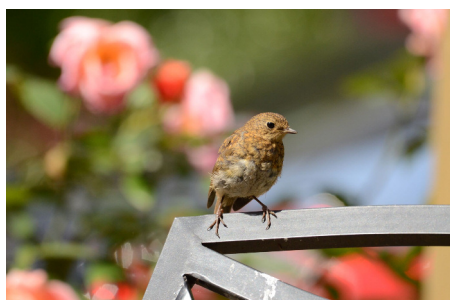


From the Editor

If in January you'd have said we'd all be spending the best part of four months under lockdown with restricted access to visit places, family and friends I think most of



Baby Robin

us would have thought it crazy. We are lucky we have a large garden with lots of boxes and feeders. So, whilst we have missed visiting Foxglove Covert,

we have enjoyed the wildlife on our doorstep and gained a greater appreciation of what is around us.

Unable to support the reserve in other ways I have ensured any online shopping I have done with Amazon during the pandemic has gone through the Foxglove Covert Amazon smile account. 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, and costs you no extra than the purchase price of your items.

None of us know what is around the corner but now the reserve is open we hope you can come and enjoy a visit soon. If the situation does change, we will place updates on our website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Undergrowth.

Katie Awdas

Message from the Chair

At the time of writing, there are now signs that things are beginning to improve and, slowly and cautiously, the reserve is beginning to get back to normal since the UK's 'lock-down'.

It's good to see our Reserve Managers back to working their full hours, rather than on a rota basis and I would like to sincerely thank Sophie, Gerry, Ian and Sandra for their continued hard work over the past few months.

Of course, I also convey my thanks and appreciation to

our volunteers. It is pleasing to hear and read that they are beginning to return to carry out a wide variety of tasks. During my bird ringing visits I have been amazed at how beautiful and well-kept everything looks, and I can fully appreciate how much effort has gone into achieving this. I can honestly say that when the bird ringers turn up at daybreak and find perfectly mown net-rides, we are extremely grateful and humbled that others have put in so much extra effort for us all. Thank you so much.

It's encouraging to see that visitors are also starting to enjoy the reserve once again and all it has to offer.

Moth recorders have resumed their survey work and were fortunate to be able to record a Large Emerald amongst their catch, as well as two new species.

The bird ringers are continuing to put out their mist-nets and can boast a Common Crossbill amongst their latest catches. They have had a very busy and successful nest-box season too.

Of equal importance, the recent dragonfly and damselfly survey provided some amazing photos and interesting facts on the Blog and social media.

We have also taken loan of a flock of Hebridean sheep, which add a new dimension to the visitor attractions and seem to be keeping everyone on their toes!

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has taken its toll and donations and income are at an all-time low. This is the time that I would like to ask everyone to encourage friends and family to visit the reserve, especially over the summer months when, in my opinion, it is looking its best.

Finally, I hope that everyone involved with the reserve, and beyond, remain well and safe as we continue to protect ourselves during this pandemic.

Lesley Garbutt



Keep in touch!

Like us! www.facebook.com/FoxgloveLNR

Follow us! www.twitter.com/FoxgloveCovert

Follow us! www.instagram.com/foxglovecovert/

Read our Blog on our website

www.foxglovecovert.org.uk



Money Trees

Sophie and I are often complimented on how great Foxglove is looking. I believe this is down to three things. The first is Mother Nature; she does a fantastic job each year providing us all with a variety of colours, smells and noises for all of us to enjoy. The second is the hard work provided by an army of people who give up their valuable time to make a difference. Either in the reserve doing manual conservation work or behind the scenes doing hundreds of jobs such as databases, booking food, giving presentations, planning school visits, giving guided walks, the list is endless. Thank you! The third is a vital but difficult subject to write about, money.

“Trees cost nothing to grow, just leave nature to do its thing”. Two years ago, I would have agreed with this statement, but not now.

I would like to point out that Foxglove does get financial assistance. The Military and Natural England do provide some money towards the upkeep, and for that we are extremely grateful.



Work on the reserve

But the true costs are surprising. Trades people, raw materials, fuel, insurance, tools, computers, phone and internet, seed, and of course the bird rings are just some of the costs that we incur. Each year the prices increase, and I have only just scratched the surface.

These costs are a constant and are expected when managing an award-winning reserve. We cannot just sit on our laurels, we need to continuously improve our facilities, habitats and personnel skills so that our conservation management is up to date and current, making the reserve better for everyone. This costs money.

I know, another article asking for money. No not this time, I have written this to inform you how the money you donate is used and how much we appreciate your donations. We would struggle without your generous support. We want you to know that every penny you donate is spent with very careful consideration, one of the many reasons for having a Management Group.

Please remember that we do not charge an entry fee, we are a charity. It is important to us that people from all walks of life can experience all that is available here in Foxglove. Yes, we ask for a donation and we have begun charging for parking but 100% of the money taken goes back into the reserve. We believe Foxglove provides a fantastic experience for all visitors and that for a small donation you get a great day in a very unique location.

We are currently in a global pandemic and thousands of people have tragically lost their lives to COVID-19. Businesses have closed permanently and people are losing their jobs. This might seem the wrong time to be writing an article about money and the costs associated with managing a nature reserve, but the knock-on effect has hit the reserve. Until recently all group visits and planned activities were cancelled, and visitor numbers are now down. We are open, social distancing still applies but with 100 acres to roam that should not be a problem.

It will be vital in the near future that people have access to nature for mental health and for overall wellbeing, we will be here. Please give generously.

Gerry Dorrington

Memories of Foxglove

On my journey north I had time to reflect that it was 11 years since I had last been to Foxglove. My plan was to return and act as sponsor to Sophie who was seeking advancement of her ringing permit to take on a training role.

I first saw the reserve on a slide show that Tony gave at a ringing course which in the best macho tradition was all bulldozers, diggers and mounds of earth. What would I find in the late spring of 2020?

Well the quarry stone by the track was just as intimidating and the Field Centre as cosy as I remembered. The greeting from Sophie and Gerry was warm, I was given my map and became an explorer. Lost down net rides which could be cricket pitches they were so good, through conifers tinkling with finches and out to wetland, proper wetland with pools and shallows, reeds and rushes and mallard looking settled. I felt good about this and moved on through wildflower meadow proudly boasting Buttercup, Cuckooflower and Ragged Robin.

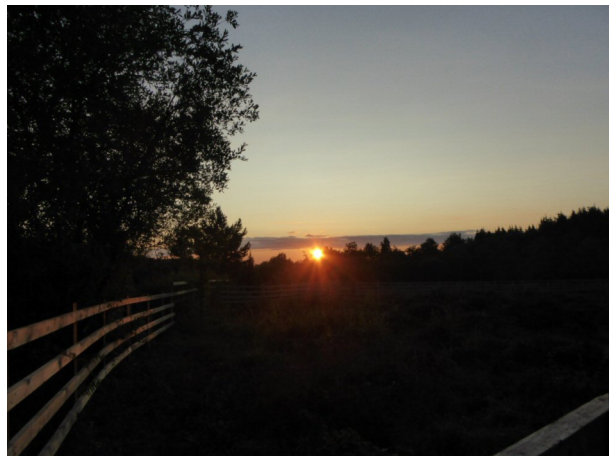
British Trust for Ornithology Constant Effort Ringing Scheme

CES is a term many of you will have heard mentioned over the years; it is the BTO's primary bird ringing project which at Foxglove we have operated for almost 28 years. For us there are 12 mandated visits of 10.5 hours duration annually and we have never missed a single session which is miraculous. For the entire time we have used the same net rides, on the same days, for exactly the same duration, making everything as constant as possible.

The ringers are totally dependant on our erratic weather and very often have to cancel or adjust personal arrangements or even take annual leave to meet the vagaries of the prevailing British conditions.

Start time varies according to sunrise but the 300m of mandatory net is always out there supplemented by 300+ metres of additional net which fortunately the computer program can remove from some of the key calculations at the end of each CES day giving us some much valued flexibility.

Our results over the years have contributed to this principal national survey and the associated analyses of breeding songbirds; the Foxglove component is by far the biggest in the country by a long way. We have completed 9 visits this year already totalling 94.5 hours and over the 28 years have clocked up 3,496.5 hours of CES ringing, or put another way, 146 days ringing around the clock non-stop! The mathematicians amongst you will soon deduce that is roughly 4.5 months of ringing every day and night back to back without a break! It really is quite an achievement. Once you miss a visit that is the balloon burst and very much the reason why we try, despite the odds, to keep the scheme alive at Foxglove.



Dawn at the reserve



Chaffinch

Despite the very erratic weather of recent summers and the difficulties lockdown has created this year we appear to be on track for a very productive season and are likely to produce certainly the best results of the past 3 years.

With over 1200 new birds caught at Foxglove already this year, not to mention the numerous retraps, Chaffinches (9,172) remain our most common bird followed by Blue Tits (6,306)! Willow Warblers are our most common migrant at 5,249 but their numbers are slowly dwindling as are many warbler species across the spectrum. The one exception is Chiffchaff; we have this year ringed exactly 123 new Chiffchaffs so far with Willow Warblers falling behind at 89.

There is a mountain of information available from our CES activities and we are trying now to make this more accessible to all on the newly designed DeMon website being built by the BTO. It is happening, but it's very slow, and it is hoped that in the near future simpler access will make interrogating the data more interesting and much more fun!

Our CES activities rely greatly on our staff and volunteers so they deserve a mention in any CES related text. The support they give us is amazing and we know it, thank you. We are remarkably fortunate to have such a fantastic place to run this scheme at Catterick and we really do thank all those who help in whatever way they do.

Tony Crease

Up a slope to the surprise of Spigot Mere. Amazing in concept and structure and I could hear Oystercatchers and Lapwing before I crested the rise. In visual and emotional contrast, the ancient legacy of the Stone Circle next door with Bluebells emphasising the time capsule. I went on to the boardwalks that I remembered but still had a personal show from a roding Woodcock that evening before my bunk. Truly memorable.

Ian Grier



Bluebells

Volunteering at Foxglove Covert

Readers of Undergrowth and visitors to the Foxglove website and social media will likely have seen regular mention of the volunteers that are heavily involved in the upkeep and maintenance of the reserve. Have you ever wondered what they get up to?

My wife Jo originally volunteered not long after we moved into the area in June of last year in search of something to do and as a way of meeting people. I eventually joined her on my retirement from full time work at the end of 2019. Prior to that, I had attended a couple of Winter Worky days, which was a taster for things to come. As a recent addition to the regular Tuesday group of volunteers I have thoroughly enjoyed helping at the reserve and have been involved in a variety of tasks working alongside the longer serving members of the team. We have both been made very welcome and look forward to our days out on the reserve and the friendly camaraderie that goes with it. Some of the work carried out over the shorter, darker days of winter included tree popping where unwanted self-seeded trees are removed, either by hand or by using a 'popper' to lever out the more strongly rooted individuals. Over a period of a few weeks afterwards some six hundred odd trees of different varieties donated by local businesses were then planted all over the reserve in places either as hedging or to improve an open area. These will all hopefully thrive in the future. Visitors to the reserve might notice the additional wooden posts and the protective green sleeving that are obvious markers for this new planting.



Tree planting

Other tasks have included the trimming back of overgrown branches around the important net rides that are used during the CES ringing season and the general thinning out of overpopulated areas. This period seemed to involve a lot of cutting back of wood and brush and a lot of bonfires but was well worth the effort as it opened up areas that were thoroughly overgrown and will improve the general habitat and allow light into areas that were 'in the dark'. Volunteers have also sanded and painted several benches that are found all around the reserve as they were showing signs of having seen too many wet winters and needed a makeover. Bird feeders require regular filling, signposts need replacing etc. etc! The list is long and varied and is well organised by Sophie and Gerry the two full time managers.

To date, the majority of the time that I have personally been involved has been towards the end of 2019 and into the early part of 2020 and so was mainly during the autumn/winter

season. The enjoyment to be had in doing something worthwhile, whilst also meeting and making new friends, was a big part of this whole experience and I would highly recommend it to anyone thinking of getting involved. The Tuesday group would work hard but also enjoy the tea/coffee breaks and a 'chatty' lunch in the Field Centre. Learning new things by doing and listening to others sharing their knowledge and experience is well worth the effort of turning up every week.

All was going swimmingly and then of course along came COVID-19 and all volunteering had to stop. Not only that but the regular paid team were then forced to cope on their own and at one stage early in the lockdown period, had to keep safely separated by working alternate days. This of course was extremely unfortunate timing for the reserve as spring came with a vengeance with everything growing at a pace during the unusually hot and sunny days of April and May with hardly any hands to hold it back! We heard the occasional word from Sophie and Gerry as to how lovely everything was starting to look which enforced the fact that we had only ever seen it during autumn and winter.

Thankfully, the lockdown was eventually eased, and we were slowly allowed back, first as ordinary visitors which we greatly enjoyed and indeed as we had been told, everything was looking wonderful. Trees were blossoming, ponds were full of life, birds were singing and obviously busy. Finally, we were seeing the reserve in all its glory and had the place pretty much to ourselves.

Although the regular Tuesday group is still officially disbanded, as part of the safe distancing regime and the following of Government advice on staying safe, we volunteers have been allowed to return and are now helping out in smaller 'bubbles'. Jo and I, as a team, are finding safe slots to work in. The reserve is big enough to easily maintain social distancing and if the numbers are low, we can still stop for the obligatory 'cuppa'. Not before time as between us and on different days of the week we have trimmed and pruned all along the pathways and the boardwalks so



Volunteers

that the returning visitors may safely walk without being attacked by overhanging branches. Paths have also been resurfaced and tamped where required, bridges and buildings have been maintained and/or repaired, the most recent case being the re-staining of the front porch. Once more we can take pride in the fact that we are contributing to the upkeep of what is an amazing oasis of calm and a fantastic place to visit, especially now in these very strange and unusual times. We are starting to see visitors returning and it is pleasing to see people once again relaxing and enjoying the peace and quiet as well as the abundant flora and fauna that Foxglove Covert LNR provides.

If you have ever thought about volunteering here, then get in touch with Sophie or Gerry; you won't regret it. If you are still in full time work, look out for the Winter Worky days that will hopefully return later in the year as these are run monthly on a Saturday and lunch is provided! Something for everyone!

Roger Suddaby

Hebridean Sheep for Conservation Grazing

The wetland at Foxglove is managed as part of an Environmental Stewardship Agreement with Natural England. The target species for this habitat are waders such as Curlew, Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe all of which have been present this year. One of the indicators for success is that the sward is kept below a certain height and that the cover of tussocks of grass and sedges is kept below 60% and cover of rushes less than 30%. Natural England advise that the area should be grazed or cut to help achieve these aims. Cutting this area with trimmers is an onerous task and to make life easier some Hebridean sheep have been

borrowed from Gam Farm in Grassington who support the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. The small flock consists of one tup and 14 ewes. The tup has long twisted horns and is easy to distinguish from the others, his name is Thor!

The Hebridean is a breed of small black sheep from Scotland similar to other members of the North European short-tailed group, such as the Shetland and North Ronaldsay breeds. They are perfect for the Foxglove wetland as being lightweight, they do minimal damage to pasture even in wet conditions. They are particularly effective at scrub control, having a strong preference for browsing. In addition, their hard-black hooves are less susceptible to foot problems.

Their arrival coincided with the start of a heat wave and a main priority was getting them sheared. Fortunately, Reserves Team Operative, Ian Tunstill, is a farmer and is well adept at shearing. He made it look easy and it took less



Our flock!

time than anticipated. Once sheared they looked completely different. They were not at all fazed by the process and seemed quite content once they were released back into the meadow. An added bonus was that the fleeces were taken in exchange for a donation and will be used for creating felt animals to be sold in aid of various charities.

As suspected, the sheep chose to graze at Plovers Pool rather than on the wetland bunds where they were needed most so it made sense to move them to the heather paddocks which were filling up fast with unwanted grasses, rushes, willow and birch. Moving them was eventful with the help of several volunteers and Ian's sheepdog and took two attempts! They are now easier for visitors to see as they are next to the main access road and easier for staff and volunteers to check up on.

Sophie Crease



Sheep shearing!



100 Club

The Foxglove Covert 100 Club aims to help our efforts at conservation by generating funds to help us pay for vital work around the reserve.

The Club holds regular draws and pays out over 50% of all the money it takes in annual memberships.

The Foxglove Covert 100 Club is open to anyone aged over 18 and costs just £11 per year. We currently hold 4 draws a year with prizes up to £50.

To join visit our website, telephone us or ask us when you next visit the reserve. We thank current members for their continued support and wish them luck in the upcoming draw!

Field Centre Shopping!

Looking for a gift for a wildlife enthusiast aged 0-100? We have a wide range of books in the Field Centre suitable for everyone!

- Britain's Birds £17
- Guide to Garden Wildlife £10
- The Owl Book £8.50
- Field Study Guides are between £3 and £3.50
- Children's Books at various prices



Some great children's books

Card Payment accepted by phone and delivery may be possible if you live locally.

Bird Food	Weight	Price
Fledgling Food - De-husked & fine nutritious foods	12.75kg	£25
Garden Gourmet - High energy, husk free, no waste	20kg	£27
Black Sunflower Seeds	15kg	£14
Peanuts	25kg	£38
Island Harvest - High energy, husk-free	20kg	£20
Niger Seed - Attracts Goldfinch and Siskin	25kg	£39
(1kg bags are also available)		

Flowers Galore!

The flowers at Foxglove are many and varied. Some recorded in the early years are long gone, whilst other new ones appear. Their seeds may lie dormant in the earth and you just have to look at the conifer area that was cleared to see the wealth of plants growing from the hidden seed store.

The spring flowers and early summer have set seed. Late summer flowers are just coming into bloom with many lasting well into September.

Some flowers are special and do a specific job, like Yellow Rattle and Eyebright which are semi parasitic on certain grasses, so enabling wild flowers to flourish on the middle moor. These flowers provide varied habitats for many invertebrates.

Rayed Knapweed is spreading its purple heads across the middle moor and they are usually covered in a variety of Bumble Bees as well as bees from the hive in the Field Centre. Butterflies and moths also flock to them.



Britain's Birds

We have a range of high-quality bird food. As well as our competitively priced seed, we have a range of fat balls, suet cakes and bird feeders on sale. To buy any of these goods please contact us.

Common bird's-foot Trefoil which grows on the middle moor is the food plant of the Common Blue Butterfly caterpillar.

The middle moor is cut once the flowers have seeded and the hay is removed so ensuring that the soil is not enriched. Wild flowers grow best in nutrient poor soil.

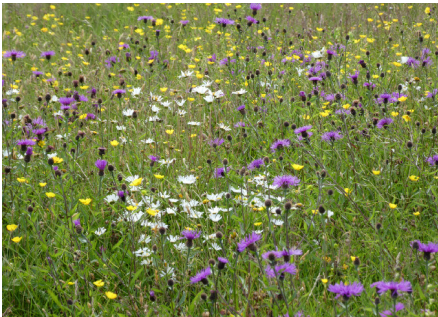
The section of rough pasture next to Spigot Mere has been transformed, with initially the help of livestock and then by the hard work of volunteers. Flowers are thriving and the mix includes Marsh Valerian early in the year followed by Foxgloves and Ragged Robin as the seasons change. Swathes of Meadowsweet flower along the edge of the path giving off a heady scent attracting many bees and butterflies.

It has been another excellent year for orchids. First the Early Purple followed by the Northern Marsh and finally Common Spotted, not forgetting the hybrids! Common Spotted Orchids can now be seen in many places where they have not grown before.

Hidden away, off the beaten track, Sawwort is slowly increasing its range. Although the flower is not as attractive as the Rayed or ordinary Knapweed it appeals to butterflies and it can be covered with several different species.

Pepper Saxifrage is an umbellifer and the many tiny-flowered flat-flower heads provides an ideal place for many insects to feed. It is also an excellent hiding place for insects that feed on other insects! It grows in a small meadow which is cut and raked once the flowers have set seed. It is another plant that can now be found away from its original meadow.

Light purple nodding heads of Devil's Bit Scabious (Nicholas Culpepper, a physician, botanist and herbalist (1616-1654) stated



Middle moor showing Rayed Knapweed and Oxeye Daisy

that a concoction of the boiled root of this plant could be prescribed for snake bites, swollen throats, wounds and the plague. The Devil was annoyed so he bit away part of the root, hoping that it would kill the plant but it didn't!) are often covered with

butterflies in late summer. It grows in the meadows and along the small streams in the Scrapes.

Hemp Agrimony is another flower of the Scrapes that provides food for butterflies as they prepare for hibernation. Every flower from the first Primroses through to the last Herb Robert is important. Some provide pollen and nectar, some hiding places, some are eaten by caterpillars and other insects. Thanks to the hard work of the reserve managers and volunteers, the varied habitats are managed to ensure all these different flowers thrive.



Sawwort with Brimstone Butterfly

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