

Editorial

Life has been very hectic at Foxglove Covert, and there is a lot to report. I have to be brief, but shall write a few comments under appropriate headings.

Wardens

Sue Rowley resigned in April, and was replaced by Alice Gull. We decided that a change in job title was in order and Marion and Alice are now known as Reserve Managers.

100 Club

A draw took place recently and was won by the Reverend Timothy Forbes Turner.

London Marathon

Emma Wyldes ran the Marathon on our behalf and came 7845th out of 35000, with a time of 5 hours 15 minutes. Well done, Emma! Now a precedent has been set, who is going to do it next year?

Wet Meadows Project

This is 'ticking over' nicely, and prospective contractors have been shown the site and asked to submit tenders.

Water Voles

Another release took place at very short notice on 28th July, when 55 of these endearing little creatures arrived at their new home. Site surveys have suggested that last year's releases were successful, and there have been numerous sightings.

Moths

Anyone who has come to Foxglove will know it is not all about birds and water voles. We now have a very active little moth group who meet on Thursday mornings. Since Marion wrote her 'ramblings', and Heather her piece on moth hunting, I am happy to report that on 24th July we trapped over 300 moths. Personally, I have never seen so many moths at one go, and at one stage several were flying around the ringing room. However, there is no truth in the rumour that most of these escaped from the wallet of a certain Scottish friend of ours. Not one of us laughed at this suggestion!

Moth Evening

An erroneous title because although the moth traps are set up on Friday 29th August, the actual identification and recording takes place on Saturday morning.

Thank You

Thanks must go to Susan Muckle who wrote to several camera companies on our behalf, and received a free camera from Pentax. Susan now holds the title of 'Scrounger of the Month' for July.

Ray Harper

Foxglove Wild Flower Walk

The Foxglove wild flower walk held on Saturday 7th June proved to be a resounding success. A small, select group turned up on this warm and sunny day: Heather Johnson, Elizabeth Dickinson and friend, Susan Muckle, Susan Harper, and Brian and Janet Bailey. No matter that we were a small group, this enabled us to go at our own pace, and everyone was able to hear about and see what was



being pointed out on the way, to observe closely, discuss the flowers and chat amiably.

The walk was led by Marion, who, although she claimed to be 'no expert' on wild flowers, managed to reel off the

Latin names of most flowers that we saw, and proved to be very knowledgeable about the subject. We were taken to a variety of habitats, including pond areas, woodland, and heathland and river banks, where we saw a dazzling array of different kinds of flowers, including a spectacular display of Northern Marsh Orchids.

It was interesting to hear about the derivation of some common plant names such as Herb Robert, named after a botanist; Lady Fern, which has 'frilly pinnies' and spores shaped like hockey sticks; and Lousewort, which was formerly thought to cause ticks on sheep.

We were informed that animal names such as dog and cow as prefixes to plant names were in the past thought to be inferior plants, for example Dog Violet as opposed to Sweet Violet. Entertainment was then provided when the only male member of the group asked if the same reasoning applied to plants such as Lady's Mantle. Marion quickly retorted that this was used as a medicinal plant, taken to relieve menstrual pains. No points scored there, then!

As we wandered around, Marion pointed out many plants of interest, including those that the most adventurous of the group might like to sample, including Pignut, and Ramson flower buds.



On the heathland we were interested to see Bluebells amongst the Bracken, an indicator of an ancient woodland area, also the last remaining Primrose, first spotted by Marion on January 2nd this year! The only minor disappointment was that although we scoured the heathland, the very pretty and distinctive purple/white Eyebright had finished flowering. However, Marion was delighted to find some additional plants not bargained for, such as Mouse-Eared Hawkweed.

On the walk we were able to observe 52 different kinds of flowers, and as the pièce de résistance at the end of the walk, a wolf spider was spotted amongst the undergrowth. For everyone, the walk was extremely informative, interesting and thoroughly enjoyable.

A big 'thank you' to Marion and can we come again?

Sue Harper.

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Moth Night at Marne Barracks

At 7.30pm on the dull Friday evening of 6th June, Friends of Foxglove Covert arrived at the entrance of Marne Barracks to meet moth experts Charlie Fletcher and Jill Warwick. Tony Crease led us through a maze of tracks into Marne's woodland and scrub areas. Nine moth traps were set at various locations. Three intrepid moth hunters volunteered to return to deep and darkest Marne at dawn to disconnect the light generators and close the traps! It had been a warm, moonless night, with a little soft, gentle rain falling, when the weary hunters returned at 4 am. But all tiredness vanished when they saw all nine traps contained moths, many brimming with them.



Swallow Tail Moth

At 7 am on Saturday morning the full team assembled at Marne Barracks to be involved with the recording and species identification of the moths. Everyone, including our experts Charlie and Jill, were amazed and excited at the large haul. There was everything from minute micro-moths to huge 'mouse size' Hawk Moths, which will happily sit on our hand. Thanks to our experts, over 100 different species of moths were recorded, a fantastic result for our Moth Night at Marne.

Heather Johnson

Cape Wrath 2008

The trip this year was the 16th main expedition to the range since 1993. Having access to the Royal Marine patrol boats provides the team with a unique opportunity to count and ring seabirds along the 16km of cliffs from Faraid Head, where we are accommodated, to the Cape Wrath lighthouse. John Bell and myself have been part of the 10-person Catterick team from the outset, and are usually joined by four other seasoned observers from NE Scotland.

The breeding seabird population has changed markedly over the years, and it was in 2004 that we first noticed a dramatic decline in numbers. At the time, we expected it to be a blip which would quickly recover. Subsequent years have shown that this is not the case, and despite a minor recovery in 2005 the last two years have been disastrous. This year was no exception.

All species seem to be affected and although there is mixed evidence in some places, the facts are that almost 50,000 auks, gulls, shags, kittiwakes, puffins and fulmars have disappeared from the ledges. Small numbers of eggs had been laid this year in some areas, but these failed to hatch as adults deserted, due, it seems, to a total lack of food availability. Thankfully, some organisations are finally taking notice, and in the past week the subject has been covered in some detail in the national newspapers and on television. This is long overdue.



One of the very few breeding adult Razorbills with a chick carefully protected beneath her wing.

The reasons for the food shortage and whether it is caused by climate change, over-fishing, or a combination of both, is being investigated. I am told the problem will take years to unravel. What is clear is that the deafening cacophony of sound and rancid smell of guano so routinely associated with these major colonies in former years has been replaced by an eerie silence. It is a depressing experience.

Tony Crease.

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Flowers, Moths, Volunteers, in fact a general ramble on!

Having started at Foxglove Covert in September of last year, I waited the winter through with anticipation to see all the flowers and plants that everyone told me would be coming through in

Spring. I have not been disappointed. This Spring, which was quite warm early on, has been beautiful. From the first primroses, (which were actually in flower on the 2nd January!) through the Bluebells, Violets and Pignut, to the Butterwort, Marsh Orchids and Water Avens, Spring has turned to Summer through every shade of wild flower. It has indeed been beautiful. From rare things such as the Butterwort and March Cinquefoil, to the ubiquitous Tormentil, it has been a pleasure to greet each flower in its turn. At the moment, the grassland in the middle of the moorland area is covered in Buttercup, red and white Clover, Tormentil, Mouse-ear, Meadow Vetchling, and Eyebright. All are common plants maybe

- but also certainly beautiful.



Going onto more beautiful things, I'm now going to wax lyrical about moths! I started using the moth trap in the back

garden of the Field Centre at the end of March, and, yes, I did prepare for my first catch with pen and paper, moth ID book, and a feeling of eager anticipation. Alas, on opening the trap, I found not one moth to record. Not one. What a disappointment! Never mind, since that first time we have caught moths every week. Not so many at first, to be sure, but that helped with the honing of new skills. Shortly after this sojourn into the world of moths, Ray Johnson, from our volunteer group, became involved, as he was also interested in finding out more about our night-time winged visitors. We now have a regular group of 'moth-ers' meeting on a Thursday morning, and a jolly good time we all have. The highest number of moths caught on a single night has been 69, (not including those pesky little micro-moths!). Our most spectacular catch? Well, you could choose between something as wonderful as the Poplar Hawk moth, Purple Thorn or Brimstone, or you could veer towards True Lover's Knot, Peppered Moth, or Dark Arches. In other words, EVERY single moth is spectacular and intricately patterned and coloured. In May, we caught a moth called a Ruddy Highflyer, which had not been seen in Yorkshire since 2004. It is verified as a site record and also a vice-county record. Hurrah for the Foxglove Moth-ers! We are all looking forward to Foxgloves' Moth Night on 29th August. Really it is a 'Moth Morning', as it will be on Saturday 30th that the traps are opened and we shall be having our fun identifying the myriad catches.

In between all this flower-watching and moth-catching there is also a huge amount of work that is done on the Reserve. This couldn't be accomplished without the volunteer group. The volunteers do a lot of work that is obvious, as in the installation of the new marker posts and making boardwalks over muddy areas, but they also do a lot of work that isn't so obvious. This newsletter, for instance, or talking to people at an art exhibition or coffee morning. Without them, Foxglove would be a poorer place. Over the last 6 months or so we have had an average of 16 volunteers turning up every week. They usually do a range of practical tasks such as weeding, strimming, pruning, plant ID,

and path maintenance. If you're reading this and have thought about volunteering but haven't done it yet, give it a try: you just might enjoy yourself! Our group usually works hard and has a good laugh at the same time. Long may it continue. Thanks to them all.

Marion Hannaford

Bird Ringing Trip to Cyprus - April 2008

Sometimes in life you get the opportunity to do something different and you have a choice to make, do you go for it or not?! I was offered just such an opportunity to go to Cyprus on a two-week bird-ringing expedition organised by Bird Life Cyprus and R.A.F.O.S (Royal Air Force Ornithological Society). The aim was to record birds passing through Cyprus during the Spring migration to their breeding grounds further north. It was to be a two-month survey, and the group organised by Tony Crease consisted of eight people who would ring birds over the first two-week period. We were to be based in Akrotiri and would ring birds in the surrounding area.

I decided to go. I love wild birds and looked on this as a wonderful opportunity to see a variety of birds I would never see in England. I was not disappointed; I was able to ring 19 new birds, and in all saw a total of 44 new birds. Exciting stuff! We did not see one finch of any description so, no Bullfinches, Chaffinches, Greenfinches,



etc., also, no Blackbirds or Thrushes. However, to remind me of home, I managed to ring some Great Tits! We did see and ring a whole host of different warblers, from a fabulous male Barred Warbler to a Bonelli's Warbler. There were also some interesting buntings, shrikes and waders. Every day was exciting, wondering what birds we would get. Every day we ringed new species - the trip definitely had the wow factor for a birder.

One day we saw a huge flock of wild Flamingoes fly over, another day I sat for 20 minutes and watched 4 Rollers perform from a telegraph line just in front of me. We drove along the road bordering the cliffs on R.A.F Akrotiri and had superb views of Eleonora's Falcons. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were seen regularly in one of our ringing areas and I felt we had seen every variety of

Yellow Wagtail in existence. Hoopoes, with their fabulous crest, were common, along with Wrynecks, which we seemed to catch in our mist nets in abundance.

Was I glad I had gone? Absolutely! The 4:30am start to the day was tedious, as was the water rationing, but the rewards were worth it. We had a lot of fun, a lot of laughs, but most of all we handled some fabulous birds and we made a significant contribution to the survey by ringing well over a thousand birds.

Jenny Wood

Moth Hunting at Foxglove

Do you think moths are small drab brown insects whose fat grubs eat holes in your best woolly jumpers? Well, be prepared to be proved wrong. Many are brightly patterned, and their sizes and shapes are more varied than those of butterflies. Britain's largest resident moth is the Privet Hawk moth, which is as big as a small mouse, and the immigrant Deaths-head Hawk moth even squeaks like one!

We have been trapping and recording moths since the beginning of April, using a Light Trap. The moths are attracted to the ultraviolet emitted from a Mercury Vapour Discharge Lamp. The trap is based on a lobster pot principle and the moths rest safe and sound until the morning, when they are identified, recorded and released unharmed. Marion, one of the Reserve Managers, sets the trap every Wednesday evening. Ray Johnson joins her every Thursday morning at 9.00am, and recordings are taken. Moths fly best on calm, balmy nights. The highest number of recordings on one single night at Foxglove has been 91 and the lowest has been just one moth.

If you would like to meet some of the Foxglove moths, please join Marion and Ray every Thursday at 9am at the Field Centre.

Heather Johnson

Adopt-a-Box Sponsorship

Thank you to all those who support our reserve by sponsoring either a bird or a bat box. We are still a little way off fulfilling our quota this year. 72% of our bird boxes are sponsored, and bird sponsorship has been steady since the beginning of the year, but only 30% of our bat boxes have been sponsored. If anyone would like to become a sponsor, they should contact Marion for details.

I have had a couple of hairy moments, taking photos in the woods in areas where the trees are not brashed, and jumping about on the beck to take snaps of the boxes under the foot bridges.

Adopt-a-Box Birds

This year we introduced two dates where adopters could

accompany Tom to check the boxes, and we have decided to keep this as a regular part of the Adoption calendar in 2009. Over the winter 156 boxes were checked and where necessary cleaned out, repaired and in a couple of instances replaced. We entered this year with some optimism, as ringing totals of the species most likely to use the boxes were high, but the preliminary results show a different picture. The highlights to date are:

- we had three new species using the boxes, namely Robin, Grey Wagtail and Marsh/Willow Tit. The first two species raised young, but the Marsh/Willow Tit failed before we could identify it or the young were large enough to ring!
- there were 31 pairs of great Tits using the boxes, this was down on the 35 pairs recorded in both 2005 and 2006, but more significantly, the number of chicks recorded was 50% down on previous years
- in contrast there were more pairs of Blue Tits than in previous years and the number of chicks was close to the previous years

Whilst we have completed the ringing of the chicks, the full extent of this year's breeding 'success' will not clear until we have been round all the boxes again to check for ringed chicks that have failed to fledge. Experience from around the area would suggest that the shortage of suitable food in the earlier part of this year has led to the decline in number of eggs laid and chicks raised per nest when compared to previous years.

Adopt-a-Box Bats

With a changing countryside, bats rely on much smaller habitats than before. The country is no longer covered in trees. Bats are resorting to buildings and man-made boxes to live. Bats prefer to live in dead wood, nooks and crevices, but unfortunately most woodland is managed in the UK. As dead wood is removed, it is therefore necessary to simulate their habitats by putting up boxes. Bats are protected by law because their population has been, and still is, declining.

Top 5 things you should know about bats...

1. They are the only mammal that flies.
2. The smallest species weights the same as a 2p coin.
3. Bats only have one baby a year.
4. Bats can eat up to 3000 midges a night.
5. They can live for up to thirty years.

Tom Dewdney and Susan Muckle.

Volunteers

Volunteers work at Foxglove Covert every Tuesday. If you have not been before, and would like to join us, you will be made most welcome. If you work during the week, you are welcome to join those who come in on Saturdays.