

Stacey - 60° South

My season on Signy has been a busy one. Upon my arrival in November, at the small research station here in the South Orkney Islands, the breeding season for Signy's wildlife had already started. The penguins and other birds here must take full advantage of the short spell of summer weather and long hours of daylight, to give their chicks the best chance of survival.



Signy Research Station

The Adélie penguins arrive first and their eggs begin to hatch in late November. An Adélie penguin colony in the height of the breeding season is an incredibly smelly and noisy place - sometimes quite a sensory overload!



Adélie Penguin colony

The Chinstrap penguins breed a little later, but it is still not long before their tiny chicks also start emerging. I very much enjoy my work at Signy, keeping track of



Chinstrap Penguin and chick

how the breeding season is progressing, by counting, weighing and measuring the adults and chicks, to see what they are eating and how many survive. In addition to the penguins, I also keep track of the other wildlife - counting Fur Seals, Elephant Seals, Shags and Giant Petrels amongst other things. The data is added to the long term dataset for the island, which goes all the way back to the 1970s. With such a lot to do, the season passes at a surprisingly rapid rate. Already as I write this, we are several weeks past the half way mark, with only six weeks left before we close the station down and head back northwards. If I am lucky, my arrival back into the UK should coincide perfectly with the arrival of spring!

Stacey Adlard

Chicken Dippers?

In another volunteer spotlight interview, I met Jenny Francis, who has been a Foxglove volunteer since 2013. CH: *How did you come to be a volunteer at Foxglove?* JF: I had visited Foxglove Covert previously on a couple of organised visits, and been impressed by the range of habitats and species found here. I'd always had an interest in nature and conservation since I joined the Girl Guides as a child, but had never had time to become involved as an adult, due to family and work commitments. When I was nearing retirement, I decided to follow up my life-long interest, and get involved as a volunteer at Foxglove. I haven't looked back since!

CH: *What do you do in your role as a volunteer?*

JF: I started with the Tuesday volunteers group, clearing scrub, general maintenance and building bonfires. I went along on some flower survey walks and then volunteered to help with the administration of the 100 club and Friends of Foxglove. I have also been training for just over a year in bird ringing, which has been a challenge - to overcome my initial trepidation about handling the birds (and the really early starts in the summer!) but I absolutely love it! I like the way that the birds' safety and welfare is always paramount and it has given me confidence in handling a range of birds - from a tiny Goldercrest to a Peregrine Falcon chick. What an experience!

CH: *What do you like most about volunteering at Foxglove?*

JF: I come to Foxglove because I love it here, I am interested in everything that goes on and I enjoy coming in with no pressure or stresses. Everyone is so friendly and welcoming and I have made some really good friendships, which carry on outside of the reserve with meals, theatre trips and even holidays together. I learn a lot when I come here, there are so many experts, providing a never-ending resource of very knowledgeable people. I feel privileged to be part of the ringing group and am very conscious of how lucky we are to be able to ring such a range of birds both at the reserve and on other sites too, under expert tuition and with excellent facilities. The spring and summer last year - helping with the nest boxes, ringing chicks and being part of the CES (Constant Effort Site) scheme, was busy but very rewarding. I was surprised however, when I thought Adam asked me to go for some chicken dippers one day; how kind I thought, to offer to take me for a snack. It turned out we were going to ring some Dipper chicks!

CH: *Do you have a favourite part of the reserve?*



Jenny ringing a Dipper chick

JF: It changes according to the season, but Risedale Beck with the Woodland Walk is a particular favourite. Sometimes I just come for a quiet walk around the reserve, and I always find something different to see. I also enjoy bringing my grandchildren to Eco club and it gives me a lot of pleasure to see their interest in nature growing.

Thank you Jenny, for sharing your thoughts about Foxglove.

Catherine Hayden



Undergrowth

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The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

There is a definite feel of spring in the air. The Song Thrush is singing his song (twice over) and the Snowdrops are in full bloom in my garden. We have lots to celebrate at Foxglove too and in this issue of Undergrowth you can find out about everything from clever birds, to bodging, developments on the reserve and personal perspectives on volunteering at Foxglove.

My thanks go as always, to everyone who has contributed to this issue, and for those of you who haven't yet put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard - please get in touch with me through the reserve managers if you would like to write something for the next edition.

Enjoy the first fine careless rapture of birdsong this spring, while you put up your feet for a moment and read Undergrowth!

Catherine Hayden

Message from the Chair

On Thursday 11th February, Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve (LNR) AGM was successfully held at Wathgill camp. Tony Crease, Graham Newcombe and Elizabeth Dickinson were all re-elected to the Management Group (MG). Lesley Durkin, Lesley Garbutt and I were elected on to the group. As stated in the Constitution, the MG then elects the positions of Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. I accepted the proposal and became Chair, whilst Tony remains as Treasurer and Elizabeth as Secretary. The MG oversees the running of Foxglove and ensures that the constitution is adhered to. The members are Trustees of the reserve and focus on the governing principles listed in the constitution, the well-being and future of the reserve. I would like to thank all of the retiring members for their valuable contributions over the last year and look forward to working alongside the remaining members and those newly elected, to take Foxglove forwards through the next two years.

Already, meetings have taken place regarding the future of the LNR and education is at the top of our agenda for the coming months. In response to the introduction of a new curriculum, we will be reviewing our educational activities to ensure that they meet the requirements of the many groups that wish to use the wonderful facilities offered by Foxglove.



Plovers' Pool

It is an exciting time with the start of spring and it will be fascinating to watch the newly built wetland scrape develop over the coming months. The start of the bird breeding season is just around the corner and as I write the Tawny Owls will be settling into their cosy boxes across the reserve and

training area thanks to Tony, Robin and Martin. Fingers crossed that the spring weather is a little kinder to the wildlife this year and that the breeding season is a successful and productive one. One thing is for sure, no matter what the weather, the volunteers and bird ringers will have a busy time keeping on top of the never ending list of jobs associated with the running of such a popular and dynamic reserve.

Sophie Rainer

Every day is a good day to be at Foxglove!

There's nothing better than being at Foxglove on a fresh crisp Sunday morning, with birds chattering and the frost glittering as the sun shows through the trees.

I have recently started Warden Duty on a Sunday, and I have never looked back. Although sometimes it can be challenging, it never feels like a job because I enjoy it so much, and I always feel refreshed when I start my 9-5 job on a Monday. Weekends at Foxglove have a vibrant and relaxing atmosphere, as most of the maintenance work stops (excluding worky days) and visitors of all ages come from miles around to explore the reserve. Families visit with eager, fresh-faced children anticipating their next adventure. There is always something to explore no matter what the weather. Children dressed in raincoats and wellies, splash in puddles and find all kinds of creatures - from tiny ladybirds snuggled into the gaps in fence posts, to catching a glimpse of a flash of blue when a boisterous, clattering Jay declares itself as it darts through the trees in search of more peanuts!



The end of a good day

It is lovely to talk to the visitors, finding out how far they have travelled and letting them know what they can find on the reserve; the Kingfisher is almost always the favourite topic. Sunday is also our preferred ringing day (weather permitting) and it's great to see visitors getting to know more about what we do and how much our ringing data contributes to the overall picture of the survival of birds in the UK. Seeing the birds up close is a special experience and we always get visitors involved by allowing them, under close supervision, to release the birds back into the reserve.

Every day is a good day to be at Foxglove, however I feel especially privileged to work on a weekend and be able to welcome so many new visitors to experience a truly unique place.

Leanne Marksby

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Future Projects update

Many of you will be aware of the large pool Willie Metcalfe has recently created on the moor, for which the Management Group tried unsuccessfully to acquire funding, but which we eventually had to contribute £8000 towards out of the credit balance we accrued in 2015. This money was raised as a direct result of volunteers completing work which, in the past, we have often sub-let to contractors, or funds accumulated through all the little schemes you ran in 2015, which helped produce



Digging the pool

a substantial credit balance at the end of the year. After months of negotiation with Natural England – because the area is within the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement – we finally received permission in December to alter the existing habitat to what we have now. The intention is to create a shallow, level wetland, no more than 9 inches deep, which will be available to the waders that breed inside and outside the moorland compartment of the reserve. We hope you like what has been achieved so far.

A condition of the agreement we have with the MOD states that each year they will pay us up to £10k for “Green Works” in sections of the reserve not funded by the HLS; Graham and I have been battling for some time to get the money paid. We had no success in 2014 due to the change of contracts, but made a very strong case in 2015 for this contractual obligation to be met. It was with some surprise and personal glee

therefore, that early in February we were given the green light! As a result we have placed orders for £2k worth of dangerous, high-level tree surgery, £2k worth of bank strengthening and maintenance to the beck sides and to the wetland and scrapes, and around £5k for surfacing to the footpaths which have suffered serious erosion in places from the incessant rain this winter. Much of this work you will see going on in the next few weeks. The road into the reserve will also have some maintenance done to it which is an entitlement under the terms of the contract.

As a footnote you should also be aware that the local Semex Quarry, with whom we have been negotiating for some time, has agreed to provide 12 large stones, transport, manpower and equipment to create a stone circle on the moor! How it will look, where it will go and when, still has all to be decided – and you are welcome to voice your preferences – but it seems likely this exciting project will be completed, virtually cost free, some time around May 2016. We may be looking at a dawn breakfast on the moor on mid-summer’s morning!

So there is much to rejoice over and look forward to. Together with all the work achieved this winter, Foxglove is set to look its normal stunning self in the months ahead. The Management Group wishes to acknowledge and thank all those who have played a part in any of these projects.

Tony Crease



The new pool

Volunteering: a personal view

Volunteers come from all walks of life and with a range of abilities. Yet we all have one thing in common; we want to give. In the case of the Foxglove Covert volunteers, they give their time and knowledge to help improve the experience of visitors to this outstanding Local Nature Reserve.



Making a difference

It is very difficult to put a finger on why people volunteer. It is certainly not for financial gain - in fact if offered payment, most volunteers would not only decline the offer but probably cease working at that establishment! No, why one volunteers is a very personal matter and if questioned why we do it, most would not be able to give a quick answer.

Some reasons why people volunteer might be: ‘to make a difference’, ‘stop me going crazy’, ‘give me something to do’, ‘improve my knowledge’, ‘share my knowledge’, ‘lose weight/get fit’ (perhaps that’s just me?), ‘meet interesting and like-minded people’; the list goes on ...

At Foxglove, the reserve is managed on a daily basis by the Reserve Managers and if there is one skill that these managers have in abundance, it is the ability to get work out of the volunteers. Some of the tasks undertaken by us require a great deal of hard labour - tree felling and the moving of the logs spring to mind, but with words of encouragement, guidance and good humour, the volunteers knuckle down to the task. However, at the end of a day of good honest toil, the managers always say “thank you” and when that is sincerely given, it is accepted with good grace and stored away in the ‘good feelings’ box.

Would I encourage others to volunteer at Foxglove Covert? You bet! In the short time that I have been a volunteer, I have met some very knowledgeable people who are always willing to share their knowledge with me and I have learned so much. I have also been blessed with working alongside some of the most dedicated and industrious volunteers I could wish to meet. Puffing and wheezing my way through the day, they put me to shame with their hard work, yet never do I hear anyone chide me for being a slowcoach. All the volunteers understand that just completing one small task has made a difference.

John Graves

Outwitted by Birds

The bird-ringers were on high alert in the New Year: we had been told of a murmuration of Starlings near Catterick. We were given kind permission from the landowner to erect mist nets in order to catch the Starlings as they came in to roost in his bamboo plantation. After a ‘recce’ had been carried out and a plan developed, all we had to wait for was decent ringing weather and an email telling us when to go! It was on, then off, on, off ... then all systems go on 6th January.

We had an impressive team of bird-ringers and FGC volunteers and were all prepared for a massive challenge. We anticipated that we could catch hundreds, if not thousands, of Starlings. It was going to be a very busy time and a very long night. Wearing more layers than your average onion, and weighed down from all the extra batteries we had brought for our head torches, we were READY!

Nets were put in place from 1.30pm and the ringers checked these regularly, but kept disturbance to a minimum. We expected the murmuration to arrive from 3.45pm and we weren’t disappointed.

It was the first time that I had experienced anything like it. They came in huge waves, each one sounded like a strong gust of wind. I can’t describe the smell, but you couldn’t miss it as it filled the night air. Oh, and of course, thousands of birds drop copious amounts of guano and I don’t think any of us avoided being hit! It was breathtaking as we watched about 10,000 birds gather.

Birds began to drop and ringers went into action, equipped with as many empty bird bags as possible. Over time, it became apparent that this was no easy catch. The birds were landing .. but not in our nets! Robin was confident that the 20 birds in one net were secure and he left them to check further nets, only to return to find that they had all escaped. The birds were outwitting us and as time went by we tried various tactics, even using two men to hold the poles higher from the ground and flushing the birds towards them, but to no avail. These were clever birds!

As the weather deteriorated, we had to admit defeat. Our final count was 19 Starlings and 6 Blackbirds. Disappointing, but I would definitely do it again.

Lesley Garbutt



Coming in waves

Foxglove Bodgers

Bodging is a traditional wood-turning craft using green (unseasoned) wood to make chair legs and other cylindrical parts of chairs. The term “bodger” originated in the Chiltern Hills in Buckinghamshire where these highly skilled wood-turners worked in the Beech woods.

Traditionally, a bodger would buy a stand of trees from a local estate, set up a place to live (his bodger’s hovel) and work close to the trees. The bodger’s equipment was so easy to move and set up that it was easier to go to the timber and work it there, than to transport it to a workshop. After felling a suitable tree, the bodger would cut the tree into billets,



Ash Rocking Chair and rustic stool

approximately the length of a chair leg; the billet would then be split using a wedge.

Using the side-axe, he would roughly shape the pieces into chair legs and a drawknife would be used to refine the leg shape. The finishing stage was turning the leg with the pole lathe which was made on site. Once the legs or stretchers were finished, being of “green” wood, they required seasoning and chair legs would be stored in piles until the quota was complete. The bodger would then take their work to one of the large chair-making centers. The largest consumer of the day was the High Wycombe Windsor Chair industry and after completion the chairs were sold on to dealers, mainly in the market town of Windsor.

In the last 30 years or so, there has been a revival in the traditional country craft of pole lathe turning. The North Yorkshire group is the Foxglove Bodgers, who meet every

third Sunday in the month, weather permitting. We have twelve regular members: 8 adults and 4 youngsters under 16 (accompanied by their Dads). We are a recognised group and are registered with the Association of Pole Lathe Turners and Green Woodworkers – APLTGW. Our main activities include pole lathe turning, spoon carving, stool making, basic metal working – making our own carving knives, and bowl turning. Other activities have included coracle making, rope making, Ash and Hazel gates, coppicing, hedge laying, spinning and weaving. Our aim is to promote the heritage skills that are sadly in decline.

Anyone interested in coming along to have a chat and look at what we do, is most welcome. If there is a particular skill you would like to know more about or would like to ‘have a go’ then please get in contact through the reserve managers.

Our next large project is help setting up a Medieval Wood Workshop at Bolton Castle!

Chris Morgan, Foxglove Bodgers



Chris Helliwell, and friends