

Update on Recent Developments

The major habitat works that were mentioned in the last Undergrowth have all made excellent progress. The area of thinned conifer plantation was tidied and the footpaths were reinstated by staff and volunteers. It was hoped that by spring 2020 there would be more wildflowers as a result; however, this spring there were already plenty of new ferns and Wood Sorrel, and even a few clusters of Bluebells and Primroses benefitted from the new light reaching the ground.



The restored wetland

A brand new wetland was created on the moor and is already proving to be a superb habitat for all kinds of species. The new water body was named Spigot Mere after the discovery by the digger driver of not one, but two WW2 spigot mortars! This large pool has already attracted many birds including some new species to the reserve. Up to 25 Lapwing and 13 Oystercatchers have been seen, and for the first time Little Ringed Plover were recorded at Foxglove. House Martins have been photographed collecting mud from the banks for their nests too. Volunteers have recently planted a reed bed on the far side of the mere in order to provide some shelter from the prevailing winds. The icing on the cake will be the construction of a tower hide to overlook the new habitat and some screening to prevent disturbance by people using the footpath; watch this space!

Sophie Crease, Senior Reserve Manager



Foxglove Barn Owls



Little Ringed Plover



House Martins at Spigot Mere

Nestbox Ringing – Crucial to our Understanding of Bird Migration

Spring is a very busy time for Foxglove Covert's bird ringers. Not only is it when we commence our 10½ hour mist-netting sessions as part of the BTO's Constant Effort Scheme (CES), but we also monitor nest boxes.

It is, by far, my favourite time of year. It's always a pleasure to check how birds are progressing with their nest building, egg laying and rearing chicks. We ring the chicks and, wherever possible, the adult bird on the nest. Generally, at Foxglove, most of the birds in small nest boxes are from the Titmouse family, with some exceptions. However, the members of the ringing team also check boxes in the surrounding area. This is where some interesting data can be found.



Pied Wagtail chicks in the nestbox

I've been lucky enough over the past three years to record the productivity of a local, mature wood which attracts Pied Flycatchers.

These are summer visitors to the UK, spending the winter in West Africa. Interestingly, this year I've caught a female Pied Flycatcher that I ringed in the same wood, as an adult in 2018. I have also been fortunate to catch one of the young from her 2018 brood, which is now an adult. The parent bird is nesting just one box away from her previous one. This is the kind of data that I find fascinating, and it confirms that, at least in this case, parents and offspring remain together and learn the migration journey

from their elders. To complete the picture, I would have liked to have caught the male bird too but this is rarely achieved. All of this information is relayed to the BTO and from this we can begin to learn more about the journey that these birds make to reach their breeding grounds.

Lesley Garbutt



Pied Wagtail female

Children of the Moor

In comparison to other breeds of horse, Exmoor ponies all look very similar. They typically have 'wild' colouring, brown with black manes and tails and lighter areas on the flanks, under the belly and on the face. This way they blend into their natural landscape and it can make them very hard to spot! The ponies are described as being 'children of the moor' – that is, their characteristics and behaviour have been shaped by their environment, particularly their need to find food and shelter in order to survive each winter. So, they have a thick double layered coat, lots of mane and tail to protect the head and tail end, whorls of hair on the body that direct water away from thin skin and the distinctive fat deposits above and below the eye that protect it.



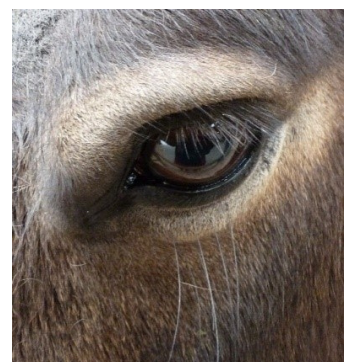
Lark and Taurus

The two Exmoors at Foxglove, Taurus and Lark, are actually quite easy to tell apart. Lark is taller and darker with a much more stocky, compact frame and a more upright stance, whereas Taurus is smaller and more conker coloured with a longer, leaner body. They have different characters too – Taurus is more inquisitive and has had more handling, so he is happy to investigate

people, whereas Lark tends to observe from a distance before making up his mind whether something, or somebody, is trustworthy. Neither of these two was actually born on Exmoor, which is still home to around 150 free living ponies, separated into several distinct herds out on the moorland all the year round. Surprisingly, these two share the same father or sire, a pony called Don Quixote. Both ponies have been with the Trust since they were born – Lark's mother (dam), Pheasant, is also part of the Yorkshire Exmoor Pony Trust and

travels around North Yorkshire grazing different sites with her long-time friend Pippa. Taurus' dam, called Cassiopia, runs in a group of 8 on Skipwith Common, south of York.

Susanna Baker, Yorkshire Exmoor Pony Trust (YEPT)



Fat deposits above and below the eye, help to protect it