

## Message from the Chair

They say time flies! Well, what happened to the last 30 Years? Creating a beautiful and functional nature reserve that's what, for Foxglove Covert is 30 years young this year. As we all know these things don't just happen on their own. They need leadership and drive, enthusiastic employees and countless volunteer hours. I think everyone will agree Foxglove has evidently had this in abundance, so congratulations all round on what has been achieved.

Reflecting on that, the Trustees are now actively looking at what the reserve might look like over the next 25 years, that maintains a sustainable and affordable legacy into the future. More on this in the future but the reserve does not function without income, 100% of which is used to maintain the reserve. Therefore, income from all sources remains crucial and we will be looking at this in some detail and hope that readers of Undergrowth continue to see the value of being involved.

I have mentioned previously that there have been some changes to the Charity that oversees the work of the reserve. Some Trustees have taken the opportunity to stand down and again reflecting on what has been achieved a huge thank you is owed to Lesley, Katie, Diane, Elizabeth and Graham. But the talent is not lost as most of the crew are continuing in a volunteer capacity to help with the work. And, as has been said many times, volunteer input is both essential and hugely appreciated – as it will be when planting a new woodland to replace the Ash trees that have Ash dieback and are being removed. Our 'Queens Jubilee Wood' is being funded by the Woodland Trust as part of the celebrations.

Oh, and please try a new addition to the shop on your next visit – a nice ice cream – with thanks to Froneri Ice Cream at Leeming Bar for providing the kit.

*Peter Simpson*

*Chairman and on behalf of the Trustees - Tony, John and Mark*



## 30 @ 30

Foxglove has had a species list since it was started in 1992, then on paper and now held digitally and on paper. Over the years that list has grown. At the beginning of 2022 the list stood at 2853. Some of these species we will never be able to check to see they are still present, for example, the lice on birds. These were investigated by a student from New Zealand doing his dissertation to see if birds introduced from Great Britain, centuries ago, carried the same lice as those found on species in New Zealand now.

Foxglove always gives us opportunities to look for 'living things'. Self-seeded trees, to bugs hiding under leaves, fungi, flowers, creepy crawlies and birds, to name but a few. Some are old friends and appear every year in the same place, some are spreading, some do well, some need a little bit of TLC provided by the reserve managers and the volunteers.

At the beginning of this year, we decided to put our skills and those of the experts to the test to see if we could find 30 new species to celebrate our 30th anniversary.

Up to our Bioblitz day we had already identified 15 new species, including trees, a bird, both a micro and macro moth and fungi. However, the highlight of the finds just before the day was a Silver-washed Fritillary Butterfly. Like the Dark-green Fritillary they rely on violets on which to lay their eggs and for the caterpillars to develop. Foxglove has plenty of Common Dog Violets spread right across the reserve. The fritillaries were very co-operative on the Bioblitz day, and many photographs were taken.

Although the Awl Fly was the highlight for Dr Key, it was upstaged, for me, by the Brown Argus Butterfly found during the butterfly walk.

Lists of species are still coming in and being inputted into the programme, but so far we have exceeded our 30 for 30 target with a grand total so far of 35 new species. How many can we add before our 30th anniversary year ends? Autumn brings fungi, weather permitting, so possibly some new ones may be added to the list. The portable moth trap can now be placed around the reserve, so fingers crossed for some more new species of moth.

*Elizabeth Dickinson*

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## 30 years and counting

In September 1992, the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards returned from the First Gulf War to Catterick Garrison. They established a small conservation area on what was once the Small Arms Firing Range behind Cambrai Lines. The walls of two 'bullet catchers' still stand on the reserve today, but they haven't been used since the 70's and where a pile of sand used to sit to dissipate the pistol pellets, there are now ponds brimming with wildlife. In the early days, the only building was a 'wee' shed which was the base for any conservation volunteers. This small wooden hut is still there today but is now only used as a store for bird feed. Inside, there is a poster with the original 'rules' which were very strict! For example: "We are very fortunate to have our existing facilities which represent a modest investment. They will last a long time if proper care is taken of them." "Hand tools should be cleaned before being replaced in the tool box." "Please ensure all utensils/cups are properly washed using the minimum amount of water."



The original hut!

Prior to the 70's the Garrison was open plan but then during the IRA troubles, tall perimeter fences were installed for security. As a result, the firing range was fenced off and forgotten about and was left untouched for 30 years. During this period the 32 acres became completely overgrown. The serving soldiers had both time on their hands and access to machinery and helped to carve out the main track and some of the footpaths that still wind their way through the Willow Carr.

In April 2001 the area was declared a Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCI) appearing in Richmondshire District Council Local Plan. It was the first Local Nature Reserve in Richmondshire, North Yorkshire and the first on Ministry of Defence land in the UK.

In March 2010, the environmental value of the reserve was further recognised with the signing of an Environmental Stewardship Agreement between the Management Group and Natural England. The site has grown over the years and is now 100 acres (42 hectares) and is well known for its mosaic of habitats several of which are of international significance for biodiversity with several red listed species. Foxglove is a Centre of Excellence for bird ringers. It has been a Constant Effort Ringing Site (CES) for 30 years (more on this in the next edition). It has the second-best data set in the entire country with well over 60,000 birds ringed. Around 300 bird ringers have been trained at the centre.

It is a dynamic site and over the years has seen many new and innovative projects such as wetland creation, Water Vole releases and even the construction of a stone circle. Throughout the time, volunteers have been the backbone of the reserve and continue to be so. It is estimated that over the last 5 years alone there have been over 70,000 hours of volunteer time which costed at the basic minimum wage equates to £665,000. Their efforts were recognised last year when the group was awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (QAVS), equivalent to an MBE, QAVS are the highest awards given to local voluntary groups in the UK, and they are awarded for life. Nearly a million people have visited the reserve and over 50,000 school children have visited on educational visits. Over the years there have been many VIP visits too including by the Prince of Wales, Admiral Tim Lawrence, William Hague, Rishi Sunak MP, Lord Zetland, David Bellamy and many other civil and military dignitaries. Lord Zetland is the Patron and visits routinely.

The site now boasts fantastic purpose-built facilities and several kilometres of well-maintained trails and remains a special sanctuary for both people and wildlife and a fantastic legacy to Tony who had the vision and drive to create it. Here's to the next 30 years!

*Sophie Crease*

## Welcome to Hayley!

I have recently joined the team at Foxglove having graduated from Lancaster University this summer with an integrated master's degree in Ecology and Conservation. I have always had a passion for wildlife and the outdoors and feel very lucky to be working in such an amazing place. Foxglove is a hidden gem with so many different habitats teeming with life – woodland, wetland, heathland, meadows, ponds and much more. It is fantastic for wildlife and the perfect spot for people to get outside and enjoy nature. I have a particular interest in birds; I am fortunate to be a trainee bird ringer with the Swaledale Ringing Group and currently represent other trainee ringers on the British Trust for Ornithology's (BTO's) Ringing Committee. I really enjoy seeing the birds up so close and learning more about ornithology despite the very early starts!

I started working at Foxglove as Assistant Reserve Manager in June having previously volunteered at the reserve during my university holidays. No two days have been the same and the time simply flies by with such a wide variety of tasks. One moment pond dipping with school groups, the next checking nest boxes and ringing chicks or working alongside dedicated volunteers to carry out a range of reserve maintenance tasks. There is always something new to see, do or learn and I am enjoying every minute.



Hayley!

To Sophie, Gerry, and to all the volunteers and friends – thank you. It is a privilege to work with such a friendly and knowledgeable team and the support you have given me has been amazing. I really am 'living the dream'!

*Hayley Land*



## Beautiful Butterflies



Kate Atkin - Dark Green Fritillary



Kate Atkin - Silver-washed Fritillary

Dove's-foot Cranesbill. However, whether this butterfly is here to stay is yet to be discovered as no further sighting have been recorded.

Kate Atkin

The butterfly walk lead by Tim Helps was based around the Orchard area of the reserve with a total of 15 old and new species recorded. Species included Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Comma, Painted Lady, Green-veined White, Small Tortoiseshell, Small Skipper, Large White, Brimstone (f)(m), Red Admiral, Small Heath, and Peacock. Surprisingly no sightings of the Small White were observed, whilst highlights included several sightings of the Silver-washed Fritillary first recorded on the 27th July 2022. The appearance of this butterfly species may be due to individuals in the area expanding their distribution by flying large distances to find suitable habitats to colonise. The latest UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme report (2020) states this butterfly species has expanded 257% since 1976 making it one of the fastest expanding butterfly species in the UK. The Dark Green Fritillary was also observed making it the first time two fritillaries were recorded on the reserve. Both these species are of regional priority in some areas meaning habitat must be managed appropriately to maintain the main larval foodplant Common Dog Violet.

Another species observed was thought to be a female Common Blue, but after further investigation with the help of Tim Helps, Catherine Jones and Martin Partridge we discovered this species to be a Brown Argus. The difference between the two species is the underwing dots where the Brown Argus forms a figure of 8 or colon (:), whereas the Common Blue dots form a continuous arc. This species over recent years has populated the North of England due to the presence of its host plant Rock Rose and plants of the Geranium family, typically



Kate Atkin - Underside and side view Brown Argus



Tim Randall - Common Blue Butterfly female

## Bug Walks

Our Bug Walks in the heath and flowery meadow area were a bit quiet compared with previous years - no youngsters booked onto the 10am one so we ran an experimental one for grown-ups which went very well, with quite a few Foxglove volunteers coming along to learn about the minibeasts in their care.



Bug Safari

In the afternoon, although there were only three pre-bookings, plenty of youngsters joined in 'on the spur of the moment' and were so eager that we had a job drawing the event to a close after its full hour. Mums and Dads were just as enthusiastic and as difficult to persuade to return to base as the youngsters. Such was the phrenetic pace of the afternoon event that many more species were almost certainly presented to us than ever got written down! Despite that, in total we recorded 36 identified species and have a further 27 with (so far) an approximate idea as to what the creature is - usually what family it belongs to.

Some of the unidentified bugs, hoppers and parasitic wasps are now off to specialists to get identified and it is with the parasitic wasps that I'm sure we'll have got something new - the wasp families Mymaridae (tiny 'fairy flies') Pteromalidae, Encyrtidae, Torymidae are all new to Foxglove Covert.

the identified ones was probably the Awl Fly, *Xylophagus ater*, brought to me by an enthusiastic youngster, which seems to be new to the reserve. This fly very closely resembles an Ichneumon wasp in both appearance and behaviour. It breeds commonly in damp decaying wood but its adults are secretive and are seldom seen.

Dr Roger Key and Rosie Key

P.S. After Dr Key sent his article and list he added a couple of extra species - in his own words - Family Tabanidae Common Cleg *Haematopota pluvialis* - biting me!

Family Ceratopogonidae - *Culicoides* sp 'the wee Scottish midgie' - biting me!



Awl Fly *Xylophagus ater*  
(photo: Pristurus (CC BY-SA 3.0))



## A day of wonder and a wonderful day!

Having been asked to lead two photographic walks, I arrived in plenty of time to reconnoitre some areas of the reserve for photo opportunities. By 8am, many moths were being transferred to holding tubes for future viewing and identification, so I set off along parts of the Red Route, starting with The Scrapes.



Toadstools

Woodland and down to Plovers Pool.

By the path, in the woodland, I found these fungi fruiting bodies which something must have found tasty.

I saw a dragonfly, very briefly, but with no time to guess at the species. The limited sightings left me feeling a bit concerned as to what we might find on the photographic walk.

I needn't have worried. By the time for my first walk the sun was breaking through, the temperature had risen and Foxglove Covert was wide awake. I'll let the following photographs illustrate this awakening.

*Tim Randall*

Due to the overcast and rather cool conditions there were few subjects to photograph apart from some bees, bumblebees and flies.

I continued down to Hague Bridge, past pools and ponds, through scrub and woods, and back to the Field Centre.

A little later, I walked up to the Orchard, through the Conifer



Bumblebee



A passing Damselfly



Catching the sunlight

## Foxglove Covert BioBlitz 2022 – Moths



*Pyraustra purpuraris*

Moth trapping at Foxglove Covert can be an exciting event. The reserve is the home of many local and scarce species, and we seem to add to the list every time we come and trap. The odds this time however seemed to be stacked against us. After a week of warm nights, the weather turned much colder, leading to a small catch, and one generator stubbornly refused to cooperate, so the number of traps set was not as large as it has been in the past.

Despite this, we managed to log 77 species. Two of these were new to the site. The little *Gelechiid* moth *Bryotropha senectella* was in one of the traps, and leaf folds of *Callisto denticulella* were found on an apple tree behind the centre. This takes the number of species of moths recorded on the reserve to an impressive 583.

Several nice species of wooded upland moths were recorded. Barred Chestnut and Square-spotted Clay are uncommon in the county but seem to be thriving at Foxglove Covert. Lempke's Gold Spot

and Gold Spangle are also two very attractive upland species which are not commonly recorded, and Blue-bordered Carpet was another nice find. It was good to record two uncommon micro moths, *Ypsolopha nemorella* and *Elachista adscitella*, both of which are uncommon in the county but doing well at Foxglove Covert.

*Charles Fletcher*



Yellow Tail



## Buckingham Palace visit



Outside the Palace

On Wednesday 25th May Lesley Garbutt and myself were lucky enough to visit Buckingham Palace on behalf of all the volunteers of Foxglove Covert in recognition of our Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

Travelling down on the train from Northallerton in our posh frocks and hats and fascinators in hand we generated some looks and comments from fellow passengers! One lovely family, when hearing where we were going had great pleasure in telling their young daughter we were going for tea and cakes with the Queen!

Travelling across London the closer we got to Buckingham Palace the more people we saw in their best frocks and suits with some amazing hats and fascinators also on show! Due to the Platinum Jubilee concert which was taking place some 10 days later access to the Palace was limited and we had a long walk effectively right round the back of the Palace to get to the entrance we needed. Thankfully we were both wearing sensible shoes but even before the event started, we saw ladies walking in bare feet and being carried by their other halves!

At 3pm were we allowed to enter via the front gates on The Mall. Everyone was very excited! Being encouraged to move to the gardens at the rear of the Palace it was lovely to see parts of the building which are usually shielded from



Afternoon tea

public view. The sound of military bands playing both traditional and popular musical tunes welcomed us and at this point we were lucky that the sun was shining!

Having studied the programme for the event we had decided to enjoy an early afternoon tea to then be free to watch the Royal Family's entrance at 4pm. Lesley was very good having a mixture of sweet and savoury whilst I went straight to the sweet and ate a month's worth of sugar in one sitting! At this point we enjoyed a toast to Tony who was in our thoughts throughout the day (sadly it was tea and nothing stronger!)



The Royal Family

Keen to see the Royal's we took our place about 3 rows back from the front and were happy with having a reasonable view. It was, however, our lucky day as a loud stern Beefeater came along telling the rows in front of us that they were stood on the road, which was classed as an emergency exit, so they needed to move leaving us stood nicely at the front!

Each Garden Party had seen different members of the Royal Family attend on behalf of the Queen, and we were lucky to have the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Prince Edward and his wife Sophie, Princess Eugenie and the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester! We had been given some insider info beforehand so knew we were going to be lucky although for many people it was a surprise with the details not being released to the public until a few hours beforehand. Although we didn't get to speak to anyone (people had been picked out prior to the event) we did get to stand very close!

During the afternoon, showers kept rolling in and out although we were grateful it wasn't persistent rain. We enjoyed a lovely walk around the gardens in the warm sunshine. The flowers were more advanced than up in North Yorkshire with the rose garden

positively blooming and a lovely scent in the air. We both smiled on seeing Foxgloves in flower! The gardens contained many different plants and birds could be heard singing from the trees. The Greylag Goose family had young and as Bird Ringer Lesley was keen to try read their rings, but we couldn't get close enough as we didn't want to make them feel threatened.



Foxgloves at the Palace

The afternoon flew by with the Royal Family leaving just before the public with the National Anthem being played beautifully by one of the Military bands (I wish I could include a video here!!!) With time to spare before the train home we enjoyed a lovely walk-through St James's Park looking for the Pelicans which Lesley remembered being taken to see as a child!

A once in a lifetime, amazing experience for us both and something we will remember for the rest of our lives!

## Spanish ringing report

As a fresh-faced trainee ringer, I was sad to have missed out on the CES efforts at Foxglove Covert this year. I was, however, doing my share of ringing elsewhere – spending the month of May assisting the Spring ringing campaign at the Aiguamolls de l'Emporda, a coastal wetland reserve in north-eastern Catalunya, Spain. The campaign, coordinated by the Catalan Institute for Ornithology (ICO), and running from March through May every year, attempts to ring and collect data on as many migratory (as well as resident) birds as possible. This data is subsequently made freely available in the hope it might be used to contribute to reserve management and scientific research. I was there as one of many 'auxiliares' (assistants) who came and went, working under the auspices of an experienced head ringer who changed from week to week (all of whom were eccentric, yet endearing, 'characters'), and living together above an information centre at the heart of the reserve.

The survey area at Aiguamolls is divided into 3 habitat zones - reedbed, riparian woodland and rushy meadow – with 7 net rides each, totalling 21. Times of ringing changed as the days lengthened, but the usual schedule was: Open the nets at 6:30-7am; ring until 1:15pm and then close the nets; eat lunch; have a siesta; perhaps do a round of birding or pick up supplies; reopen the nets at 7pm; ring until the light has gone (9:30-10pm). Ringing protocol is somewhat different in Spain – the nets need only be checked every hour instead of 20 minutes and are left open overnight after the final crepuscular round. As well as ageing and, if possible, sexing the birds, and measuring wing length and weight, a record is taken of the length of the third primary feather, state of muscle, fat, moult, and signs of reproduction.

The highly variable weather conditions of the region can have a pronounced effect on bird activity at Aiguamolls. On some days, the Tramontana – sporadic gale-force winds arriving from the nearby Pyrenees to the north – makes the nets too visible and more easily evaded by the birds. These northerly gusts also halt the progress of flocks migrating northward, forcing them to drop into the reedbed to seek refuge and wait to move on – now in enormous numbers – once the wind drops. This was evidenced on the 2nd May this year when, once the Tramontana subsided after several days of incessant blowing, 189 swallows were caught in the nets in the space of a couple of hours! On other days the stillness and oppressive heat (surpassing 30 degrees this spring) prompt bird activity to cease.

The most common bird we caught was Eurasian Reed Warbler. Aiguamolls is both an excellent site for a large breeding population of this species as well as a key stopover location for birds on passage towards northern Europe. Despite ringing what seemed to me to be huge numbers of Reed Warbler, I was assured that we were catching far fewer than in recent years. It was proposed that this might be due to problems encountered in Africa, such as drought conditions in the Sahel wintering grounds.

Other resident and migrant species we regularly ringed included Great Reed Warbler, Sardinian Warbler, Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler, and Yellow Wagtail, which all enjoy strong local populations. Among them were the occasional Hoopoe, Melodious Warbler, Sand Martin, Barn Swallow, Stonechat, Pied Flycatcher, Kingfisher and what several head ringers made reference to as the ringer's nemesis: the Starling! The rarities and highlights of the campaign during my time there included several Little Bitterns, Black-crowned Night Heron, Long-eared Owl, Cuckoo, Jay and Common Sandpiper.



Little Bittern

One special moment occurred when a convention of Catalan bird ringers took place at the reserve, with the team of ICO leading a refresher course using birds we caught that day. After ringing what at first appeared to be a Melodious Warbler, the expert eyes in attendance confirmed we had in fact caught an Icterine Warbler, a scarce passage migrant in Catalunya and the first of the year. The giddy elation that erupted among this group of bird lovers and devoted ringers, while the experts elucidated the fine differences between both species, was a delight to witness.

This year a total of 2869 individuals were ringed across the campaign, and I personally ringed a few hundred birds in the month I was there. Aiguamolls truly is an excellent reserve, a crucial home and stopover site for European

birds, and of great importance for wildlife more generally. Outside of ringing, it was also an exceptional place for me to see a host of lifers – Red-footed Falcon, Lesser Kestrel, Slender-billed Gull, Broad-billed and Curlew Sandpipers, Caspian and White-winged Terns – as well as reencounter some of the most beautiful birds of the continent – European Bee-eater, Roller, Purple Heron, Collared Pratincole, Greater Flamingo, Glossy Ibis and many more. While I can't see my newly acquired familiarity with the moult characteristics of Nightingale and Little Bittern being of particular application at Foxglove Covert, I've greatly benefited from the opportunity to improve my handling and 'reading' of birds, and my acquaintance with shared species, whilst I was there. It was a galvanising experience, and I'm looking forward to ringing with you all again at Foxglove Covert very soon.

*Joe Fraser Turner*



## The moment I fell in love with butterflies!

I am often asked when and why I fell in love with butterflies. I was asked the same question by a young man with an enquiring mind at the recent Foxglove Covert Bioblitz. I think I said that it was when I encountered swarms of Clouded Yellows on Buddleia bushes growing in Amroth, Pembrokeshire, in the very hot summer of 1947. On the strength of that I might have pestered my parents to give me a copy of the Observer's Book of Butterflies compiled by Mr W J Stokoe. They succumbed to my pester-power and duly bought me the book perhaps in the hope that it might stimulate my interest in nature. The book might have done very briefly but, in truth, I was a late entry with regard to having a real interest in butterflies. In my youth I could just about tell the difference between a Peacock and a Red Admiral and I knew about Clouded Yellows but all "whites" were "Cabbage" and that was about the extent of my knowledge. However, a chance encounter with a beautiful lady in a far-off land changed all that.

I fell for *Amathuxidia amythaon dilucida* in 1966. I admired the black bordered vibrant purple sheen on her forewings which contrasted with the dark brown of her underwings and I also admired her nerve. I encountered her in the primary jungle of Malaya in a dark clearing illuminated by a single shaft of sunlight that pierced the canopy.

I was a young Army lieutenant undergoing a final training exercise at the British Army Jungle Warfare School before deploying on operations against the Indonesians in Borneo. We were awaiting the order to attack the enemy and our objective was being subjected to a simulated artillery barrage. I was lying on my stomach in the shadow passing the time watching a column of ants moving like a snake across the jungle floor when a movement caught my eye and there she was. It was love at first sight. Like an operatic prima donna held in the spotlight *Amathuxidia* alighted on a leaf lit up by the sun's rays. She opened her wings, at least four inches tip to tip, to soak up the sun's energy. The explosions reverberated and the jungle shook but she was not to be moved. She stayed on her leaf rotating slowly, luxuriating in the rays of the sun that emphasised her purple sheen.

Some five minutes later, the order came through to advance. I stood up and my shadow fell across the sun-basking butterfly. Explosions are one thing but to be startled by a complete stranger in ones' boudoir is quite another. With a single click of her wings she was up and away and the last I saw of her was a flash of that fluorescent purple as she disappeared into the gloom. I have never forgotten her.



Silver-washed Fritillary

Fritillary cavorting and gliding amongst the grasses below and the trees above and somehow missing, with Red-Arrows precision, the line of spectators was impossible to judge – maybe the lady had a slight edge. Whatever the result, the encounter reinforced my love of butterflies and perhaps triggered a similar love amongst the other spectators.

The complex and inspirational beauty and variety and energy of butterflies never fail to amaze me and give me faith and belief that perhaps there really was a Creator who was not resting after all on the seventh day but thought that as he had a few hours on his hands he would give "butterflies" a bit of a go!

*Tim Helps*

Inspired by the encounter with such a majestic butterfly I bought a copy of the Butterflies of the Malay Peninsula by Corbet and Pendlebury in Singapore before my deployment to Borneo. That was my second book on butterflies and since then I have bought many others and have been fortunate to observe many species in many different lands and habitats during my subsequent travels.

On 6th August 2022, I had a further chance encounter in the company of several other butterfly observers in the "Orchard" flower meadow at Foxglove Covert to watch another lady. This time the lady was not in her boudoir but a lady that was trying to outdo a gentleman in her acrobatic skills. We marvelled at female *Argynnis agalja* trying to eclipse a male *Argynnis paphia* in their aerial dances. The winner of the duel between the Dark Green Fritillary and the Silver-washed



The most photographed butterfly at Foxglove!

## Building the future of the reserve

We are lucky, really lucky! Sophie, Hayley and I get to work in one of the most beautiful places in North Yorkshire. We see amazing animals, moths, plants and birds every day. We meet people from all over the world, who come to experience this award-winning reserve. It's also great to see people of all ages enjoying what nature has to offer.

There is another side though, the boring forward planning side. Thinking ten years ahead. Making things last longer. Getting our monies worth.

To make Foxglove work we must have a Field Centre, hides and viewing platforms. Bridges; lots of bridges, from small to rather big ones! Boardwalks; hundreds of metres worth. Paths, fences, gates, an outdoor classroom and an electric gate that needs blowing up! Not forgetting our many water habitats supporting a myriad of creatures, large, small and everything in-between.

Most of this infrastructure was put in place ten to twenty years ago and sadly this is now beginning to show its age and deteriorate. At the time of building Foxglove's infrastructure nobody thought about replacing it or digging it up again!

This is where we are right now, just as a cost-of-living crisis hits all of us. Brexit has just happened and a War in Europe. A perfect storm.

Quotes that the reserve received for planned work two years ago have now doubled in price and are still rising. The price of timber is increasing at an alarming rate. However, change is happening. Slowly I know, but it is happening.

The boardwalk will be replaced over several years so that the next team of managers don't have the same challenges we are currently enjoying.

Gate posts are being replaced, fences are being maintained and path edges are being fixed on a weekly basis.

The lake and ponds have all been silting up so a plan is currently being put in place so that they can be maintained and enjoyed for years to come. The costs are extremely high and difficult decisions will have to be made very soon on what takes priority. In the short-term volunteers have been pulling reeds and getting covered in mud; thank you! Dams in the Scrapes and other locations within the reserve have all been given an overhaul, diverting much needed water to pools and ponds which would have dried up in the heatwave if it had not been

done. My thanks to Brian and Peter who completed this just in time.

Just keeping our infrastructure maintained isn't good enough though. We must look forward and constantly try to improve our reserve, otherwise we will be left behind.

Bob Ripley is currently building a new viewing platform at Spigot Mere. The great thing about this project is that he is using old wood saved from the replaced boardwalk and timber left over from when the Field Centre was built! Once complete visitors will be able to observe the wildlife on Spigot Mere without disturbing it.

To all our volunteers and donors, thank you. Without your support Foxglove simply wouldn't work, you should all be proud of yourselves!

I am sure in twenty years' time the next team of managers and volunteers will be fixing, replacing and adding to Foxglove, lucky them!

*Gerry Dorrington*  
*Reserve Manager*

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- Shop with Amazon Smile
- Adopt a Bird or Bat box around the reserve
- Enter our 100 Club
- Buy from our shop – bird food, wildlife boxes and feeders, cards, clothing, gifts, books

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