

Issue No 9. Summer 2006

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

All the bird boxes have been checked, we can't see more than 5 yards in any direction, the bird ringers have been to Cape Wrath, the volunteers are finding a little less to do, the Reserve is alive to the sound of school-children and every patch of water seems to have a resident dog. This can only mean one thing - Summer. Foxglove has responded with a huge burst of growth, and people are emerging on every side clutching bits of plant and looking puzzled. And about time too. It's been a bit of a roller coaster but at last things seem to have settled down into a spell of really warm weather.

This season sees a change of emphasis for everyone who works on the Reserve - from habitat maintenance to visitor management. Once again we have had a huge amount of interest from local schools and hardly a day passes without another coach load drawing up at the gate. The popularity of Foxglove as a place to visit shows no sign of declining and this must reflect well on the work which we are doing to improve the Reserve as each season passes.

Our thanks, as always, to everyone who has helped us to achieve so much over the past few months.

*Sam*

### *Not Only, But Also . . .*

As many of you will be aware, when we advertised the post of Warden back in the Spring we had the opportunity to take on not just a single Warden, Sue, but also an Assistant Warden in the person of Gez Marshall. This has been a great success as they are able to mesh their individual skills into a powerful team effort for the benefit of the reserve and its visitors. We wish Gez well and hope that he will enjoy his work with us.

Gez writes:

Hailing from Otley, West Yorkshire, I am 32, married to Rebecca with a young baby son, Jan. I've worked in conservation and forestry since 1998 when I started

my career with BTCV in Leeds. I've since worked as a tree surgeon, forester and dry stone waller. My post prior to Foxglove was as Estate Worker for English Nature. I looked after National Nature Reserves in the North Pennines, covering Cumbria, County Durham and Northumberland. I managed the same number of habitats as here at Foxglove but it required a 200 mile round trip to see them all. It's nice to take a half hour walk and cover the lot!

I am looking forward to the challenges at the reserve, balancing all the different requirements (both wildlife and people). I hope to carry on the excellent work already done at the reserve and am looking forward to getting stuck into the practical management of the site. I am especially interested in the continued development of the existing woodland, as well as bringing the new area into the reserve.



One of the most significant benefits of having two Wardens is that we can, at long last, open Foxglove

to visitors for seven days a week. This is a real improvement and will, we hope, greatly increase the number of people who are able to visit the Reserve.

### *Adopt-a-Box*

As we have already said, we have checked all the nestboxes and everyone who sponsored a box should have received a letter telling them how their box got on. For those of us who don't sponsor a box, it was quite a good year for chicks and we raised 266 compared with 205 last year. Once again the Tits were well to the fore with a nice coincidence: we had exactly the same number of boxes with both Great Tits and Blue Tits in them as we did last year and there was only a difference of one in the number of Great Tit chicks we raised.

The increase in chick numbers was down to the efforts of Blue Tits and Coal Tits both of which were well up on last year. It was a disappointing year for our special boxes - we had no successful owl boxes and, apart from a Stock Dove, a Jackdaw and a family of Great Tits, all our special boxes were empty.

### *Mammal Monitor*

Last year of all the biological records sent to various biological recording institutions and county recorders only 0.5% were mammal records which seriously under-represents their numbers. This is true of everywhere in the country so it's not just a problem at Foxglove. Astounding! That's terrible we hear you cry, mammals are important, they feed lots of things and they help to control lots of things! (OK, with the obvious exception of the grey squirrel). The last mammal survey we can find for Foxglove was carried out in 2002 and as Sue has huge affection for furry things, this needs to change and our records need updating.

Sue has heard claims that mammals are easy and so not worth bothering with, and she wants to challenge this view (with our help). If mammals are so easy then why are the records so poor? Birds shout out to us; moths are considerate enough to go into traps in huge numbers; trees, flowers and fungi stand still and let us look at them; even butterflies follow flight patterns and have bold colours and markings. Mammals don't do any of these things.

If anyone is interested in learning how to identify mammals and form sound and scientific mammal records please let Sue know. She hopes to run a week of monitoring and needs some help. Even if you have no knowledge she can provide the training. She has the

use of Longworth traps for small mammals so there will be a chance of actually seeing and handling them. The rest, well, footprint tunnels can give evidence of most of the mustelids and then there is always poo!

If you would like to take part in the monitoring, please give Sue a call on 01748 831113 and let's get the furry things properly represented!

### *LNR Week*

This year, the week from 22 to 30 July has been declared LNR Week. To celebrate this event Foxglove will be hosing a series of free guided walks and sessions as follows:

Sunday, 23 July and Tuesday, 25 July at 2.00 pm

**Tree Identification.** A guide to identifying trees and discovering more about their diseases and arboriculture.

Wednesday, 26 July and Saturday, 29 July at 2.00 pm

**Walking with Wildflowers.** A guided walk covering a variety of habitats with an emphasis on wild flowers.

Thursday, 27 July and Sunday, 30 July at 2.00 pm

**Discovering Dragonflies.** A session using nets to catch and identify dragonflies and damselflies.

Tuesday, 25 July and Sunday 30 July at 8.00 pm

**An Evening with Mammals.** An evening guided walk with a bat detector and an emphasis on nocturnal mammals.

All the sessions will set off from the Field Centre. If you would like more information or to register your interest, please call Sue or Gez on 01748 831113 or 07754 270980.

### *Friends Group*

Our Friends Group continues to expand and we now have some 65 members. We would like to welcome the following new members who have joined us since our last issue:

Gordon and Julia Wright	Barnard Castle
Hilary Bowes	Hipswell
Alan and Clare Dobie	Witham, Essex

## *Beekeeping at Foxglove*

Beekeeping at Foxglove started in the late 1990s. But how did this happen and why?

“The important thing in all nature reserves...” Tony Crease kept saying (as he led our group of visitors around Foxglove Covert) “the important thing is to engineer the greatest possible biological diversity.”

“Meaning what?” we asked.

“Having as many different species of insects, plants and animals present as possible.” was the answer.

“How about introducing beehives with honeybees?” I ventured. “It would certainly help pollinate the wildflower meadows that you are planning, and assist heather in heathland regeneration.”

Thoughtful silence from TC. No reply. “Oh well.” I thought, “it was nearly a good idea.”

Two weeks later. Tony Crease on the phone “We’ve had another committee meeting. We think bees are a really good idea. Please do it, David. And we’d also like an observation hive in the proposed Field Centre.”

So it happened, and we’ve never looked back, thanks to the help of my fellow beekeeper David Ayton, the Richmond & District Beekeepers, and loads of help from the Foxglove committee, staff and volunteers.

David Ayton and I chose the woodland site from a number of possible locations suggested by TC and Mark Hewitt. Perfect! A firm level area, screened by trees from pathways, steep drop in front of the hives so that the bees (making their bee-line to the hives) wouldn’t bang into visitors, and yet with good vehicle access. And a simply wonderful view over the valley and stream! I’ve never kept bees in a more beautiful place.

We planned it to be simply a pollination apiary, with the added advantage of being a good bee-keeping teaching site for Foxglove’s education programme. It does both beautifully. But it also proved an excellent honey site! For example, by mid-June this year we have already harvested over 200 lbs of woodland and meadow honey from the five hives (that’s nearly a tenth of a ton!) and it’s great to be able to sell it in the Field Centre to raise funds for Foxglove.

The observation hive in the Field Centre is always

popular with visitors, especially school groups, although it took me and David Ayton some time to work out how to manage it. (We are both still “learner drivers” in this matter!) We’ve learned, for example, that a fertile young queen rapidly produces such a population explosion that the bees regularly swarm out of the hive to reduce their numbers. An older, less fertile queen is easier to contain. We took the advice that, since bees in the wild use the cold winter months to recuperate and regroup, we should remove all bees from the centrally-heated Centre observation hive in October, and not re-stock it until April. But we’ve ignored that advice for the last three years: the bees have been in place right through the winter, and seemed happy (as well as keeping the visitors happy).

All living things are part of a food chain. Bees in the wild are preyed upon by humans, bears, honey badgers, woodpeckers, bee-eaters etc, as well as by a number of parasites and viruses. We’ve kept the observation bees safe from most of these, but Blue Tits also love snapping up bees at a hive-mouth. We have twice found a Blue Tit corpse in the transparent entrance tunnel inside the Centre: they had crept all the way in to eat the bees.

“Beekeeping for Beginners” weekend-courses have also proved popular (even over-subscribed) in 2005 and 2006. This year’s course, in mid-June (the swarming season) saw 28 of us (including Mark Hewitt, Graham Hodge & Gez Marshall from the Foxglove team) learning about the natural history of bees, about the techniques and equipment for beekeeping, using talks, films and video. But, best of all was the practical hands-on experience in the woodland teaching apiary, and in the temporary heathland apiary which we create just for the course. A high-light of the weekend was Keith Bartlem producing a swarm that he’d caught in a wicker skep, which we threw down on a sloping board leading up to an empty hive-mouth, and we then watched ten thousand bees (and their queen) march up the slope and into the hive, their new home. Marvellous! Better than the Grand Old Duke of York.

Our Richmond Beekeeping Association has gained 10 new members from the event, Foxglove volunteer staff have become even more adept at handling bees, and the nature reserve has a new group of enthusiastic supporters.

So - we shall do it again next year. To be precise, on the weekend of 16 - 17 June 2007. If you are interested, tell me now (tel 01748 850 791) and put the date in your diary. See you there?

David Gray



# 2006 Photo Competition

## Rules

1. The competition is open to everyone but all photographs must have been taken inside the Reserve.
2. Competitors may enter a maximum of six photographs.
3. An entry fee of 50p will be made for each photograph submitted. Please make cheques payable to "Foxglove Covert LNR".
4. All photographs must have the competitor's name and address written on the back.
5. All photographs should be sent to the Reserve address to arrive not later than 30 September.
6. The photographs will be judged by a panel of judges from the Management Group whose decision will be final. They will award prizes to the photograph they think the best, together with two runners up.

The Reserve will mount an exhibition in the Field Centre of all the photographs submitted. They will also ask the prize winners and others for permission to use the photographs in a calendar or as Christmas cards to be sold in aid of Reserve funds.

Whilst every care will be taken to prevent damage or loss of photographs, the Management Group cannot accept any responsibility for any loss or damage howsoever caused.

## News in Brief

On Saturday 8 July Sue discovered 2 dead stoats, a male and a female, just a few yards apart near to the beck. There was no obvious damage to either and it remains a mystery what might have killed them.

This year's ringing course is due to start on 20 July. Twenty-one students and one helper have enrolled and we hope it will be as successful as those we have run in the past. We will have a full report in our next issue.

Winifred held a painting course at Foxglove in May. She had 6 students of mixed abilities and everyone enjoyed the experience. She has another course starting on 17 July which is fully booked. If anyone would like to see some examples of Winifred's work, log on to [winifredhodge.co.uk](http://winifredhodge.co.uk) where some of her recent pictures are on show.

Sue and Gez have been busy, with the help of our volunteers, improving access around the Reserve. This has resulted in a number of relatively small but welcome improvements. Most noticeable changes are on the Woodland Walk where they have added some steps at the western end and improved and replaced some of the broadwalks. The problem with this sort of work is that it only comes into its own in the winter and one is left wondering why they have bothered to bridge a perfectly dry area. Just wait until it rains a bit, then we'll appreciate the improvements.

## School Visits

This is the season of school visits to Foxglove and so far this year we seem to have had a fair number of children. Up to the 12 July we have had 15 separate visits with a total of 634 children involved.

Although many of the visits are self-sufficient with the teachers coming armed with a programme of events for the children, this is not always the case. The amount of work which this causes for both Sue and Gez, not to mention Graham who is often drafted in to help, can be enormous, especially where large classes are concerned. It is a frequent sight to see a class divided into three groups all disappearing in different directions for minibeast hunts, pond dipping and guided walks. Whilst we would always want to encourage schools to visit, especially those from the local area, the sheer volume of children makes an open door policy quite difficult to maintain.

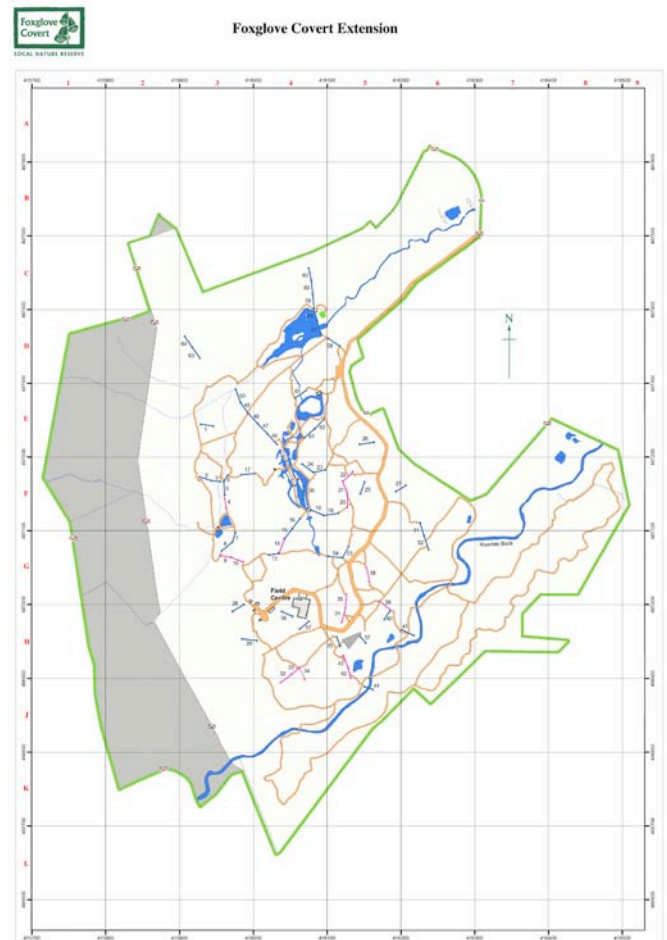
There can also be an issue with behaviour. Most of

the children are well behaved and respect what we are trying to achieve but some do not and this can cause a certain level of tension as we try to balance the need for enjoyment, the children's learning and the needs of other visitors and the Reserve itself. However, once we have explained the ground rules, most children accept them and their visit can be highly successful.

## Foxglove Extension

We are continuing to carry out a survey of the extension to the Reserve to see what plants are represented. So far we have managed to find over 80 species of plants (excluding grasses, rushes and sedges), with more turning up every time we look.

For those of you who are not aware of the extent of the new land, here is a map on which the shaded area shows how much we have gained. The new size of the Reserve is 38.172 hectares which is 94.33 acres in old money. That represents an increase of 7.487 hectares or 18.50 acres over the previous size.



## Institute of Biology

The Yorkshire branch of the Institute of Biology paid us a visit in July. Some 60 people came for a series of guided walks and a good look round. They were very

impressed with everything they saw, which included the new area and a good display of orchids. They kindly made a very generous donation after their visit.

## Volunteers

For the past week we have had a short-term addition to our volunteers in the shape of Dennis Kaiser. Dennis has been working at Foxglove as part of work experience from Francis Xavier School in Richmond. He has been a great help and willing to get stuck in to anything he was asked to do. The main task he worked on was clearing the vegetation on our footpaths and net rides, a constant job at this time of year.

Two schools visited whilst Dennis was with us, and he was very popular with the children, especially Hipswell Primary Year Fives. On his last day he brought in a chocolate cake as a thank you, so he can definitely come again! Thanks for all your help, Dennis.



## 100 Club

The 100 Club continues to make slow but steady progress. We have recruited a few new members over the past few months and our membership now stands at 26. The hunt is still on for new members.

We held the second draw of the year at the Management Group committee meeting in May when the prize was won by Alison Hackett. How embarrassing was that! Our next draw will be in August.

## Competition Corner

There is no competition this time as we want to launch our 2006 Photographic Competition. The competition will be open to everyone and we will mount an exhibition of the entries in the Field Centre. There will be exciting prizes for the best photograph and two runners up.

The closing date for the competition is 30 September, judging will take place during the following week and the winning photographs will be displayed until the end of the year.

If the winners are willing to let us we would like to use the best photographs to produce either a Reserve calendar and/or a series of Christmas cards or notelets which we can use to raise funds for the Reserve.

Full details of the competition are shown on page 5 of this edition.

No response to our sudoku competition in our last issue. For those who tried, here's the solution:

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

## And Finally . . .

What goes 99 clonk, 99 clonk?

A centipede with a wooden leg