

## Well worth getting up for!

I have always been interested in garden and woodland birds and in 2008 I took this interest to the next level through the British Trust for Ornithology. They gave me contact details for Major Tony Crease who agreed to become my bird-ringing trainer and I began ringing under a trainee permit. Since then, thanks to Tony and other experienced ringers, I have never stopped learning and have become more confident with extracting, handling and processing birds. I have been given the opportunity to ring British and migrant birds, nestlings in bird boxes, cygnets, owlets and water birds. I have visited other ringing sites and welcomed visiting ringers to Foxglove.



### Redwing

Last year I qualified for my 'C permit' which allows me to use mist nets for taking birds, ring fledged birds, ring nestlings and supervise students and helpers without the close supervision of my trainer, although I am still accountable to him. Last month Tony tested my confidence and ability by leaving me in charge of a Sunday ringing session, which meant that I would oversee everything and check the accuracy of the information gathered for each bird before its release. I was delighted when most of the ringing team turned out to show their support! We had a very successful day, processing over 80 birds. There were a great many visitors to the ringing room that day and I'm sure that they learned a lot and enjoyed the chance to release the birds back into the wild. Bird ringing is not for those who like a weekend lie-in, but it's a small sacrifice to make when I consider how much information we all glean on the movement of birds and the knowledge and banter we share in the ringing room. It's well worth getting up for!

*Lesley Garbutt*

## Full steam ahead!

"Team Cappuccino" is the name of the volunteers group which was launched to help run the fundraising coffee mornings held at Bedale and Richmond each year. There is a lot of organisation involved in running the mornings, so a big thank you to all members of Team Cappuccino and the Reserve Managers for their hard work in helping to make last November's coffee morning in Richmond such a success. Over £330 was raised from the delicious refreshments, boosted by sales from a cake stall, raffle, tombola, book stall and bric-a-brac. It also provided a good opportunity to raise the profile of Foxglove, taking along the display boards and chatting to the customers about the reserve.

We have two dates for this year's coffee mornings - Thursdays 5<sup>th</sup> June and 13<sup>th</sup> November. We'll be meeting soon to discuss the format; new faces and ideas... and offers of cakes ... are always welcome!

*Tony Cooper*

## Spring Willow Weaving

On the second day of spring, a small group of aspiring willow weavers, under the expert tuition of Adam and Lizzie, spent an enjoyable morning creating willow sculptures for the garden. Adam and Lizzie had harvested some fresh willow and we learned how to make dragonflies, fish and Easter bunnies!



Do look at our events listing to see what is coming up over the next few months. A chance to learn a new skill or discover hidden gems on the reserve with a friendly group of people (and well-behaved dogs), is not to be missed!

*Catherine Hayden*



# Undergrowth

**Issue number 34 Spring 2014    The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve**

## From the Editor

Spring has arrived! I know because today I was woken from my slumbers by a wonderful dawn chorus (I do not usually enjoy being disturbed from my sleep, but birdsong is always welcome, whatever the time of day or night!) and I heard my first Chiffchaff of the year. But also - the spring edition of Undergrowth is here! We have a lot to fit in to this newsletter, including an update on the changes to Foxglove's Management Group. We extend a warm welcome to our new Reserve Manager, Lizzie. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this edition of Undergrowth and invite you all to send in contributions for future issues. Any feedback would be most welcome. Please contact me through the office at Foxglove with your comments and suggestions. Happy reading!

*Catherine*

## Message from the Chair

Spring is always a very exciting time of year on any nature reserve but this year at Foxglove there is an extra buzz of activity. The change of the seasons marks a fresh start in many ways and there are several innovative plans in the pipeline. Some of these are outdoors.

The new pools created at the head of the lake have already made an impact. These will certainly enhance the visitor experience. The sound and sight of running water has its own beauty and will be appreciated by visitors using the easy access trail. The gentle cascades of clear water will also serve to improve this habitat for many wildlife species from invertebrates such as dragonflies, to birds such as Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher.

There are also plans to upgrade some of the indoor facilities. Educational displays in the visitor centre will be brought up to date with modern technology. As the latter advances it is important to keep up with the times and make good progress in order to appeal to the younger generations who are after all the conservationists of tomorrow.

Finally, I am pleased to announce that Lord Zetland has agreed to become Patron of the reserve. This is very good news and will hopefully bring additional benefits to the organisation.

Amongst all of this change there is one thing that is guaranteed, with the hard work and dedication of staff and volunteers, and the continued support from friends and visitors, Foxglove will continue to develop and evolve whilst providing a safe and valuable haven for people and wildlife.

*Sophie Rainer*

## Introducing our new Reserve Manager

Hello Everyone, I have been asked to tell you a little about myself so...

I completed my BSc in Countryside Management at The University of Wales, Aberystwyth in 2005. As part of my degree I spent a year working with the Forestry Commission in mid-Wales. After university I went to work at a PGL activity centre near Shrewsbury where I thoroughly enjoyed teaching children activities such as climbing, abseiling, kayaking and archery. I then spent three years office-based working in HR before the call of the wild led me to make the decision to leave and return to conservation.

After a quick whizz round the world I returned to my home county of Rutland and completed a year as a trainee Reserve Manager (the same programme which Adam had done the year before – it's a small world!) Mid way through this year I got a job as Information Officer with the Rutland Osprey Project and worked part-time alongside the trainee placement. As the Ospreys left Rutland to migrate to Africa I too moved on to ventures new, and into the role as Project Officer for a breeding Grey Seal colony with the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust. I worked on these two seasonal projects – Rutland in the summer, Lincolnshire in the winter, for two seasons before coming to Foxglove.

Since arriving at Foxglove, it's been a pleasure working with the volunteers and the visitors and I look forward to seeing the reserve change through spring and into summer.

*Lizzie Lemon*



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## An update on the management of Foxglove

Many of you will be aware of the turbulence associated with the management and Management Group at Foxglove over the past weeks. This period of difficulty has resulted from the decision taken by the new Garrison Commander to change the access rules to the reserve as they currently stand. He has placed a more direct emphasis on the security of Munster Barracks, although I feel it would be wrong to imply it is something of which we are not already fully conscious. Certainly in my experience staff, managers, and volunteers have adhered rigidly to the requirement for barrack and soldier security and understand the critical need for observance of the same at all times.

Allied to the access issue, and running in tandem, has been a perceived requirement for a new car park, some 850 metres to the North West of the Field Centre, which is seen by the Garrison Commander as the answer to the security problem. By directing more visitors and volunteers away from the existing gate to this new car park, he believes security will be enhanced. There have been many others involved in the decision making process but the news I have is the car park and the access road across the field to it will go ahead. When exactly, is not yet certain, and it may well take a year. Clearly there are those who the new car park will suit very well and for whom it is good news. There are others who will continue to require the use of the existing access so that cars and goods, equipment, the disabled etc., may be transported to the Field Centre and the car parking spaces nearby. I have discussed this requirement with the local Brigade Commander who stated he felt this request was reasonable. He said he would underwrite it.

So, I believe we are left with the following situation:

1. Access in the short to medium term will remain as it is.
2. A new car park will be built in due course and those who do not need the use of the existing access will be at liberty to use the new facility.
3. Once the new car park is built access using the existing route may be restricted to those who require vehicular access to the Field Centre.

All of this had created considerable angst amongst our supporters and members of the Foxglove Covert Management Group. Errors had occurred in some secretarial procedures and in the end advice had to be sought from the Charity Commission and an Extraordinary General Meeting had to be called. This is alien to the reserve and the upset and resulting concern is hugely regretted.

The EGM called on Tuesday 18 March 2014 considered 8 proposals for election to the Management Group. Of the eight, five were selected as follows:

Tony Crease  
Elizabeth Dickinson  
Sophie Rainer  
Ruth Farrow  
Seb Mankelow

The votes were counted by Graham Newcombe, an existing member of the Management Group. Jacky Bottrill was appointed a co-opted non-voting member of the Management Group as the reserve Grant Seeker. Subsequently a short meeting of the Management Group was called with six members in attendance. Sophie Rainer was elected as Acting Chair of the Management Group, Tony Crease was elected as Treasurer and Elizabeth Dickinson as Secretary.

What is quite clear is that throughout all of this turmoil the reserve has continued to flourish and the winter habitat work, bird ringing and general activities have been maintained. The support from the ‘shop floor’ remained resolute and the evidence for this is the way the storm has been weathered. We have turned the corner and it is business as usual. Much has been learned from mistakes made and our Constitution, which has served us well for 13 years, will be updated to reflect the current needs. We are back on course now and I thank you all, very sincerely indeed, for the encouragement, patience and determination you have shown. It has not been an easy time but we have prevailed – Foxglove is a special place with many special people, and with your help it will remain so.

*Tony Crease*

## A winter of plenty

Generally speaking 2013 was considered a ‘mast year’ and fruit, berries and seeds have been plentiful. This has been evident over the relatively mild winter and although incredibly wet for some, we in North Yorkshire have been lucky. This has manifested itself ornithologically as the large flocks of Scandinavian migrants have not been seen in numbers associated with more severe winter weather conditions.

September is the earliest we have recorded Brambling on the reserve but this winter it was into March before the first were caught. Flocks of Fieldfare and Redwing were seen but much less frequently, and the Hawthorn berries remained on the trees well into the New Year. Many of these thrushes spent time in the fields rather than in hedgerows as the ground was frost free, and they were able to find food freely in the soil rather than rely entirely on fruit.

Even the Chaffinch flocks have been much reduced and there were long periods where the garden at Foxglove was Chaffinch free - which is very unusual. Lesser Redpoll (see photo below) have returned and there have been small groups regularly on the feeders, quite often outnumbered by Goldfinches; the latter have staged an increase in the past few years and are undoubtedly attracted to the Nyjer seed.



Although rarely seen at Foxglove, Waxwing numbers in general have been greatly reduced compared with recent winters, and even the November influx of the large continental Blackbirds failed - which was a surprise. Normally, we ring good numbers of heavy, long-winged birds forced in from Holland, but this year there were none at all. So, on reflection, the milder winter weather has left us with fewer of the species we normally expect to see.

As the breeding season approaches many more finches are taking advantage of the seed we provide to gain optimum breeding condition before the rigours of raising four or five young take their toll. With luck the weather will be kind throughout 2014 allowing the birds to capitalise on the moderate over-wintering conditions which have been the least challenging for several years.

*Tony Crease*

## Winter Flora and Fauna

We have heard from Tony of the mast year of 2013, giving us a winter of plenty. Our Crab Apple trees, almost devoid of fruit in 2012, were covered in fruit last year and the grey and yellow lichens on the Hawthorn trees could hardly be seen with the large number of red berries. Raspberries and Blackberries were enjoyed by the humans - whoops, that should read birds and invertebrates - and one Roe Deer very selectively chose only the ripe Blackberries to eat!



Gorse buds, in 2013 did not open until later in the year; this winter bright spots of yellow have been seen across the reserve. Seven-spot Ladybirds like to hibernate in Gorse, but not many have been seen, as they did not do well last year. Apparently this was due to a lack of Greenfly, their prey. Greater Spearwort is a summer flower and turns some of the ponds in the scrapes to yellow. As the flower walks progressed through November and December we found that one flower was still showing its bright yellow petals. Unfortunately the storms meant that it did not make it onto the January list.

*Excidia recisa* is a beautiful fungus that grows on Willow and has been found at Foxglove this winter. Once we had spotted it on one tree we found it on many others. It is highly dependent on water and once it stops raining, the fungus very quickly disappears.



As winter is now coming to its close and spring is waiting in the wings, we are impatient for flowers to start opening. Primroses are late this year and one that survived the snow, cold and frost last year from January onwards, is in leaf, but with no flower buds yet. Coltsfoot is just opening and a single Barren Strawberry has joined the March observations.

*Elizabeth Dickinson*