

Issue No 12. Spring 2007

Once again the clocks have gone forward the ponds are knee-deep in toads and the sound of the chiffchaff is heard throughout the land - Spring has come to Foxglove. It's early days, of course, but we are all hoping we may get away without the very cold snap which has been such a feature of the last two years, much to the detriment of our breeding birds.

Talking of birds, in our last issue I mentioned that I had recorded the first siting of a Teal at Foxglove. Well, I've done it again. In February I saw our first Short-eared Owl hunting along the outer edge of our new piece of land and sitting on one of the fence posts. I am now going to retire from this sort of thing - one doesn't want to get the reputation as a Twitcher!

And, speaking of retirement, this is the last edition of Undergrowth that I will edit as Alison and I are hoping to move to Suffolk at the end of May. I would like to thank everyone associated with Foxglove for their help and support with the various things I have looked after. In particular the Management Group, Sue and Gez our wardens and all our Friends, Volunteers, Box Adopters and 100 Clubers. Without your involvement and enthusiasm, Foxglove would be a poorer place. As we prepare to leave it is good to see that Foxglove continues to develop and we will take away with us many happy memories of the best nature reserve we have ever known.

My only regret is that I haven't been able to organise the Plant-a-Tree scheme which I was hoping to launch last autumn. I hope someone will pick this up in the coming years as I think it is an excellent way of raising much needed funds for the Reserve and, at the same time, improving the habitat for all our wildlife.

We wish everyone continued success for the future.  
Floreat digitalis!



Sam

## *From Our Man in Namibia*

Chris Bell has sent us this article about one of the last great wildernesses in the world. Many of us know Chris from his work as a birder at Foxglove and from his article in our Spring 2006 edition about his time in New Zealand.

Recently I returned to our northern climes with only a brief visit to my old haunt of Foxglove Covert from my adventures Down Under, but it wasn't long before I was crossing the equator once more, this time heading for the southern African country of Namibia. Neighbouring South Africa to the south and Botswana to the east, Namibia is one of the driest countries on Earth and only Mongolia is more sparsely populated. Recently celebrities and a strong advertising campaign have put Namibia firmly on the tourist map and it was to this trade I took, volunteering for Wilderness Safaris, one of the big players in the booming African wildlife safari market.

I arrived into the capital city of Windhoek and was given a brusque Afrikaner welcome before being whisked off to the first of four camps around the country I was to work in. I flew down into the unpopulated south, on the edge of the great dune sea of the Namib where the red dunes stretch away to the southern Atlantic beneath a baking sun and on the rocky edges of which only the hardest of animals, Springbok, Oryx and Mountain Zebra seem not only to survive, but to thrive.

While Wilderness Safaris 'eco-credentials' were lacking in some respects, my learning curve was huge (Unsurprising as I'd never worked in hospitality or tourism before). I worked with Namibians drawn from every cultural background of this diverse country, whether Afrikaner, Coloured, Nama, Ovambo, Herero, German or San Bushman, listening to a flow of half a dozen languages from ways of life alien to what I had known, before.

From here I headed deep into the wild north west of Namibia, to Damaraland where even today you can find some of the most traditional communities in southern Africa including the semi-nomadic Himba

people. The prize wildlife attraction are the desert-adapted elephants, a smaller sub-species capable of travelling long distances and going a week without water. Intensive effort is also made in the region to conserve populations of white and black rhino. Further east and north the country is relatively populated, and despite this Etosha National Park is one of the great big game refuges of Africa.

My final stop was to Namibia's most unique landscape, the legendary Skeleton Coast where the worlds last desert-adapted lions roam, a true wilderness of desert plains and rugged mountains tinged purple with magnesium. This is a region that people have been forbidden to access since the arrival of the white man because of imagined diamond fields so rich that they would make the stone so common as to be worthless and destroy the huge profits from the South African industry. The coastline is strewn with the wood of wrecked sailing ships, the bleached bones of southern right whales and colonies of cape fur seals numbering tens of thousands, preyed upon by Jackal and Hyena.

These three months in Namibia were my first exposure to Africa and I encountered many of the things the continent is famous for; its wild beauty and fantastic natural history, the poverty and disease we see on our televisions, but also the great cultural wealth and overwhelming friendliness of a people attempting to confront change on their own terms.

Chris Bell

### *Friends Group*

We have a number of new friends although, sadly, we have also lost one or two since our last update. Our new members are:

Mrs Joan Archer	Northallerton
Mr Miles Langthorne	Northallerton
Mrs Margaret Clarke	Thirsk
Nigel & Alison Stanwix	Stainton
Stephen Lawson	Richmond
Ivy Hodgson	Brompton on Swale

In our last issue we mentioned that we were hoping to arrange some events specifically aimed at our Friends and Volunteers. This is now in hand and, if you look at the Dates for your Diary section you will see that we have two events scheduled for later in the year:

3 August	Barbecue
15 September	Away Day

We hope as many people as possible will join us for these two events. Although we are not yet in a position to say where our destination might be for our Away Day, we are sure it will be worth attending.

### *Dates for Your Diary*

The following dates are offered to anyone who would like to attend or help with:

5 May 07	Birdsong Breakfast
22 May 07	Annual Moth Night
8 Jun 07	Birdsong Supper
22 Jun 07	Moth Night
23 Jun 07	Richmond BAP Open Day
20 Jul 07	Moth Trapping at Marne Barracks
3 Aug 07	Friends and Volunteers Barbecue
30 Aug 07	Coffee Morning Richmond
15 Sep 07	Friends and Volunteers Away Day
30 Sep 07	Money Collection - Sunday Market
17 Nov 07	Quiz Night at Lizzie's Bar

It is good to see that this year we have been able to revive the Birdsong Breakfast and the Birdsong Supper. Both of these events proved very popular in the past and we hope they will find favour again this year.

One important date is the Richmond BAP open day on 23 June. This is a full day event, starting at 10 am and ending at 5 pm. We would welcome offers from anyone to help us manage the event. We are particularly looking for anyone who would be prepared to lead a guided walk, man the centre, act as information points, etc. This is likely to be the largest event of 2007 and we need to make sure that we can handle the large numbers of people who we are hoping will turn up. If our last open day is anything to go by we may have up to 600 people visiting Foxglove on the day.

If you would like to attend or can offer help for any of these events, please ring Sue or Gez on 01748 831113.

### *Work Programme*

Sue, Gez and our volunteers have been hard at work over the winter and this has produced three major new additions to our pathways. As most people are aware, when we took over our new piece of land to the west it was quite difficult to get to. Although there were three gates into the area there were no paths leading to the gates and some of the approaches were over some fairly wild country. Our volunteers are now rectifying this by building three new paths through our western conifer belt, one to each gate.

The southern path will start at a point just above Risedale Beck behind the Field Centre. The middle path will start from the ponds below net rides 9 and 10 and the path to the northern gate will start from the large holly tree in the valley upstream of the lake.

These three paths will make a huge difference to the access to the new area where work is also going ahead to make walking and cow-visiting easier to achieve. There is also a new path under construction by a contractor. For some time we have been concerned that access to the lake hide has been only from the front. This is a bit self-defeating because anyone approaching from that direction is likely to frighten every bird and animal away. To avoid this problem we have been looking at a way to open up access to the hide from behind. Our contractor has started to put in a path which starts at the Foxglove Covert welcome sign near the main gate, goes down the bank to the outflow stream from the lake, crosses the valley and comes up the far bank to join with the existing path at the bottom of the steps up to the hide.

In time there will be yet another new path which will head north from the hide and then turn west to join up with the new path to the northern gate of the new area. Apart from making the going easier, all of these new paths will open up areas of the Reserve which have been poorly visited in the past, precisely because access was so difficult.

### *Volunteers Group*

As we can see from what we have already said, our volunteer group has been working its collective socks off over the winter and we would like to pay tribute to their efforts. As many of us will be unaware who these stalwarts are, here is a list of those who regularly turn their hand to the more physical aspects of management:

John Smith  
Brian Warner  
Ann Luxmoore  
Caroline Stott  
Grahame Bentley  
Stan Prentice  
Ian Fay  
Hilary Bowes

Thank you for all your hard work, ladies and gentlemen, it has not gone unnoticed. Your contribution to the success of the Reserve is huge.

Of course, we are always on the lookout for people who might be willing to swell the numbers of our volunteers. No particular skills are required but a willingness to work in appalling conditions and a very, very strong sense of humour are probably essential.

### *News in Brief*

In our last issue we carried an article by Anne Flecchia who manages the Catterick Thrift Shop in which she explained how proceeds from the sale of goods can be diverted to Foxglove funds if those donating the goods so wish. Over the past few months this has started to produce some results and we are very grateful to all concerned. If anyone has anything saleable, please think of the thrift shop and Foxglove.

Our Highland Cattle, MacGregor, McDuff, Fraser and Hector continue to thrive. They seem to like their new home, even if they have tried to escape by jumping over the fence on to the training area, and they have made a huge impact on the grassland area which they have grazed over the winter and which now looks in excellent shape for the summer growth.

It's time for 100 Club membership renewals and letters have gone out to everyone over the past week. If anyone would like to join the club which raises vital funds for our conservation efforts and costs just £10 per year, please contact Sue or Gez on 01748 831113.

Our frogs and toads are hard at what frogs and toads do at this time of year. There is lots of spawn about although the frogs don't seem to be as prolific as last year.

28 March saw our first sighting of this year's chicks - 3 moorhens chicks on the lake. They have now been joined by a fourth and a pair of greylag geese who are nesting on one of the islands.

Sadly our indoor observation hive of bees got dysentery and has had to be removed for cleaning. We expect it back towards the end of April. Three out of four of the outside hives above Risedale Beck survived the winter.

Defence Estates held a two day conference at Foxglove in which over 50 people attended. This was a great opportunity for them to look round the Reserve and see the sort of conservation effort we are making.

We have already started taking school bookings for next term and 2007 looks like another bumper year.

We held our Annual General Meeting as scheduled on 24 January in Lizzie's Bar. This was an opportunity to review the past year's activities and to look forward to the future. Each member of the Management Group reported on the area for which they are responsible and Mark Conroy, our chairman, thanked everyone for their contribution over the year. It was good to see some of our supporters there and our thanks to them for attending.

We would like to welcome John Smith who has agreed to join the Management Group. We look forward to his input as he has a wealth of experience as a volunteer, both with us and elsewhere. If anyone else would like to join the group, please contact our chairman, Mark Conroy, on 01748 818198.

### *Adopt-a-Box Scheme*

Our breeding season for birds is fast approaching and, as we said earlier, we are hoping that we won't have a repeat of the very cold snap which occurred just at the start of the season for the last two years. Unfortunately I will be leaving just as the bird boxes are being checked so I will miss the excitement of seeing the results as they come in. Let's hope we can beat our score of 267 chicks raised last year.

Our Adopt-a-Box scheme is running well again this year although we have had a number of people who have not renewed their sponsorship. This means that we have five special boxes available for the first time in two years. Two of them are wagtail boxes, one is for owls, one for goosanders and one for a tree creeper. Overall 75% of our boxes are sponsored at the moment

We have also been promised a new special box (number 157). This is designed specifically for Little Owls and we will locate it on one of the old hedge lines on the new area. We hope it will become available for sponsorship in time for this year's breeding season at just £4 per year. What a bargain!

### *Working Weekends*

We cannot finish this edition without saying how impressed we were with the turnout at our working weekends over the winter. Although these actually

turned out to be working days, the response from everyone was tremendous. The two major days were 27 January, when 31 people came in to help and 13 February when 36 people came in. The amount of work which we got through was a real bonus to the management of the Reserve. This was a huge effort and we are very grateful to everyone who was there.

This clearly demonstrates the value of our volunteers when you think how much it would have cost us to buy in that many man hours; even at the minimum wage it would have certainly cost us well over £2000. A lot of money to find.

### *Competition Corner*

A nice easy competition to finish with. As our readers have a voracious appetite for wordsearches and summer is approaching, we thought a butterfly theme might be appropriate. Can you find the names of 20 British butterflies in the grid? They're entered across, up, down and diagonally. A crisp book token to the best entry received before I leave for Suffolk.

E	S	S	E	X	S	K	I	P	P	E	R	L	E	H	X	F	D	P	L
M	Q	E	T	S	H	W	H	Z	P	H	F	F	O	D	J	N	W	D	L
A	Z	D	E	C	L	C	D	S	W	A	L	L	O	W	T	A	I	L	C
R	O	G	L	C	R	E	U	J	V	A	D	O	N	I	S	B	L	U	E
S	X	X	G	A	T	E	K	E	E	P	E	R	S	X	C	E	A	S	H
H	Z	T	N	A	D	P	D	F	V	T	R	I	I	Q	H	F	R	M	R
F	M	O	I	B	W	P	E	A	C	O	C	K	D	S	A	L	G	R	O
R	M	M	R	X	K	M	F	Q	D	C	F	U	E	H	L	B	E	P	R
I	S	E	B	D	P	E	G	L	B	M	D	S	U	B	K	I	W	U	E
T	B	T	O	O	R	A	N	G	E	T	I	P	G	R	H	F	H	P	P
I	X	R	L	C	I	Q	I	V	J	O	S	R	H	I	I	Q	I	S	M
L	G	G	I	U	H	L	U	N	T	L	Z	C	A	H	L	J	T	M	E
L	S	R	F	M	M	C	Z	R	T	V	E	H	H	L	L	C	E	O	E
A	G	E	A	J	S	D	O	L	G	E	E	E	N	C	B	I	P	Q	L
R	M	Z	F	Y	Q	T	E	H	R	E	D	F	R	A	L	G	Q	L	P
Y	S	M	A	L	L	C	O	P	P	E	R	L	M	O	U	J	F	P	R
J	T	H	H	L	S	I	N	N	I	C	N	M	A	W	E	O	N	D	U
R	O	E	A	J	S	S	N	B	E	O	O	C	P	D	C	G	C	Z	P
O	I	M	I	C	V	N	N	G	M	C	D	Q	P	V	Y	I	L	B	L
G	S	P	E	C	K	L	E	D	W	O	O	D	S	F	I	K	B	U	E

### *And Finally, Finally . . .*

What's the difference between a wolf and a flea?

One howls on the prairie, the other prowls on the hairy.