

Summer in the Southern Hemisphere

While the Northern Hemisphere endures the long dark winter nights, here at Signy in Antarctica it is summer. At this time of year the days are long, the temperature is relatively warm and the sun only sets for a couple of hours each night. In winter, temperatures at Signy can drop to -35°C, and the



Gentoo family

island becomes locked into the sea ice that extends across much of the Southern Ocean. The Antarctic wildlife takes full advantage of the summer conditions to breed. It takes about four months for the penguins to complete their breeding cycle, during which time the adult birds must return to the island, relocate their partner, build a nest, incubate their eggs and then feed their rapidly growing and ever-hungry chicks until they are big enough to fend for themselves.

I arrive at Signy in early November, in time to observe the hatching of the Adélie and Gentoo penguin chicks and the arrival of the Chinstraps, who nest a little later. By late December, only a month on, the Adélie and Gentoo chicks are already getting quite large. The Chinstrap penguins are currently busy incubating their eggs, which should start hatching any day now. My role here is to monitor the wildlife through the breeding season to see how successful they are, adding another year's data (counts, weights and observations) to the long term data set that now spans nearly forty years. Penguins are not the only creatures to be found at Signy. A variety of flying birds also come to Signy to breed, and the island provides haul-out sites for large numbers of non-breeding Antarctic Fur Seals and enormous Southern Elephant Seals. Counting and monitoring these also forms part of my work. The Elephant Seals that come to Signy are usually sub-adult males, who are not yet big enough to hold a territory on the breeding beaches at South Georgia, so spend the summer relaxing at Signy. With nothing else to do they pass the time noisily belching, roaring and battling with their neighbours. Sometimes there can be sixty of these creatures

(weighing up to four tonnes each!), lying next to the research station. Although charismatic creatures, the noise and smell can take quite a bit of getting used to!

My life in Antarctica is not all work. Although the workload can be very heavy, and at times seems to take up most of my waking hours, there are still opportunities for the odd day off here and there. One of the highlights this season has been a great morning sledging on Christmas Day, down a 1km long snow slope, with the aid of the skidoo to tow us back to the top of the hill for the next run! We also spent an exciting



Crevasse exploring

Sunday afternoon climbing one of our glaciers and abseiling down into the beautiful blue crevasse we found there. And we have been treated to some lovely sunsets, which provide a great opportunity to get out the cameras.

I return north to the UK at the end of the season, arriving back at the end of April - in time for my second summer of the year! By this time spring will be well under way, and I look forward to returning to lengthening days and warmer weather, to lambs in the fields, Bluebells in the woodlands and birds singing in the trees.

Stacey Adlard

Volunteer Focus: Retired Industrial Chemist Tony Cooper tells us about his role at Foxglove

How and when did you come to be a volunteer at Foxglove? When my friend Mike Bacon and I were looking to do some voluntary conservation work in March 2010, I remembered reading a newspaper article by Tony Crease extolling the virtues of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve. Fortunately the Reserve Managers were able to accommodate us on Thursdays rather than the more usual volunteer day of Tuesday ... and the rest is history.

What do you do in your role as a Foxglove volunteer? Pretty well anything that is required! I started off filling bird feeders and hoppers, and progressed to strimming and mowing, building dams, making and repairing steps, making and repairing boardwalks, tool & machine maintenance, coppicing (we are on our fourth willow stand now) and planting trees, etc. Now, I am involved in water management around the reserve – I have identified 10 drains on the Wetlands and 74 around the reserve which are subject to an annual maintenance schedule of rodding and vegetation clearance; so far 21 dams have been identified and there are new weekly maintenance schedules to check the inlet water flow into the Wetlands, to control the levels at dams using adjustable pipes and to identify where improvements are necessary. Biannual water sampling has commenced at 22 locations on the reserve to check for nitrates and phosphates. My elder son and I developed and manage a database to record details of Foxglove volunteers, along with a spreadsheet for stock and sales in the Field Centre which I analyse monthly. Our Coffee Mornings in Richmond Town Hall have been successful due to the willing assistance of the members of Team Cappuccino. My wife Lilian and I try to get to as many of the Winter Worky Days as we can.

What do you like most about volunteering at Foxglove? The opportunity to get some outdoor exercise and engage with lovely people. I hope that my involvement in this addictive place is helping the team to make a difference. Also, it is great to take ownership of certain projects and to be empowered and delegated to take them to a conclusion.

What's your favourite part of the reserve? That's difficult! I suppose that I should say the Wetland because it is so important and also very challenging to keep the water levels at their optimum.

Tell us something interesting about yourself: I have run 4 marathons and multiple half-marathons. We celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary during 2016. My involvement at Foxglove has given me developing interests in Moths and Ferns.



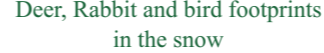
Tony working on the reserve

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The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

All is quiet on the reserve in winter – or is it? On a recent walk around Foxglove on a snowy morning, I was delighted to find evidence of all sorts of wildlife, in the form of footprints. Deer, Rabbit, Stoat, numerous birds, all leaving their tracks in the snow – showing that even in the depths of winter, the reserve is full of activity. Staff and volunteers have been beavering away with practical tasks and plans for the forthcoming season for what promises to be another memorable year of wildlife at our special reserve, celebrating its silver anniversary in 2017.



Deer, Rabbit and bird footprints in the snow

Welcome to your winter edition of Undergrowth!

Catherine Hayden

Message from the Chair

Winter is always a busy time at Foxglove as that is when most of the practical habitat work is carried out. This is because the ground layer must not be disturbed once the flowers start to grow and the birds begin to breed. There is a huge list of jobs to do, and the Reserve Managers and volunteers have been putting in a tremendous amount of work. The main task has been to coppice a block of willow, which is well under way. The ever increasing list becomes a race against time each spring as the days lengthen and the temperature gradually rises. The Winter Worky Days have been well attended and there are still a couple left, so if you fancy bringing the family out for a 'screen free' Saturday then please get in touch and book a place so that your lunch can be ordered.

Earlier this month, a grant seeker visited Foxglove and was extremely impressed with the facilities and the community spirit - so much so, that he has offered his assistance in obtaining funds. He has already submitted an application for a £5000 grant so we will keep our fingers crossed for a positive outcome. He will be coming along to the AGM on Thursday 16th February to introduce himself and to find out more about how the reserve is managed.

Planning for the Festival of Nature is under way and the Management Group is keen to hear from anyone who can offer support for the two-day event in July, which will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the reserve. The weekend will include a whole range of Natural History talks, walks and demonstrations. The summer BBQ will also be on that weekend so please get involved if you can - it will be lots of fun.

There will be a new Garrison Commander, Colonel Joe Jordan, starting at the end of January, and the good news is that he is a

cavalryman and will hopefully embrace the Local Nature Reserve and be proud to have such an amazing resource on his doorstep! We will be inviting Col. Jordan to visit Foxglove, along with our Patron Lord Zetland, as soon as he has settled in to his new role. Thank you to everyone for your continued support at Foxglove in whatever way. I feel certain we will have a successful 2017 and a wonderful celebration of wildlife and people working together, to mark our 25th Anniversary year.

Sophie Rainer

Starling Murmurations

Winter is a busy period for the bird ringers and during the Christmas break the Foxglove Ringing Team made the most of local opportunities to catch different species of birds at various locations. Some of the team were out in January at a Starling roost at a site which was known to be used by around 4,000 Starlings as an overnight roost in reed beds. The team prepared 3 net rides then put out the nets and watched as thousands of birds appeared to fall out of the sky over a period of around 15 minutes.



A beautiful female Starling

The catch, although purposely restricted, was a success, and resulted in 75 Starlings and 2 Wrens being caught in the specially designed mist nets. The birds were taken back to the nearest ringer's garage and were carefully fitted with a BTO ring, after taking biometrics including age, sex, wing length and weight. This information will be valuable to the BTO as these are now relatively scarce birds; the large flocks are deceptive as Starlings are a species in serious decline and now on the Red List for conservation. The birds were roosted overnight in a shed and released the following morning at dawn, close to the reed beds. On Saturday 21st January the ringers returned to the same roost where several net rides were cut and at dusk the ringers gathered to watch the murmuration. Once darkness fell, 78 Starlings were caught, along with a Wren, a Reed Bunting and two Blue Tits. They were all ringed and successfully released back into the wild. This brings the total number of Starlings ringed by the Swaledale Ringing Group to 715 of which 149 were caught this year, not bad considering it is only January!

Sophie Rainer

Looking back at 2016; a good year for Finches

However much we try, it is not until the very last day of the year when the final data is entered in to the computer, that we can really assess what kind of a year the birds have had. Species in the reserve are seasonal, and some show significant between-year contrasts. We go through periods where there is an abundance of one type or another, and usually it is the weather, food, and the quality of the habitat that pull the strings, not necessarily in that order!



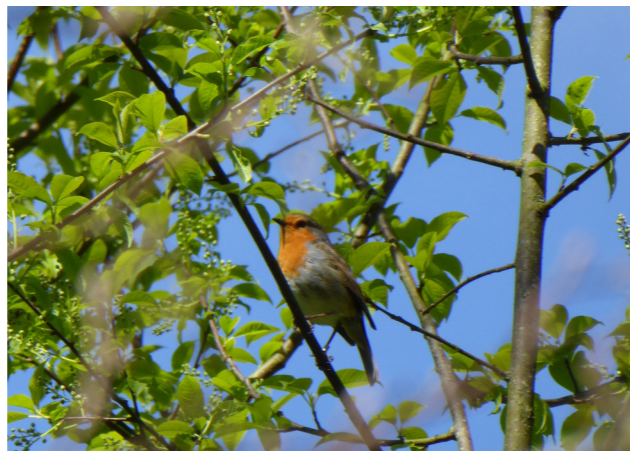
A male Siskin - finch numbers in general were good

The downside has been mentioned before with the titmice significantly reduced, Great Tits especially, but this will have been due to the lack of insects early on during the breeding season. Kingfishers have fared badly this year and Robins too. Tawny Owls at 7 equal the highest we have ever achieved. Redwings at 27 provided a much better than average total, but the warblers, with the exception of Chiffchaff at 151, had a noticeably moderate year.

As ever there are mixed fortunes but presumably it has always been so. The sadness is we have lost species like Turtle Dove, Sand Martin, Tree Pipit, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Tit and Spotted Flycatcher. It is 5 years now since we caught our last Green Woodpecker – although we can often hear the remaining pair marking their nearby territory out on the moor.

Tony Crease

Of the 25 years we have been ringing at Foxglove, 2016 came 7th where new birds ringed are concerned. We had a four-year period of very good results between 2004 and 2007, and the best year ever in 2011 with 3756 new birds. Last year, 2016, the number of newly ringed birds was 2887. This is a surprise in many ways as the summer season was relatively poor; but since then the figures have risen, mainly as a result of the increasing numbers of finches. Brambling for example, with 56 caught in contrast to zero in 2015, Chaffinch and Greenfinch numbers which are happily on the increase again, and Goldfinches that are flourishing. Siskin have bred very successfully on the reserve and 235 were ringed, the best number ever. Redpoll are abundant and a source of great interest to visiting birdwatchers.



Robins fared less well in 2016

The Scents and Sensibilities of the Changing Seasons at Foxglove

As the summer moves in to autumn, we note the disappearance of the Swallows and Martins hawking over the lake and wetlands, recently scouring the area for low flying insects. Most of the warblers have departed for warmer climes, and their numbers are down to single figures in the ringing room. A small, mixed flock of birds leaves the moorland. Some individuals alight on the flower meadow fencing wire. Linnets, Goldfinches, Whitethroats, and Chiffchaffs, along with several species of



Alder Jewels

the tit family make up this energetic group. They scrutinise the neighbouring gorse and scrub for seeds and insects, as they weave through the vegetation to lower ground.

Small and recently emerged Speckled Wood butterflies flutter through the glades, caught briefly in hazy rays of weak sunshine. The larger, darker shapes of Peacocks drift over the scrapes, selecting the later flowering Hemp Agrimony, and flap open their wings to display their exotic colours. There is a seedy and blowsy quality to the landscape, heralding the change of season.

The distinctive smell of newly cut hay drifts from the meadow as it is raked up into rows ready for collection by the farmer. In the adjacent woodland, the fungi are pushing through the rotting and decaying leaves, adding their characteristic pungency to the air. From time to time, at strategic points - along the path, at a post, a tree root, or on a low clump of grass - it is possible to detect the rank, musky smell of a Fox.

With the arrival of autumn, Saturday ‘worky days’ witness large groups of volunteers labouring on the reserve. The beguiling smell of sawn pine logs, wood chippings, and as work progresses, the aroma of wood smoke, will drift over the site as piles of brash are burnt.

But maybe the most arresting and attractive of all the seasonal aromas, is the smell of the Spruce and Scots Pines bordering the path to the Wetland hide. It is not surprising that alchemists throughout history have attempted to capture this smell in soaps, perfumes, and cleaning products; but nothing from a bottle or canister compares to the experience of catching the authentic scent from the trees whenever you pass by.

The psychedelic colours and sounds of spring, the rich and exotic sights and temperatures of summer, and the dramatic hues of autumn, are accompanied by a variety of fragrances, followed by the redolence of approaching winter.

And so the year turns full circle, and as the days become perceptively longer, the Robin begins to sing its plaintive, fluting song from a high branch, Blue Tits churr their agitated calls, interrupted by the insistent call of the Great Tit, and there is a sense of urgency and optimism in the air. Exciting new projects, aims and objectives, are planned by the enthusiastic, skilled and industrious team, that makes Foxglove so special.

Glennis Walton

Foxglove 25

Work began at Foxglove Covert in 1992, 25 years ago, and hasn’t stopped since; the countless hours of work by tireless volunteers has produced a rich variety of habitats that provides for an amazing diversity of wildlife and a fantastic experience for visitors. You really would be hard pressed to find a wider variety of wildlife and such a dedicated group of people working at any other nature reserve in the country.

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of Foxglove Covert this year, there will be a weekend of events over the 15th and 16th July. We have invited numerous brilliant local naturalists and wildlife groups to entertain and enthrall you with tales of lesser known wildlife found on and around the reserve. As well as this there will be several artisan craftspeople sharing their expertise with visitors and many activities and crafts put on for adults and children. Delicious food will also be available thanks to Ann and her team.

There are so many ways that you can get involved with this event, too many to list here. Please speak to the reserve managers if you would like to offer your assistance over the course of the weekend, and have any ideas for events or activities on the days.

We are very excited about this weekend of celebrations; we really want all to come and enjoy the reserve at the height of summer and to help us celebrate this milestone in the history of Foxglove Covert. We look forward to seeing you there to enjoy the best the reserve has to offer.

Adam Edmond

Keep in touch!



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Follow us on Twitter: twitter.com/FoxgloveCovert

Browse the Blog on the website at www.foxglovecovert.org.uk

Back by Popular Demand: Get Your Cameras Out!

In 2016 we ran a photo competition to find beautiful pictures for the 2017 Foxglove Covert Calendar. The response we had was brilliant, with over 100 photos for our judge to choose from and the finished calendar quickly sold out! So, back by popular demand: A Photo Competition to find pictures for the 2018 Foxglove Covert Calendar! The photos should be taken on the reserve at Foxglove Covert LNR or on the surrounding moorland. We will be choosing 12 landscape format photographs to be used in the calendar, illustrating the seasons and/or showing some wildlife.

We will also be selecting a suitable portrait format photo for the front cover.

We are looking for pictures from different seasons – a great excuse to visit Foxglove regularly to capture the changing views and wildlife on camera. Make sure you visit soon to catch the wonders of winter, followed by the sights of spring - and you can start sending in your photos any time from now!

From the photos selected for the calendar, there will be a prize for what the judges consider to be the Best Adult photo and Best Child photo (16 years and under).

Please submit your photos as prints (minimum 6” x 4”) in an envelope marked “Calendar Competition” to the Foxglove Office (in the Field Centre), by post to Foxglove Covert LNR, Wathgill Camp, Downholme, Richmond, North Yorkshire, DL11 6AH or email to foxglovelnr@btinternet.com with a file size of between 1MB and 4MB and the subject line ‘Calendar Competition’ by the deadline which is **Friday 15th September 2017**.

The competition is open to everyone. Please include a title and location for your photo(s), your name, contact details including a phone number, and your age if 16 years or under. You can enter as many photos as you like, but you must agree that your photos can be used in the Foxglove Covert LNR Calendar and any associated publicity. All photographers will be credited. For full terms and conditions email foxglovelnr@btinternet.com

Jennifer Care and Roger Foreman, Reserve Managers



Tawny Owl - the front cover of the 2017 calendar