

COUNTRY DIARY

HIBERNATING butterflies are beginning to wake up and last week I saw my first peacock butterfly, sun-basking on a gravel path. This year it will be interesting to see how many have made it through the coldest winter in recent memory and emerge to feed on the first spring flowers.

Three hibernating species to look out for are the peacock, the small tortoiseshell and the comma and one of the best places to find them is on catkins of goat willow. Catkins of this tree produce nectar, so they are often the first refueling station for newly-emerged butterflies. The brilliant colours of the outspread wings of all three species make them easy to spot in the sunshine but when the sun goes behind the clouds and they close their wings their mottled brown undersides make them much more difficult to locate. This is particularly true of the comma, whose wings have scalloped edges that match to the tattered outline and colour of a withered leaf. This contrast between coloured upper surfaces and drab undersides may be more than just a matter of camouflage – when an inquisitive bird is around the instant contrast between camouflage and vivid colour must be totally bewildering to a potential predator, which might just allow the butterfly an extra second or two to escape. Peacock butterflies have an additional defence, located in the false eye spots on the tip of each wing, which deflect birds' attention from their vulnerable bodies. Some that emerge from hibernation will have damaged wings that testify to close encounters with predators last autumn.

All three of these butterfly species breed on nettles and once they're fully fed they'll be looking for fresh new nettle shoots to lay their eggs on.

Phil Gates

BIRDWATCH

IT'S great to be back but oh for better weather! After four months in hospital, I found it hard to head out into late December – early March's icy conditions. Since then I've been able to venture into the field at long last – only to be forced indoors again by cold winds, rain and even snow forecasts as April approaches.

With my moan of the week out of the way, let's celebrate some positives. Comparatively milder March 24-27 sparked an early surge of migrants. The stars were black redstarts – seven between Yorkshire and north Northumberland and firecrests – three at Spurn and one at South Gare, Teesmouth. The great grey shrike at Harwood Forest, south-west of Rothbury from 23rd may have been a previously overlooked wintering bird.

Ring ouzels appeared at Marsden, Whitburn, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea and inland at Rainton Meadows near Houghton-le-Spring. One or two early swallows occurred at six locations and willow warblers at Flamborough Head and Warsett Hill, near Brotton. Chiffchaffs were reported widely as were wheatears, including 18 along the Skinningrove – Hummersea coastline. Sand martin numbers at Saltholme, Teesmouth, built up to 40-plus. Species such as meadow pipit, pied wagtail and linnet were moving too, intensifying the activity.

Summer-visiting raptors figuring in the flow included marsh harriers at Saltholme and Tophill Low, near Beverley, and ospreys at Sweethope Lough, Northumberland, Kibblesworth, near Birtley, and over Yorkshire's Lower Derwent Valley and Swaledale. Ospreys continued north despite the worsening weather but, turning to herons, the great white egret in the Saltholme/Dorman's Pool area at the weekend perhaps realised its big mistake; it wasn't reported on Monday and may have been the bird that spent a few hours that day at Humberside's Blacktoft Sands reserve, 60 miles to the south.

Meanwhile, the crane remained at Eshott, Northumberland, and the avocet assembly in Teesmouth's Greatham Creek area reached 22 by Sunday.

Brian Unwin

WALKS



By Mark Reid

POINTS OF INTEREST

BILSDALE was known as Smiddesdale until 1145, an Old Norse name meaning smithies valley derived from the many primitive ironstone bloomeries (or furnaces) that were operating in the valley well over 1,000 years ago. It was in that year that Walter Espec of Helmsley Castle gave the monks of Rievaulx Abbey vast tracts of land in the valley. From the natural saddle of land on the escarpment of the Cleveland Hills between Urra Moor and Hasty Bank, the diminutive Bilsdale Beck flows south to join with the waters of Raisdale Beck at Chop Gate to form the River Sefh. This river then continues through the broad, lush acres of Bilsdale generously cloaked with ancient oaks until it merges with the River Rye in the shadow of Easterside Hill. There are no large villages, only a scattering of small hamlets with musical names: Urra, Chop Gate and Fangdale Beck. Many of the farms in the valley were established by the monks of Rievaulx as monastic farms or granges; the main granges were at Laskill, Newlass and Griff, however, a glance at the map will reveal many farm names that have strong links with the monks such as Low Ewe Cote, Woolhouse Croft and Cross Holme Farm.

Fangdale Beck is a delightful hamlet hidden away from the main valley road, a cluster of attractive cottages and farms. Its unusual name dates back to the time of the Danish raids back in the 8th and 9th Centuries as dale is Old Norse for valley and beck means stream, whilst fang was most probably derived from a personal name. The hamlet is most famous for its phone box, which was painted green back in the Thirties at the request of Lord Feversham to blend in with its surroundings, and is now a listed building.

THE WALK

1 From the streamside parking area in the heart of Fangdale Beck, cross the footbridge over the stream (by the Parish Notices board) and head up to quickly join another road opposite the old chapel. Turn right along this road and follow it round to reach Malkin Bower Farm. Walk into the farmyard then, as you reach the farmhouse to your left, head through the gate ahead slightly to the right (blue waymarker). After the gate, follow the enclosed grassy track straight on for 600 metres to reach a gate at the end of the enclosed track, with the wooded banks of the River Sefh to your left. Carry straight on along the grassy track with a wall on your right (river to your left) for 75 metres then through an old gateway, after which continue along the grassy track bearing slightly to the right (away from the river) across the field to soon reach a gate (waymarker). Head through the gate and turn sharp right up across the field alongside the wall on your right then, as you reach the top corner of the field, turn left across the top of the field (wall on your right) to reach a gate in the field corner. Continue straight on along the clear track to reach Helm House Farm.

2 As you reach the crossroads of tracks at Helm House Farm, carry straight on along the track (passing the farmhouse to your right) to soon reach some old stone

WALKFACTS

Distance: 9 km (5.5 miles)

Time: Allow 3 hours

Map: OS Explorer Sheet OL26

Parking: Small parking area beside the stream in Fangdale Beck (SE 569 946)

Refreshments: None en route. Pubs in Bilsdale nearby.

Terrain: Clear field tracks, moorland paths and tracks virtually all the way, with boggy ground and rough terrain in places. The moorland is exposed to the elements, whilst the descent back into Fangdale Beck is steep.

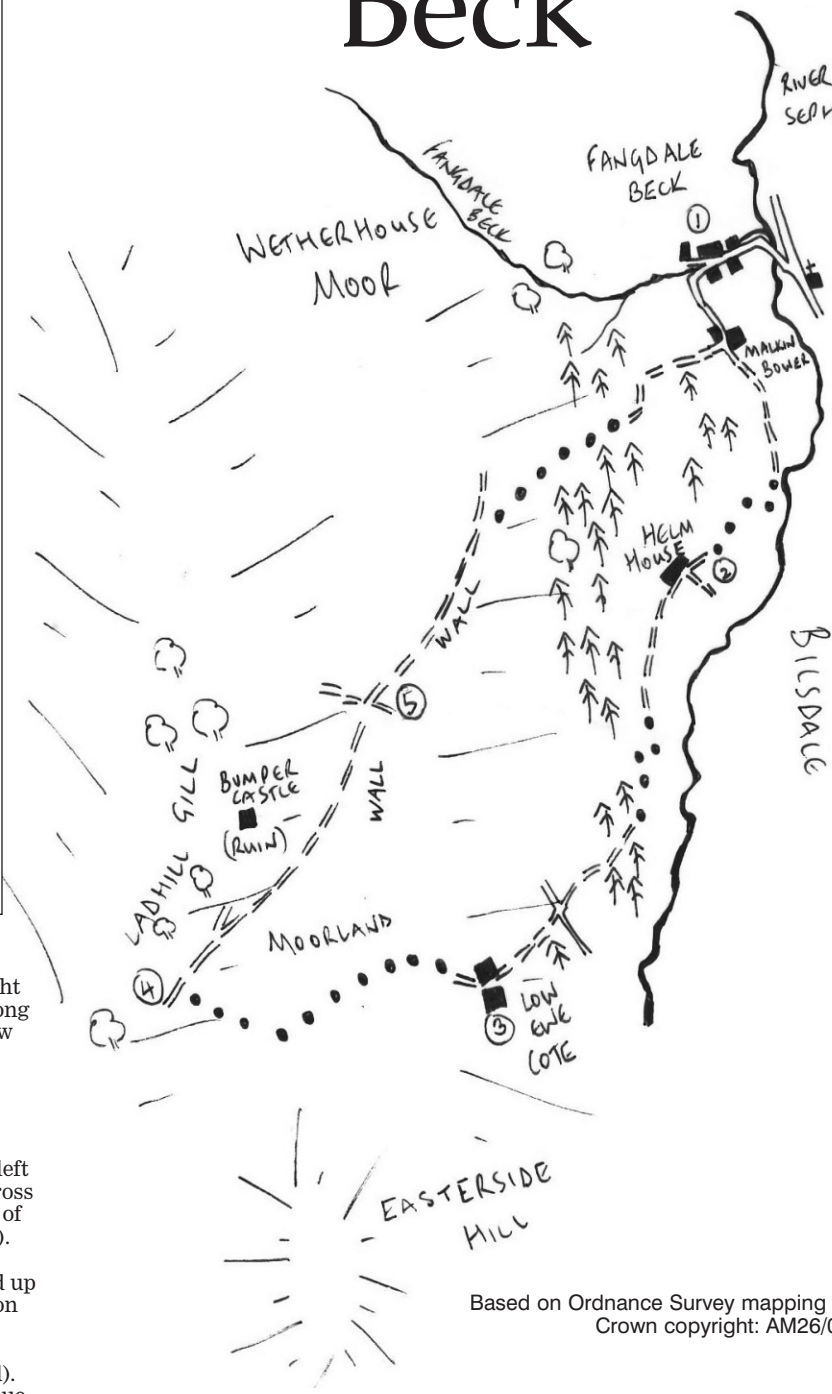
How to get there: Fangdale Beck lies just off the B1257 in Bilsdale, midway between Stokesley and Helmsley.

Caution: This walk heads across open moorland with little shelter from the elements and rough/boggy terrain. This walk also includes a number of inclines, with a steep descent back into Fangdale Beck.

barns on your left. Carry straight on through the wooden gate along an enclosed grassy track. Follow this clear track straight on through two more gates after which the track becomes unenclosed and less distinct; however, continue straight on alongside a fence/wall on your left until you reach a stone wall across your path in the bottom corner of the field (at the end of the field). As you reach the wall in the bottom corner of the field, head up to the right alongside the wall on your left to reach a gate in this wall/fence on your left (three-quarters of the way up the field). Go through the gate and continue straight on across the next field alongside the wall on your left, through another gate after which follow the indistinct grassy track bearing slightly to the right up across the field to reach a gate that leads into a plantation. Follow the track up through the woods then, as you emerge from the woods, continue along the walled, grassy track for 400 metres to join a road. Cross over the road and follow the track opposite up to reach Low Ewe Cote Farm.

3 Walk through the farmyard then follow the track round to the right after the farm buildings up to reach a gate at the start of a walled, grassy track. Follow this walled track up for 125 metres then, after the next gate (walled track ends), bear right through another gate after which head to the left up across the field (alongside the wall on your left) to reach a gate in the top left-hand corner of the field (moorland ahead). After the gate, head straight on along the sunken path directly ahead. This sunken path quickly divides – follow the left-hand branch along the bottom of the left-hand sunken pathway (ignore path between the two sunken paths), which quickly becomes a clear, narrow path that gradually bears to the left across the heather moorland 500 metres to reach a gate in a stone wall in

Fangdale Beck



Based on Ordnance Survey mapping © Crown copyright: AM26/09

the shadow of Easterside Hill. Do not head through this gate but turn right before it heading down alongside the wall on your left then, where this wall turns away after 150 metres, follow the path bearing slightly to the right ahead down across the heather moorland (heading towards Sportsman's Hall Farm across the valley) for 250 metres to reach an area of flat boulders (boulder field) where you drop down to quickly reach a gate in a stone wall. Head through the gate and drop down the bank to join a clear, grassy track at the foot of this bank (gate in the wall to your left).

4 Turn right along this track then, where it forks after 400 metres, bear right up across the hillside to join a wall on your right which you follow straight on to soon reach a gate in a dog-leg in this wall. Head through the gate and follow the track straight on alongside the wall on your left for 25 metres then gradually bear to the right away from this wall across Wetherhouse Moor for 0.75 km to join another wall on your right beside an old sheep pen (and a junction of tracks).

5 Continue straight on along the track alongside this wall on your right (moorland to your left) – the wall bears very slightly away from the track then, where the

wall meets the track again at a wall corner after almost 1 km, head to the right off the track (leaving the track to swing round to the left) heading down along a narrow path alongside the wall on your right. Follow this path down then, where the wall turns away after 200 metres, carry straight on along a narrow, rough path heading down across the moorland (head towards the left side of the large plantation ahead) to reach a gate in a wall along the bottom edge of the moorland beside an information board. Head through the gate and follow the sunken track straight on passing some overgrown quarry workings on your left, after which the track swings down to the left to reach a gate beside a plantation. Head through the gate and follow the track steeply down to reach Malkin Bower Farm. As you enter the farmyard, turn left along the metal lane and follow this back into Fangdale Beck. As you reach the old Chapel, turn left down over a footbridge back to the parking area.

Mark Reid
Author of The Inn Way guidebooks

■ While every effort is made to ensure that walks are accessible and are rights of way, The Northern Echo cannot guarantee that fields, paths or pubs will be open. If you are walking in the countryside, please remember the Country Code.
www.northernecho.co.uk/leisure/walks