

Pony Power

A farm in West Sussex, taken out of modern agricultural production to be managed as a wildlife conservation project, has chosen to use livestock as near as possible to the big, grazing animals that once roamed Britain in the past. One animal that seems best suited to poorer quality fodder, is the Exmoor pony and Exmoors have become the equine breed of choice for many conservation grazing projects. *Lark* and *Taurus* have been used at Foxglove over the last six months to munch their way through the Heathland, Wetland, Moorland and now on the area around Plover's Pool. In each habitat they have made a difference.



Lark and Taurus at Plover's Pool

The ponies affect the vegetation not only through grazing but also by trampling. They will take food in an order of preference, with finer, richer grass at the top of the list. However, feeding on improved or semi-improved pasture can be too rich and may result in laminitis – an inflammation of the laminae which act as shock absorbers within the hooves, and can be very painful. Coarse grasses are also taken, and the ponies will then take rushes and sedges. If there is limited availability of any of these, they will browse on Gorse, Heather, Willow, Bramble, Birch and Oak. Having a single-chambered stomach, Exmoors will need to feed up to 18 hours a day in order to process this food, particularly in winter when there is a lower nutritional value in vegetation, requiring a higher intake of calories. As they can eat 2.5% of their body weight per day, they will take more of the shrub species in late autumn and winter as the supply of grasses dies back. It is tempting to provide supplementary grazing at this time, but that can mean that the ponies will not be providing the required vegetation management. This winter, feeding hay was only necessary when the snow was too deep and when the lengthy period of cold weather delayed new grass growth for longer than expected. The ponies will move around the Reserve in the next few months. Grazing back on the Heathland, their preference for the new grass will allow new Heather growth and reduce competition for the Heather seeds that were scattered here last December. Year-round grazing by Exmoor ponies has not been tried at Foxglove before, so it will be interesting to see how they affect the different habitats.

[Ed. - References relating to this article are available – please contact Steve for further information.]

Steve Scoffin, Senior Reserve Manager

On being a Trainee Bird Ringer

When I was 12, I first saw bird-ringing at Foxglove Covert, and I was fascinated by it. With careful supervision, I was allowed to hold a bird after it had been ringed, and the moment I let my first bird go, I knew I wanted to be a bird ringer too. Fast forward 6 years and I have now been a trainee bird ringer for the last 3 years, and I feel immensely privileged to be a part of the team involved in something so important. Learning how to handle and process the birds safely and accurately is definitely the most important aspect of bird ringing, but you never stop learning. The support of my trainer Tony, and the rest of the team, has been invaluable, and we're fortunate to have such fantastic facilities in the Field Centre at Foxglove; however, being able to ring at other sites too, such as Bellflask, gives us a great opportunity to process different species of birds.

Some of my most memorable moments of being a trainee ringer have definitely occurred when I've been out on net rounds extracting the birds. You never know what you'll find when you go to the nets, and a couple of times I have been surprised to find some larger and less common bird species, such as a Kestrel and a Tawny Owl. These birds are powerful but incredibly beautiful, and with careful handling and support from the other ringers in the team, we are able to quickly process them before releasing the birds back in to the reserve. I think the question I am asked most as a ringer, is what my favourite bird is to ring – but I honestly don't have one answer. The different bird species all have their own particular



A Coal tit, ready for release, after ringing

characteristics: Blue Tits are feisty, Bullfinches are calm, Great Spotted Woodpeckers are ear-splittingly loud (and with a powerful beak!) ... the list goes on. Every bird is unique, all bringing something different to my ringing experience – and there are still many more species out there which I haven't yet seen. Bird ringing is such an important part of my life – it is through being a bird ringer that has led to my wish to pursue a career specialising in ornithology – and I am so grateful for being able to train at Foxglove Covert.

Alicia Hayden



Undergrowth

Issue number 47 Spring into Summer 2018

The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

My Swift clock has announced the start of the summer season, telling me that your *Spring into Summer* edition of Undergrowth is due to arrive too. The nesting season is upon us, and so far, our owls appear to have made a good start, which you can read about, along with the update on all the bird ringing so far this year, in Tony's report on page 2.



Barn Owl

Elsewhere, Steve explains about the winter grazing by our Exmoor ponies, which seems to be working well; it will be interesting to see how the heath, in particular, fares this summer. The bees are out and about now, and you can discover more about these fabulous insects, in Ian's article on page 3. Finally, we have a couple of vacancies to fill – one for a Sunday post on the reserve, and the other, a voluntary post as a Butterfly recorder. Enjoy the spring sunshine, now it has finally arrived, and don't forget to follow us on the blog, facebook or twitter, as the season unfolds...

Catherine Hayden

Message from the Chair

After a long 'proper' winter, the signs of spring are extremely comforting! Although it begins slowly with the odd Primrose and Bluebell daring to flower, soon the whole reserve is awash with vibrant colour. It never ceases to amaze frequent visitors how quickly the labyrinth of pathways that criss-cross the site become more secluded as the woodland areas cloak themselves in green. One of the most frequently asked questions is: When is the best time to visit Foxglove? Whereas each season has its wildlife gems, the answer has to be spring time. The Bluebell banks alongside Risedale Beck and on the Moorland are absolutely spectacular and the show of orchids all over the reserve seems to be more and more impressive each year. Birdsong adds to the atmosphere and it was definitely worth getting out of bed early for the Birdsong Breakfast event. The (very) early morning walk was followed by a welcome traditional English Breakfast to reward the early start. Thanks to everyone who helped with, and attended this event.



On behalf of the Management Group I would like to thank all of the contributors to and readers of Undergrowth, for your valued support.

Sophie Rainer

Sunday Vacancy

We are looking for an enthusiastic, committed person to work at Foxglove on Sundays, 10am to 4pm. The job is varied and ranges from habitat management, to meeting and greeting visitors, ensuring that the Field Centre is clean and tidy and welcoming visiting groups, along with almost everything in between! This is a paid position.

If you are interested then please contact Tony Crease at Wathgill Camp, Downholme, Richmond, N Yorks, DL11 6AH. Tel 01748 875504 or on 07624 909003

Help with a Smile

Shopping online is a part of everyday life now, but did you know that 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 no extra than the purchase price of your items. For the donations to work you must shop through smile.amazon.co.uk. Bookmarking this website rather than the regular Amazon site, will help ensure donations are made each time you shop with them. Thank you for your support!

Adam Edmond

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: foxglovelnr@btinternet.com
Telephone: 01748 830045 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

Ups and Downs of Bird Ringing

After such a seemingly long and damp winter, I would like to suggest that we have finally moved on. We are now into May and, despite a short setback, the temperatures have finally started to reach normal levels.

The slow change in the seasons has affected much of our wildlife and the abundance or otherwise of our bird populations; it has also impacted on our activities by curtailing many of our over-winter ringing sessions. Glancing at the totals, we ringed only 711 new birds in four months, which is hardly a record.

We have been out when the conditions have allowed with Siskin numbers being good (68) and latterly Redpolls with several interesting controls from as far south as Suffolk and one from Holland for which we await further information.

At Bellflask we prepared the duck trap and caught Teal, several Mallard and Moorhen, before the wet conditions there became impossible and the 9 inch deep mud virtually impassable. The site is being restored now and quarrying has finished, but hundreds of tons of soil needs to be moved around and this last winter has not been the time to do that, as the routes the excavators have taken have shown. It really was a quagmire!

Back at Foxglove many of the net rides were trimmed back ready for the 26th CES season and we finally found the time to try out the new elevator net with which we were well satisfied. I'm sure it will prove very productive in due course.

Nest box replacement and repairs have been successful over the past 3 months and we are as ready for the next breeding season as ever we were.



The new elevator net



Willow Warbler

around Catterick. This is a magnificent effort and we very much look forward to increasing these numbers and adding to our knowledge over the coming months.

Tony Crease

Butterfly Recording

Do you like butterflies? Can you identify butterflies? Do you enjoy walking around Foxglove? If you answer yes to these questions, would you like to consider becoming our butterfly recorder?

There is a set route which takes you around most of the reserve during the summer months. Each butterfly seen is noted, counted, and then recorded. At the end of the season, these records are sent to the VC65 Butterfly Recorder.

If you are interested, please contact the Reserve Managers.



Brimstone Butterfly

Reed Bunting numbers have been encouraging recently with 55 new birds ringed, which is close to a record, but Bramblings were very scarce this year and quickly moved on, as did the thrushes. The harbingers of spring, our Phylloscopus warblers have been somewhat out of kilter, with the first Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers being caught at the same time; usually there is at least a 14 day gap between the two. Towards the end of April we started on the owl boxes and to date have had a good number of nests with eggs or young, supplemented by the odd Grey Squirrel and Jackdaws!

Finally, one of our Oystercatcher chicks ringed locally last year has been caught in Devon, and sadly we lost a 7 year old Mute Swan, ringed as a cygnet at Ravensworth, that flew into electric wires and was killed at Kirby Fleetham. This is a very sad loss for such a majestic bird. Our total of birds processed by the group now stands at 227,610 of which 122,751 have been ringed

The Bumblebees of Foxglove

You would be forgiven for thinking that the poor weather we experienced at the beginning of the year may have had a negative impact on Foxglove's Bumblebee population. Thankfully however, most of our queen Bumblebees did not emerge from hibernation during the one and only brief spell of warm weather we experienced in April, with the exception of the

Early Bumblebee queens. The Early queens not only emerged during that four day period of warm weather, but also raised their first brood!

The yearly cycle of a Bumblebee begins in spring. Rising temperatures awaken queen Bumblebees from hibernation, which then emerge from the soil where they have spent the winter in solitude. Upon emerging the queen feeds on nectar to replenish her depleted energy stores.

Queens begin searching for a nest site, with old burrows, bird boxes and spaces under rocks being particularly sought after. Upon choosing her nest, the queen then starts collecting pollen, mixing this with secreted wax to create 'bee bread'. She also creates wax 'honey pots' to fill with regurgitated nectar. The queen uses this store of pollen and nectar to survive without foraging during bad weather.

After laying her first brood the queen keeps the eggs warm by sitting on the wax nest and shivering her muscles. She feeds on the collected honey in order to survive long enough to incubate the eggs, and this process often takes several days. Once

the white larvae emerge, the queen is busy once again collecting pollen and nectar to feed them. After a fortnight the larvae spin a silk cocoon, in which they develop for a further week or so before emerging as adult female workers. The first brood of worker females carries out a variety of

different jobs, from guarding or cleaning the nest, to foraging for nectar and pollen; the queen now remains inside and continues to lay more eggs.

In late summer new queens and male drones are produced. Drones leave the nest first and position themselves outside of nest entrances in search of a mate, all the while feeding on nectar to survive. New queens begin to emerge a week after the males, and when the time is right will follow chemical cues deposited by the drones, to find a suitable mate.

So far seven of the 'Big 8' Bumblebee species have been seen on the Reserve; namely the Heath, Tree, Buff-tailed, White-tailed, Red-tailed and Common Carder Bee, with only the Garden Bumblebee left to see; keep your eyes peeled for large Bumblebees with a long face and protruding tongue!

Ian Wilson, Reserve Manager

Don't forgot our **Photo Competition** to find amazing pictures for the 2019 Foxglove Covert Calendar! DEADLINE: Friday 14th September

- Photos should be taken at Foxglove Covert LNR or on the surrounding moorland
 - Photos should illustrate the season and/or show some wildlife
 - We will choose 12 landscape format photographs to be used in the calendar and a portrait format photo for the front cover
 - Prizes for Best Adult photo and Best Child photo (16 years and under)
- See the website for further information, including Terms & Conditions



Heath Bumblebee queen



Early morning Hare - the cover photo for 2018

Keep in touch!



Find us on Facebook.com/FoxgloveLNR

Follow us on Twitter: twitter.com/@FoxgloveCovert

Browse the Blog on the website at www.foxglovecovert.org.uk