

Volunteer spotlight

Still looking for the elusive Kingfisher ...

I met with Ron Riley, on a warm and sunny October afternoon, following his morning volunteering with the Tuesday working party.

CH: How did you come to be a volunteer at Foxglove?

RR: I had intended to visit Foxglove Covert for years, and had driven past the signs but never got round to visiting. Then a couple of years ago some friends brought me along as a birthday treat, hoping to show me a kingfisher, which was on my bucket list. I didn't see a kingfisher that day, but I was captured by the reserve from my first visit and decided to volunteer. I've been coming to the Tuesday workdays ever since.

CH: Do you have a background in nature or conservation?

RR: I've always had an interest in the natural world and the environment, but my background is in building surveying. I've enjoyed learning more about nature conservation since I've volunteered here.

CH: What sort of things do you do on your typical Tuesday workdays?

RR: All sorts! In the summer we cut grass to keep the paths clear, do fence repairs, clear the wetlands and brashing. In the winter - coppicing, bonfires, fedging (a portmanteau of fencing and hedging which creates natural habitats for smaller birds and involves weaving the brashwood between stakes). Whatever the weather, if the volunteers can get here, the Reserve Managers will always find us a job!



A Tuesday working party

CH: What do you enjoy about being here?

RR: Working outside, keeping fit – some of the work can be quite strenuous, - being with like-minded people – the friendship and banter. I enjoy working with the Dales School during term-time, getting the pupils involved with practical work, it's a really important place for education.

CH: Any downsides?

RR: I am concerned about the current access difficulties – I would like it resolving quickly and amicably both for employees and volunteers. It is a concern and I feel it puts some people off from visiting.

CH: How do you feel after a hard day at the outdoor office?

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: foxglove@btinternet.com
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RR: Satisfied with having done something to help our local environment, happy to have been working alongside good friends, and often full of aches - but nothing that a soak in a warm bath and a soothing glass of red wine won't cure!

CH: Would you recommend it?

RR: Definitely! Everyone is made to feel welcome, it's a flexible way to volunteer and you feel like you're giving something back. Foxglove wouldn't function without its volunteers.

CH: And did you tick off the kingfisher from your bucket list?

RR: I have managed to see one, but not here at Foxglove! I'm still keeping an eye out ... but I'll continue coming here even when I've ticked it off my list.

Catherine Hayden

Winter Work

Our habitat volunteers have worked incredibly hard over the summer maintaining pathways, repairing fences, and improving several of the habitats - most notably clearing invasive scrub from the heathland. They will be glad to hear that as the autumn progresses we will move from general maintenance work to our programme of winter habitat improvement - bonfires once more!

The main job planned for this winter is coppicing 'block 3' of the willow carr. This large section of woodland is found between the lake and Field Centre. Coppicing involves the cutting of willow stems encouraging regeneration and new growth. There are five willow blocks, with one cut every two years in a 10 year rotation. Coppicing in this way provides a varied age structure creating suitable habitats for a wide range of plants, animals and fungi. Areas that have been cleared receive more sunlight allowing wild flowers to flourish and insects to feed, therefore providing more food for animals higher up the food chain. This year we are planning to use much of the cut willow for a couple of exciting projects around the reserve. Firstly we are going to build a living hedge around our picnic area, and secondly to reinforce a section of the bank along Risedale Beck by spiling.

This involves weaving a willow hedge into the bank which will then root and stabilise the loose earth. There are plenty of other jobs on the list to keep everyone out of mischief over the winter months; if you would like to come along and volunteer please contact Adam or Matt to find out more details.

Our **Winter Work Days** are fast approaching, with the first on **Saturday 8th November**. These fun days are open to all and are a fabulous family day out. We provide all the tools and gloves along with a hot lunch and cakes! Please see our Events page for more information and to book your place.

Adam Edmond



undergrowth

Issue number 36 Autumn 2014 The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

Welcome to your Autumn edition of Undergrowth. In this issue we focus on the volunteers who help to make Foxglove the magical place that it is. We feature species recording which takes place, often behind the scenes, and have our first 'Volunteer Spotlight' interview, giving us an insight into what it's like to volunteer at Foxglove. Warmer days will come to mind when you read a lovely article reflecting on a walk around the reserve on a summer Sunday afternoon. We extend a warm welcome to Matt, our new Deputy Reserve Manager, who has already made his mark around Foxglove (in a good way, Matt!). Finally, discover what is happening around the reserve now, as we prepare for the winter months ahead and - yes, the bonfire season! As usual, your comments and feedback are most welcome, and if you would like to contribute to future issues, please get in touch via the office. Enjoy the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!

Catherine

A new member of the team

Hello one and all! I'm Matt the new(ish) Deputy Reserve Manager here at Foxglove. My background is in Environmental Management, with an MSc in Environmental Monitoring, Modelling and Management, following which I worked for the Environment Agency and the environmental regeneration charity Groundwork. Two years ago I decided to get out of the hectic world of environmental management (way too much time spent in offices staring at computers) and take a much more hands-on approach to protecting our environment.



Matt Fitch, Deputy Reserve Manager

Don't miss the Foxglove Christmas Party!

Wednesday 17th December
7.00pm start
at Wathgill

Join us for an evening of festive fun
with
Full Christmas Dinner,
quizzes, raffles, live music and more!

All welcome - bring along a friend

Tickets £12
Available from the office or
Book through the Events section on
Foxglove Covert website

Please book by 30th November

To this end I have spent the last few years completing training/college courses including an SVQ in Environmental Conservation and NPTC qualifications in Chainsaw Operations and Tractor Driving. I have also worked for a variety of organisations including The Northumbria Wildlife Trust, Landmarc (MOD), the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust and EcoNorth, in a number of different conservation jobs. From being an Upland Path Builder in the Cairngorms to a Warden at Northumberlandia, these practical roles have led me to my job here at Foxglove.

Over the last few years I have entered into the world of endurance sports, after I completed the Sunderland Marathon in 2013 and was bitten by the bug. At the end of August this year I completed my first half iron-man distance triathlon (1.9km Swim, 90km Bike and 21km Run) in 5hrs and 54 minutes and then ran the Great North Run a week later!

Since working at Foxglove I have been amazed at the depth of knowledge of the people here and their willingness to share it with me - I learn something new every day. I have been made to feel really welcome by the volunteers and staff alike and it feels like I've been here a lot longer than three months (in a good way). I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made me feel so much at home here. And if I haven't met you yet, I look forward to doing so very soon!

Matt Fitch

Many things to different people; reflections on a Summer Sunday walk

It can be a little daunting to new visitors venturing to Foxglove Covert via a guard post, but once through the gate, as the kaleidoscope of habitats is revealed, you know you have arrived somewhere special. As you enter the reserve, young rabbits scud across the path, surprised roe deer slide into the undergrowth and the white rumps of Bullfinches flash through the trees as they scatter out of sight. With imagination, it is possible to move from the fenland of East Anglia, moors and wetlands of Derbyshire, through Lakeland, the heathland of Dorset, beside the streams of Devon, and coniferous woodland familiar to Scotland.



Female Mallard and young

Today as the sun came out, Speckled Wood butterflies fluttered through clearings in the glades approaching the Scratches, and the iridescent damselflies rested along the boardwalks and adjacent foliage. Large numbers of Ringlet butterflies flew amongst the vegetation, and several skipper butterflies posed on purple thistle heads. The resident Sedge Warbler sang its scratchy song from the depths of the reeds, only appearing briefly as it perched in a Hawthorn bush.

From the bridge below the dam, a Kingfisher called its distinctive metallic whistle and was seen as it flew just above the water before alighting on the 'Cobra's Head' roosting post, and then followed its familiar route around the lake, flashing past the hide. Moorhens led their punk-headed chicks through the reeds and rushes, plucking morsels from the water, as a family of Mallards edged their way along the bank, keeping in touch with continuous calls.

In the open sky above the moorland, a Kestrel maintained its heraldic pose on the wind, and later a Buzzard wheeled and soared above the woodland, sending up a large flock of Jackdaws. The House Martins and a Swallow continued to sweep at speed over the Wetland, seemingly unperturbed by the birds of prey above. Throughout the reserve, orchids bordered the paths, pushing through the grasses, and carpeting open spaces, while thistles and nettles justified their place as they played host to bees, caterpillars, butterflies and other fascinating insects. Returning along the boardwalk through the conifers, an Eyed Ladybird posed on a leaf, striking with its distinctive spots and larger than the others found on the reserve - the 7-spot, Heath, Pine, Larch, Kidney-Spot and multi-spotted species.

Now the grasses and leaves are changing colour, and although still abundant, the flowers are bearing seed heads. The young birds, no longer dependent on their parents, are less vociferous, limiting their calls as they flit through the bushes. The frogs and toadlets have left the waters in biblical proportions, now sheltering under logs and stones. Footprints of young Roe Deer, Otters, and Badgers can be seen imprinted in the mud in sheltered areas.

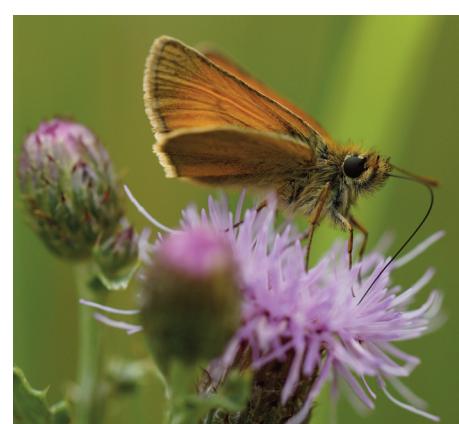
With such a diverse range of habitats, diligently maintained by the managers and a large group of volunteers, it is possible to spend an entire day on the reserve without returning to any specific area, or even meeting other people. All ages of visitors - and well-behaved dogs - can find solace within its boundaries. As quoted recently, it offers so many different things to so many different people.

Glennis Walton

Reporting on a breeding season

For the first time in many years, all of the annual nest box and fledgling data is computerised and up to date so we have instant access to the results. Generalisations are seldom appropriate where birds are concerned because as one species thrives, there will generally be another less fortunate – so it was in 2014.

There have been many successes, and what can be declared with some confidence is that although breeding adult numbers remained depressed and nest box take up was below par, the productivity in the boxes that were occupied was high. This was made very clear by the 600+ Blue Tits and Great Tits ringed at Foxglove as pulli – a huge improvement on 2013. Among other species that the ringers found in and around the garrison and training area were: Pied Flycatcher 122, Tawny Owl 49, Lapwing 134, Meadow Pipit 1500+, Dipper 10 and Kestrel 66. On the down side



Small Skipper butterfly on a thistle



Ringing Buzzard chicks on a steep hillside

The People behind the Species

Here at Foxglove we gather information and data about the species found at the reserve which is held in our species database and for some groups, added to national databases. To gather all of this data, our volunteers go out into the reserve, spot it and collect it!

The bird ringers ring most weekends, weather permitting, and data is inputted as the birds are ringed. We haven't yet managed to get technology out to the nest boxes and the training area, so the records from these and other sites, are inputted over the long winter nights to meet the deadline for the BTO.

Flower walks take place on the last Wednesday of every month and our scribe, Ruth, transfers the list - which in summer can be nearly 100 species - onto the observation board. Ann is very good at identifying those

small flowers that all look the same; Sue, Caroline, Christine and others regularly join the walks.

A team of up to eight volunteers gathers on a Wednesday morning to help to empty the moth trap and identify the moths. Brian and Linda are expert at catching those moths that escape! Usually identification can take an hour or so and on those mornings when there are over 300 moths to identify, Glennis, Joan, Brian, Linda, Jenny, Christine and Ruth require frequent cups of tea and an occasional break for a walk in the fresh air! Moth IDs and numbers are recorded, entered into the species database and submitted to county records.

Close relatives are the butterflies and John carries out his surveys on Tuesdays throughout the summer, sometimes joined by other volunteers; his data is



The Moth-ers group

also sent to the county butterfly recorder. A new species for the reserve this year was the Purple Hairstreak, rarely seen as it flies in the upper canopy of Oak.

Birds, flowers, moths and butterflies are all recorded centrally, but at the field centre the observation board gets filled up with many other species, recorded by volunteers and visitors as they walk around the reserve. Brian heads out on regular rooting walks to see what is about, often taking him off the beaten track, when reporting back the exact position of a find is one of the biggest challenges! Insects and fungi are the main groups he records.

Our volunteers are very busy in the field of identification and recording and our data would certainly not be as rich without the support of all of these people. Likewise the species would not be there if many other volunteers were not working hard at habitat management – and these volunteers are also very good at finding things too, which is how we recorded Eddie's Puss Moth caterpillar. So a huge thank you to everyone involved and please keep looking - you never know what you may see or hear hidden along paths, down tree tubes, in Gorse and up trees!

Elizabeth Dickinson



A monthly flower walk

was the worryingly depleted numbers of migrant warblers, and on the reserve Willow Warblers produced the least number of young ever recorded. Species like Garden Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Blackcap were also in very limited numbers although Chiffchaff did reasonably well and we had our first recorded Reed Warbler breeding at Foxglove with two of the young caught and ringed. Bullfinch totals for the year so far are amazing with 257 new full-grown birds processed; the Lapwing and Pied Flycatcher numbers, as quoted opposite, are certainly among the best ever.

From a CES perspective it was a very moderate year but that, in the main, was due to numbers within the adult population being depleted after the last two poor breeding seasons. Nevertheless, that is what CES is about and our data has all gone forward to the BTO for analysis. 2772 hours have now been committed to our 22 years of CES recording! Two new species were ringed this summer - Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail – both netted where we catch the Meadow Pipits in the crater near the Green Hut! There have also been high numbers of recoveries as shown on the web site. These will be the subject of a future article.

In summary, a much better year, and numbers going into the adult population this autumn should, with luck and a reasonable winter, create a much better breeding season in 2015.

Tony Crease