although only one Chalkhill Blue was recorded in transect counts in 2011, 3-5 were seen by Peter and Anne Grubb on 5th September, and these included one female.

Who uses the Roman Road?

All sorts and conditions of men, or, in PC plus, dogs, children, women and men. Sometimes I record the users along with the butterflies and other wildlife. On any day of the week there are cyclists speeding past, runners puffing along heroically, dogs and their owners of all shapes and sizes, horses and riders, legitimate Range Rovers and trucks, and illegitimate motorcycle riders. ("No, your map is incorrect. This byway is not open to all traffic.") Sunny weekends bring dozens of users, especially in the afternoon, but with entrances at Wort's Causeway, Wandlebury, Babraham Road, the Fulbourn footpath, Mount Farm and Worsted Lodge, Hildersham footpath and the Hildersham Road itself, no section ever feels crowded.

Best Breed in Show, literally. A couple of Irish Wolf Hounds and their owners. I did not dare ask if the new larger dog bin had been used. A Roman Road leaflet was refused, so I may safely quote Alexander Pope's epigram on the dog collar he presented to George IV.

"I am His Highness' dog at Kew.
Pray tell me, Sir, whose dog are you?"

Most unusual runners

Walking back up to Copley Hill in late autumn, I saw what appeared to be a sunlit figure running steadily but not coming towards me at any speed. Then I realised that he was running backwards, with lots of calf muscle stretching, in training with other youngsters. Who were they?

The Cambridge & Coleridge Athletic Club by Neil Costello, Chairman

We are the only club offering the full range of athletics, including track and field, cross country running, road running, fell running and race walking in the greater Cambridge area. We're a pretty big club – we have over 800 members of whom around a third are aged between 10 and 15. We encourage everyone who is interested to have a go and to be the best they can and have active members in their eighties. We have a beginner's running group and a slow runner's group as well as some really star athletes. We have a small number of members who are (or have been) GB internationals and our teams perform well in regional and national competitions, for example, in September 2012 the UK Half Marathon championships were incorporated in to the Great Eastern Half Marathon in Peterborough; our women's team are UK champions and our men's team got the bronze medals.

I should say that this is partly because Peterborough is a long way to go for some of the other UK teams but you've got to be in it to win it!

Some members of those teams train on the Roman Road. This list of accomplishments actually gives a slightly false picture. The club's primary aim is to enable individual athletes to achieve their dreams whatever they may be. For some it may be just completing a race. We put on running events to raise funds for local charities. This year our primary charity is Camsight. If any of your members are interested in joining, including running on the Roman Road, they should have a look at our web site. We'll be pleased to see them.
<http://www.cambridgeandcoleridge.org.uk>>

You may not know that there is an annual Roman Road race, organised by Cambridge University Hare and Hounds on the last Saturday of full term in March every year. It goes back probably over a hundred years. It's a classic hare and hounds race, one of the few remaining, and is an enjoyable event. The route takes you over the Gogs for just over nine miles. It is run as a handicap - slowest off first. Well worth having a go if you can.

Neil Costello

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The Roman Road Race was held this year on 16th March. Did any readers see any of it? A member of the C.U. Hare and Hounds Society writes:

We are treated to a thrilling staggered start: four or five groups of runners set off at five minute intervals. Interestingly, everyone picks their own handicap; this doesn't affect the final results (as the finishing times are all adjusted to account for this devilish scheme) but it does lend an atmosphere of excitable confusion to proceedings, with runners drifting back and forth through the field and no one ever quite sure of what position they're really in. It also gives more casual participants the chance to take on and beat the cream of Cambridge athletics in a cataclysmic clash of egos. All in all a rather fabulous idea, what what?



Athletics Champions in the making. October 2012

“A Soldier’s Life is Terribly Hard”, says Alice

On Easter Saturday, Mark Bishop with his wife Cheryl, set out to establish a reasonable time for the whole 25 mile walk. They completed the distance in 10 hours 50 minutes. During their walk, Cheryl raised a series of questions, which I passed to Helen Fowler, the local Finds Officer for portable metal artefacts.

Helen asked **Stuart Orme**, the Marketing and Events Officer for Peterborough Museum, shown here as ‘Your Guide on the Peterborough Ghost Walk’.

Quinton Carroll, the County Council Historic Environment Team Manager and Archaeologist, who receives this newsletter, very kindly sent some additional comments, which I thought would interest you.

I have reprinted Stuart’s replies, which answer what he saw as a very general ‘in Roman times’ question.



Question: In the 5th Century, how big and how heavy would a Roman Soldier’s shield have been?

Stuart Orme: Difficult, as few survive, but based on replicas about 1 - 2 kilos depending on size (whole kit estimated at 35 kilos - about the same as a modern British soldier).

Quinton Carroll: They are using an oval flat shield by this point. Surviving evidence indicates something like 4ft tall, 3ft wide, made of 1/2 " thick planks of poplar. I don't know how heavy this is, but I suspect more than 2 kilos.

Q. What was the length of their weapons?

Stuart: Spears (Hasta) seem to have been 2m in length (7ft long)

Quinton: Agree. Some thrusting spears were up to 9ft., throwing ones c.5ft.

Q. How fast did they march?

Stuart: Soldiers were reckoned (according to Josephus, Vegetius etc) to be able to march 25 miles a day and fight at the end.

Quinton: Yes, although realistically, given they marched with baggage trains that often had their families on, 10-15 miles is probably more accurate. They also had to take down and make a new camp before and after each march.

Q. What happened when a soldier's sandal broke?

Stuart: Each man carried a spare pair, and within each cohort there would have been trained shoemakers to mend them. Many soldiers were trained as craftsmen (immunes) who could do repair jobs on kit.

Quinton: By this time, [the fifth century] soldiers were wearing ankle length boots or closed sandals. There were cobblers in the ranks and forts who could repair them, but increasingly troops were not equipped centrally but were given an allowance to go and buy their own equipment.

Q. Would these answers be true throughout the Roman Empire or is the answer for the 5th Century different to previous centuries?

Stuart: The short answer is we don't know for sure. Roman kit changed and varied across the period (400 years), and would have also varied from province to province - so in Britain soldiers wore more and heavier clothing to cope with the weather, those in North Africa wore light clothing and even fabric armour rather than cook in metal!

Quinton: I should really answer this one first as it underpins all the others! The 'traditional' Roman legionary was long gone by this point, and in terms of equipment and dress, soldiers were almost Germanic in appearance. In fact, much of the Roman military in the 4th and 5th century was comprised of German mercenaries. Armour was not universal and, when it was, it was chainmail, or lorica squamata (scales stitched to a backing material) not the lorica segmentata of the past, (broad metal strips sewn to backing material as shown in Hollywood and TV films). The pilum (throwing javelin) and gladius (short sword) were gone, replaced with the hasta (spear) and spatha (longsword), and the scutum (shield) was oval, not curved and rectangular. However, by the 5th century there were most likely no Roman soldiers left in Britain. The main Roman armies had been withdrawn from the province in c.380 AD to fight in a civil war and they never returned. Some of the frontier defences, like the Shore Forts, were garrisoned by any of the effectively part-time troops who might have been around.



Work Parties

This winter, my three attempts to get photographs of either group of volunteers have been a failure: battery ran out; bad light down in the Fleam Dyke ditch, hands frozen, Mid-week Volunteer workers freezing; bad light in Stonebridge Lane, workers cold and getting wet.

In our 11 years of work parties, we have had: the **wettest** (Fleam Dyke in about 2003); the **windiest** (the Roman Road in the last big gale); the **coldest** (the Roman Road on a day when the temperature did not rise above freezing); and on March 17th, the **wettest and muddiest group photograph**. The resulting fuzzy photograph shows a cold but heroically co-operative group, with Cassie Sparks and Christine Newell slithering sideways in an attempt to kneel without actually kneeling in the mud. A new Olympic sport.

Instead here is a list of our regular volunteers, with many thanks.

Mike Albutt, Helen Chubb, Richard Fowling, Cathy Goss and Sophie, Tim Moore, Christine Newell, David Seilly, Cassie Sparks, Edmund Tanner, Clive Tregaskis, Matthew Wallis, David Waterhouse, Roger and Stella Wolfe, (Butterfly supporters and recorders, who come from Ipswich!) and two very welcome new supporters, Paul and Sylvia Davidson.

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Our grateful thanks for another Legacy

Missing from this list, and from the lives of her family and friends, is **Ann Bicknell** who died too young of cancer. Her will specified £500 to help wildlife in some way. Her husband, John, offered the money to the Friends. It was used in 2012 for a reprint of the Fleam Dyke leaflet.



If you have mislaid your copy, or would like another, please send an s.a.e to Julia Napier, 30a Hinton Avenue, CB1 7AS

£ £ £ £ £ £ £ £

From time to time members say to me, "I am sorry. I cannot really **do** anything for the Friends." The reverse is true. By joining you have already done a great deal. It is your subscriptions which got us grants from Awards for All, 2002, the Lottery Heritage Initiative and from South Cambridgeshire District Council.

When the subscription went up from £5 per household to a £10 minimum most members continued to support us, increasing their annual donations and standing orders. Many members added five or ten pounds, or even more. This has been wonderfully encouraging and enabled us to pay for much more work on the sites than in previous years and to plan for more in future.

Suspicious minds will have noticed that I am working gently up to a reminder that **Subscriptions are payable on 5th April each year.**

With sincere thanks, Julia Napier, March 2013

8th May, Twelfth Annual General Meeting

7.30pm in the Function Room of the Six Bells Public House, High Street, Fulbourn, CB21 5DH

Business meeting, followed by refreshments and illustrated talk

Guest Speaker: Professor Paul Brakefield, Fellow of the Royal Society and Director of the Zoology Museum of Cambridge University

Eyespots and Scents in Butterflies and Moths: Survival and Courtship

'I will explore how the wing patterns of butterflies and moths, especially eye-like markings, help them to evade their predators. We also now understand much about how these 'eyespot' are laid down on the wings before the butterfly emerges. More recent work on the diversity of the scents produced from the wings of male butterflies during courtship will be mentioned too.'

All welcome.

Members free.

Non-members £3

Please display our poster somewhere near your house or at work.

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