

Bee Happy!

Allister and I are the present custodians of the Observation Hive at Foxglove Covert. We are also lucky enough to have our own bee hives at home too. Currently, we have five hives (colonies of bees) but this number will increase rapidly as we try to manage the swarming instinct of the bees in the summer.



Honeybee on Glory of Snow

We started bee-keeping in 2011 after coming to Foxglove Covert's "Introduction to Bee-keeping" weekend run by the Richmond and District Bee-keepers' Association (RDBKA) in May that year, after which we were hooked! We took charge of our first colony of bees that July and have gone on to attend the winter Basic Bee-keeping course and do the assessment to achieve our Basic Certificate. We have continued learning and developing our expertise; one thing we learnt very early on was ... bees don't read the same books as bee-keepers!!

What's the attraction of bees? Bees are fascinating little creatures and we love to watch them at work. They do so much for us... pollination being their most important role. Flowers vary in shape, size and colour, but nature has evolved bees with different lengths of tongues adapted to feed from, and pollinate, specific flowers and crops.

Some fascinating facts about bees:

- ⤴ Honeybee workers are all females.
- ⤴ A honeybee will make 1½ teaspoons of honey in her lifetime.
- ⤴ A honeybee will cover 12 square miles to collect a load of pollen. They need both pollen and nectar to have a balanced diet.
- ⤴ A load of pollen is approximately 10 mg.
- ⤴ Honeybees have been producing honey for 10 – 20 million years!
- ⤴ Honeybees will tap 2 million flowers to make one pound of honey.
- ⤴ A worker bee will live for about 6 weeks in the summer (its busy season) but up to 6 months over winter.
- ⤴ Honeybees are so named because these are the only bees that make a surplus of honey and store it. Other bees make enough honey-like fluid to feed themselves but no more.
- ⤴ Honeybees live in colonies of 50 – 60,000 bees and live all year round (either in hives or in the wild). Other bees nest with 50 – 400 bees and live for a season.
- ⤴ A honeybee queen can live for 3-5 years while other queen bees live for only one year.
- ⤴ Honeybees are mainly in decline because of pests and disease (such as the Varroa Mite).
- ⤴ Other bees are in decline because of a shortage of flowers to feed from and also places to nest. Neonicotinoids are of course of great concern to all bees.
- ⤴ Honeybees don't tend to fly in the wind or rain but some of the other bees can.



Swarming Honeybees



Honeybee on a Crocus

The honeybees in the Observation Hive at Foxglove give a small glimpse of what goes on in a hive. Look out for the bees doing their waggle dance – their way of communicating to each other where to find the good foraging.

If you come across a bee of any variety, crawling on the ground exhausted, give it a teaspoon of sugar dissolved in water and see the transformation!

Bees are fascinating insects - 'Bee Happy' and enjoy!

Alison and Allister Shepherd RDBKA

Local Honey from the RDBKA bees
is for sale in the Field Centre, £5 a jar.

The Importance of spreading the word through Education

Having enjoyed my days helping with primary school visits, I have got more involved with education at Foxglove this year and am now working with the education team on the Management Group. As a secondary trained teacher, now also working in primary schools, I feel that Foxglove has a huge amount to offer students of all ages and I am keen to expand to offering days for secondary level and even beyond.

After an inspiring education meeting earlier in the year, we have been rejuvenated into thinking in depth about what we can provide for educational groups visiting Foxglove. Yes, children love pond dipping and bug hunting but we hope this year to expand on that theme and develop more specific resources relevant to the curriculum. There is a fantastic range of habitats and biodiversity of which we should make everyone more aware, and our expertise in particular areas is phenomenal; we have a lot to offer!

For me, education is the key for spreading the word and promoting what Foxglove represents. With today's busy lifestyles it is easy to forget the importance of biodiversity and the benefits of being surrounded by nature to promote a sense of well-being. Children already enjoy coming to Foxglove but we want to make a day at Foxglove not only an unforgettable experience, but also the catalyst to engender a life-long awareness and enthusiasm for the natural world. After all, if children are not aware of our environment and our impact on it, there will be little left for generations to come.

Lesley Durkin

A Grand Day Out

During the school holidays our children and friends often attend one of the varied, enjoyable and fabulous activity mornings at Foxglove. From making bows and arrows, colouring in wildlife images, making bird feeders and collage pictures – the variety is endless! We have even used jelly pads to draw creatures and skulls which involved learning to use the equipment as well as being taught about the skulls. Now our children are old enough to bring their friends too and there are always new activities to do, which they all learn from and enjoy.

We have been attending these half-day activity mornings for the past 5 years and I couldn't help but reflect on how fortunate our family has been, especially the children, growing up with Foxglove Covert as a big feature in their lives. These sessions help to consolidate a lot of their wildlife understanding and appreciation. Of all the wide variety of activities on offer for family groups, I think a firm favourite is the owl pellet dissection, when the children hugely enjoy identifying what the owls have been eating! A lot of the kind volunteers who run these events have teaching backgrounds or a long connection with running events at



Childrens' activity sessions are popular in our programme of events



Busy doing crafty things in the field centre

Foxglove and in addition their wildlife knowledge is amazing. Many of these lovely people have become friends over time and the children and I learn so much in general conversation as well as through some of the more formal elements of the activity mornings.

The field centre has a lovely warm and friendly atmosphere which defies even the worst of weather. And if a child needs a change of occupation they wander off and peer at the exhibits or use the touch-screen.

It's certainly one of our family's favourite places for a day out!

Jai Mankelow

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