

## Message from the Chair

We all know the saying, 'time flies', and it certainly has since the last edition of Undergrowth.

It doesn't seem so long ago that we welcomed the Lord Lieutenant of North Yorkshire, Johanna Ropner, to Foxglove Covert LNR. On 27th August, Mrs Ropner presented our Senior Reserve Manager, Sophie, and I with a certificate signed by HRH the Queen and a crystal dome in recognition of being awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. We gratefully accepted these on behalf of all the hard-working and dedicated volunteers. It was a whirlwind of a morning for me; full of congratulations and conversations with as many of our guests as I could manage.



Lesley and the Marquess of Zetland

In addition to the honour of receiving the Award itself, I was equally thrilled to receive my commemorative QAVS badge from our Patron, the Marquess of Zetland. He also had the honour of

cutting a huge commemorative cake, kindly provided by one of our long-standing volunteers, Elizabeth.

More recently, we have had a visit from the BBC's Carol Malia and her cameraman to film and chat with volunteers around the reserve. They also spent time learning more about our bees from Colonel Allister and Alison. This film will be archived until a future date.

Moving on, it is lovely to see many more visitors returning to the reserve and our volunteer numbers steadily increasing again.

From the Blog and Facebook pages, I see pictures of craft/activity sessions, fun trails to follow, fungi explorations, a coffee morning in Richmond, returning school groups and numerous images of work on the reserve. I've joined in with the winter worky days and enjoyed the hot lunch provided. We're getting back to normal at last.

Importantly, on behalf of myself and the Management Group, I send a huge thank you to our Reserve Managers, Sophie and Gerry. As always, they work incredibly hard to keep things running like clockwork and never fail to be cheerful.

Finally, I hope everyone reading this has a super time over the festive period and remain fit and well.

*Lesley Garbutt*

*Chair, FGC Management Group*

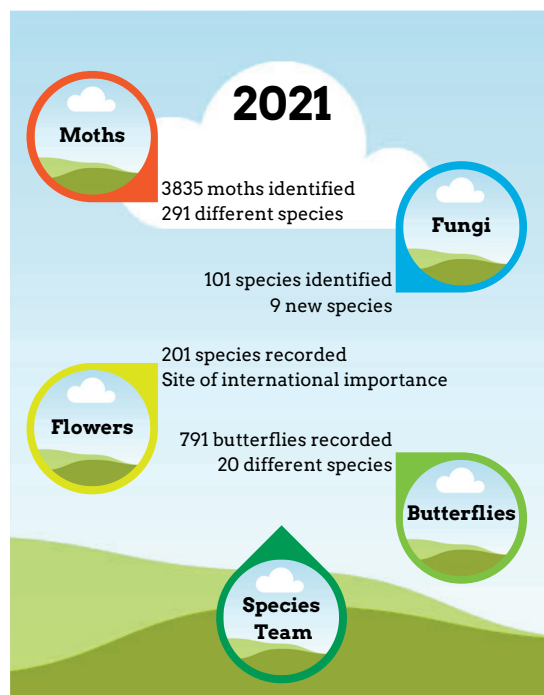
## From the Editor

I echo Lesley's comments about how proud I was to attend the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in August. It was lovely to meet our special guests and to chat to Lord Zetland both sharing our memories of Major Tony Crease who was sadly missed at the event.

My thanks go to those who have contributed to this issue. Thank you also to those Friends who have opted to switch to an electronic copy of Undergrowth in our drive to be more environmentally friendly. Congratulations to Tony Waldron on winning a year's 'Adopt a Box' prize as thanks for switching to an online edition of Undergrowth. If you would prefer to switch to an online version please email [foxgloveLNR@btinternet.com](mailto:foxgloveLNR@btinternet.com)

May I wish all our supporters and volunteers a Merry Christmas and good health in 2022.

*Katie Awdas*



## Keep in touch!

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[www.foxglovecovert.org.uk](http://www.foxglovecovert.org.uk)



## Bees in the autumn



Honeybees at work

*Did you know* that bees belong to the same great insect order as wasps, ants, and sawflies? We know of about 150,000 species... although there could be over a million!

*Did you know* that there are over 270 species of bee in the United Kingdom? The bumblebees and honeybees only account for about a tenth of that number.

*Did you know* that about a quarter of our bee species do not collect pollen or make nests? These are “Cuckoos” of other bee species. They do as their name suggests!



There are “Solitary” bee species... some of these are actually sociable.



There are some bees that look a bit like wasps.



Some bees nest above ground and others below depending on their species.



Bumblebee nests are rather untidy with their nest cell arrangements, whereas the honeybee is amazingly neat with their hexagonal cell arrangement.

In autumn, most bees and wasps have had their queen for next year mated and she will be looking for a place to hibernate over winter – either in the ground or in a space in a wall. This will not be her nesting place in spring. This year’s queen will have stopped laying and her brood will be slowly dying off and will be gone before winter sets in. Occasionally, you will find this year’s queen hibernating too. These species only bring in enough stores to feed their young. Once the young have all hatched and there are no more mouths to feed, that is when you find the wasps trying to steal your lunch!

A honeybee colony, on the other hand, will breed bees that will survive over winter, and will store enough honey to see them through to the spring. They have a queen which can live for up to 5 years and overwinters with her bees.

It is this ability to store honey in large amounts and live in a colony all year round, that drew our ancestors to build artificial homes for honeybees. They could harvest the excess honey, make mead, and use the wax. The health benefits of honey have been known for centuries.

It is important for a beekeeper to learn and understand what their honeybees do during the different seasons to help keep their bees in the best health and condition. There are feral colonies of honeybees in Britain, usually in hollow trees (e.g. old Woodpecker holes/nests) and sometimes in a roof space or chimney! They can survive for a few years but often the colony will starve over winter and die or succumb to a parasite called the Varroa Mite which was brought into the UK on imported bees.



Uses of Bees Wax

## Visiting Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

Having visited this gem of a nature reserve in the early years of the 21st century, and then again in 2012 (when attending a macro-photography course), I was delighted to spend a day there again in August 2021; so-much-so that I returned two weeks later.

I may be preaching to the converted, but this reserve is a total delight with its wide range of natural environments in a modest space – from reeded wetlands to upland ponds and lakes, from flower meadows to open moorland, from scrubland to dense conifer and broadleaved woods and from a tranquil lake to a rushing beck. All these environments can be visited in a walk of two and a half miles (4 km), and several are within a few hundred yards (metres) from the Field Centre.



Buff-tailed Bumblebee

My interests include photography and the natural world. Consequently, I found much to view and record during my visits. Sophie and Elizabeth made sure that I knew which areas to concentrate on. Given the conditions and time of year, butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies, and other insects were likely to be my targets, and so it proved.

Spigot Mere was my first target and here there were many dozens of damselflies – Common Blue and Emerald – and a few Common Darter Dragonflies. Spiders and grasshoppers were abundant too. A brief sighting of a damselfly left me convinced that I had seen my first Banded Demoiselle Damselfly – unfortunately I never saw it again. I spent more than an hour by the Mere and loved every moment, even when the thistles prickled my ankles, and my bottom when I tried to sit down!

What are the honeybees doing in the hive now?

Since July, the eggs the queen has been laying have been fed a slightly different diet by the workers... this makes them a little fatter so they can survive the winter. From about August, the queen will reduce her egg laying as the source of pollen and nectar reduces and less bees are needed for foraging. The workers (female) kick out any remaining drones (male) from the hive. They do not have any purpose over the winter and are only extra mouths to feed. Occasionally, a drone may be found still in the hive but he's the lucky one. The drones only purpose is to mate with a queen, after which he dies. He does not forage nor contribute to hive duties – he doesn't even have a sting!

A honeybee colony at the height of summer will have 60–70,000 bees and over winter this reduces to about 10,000. The bees will have been building up stores to take them through the winter... they will need about 40–45lbs of honey stored. If the weather is bad during the autumn and the bees can't forage, they will use up the stores they are laying down for winter.

What can the beekeeper do for the bees?

As mentioned before, the bees have a parasite called a Varroa Mite. If the colony is over infested, it can cause a colony to die. This is the time to give the bees medically approved treatment to try and reduce the numbers of mite – a bit like given your dog/cat flea treatment.

Wasps are a pest to bees at this of year because they like to invade the hive to aggressively steal the honey. To help, the beekeeper will reduce the entrance of the hive to give the guard bees a chance to put up a defence. We also put wasp traps near the hives in the autumn.

Other pests include the Green Woodpecker which likes to bore holes in the wooden hives to reach the bees and honey. In areas affected by this woodpecker, the hives are wrapped in chicken wire in autumn.

Mice can be a bit of a problem. A mouse guard is fitted on front of the entrance to prevent the mice sneaking in to hibernate in the warm hive, while having a lovely food source. Mind you, it is not always a comfy place to stay once the bees find you!



Snow-covered hives

The stores are checked to make sure the bees have managed to collect enough and if not, they are topped up with sugar syrup – there are different strengths for different times of year.

As winter approaches, the bees will go into a cluster. This helps to keep them warm, and the cluster will contract or expand depending on how cold it is. Through winter the hive will be hefted to check the weight. This indicates how the stores are lasting. A pack of fondant (bee fondant icing) can be given to top up stores. The entrance is checked and cleared in snow.

The beekeepers are now able to take a holiday and, all being well, in the spring the bees will be healthy and ready to go again.

*Allister and Alison Shepherd*  
*Richmond and District Beekeepers' Association*



The reed-beds of The Scrapes can be a magical area with so many insects going about their business of looking for food or a mate. Bumblebees, hoverflies, damselflies, and dragonflies were plentiful. Close to the end of my stay, Elizabeth pointed out a Brown Hawker Dragonfly which had settled, briefly, on the reeds. This species had been reported as sighted in the past but mine may have been the first photograph.

The Lake was quiet apart from a Common Moorhen and Little Grebe although the bird feeding stations were busy. Spotting a small bird in the reeds below the hide, I soon realised that it was either a Chiffchaff or Willow Warbler, but I've never been able to distinguish between them using their songs. However, my photograph made that task easy. Black legs = Chiffchaff (Willow Warblers have light brown legs).

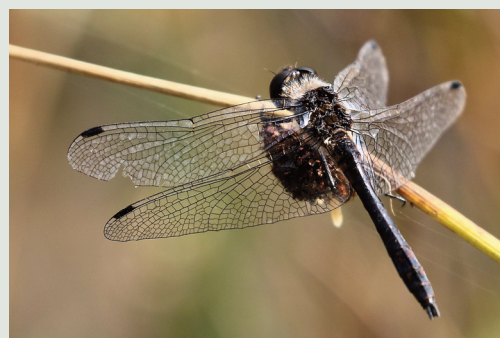
Plovers Pool provided some delights and frustrations. There were several hawker dragonflies flying over the water, but I couldn't get my camera's autofocus to lock onto any of them. I did try manual focussing but, inconsiderately, they didn't fly through my camera's view! Darter dragonflies were much more co-operative, and I had my first sightings (and photographs) of Black Darter and Ruddy Darter Dragonflies.

If you have never visited Foxglove Covert, put it on your to-do list. You won't regret it. Talk to the managers and follow their advice as to when and where to go, and what to look for. If you are a seasoned visitor, well done. Keep up your support for this very special reserve.

If you'd like to see more photographs from my visits, try my Flickr account -

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/timrandall44/albums>

*Tim Randall*



Black Darter Dragonfly



## A poem of appreciation

I sit,  
amongst swaying reeds  
breathing in the wind  
rustling fills my ears  
down in the beds  
I sway, in time to the melody.

I sit,  
hearing the cries  
of buzzards overhead  
learning the skies  
swoops and dives  
I yearn their freedom.



I sit,  
holding my breath  
making no sound  
as a dragonfly hovers near  
whirring wings assail my ears  
I watch, mesmerised.

I sit,  
awaiting the flash  
of brilliant blue  
eyes open not to miss  
his catch of silvery fish  
I marvel as he swallows.

I sit,  
amongst trunks  
of ancient trees  
rugged bark with crevices deep  
giant boughs envelop me  
I long to climb.



I sit,  
eyes on the feeders  
of seeds and nuts  
will he come today, hang  
upside down  
his beak to fill?  
I wait until.

I sit,  
beneath lofty pines  
the path scattered  
with wind strewn cones  
seeds for future trees  
I crunch with my wheels.

I sit,  
drinking in beauty  
filling my senses  
reining in my pain  
restoring my soul  
I sit, I smile.

I visit Foxglove Covert Nature Reserve in Catterick Garrison regularly and wanted to share how this wonderful place makes me feel.

*Jan Gillings*

## Ways to help and support us!

### Adopt a Box

There are over 100 nest boxes on the reserve and each of them is checked by the bird ringers every spring. It is a huge task which takes several days to complete.

Our adopt a box scheme makes a lovely gift for someone who has everything and starts at just £6. By sponsoring a box you will be helping to fund our conservation work, improving habitats for many species. In pre-Covid 19 years we have always welcomed supporters to the reserve to be present when we check their box and hope this will once again be possible in the future.

### Amazon Smile

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](https://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.

### Field Centre shopping!

Looking for a gift for a wildlife enthusiast aged 0-100? We have a wide range of books and gifts in the Field Centre suitable for everyone!

We have a range of high-quality bird food. As well as our competitively priced seed, we have a range of fat balls, suet cakes and bird feeders on sale.



One of the Foxglove volunteers has kindly crafted bespoke wildlife homes and feeders. They are all for sale and all proceeds will go directly to the reserve.

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: [foxglovelnr@btinternet.com](mailto:foxglovelnr@btinternet.com)

Telephone: 01748 830045 Mobile: 07754 270980 Website: [www.foxglovecovert.org.uk](http://www.foxglovecovert.org.uk)

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