

## Message from the Chair



I am delighted to be able to announce that Foxglove Covert LNR has been awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The official announcement was on 2nd June 2021

and we received much media coverage thanks to the efforts of our volunteer, Katie, who put in many hours to distribute our press release prior to that date.

Before the official announcement, the reserve was visited by local press reporters with cameras. I recorded radio interviews from home and our reserve managers had to pretend they knew nothing about it when our volunteers became suspicious of all the extra attention! Things were very busy.

The journey to winning the Award began in early 2020 when Major (Rtd) Tony Crease began the application process. He encouraged and gathered letters of support, spent hours of his time on correspondence and, ultimately, welcomed a visit by the Queen's assessors to the reserve in November 2020. He was meticulous and determined that our volunteers receive the highest recognition possible. Fortunately, all his hard work has come to fruition. It is with sadness that I can report that Tony died earlier this year, so cannot be with us to congratulate and celebrate. He is greatly missed and will remain in the forefront of our minds.

I hear positive news from our reserve managers, who have been busy filling in the diary with a variety of seasonal events and activities. For more details, please visit our website and join us if you can.

Still on a positive note, I would like to say a huge thank you to all our supporters who have chosen us as their Co-op's



Volunteer catwalk!



Volunteers waiting for a slice of cake!

Community Fund good cause. We currently have a total of over £900 which is an outstanding amount.

Finally, I am very pleased that we have volunteers who can turn their hands to practically everything, including water management, and have been able to repair the damage caused by our lovely water voles. You can read more about that in this edition of Undergrowth.

As always, I hope everyone associated with FGC remain safe and well.

*Lesley Garbutt*

## From the Editor

After a year of shielding during Covid-19 I was delighted to finally return to the reserve a few weeks ago. It was lovely to see everyone! Walking round, the reserve was alive with birdsong with adults busy feeding and lots of juvenile birds (some of which had already been ringed). With the warm sunshine the Gorse was glowing and along with the Bluebells made the reserve look very colourful.



Juvenile Marsh Tit (already ringed!)

I was also lucky enough to sample a slice of one of the delicious cakes Elizabeth had kindly brought to celebrate our Queen's Award for Voluntary Service!

There was a hint of sadness to the visit knowing Tony would not be there. He was so kind and supportive of me when I became a volunteer and I miss chatting to him especially when we were working on Undergrowth.

My thanks go to those who have contributed to this double edition celebratory issue of Undergrowth. May I offer congratulations to my fellow volunteers on receiving the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service and wish them and all our supporters and volunteers a safe and hopefully sunny summer!

*Katie Awdas*

## Would you prefer an electronic copy of Undergrowth?

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](mailto:foxglovelnr@btinternet.com)

## Major (Rtd) Tony Crease



Major (Rtd) Tony Crease

It is with great sadness that the Management Group must share the news of the passing earlier this year of Major (Rtd) Tony Crease.

In 1992, Major Crease had the vision to turn undeveloped land near the training area in Catterick Garrison, into a place where nature would thrive. Under his leadership, the hard work and dedication of soldiers of the Royal Scot's Dragoon Guards, recently returned from the First Gulf War, formed the basis of what we have today.

He has always been an inspiration to many people, both inside and outside of his Army career. He was a strong character, yet never sought the limelight. Tony always looked for ways to expand and develop Foxglove Covert; always looking forward. His ornithological knowledge was extensive and, because of his dedication to training, bird ringing is an integral part of the reserve today.

He never ceased to admire and appreciate our volunteers, and despite not being in good health, worked tirelessly to obtain for them the highest recognition he possibly could. He would be immensely proud of them receiving the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 2021.

He has left a huge hole in many people's lives. Our deepest condolences go to the family he leaves behind.

## Bird Ringing Update

It has been an extremely busy season for the Swaledale Bird Ringers. The Yorkshire weather has thrown everything at us this spring starting with weeks of extreme cold followed by weeks of extreme wet and then weeks of extreme dry! Tawny Owls are one of the first birds to breed and early monitoring was put on hold during the cold wet spell at the start of spring. Caution is always exercised as it is best not to disturb the adult owls while they are incubating eggs and owls must not be disturbed when it is raining. The harsh winter has led to a lack of small mammals such as voles and an obvious lack of food has been observed in the Tawny Owl nests this year. Sadly, it is not uncommon for an owlet to eat a sibling if it is really

hungry, and this happened in several nests.



Little Owl chicks

Barn Owls appear to have bred later than usual with some not laying any eggs at all! It will be interesting to see how successful the ones that did breed are (this work is ongoing).

A few Little Owls have been successful with one nest producing three healthy (but rather dirty and smelly) chicks!

CES (Constant Effort Scheme) bird ringing has taken place with five visits to date. These have been relatively quiet with fewer birds than usual but a crazy number of new Bullfinches and five new Sedge Warblers.



Sedge Warbler

Monitoring of over 500 small nest boxes is now almost complete. Results have been disappointing and again this has been put down to the awful spring weather



Lapwing chicks

conditions with frosty nights and lots of rain. A pleasant surprise was a brood of Marsh Tit chicks in one of the boxes at Foxglove, a first for the reserve. Our Adopt a Box supporters will receive news from their box in the coming few months when breeding finishes. More details on the scheme are on the back cover of this edition.

The Waders had a rough time early on too, but the second clutches have been a success and two Lapwing chicks were ringed on the reserve at the start of June. There are simply not enough hours in the day and the ringers visited a Black Headed Gull Colony for the second time this year where they ringed 471 chicks and so far to date 31 Buzzard chicks have been ringed too. Never a dull moment!

*Sophie Crease*



## Attack of the Water Vole!



Water Vole

You've gotta love 'em! "A brown little face with whiskers. A twinkle in its eye. Small, neat ears and thick silky hair", the Water Rat or Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*), made immortal by Kenneth Grahame in *The Wind in the Willows* as Ratty. They sure are cute, and they are making their presence felt on the reserve (Hooray!). However, their antics have landed them in hot water with Foxglove Reserve Managers, as they appear to be causing the managed water levels in the wetland ponds to drop because of their burrowing behaviour!

In the early 1900's Water Voles were widespread and would have been commonly sighted or heard on most slow flowing bodies of water in the British Isles. Numbers were thought to be around 8 million. Today there are estimated to be only 100,000 across the UK and they have disappeared from over 90% of their former range and they continue to decline. For the

most part this is largely due to habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation, with the removal of their preferred habitat due to intensification of farming practices, development and poor wetland management. This decline in numbers significantly increased with the introduction of American Mink (*Neovison vison*).

These non-native, highly skilled predators were popularly farmed for their fur in the UK from the 1920's. By the 1970's there were 800 mink farms in Britain. Many of course managed to escape (or were released by animal rights activists) and they quickly adapted. This had a devastating impact on our native Water Vole. Mink are small enough to enter a Water Vole burrow and can wipe out a colony in a single breeding season. Leading, according to the People's Trust for Endangered Species, "... to the most rapid and serious decline of any British wild mammal ever". They are now fully protected under the UK wildlife law. Next time you visit the reserve keep your ears open for that distinctive 'plop'!



American Mink

### Water Vole Facts

- Size:** Head/body 12-20cm, tail roughly half the body length. Weight up to 300g
- Lifespan:** Possibly two winters
- Diet:** Reeds, grasses, rushes, water/wetland plants, roots, bulbs and bark. Needing to eat 80% of their body weight each day.
- Habitat:** Banks along slow-moving ditches, streams, rivers, ponds etc. Digging burrows that can have underwater entrances.
- Main Predators:** Mink, Fox, Otter, Stoat, Weasel, Owl, Heron and Brown Rat.
- Habits:** Water Voles are active during the day and it's the distinctive 'plop' sound as they enter the water that is often heard rather than an actual sighting. They swim at the surface of the water with face and back being visible. The peak breeding season is April-September with a gestation period of 20 days. 4/5 litters of 5-8 pups being born each season.
- Signs:** Latrines. Breeding females have fiercely defended territories that can overlap. They mark these with latrines of flattened piles of cylindrical droppings, rubbing their hind feet on to a scent gland on their chest and stamping on the droppings. These can be found close to burrow entrances and at boundaries.
- Feeding Remains:** Piles of chopped vegetation with a characteristic 45-degree angle cut edge.
- Footprints:** Clearly there is a need to control the presence of mink in any area that may have Water Voles. Mink Rafts are used to monitor/detect the presence of mink and give a nice indication of the presence of other species. A soft clay cartridge is placed in the tunnel of the raft that most curious species will investigate and leave a record of their footprints. These are checked regularly for prints.



Mink Raft

Nicola McCreadie

## Wounded Military Volunteers



Phoenix House

Since 2012 small groups from Phoenix House, the Army's Personnel Recovery Centre (PRC) in Catterick, have been attending Foxglove Covert as an aid to Individual's Recovery Pathways. The "Outdoors" is one of very few therapies which have shown to improve both physical and mental wellbeing, relieves stress and helps to develop a sense of worth.



Helping plant trees

### The Troops

Phoenix House delivers recovery activities to some of the Armed Forces most vulnerable Service Personnel. Long term and often complicated conditions, illness and wounding can lead to significant dips in their mental and physical wellbeing. The chance to get out into the field in an accessible and safe way means that they can test themselves without the pressure of having to achieve any set goals or fear of failure. Service personnel work for as long as they can during the visits, and then enjoy the nature reserve by way of educational talks from the permanent staff and by using mindfulness and ground techniques delivered by their Battle Back Warrant Officer.



Another team of Troops!

### The Programme

The groups who attend the reserve are doing so as part of the Rolling Recovery Programme (RRP). This week-long adaptive sports and adventure training course, which is founded on the NHS 5 Pillars of Wellness, which are Giving, New Learning, Taking Notice, Being Active and Connecting. These pillars are at the centre of the activities during the visits. The students are encouraged to interact with other volunteers from many and various organisations, whilst enabling the students to understand their own thoughts and feelings. There is always plenty of robust, outdoor work to be carried out and this helps everyone keep fit and motivated.

## What's on? Dates for the Diary!

For more information or to book a place please visit the website or contact us on 01748 830045 or 07754 270980.

### Dragons & Damsels

Sunday 25th July 1-3pm

### Owl Pellet Discover

Monday 26th July 10am start

### Family Pond Dipping 1

Wednesday 28th July 45-minute sessions starting each hour

### Family Pond Dipping 2

Wednesday 4th August 45-minute sessions starting each hour



Dragons and Damsels



Pond Dipping



## Varied Taskings

Visits are conducted throughout the year, which allows the service personnel to tackle a wide range of land-based activities, including coppicing, meadow clearance, pond dredging, making bird boxes to name just a few of the activities on offer. More recently, service personnel have been heavily involved in the removal of trees that have been affected by Ash dieback; everyone has been shocked to find out how widespread the disease is and how devastating it can be to natural woodlands. The very fact that Ash is a dense hardwood means that it's a real 'all over body' workout to move the felled trunks and branches to a disposal area.



The Troops

## What They Say

When asked, service personnel invariably say they gain a great sense of achievement while working at the Covert. Whether resurfacing a disabled access pathway or dragging weeds from an educational pond, having something to show for all their hard work is always a great payoff. Many attendees come back in their own time with family and friends to show off their achievements. Many service personnel cite the benefit of visiting the reserve has been the chance to experience some tranquillity in their lives. When your day-to-day routine is turned upside down by a life changing event or illness, it can be almost impossible to find time to relax and chill out. Foxglove Covert is the perfect place to make this happen. Just a few yards into the woodland or wetland habitats can feel like you are alone in the wilderness, and because these areas can be accessed by anyone in wheelchairs or on crutches, it means that this serenity is available to all.

## What's Next?

As the restrictions imposed by the COVID crisis ease, so the group sizes will eventually return to a healthy 8-12 students, which will mean that as we head through summer and into autumn, the bigger more labour-intensive tasks can be tackled. Undoubtedly, more Ash will need to be removed but also the challenge of clearing gorse (the boys always love a bonfire) and the ever-growing birch saplings will be on the horizon. More pathway maintenance and creation of woodchip paths should see the students working as hard as ever to "Give Back" to their local community, and in doing so strive towards their individual recovery goals.

## Parting thoughts

To manage and maintain 100 acres of such diverse wildlife habitats, whilst educating the public and playing an important role in conservation, is an enormous and ever recurrent task. To have the honour to help out in whatever small way they can, has been a real pleasure for our young men and women and we hope to continue visiting long into the future, seeing the fruits of our labours grow, mature and spread far and wide across the reserve.

*Roger Coates, Battle Back Warrant Officer, Phoenix House.*



Helping with the Ash Dieback clear up

## Moth Morning

Thursday 5th August 8am start

## Wildlife Craft Activity – Make a Bird Feeder

Monday 9th August 10am-3pm

## Wildlife Craft Activity – Make a Butterfly Feeder

Monday 16th August 10am – 3pm

## Family Minibeast Safari

Wednesday 25th August 45-minute sessions starting each hour

## Bee Happy Day!

Monday 30th August 10am start

## Family Pond Dipping 3

Wednesday 1st September 45-minute sessions starting each hour



Wildlife Craft



Minibeast Safari

## 15 Billion

I am afraid this article is not good news; the reserve is now looking very different from how it did last year. I shall get straight to it; we have had to cut down over one hundred Ash trees and this is set to continue later in 2021. The decision to cut down the trees was taken after consulting with Military Land Management Agents, Tree Surgeons and Foxglove's Management Group. We can assure you that this decision was not taken lightly.

The Management Group and Managers at Foxglove have been aware of Ash Dieback for some considerable time, knowing that at some point this disease would eventually reach the reserve. Ash Dieback will kill over 80% of all the Ash trees across the UK, it will change the landscape forever and threaten many species that rely on Ash. Birds such as Bullfinches eat the seed, Woodpeckers, Owls and Nuthatches will use the trees for nesting. Plants such as Dog violet and Wild Garlic grow underneath due to the airy canopy, plus many lichens and mosses grow on the trunk and branches. The leaves are an important food source for moths such as the Coronet and Centre-Barred Sallow. I am sure that the Wednesday moth group will be checking data and comparing their findings from previous years.

So, what is it and how did it get here? Ash Dieback is simply a fungus that originated in Asia, it does not damage Manchurian and Chinese Ash, but our European Ash has no defence against it as it did not evolve with it. The fungus overwinters in leaf litter then in July spores are released into the atmosphere that can be blown tens of miles until they contact a new tree. The fungus grows in the tree eventually blocking its water system, causing it die. The tree does fight back but year on year infections eventually kill it. Ash Dieback has been in Europe for about 30 years but was only recorded in the southeast of the UK in 2012 but must have been in the area years before that. The UK was also importing diseased trees, this sped up the spread of the fungus from saplings to mature trees.



Hollow Ash

This section of branch from a Foxglove Ash was totally hollow as the fungus had destroyed the wood but from the outside it appeared healthy. In 2020 a survey was undertaken to assess the trees here in Foxglove. We knew that the leaves develop dark patches in summer and then wilt and discolour to black, we were also aware of "diamond" lesions on the trunks of some of our trees. We thought that only a small number of trees might be affected, the information available to us said it was mainly in the southeast of the UK. It was much worse than we

expected with many diseased trees next to our main walking routes.



Monolith tree

A monolith tree with the diseased wood stacked behind.

We simply had no choice but to either fell or monolith the trees to make them safe. The reserve was closed due to the national lock down, so it was the ideal time to carry out

the work safely as we had no visitors. Some of the branches were substantial and weighed hundreds of kilos so could not overhang any paths. The fallen trees then had to be cut into pieces small enough to move; a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped move the wood from our pathways. This was simply a herculean job; the Bluebells are now all flowering because of all your hard work.

The cost for a Tree Surgeon to carry out this work was £10,000. This was kindly funded by DIO. We then also had to organise a woodchipper course for the volunteers and Managers due to the amount of brash that the fallen trees produced. This was another £2000. This is a large sum for a small charity that has been closed for nearly a year, however the monetary cost to Britain is estimated at a staggering £15 billion (£15,000,000,000).

The cost to conservation will also be high, the biodiversity of our woodlands and connecting hedges will be severely affected or possibly lost. Carbon capture will be reduced due to the sheer number of trees that will be felled. Generations will never know or see an Ash woodland and be able to enjoy these mature and beautiful trees.

It is not all bad news, here in Foxglove we have made the decision to leave some of the mature trees standing. These trees are in areas that are away from the public and pose little risk leaving them in situ. They may over time succumb to the disease, but this will be over many years. Some trees in the UK have been found to be resistant to the disease and will survive, these will produce new resistant trees in the future. Hopefully, some of those trees are the ones we left here in the reserve, only time will tell.

The Foxglove team has already begun to plant new trees within the reserve using a mixture of species so that if another disease arrives, we will still have other trees to enjoy. A special "thank you" to Jan from Hunton for supplying over 40 Oak saplings that are now placed throughout the reserve.





V for Victory

Finally, one of our Ash trees showing the “V” for victory sign! Let’s hope these trees win the battle and visitors to Foxglove in a hundred years will be able to enjoy them.

*Gerry Dorrington*

## Worky Days

Covid-19 sadly meant that we were unable to host any of our usual Worky Days during the quieter months of the year. We are therefore hopeful that as things stand, we will be able to reintroduce them later this year. The habitat work carried out during these sessions is so valuable to the reserve and it’s a great chance for volunteers to get together.



Starting time 10am, hot lunch about 12.30pm and then back to work. Sticky buns and a cup of tea about 3pm and head home to give the washer a good work-out and have a soak in a warm bath! Everyone welcome (please contact us in advance so we know how much food to cook!)

Saturday 2nd October

Saturday 6th November

Saturday 4th December

As a side note our Coffee Mornings will also return in 2022 at Richmond Town Hall.

## Chasers

Standing by Plover’s Pool on a warm day in June and the surface is calm. Nothing is moving. Then the sun comes out



Broad-bodied Chaser

and the Pool is alive with movement – where have they all been hiding?

It is difficult to focus on one individual as there are many flying around. They are mainly Broad-bodied Chasers.

The males have a distinctive blue abdomen, whilst the female is golden. Some of the females are egg laying by flying across the surface and flicking the end of their abdomen into the water. The males are defending their territories and sometimes their females, spending much time chasing each other.

These chasers frequent newly made ponds and did appear on Plover’s not long after it had been developed, but it is now a well-established area of water, and they are still around.

Small twigs pushed into the mud encourage another chaser to land, a Four-spotted Chaser. These have four noticeable marks on their wings.

They do hunt over areas away from water.



Four-spotted Chaser

The distribution maps for both these chasers seem to indicate that they are not in great densities in the northeast of the country.

## All volunteers are cordially invited ...

In addition to the honour of winning the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, all recipients receive two invitations to attend the Queen’s Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May 2022 (restrictions allowing).

The FGC Management Group wish to give recognition to the commitment of ALL volunteers, PAST and PRESENT, which has culminated in winning this prestigious Award.

Therefore, we are inviting volunteers who would like to be given the opportunity to meet HRH Queen Elizabeth II to email your name and contact details to foxglovelnr@btinternet.com with the subject ‘Garden Party’.

The deadline for entry is 31st August 2021. All names will then be entered into a draw and two lucky volunteers will be chosen at random. Good luck!

## Ways to support us!

### Co-op Community Fund

We would love to encourage all our supporters to become Co-op Members and link their membership card to FGC.

To become a Co-op member costs only £1.00 and all members are invited to choose a local cause to support. For every selected Co-op product purchased, 2p will go into the Community Fund of your choice. Regardless of where you live in the UK, you can still link your Co-op loyalty card to us by following the link

<https://membership.coop.co.uk/causes/49860>. Even buying small grocery purchases each week will make all the difference.

Last year, we were fortunate enough to receive an amazing total of £4,758.11 which has been wisely spent on replacement tools for our hard-working volunteers.

This year we would like to create new access paths and sensory experience areas to make Foxglove Covert's inspiring, educational spaces more accessible to everyone, whatever their age or ability.

### 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



Adopt a Box Blue Tit ringing

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 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.



Wildlife House

Toad hideaways and Hedgehog abodes, there is something for every garden! Many are made from wood from Foxglove. They make wonderful environmentally friendly gifts.

To buy any of these goods please contact us. Card Payment accepted by phone and delivery may be possible if you live locally.

One of the Foxglove volunteers has been working hard at home during the lockdowns to craft bespoke wildlife homes and feeders. They are all for sale and all proceeds will go directly to the reserve. From bird and Bat boxes to

Bird Food	Weight	Price
Garden Gourmet - High energy, husk free, no waste.	20kg	£27
Black Sunflower Seeds	15kg	£19
Peanuts	1kg	£2.50
Island Harvest - High energy, husk-free	20kg	£20
Niger Seed - Attracts Goldfinch and Siskin	1kg	£2.50

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