

Undergrowth

Issue No 6. Autumn 2006

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

One of the problems of producing a newsletter is trying to think of something original to say about each of the seasons. Everyone must get pretty tired when I bang on about the beauty of Foxglove as it changes its clothes through the year. But about Autumn I make no apology; this is my favourite season and I could, if She would allow me, spend hours just looking at a single leaf, let alone a whole tree. Don't mistake me - Spring is great but it is, at best, green - Autumn wears every imaginable colour. At the risk of sounding like the cast of the *Sound of Music* here are some of my favourite things:

The peppery smell of fallen leaves; fungi shining like jewels; larch trees standing in pools of discarded needles; the stillness broken only by the slow drip of water; Redwings and Fieldfares; beech trees flaming in the sun.

On a personal note, could I take this opportunity to thank everyone for their kind thoughts and good wishes on Alison's illness. They were much appreciated by us both.

A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to you all.



Bird Ringing

There has been a reduction in the number of people taking part in our bird-ringing in the past few months. This has been caused by a number of people moving away and others who have, for one reason or another, reduced the amount of time they can devote to the task. In particular, the departure of Richard Brown to work on Skomer and Chris Bell to New Zealand has left a large hole both in terms of enthusiasm and knowledge. If anyone would like to take up this highly valuable work and make a direct contribution to conservation, please contact Tony Crease on 01748 875504 who will be delighted to hear from you.

We had a rather sad occurrence at the Centre last

month - a ringed blue tit was found dead at the end of the tunnel which leads to the indoor beehive. It had presumably flown or fallen down the outdoor pipe and then moved along the perspex tunnel, perhaps attracted by the light, and ended up close to the beehive itself.

Meet the Volunteers

Ann Luxmore is one of our loyal band of volunteers who turns out on most Tuesdays to help with the management of the Reserve. Ann is also a member of the Friends group and has also adopted no less than 4 of our birdboxes. All of which must make her one of the most committed people around.

Ann works as a healthcare professional out in the Dales and fits her voluntary work around her busy schedule. Ann likes to get her teeth into a job and is particularly fond of bonfires. As always, we are very grateful for the time and effort she puts in.

Our Tuesday volunteer team now numbers seven members and the amount of work that they achieve is really making a difference to our habitat management across the Reserve. The team enjoy their day together and there is always a lot of chat and laughter about. Ann is a key part of this and talk of trips to places like Ethiopia keep everyone entertained.

Our merry band of volunteers has recently been boosted by the arrival of Kayleigh Norman, a student at Askam Bryan college, who spends each Monday on the Reserve. Kayleigh is in the second year of a 2 year National Diploma in Countryside Management and her day on the Reserve is designed to give her valuable work experience.

By working alongside Mark it is hoped that Kayleigh will gain a range of useful experience in Nature Reserve management covering everything from practical habitat management through to planning, monitoring and visitor management.

Kayleigh lives locally and is enthusiastic about conservation in general. As well as working on the

Reserve and studying at Askam Bryan, Kayleigh also attends training courses and workdays run by BTCV. We wish her well and hope that she enjoys her time with us.



Our photograph shows Ann on the left with Caroline Stott getting to grips with some heavy undergrowth.

Volunteers, whether available during the week or at weekends, are most welcome to come along and meet us to find out what we do. If you would like to be involved, please ring Mark on 01748 831113 or 07754 270980.

CLO Post Funding

As is usual with virtually every enterprise of its type, Foxglove needs to generate a certain amount of cash to fund the work it does. Although it is often possible to get hold of money through grants for specific projects or purchases it is far harder to generate revenue grants which cover our on-going needs over a period of time.

At Foxglove we have a particular need in this area - our CLO post, currently held by Mark Hewitt. This post has been funded for the past two and a half years by a grant from English Nature under their Wildspace scheme but that funding runs out in September next year.

Although the Management Group has made strenuous efforts to find other funding streams this has proved largely unsuccessful although there are still some avenues to explore. In order to help us to focus on this problem we have invited Chris Stott to join us. Chris is a financial consultant with a long and successful career at the highest levels of the banking sector. His specific remit is to look for funding in areas with which we are unfamiliar.

This is a matter of huge importance to the future of Foxglove. If we are unable to replace this grant with funds from other sources we may well have to face the future without the huge benefits which a full-time warden brings to the Reserve. In our case, where we have restricted access, the lack of someone who is available to ease the access problem will make the Reserve far less attractive to visitors; this will have a knock-on effect on our involvement in education which is one of the key aspects of our work. We will also lose the expertise we have in managing and maintaining the Reserve through the directed efforts of our volunteers.

In the meantime, if anyone has access to a fairy godmother with time on her hands . . .

Friends Group

The Friends group continues to expand slowly. We are now in the process of asking people to renew their memberships for the coming year. The response has been excellent with only one person failing to renew so far. We also have two new members and we would like to welcome:

Tony and Brenda Croser Thornton Watlass

Could we point out that membership of the Friends group would make a very good Christmas present for anyone who is interested in conservation. If anyone would like to give membership as a gift we would be delighted to include a short greeting with their joining letter. Just let us know what you wish to say and we'll do the rest. With this in mind, we have included a Friends application form with this issue.

One of our Friends, Jean Gabriel, had an accident while out walking in the Dales recently and broke her leg. We all send our best wishes and hope she is making a good recovery.

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM will take place on 11 January at 7.00 pm in Lizzie's Bar in Piave Lines. Everyone is welcome to come along to this event and take part. The meeting will follow the usual pattern of a report from each member of the Management Board on their area of responsibility and this is an excellent opportunity to bring up any concerns which you may have over the management of the Reserve and the work which we do. However, the most important part of this year's agenda is the election of members of the Management Group. Members serve initially for three years but may stand for re-election if they so wish. This year the three year period ends for the following people:

John Bell	Ringing Co-ordinator
Mark Conroy	Chairman
Tony Crease	Treasurer
David Elliott	Richmondshire DC
Mark Hewitt	Community Liaison
Winifred Hodge	Education Officer
Graham Newcombe	Defence Estates
Colin Newlands	English Nature. Secretary

Christmas Party

In a break with tradition, we have decided to defer our annual party until the early Spring instead of holding it close to Christmas. We have done this because we felt that Christmas is such a busy time of year for us all, and this, coupled with the fact that many of our supporters are away visiting families and friends, means that many people who would like to attend are unable to. We haven't yet decided on a new date but we will let you know as soon as we have.

Winter Work Programme

Mark has just published our Winter work programme which lists all the larger jobs which we hope to carry out over the next four months. He has earmarked many of the jobs for our regular weekday volunteers but has also set aside some work for anyone who is willing to come and help out at weekends. With this in mind we have set aside some dates which we have designated as working days when we will not do any bird ringing. These dates are as follows:

January 21/22. This weekend will be centred on re-structuring one of the conifer woodlands. Tasks will include cutting down small trees, cutting branches burning the brash and stacking the logs.

The bulk of the work will be in the Woodland Walk area with the aim of encouraging native deciduous woodland to expand and to help existing trees to spread. The larger trees will be felled by chainsaw-qualified volunteers with others helping to clear the brash produced.

Other tasks will be available, so please contact Mark nearer the date for details.

February 18/19 and March 11/12. We have not yet allocated specific tasks to these dates as we would like to use the time to put extra effort into projects which we need to complete before the end of March. These projects, which are ongoing, will be at different stages by the set dates so, once again, please contact Mark for further details nearer the time.

If you would like to help us on any or all of these projects please let Mark know or turn up on the day. We aim to start work at 9.30 am.

Adopt-a-Box Scheme

Believe it or not but we are still receiving the occasional request to sponsor boxes this late in the year. Because of this we have decided that we will count everyone who sponsored a box after 1 June, the approximate date on which we completed our check of the boxes, as having sponsored it for the coming year, rather than for the current year. We have done this so that it gives late sponsors a complete breeding season during their period of sponsorship.

Our next assault on people's pockets will occur in January when we will write to everyone who has sponsored a box for a single year before 1 June to offer them the chance of renewing their sponsorship for 2006 and beyond. We will also offer sponsors the opportunity to "discard" boxes which they no longer wish to sponsor and to sponsor new ones if they so wish. We will hold each sponsored box for a month to give people enough time to respond. At the end of January any boxes which have not be renewed will be "repossessed" and made available to everyone else.

Trail Guide

We are in the process of developing a new trail guide for the Reserve. Those who are familiar with the existing one will realise that it has gradually become out of date over the years as we have changed and improved the Reserve. The existing guide is some four years old and doesn't include features like the

Woodland Walk which has been added in recent years.

The guide is being designed by Blue, a graphic arts company based in Askrigg and we hope to have it ready for sale in the New Year.

News in Brief

- A recent security requirement has meant that we have had to clear a strip of land on the outside of the Garrison security fence where it forms part of our boundary.
- The Dales National Park staff booked 2 days with us in September, both of which were oversubscribed. We provided a talk and guided walks on both days.
- Foxglove hosted 3 walks during the Richmond Walking Festival, one of them specifically aimed at bats. The walks were well attended and enjoyed by everyone who took part.
- As a result of the visit mentioned above, we have recruited a new volunteer for the Reserve who will be starting shortly.
- Andrea Blakemore, one of our volunteers, made an interesting observation recently. She watched two brown trout about 25 cm long making repeated efforts to jump into one of the blue drainage pipes which run under the bridges at the two small ponds beside net ride 4. What makes it interesting is that the stream they were trying to enter is barely 30 cm wide and they must have travelled all the way up from the lake through streams which are not much wider.

Education Pack

For some time we have been looking at the need to provide an Education Pack for visiting schools. This would include information and projects which the students could complete so that they gain the maximum benefit from their visits.

The one thing which has held this project back is a lack of expertise on our part, mainly in the area of the National Curriculum. At this point enter Elizabeth

Dickenson, one of our Friends. Elizabeth is a retired teacher whose particular area of expertise is an exact match for our needs. As a result she has spent the last few weeks developing the text elements of our pack which currently runs to over 40 pages!

When this part of the project is complete we will, again, pass it over to Blue who will finalise the design of the pack as a complete document. We feel that this will result in a first class tool which will be ideal for both teachers and students alike.

Competition Corner

Our recent photographic competition attracted just a handful of entries but we were very pleased that people took the trouble to enter. In all we had some 23 photographs to choose a winner from. The subjects ranged from some very interesting early photographs of the Reserve before much of the work like bridges had been put in place, to some delightful views of the Reserve today. We even had a photograph of William Hague opening the new hide!

In the end, our judges awarded the prize to Christine Whitehead for an excellent picture of two white fungi. The runner-up was Sam Hackett with a picture of snow covered logs.

We will now negotiate with all the photographers to see whether we can make up some suitable Christmas cards or a calendar to sell in aid of the Reserve. In the meantime, all the photographs are displayed in the Centre if you would like to see them.

This time our competition is absurdly simple: just make a list of all the words containing three letters or more which you can find in the word

UNDERGROWTH

Send your entries to my hat at the Reserve address by 31 January and a small book token may well be on its way to you.

And Finally . . .

What's the difference between a buffalo and a bison? You can't wash your hands in a buffalo.

Undergrowth is published four times a year. Articles for inclusion in future issues should be sent to the editor, Sam Hackett, at : sam.hackett@btinternet.com tel: 01748 850966 or Tony Crease at tonycrease@aol.com tel: 01677 427 925.

Any opinions included are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foxglove Covert Management Group or the policy of the Ministry of Defence.