

## A Great Experience!

In June I went on work experience at Foxglove Covert. I love visiting Foxglove and I am training as a bird-ringer at the reserve, so I was really pleased when I was accepted there for my work experience placement.

I was at Foxglove for two weeks, and all the staff and volunteers were extremely friendly and welcoming – volunteer days with everybody working on tasks around the reserve were lots of fun. One of my favourite tasks was to fill up the bird feeders around the reserve which I did most mornings. Another really exciting thing was seeing the bees swarm several times during my placement, which was amazing to watch,

especially as I'd never seen bees swarm before.

A new activity for me was replacing old fence posts – this was challenging but very rewarding. When fence posts become rotten they may fall causing damage, or giving the cattle a chance to escape. So



Swarming bees

we went round checking all of the fence posts, and if any showed signs of being rotten, we removed and replaced them with new ones. I enjoyed doing this and learnt many skills and found new muscles in the process!

During my second week at Foxglove, I saw my first ever Water Vole! I was incredibly excited to see it on the wetland when it suddenly ran across in front of me – I also found a Water Vole hole entrance complete with fresh droppings. One morning I did a wild flower survey with some of the volunteers – I learnt so much from them and we found so many beautiful flowers.

Foxglove is an extraordinary and very special place and it was a privilege for me to work there for my two weeks work experience. I'm really grateful to all the staff and volunteers for making me feel so welcome and teaching me so much – thank you, I really enjoyed it!

*Alicia Hayden, 15*

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: foxglovelnr@btinternet.com  
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## Dragons and Damsels

Often seen as little more than a flash of colour before disappearing, to many dragonflies remain something of a mystery, but spend a little time on a sunny summer's day by a pond or lake and you would be surprised by how many of these colourful insects you can see.

All dragonflies belong to the order Odonata but are then split into two sub-orders, the true dragonflies (Anisoptera) and damselflies (Zygoptera). True dragonflies are robust insects: strong flyers that keep their wings out-stretched when at rest, their large compound eyes meeting on top of the head.

Damselflies tend to be smaller and slimmer like coloured matchsticks with a weaker, fluttering flight. They fold their wings along their abdomen when resting and have eyes that are clearly separated on either side of the head. Today's dragonflies have evolved from ancestors that were flying over 300 million years ago.

Adult dragonflies must search out a source of fresh water in which to lay their eggs and spend the larval stage. Depending on species dragonfly larvae live for between 1 and 5 years before emerging as an adult. Adult life is relatively brief, being only a few weeks; in this time they will mate, lay eggs and complete the life cycle.

Although harmless to humans, dragonflies are highly developed hunters, feeding on other insects by catching them in flight. With extra large compound eyes they have excellent vision for locating their prey. Each of the four large wings moves independently allowing them to hover, fly forwards at great speed, or manoeuvre sideways and backwards. Hairs on their legs help create a basket in which to scoop up their prey, before devouring it with large sideways-hinged jaws.

The varied wetland habitats of Foxglove Covert make it an excellent place to observe these fascinating insects. Over a summer 16 different species can be seen and dedicated walks at the 2015 Festival of Nature gave people the opportunity to learn a bit more and see the insects close up. This stunning female Emperor was surely the star of the show.

*Keith Gittens*



Female Emperor Dragonfly



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## From the Editor

Autumn is a time to catch our breath after the busy summer when so much of the recording work takes place at Foxglove; we have reports on birds, flowers and dragonflies in this issue of Undergrowth. Autumn also gives us chance to return to some of the practical tasks of habitat management on the reserve; all are welcome to join the monthly Worky Days which start again in November. It is a beautiful time of year and Glennis's article reminds us to stop and look at the amazing colours on the reserve at the moment, from a different perspective.

A big thank you to everyone who has contributed to Undergrowth with articles and photographs. If you have any suggestions for what you would like to see in future editions, or if you would like to write an article and share your experiences of our beautiful reserve, please get in touch with me through the Foxglove office.

*Catherine Hayden*

## All Change

At the end of July we said goodbye to our Senior Reserve Manager Adam Edmond. Adam had been at Foxglove for four years, initially working with Sophie and then as Senior Reserve Manager. In addition to being a keen naturalist, bird ringer and biologist, Adam always had the interests of the Reserve at the forefront of his management strategy. He demonstrated sensitive and caring management skills and worked with a variety of groups, from schools to specialists, regular volunteers and members of the public, always promoting the ethos of the reserve. He also gave many extra hours to a variety of activities but



Adam, Stacey and Matt

especially to bird ringing where he was a valued member of the team. We are very grateful for the important contribution he has made to Foxglove. Adam has left to train as a teacher and is based at Harton Technical College, South Shields where he will teach Biology with some Physics and Chemistry. We are sorry to see him go and wish him every success in his new career.

We have also said au revoir to Stacey Adlard who has been a welcome addition to the Reserve for the summer. We have enjoyed having Stacey with us. She has fitted in well with the management team and the volunteers and has been actively involved with the running of the Reserve. Stacey will be returning to work with the British Antarctic Survey Team again this winter. We wish her well and hope to see her at Foxglove again next year.

Lisa Allen has been appointed as our new Reserve Manager to work alongside Matt Fitch. Lisa has a background in Environmental Science and Ecology and has recently worked in the Dumfries Museum and Tolbooth Arts Centre, Kirkcudbright. We welcome her to the Foxglove team and hope she will be happy in her new role.

*Ruth Farrow and Glennis Walton*



Lisa Allen, our new Reserve Manager

## Come and join us at the Foxglove Christmas Party!

at Wathgill  
on Wednesday 16th December  
7.15 pm for the meal at 7.45 pm

Enjoy an evening of festive fun with Full Christmas Dinner, quizzes, raffles, live music and more!

All welcome - bring along a friend

Tickets £12 - Available from the office or Book through the Events section on Foxglove Covert website

Please book by 30th November



## Winter Worky Days

Old coats, waterproofs, wellies and socks, hats, thick gloves and camera. All sorted, ready to head off to a Winter Worky Day at Foxglove! Volunteers young and not-so-young join together to carry out habitat work on the reserve, no matter what the weather (well, almost no matter what the weather). A day of chatter, putting the world to rights and laughter; a day of catching up with everyone. Trees to cut, branches to drag, Brambles to trip over and Gorse to clear. Loppers and saws needed to cut branches into manageable pieces for burning. The expert fire-tenders will get a good fire going so all the brash can be burnt easily.

Starting time 10am, hot lunch about 12.30pm and then back to work. Sticky buns and a cup of tea about 3pm and head home to give the washer a good work-out and have a soak in a warm bath!

If you would like to join us, you are most welcome. Please let Matt and Lisa know so they have an idea of who is coming and numbers to order for lunch. We look forward to seeing you at some of them!

*Elizabeth Dickinson*



Winter Worky Day bonfire

## Botanical Treasures

I was asked to take guided walks around Foxglove on the Festival of Nature weekend, so along with regular volunteers Geoffrey Wilmore, Ann Luxmoore and Chris Meek, we set off on our botanical expedition.

We started in the woodland in front of the Field Centre, pointing out a variety of different ferns including the rare Narrow Buckler-fern. Investigating the scrapes we found a phenomenal botanical diversity; lots of species here including Greater Spearwort, Common Fleabane, Gypsywort, and Galingale that are not common elsewhere in

North-west Yorkshire, also a couple of interesting hybrid rushes, which are generally overlooked in the county. Moving on towards the larger ponds we saw Wild Basil, another uncommon plant, on the edge of the boardwalk.

The footpaths around the assault course revealed a very rare three-way hybrid Tormentil called *Potentilla x mixta*. We also noted the beautiful rayed form of Knapweed and two similar members of the Pea family: Hairy Tare and Smooth Tare.

On the relatively new skid-pan area which had been cultivated and seeded with arable weeds, we found Wild Madder, only the third record of it in North-west Yorkshire. This species, like the Wild Parsnip and a few others, seems to be moving northwards due to global warming.

Leaving the woodlands we went to the moorland section of the Reserve with the relatively species-poor dry grasslands and banks, finding both of the smallest grass species, Silver Hair-grass and Early Hair-grass. Just off the path we visited the mound, the site of a spring whose water is so calcareous the calcium carbonate precipitated from it builds up into a conical mound. The species here reflect the highly calcareous nature of the soil and we had the uncommon Broad-

leaved Cotton-grass, Few-flowered Spike-Rush, Grass of Parnassus – a pretty white flower, not a grass at all – Marsh Valerian and lots of Bogbean which is dominant over the whole mound.

On the way back to the Field Centre we visited more ponds on the south-eastern side of the Reserve, where we found some quite rare species: Pillwort, which despite looking like a grass is a small water fern and Marsh Stitchwort, with only seven previous records in North-west Yorkshire. We also noted Floating Club-rush and the small Adder's Tongue Fern on the drier ground between ponds.

On the path nearer the Field Centre we spotted the Lemon Scented-fern and the hybrid between Common Spotted Orchid and Northern Marsh Orchid; a good find at the end of a lovely walk through the Reserve.

*Linda Robinson*



Greater Spearwort

## The Language of Nature's Palette

Having retired from a career in teaching, it is impossible not to see the benefit of close observation. From their very first outings beyond the home, young children examine and scrutinise their immediate environment. They gather and collect pebbles, acorns, conkers and feathers and are fascinated by small insects. Their attention is arrested by the different textures of tree-bark, the colours and scrolls of the Silver Birch and the spiralling and twisting forms of the Honeysuckle. Recording the shapes, textures, and colours of the natural world in drawings, paintings, prints, and sculptural forms, and encouraging the development of vocabulary and language to describe the images, is a rewarding experience. Imagine discovering, for the first time, a Buzzard's flight feather, or the jewel-like feather from the wing of a Jay ...

On entering the reserve at Foxglove Covert at this time of year, the striking image of a Rowan Tree beside the track, loaded with strident orange berries, captures the attention.



Gold and bronze Beech leaves

Almost immediately the leaves of another tree catch the eye, but different words are sought to describe its variety of hues. The Beech are a riot of golds and bronzes, the Silver Birch leaves tremble in delicate shades of pale lemon and green. Beside the lake an Elderberry is conspicuous with its rich burgundy foliage, contrasting with the knitted branches of a Bramble twisting around its base. Moving on along the paths and through the woodland glades, the emergence of fresh fungi reveals new colours, shapes and textures.

Walking through the various habitats of Foxglove Covert, we automatically look around, but only when we stop and study the infinite cameos within the canvas, do we begin to see the opportunities for developing and increasing our insight into the natural world. The challenge then is to find sufficient vocabulary to describe the range of Autumnal hues and tones in the palette, to paint in language and pictures, grasses, seed-heads, leaves, berries, ferns and bracken... in words and images beyond the biological identification of the species.

*Glennis Walton*

## A Weather eye on the Season

Many of us keep a weather eye on the fortunes of our bird populations and can pick up trends from what we see on the reserve or in our gardens. The 2015 Constant Effort Scheme (CES) totals offer a bit more as a result of the consistency with which the scheme has been operated on the reserve for 23 years, or 276 days, or 2898 hours – whichever way you choose to view it! We have had to work hard to achieve even average results this year; the conditions we endured in the early part of the season are reflected in the paperwork sent to the BTO. It shows that for 9 of the 12 CES visits the catch was affected by poor weather – either the wet or the wind! This compares badly with our experiences in most of the previous years.

Yet having felt that the summer was below par, when the numbers are crunched they show we did better than in 2014, which you may remember was particularly grim, and over the 23 years the results were entirely the average. 2006 was our best year with 2479 different CES birds caught; in 2015 we achieved 1780 with the worst ever being 1295. So, moderate as it has seemed there has been a little improvement in some species, although spread across them all it is not easy to detect which ones! Nothing stands out as a major success and the misfortunes of our Willow Warblers (60 from what used to be 300), Robins (47 from 200), Chiffchaffs (40 from 100+), Chaffinch (131 of 300) and Lesser Redpoll (2 of 150+) appear to confirm a slow and relentless decline. As has been mentioned before it seems to be the migrant warblers that are faring worst of all with Blackcaps and Garden Warblers suffering in the cold and inhospitable weather. Some finch numbers have tumbled too.

But we did ring 150 Pied Flycatchers, 74 Kestrels, 40 Tawny Owls, 33 Buzzards, 102 Lapwings and 15 Golden Plovers on the Training Area which is no mean achievement and helps balance the overall picture. We also found the first Barn Owl nest ever known on the Catterick Training Area and ringed the 3 chicks all of which fledged.

My sincere thanks go to all who worked hard to help complete the CES sessions and the nest box and pulli ringing. Great credit goes to the support staff and volunteers without whom we would never begin to accomplish what we do.

*Tony Crease*