

Editorial

A great deal has happened at Foxglove Covert since the last issue. The main focus of attention has been the Wet Meadows Project, which has demanded much activity in the way of fund raising, and a huge number of hours spent in gorse removal.

Staff Changes.

Mark Conroy has decided to step down as Chairman of the Management Group, and the proposed new Chairman is Colonel Guy Deacon. We wish Mark all the best for the future and thank him for all that he has done. We are happy to welcome Guy to Foxglove Covert and look forward to working with him.

Alice Gull left us at the end of August. Sophie Benaiges was appointed Reserve Manager in her place. We welcome her, and wish her all the best.

100 Club.

A draw took place on 21st October and was won by Stuart Ogden. The prize will be presented at the Christmas 'Do' when Tony and I are alongside him at the bar. Cheers Stuart!

Ray Harper



Wet Meadows - Latest Update

Clearance to carry out the work has been granted by the Environment Agency who manage the water system and the tenant farmer who leases the land the pipe work will cross. DMS, the appointed contractors have stated no ram pump is necessary to deliver the water which will now be gravity fed. This will save us over £3k.

The recent pond survey report highlights the presence of Great Crested Newt tadpoles and Mud Snails on the site which are of

national importance. We will, therefore, isolate some of the tiny ponds these species were found in and will not connect them into the new system of channels.

£22,117 has currently been secured to carry out the works and there are several other irons in the fire which have the potential to realise funding. Most recent estimates indicate that works to get the water on site would take 8 days and the creation of the wetland a further 10 days. The provision of the hide and walkways will have to wait until further funds are secured but achieving the ground works is well within our grasp.

Obtaining a licence to do the work and meeting the conditions of the Newt Licensing laws remains our single, most significant obstacle. This is being worked on currently and we hope to have a way forward which will meet the requirements of the law and the Wet Meadows Project before too long.

The work will start very soon after the newt issue has been resolved and we hope will be complete by the end of January. DMS work on several RSPB and other sensitive sites and have brought interesting innovative ideas to the project all of which will deliver a more pleasing result to the completed design.

Update: Authority has been received from Natural England to proceed with the project subject to the roping off of the key ponds which had been the intention anyway. It is possible that the groundworks will be completed well before Christmas!

Tony Crease

A note from the proposed Chairman of Foxglove.



I have had an interest in the natural world for as long as I can remember. My earliest memories are of spending hours and hours leafing through the pages of Book Number 1 of the Observer series of guides: British Birds. Many of the plates were in black and white, but my imagination was fired. I joined the Young Ornithology Club and used to delight in the quarterly magazines that

would be sent to me, but I must confess that I was pretty amateur

in my approach, nevertheless delighting in spotting birds I had not seen before.

As a serving soldier I have spent more of my fair share of time sitting quietly in woody clearings, dense pine, dripping jungle, and, of course, open desert, and I have always delighted in what is there to be seen if one chooses to open one's eyes. With the exception of Toucans and macaws, as often as not I have failed to recognise what I have seen, but that has not taken from the pleasure. And that is what is so special about Foxglove - everywhere you look there is something else to highlight - just how much I do not know, and, equally importantly, there is someone involved in Foxglove who does know and will tell you!

Even though I was stationed in Cambrai Barracks in 1997/8, my only memory of the land that is now Foxglove Covert was of running through Risedale Beck back in 1980 when I first joined the Army as a young trooper. And you can imagine my surprise when I came up for the first time last year to visit Tony and a group of ringers. The dedication of the ringers and the volunteers was immediately apparent; the huge commitment of everyone to create a centre such as we now have was obvious; the plans for the future were inspired; and the pleasure that could be found was clear. So after a few more visits and a little bit of encouragement from Tony, I found myself becoming involved.

Brigadier Mark has been involved in Foxglove since the very first days, and has seen the reserve grow from a patch of redundant ground to what we have today - a nationally renowned reserve. And having got so much done he has quite rightly earned the right to draw breath and spend a bit more time on the very many other interests he pursues. But who was to replace him - who could? Barely qualified and with a fraction of his knowledge, I would not seem to be an obvious choice to be Chairman! Yet here I am, offering myself to the AGM.

After some considerable thought, it was clear that the value of having a serving officer with a keen interest in Catterick and more than a passing interest in Natural History, and living much of the time in Wensleydale, was acceptable. But it is perhaps my position as a serving officer that will be of most value. With 27 years of service behind me and more to come, I know how the army works, who to talk to when we need help, and how to promote the value of Foxglove to the Army. I know the Garrison well and understand the pressures on Defence Estates, so will provide a useful conduit between Foxglove and those we need to help us maintain and develop Foxglove as we wish to. If I do not have answers I should be able to find out who does.

I have been hugely impressed by all I have seen over the last couple of months. I can never compete in time or knowledge with those who are involved week in and week out. But I intend to ensure that everyone beyond the volunteers knows about Foxglove and supports the efforts of the management committee and volunteers in maintaining and developing this jewel of a reserve. I look forward to meeting more of you over the coming weeks and months.

Guy Deacon

New Reserve Manager



Hello! I am Sophie Benaiges and have recently been employed as Reserve Manager at Foxglove covert to work with Marion Hannaford.

I live locally with my husband, 2 sons, 2 cats, 2 rabbits & 2 goldfish! My first experience of practical conservation was with BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers). I was a full time

voluntary officer based in Carlisle for 18 months. This involved working with mid-week volunteers twice a week and lots of training. I also led a couple of week long working holidays - I know it sounds like a contradiction in terms but it was good fun!

This led to my first paid job, working as a recreation ranger for Forest Enterprise at Whinlatter Forest Park in the North of the Lake District. This was an 18 month placement post and a great insight into how a very busy site is managed (300, 000 visitors/year). Since then I have worked for both the Lake District National Park Authority and Cumbria Constabulary (as a civilian). Both of these jobs were mainly office based and therefore I am delighted to be working in the outdoors again.

I have been to Catterick Garrison before on various summer camps with the TA when I was at University - unfortunately there was no opportunity to stop and admire the wildlife then! I discovered Foxglove Covert earlier this year and haven't been able to stay away since! I started to do a bit of volunteering on a Tuesday and to bring my family here on weekends.

I feel very privileged to be a part of the Foxglove team and am looking forward to working alongside Marion and our dedicated group of volunteers to help conserve this special place and its wildlife.

Sophie Benaiges

Fungal Foray, 11th October 2008

A group of 23 gathered with a variety of containers in the Foxglove Visitor Centre to meet Dr Keith Thomas for an afternoon of



foraging. Keith carefully asked everyone what they wanted from the afternoon - information on eating fungi, or drawing them, etc., before we set off. The group included 8 children who were a real asset, contributing to the afternoon with their enthusiasm and energy - running about finding fungi.

The weather was good, and we walked through the wood to the moorland via the 'top' gate, and back via the 'middle' gate.

Then back to the Visitor Centre, where our collection was displayed in the activity room, and we had tea and biscuits. We

found that we had collected about 50 different fungi, 30 of which Keith was able to instantly identify.

These included the poisonous Fly Agaric, Honey Fungus, Ink Cap, Puff Ball, The

Deceiver, and others. Keith was able to answer all our questions about which can be eaten, and which should be avoided, and to describe the habitats in which the various fungi are found.

Sophie Benaiges, one of the two Reserve Managers, also collected fungi for spore print impressions. We all went away inspired to take more interest in and learn more about the fungi around us.

Ann Luxmoore

Notes From The Ringing Room

The ringers had a very useful meeting recently in order to take stock of the present and plan for the next five or so years. Foxglove has been our base for the past 16 years, but as 2008 draws to a close the team grows ever senior and the few youngsters who have back-filled the team have earned their spurs and moved on. With around 65,000 birds processed at Foxglove during this time, and over 115,000 on our database altogether, it was an appropriate time for reflection.

Recent discussion with the BTO Headquarters in Thetford, who license our ringing on behalf of the government, revealed some interesting facts. Our contribution via the Constant Effort Scheme, we have known for some time, provides almost the highest data set in the country. We are, in fact, in second place to a major migration centre on the south coast of England. But what is becoming more evident is the information Foxglove, with its regular trapping of residents as well as migrants, is providing from our retraps.

Prior to the introduction of our revised computer system IPMR (Integrated Population Monitoring Recorder), few people paid much attention to retraps and the emphasis was mostly on new birds. Nowadays, the knowledge provided as a result of the new technology and our fieldwork delivers a much better insight into the age structure of the bird population. Isolated individual

longevity records, which appeared in years past, are being overtaken by a growing mass of information on the percentage of small birds surviving for much longer than expected. With the ability to track individual birds at the click of a button we see, for instance, that we have not one but several 'wee brown jobs' that are over five years old. Some examples from this year are:

- A breeding willow warbler (9M7796) that was first ringed as an adult in 2001, ie it is now over eight years old.
- Another willow warbler (9M7696), a male, which was ringed as an adult in 2002 and has bred in the Covert every year since having migrated to and from South Africa annually. And we even know the very area of Foxglove it returns to breed in from the net ride recording - which is remarkable.
- We caught a garden warbler this year ringed in Foxglove in 2002 which was never seen again until 2008. Where had it been in between? Another garden warbler (N591722), which bred here in 2000 (as an adult) and was back this year, had also bred in the Covert in 2001, 2004 and 2006.
- Several long-tailed tits have been with us longer than five years, with 6U7500 ringed in 2002 still breeding in 2008.
- Some of our tawny owls have lived for the entire 16 years, and we have evidence of them breeding in the same area, often in different boxes, throughout that time. We also know most of their young and where those young have moved to, to breed themselves subsequently. Many are in our large nest boxes which are positioned in the Covert and all over the training area.

IPMR is a very powerful tool, and there are many more similar examples across the species list. It is our intention to do more with our data in the future and produce a better analysis of the information we have collected. What is important is that the BTO is already doing this at a national and international level, and the government is using our CES data as one of their 'life' indicators.

Tony Crease

Cape Wrath, September 2008

Storm Petrels, otherwise known as Swallows of the Sea, are the smallest seabird in the UK. To avoid being attacked by Gulls and Skuas, they feed far out at sea in the day and come ashore at night. So to catch them humans have to adopt a similar strategy and become nocturnal!



In early September John Bell, Tony Crease and I travelled overnight to Cape Wrath for three nights ringing Storm Petrels. A ringing session started at about 5pm when

we cooked, correction 'micro waved', our meal and got ready to depart. Nets were erected at 8pm, and catching started by 9.30pm. We then continued throughout the night, with two of us ringing

and one removing birds from the nets, until light dawned around Sam the following morning and we got a chance to take stock. Most unusually we had three nights like this in quick succession, and managed to catch and ring 816 Storm Petrels and in addition we caught 35 birds which already carried rings including 3 with Norwegian rings.



Ringling all night and then sleeping till after midday would be enough for most folk but not us, on walking round the camp we realised that there were a number of Meadow Pipits gathering around the fences prior to migrating south and so we spent the rest of our three afternoons catching 35 of them until the night's routine started again!

I have caught and ringed Storm Petrels over the years but never so many with so few ringers in such a short space of time. All there is left to do now is to wait for notification from the BTO of the original ringing details of the 35 controls and we will have the makings of another article for Undergrowth!

Tom Dewdney

More Than Just School Trips

Most people know Foxglove Covert because they have been on a private visit, or they have been part of an organised group such as a school trip, or perhaps through a visit by the W.I., for example.



Askham Bryan College also bring groups on countryside management course every week during term time.

Foxglove Covert also serves the community in many other ways. For example, every now and then small groups of 'young offenders' come in to repay their debt to society.

In summer we had a number of students from local schools on 'work experience' placements, and

these young people benefitted greatly from their time here. Andy, who can be seen in the photograph, turned out to be a real 'star'. Despite his problems, he achieved everything he set out to do and performed all his set tasks with good humour and without a single complaint. Some of his more able-bodied peers could benefit from his example.

Ray Harper.

Adopt-a-Box Update

At the time of writing, there is an intention to continue with the replanting scheme in the coniferous forest and with the removal of sycamore and silver birch that are starting to dominate other native tree species. This means that a few of the bird boxes need to be moved for safe-keeping, and when all the work is complete they will be replaced or re-sited to an area matching our nesting species' preferred living conditions. Bat boxes will be checked before work starts and if bats are found the tree will not be felled.

We are planning two "adoption" activities before winter sets in. Firstly, to check all the bat boxes on a Volunteer Day in the week beginning 10th November, looking for signs of occupation. Secondly, on a separate day (date not yet finalised), we plan to check and clean all the bird boxes. If you would like to know whether your box is affected, or to join in the box checking, please contact either of the Reserve Managers, Marion or Sophie, for more details.

Are you looking for a novel idea for a Christmas present for someone who has nearly everything? Or for someone who lives away? Why not buy them a subscription to Adopt-a-Box? If they are really special, you may want to consider buying one of our Bird Boxes on sale in the Visitor Centre.

Susan Muckle and Tom Dewdney

Acknowledgements

You will all be aware that an organisation like Foxglove survives largely as a result of the vast amount of good will and support offered in a variety of ways by an endless number of people. The list of contributors is huge but four among the many who stand out are:

- Andrew Russell of Moonburst who very kindly hosts and maintains our web site for no charge.
- Dr Welch of Richmond - who rarely visits Foxglove but who donates regularly and made a large generous contribution to the Wet Meadows Appeal.
- Keith Percival - from Constable Burton who very kindly looks after our cattle, administers their medication and generally offers his Highlander expertise to ensure their well-being.
- Sam Hackett - who was a Management Group member before he moved to Suffolk. Sam continues to offer his support by printing our calendars and cards at virtually nil cost.

To all of the above we offer our very sincere thanks.

Tony Crease.