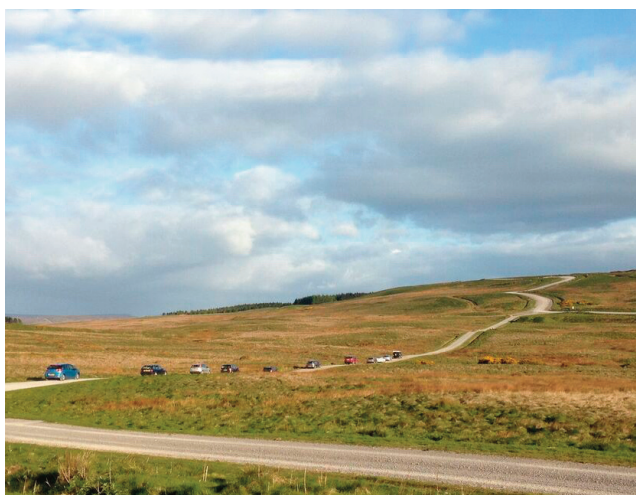


Birdsong Breakfast 2015

Saturday 16th May started with a beautiful dawn, as 27 people arrived at Foxglove Covert for a 5am start, some travelling from as far as Durham City. Following an early start for the previous day's bird ringing, not everyone was bright-eyed and bushy-tailed!

We were split into three groups, led by Tony, Adam and Seb, then each group proceeded in different directions across the reserve. It was wonderful to hear all the various bird calls and have them identified. We were also able to spot some of them: a male Redstart was clearly visible sitting in a Scots Pine overlooking the lake, staying long enough for us all to have a very good view. The groups identified 21 bird species, along with mammals including Roe Deer, a Fox and a Water Vole.

Finally we followed 'Tony's training ground convoy', spotting Black Grouse and a Whinchat; some were lucky enough to hear a Grasshopper Warbler.



The Black Grouse Convoy

The morning was completed with a 'fat boy's breakfast' at Wathgill Training Camp – delicious and much appreciated by all!

Many thanks to those who organised and led the event.

Gordon & Felicity Hackett

The Essential Work of our Volunteers

Maintaining and developing the reserve at Foxglove in a condition which allows visitors good access and plenty of interest, requires a massive workforce effort. The work is planned by the reserve managers, who rely on the input of volunteers, particularly for large-scale activities such as coppicing. Records are kept of the total number of hours worked by volunteers and this information can be used to support applications for grants.

So what motivates the volunteers to help at the reserve? Reasons include having an interest in nature, putting something back into society, enjoying fresh air and exercise and meeting like-minded people. There are about 120 people on the main volunteers list and 15 bird ringers; some are regulars and others come along when they have time to spare.



Clearing brash from the conifer woodland

In many cases the volunteers are involved in more than one group. The main activities are carried out on Tuesdays, involving up to 25 regular volunteers, but there is a smaller group on Thursdays. The "worky days" at the start of each winter month attract up to 40 volunteers comprising regulars and family groups, all of whom enjoy the lunch provided by the reserve! The work might include coppicing, pollarding, dam-building, tree planting, sapling clearance, mowing/strimming net rides and lawns, pond clearing, cutting and gathering reeds and gorse. Smaller scale works include tool maintenance, joinery, painting, filling bird feeders, repairing potholes and clearing drains.

The bird ringers turn up very early, usually on Sunday mornings, to set up nets, catch, record, ring and measure huge numbers of birds, providing information which is of national importance and submitted to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). Some volunteers give specialist assistance in such areas as recording fauna and flora on the reserve, including moth trapping and identification. Leading guided walks for schools and other groups, helping with office work, grant applications, fund-raising and serving on the management committee – are all essential to the work of Foxglove.

Volunteers go home pleased with their day and Tony Crease and the reserve managers always make a point of thanking the volunteers for their efforts. If you would like to be involved with some extra volunteering, please get in touch with the reserve managers.

Mike Bacon

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: foxglove@btinternet.com
Telephone: 01748 831113 Mobile: 07754 270980 Website: www.foxglovecovert.org.uk
Registered Charity No. 1089020

Opinions are those of individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foxglove Covert Management Group or the policy of the Ministry of Defence



Undergrowth

Issue number 38 Late Spring/Early Summer 2015 The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

Spring has been slow in coming this year, and so has Undergrowth, as we have waited to report on wildlife news – Welcome to your late Spring /early Summer edition!

I often reflect on how important it is to be in touch with nature, for our personal well-being. So many volunteers say how much better they feel for being out in the fresh air, with like-minded people, supporting the work of the reserve; many of the articles in this edition focus on the benefits of volunteering. Thank you to everyone for your contributions.

As Tony reports in his article, some of the trends in bird numbers are worrying, but the work done by the ringers and volunteers provides a vital contribution to national data which will be used to help find new solutions to conservation challenges.

This summer, let's celebrate our wildlife by supporting the Festival of Nature in July and help to spread the word about the amazing place that Foxglove Covert is.

Catherine Hayden

Wildfowl Feeding Platform

We are grateful to our grant seeker Jacky Bottrill for securing a generous grant of £14,000 from Yorventure to create a wildfowl feeding platform on the north-west side of the lake. A stretch of board-walk has been constructed which meanders down through the larch trees to a feeding platform overlooking the lake, allowing visitors to have a good view of the wildfowl.



The new Wildfowl Feeding Platform by the lake

Seed for feeding the birds will be available to purchase in the Field Centre. Hopefully this will encourage the birds to

climb out on to the grassed area to feed, which will also create more interest for people using the lake hides. Our thanks go to Yorventure and to the contractors for doing an excellent job.

Ruth Farrow

Festival of Nature

Following the success of our Bioblitz weekend in 2013, Foxglove will once again host a weekend of nature events on Saturday 18th and Sunday 19th July. Local naturalists will be joining us for the Festival of Nature to lead guided walks where you will be able to discover more about the beautiful flora and fauna found here on the reserve. There will be a range of activities for families including pond



A froglet discovered on the last Foxglove bioblitz

dipping, mini-beast safaris and natural workshops where you will be able to explore the fascinating lives of our nocturnal animals. Volunteers will be on hand to lead guided walks where you can explore the reserve, learning how Foxglove has developed since its conception in 1992. We also have artisan craftsmen demonstrating their skills and running workshops over the weekend, including pottery, rope making, felt making and green woodworking. Local botanical artist, Karen Innes, will be running an art workshop for beginners.

Home-made cakes, sandwiches and lunch will be available from the Field Centre as well as a range of hot and cold drinks. There will be an entrance charge of £2 per adult and £1 per child for the weekend. Our annual summer BBQ will also be held during the Sunday afternoon, with tickets available from the Field Centre.

We are very excited about this event and looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible on the reserve to enjoy the festivities over the weekend.

Adam Edmond

Nature is Brilliant!

Two years ago, Foxglove held a Bioblitz weekend. It was fun for all ages at a family friendly nature reserve. We did pond dipping and found tadpoles, diving beetle larva, leeches and baby frogs among other things. We put all the creatures into the sinks where we could see and identify them before letting them go safely back to the pond. We had to do this quickly to stop the diving beetle larva eating the tadpoles; food chains in action: amazing! We also did a bug hunt on the heathland, and found spiders and bugs; don't suck up the bees though! Mum found a Darth Vader beetle! We then went to learn about earthworms at the outdoor classroom.



In the field, identifying invertebrates

The rope maker was there and we made lassos and had a great game lassoing posts and each other. We also made pots from clay on the potter's wheel. Sunday had the usual bird ringing, and as special volunteers we were allowed to release some of the birds, wow! This year Foxglove is holding a "Festival of Nature" on the 18th and 19th July. We are looking forward to pond dipping and bug hunting again. We want to show other kids around Foxglove and let them see what an amazing place this is. It will be brilliant! Foxglove is a place we never want to leave,

because it is just so... well... we love being surrounded by nature and no pollution and it is just lovely. So come and join us on this spectacular weekend, you will have the chance to learn so much about this amazing environment.

Martin and Conaire Durkin, aged 13

Silent Spring

Rolling back the curtains, looking out at a blue sky, a manicured lawn and a warm sun already high above the horizon, it is easy to forget the cold, dull, wet and windy conditions we have all experienced for almost the last eight weeks.

This continual stream of unseasonal weather from the north-west has had a negative impact on the breeding season, but as ever it is difficult to quantify with other factors blurring the picture. Without doubt the cold temperatures and commensurate lack of invertebrates has had quite an effect on the nest boxes and on the young moorland waders too. Our Tawny Owls have done less than half as well as last year and the kestrels, although more have bred, have had less success with clutches often down to 3 or 4. Lapwings have done poorly and Jackdaws, surprisingly, have had what appears to be the worst year ever.

Tits in the boxes have reduced from last year just when they were beginning to make a recovery, and although we have lost some of our young Pied Flycatchers we still have boxes to do, and it may well be that they have fared reasonably well. Redstarts paint a similar picture.

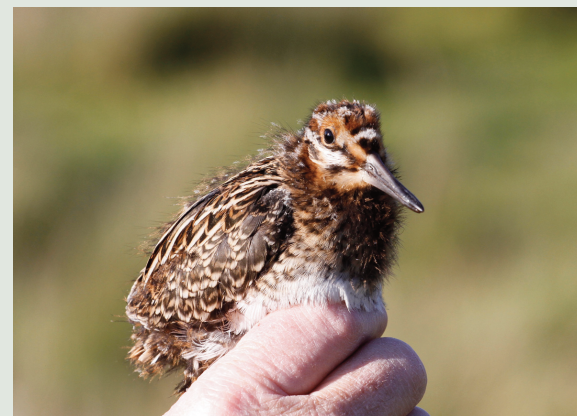
Our constant effort ringing results at Foxglove are where the real crunch comes, and the numbers of migrants returning to breed and young being produced are well down. What we have found mirrors an article published only yesterday by the BTO which is entitled "The Silence of the Countryside – our conservation methods are not working and we need new solutions".

Many of our warblers are hanging on by the tips of their bills and some are at their lowest ebb. Although we have recorded at Foxglove the longest lived Marsh Tit ever known and had back a Reed Warbler ringed as a chick last year, numbers of many of our summer migrants are very depleted indeed.

Conscious that I must try to end on a positive note, the Snipe population this year is notably the best in 20 years which is very good news. We are about to start on the local Buzzards and have lots of nests to visit. Hopefully, they might contain healthy clutches. We will be sure to let you know!

My sincere thanks go to the many ringers, volunteers and other helpers who have assisted throughout April, May and June; it is an incredibly busy programme.

Tony Crease



A young Snipe

First Impressions

I joined the team at Foxglove at the end of April. My calendar tells me it is somehow June already – I'm not sure where this last month has gone to! Since I arrived I have been very busy, and Foxglove has undergone a striking transformation – spring has arrived and the bare branches and brown grasses of winter have been replaced by a lush leafy world of green tunnels and pathways, winding through the trees and undergrowth.

When I first arrived, my work involved tasks like checking tree guards and removing vegetation from around tree



Stacey in the bird ringing room

bases to allow them to grow unimpeded by weeds. As the weeks passed, my duties slowly changed, with strimming and mowing becoming an ever more regular task as the weather turned warmer and the grass grew faster. Birds are now nesting in many of the nest boxes on the reserve and we have spent a lot of time checking boxes and ringing chicks. The CES bird ringing programme has also started, giving me the chance to develop skills in ringing and ageing passerines. This is done every 10 days and the start time gets earlier and earlier as the days lengthen. I am always surprised at how light it actually is at 4am and how lovely Foxglove looks at this time of day once I have fully woken up!

Many of the wild flowers on the reserve are now in full bloom and new ones are appearing faster than I can keep up with them. Our knowledgeable volunteers are very good at teaching me about the diverse and ever-changing range of flowers, fungi and moths. As spring progresses we have also been out and about more with school groups, seeing what we can find in the ponds and bug hunting under overturned logs.

It has been a busy first few weeks at Foxglove Covert but I have enjoyed it enormously and learnt a lot from the endlessly enthusiastic bunch of staff and volunteers who help keep Foxglove the special place it is.

Stacey Adlard

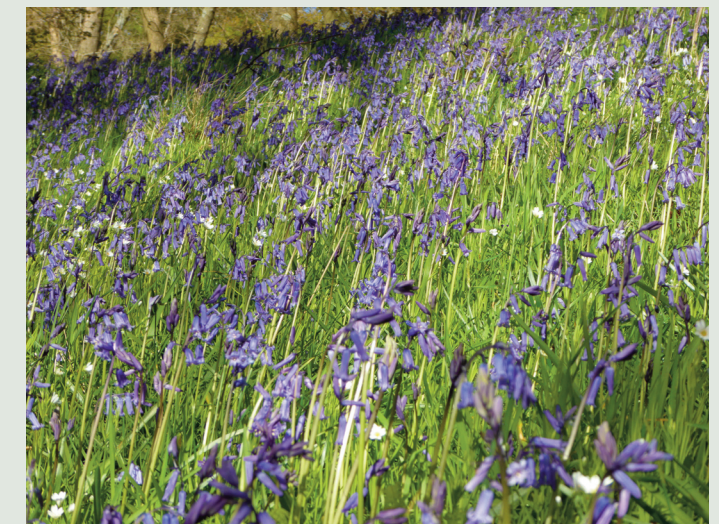
Down a steep hill slowly!

Recovering from being poorly I decided that an evening in the fresh air would be good for me, so I offered to "help" Adam, Matt and Stacey check the nest boxes in a wood. Adam did say it was steep and I had seen photographs, but I really wanted to visit myself, as it is a haven for Bluebells at this time of year. We all met at Wathgill, sorted transport and departed. One slight problem was the height of the Landrover I was assigned to – the step up was taller than the length of my little legs! Good job no one had a camera handy as I (in)elegantly climbed up and fell in! Landrovers, unlike cars, are designed to go off road, up hill and down dale – hang on to your hats! Amazing what you can see from being so high up...

Once we arrived at the nest box site, having overcome the next climbing hazard and under strict orders to be quiet, we proceeded with the task in hand. It is amazing to watch the licensed and expert bird ringers catch the adult owls, process them, check the young, ring them if they are big enough and return all of them to their nest. The birds' welfare is always paramount.

Off to the next one – just that slight hiccup of getting back into the Landrover! After a short drive we arrived at the moor and I gained a false sense of security as we walked along a rough track – easy! Then a hint of what was to come as the ground began to show a steep decline. Oh not forgetting the barbed wire fence – did I mention my little legs? – and the hill got even steeper! Pied Flycatcher females were caught and we noted lots of eggs in boxes – all to go back to in 10 days time; I may just give it a miss, the Bluebells will be past their best! It was a huge privilege to go out and experience the processes involved in nest boxing. The data collected is so important and adds to our extensive database of information. Thank you to all of the team for taking me with you! P.S. I decided to head out on another nest box outing – but luxury, absolute luxury – the Landrover I was assigned to had a step. Amazing - my little legs managed so much better!

Anonymous



The steep-sided Bluebell wood