

Butterflies

Foxglove Covert is host to 19, of the 35, regular species of butterfly found in Yorkshire. Most are resident but some arrive each year, like the Red Admiral from the Mediterranean region, or the Painted Lady from North Africa. We monitor their numbers on a weekly basis between April and the end of September. This is done by following the same route each week through the various habitats found in the reserve. The count for each species is logged and at the end of the season all the data is sent to Dr Paul Millard, the Butterfly Recorder for Yorkshire, who enters it into a database for the County. Ultimately the information will end up on a national database, where analyses will give a picture of the health of butterfly populations throughout the UK. Unfortunately, 2016 was a poor year for butterflies, as numbers were down compared with previous records. I'm told that this is similar to the situation with moth, bat, and bird populations recorded here at Foxglove. However, we should not read too much into this because historic records show that populations of many species can vary widely from year to year. Hopefully 2017 will be a better season.

So, what's our most common butterfly? Well, probably the Speckled Wood, since it can be seen almost every week throughout the season and the dappled shade of our deciduous woodlands is the ideal habitat for it. I should mention that 10 years ago this butterfly would not have been present at Foxglove Covert. Reasons why they are now here in such large numbers (counts can sometimes be 40 or more) are anyone's guess - maybe global warming or possibly good site management by our staff and volunteers - who knows?! There are quite a few contenders for rarest butterfly, with low numbers recorded for several species each year, but my current favourite is the Wall Brown. It's not a rare species in general, but none had been seen here for three years, until two (a male and a female) were spotted on the reserve last season, which was a welcome return.



A pair of Wall Brown

For my part, I have been recording butterfly numbers on behalf of the reserve for around five years now, and I enjoy the challenge as it balances nicely with my other volunteering work here. I only got into butterfly recording because I have an interest in photography and

I just happened to know what they looked like. I initially became an assistant and subsequently took over when the previous recorder left. If there is anyone who might be interested in assisting or just learning to recognise different butterflies, then you are more than welcome to join me on my rounds. The route normally takes around two hours to complete.

John Smith

From Water Voles to Tawny Owl chicks – a good experience!

As part of my degree in Animal Conservation at Askham Bryan College, I am required to complete 150 hours of work experience with a relevant organisation. For my placement, I chose Foxglove Covert as it was somewhere I visited as a child on a school trip, and where I had volunteered before. From my first day at Foxglove, I was pleasantly surprised to find that this wasn't going to be a work placement where I would just be making cups of tea (although there is a lot of tea-drinking involved!) and cleaning up around the office. No, this was much more exciting than that. I have had many wonderful opportunities presented to me during my placements at Foxglove, from spending the evening ringing Buzzard chicks, to writing a press release for the newspaper, and getting involved with practical work. I have also got stuck in with the children's events, in which I have expressed my astounding creative talents (!) by making robins out of pine cones and supervising the children's pond dipping which usually resulted in a tadpole fishing competition!

During my time at Foxglove I delighted in the encounters I had with numerous creatures, many of which I had never seen before. But for me nothing compares with the sightings I had of the Water Voles. I could have sat and watched them for the entire 150 hours! This new-found passion has led to my desire to conduct a study on Water Voles at Foxglove for my dissertation, so I hope to be back again this summer! I have also really enjoyed my time working with and learning from the volunteers at Foxglove, all of whom were so welcoming and knowledgeable. I feel I have learned as much from them as I have in the first two years of my degree! The Reserve Managers, Roger, Jennifer, and Stacey made me feel so welcome and I felt that they genuinely appreciated my input. The skills and experiences I have gained at Foxglove are invaluable and will undoubtedly help me in my future career. I cannot thank everyone at Foxglove enough and I hope to see you all again soon!

Jade Quirie



Jade with two Tawny Owllets



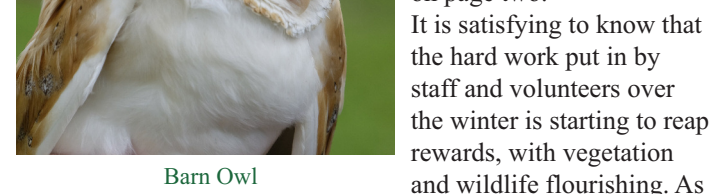
undergrowth

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The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

I always feel that summer has come when the Swifts return at the beginning of May; I can almost set my clock by them! Hopefully they will have a successful season, along with all of the birds found in and around the reserve at Foxglove - many of which appear to have made a good start; the number of owls looking particularly promising, which you can read about on page two.



Barn Owl

It is satisfying to know that the hard work put in by staff and volunteers over the winter is starting to reap rewards, with vegetation and wildlife flourishing. As we look forward to another busy season of recording, it is interesting to reflect on the many groups and individual species found at the reserve. With Foxglove 25 on the horizon, keep an eye on the website, and follow us on the blog, facebook or twitter, as we celebrate this special year!

Catherine Hayden

Message from the Chair

The website statistics show a definite spike to visitor numbers in April, most likely a result of the Coast to Coast episode that featured Tony Robinson spending a day at the reserve. If you haven't seen it yet, you can still view the programme on Channel 5 Catch-up - it is the fourth episode in the series. The reserve was well represented and the footage has encouraged many new visitors to the site.

Thanks to the blood, sweat and tears of staff and volunteers over the winter months, the reserve is beginning to look at its best, as the trees green up and the flowers start to bloom once again. The recent warm weather has meant a positive start to the year for much of the wildlife, and the mild winter has been kind to the invertebrates and small mammals which are a valuable part of the food chain. Roe deer have been seen regularly and the females will be giving birth to their young soon, so keep an eye out for them when you visit. The bird nesting season is well underway and so far, the bird ringers have reported encouraging results.

Behind the scenes, planning continues for the Foxglove 25 celebrations, with several VIPs invited to a tree planting ceremony. The Reserve Managers have also contacted a host of Natural Historians and organisations who will share their knowledge and experience over the two-day event in July. Fingers crossed for the one thing that is out of our control: sunny weather!

Sophie Rainer

Winter Coppicing

The Willow Carr running through the centre of the reserve is managed on a ten year coppice rotation. The area is split into five blocks, one of which is cut every second year; 2016/17 was a time to coppice the block close to the car park and the Field Centre, so this was one of our main winter tasks. This management creates a habitat mosaic with a variety of stages of growth, so lots of niches for our wildlife!

Coppicing involves repeatedly felling the same stump near to the ground and then allowing shoots to re-grow. This maintains trees at a juvenile stage and creates woodland with multi-stemmed trees. Traditionally coppices were managed on rotation to ensure a continuous supply of timber, as it is a highly effective method of producing a great deal of fast growing, sustainable timber without the need to replant.

Along boundaries and net-rides we sometimes pollard trees instead. This involves removal of the upper branches of a tree nearly back to the trunk, promoting a dense head of new growth. Pollards are a traditional method of marking boundaries. Although it can initially look quite bare, once an area has been cut, the soil is warmed by the additional light reaching the ground and there is an explosion of plant life as the seed bank is stimulated.



Work in progress

We also leave some trees as standards among the coppice to add to the variety of the habitat and to give an upper storey of vegetation. However, these need thinning so as not to produce too much shade, which could stunt the regeneration of the coppice stools. Wood piles are left in the woodland to provide habitat for fungi, shelter for small mammals and amphibians, and to encourage invertebrates such as beetles in to the area.



Finished!

Thank you again to all who helped with the coppice block – it was a big task and has made a huge difference. Now we wait to see what appears!

Jennifer Care

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: foxglovelnr@btinternet.com
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A Productive start to the Season

On the back of all the repaired and replaced nest boxes over the winter, most of which were put right by our band of skilled volunteers, we found ourselves well prepared for the start of the 2017 breeding season. I can only report on what we have seen so far in the 80+ widely-distributed owl and Kestrel boxes we have around the area – but, we have experienced an amazing occupation rate and the number for this year has to be amongst the best ever with over 20 Tawny



Good numbers of Tawny Owl chicks

nests, at least 10 Kestrels, and probably 9 pairs of Barn Owls breeding. Several boxes have been hijacked by Jackdaws and the occasional Stock Dove, but the potential for young fledged birds is very good indeed. Two Tawny Owl boxes, quite incredibly, had 5 well developed chicks – the highest number ever encountered. In addition we have located Grey Wagtail and Dipper nests, and the Peregrines locally, are also seemingly doing well. So, no complaints so far this year as we wait to see the moorland waders hatch and the start of the 600 or so small boxes. The weather plays a key role every year and it will be interesting to see what comes our way in the next few months, after the unusually dry conditions recently. I hear some pessimistic forecasts from the local farmers, but time will tell! The fate of our small song birds, we will be able to describe in more detail in the next edition, but certainly relatively few Swallows seem to have returned so far. With our Constant Effort Sites scheme (CES) summer programme just started, it won't be long before we get a feel for this year's returning migrants. Finally, a note on the Black Grouse which seem to be in reasonable numbers locally; there are many Grey Hens around and if we are lucky with the weather they should do well. Keep your binoculars handy!!

Foot Note: Two Barn Owl boxes we visited on 6th May, had 6 and 9 live chicks respectively which is indicative of the unusually productive season mentioned earlier. The total today stands at 80 Tawnies and 26 Barn Owls.

Tony Crease



An Owl's view

Ringling Waterbirds at Bellflask

In May 2007, a duck trap was installed by the Swaledale Ringling Team at a site near to Masham called Bellflask. The quarry site is managed by Brian Morland who very kindly allows the group to ring birds there throughout the year when the working quarry is inactive. During the winter months, the duck trap is set on most days and in the evenings the ringers check it and ring any birds found inside, before releasing them back to the wild. So far, the following birds have been caught and ringed there: 67 Moorhen, 25 Coot, 38 Tufted duck, 21 Teal, 63 Mallard - a total of 214 birds.



The Duck Trap - with Moorhens

At night time the quarry area is pitch black and can be a very peaceful and tranquil place. Head torches are necessary for the ringling, and the birds are measured and weighed in the back of a Land Rover. Some of the Moorhens are so hungry that they frequently return to the trap. During this last season, one bird was there almost every day and he became known as 'Morris' the Moorhen! It is interesting to see how this particular bird's weight fluctuated over the weeks and in cold weather it lost almost 100g in a day. Although a Moorhen is not a bird that you would expect to travel very far, a recent recovery proved that one of our birds had flown over 18km, only to be knocked down by a car in East Witton. The body was found in the road and the finder reported the ring number to the BTO (British Trust for Ornithology). This kind of information is so useful and often forms the basis of facts in bird guides, so please do check any dead birds that you come across for a metal ring, and report the details to the Reserve Managers, or direct to the BTO via their website. Sadly, more and more birds lose their lives on British roads each year, casualties numbering a staggering 240 million in the last year, according to a recent news report.

This year at Bellflask, numbers of Teal, Tufted Duck and Mallard were very low compared to previous years and the once common Mallard is now a species that finds itself on the Red List. On a more cheery note, several Mute Swans enjoyed visiting the trap and would wait close-by each evening, for some wheat! They successfully raised a single cygnet which also learned to wait for its dinner – from our food bank!

Sophie Rainer

Species – facts and figures

In the Field Centre, many people look at the Monthly Observation board before setting out for their walk around the reserve, or add their sightings to it afterwards.

Our species recording takes place throughout the year, by a dedicated team of volunteers. This is the conversation that you are likely to hear every Wednesday morning, as the volunteers identify the moths caught overnight: 'Try page 234.' 'No, it's too small/big', 'Wrong flight season.' And so the conversation goes on until the right identification is made: 'That's it, right flight season, right size!' Once all the moths are recorded they are entered into the Species Programme. During the year the list is collated and sent to the Moth Recorder for VC65, the area in which Foxglove lies. As we see in John's report overleaf, butterfly surveys are carried out regularly over the summer, and at the end of the season the data helps Butterfly Conservation to come to conclusions as to the well-being of the butterfly population.



Four-spotted Chaser Dragonfly

Similarly, all the bird ringing data from Foxglove, the training area and further afield, is sent to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Flower walks take place on the last Wednesday of the month and by March we are getting a little flower crazy and hunt for anything which is not black, brown or grey! However any flower must still pass the 'flower test' and be open. By the end of April the list of flowers has increased considerably and the flower volunteers are a happy group of people!

Eagle-eyed volunteers are always looking for any invertebrates and, like the flower walkers, they are desperate to find some by the end of April. Not forgetting the fungi and lichen ambles that volunteers take throughout the year too, adding to our observations.

It is amazing that we still find new species on the reserve. Recently when an old Ash trunk finally rotted and fell, it opened up a different vista down to Risedale Beck, and revealed a new fern for the reserve: Hart's Tongue Fern.

Although it is very good to find new species it is also satisfying to greet old friends as they flower, hatch or fly. Habitat management is encouraging species into new areas - Common Spotted Orchids have been found in places where they have not been seen before and the Early Purple Orchids are flourishing. Pepper Saxifrage is looked after very carefully in the meadow but it is also thriving near a net ride! Four-spotted Chaser Dragonflies were seen in large numbers on the lake last year and our Water Voles are enjoying the apples! Yellow Rattle seedlings are growing on the middle moor again this year, and continue to do a good job reducing some of the grasses, so



Common Lizard - soaking up the sun

enabling a wider variety of flora to flourish, which in turn encourages many more invertebrates. Common Lizards have been seen over the years but last year the number of sightings increased and we were able to take photos. Fingers crossed that they reappear this year when the sun comes out again!

To date there are 2606 species recorded on the reserve at Foxglove, including six new ones already in 2017. Many thanks to all of you who help with the species recording.

Elizabeth Dickinson



Common Spotted Orchid

Keep in touch!



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