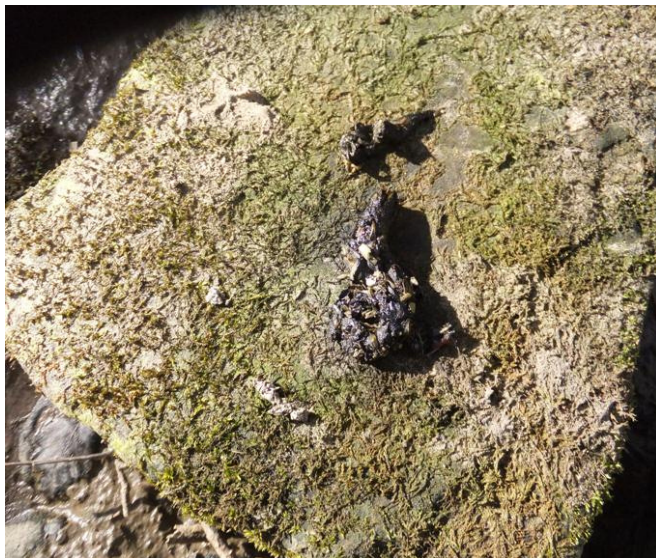


Scatologically Speaking

I was helping out with checking the reserve's Bat Boxes and it became apparent that finding droppings, or scat, in a box, was of significant importance; much could be deduced from the feel, look and smell of these droppings. If the droppings were dry and powdery then they had been deposited a while back, although since the boxes are cleared every year, they could be no older than that. Fresh droppings signified that the box was in use, and droppings which weren't from a bat could indicate that a bird had occupied the box and thus deprived a needy bat of a roost. I suggested that the boxes should be labelled 'Bats Only', but it seems birds cannot read.

Anyway, this got me to thinking about how often we know what animals frequent the Reserve, not by seeing them, but by the signs they leave. Tracks are an obvious clue to what animal has passed through, and those more knowledgeable than I can tell you the species, when it passed, and even how fast it was moving. All of this is excellent and useful information but droppings can tell us more.

I have often seen droppings left around the Reserve and have asked my companions what animal has left them. A quick examination by eye may elicit the response 'fox' and then go on to explain that by the colour and consistency, it is a fox that has eaten a lot of berries - or one that has eaten many small mammals. Fox poo has a characteristically strong smell, although I haven't personally noticed this. Another animal's poo that has a distinctive smell is that of the Otter. Otter poo, or spraint, is said to have a sweet-musky odour and is generally considered not unpleasant. Otters tend to leave their spraints in chosen areas on rocks, for example, and on closer examination can be seen to contain clearly visible fish bones and scales, with some other small bones, fur, feather and insect fragments sometimes present, dependent on the individual's diet.



Otter spraint

Other members of the Mustelid family (Badgers, Stoats and Pine Martens) also have their own special odour and may be identified by this alone. One member of this family, not native to the UK, is the Mink, whose droppings, when fresh, can readily be identified by their very unpleasant odour of rotting meat. Identifying the species from droppings is the least of what can be done; within a laboratory it is possible, amongst other things, to identify the state of health of the animal. So, next time you are wandering around the reserve at

Foxglove and you happen upon a volunteer or manager gazing almost lovingly at a pile of poo, stop and ask them what they are doing. You may be pleasantly surprised at the answer and will surely be assured that they are not 'scatty'!

John Graves

The role of Foxglove Trustees

In order to run Foxglove Covert there are countless hours of work put in by many individuals. Volunteers work hard to maintain the nationally recognised habitats, educate school children, lead guided walks, identify thousands of species and much more; there are simply too many tasks to list.

Behind the scenes volunteers also make up the Management Group, all of whom are trustees registered with the charity commission. Their job is to promote the reserve ensuring its continued success, source funding, manage staffing, and along with the Reserve Managers, devise a plan to manage and develop the many different habitats found at Foxglove.

The Management Group consists of people from both civilian and military life. We work hard to fulfil the responsibilities set out by the charity commission. We strive to improve the reserve, and are always working with many outside organisations to promote and provide for the needs of the reserve.

We work closely with the Reserve Managers to support their work. In discussion with them we can devise habitat management plans ensuring continued improvement of the habitats found at Foxglove. Personally, I benefited from this advice during my time as a Reserve Manager at Foxglove, helping me to deliver the projects we worked on when I was employed on the reserve.

As a member of the Management Group I feel privileged to work with so many experienced and knowledgeable volunteers; it is a pleasure to continue working for Foxglove Covert, the reserve is such a magnificent place to be enjoyed by visitors, volunteers and all.

Adam Edmond

“Why Be A Volunteer?”

It's not for money, it's not for fame
and it's not for any personal gain.
It's just for love of fellow man.
It's just to lend a helping hand.
It's just to give a tithe of self.
That's something you can't buy
with wealth.

It's not the medals worn with pride.
It's just for that feeling deep inside.
It's that reward down in your heart.
It's feeling that you've been a part
of helping others far and near.
That's what makes you a VOLUNTEER

Keep in touch!



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

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Undergrowth

Issue number 46 Winter 2018

The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

I hope you enjoy reading this winter edition of Undergrowth, as we celebrate the well-deserved achievement of being presented with the Sanctuary Award. We hear about the continuing dedication of our bird ringing team, as well as a lovely account of the group's visit to Norway last year.

2017 was another good year for adding to the species list, including some spectacular insects and gruesome fungi. Isn't nature wonderful!

Catherine Hayden

Message from the Chair

With the Christmas season over, it is time to plan ahead and look at the vision for the coming year. Foxglove is always evolving and the 'big picture' is vital in striking the right balance between recreation and wildlife.

We welcome Steve and Ian to the Foxglove team and hope that they enjoy taking the reserve forwards through its 26th year. They will be working both together and with the Management Group to produce and implement a Management Plan for the mosaic of habitats that make up the LNR.



Taurus and Lark

Since the last undergrowth, the Foxglove team has also gained another two members: Lark and Taurus, two Exmoor ponies, on loan from the North Yorkshire Exmoor Pony Society. They are quite a sight and have proven to be very popular with visitors; they have generated much interest in the local media and on the Foxglove blog. The ponies are beautiful animals to observe but are much more than just that, as they help to weed out the invasive species from several of the major habitats such as the heathland and the wetland; they even eat Gorse! Lark and Taurus are from wild stock, so visitors are asked not to approach or feed them. They will be staying on the reserve all year round and are extremely hardy, but will be moved regularly to ensure that they have plenty of food. In terms of future projects, 'improvement of the website' is first on the list. Although the website appears fine, due to its age, it sits on an unstable platform. The work to be carried out in the next few weeks will mean that the website can continue to function as it is, so there won't be any noticeable changes to the viewer. However, the work is necessary to 'future proof' the web pages that now have an incredible world-wide audience.

Foxglove is a labour-intensive site as it contains many different habitats, and the Management Group are very grateful to all

volunteers who give up their time to help make a difference. Whilst looking up the dates for National Volunteer Week I came across a lovely quote: *"Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart"*. I also found a poem, which you can read on the back page.

On behalf of the Management Group, I would like to thank all Undergrowth readers for your ongoing support and wish you a very Happy New Year.

Sophie Rainer

Sanctuary Award

November 22nd 2017, 7am. A cold, wet morning found me waiting at Northallerton train station en-route to London. I was wearing a posh frock, and make-up - both very rare, as anyone who knows me will testify! It needed a very special occasion to tempt me out of my usual fleeces, comfy trousers and trainers.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), part of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), manages the defence estates and supports armed forces throughout the UK and abroad to live, work and train. This was the 27th awards ceremony to showcase the achievements of teams and individuals working to preserve and protect the defence estates. I was lucky enough to be one of two representatives from Foxglove volunteers, chosen to go to the MOD in London, to receive the Sanctuary Environmental Project Award 2017, in recognition of 25 years of achievement at Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve. My companions were Sophie, Chair of the Management Group, Steve, Senior Reserve Manager, and fellow volunteer Ken Ezard. We met up with Colonel Mark Holden at the Ministry. We were also joined by Defence Estates Ecologist, Dominic Ash, who nominated the reserve. Dominic is a fellow bird ringer and planted one of the trees during the 25th Anniversary celebrations in the summer.



Receiving the Sanctuary Award

We were incredibly proud to accept the Award on behalf of all the individuals and organisations that support the Reserve. Thank you to the Management Group for asking me to go; I am very aware of the huge number of volunteers, past and present, whom I was representing. 25 years of effort can clearly be seen, making Foxglove the wonderful place that it is. Here's to the next chapter! The day went like clockwork and was very enjoyable, with good company and more than a few laughs along the way. We even survived leaving Kings Cross from platform zero, despite Steve denying its very existence ... but that's another story!

Jenny Francis

Bird Ringing 2017

I am writing this short piece as I close down the 2017 ringing activities. The figures that we juggled during the year can finally be reconciled, and the true picture of the ringing activities can be assessed. Bird ringing and CES was one of the key factors affecting Foxglove being accepted into the HLS scheme by Natural England. Few will know that the regional Natural England ornithologist visited the reserve and assessed what was being achieved before the scheme negotiations began. In many ways the ringing effort has been significantly responsible for the near £3/4m funding that the reserve has currently received through the HLS scheme. It may surprise some to learn that ringing takes place on the reserve no more than 30 times annually due to weather and ringer availability, and this includes



Coal Tit

the CES sessions. Many places like Foxglove now have permanent ringing teams who ring regularly on a daily basis, with staff specifically employed for the purpose. Our annual figures should be considered against this background. Results show that our activities have been hampered by the poor weather and although early spring and late autumn were particularly bleak, the summer months were nothing special either, with wet and blustery days which precluded mist netting and created the demise of many nests and young fledglings. That we managed to get the CES visits in at all was only by careful judgement and last-minute decision making. Our CES season, which is purposely comparable with other years over a 25 year period, showed only 3 years had been better. We caught 2338 birds, 1280 new and 1058 re-traps over the 12 visits – almost 200 birds for each session. In Foxglove generally, ringing throughout the year, we had experienced 8 better years out of the 25 which is reasonable, with 2599 new birds caught over the 30 outings. Some of these were short sessions with fewer nets open, but still the average catch for every visit was a minimum of 84 new birds. When added to the re-traps this soon takes the total for every visit close to 150.

Top 12 species, ringed over 25 years

1	Chaffinch	10316
2	Blue Tit	9724
3	Meadow Pipit	9010
4	Greenfinch	8749
5	Storm Petrel	7304
6	Willow Warbler	6280
7	Great Tit	5282
8	Sand Martin	5161
9	Robin	4250
10	Bullfinch	3899
11	Blackbird	3761
12	Guillemot	3625



Male Goldcrest

For all ringing within the UK, and not specifically at Foxglove, Swaledale Group processed 8400 birds, which does not include the 2000+ ringed in Norway. This placed 2017 in 13th position out of the 25 years, with 5915 new birds ringed bringing the total of new birds to 157,192. An additional 60,000 birds have been re-trapped or controlled bringing the species handled total to 144. So those who hear the alarm go off at 2.30am on summer Sunday mornings and make their way to the reserve, have much to be proud of. It is a long day and often hard work – but the results are there for all to see. The Foxglove data set remains the best produced in UK for the summer migrants and residents within the scheme. Quite precise figures are available over the 25 years for all species, some showing very little fluctuation but others that have sadly dwindled to nothing and have disappeared altogether. I have attached a short league table which shows the top 12 species caught during the 25 year period – for new birds only.

Tony Crease



Scarlet Caterpillar Club Fungus

Dividalen, Norway

Tree shaking is on the list to find and identify some moth caterpillars; the shaking should be good fun but I’m not so sure about identifying all those green caterpillars! The butterfly survey will be carried out in the summer months - will we beat last year’s 118 Small Skippers counted on a single day? Flower walks will continue each month, recording old friends that grow in the same place every year, along with one aim we have, which is to look for some flowers that haven’t been recorded for some considerable time. Linda Robinson, the VC65 Botany Recorder, is coming to look at our grasses, sedges and rushes. We will be checking for our Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle and our False Ladybird to see if they have stayed around or were only fleeting visitors. And keeping our eyes peeled for even more interesting finds ...! Thank you to you all for your hard work last year in adding to our species list. During 2017 we recorded 65 new species; a truly amazing number. Our species list now stands at 2687.

Elizabeth Dickinson



Norwegian hut

Our journey from Manchester Airport to our destination of Tromso, via Frankfurt and Oslo, took us just over nine hours. The station is situated in woodland where two sides of a steep valley come together, through which many birds travel during their spring and autumn migration. The wooden building that was our home for the week was basic, but clean. There was no running water or mains electricity, bottled gas was used for cooking and we slept in bunk beds in one main bedroom. The privy was a newly erected building, a small distance away, with a very, very deep hole and polystyrene seat. Pure luxury! Shortly after arriving, we began our week of 24-hour bird-ringing, being made possible because of the Norwegian, long daylight hours. We arranged ourselves into two teams and took turns covering late nights and early mornings. Ringers in Norway apply the ring to the left leg and their rings are made of much softer metal than ours. It was the first time I had seen and used elevator nets, which use a pulley system to hoist the nets up the pole and gently and gradually lower it to extract birds. They are roughly the height of three mist-nets and are very effective. The use of tape-lures is crucial to attract birds into nets and KB had a battery-powered ‘music room’ where bird calls are changed centrally and played through speakers on the site. He was continuously listening for birds flying overhead. During our week we ringed 22 species of birds, including Bluethroat, Three-Toed Woodpecker, White Wagtail and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker; a total of 1,366. It was a brilliant experience. My main memories would be experiencing the beauty of Norway, learning so much more about birds, seeing the pain and misery inflicted on Adam and Sophie by hungry mosquitos, KB’s mosquito-killing racquet constantly being swiped in the air, Adam’s daily walk to the river to fetch our fresh water, Tony adding to his poem each day, sharing evening meals together, and lots and lots of laughter courtesy of a fantastic lady called Vigdis.

Lesley Garbutt



The elevator nets