

Glow-worms are beetles; the female has no wings and in her adult life she doesn't go far, but she has the ability to produce quite a powerful green glow during the mating season, and the male, who has wings, flies about looking for the glow. They were once a common sight in our country places, but they are suffering now from habitat loss and light pollution, and the females' sedentary habits make it very difficult for them to move to new sites. They are still surviving in dark places that haven't been ploughed or sprayed, and where there are plenty of snails for the larvae to feed on, but these places get fewer and fewer.

This poem is the same shape as Robert Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'.

Glow-worms

A country lane just after dark;
down summer-shabby unremarked
verges, a flying beetle scans
the grasses for a sea-green spark.

For heath nearby and pasture-lands
the village stretches out its hands,
and meadow turns to Meadow Close.
A patchwork of new houses stands

along the lane. The village grows;
cars and streetlamps and windows throw
patterns of artificial light
on places where the glow-worms glowed.

I know a meadow still, where night
is dark, with stars and glow-worm light.
Come out with me and look tonight,
come out with me and look, tonight.

Written by Barbara Payne

The green woodpecker has a loud call that sounds like laughter, and many nicknames: Yaffingale, Jack Eikle, rain-bird, weather-cock, nickle, nicker-pecker, laughing Betsey, and the best-known one, yaffle.

Yaffles

This rain-bird on the regular shuttle
from his whittled woodland home,
is Jack Eikle the weather-cock,
green as a crab-apple
with clown-red crown and yellow bum.
He and Betsey, the nicker-pecker,
bringing their young to the garden-buffet,
stippling the lawns, to scoff
as many ants as they can snaffle!
and after the formic family picnic
he and she and the little yaffles
their laughter making the meadows rattle
dip-diving home on their daily run.

Written by Barbara Payne

Over the Top

Tonight's the night
we go over the top
all is ready, this is the hour

with the wood behind us
we crawl through the ditch and up the far bank

before us lies no-man's land, the grey waste.
Great things rush past with noise,
with explosions of light
it's a long, long way across,
and the surface, even after rain, is rough
so hard
on the feet

this is the way
this is the way it lies,
the place we know in our blood is best of all

companions fall, behind and beside us
the route is littered with our dead

through this great peril we will come to it,
through danger and fear we come at last
to the place of safety

coming home
to softness of grasses,
welcome of water,

meeting and mating
in this most perfect of places
here we are dancers, acrobats,
we are graceful,
here we know and are known.

Afterwards there is the return crossing.
It is what we do.

Toads
are not made for roads.

Written by Barbara Payne

Dispersal

A young kite sets off.
Here the wandering year begins;
it will roam far and wide across the land
far from the nest where it was hatched
until the time comes to make a nest of its own.
But now the wind whispers in the kite's russet feathers,
of a wide unknown world, of freedom unfolding
all the land laid out below
for it to inspect.
Tilting its forked tail,
it leisurely considers its course.

In the wood below
a tree-creeper ventures from the crevice
where it has been fed and fattened
crammed beside its siblings.
Its parents will no longer wait on it,
nor is there food enough
in this copse
for nine adult mouths.

Toes and tail cleave to familiar bark
as it looks out past the drip line.
In the distance is a dark smudge,
the hint of far off trees
but in between
emptiness
acres of bone-white stubble
a space wide and shorn
laid bare and exposed to the sky
no place for a tree-flitter.

But threading through the plain
is a green way.
The tree-creeper slips out into the hedgerow
and follows it.
Part way across, the line is broken
a gateway of empty air
the other wood is near
it steels itself
warily.
Quickly
it flits across the gap.

At the foot of the hedge
a lizard tips her head
to see at once the sky and her sun-bleached log.
Her young bask beside her.

Lizards cannot flit,
this hedge fragment will be their world.
The surrounding heath and fen
is long gone, ploughed and drained
and these hedge-dwellers are a relic,
no new blood in or out.

Away to the west, as the kite flies,
are other pockets of lizards,
in the cemetery,
on the railway embankment.
Separating them, roads, ploughed fields, green deserts,
each is an island
no new blood in, or out.

In the cemetery, the cats have come for them.
They pick them off one by one -
no new blood in.
If the hedge-lizards fall prey to disease,
no new blood in.

Beneath the soaring kite
the tree-creeper flits nervously
and one by one
the lizards wink out.

Written by Emma Gardner & Barbara Payne