From the Editor

Welcome to the Autumn Edition of Undergrowth.

Firstly, may I introduce myself as the new Editor of Undergrowth and thank Catherine for her hard work as previous Editor. I have been volunteering at Foxglove helping with social media for eight months and it’s a privilege to be able to assist both with that and in my new role as Editor. I’m a Yorkshire lass through and through, born in Northallerton and now living in a small village just outside Thirsk with my husband and two cats. I have always had a keen interest in both domestic animals and wildlife which spurred me to complete an Animal Management Degree. I previously kept Racing Pigeons for which I won the highest accolade possible within Yorkshire and more recently have taken up wildlife photography.

My husband and I love sitting in the Wetland Tower Hide with a flask and a packed lunch looking out across the pools and open moorland. Despite being in the middle of the Garrison we find it such a tranquil place where we usually see something new each time we visit.

My thanks go to those who have contributed to this issue and to everyone who has made me feel so welcome since I started volunteering.

We are constantly looking at ways to be more environmentally friendly and can now send Undergrowth out electronically. If you would prefer to switch to an online version please email foxglovelnr@btinternet.com

Although perhaps a bit early, as our last edition before Christmas, may I wish all our supporters and volunteers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Katie Awdas

Message from the Caretaker Chair

May I take this opportunity to introduce myself as the caretaker chair of the Foxglove Covert Management Group. Our previous Chairperson, Janet Boakes, has very unfortunately had to resign from the position due to a sudden and unforeseen medical condition. Janet is now on the long road to recovery and I understand that she is making good progress. The Management Group would like to say a sincere thank you to Janet for all her hard work, both in the role of Chair and as an avid supporter of the activities of the reserve. We hope to welcome Janet back to Foxglove Covert in the future.

I have been involved with the covert and its development for 25 years and have been a member of the Management Group since it was established by the original constitution agreement of 2001.

In September we welcomed Carla Wood and Alex Wade who have joined the staff as interns from Teesside University. Carla is working on a research project and the focus is studying the data on migratory birds. Her report will be published in a future edition of Undergrowth. Alex is the Assistant Reserve Manager supporting Sophie and Gerry in the day to day running of Foxglove. We are fortunate to have Carla and Alex on placement until the end of the year and they are proving to be a real asset in the short time they have been here with us.

The Autumn and Winter work will soon be underway with the Winter Worky Days starting. Foxglove would welcome any support you could give to the work programme. Volunteer opportunities are always available during the week and at weekends. Just contact the Reserve Managers if you would like to offer your support. You will be made very welcome and there is always plenty of tea and cakes!

Early in the New Year, the Annual General Meeting will be taking place and I do hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend. It is a chance to hear about the excellent work that has been undertaken in the previous year and a chance to be informed of the exciting new projects planned for 2020.

Graham Newcombe

Richmond Coffee Morning

Thursday 21st November 2019
9.00am - 12.00 noon
Richmond Town Hall

There will be a raffle and a stall selling delicious homemade cakes!

All proceeds from this fundraising event go towards the running costs of the reserve.

If you would like to donate any cakes or items for the raffle, please take them to the Field Centre beforehand or to Richmond Town Hall on the day.

Thank you to everyone who supported the July Coffee Morning.

Katie Awdas

Graham Newcombe Caretaker Chair

July Coffee Morning
Welcome to the Team!

Alex tells us “I graduated from Teesside University with a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Science earlier in the year and have since been looking for a job in the field of natural history. Since graduating from university I have volunteered for the Wildlife Trusts doing habitat management as well as work with a local ecology firm conducting bat surveys to gain a little bit of experience. When I saw the opportunity to intern here on the university’s website I jumped at the chance, I had never visited the site before but had regularly heard positive words about it. I have now been working here for over two weeks and I have been loving every minute of it, the site is beautiful and diverse and everyone has been extremely friendly and welcoming, I am learning so much and I know that this experience will be crucial to help me get a career in this field, the only problem is that three months is just too short.”

And Carla says “Whilst studying for a Bachelor of Science degree in the field of Crime Scene, one of the modules I chose to cover, was Forensic Ecology. I have always had a passion for natural history and learning about how both flora and fauna of ecosystems are suffering due to the Anthropocene highlighted the importance of protecting the natural environment. The internship at Foxglove really stood out for me, combining scientific research with data analysis was something I had the skill set to tackle and to be able to do this in such a stunning and tranquil setting was just the icing on the cake! I’d had previous experience of working within a hospice which had a regular volunteering community, so I knew that I’d be working alongside kind, genuine people. I wasn’t wrong, I love working here, it’s fantastic! In the short while I’ve been here, analysing data, we have discovered that four Willow Warblers have been returning to Foxglove for 8 years, a wonderful achievement bearing in mind their average life span is just 2 years! I’m very grateful for this opportunity, just wish it was for longer than 12 weeks (Perhaps I’ll follow in the Willow Warblers footsteps and return for longer!)”

Small Mammal Survey

Having finally got my hands on 50 Longworth Small Mammal Traps (kindly lent out from the Mammal Society), I was very keen to get them set and see what I could catch!

Longworth Traps are small, humane traps that capture species of small mammal. They ‘trip’ a wire upon entering a tunnel and are safely (and I would say, comfortably!) contained in a nest box. Having identified a good site to place the traps I set about one evening, with the help of my 9-year-old son, marking out a grid that we placed stations out on, at intervals of about 10 metres. Each trap was then baited (for both rodent and insectivore) and bedding added, to reduce mortality rates (particularly for Shrews). These were then placed roughly 1 metre from a station, along or at right angles to trees, fallen branches, grass tussocks etc. with 4 traps per station. We were hoping to catch Woodmouse (Apodemus sylvaticus) and Bank Vole (Myodes glareolus). Unfortunately I couldn’t choose the weather and it rained.....heavily! Early the following morning we eagerly collected in the traps. We were soon to be very disappointed as trap after trap came in empty. Our final trap had tripped and it was with much excitement that we bagged our only Woodmouse!

With owl species evidently doing very badly, these disappointing results clearly show why! Another trap, during the day, this time resulted in not a single species being caught! Incredibly disappointing results all round, but perhaps not that surprising as research has shown a decline in most species of small mammal.

On a happier note, I set a few traps in my garden (in desperation, to show my son at least one other species!) and we caught a very pretty female Bank Vole (phew!)

Nicola McCreadie

Yorkshire Exmoor Pony Trust Update

The permanent residents, Taurus and Lark, have been continuing their munching work across the reserve while major ‘resurfacing’ took place around them on the moorland last winter. They took a close interest in diggers and dumper trucks! One large lake later, the ponies have spent the summer next door where they are enjoying paddling in the smaller pond there and even grazing underwater!

A chance encounter at the reserve last Autumn, has seen a new string added to the ponies’ bow. Susanna (Secretary of YEPT) met Amy Robinson, an Equine Assisted Learning practitioner, and while chatting about the ponies, Amy expressed an interest in using her experience, skills, the ponies and the Foxglove environment to promote EAL and mental well-being among the wider Catterick community but especially the military families.

Nicola McCreadie
A Kaleidoscope of Butterflies!

When I asked if I could volunteer at Foxglove Covert in April this year I had never been and didn’t know what to expect, so it was a fantastic surprise to find out how beautiful the reserve is and what a rich mix of habitats have been created. My special interest is in butterflies. The huge variety of flora that has been encouraged means that over the summer I’ve seen large numbers of butterflies from 20 species, with the butterfly season at Foxglove Covert continuing longer than the surrounding area due to the number of late flowering plants and the creation of special sheltered glades. I’ve no doubt that in future years I’ll see even more species given that there are at least a couple on the species list that I didn’t see this year.

For me the highlight was the number of Brimstones I saw this year. Before I visited Foxglove I’d only ever seen 1 Brimstone this far north and thought they were rare-ish visitors to the top of Yorkshire. Yet at Foxglove there is a healthy breeding colony and they’re regularly seen now, including in late September, due to the planting of Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn trees. Looking back at the 2014 records only 3 Brimstones were seen in the whole year, whereas I recorded 14 and other volunteers saw many others plus eggs on leaves. That’s a fantastic success for Foxglove.

The influx of Painted Ladies into Britain this year has been well documented and I saw 107 over the year. It did seem a high number but I only realised just how high after looking back at old records. In 2014 there were just 2 and in 2015 only 1. Despite the large influx from overseas I’m sure the concentration of Painted Ladies at Foxglove this year was also partly due to the abundance of flowering plants such as Saw-wort, Buddleia and thistles because Painted Ladies seem to just love pale-ish purple flowers of any sort.

Other highlights were the swarms of Peacocks, Red Admirals and Tortoiseshells on the hemp-agrimony flowers and buddleia and the large numbers of Ringlets and Speckled Woods. On the negative side I saw 49 Green Veined Whites, which I initially thought was fine, until I realised 269 were counted in 2014. I’ll be counting them very carefully in 2020 to see how the numbers change.

One subject that really interests me is how the species of butterflies interact. Some species, such as Painted Ladies and Speckled Woods, are very territorial, both with other species of butterflies and insects such as bees. I did wonder if the influx of Painted Ladies was such a good thing after seeing them fight off 2 Holly Blues in my garden!

I’m already looking forward to next Spring and seeing what emerges and what new species move into the habitats.

Catherine Jones

Winter Worky Days

Saturday 9th November
Saturday 7th December
Saturday 4th January
Saturday 1st February

Volunteers young and not-so-young join together to carry out habitat work on the reserve, no matter what the weather (well, almost no matter what the weather). Starting time 10am, hot lunch about 12.30pm and then back to work before tea and cake about 3pm.

Everyone welcome (please contact us in advance so we know how much food to cook!)

Military families are more likely to experience PTSD, depression, isolation and low self-esteem which Equine Assisted Learning can help with.

EAL involves various interactions between participants and the ponies or horses. This includes experiential learning including asking the horses to do various tasks. Working with these animals in unfamiliar situations can help us to understand how to adjust our own communication styles and reflect on how we react to similar challenges in daily life.

At the moment, the programme is at the pilot stage, but we are hoping to continue with more regular, structured sessions for a number of people seeking support. The ponies seem to have enjoyed the sessions so far - it is very interesting, even to us who know them well, to see them respond to the different people working with them.

Wish us luck for the future!

Amy Robinson
Trouble with Trees

Foxglove Covert is home to a wide range of tree species giving a multitude of habitats, supporting a variety of insects and ultimately birds and mammals. They are the foundation of the reserve and a lot of time is spent on their care.

However, not all is well with trees. The most serious problem is Ash Dieback which is now established here and throughout the lower part of Swaledale, in fact the whole country. The cause is a fungal disease, probably originally from Asia known as *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (formerly *Chalara fraxinea* so the pathogen has changed name and gender) which is spread by the wind. Most of our trees show the twigs changing from ash grey to brown and the leaves dying, then the whole tree will eventually be lost. Hopefully some will be resistant and survive.

Two years ago we became aware of shrivelled leaves on our Wild Cherry trees which did not fall in autumn. Researching this shows that we now have another fungal disease (*Apiognomonia erythrostoma*) which, once rare in Britain, has now become established first in the South East and is now spreading to the whole country. Thankfully the trees survive although look bad at this time of year. The fungus is transmitted on infected leaves and fruit which is why we all must be careful about plant hygiene and not bring any plants including seeds and fruit into the country. The Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*) is the most susceptible, Bird Cherry (*Prunus padus*) seems to be less so. We have both of these and their spring flowers are a delight. In a garden with any cherry tree it will help to remove all affected leaves from the tree and clear all leaves from under a diseased tree.

On a brighter note, although I remember the devastation of Dutch Elm disease of fifty years ago when almost all elm trees were destroyed, many of our Wych Elms (*Ulmus glabra*) have regenerated naturally from seed and at least one seems to be large enough to have survived the original attack. Our Alders (*Alnus glutinosa* and *A. incana*) also seem well although the fungus-like disease *Phytophthora alni* is established along the lower reaches of the Swale. Finally our Juniper bushes are well perhaps because they are isolated from the areas, like Upper Teesdale, where they are infected with *Phytophthera australocedri* and we do not have larch affected by *Phytophthera ramorum*.

When visiting the countryside we should all be aware of the risk of transmitting disease and clean our boots and shoes if there is a risk, and never take plants, seeds or fruit through customs.

Peter Langholme

Dividalen, Norway

In August, I made a return visit to the Dividalen Ringing Station, Northern Norway. This was the third visit by the Swaledale Ringing Group, but only the second time for me. I was accompanied by Tony, Sophie, Alicia and Roger (a member of the Army Ornithological Society).

Our Norwegian hosts, Karl-Birger Strann (a very experienced, knowledgeable and influential ornithologist and author) and his long-term partner, Vigdis Frivoll, were still as welcoming as they were on my first trip. Nothing had changed as far as facilities were concerned, which were clean and basic. All water still had to be collected from the nearby stream and power was sourced from gas canisters or solar panels.

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. Owing to Norway’s long daylight hours at that time of year, it is possible to have a week of 24-hour bird ringing, taking it in shifts to cover nights/early mornings. However, the warm, dry weather was interrupted by periods of torrential rain, which caused us to close the nets for a while.

The ringing station uses 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. We now have this type of net at FGC. The use of tape-lures is crucial to attract birds into nets and Karl-Birger 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 1,039 birds of 26 species. Willow Warblers were the most frequent birds caught (558) but the most unusual for us were Hawk Owls (5), Tengmalm’s Owl (1) and my personal favourite, Pygmy Owls (2) – none of which we see in the UK. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Norway and learned a lot from the experience.

Lesley Garbutt
Update on a busy Bird Ringing Summer
It seems almost yesterday when, during the summer, I hurriedly scribbled out my last update and since then so many things have happened it is almost a blur!

Importantly our CES (Constant Effort Sites) commitment was achieved and on 1 September we met for the 12th and final CES session this year. It was a productive day with 236 birds processed taking the total to the 7th best of our 28 years; 2215 captures went through the ringing room in 2019. This is really an amazing achievement which, when punched into a calculator, shows that this year we have caught an average of 184 birds on every single CES outing – 102 new ones and 82 re-traps. All of this is genuinely a national record and the contribution made by the ringing team (and their associates) to the collection and collation of this data, really is remarkable.

It has to be said that it is not always easy or convenient to meet the CES schedule, but then not everything worth having is ever easy. We could do with a couple of additional ringers to see us into the future so if you are aware of anyone interested in training, who is committed and reliable, please point them in our direction. Dedication and determination is essential!

CES is now parked until May next year but already the BTO have written to thank us and enquire about 2020!

Five members of the group went to Norway to face quite an intense week ringing around the clock inside the Arctic Circle south east of Tromso. We were the first team in this year so we had some of the setting up to do as well. We ringed around 1050 birds of some very beautiful species and learned lots from the experience, especially catching owls in the darkness! Several photos have gone up elsewhere and this special opportunity, dealing with birds in stages of moult we never see in this country, was quite revealing. Unfortunately, the rain slightly marred our visit and we had to contend with a couple of very wet days.

More recently at Bellflask, after a prompt by Mark Williams, one of our team, we caught 3 Cetti’s Warblers, the first I have ever seen caught in this county. It was such a surprise finding them in consecutive nets and really quite a thrill. The net rides were prepared at the Crater in time for the Meadow Pipits but unfortunately they coincided with a month of rain and strong winds so our results for this migration season were poor. Interestingly we caught almost as many Reed Bunting there as Meadow Pipits and that was followed by a catch of 35 Goldfinches at Foxglove early in October.

Two other things I must quickly mention. Today (15th October) we had our HLS ‘Aftercare Inspection’ conducted on the reserve by Natural England; the current Stewardship agreement runs out early in 2020. I am pleased to tell you all that due to the masses of hard work conducted by staff and volunteers recently we ‘passed’ with a recommendation for continuance which is a huge relief and great news for us all. This means our contract rolls over a year at a time for the next four years with no further inspections. The money we receive will stay roughly the same but in future all woodland is being removed from the scheme which means we will lose £2798 each year as a result. We have been given advice on some alternatives but I am less confident about those. The HLS contract is really important to the reserve and contributes more than £20,000 each year.

Finally, you will read elsewhere that we have 2 new temporary graduate members of staff funded by Teesside University who will be working with us until Christmas. Carla Wood, I am very pleased to say, has dug right into the ringing data set and is in the process of revealing some previously unknown statistics on the Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs we have caught over the past 28 years. I won’t steal her thunder but I’m sure you will find much of what she has produced as intriguing as I have – it is so good to have the ability finally to get all this data interrogated and see the results. And it will be exclusively set out here in the very next edition of Undergrowth – so make sure you book your copy!

Tony Crease
Ways to Support Us this Christmas

When buying presents this Christmas please spare a thought for us!

Did you know that when buying from Amazon you could help support Foxglove Covert LNR, by making one simple switch? Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of any item you buy, if you shop through: smile.amazon.co.uk selecting Foxglove Covert as your Charity. This is a really simple way to help us, and costs you nothing other than the purchase price of your items.

Looking for a gift for a wildlife enthusiast? We have a wide range of new books in the Field Centre such as Britain’s Birds – an ID guide, Moth Snowstorm, Wildlife in Your Garden, British Wild Flowers, the Trees Handbook; there are also some fantastic children’s books including one of our favourites You’re Called What?!

Our adopt a box scheme makes a lovely gift for someone who has everything and starts at just £6. Last year boxes at Foxglove were used by a variety of birds including blue tits, coal tits, tawny and barn owls and bats. By sponsoring a box here you will be helping to fund our conservation work, improving habitats for many species.

Foxglove Honey is available again in the Field Centre but be quick as it is very popular and sells out quickly! It will make a great Christmas present or treat yourself; it tastes delicious on a cold winter’s morning on toast or in porridge!

We also sell a wide range of different foods to meet the needs of all your garden bird visitors this Winter.

Operation Owl

All birds of prey are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. It is a crime to kill, injure, or take a wild bird, unless under licence. Yet birds of prey are regularly being shot, trapped, or poisoned. They are being persecuted but there seems to be very little general public awareness of it.

Operation Owl was first launched by the North Yorkshire Police Rural Task Force in February 2018. It is a response to the fact that North Yorkshire is repeatedly named as the worst county in the WHOLE of the UK for confirmed cases of raptor persecution. It was launched alongside our partners in the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors National Parks, the RSPB, the RSPCA, and also this year the Nidderdale AONB. And in 2018 Operation Owl was awarded as the best wildlife crime operation of 2018 by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Our aim is to stop or greatly reduce bird of prey persecution in North Yorkshire. North Yorkshire has an atrocious record for the killing of our birds of prey – YOUR birds of prey. Those that kill our birds of prey are criminals and they are killing our wildlife. This has to stop.

Operation Owl has a number of elements to it, but it is primarily an awareness campaign intended to raise public awareness of bird of prey persecution (crime) in our county, and to raise awareness of what a possible bird of prey crime scene looks like. By creating more eyes and ears in our county we hope to give those who are illegally killing our birds of prey less space to operate in, and create more potential witnesses to offences taking place.

Among the Operation Owl projects undertaken during 2018 were 2 full wildlife crime training days for National Park Rangers and staff, members of the Environment Agency, and Forestry Commission. As well as that a series of PowerPoint presentations were given to a range of outdoor orientated groups such as Mountain Rescue, walking groups, National Park volunteers, and volunteer angling bailiffs – as well as parish councils, community forums and so on. The background to bird of prey crime was explained, and examples of persecution were shown, along with a basic overview of traps and snares that members of the public may see when in the countryside. Practical advice was also given to explain what to do if someone found a shot or poisoned bird of prey.

This year Operation Owl received a further boost when the operation was adopted nationally by Superintendent Nick Lyall (Bedfordshire constabulary). Nick is the national (England/Wales) bird of prey lead. North Yorkshire Police Rural Task Force played a large role in helping to roll out Operation Owl nationally and also to set up ‘OpOwlUK’ – a national awareness campaign weekend which took place in September 2019. This campaign weekend saw 27 forces sign up to support the campaign right across the UK – including Police Scotland, every upland force in England along the Pennine chain, most of Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as other English counties as far south as Devon and Cornwall.

Nick Lyall has created a national Operation Owl website at www.operationowl.com Anyone who finds anything suspicious or sees a bird of prey crime taking place should ring the police immediately on 101. Anyone with any information can ring the Crimestoppers number 0800 555111, or call the RSPB confidential Raptor Crime Hotline on 0300 999 0101.

Stuart Grainger
Sergeant, Rural Task Force, North Yorkshire Police

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

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