

Issue No 8. Spring 2006

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

We've had one of those Springs where everything seems to be on hold, except the snow. The frogs had a bit of a surprise, spawning only to find their spawn held fast in the ice. Not that that seems to have curbed their enthusiasm - according to a recent survey carried out by Graham Hodge and Andrea Blakemore we have spawn in no less than 32 ponds around the Reserve. This might give the toads a bit of competition although, to judge by the number we have seen already, the toads are likely to win hands down. Where do they come from in such numbers? and why do we see so few for the rest of the year?

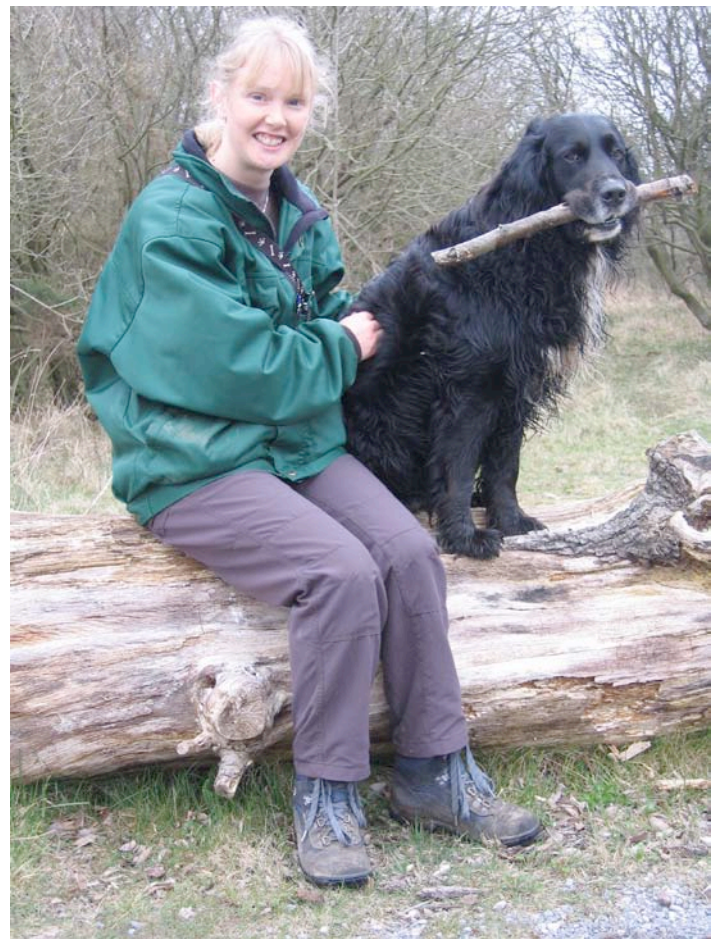
As Foxglove begins to dress for the Summer the long winter views are quickly being obscured by new leaves. It always strikes one as ironic that one can see less of Foxglove when it's looking its best. In Winter it is often possible to see as much as 100 yards through the bare branches; in Summer we are sometimes lucky if we can see 10 feet. If we were to raise one complaint about Foxglove it would be to say what a difficult place it is to photograph. There's plenty of scope for close-ups, of course, but it is appallingly difficult to get a good vista from anywhere except the hide. Which is why a helicopter is so useful. Here's one we took earlier. This is the first aerial photograph which we have had taken since the Field Centre opened.



Susan

Our New Warden

In our last issue we reported on the departure of Mark as CLO. In this issue we can report on the arrival of Susan Rowley who has taken over the reins, not as CLO but as Warden. We are all looking forward to working with Susan over the years to come and wish her every success in her new role in which she will be helped (?) by her dog, George.



Susan writes:

Hi everyone, my name is Susan Rowley but I prefer to be called Sue. I am really looking forward to meeting you all in the coming months. I have moved over from Penrith where I was working for Centre Parcs as a Conservation Ranger. I am, at heart, a mammologist and have a wealth of experience with species such as badgers and red squirrels. I have also gained a lot of practical experience working as a volunteer for Cumbria Wildlife trust.

I feel incredibly lucky (and quite smug) to be the new Warden of Foxglove. As I am sure you are all aware we have a very special reserve here and I look forward to continually improving and enhancing the site. I intend to encourage greater enjoyment of the reserve by both individuals and groups. So, if anyone has any good ideas for events etc, please let me know.

I could go on for hours however, I am going to keep this brief. I am sure I will get to know you all individually over the months to come. In the meantime, may I take this opportunity to thank you for your kind and continued support. I hope I can fulfill all your expectations for Foxglove Covert.

From Our Man in New Zealand

Until September last year, I was a pretty active member of the Swaledale Ringing Group, and semi-resident of Foxglove Covert visitor centre, where I had the opportunity to give a huge contribution to science through the art of moth-trapping.

Then I was given the chance to come to New Zealand and volunteer in the Tongariro National Park for the summer (our winter), and I couldn't refuse. The Tongariro National Park is the most actively volcanic part of New Zealand and contains a diversity of extremely valuable natural habitat from lowland forest to alpine herblands. Unfortunately, as with all of mainland New Zealand it has been substantially degraded through introduced mammals such as our own ship rat and stoat and the Australian possum. The most obvious result of this has been a severe decline in birdlife with both local and total species extinctions.



Mount Ngārahoe

My project, working with the Tongariro Natural History Society, was to begin the ecological restoration of an area of prime native bush around the beautiful Lake Rotopounamu (from the Mouri meaning 'Lake Greenstone'). The intention is to restore the 'Mauri', or life-force of the forest, which all sounded a bit spacey to me until I'd seen some of the wild areas of the Park and discovered how tangible that feeling of sacredness is here. The first phase was to establish a network of 'bait stations' throughout the surrounding bush that we could fill with poisoned rat bait during the bird breeding season. This was a lesson in itself as the New Zealand bush is not much like our own tame forests.

Then throughout the summer I worked to monitor the breeding success of native passerines, specifically the New Zealand Robin and the Fantail to see if our control of the rat population resulted in more chicks being fledged. The result was an improvement in the proportion of successful nestings which we hope can be built on in subsequent years.

I found that everything in New Zealand that I recognised was a horrible foreign invader here, from rats and stoats, to fairly innocuous willow, heather and broom (and particularly Pommies). However the natives are a weird and wonderful bunch (not only the people), the sound of forest parrots cackling and the eerie melodic call of the Tui and the Bellbird can't be forgotten easily.

I've also had the chance to work on some other great projects including the Kiwi Recovery Project, searching mountain rivers for the rare and endangered Blue Duck (see below) and botanising some very cool mountain flowers. Now the summer is drawing to a close so it's time to leave and work a slow route back to Foxglove and some serious mothing.

Chris Bell



Friends Group

Again, this has been a fairly quite period for our Friends Group with just a few new members. Nevertheless, we would like to welcome:

John Harbron	Darlington
Martin and Irene Hobbs	Peebles
Gordon and Julia Wright	Barnard Castle

It will not have escaped your notice that Martin and Irene Hobbs are not what you might call local to Foxglove and we would like to say a special word of thanks to all our Friends who support us at such long range. A quick survey of our membership shows that we have no less than nine Friends from outside the local areas of North Yorkshire and County Durham. These nine range from Surrey and Dorset in the south, through Nottinghamshire in the midlands to the Wirrel in the west and Peebles in the north. We find it both amazing and very gratifying that people are sufficiently interested in what we are doing to lend their support at such a distance.

Centre Opening Times

A word of thanks to everyone who took the time to respond to our request for help in keeping the Centre open during the period between Mark leaving and Sue arriving. In the event this did not prove as much a problem as we thought it might as Sue did not have to give a full month's notice and we were able to cover the two weeks thanks to Graham Hodge who stepped into the breach and manned the Centre for no less than 10 days.

Do not think, however, that this has let anyone off the hook! We are still looking to man the Centre on Saturdays and in the long summer evenings and Sue will be having a look at your responses to see how best to achieve this. I have no doubt she will be in contact soon.

News in Brief

The lake has been very active this month with Mallards, Greylag Geese and Moorhens nesting. We also have Tufted Ducks and, for the first time in about five years a Coot has taken up residence, sadly without a mate at the moment.

The bird ringers have had great success last year with Reed Buntings. Last year they captured 39 compared with 64 over the previous 13 years. This year they have

already captured a further 17. This is an excellent result for a bird which is generally in decline throughout the UK.

While we're on the subject, the bird ringers have recently recaptured two Chaffinches - one proved to be 9 years old and the other 10 which is some age for so small a bird. They also captured another woodcock, their thirteenth, a very large bird to catch in a mist net.

Every day for about a week in April two crows beat their heads against the Centre windows which look out on to the garden. The result looked like the night of the long knives and we had to clean the windows and path of feathers and blood after every occurrence. When they were seen their heads were a complete mess where they had repeatedly dashed at their own reflections in the glass.

There seem to be more and more primroses in Foxglove every year and what a beautiful sight they make. This must be largely due to the efforts of our volunteers to open up areas to the light. Come on you bluebells!

A Mallard appears to be trying to nest on the tiny island in the lower dipping pond. Unfortunately it might not get away as there is always a lot of disturbance around the area.

Our disabled route has been thoroughly tested by Gillian in her Mackenzie mobile and has proved highly satisfactory now that the new surface has bedded down. It hardly seems fair to add that Gillian was recently able to walk around the whole route without having recourse to the wheelchair!

Sue is about to make her first permanent mark on the Reserve by tackling some of the areas on the woodland walk where the water is slow to drain away. She has been busily repairing some boards and adding chicken wire to them before they are laid.

100 Club

We reported in an earlier edition that our 100 Club was ailing through lack of support with just 25 members or so. If we are unable to recruit some more members fairly soon we may well have to consider closing the scheme as it just doesn't generate sufficient funds to make the prizes worthwhile. Ideally we would like to have a minimum of 50 members.

In an attempt to drum up some support we are sending a leaflet to each of our supporters in the hope that some

may feel able to join the scheme. Membership of the Club is open to anyone aged 18 and over and costs just £10 per year. We hold 4 draws a year with cash prizes which increase in proportion to the number of members. Please support the Club if you can.

2006 Courses Programme

Last year we ran a number of courses at Foxglove with varying success as far as the number of people who took part and we hoped to offer some of the more popular ones again this year. However, due to new government funding rules, the cost of the courses which we ran in conjunction with Askham Bryan College has risen steeply this year and, whereas last year we were able to offer a typical course for a few pounds, a similar course this year would cost as much as 8 times as much! In view of this we have decided that most of the courses are unlikely to be viable and we will not be able to offer them again.

We will run some of the courses, particularly those offered by groups like the Mammal Society and the BTO. We hope to publish a list as soon as we have firm dates for them.

Adopt-a-Box Scheme

It won't be long now until we are busily checking our bird boxes and ringing the occupants. Last year we started in the last week of May and this year we will probably do the same, despite the very cold weather in March. We propose to publish another special edition of *Undergrowth* as we did last year in which we will show the results of our efforts.

Which means that there is still time to sponsor one of our few remaining boxes - there are still 40 left of the 156 on the Reserve. Who knows, the box you sponsor today may be full of Blue Tits by the end of the month.

Take up of our bat boxes has been slow so far with just 5 out of 50 taken up. However, the summer is just around the corner and we hope to increase that number before we check them all in September.

Competition Corner

I suppose that the best thing we can say about our limerick competition from our last issue is that at least the Poet Lauriate can sleep easy in his bed; I don't think we pose any challenges in that department. Not a huge number of entries but some good attempts. We have awarded our prize to Pat Anderson for the following:

At Foxglove the birders are letting
 A bookie establish some betting:
 But his odds against getting
 A wetting while netting
 Suggest that the betting needs vetting

This time we thought we might deviate from our usual word-based puzzles and give you a chance to show how good you are with numbers. So we have a soduko puzzle for you to solve.

For those who haven't come across this type of puzzle before, the object is to fit all the numbers from 1 to 9 into each of the 3 x 3 squares in such a way that each of the nine columns and each of the nine rows also contain all the numbers from 1 to 9.

		7						
5				8	9			
1	3					4		7
4								6
					6	9		
9	1			4				
	6		2		5		3	
			8			5		
7		5			3		1	

And Finally . . .

Why did the Owl 'owl?

Because the woodpecker woodpecker