

Flagship ponds

The Wetland was created from a boggy area of moorland during the winter of 2008/9. A series of pools were dug with water levels controllable via a series of sluices and adjustable pipes. The ponds were designed such that there was 4km of edge, providing habitat for a wide variety of species. Water Voles were released into the area and have made themselves at home, with latrines and feeding stations seen regularly. Birds including Snipe and Redshank are often recorded on the wetland.



The Wetland

Since its creation the vegetation has grown well, and now supports a diverse and complex community, in turn supporting a wide range of invertebrate life. During the summer months damselflies and dragonflies can be seen hunting for food across the ponds. Tiny moths and many other insects fly around and these in turn support frogs, toads and newts on the land and House Martins and Swallows in the air. Foxglove Covert has been accepted into The Flagship Pond Scheme for ponds across the reserve. This is supported by Natural England and recognises areas that are of particular value because they support Biodiversity Action Plan species and very rich assemblages of plants and creatures. This acknowledges that ponds here on the reserve are some of the best in the country in terms of biodiversity. The project aims to help support our work here, ensuring the quality of the ponds is maintained.

The water levels on the wetland were checked recently and as we walked around we were astounded at the diversity of plants flowering just now. Vetches showed a vivid burst of colour amongst the grasses



Marsh Cinquefoil

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: foxglovelnr@btinternet.com
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and were punctuated with the blues of Speedwells and yellows of Buttercups and Tormentil. Marsh Cinquefoil was found in one of the 'protected' ponds where no work can be carried out due to the presence of a rare mud snail, *Omphiscola glabra*, found at only a few locations in the country. Volunteers have spent many days and weeks clearing coarse rushes from this area. This year they have grown much less vigorously and are less dense across the habitat, allowing a richer plant community to flourish. Thank you all again for your hard work and perseverance with this management programme; we are definitely starting to reap the benefits of our hard work!

Adam Edmond

I.T. comes to Foxglove

By October this year we hope to have an interactive touch screen installed in the classroom at Foxglove. This will be in the form of a free standing kiosk with a 32" touch screen. The software is being designed by Simon Kendrew and Jef Maytom of Multimedia Partners. There will be two sections to the software. One is The Collection which will be a library of information about the species which can be found around the reserve. This will be illustrated with photographs, the majority of which have been taken at Foxglove. Elizabeth has worked tirelessly to produce the species list and the photos, and thank you to everyone who has helped us with providing photographs.



The Touchscreen display in the Field Centre

The second section will be a Quiz with a scoring system which should be fun for both children and adults and will hopefully motivate young visitors to find out more about the flora and fauna which can be seen in the different habitats on the reserve. Needless to say this is an expensive project but we are already well on the way with our fund-raising. Jackie Bottrill, our grant seeker, has submitted an application for a substantial grant and we have a raffle running through the summer. This is a very exciting project and will greatly enhance the facilities already on offer at the Centre.

Ruth Farrow



Issue number 35 Summer 2014 The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

Welcome to your summer edition of Undergrowth. As usual, there has been much activity on the reserve, both outside and also in the Field Centre, where we are looking forward to welcoming new technology. Those of you who regularly volunteer at the reserve will be up-to-date with work that has been going on to develop and enhance the wetlands, but you can read more about this in the article by Adam. Don't forget to follow what is going on at Foxglove through reading the *Blog*. I am always impressed by how much Elizabeth fits in to her regular updates; if you have access to the website, do read it to keep in touch! Let's look forward to sunny days over the summer, with a sprinkling of warm rain to keep everything growing, allowing you time to put you feet up for a while and read *Undergrowth*.

Catherine

Message from the Chair

With the summer season in full flow, the reserve is the hub for a whole variety of conservation activities and research. Staff and volunteers continue to keep everywhere looking pristine and have been busy with a wide range of vital tasks.

Team Cappuccino have broken their record for fundraising at the Richmond coffee morning. All of the baking, preparing, sorting and transporting of bric-a-brac and washing up have paid off yet again.

The bird ringers have had an extremely busy and rewarding season, reported by Tony on page two. The Interactive Touchscreen will be a valuable addition to the Field Centre and is one of the most innovative ideas that the reserve has seen so far.

Thanks must go to every volunteer involved in the many different aspects of helping with the reserve, without whom a lot of our achievements would simply not be possible.

Finally, the reserve has just received Flagship Pond Status which you can read about in Adam's article. The management group welcomes this opportunity to work alongside the Freshwater Habitats Trust to help sustain pond biodiversity. This project highlights the high value of Foxglove's ponds for wildlife and will enable better protection and monitoring of this vital habitat. This grand status will also raise awareness of the reserve's importance at both local and regional levels. Foxglove may be small but it is definitely on the map where big conservation issues are concerned.

Sophie Rainer

Summer Fauna

When we can tear our eyes away from the flowers on the reserve, the invertebrate fauna is amazing - sometimes hidden away, often in full view. Bees and butterflies are busy on the thistles while the Honeysuckle's scent attracts the moths. A movement of bright blue flashes as Blue-tailed Damselflies fly by on the hunt for insects and mates. Spiders have built their webs everywhere, although some must be very disappointed as the willow seeds fall into the web, no use as food for a hungry spider. Recently a visit to the lake saw many tiny frogs almost ready to leave the water. A quick glance along the edge of the lake gave an impression that the ground was moving as some of the tiny froglets had already left. An amazing sight!



Blue-tailed Damselfly devouring its insect prey

As well as being out and about, the bird ringers have been very busy in the ringing room where juveniles are steadily coming through. Great Spotted Woodpecker, Robin, Wren, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler are some that we have seen. A number of the Great Tits ringed in the nest boxes have also made an appearance. Moorhens have used the duck raft and the male was seen walking slowly up the ramp, but running much more quickly down it! The pair were later seen on the lake with eight young. On 28th June visitors returned to the Field Centre with a report that they had seen three Kingfishers on the lake – brilliant!

Often it is only by the signs animals leave that we know of their existence on the reserve. Adult Roe Deer slots have been seen in the mud closely followed by much smaller ones - we have some kids! The Otter has left a print in the damp edge of Risedale Beck along with its spraint. Water Voles continue to thrive on the wetland and a feeding station and latrine have also been found on the far moor.

There are still many insects to take flight. Juvenile birds will begin their moult towards adult plumage while the adults, well deserving of a rest after rearing chicks, will hide away during their moult. Let us hope for a lovely summer, warmth and sun.

Elizabeth Dickinson

Breeding birds – good news for Kestrels

Summarising a breeding season is never straight-forward and 2014 will be no exception; what is clear though, is that it has generally been better than the past couple of years and, if it had not been for ten days of fairly heavy rain in the latter half of May, it might well have been the most successful season for some time. A few things stand out and to begin with adult numbers in the small passerine species are still well down on

previous years with many fewer than normal in the breeding population. Results from the early Constant Effort ringing days compared poorly with those of earlier years although there has been a much better productivity percentage in most of the woodland nest boxes.

It is in the number of Tawny Owls, Kestrels and moorland waders where the greatest and most noticeable increase has been observed. Final totals are still not available because there is a backlog of data to be computerised, but at the last count 49 Tawny Owls had been processed with the final total for Kestrels reaching over 60 - both showing more than a 100% increase on last year's exceptionally poor season. It is particularly pleasing to see Kestrel numbers on the up once again

and there seems to have been a plentiful supply of small mammals

More Lapwings have bred than for many years although the attrition rate during the cold, rainy weather was significant - and on the ground nesting passers like Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler too - with young, nests and eggs perishing due to the wet, cold and sometimes flood conditions.

The Buzzard results are mixed with 12 ringed at the time of writing. There is no doubt some have mysteriously disappeared but decent numbers remain and hopefully we will get to more before they fledge. Meadow Pipits appear to have had a bumper season and the results will no doubt confirm this once we start catching them on migration.

To summarise, a better year, with good numbers of nest boxes occupied and improved productivity for all but the ground nesters, some of whom have certainly been washed out. A more accurate assessment will follow in the next edition once the numbers have been crunched.

Tony Crease

A Medley of Moths

To many people, moths are the drab little insects that eat your clothes or fall into your milk jug, or the brown moths that come in through the bedroom window, hastily rejected into the night. But to those of us who are fortunate enough to enjoy the facilities at Foxglove, we marvel at their complexity and are full of amazement when we witness their designs and diverse shapes.

On warm, dry, windless days, day-flying moths can be seen in all the various habitats of the reserve; flying through the vegetation, along the glades, beck side and moorland, alighting briefly on leaves, branches, and the trunks of trees. But when the moth trap is set on Tuesday evenings near the Centre, the resulting catch by morning is spectacular. The bright light attracts the moths after dark, and they are drawn into the opening on the top of the trap where they shelter between the loosely arranged egg boxes until morning when they are enticed into containers, to be identified by the 'moff' volunteers.

The moths are examined with enthusiasm, and passed between the volunteers, who scan the books for images of the less well-known specimens, and those that have not been recorded before. The moth species and numbers are recorded for the Reserve's records and species lists.

It is difficult not to be attracted immediately to the hawkmoths, not only by their impressive size, but also to their dramatic colouring and patterns which usually makes them easier to identify. Sometimes the differences between each specimen can be very subtle and the moths are photographed to assist identification; the small Pugs and micro moths prove the most difficult.



Elephant Hawk Moths

Blooming Summer

My article in the Spring edition of *Undergrowth* ended by saying we were waiting rather impatiently for some colour on the reserve. Well, by April it had arrived with Primroses and Bluebells in profusion. Bluebells as always, covered the bank on the far moor. The cleared area opposite had Bluebells in flower, obviously benefiting from the removal of the old Gorse. A recent stumble through the area, now covered with a rich grass sward, saw Foxglove seedlings growing on the bare areas that were once under the Gorse. They are biannual so hopefully next year it will be pink with Foxgloves.

Adder's Tongue fern grows on the wetland. Surprisingly it has been found on an area near Risedale Beck where it has never been seen before. There is a little confusion as to whether this fern is an annual or a perennial, growing by underground rhizomes. We are still trying to find out!

Lousewort, a semi parasitic plant is flowering on the far moor, again never recorded there. Common Butterwort, Common Spotted Orchid and Early Marsh Orchid are growing on the fen.

The Yellow Rattle plug plants were checked during the last week of June.

There are plants with flowers, but also some with seed heads although they are not quite ready to rattle just yet. These plants are also semi-parasitic on grass roots, so over the coming years, they should reduce the grass sward so encouraging more flowers to bloom.

The strimming of the area to remove Brambles and other invasive plants where the Early Purple Orchids grow, resulted in far more of these flowers showing their beautiful purple heads in spring. There are more areas under consideration for a good strim over winter to encourage the spread of these orchids.

We have had wet, cold, frost, snow, warmth, heat and sun over the last couple of years, not always conditions that we like. Orchids must have enjoyed some of this weather though, along with the management of the habitats, as last year, they were very good. This year they are exceptional! Northern Marsh and Common Spotted Orchid (and their many hybrids!!) are everywhere, with new places being frequently recorded. One brave Common Spotted is growing on the obstacle course – hopefully the soldiers will go round it, following the good example of the volunteers, who circumvent all the orchids when strimming and mowing (thank you for this!). With more flowers still to bloom, there will be colour on the reserve for a long time to come.

Elizabeth Dickinson

Some of the moth names relate to the habitats in which they are found, or the host trees and plants on which they feed: Poplar Hawkmoth, Lime Hawkmoth, or Oak Beauty. Others refer to the patterns and designs on their wings: Garden Tiger Moth, Map-Winged Swift, or Beautiful Golden Y. Many are identified by their colouring: Brimstone, Large Emerald, or Purple Clay. Mother Shipton's profile is clearly marked on the wing of one moth, and a figure of eighty is inscribed in white on another. A head-on view of the Spectacle gives a strong clue to its identity, giving the impression of a WW1 fighter pilot with his cap and goggles.

Each week, more friends join the group of enthusiasts who meet every Wednesday morning, to identify the previous night's catch before they are released. There are also special moth events when Charlie Fletcher, county recorder for moths, gives us the benefit of his expertise, both at Foxglove and other special sites. At a recent open meeting in Marne Barracks, over 150 species were identified, and photographers had a unique opportunity to record the spectacular moths that were caught in the seven traps set out that night. Come and join us one Wednesday morning, as we discover our night's catch... certainly, once you have been caught, moths will have you hooked too!

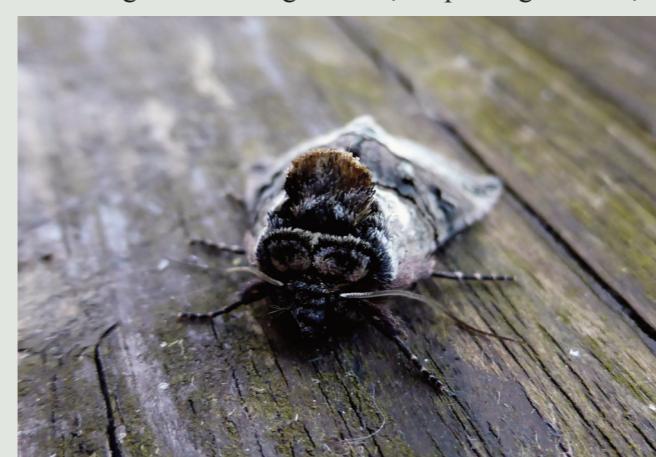
Glennis Walton



Yellow Rattle seedheads



Common Spotted Orchids



Spectacle Moth