

Editorial

As I said in issue No 13, this summer brought several changes to Foxglove Covert and these continue. Marion Hannaford has filled the vacancy left by Gez Marshall and we wish her every success during her time with us. The non *Homo sapiens* staff has increased by one to five with the addition of a Harris Hawk, though this is on a volunteer basis only. There is also a sad note to this issue. Many of our Friends and Volunteers will be aware that long-standing Friend of Foxglove, Gillian Mackenzie, passed away and her ashes were scattered at Foxglove recently. Other events in or associated with Foxglove were a coffee morning in Richmond Town Hall, a fund-raising day at the Sunday market at Catterick Race Course, and a meeting with various local government representatives and other potential funding bodies.

Marion Hannaford



Hello everyone. My name is Marion Hannaford and I am very pleased to be your new Assistant Warden here at Foxglove Covert. I am a married lady with 2 teenage children, a dog, Heidi, who comes to work with me, and 5 cats (who don't come to work with me!). I have been involved in conservation for the best part of the last 18 years. I started volunteering once a week when my eldest son was a baby, and continued all through the time I have been an at-home Mum bringing up my children. Over the years I have worked with Natural England, BTCV, The National Trust and Durham Wildlife Trust. In fact it was while I was a volunteer for Durham Wildlife Trust that I took my commitment a stage further and became Volunteer Reserve Officer. This meant working 3 days a week for the Wildlife Trust on their site at Hedleyhope Fell, near Tow Law. I gained certification in a lot of practical skills during this time. My present post is the first paid work that I have applied for - and I was lucky to be successful. I have a passion for working in conservation and thoroughly enjoy all

the practical aspects of this job. I enjoy working outside whatever the weather, and I must say that up until now the sunshine has been glorious! I haven't needed my coat on yet! I am enjoying getting to know everyone and familiarizing myself with the site so that I can help Foxglove continue to be the beautiful place you know it is.

Gillian's Service



Foxglove Covert's first, and for some time only, Friend was Gillian MacKenzie who sadly passed away in August. In September a Memorial Service was held for her, near the seat by the woodland walk which she had sponsored a year earlier.

The service was conducted by Father Timbo Forbes Turner, Chaplain of St Joan of Arc RC Church in the Garrison. Sam Hackett read the eulogy, Graham Newcombe planted an oak tree near her seat, and Tony Crease scattered her ashes around its roots. Present were members of her family, friends from the Ladies' Luncheon Club and the Yorkshire Countywomen's Society. Representing Foxglove were the following: Sam and Alison Hackett, Tony and Pat Crease, Gez Marshall, Mark Hewitt, Marie Conroy, Colin Newlands, Graham Newcombe, Ann Luxmoore, Stan and Amy Prentice, Brian Warner, Ray Harper, Sue Rowley and Grahame Bentley.

Website revamp

The new website created and hosted by Andrew Russell of Moonburst is up and running and is looking great. The Army CMS site has been arranged to redirect users to the new website, or users can enter the address: www.foxglovecovert.org.uk to access the site directly.



CES Ringing At Foxglove

A Commendable Pastime Or A Psychopathic Aberration?

September 2007 saw the completion of our 15th Constant Effort Site (CES) year and our 180th successive visit. We have had the occasional 'iffy' day, but we have never missed any of our obligatory ringing periods. Purely out of personal interest I thought I would look in more detail at just what this has meant for myself and my fellow ringers – John Bell, Stuart, Jenny, Tom, Raye and the other site operators who have contributed over the years. It was relatively simple to produce a few basic statistics, but as my calculations progressed I thought others may be interested - or amused - by the results.

For each of the 12 CES days we erect 16 nets measuring a total of 914 ft which, over 180 outings, equals 164,520 ft, or more simply 31.16 miles. Routinely we use twice that amount, so really we have put up 62 miles of net over the period and, of course, taken them all down again. A cool 124 miles!

An average net round to empty the nets is 900m long and, as a minimum, we will probably carry out five net rounds each during the ringing day, plus the setting up and removal of the nets. This conservatively calculated totals 3.94 miles each per session, or 709 miles over the 15 years that we have walked individually extracting the birds.

Our CES day – our own choosing – is of 10½ hours duration, excluding the two hours it takes to remove the nets, check and count the bags and tidy up, etc. Over the years we have manned the site for a minimum of an equivalent of 94 days, or 13½ weeks, day and night non-stop.

To reach the site the six of us have driven about 18 miles, which multiplies out to 19,440 miles one way or 38,880 return, ie almost 45 journeys between Lands End and John O'Groats (868 miles). At 30 mpg we have used 1296 gallons of fuel to carry out our CES which, at an average of 90p per litre, has cost us £5,302.

We have consumed well in excess of 1800 cups of tea (some people are better than others at making them) and 270 pints of milk. God knows how many sandwiches, pieces of fruit and chocolate biscuits we have demolished!

Over the 15 years we have caught 14,842 new birds and 12,302 retraps/controls, a total of 27,144. This equates to an average 1810 CES birds annually, 151 birds every visit (82 of them new), 14 birds per hour for every hour the nets have been open, and almost 1 bird for every 2 metres of net erected on a CES day.

A variety of ring sizes have clearly been used, but to avoid further calculations for the purpose of this note I have considered them all As and Bs (the smallest and cheapest). We have, therefore, spent over £2,520 on rings, and on 16 nets (and replacements over the years) something in the order of £5,560 again at a conservative estimate.

I was tempted to draw the line at this point but then was reminded of our IT aspirations and the fun the group 'Secretary' has committing all this information to disk and preparing the data for use by the BTO's professional analysts. No matter how skilful (I wish!), there is many a dark winter's evening involved here too. When added to the time spent gardening the site, logging the vegetation/habitat changes and countless other little diversions, is there any wonder I ask myself why there appears to be no one else locally trying desperately to usurp my position in the group or who secretly aspires to my executive appointment. Can this also be part of the reason why no queues are forming to join our ringing group? Little do they know of the rewards!

Looking back there are two uniquely memorable occasions associated with our CES days. The first was when we caught the first two crossbills ever seen in our patch on the same net round at opposite ends of the covert. It was a moment of immense excitement. The second, sadly, was the

breaking news on the radio at 3:30 one morning as we arrived at the site hinting at the death of Princess Diana. I remember we listened in the darkness with incredulity and horror as the programmes were interrupted and the tragedy slowly unfolded. Of course the highs and lows of the bird numbers and species are fascinating too, but that's another story.

So what of this self-inflicted 'Big Brother/Taransay hybrid' which we refer to as a pastime or hobby? It has cost us in excess of £2230 individually, or over £150 annually, without taking the other eight months of the year that we ring outwith the CES season into account. This is surely relatively cheap when compared with other interests.

Our partners deserve a mention for the patience they display as we extricate ourselves from the bedroom at ungodly hours of the morning. If we are in favour they may have contributed to the contents of our bait boxes the evening before. The neighbours turn over in disgust as the garage door slams and the 'head case next door' disappears into the night.

Is this harmless hobby such a commendable pastime after all or does it raise questions about our sanity? So long as it contributes to the preservation and diversity of our avian species we generally feel it has been well worth it and, of course, we do enjoy it – which is just as well as there can be few other groups who demonstrate such commitment

Tony Crease

Warden's Review of the Quarter

Past present and future at Foxglove

Past:

Since the last issue of Undergrowth there have been several things happening at or on behalf of Foxglove. At the end of August we held a coffee morning at Richmond Town Hall; the morning was incredibly successful with a total of £187 being raised. A huge thank you to all who took part either in overseeing the running of the morning or donating cakes or books to sell. Very special thanks to Hilary Bowes for being there with me from eight in the morning and explaining how the whole thing ran!

Secondly, at the end of September we were granted permission to shake buckets at Catterick market. Once again our volunteers made a huge difference, so thanks to Graham Newcombe, Colin Newlands, Beryl Bell, Marion and Michael Hannaford, Nail MacGregor-Smith, Winifred Hodge, Christine Whitehead, Wes Miners, Grahame and Lisa Bentley, Joanne and Linda Baldry, Carolyn Grundy, Kate Philips, Jenny Wood and Tony and Pat Crease. The day was very successful and both Marion and myself discovered hidden talents for persuading people to part with their money. In total we raised nearly £500.

Bovis Lend Lease, a company undertaking a lot of building works on the Garrison, held their community day at Foxglove. This meant that they paid their staff to come for two days volunteering with us. There was a good turnout both days and everyone who took part really enjoyed the day (even if they did ache afterwards!) They managed to clear a very large area of the heathland, which has since been increased. Bovis have now joined Foxglove as corporate members and are sponsoring five bird boxes for five years, so thank you very much for your support. Those who have not been for a visit for a while will be impressed by the amount of gorse free heath.

Present:

Volunteer numbers are steadily increasing with an average of around eight people now part of the Tuesday volunteers' group. This has led to much more work being achieved in several areas. The benefit of increased activity is obvious and this is set to continue through the winter months.

Marion has persuaded volunteers from Hedleyhope Fell and Low Barns Nature Reserve to join in with Foxglove volunteers to help clear the alder invasion at the top end of the lake, near the shelter belt. This work is to be reciprocated when our volunteers will go and get a taste of the work at Low Barns in the New Year.

We now have a permanent work experience pupil from Risedale Community College who works on the Reserve every Tuesday along with the other volunteers. This, Alongside students studying for Land and Environment diplomas from local schools, this arrangement has seen more hands making light work of what can sometimes seem almost impossible goals.

Future:

Although we have seen a huge increase in the work achieved thanks to several volunteers and school groups, there is, as always, more to do. In light of this there are weekend volunteer workdays coming up. Please put these dates into your diary and if possible come along and lend a hand.

- 15 December 2007
- 12 January 2008
- 16 February 2008
- 08 March 2008

As usual your hard work will be rewarded with a hot lunch!

There will also be a further work day organised by Kate Philips. Kate has become a regular volunteer at Foxglove as part of her university study in Countryside Management. As part of her course she is required to organise and complete a project, so subject to agreement with her lecturers this will be a workday. We will inform you of the date as soon as we have it, so please come along and support Kate.

Visitor numbers to the reserve have soared and we are now recording double the numbers we achieved last year.

As some of you will be aware there is a new national Bird Atlas being produced. There are 30 tetrads (2km squares) available on MOD land locally which are just waiting for volunteers to snap them up. The surveys require four annual hourly visits per square and are guaranteed to improve your birding skills. If you think you might be able to help please contact either Tony or myself.

A quiz will be held at Lizzie's Bar in Plave Lines for all Friends of Foxglove at 7.30pm on 17 November. We are hoping for a record attendance. Some who took part in the quiz last year complained that the questions were too difficult so we will endeavour to have a more rounded content this year. Please come along and give it your support.

Sue Rowley

"Ratty" comes to Foxglove: The Sequel

Some 150 Water Voles (*Arvicola terrestris*) were released at various sites throughout the Reserve on two dates in August and September. The release attracted much interest including radio and TV coverage.



Since their release the voles have been making regular appearances and the sound of the familiar 'plop' is back! On one occasion an individual was seen swimming across the lake in front of 16 people on a guided walk. During the Richmond Walking Festival, another particularly confident vole decided to have a full wash-down in front of several spectators. We now eagerly await the splash of tiny paws!!

New Friends

The following have joined The Friends of Foxglove Covert since the last issue of Undergrowth and we extend a warm welcome to them all:

Mr Brian Hird	Richmond
Mr Christopher Mitchinson	Newton Aycliffe
Mr Keith Hopps	Bishop Auckland
Mr Ian Whale	Consett
Mr Thomas Nicholson	Bishop Aukland
Mr & Mrs Robert Elsworth	Brompton on Swale
Mr Ian Mawson	Burrill
Mr James Bradshaw	Darlington
Mr s Joanne Gibson	Richmond
Mr Raymond Johnson	Cockfield
Mr & Mrs Gordon Raine	Richmond
Mr & Mrs Ian Smith	Catterick Village
Miss Danielle Nichol	Northallerton
Mrs Christine Lunn	Darlington
Bovis Lend Lease	Catterick Garrison
Mr Paul Doherty	Sherburn in Elmet
Mrs Janice Wilkinson	Hurst

Volunteers

Volunteers who have contributed regularly in various ways this autumn are:

Ann Luxmoore, Brian Warner, Caroline Stott, Ian Fay, Ray and Sue Harper, Stan Prentice, Brian Hird, Kate Phillips, Keith and Carol Berry, Brian Bailey, Ray Johnson.

Susan Muckle, mentioned in the previous issue for her holiday at Foxglove, continues to help out each Saturday and has been invited to contribute a few words of her own.

My Foxglove Covert.

When Aunty Joyce came to visit, she said she had found the most wonderful place, "a nature reserve, can you believe it, on the camp!" "What, a proper one?" I ask. Aunty replied "Yes, of course, a proper one" and what a wonderful place. This was back in May and I thought nothing of it. July came round and I found myself due for a holiday without anything to do. Foxglove was suggested, as a family member had seen a mention in 'What's on'. I rang the number and was invited to become a volunteer. I had probably picked the worst week ever; that's the week when thistle picking began! From Tues to Friday that week, I volunteered and found a little haven. Since then, Saturdays without fail, I have rolled up with packed lunch in one hand and walking boots in t'other.

Susan Muckle

Susan has added these thoughts about ...

Life as a Volunteer at Foxglove Covert

- Takes a while to understand the fine line between cleared and cut back, managed and overgrown.
- Teaches you to hate gorse with a passion.
- Trip to Seal Sands and Saltholme, using imagination, gave a bit of an insight to how Foxglove has developed from its early years.

- Looking forward to a time when there are a few more volunteers on a Saturday.
- Teaches you new skills such as strimming and safe bird handling.
- Find myself telling others (with pride) about my time at the Reserve and the things that are needed to keep it maintained.
- Leaves me with a sense of achievement as well as being knackered. My full time job is heavy on the brain, so at the weekend, volunteering at Foxglove tires the body but I still have to use common sense.
- Always enquire what the Tuesday group are up to, feel like an extension rather than a lonely soul on a Saturday.
- Did not anticipate how hooked I would be.
- Interesting, being a bit of a culture vulture and knowledge sponge, can really get my teeth into all the knowledge of others at Foxglove.
- Realised I had been missing outdoor life.
- Just the one day of fresh air makes me feel so much healthier.

Access To Foxglove

Access to Foxglove will change slightly from a date yet to be announced but around Christmas 2007. The current gate at Cambrai will cease to be manned and will be replaced by a multi-barracks gate across Ava Road just outside the current Guard Room which will facilitate access to all barracks in the west of the Garrison. At that time, existing barracks will revert to 'lines' within a barracks, and thereafter Cambrai and Alma Barracks will become known as Cambrai and Alma Lines within the new multi-barracks complex, the latter to be known as Munster Barracks.

This is a positive move for Foxglove because, when soldiers are on operations, there will be no more map reading exercises through Alma Barracks. The main road entrance will be manned 365 days a year no matter what.

Having said that, there may be some initial hurdles while the new gate staff become accustomed to Foxglove folk accessing the complex, although this is not expected to be a show-stopper. Regular visitors are advised to request a permanent pass from Tony which should minimise any inconvenience. Please be patient with the new situation which may take a few days to resolve. Thank you.

Tony Crease

A Visiting Harris Hawk



Photo Courtesy of R Slater

Late in September, the 30th to be precise, some visitors approached Sue to ask about a large bird seen in the northern corner of the Reserve which they'd managed to photograph. Showing Sue the photo on the camera display, she immediately recognised it as a female of an American species, *Parabuteo unicinctus*, the Harris Hawk.

This species is widely used in falconry and this bird had the usual furniture of jesses and bells so was clearly an escapee. Subsequent enquiries revealed a surprising number of Harris Hawks recorded as captive in the area, but none had been reported missing. Attempts to trap or lure the bird to hand were unsuccessful and she, for the moment at least, has become a resident feature of the Reserve.

Hermione, as nicknamed by Sue, can be seen most days in the same place she was first spotted. If she's not in the air, listen for the telltale tinkling of her tail bells, precisely why

they're fitted, to guide you to the right tree. She's clearly used to people and not easily spooked.

Visit to Saltholme



Saturday 15th September was dry and bright. This was good because 19 Friends and Volunteers went to Tees-side. First stop, the new 1000-acre RSPB reserve at Saltholme which is currently under construction. Due to open next summer, we had a preview guided walk of around two hours. Although not open to the public, many birds are already in residence. Gadwall, snipe, heron, black-tailed godwit, and pink-footed geese were all to be observed. Lunch on the mini-bus in convivial company, and passing the "ghost ships", we headed to our second stop, a trip to the seaside. Leaving the car park, the happy band walked through the dunes towards the North Gare for a spot of bird watching. A wheatear was observed hopping among the boulders and remains of World War II anti-tank obstacles. Sandwich terns, common terns, and shelduck put in an appearance, as did ringed plover, and oystercatcher. Shag were seen on the sea. Some of the more intrepid explorers, the nosey ones like me, made it right to the end of the Gare, skilfully outflanking the barrier supposedly preventing access, to watch the North Sea pounding the rocks. Back to the mini-bus and on to stop three. Arrival at another car park, followed by a walk alongside Greatham Creek and ponds to Seal Sands. Redshank, cormorant, and ruff were noted, along with...seals. Personally, I think this trip was a great success. We did a fair amount of walking and went to three sites, but I don't think that the schedule was too demanding, or that the pace was too hectic. We recorded 38 species. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, and all expressed a desire to return to Saltholme next year when it is completed.

Ray Harper

Things to come...

Quiz Night - Nov. 17th at Lizzie's Bar, Piave Lines, 7:30pm. Food available for £5 per head, choice of three dishes. This must be paid for before 12th Nov.

Car Boot Sale - Dec 9th Sunday morning at Scorton. Help is needed for this so please contact Sue or Marion.

Christmas Party - Dec 29th at The Bolton Arms, Downholme, 7:30pm. Book now to avoid disappointment. High-quality cuisine, 3-course meal at around £20 per head. Come along and enjoy the evening!

AGM - Jan 23rd at Lizzie's Bar, 7:30pm. This is your opportunity to influence the future development of Foxglove.

