

Foxglove Butterflies

There are currently 60 species of butterfly to be found in the British Isles during the course of a calendar year, of which half can be found in Yorkshire. Of those, thanks to the diverse patchwork of habitats, 22 species have been found at Foxglove Covert. Given a sunny day with no more than a light breeze – and a little luck – it might be possible to see 9 different species on any one day during the month of May. Later in the year this can be trumped by a summer flush of butterflies which occurs in July and August, when it might be possible to see up to 20 species. To achieve this at Foxglove you need to walk in the right area and look in the right direction. Not all species are on the wing at once – life cycles are inextricably linked to their respective food plants; for example, an Orange Tip will not be seen in July.

July and August are the peak months for butterflies and by following the various Foxglove access trails, you might see the following insects at this time – examining flowering thistles is a good place to start:

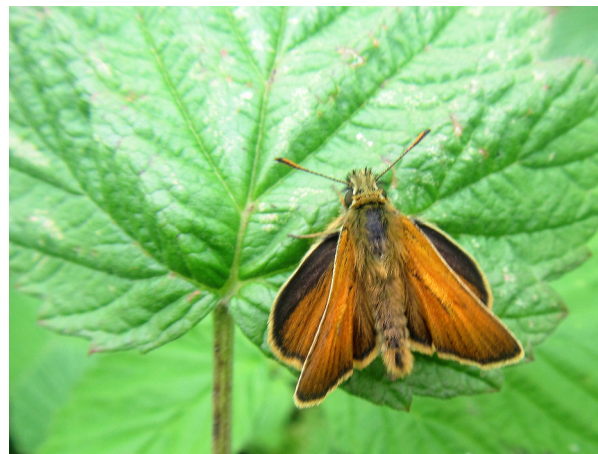
Hesperiidae (The Skippers): Large Skipper, Small Skipper

Pieridae (The Whites and Yellows): Brimstone, Green-veined White, Large White, Small White

Lycaenidae (The Coppers, Hairstreaks, and Blues): Common Blue, Holly Blue, Small Copper

Nymphalidae: (The Aristocrats): Comma, Dark Green Fritillary, Painted Lady, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell

Satyridae: (The Browns): Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Small Heath, Speckled Wood, Wall.



Small Skipper



Painted Lady butterfly. From dearth to deluge, this species is now enjoying its greatest migration since 2009

Monitoring butterflies is important because they are extremely valuable indicators of the state of the environment; visitors to Foxglove Covert are encouraged to record the butterflies they have seen on the observation board in the Field Centre. This data is subsequently analysed by Catherine Jones, Foxglove Covert's butterfly expert, who is currently developing the Foxglove Butterfly Transect which she walks once a week to observe which butterflies are on the wing and where they



Catherine Jones checking her transect data

can be found. First and last sightings and peak counts for each butterfly are passed on to Dr Paul Millard who is the Butterfly Vice County Recorder for Vice County (VC) 65. VC 65 covers north west Yorkshire and thus embraces the whole of Richmondshire, including Foxglove Covert. Paul sifts the data submitted to him by around 140 contributors and passes the result of his studies to the Yorkshire Naturalists Union for inclusion in their annual publication "Yorkshire Butterflies and Moths; an assessment of their status and distribution". He also passes similar data to the Head Office of Butterfly Conservation, based in Dorset.

Further information about British Butterflies can be found in publications such as the "Guide to the Butterflies of Britain" which is for sale in the Field Centre. For advice on Butterfly hot-spots at Foxglove on any given day, visitors can ask the Reserve Managers or volunteers working on the reserve.

Tim Helps

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

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Registered Charity No. 1089020

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undergrowth

50th Issue Summer 2019

The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

From the Editor

Welcome to the 50th edition of Undergrowth!

With practical projects, bird ringing and species recording to report on, it's clear that we're in the middle of another busy season on the reserve. But with everyone's increasingly hectic lives, it is worth remembering how important it is to take a few minutes each day to stop and enjoy the wonderful natural world that surrounds us, and Foxglove is a perfect place to appreciate nature. From finding butterflies or orchids, or watching birds at Spigot Mere, hopefully you'll be able to make some time to stand and stare this summer at Foxglove!

Catherine Hayden



Common Blue butterfly on the meadow

Message from the Chair

The first half of the year has seen major changes taking place on the Reserve; our big project has been the development of a new wetland scrape, Spigot Mere, which is nearing completion. Work has been undertaken to the conifer woodland, the dams to the cascading ponds have been rebuilt, together with repairs to the bridges, boardwalks and outdoor classroom. This has all gone on alongside the day-to-day tasks of strimming, pruning, general maintenance, as well as lots of work on the species. We could not have achieved so much without the dedication and hard work of our Reserve Managers, and the generous time given so freely by our volunteers.

It is rewarding to see a greater number of people visiting the Reserve, and yet we are still desperately low on visitor donations. The Management Group have discussed ways to increase income without charging an admission fee, and are presently considering options to introduce a small charge for parking. This will not affect our volunteers, for whom we will make alternative arrangements. We pursue all opportunities to raise funds both locally and nationally, and an example where we were successful recently was through the Tesco 'Bags of Help' Scheme. We were presented with our cheque for £4,000 in June by senior staff from Tesco, Catterick Garrison, for which we are extremely grateful to Tescos and the local population for their support.

On behalf of the Management Group, Thank You to everyone for supporting Foxglove Covert; we look forward to the second half of the year.

Janet Boakes



Receiving the Bags of Help cheque from Tesco

How did I miss this place?

When I worked in the Garrison, I had seen the road signs for Foxglove as I drove past every day, but I didn't know what a haven for wildlife was on the other side of the boundary! My first impression of Foxglove was one of complete surprise – seeing wetland with various birds and chicks was fantastic! But Foxglove just keeps on revealing more – with woodland, meadows, heathland, lakes and streams within a small area, all teeming with wildlife. I left the British Army in 2018 after serving for 28 years. I have always had an interest in the natural world and whilst serving I was very lucky to experience wildlife in a unique way. Seeing a Jaguar in the Belizean Jungle was the highlight, but hearing Howler Monkeys at night was much scarier! Finding Tortoises in Kosovo put a smile on my face and seeing Wild Boar in the marshlands of Iraq was a complete surprise.

I started working as Reserve Manager at Foxglove in March this year, so was able to see the transformation of the site as spring took hold, with colour and noise returning to the reserve. As the birds came back from their wintering grounds to breed, trying to catch Lapwing chicks



Gerry Dorrington, Reserve Manager

was just one of my new challenges! The learning curve has been steep, but at the same time I enjoy every moment here. No two days are the same: ringing birds at dawn one day, giving guided walks to schools, cubs and scouts the next, the list of jobs never ends and there are not enough hours in the day, but I wouldn't change a thing. Foxglove is a great place for everyone to learn and enjoy nature.

To all members of the Management Group, Sophie, volunteers and friends, thank you for all your help and assistance over the last few months. The knowledge, skills and support you have given to me at Foxglove is amazing, and I am really enjoying my new career!

Gerry Dorrington, Reserve Manager

Update on a busy Bird Ringing summer season

It has been a busy period since starting the Tawny Owls in April. Without Soph, Stacey, Lesley, Gerry and John H we would have struggled to achieve what we have. Very few nests have been missed and between us we have accomplished an astounding amount. Jack Daw has done very much the same on Salisbury Plain and has sent in pages of Whitethroat, Yellowhammer and Blackcap from entirely different habitats. Other people have assisted regularly.



Tawny Owl

What follows is a summary as there are at least 100 pages of data to be entered; species totals are a distant target at the moment – but we have some indicators. Across the board there has been a distinct lack of small mammals and this was clearly evident with the Tawnies who deserted many eggs and ate many of their chicks. The results were incredibly disappointing and we ended up with around 27 birds ringed instead of the 87 we managed 2 years ago. Barn Owls have done very badly at Warcop and a little better in the Catterick area but with small numbers of chicks surviving. Most of them have 2 or 3 young only.

The small boxes seem to have produced at least average results but again there were few invertebrates available at the critical time due to heavy rain and cold temperatures. Many small warblers, for instance Garden Warblers, Blackcaps, Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs, all of whom had quite recently arrived, were wiped out completely in their tiny, fragile grass nests and had to start all over again with new nests and second clutches which have been hatching only in the last few weeks.

Being dragged away to conferences, back to back with Cape Wrath, saw us chasing around in all directions to get



Oystercatcher chicks

Peregrines, Merlin and Buzzards done but we did the best we could, with Kestrels having another lean breeding season. On the moors many chicks were washed out soon after hatching but second clutches again seem to have done better. Curlews were late and many have ended up with 1 chick after early silage cutting, cold wet weather, and a shortage of invertebrates. Cape Wrath was a success despite failing to get onto the stacks and into the auk colonies. Boats go to the highest bidder nowadays and loyalty, guarantees and commitments mean nothing at all. Luckily it was the biggest 'tern' year we have ever known and we capitalised on the abundance of other seabird species. The Buzzards at Cape Wrath, which are normally ready to leave the nest when we arrive, were less than 5 days old when we found them. The highlight again this year was the Wood Sandpiper, not 1 pair but 2 pairs this year in the same place.

There are less than 20 pairs of this species breeding in the UK and although we didn't search for nests, we found 1 juvenile and 1 floating egg. While observing the tiny wetland they were using to breed we found a woman throwing stones in for her Golden Retriever, and a young lad driving a quadbike through the water! Little surprise the birds didn't seem to do very well there!

Finally a word on CES. We have completed 8 visits already, smoothly and successfully. The numbers of birds have been good and we should have some interesting figures to declare in the next edition. We have 4 visits to go and yes, they are hard work, but the ringers have honed their skills and really polished their techniques this year making it one of the most successful seasons ever. They are all a huge credit to the team and I thank them, the volunteers and supporters for all the help they give to keep the CES show on the road.

So, still a busy few months ahead with Bellflask, the Sand Martins, Norway, and then the Meadow Pipit migration to look forward to!

Tony Crease



Kestrel



Wood Sandpiper

Successes and an Orchid Mystery

When the reserve was first being developed, Common Buckthorn and Alder Buckthorn were planted, in the hope of attracting Brimstone butterflies. For several years it was only the odd one that was seen, but this has now changed and several are recorded every year as the trees are now maturing. Brimstones do seem to be more active in the spring, but in late



Brimstone Butterfly

summer and early autumn they can also regularly be seen feeding on Hemp

Agrimony flowers, along with Devil's-bit Scabious and Knapweed (Hardheads) – all of which are nectar-rich and attract many butterflies and bees. Buckthorn also benefits bees – one growing near the path down to Risedale Beck is frequently covered in noisy buzzing bees, along with other insects which can also be found amongst the flowers. Careful examination of the leaves has revealed eggs, which we presume belong to the Brimstone butterfly, and some caterpillars – a success story! The moth trap has not been out as much as we wished so far this year due to wet weather, wind, cold temperatures and high fire risk. One recording morning we struggled to identify a moth, but eventually decided that it was a Tissue Moth which was a new species for the reserve. To double check this, it was photographed and sent to Dr Charlie Fletcher, our VC65 recorder, who confirmed it was a Tissue Moth – whose larvae feed on Common and Alder Buckthorn – with its distribution moving north. We are still waiting to catch another one. One Tuesday evening when the forecast was reasonable and the moth trap was set, amongst the moths was a Cockchafer beetle, another new species for the reserve. The larvae can spend up to three years feeding on plant roots and tubers underground, before pupation. The adults hatch in the spring and only live for about six weeks. The antler-like antennae indicate the sex of the beetle, six 'leaves' are carried by the female and seven by the male. The one we caught was a male. Adder's Tongue Fern grows on the wetland at Foxglove, and was carefully marked out so that the reprofiling of the wetland did not disturb it. Several years ago it was also spotted growing on a path edge on the outside of the perimeter fence. For security reasons the area on the outside of the fence was sprayed and so the fern disappeared, but this year it is back, on both sides of the fence – another success story!

When Spigot Mere was in the planning stage, we hoped that moorland birds would visit it and we haven't been disappointed! Lapwing, Curlew and Oystercatchers have been spotted, along with House Martins and Swallows which feed and drink there too.

In the dry spell the damp bank was host to House Martins collecting mud for their nests. All of these birds have already been recorded on the reserve but new species have appeared as well! A Shelduck was seen and three Little Ringed Plover were photographed feeding along its edge. We await to see what else will arrive ...!

Our orchids always both amaze and confuse us. We have four species: Early Purple, Northern Marsh and Common Spotted Orchids – the latter two species of which, hybridise and have characteristics of both. Early Marsh Orchids are also found on the reserve in small numbers and this year we may possibly have some unconfirmed hybrids between the Early Marsh and



Common Spotted Orchid

the Common Spotted. Northern Marsh Orchids are restricted to two main areas of the reserve, but we now have some growing in other places, quite a distance from the main areas. How are they getting there? We have theories, such as wind dispersal, but we don't know for certain. There is an 'Orchid Map' in the office and all the areas are marked where the orchids are growing; volunteers who head out to trim are given instructions on where to avoid – many thanks to them that no orchids are cut down! Orchids reproduce by cloning, so a group growing together will all be genetically the same. Some orchids may take several years to germinate and even more before they flower. They will grow from seed but need the mycorrhizal fungi for germination and growth; it is thought that some orchid seeds now contain the fungi in the seed itself. Nature is both amazing and mysterious!

Elizabeth Dickinson



Northern Marsh Orchid

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