

Issue No.13 Summer 2007

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

This summer has brought several changes to life at Foxglove Covert. A major new path has been built by contractors which, complete with bridge and boardwalk, leads directly to the tower hide from the access road near the main gate. Further new paths in the open moorland of the newly acquired extension to the west of the reserve has meant bridges and boardwalks, markers and signs being built and installed by Foxglove staff and volunteers.

Gez Marshall, our Assistant Warden, has taken a new post with The North York Moors National Park and departed at the end of June.

John Smith, a very active volunteer and member of the Management Group has felt the need to reduce his commitments and so has resigned.

Last but by no means least, our Friends Coordinator and Newsletter Editor Sam Hackett, has upped sticks and moved south. That his shoes will be difficult to fill is evidenced by the late arrival and much reduced content of this newsletter.



As well as departures there have been arrivals. An essential element in maintaining moorland habitat is grazing by sheep and cattle, so last year four young live-in helpers were recruited. As mentioned in the last issue of Undergrowth, these year-old highland bullocks arrived in December of last year. Aside from their more utilitarian duties in habitat management, McGregor, Fraser (shown above), Hector and McDuff have proved a great attraction with visitors and staff alike, as well as creating a few management problems of their own.

The new paths up to these moors have been named Moor Trail, Discovery Trail and Hide Trail and these were put in by Foxglove staff during the spring. At the same time the reserves first finger posts were added, to help direct visitor's attention to them.

The major new path also added this year provides access to the hide from the rear. Disturbance at the lake by visitors using the existing lakeside paths has in the past reduced the usefulness of the hide, and may have had some effect on the breeding success of water birds. With new hide access available, it now becomes possible to restrict use of the lakeside paths, giving hide users views of a less disturbed



lake. The photograph above shows the view from behind the lakeside tower hide. The major new path from the entrance gate is seen with steps branching off towards the moorland extension.

BAP open day



This summer, local environmentalists and conservation groups organised a Woodland Biodiversity Day, which was held at Foxglove on the Saturday of June 23. The event was to promote the Richmondshire Action Plan, written by local environmental groups to provide guidance on local wildlife within a national framework. It was opened by the widely respected and occasionally controversial conservationist David Bellamy. Dr Bellamy was later quoted as saying:

"Biodiversity is important because it enables life to exist on earth; it provides the air we breathe, the food we eat, the materials we use and the medicines we take. Every part of the complex web of life is dependent upon interactions with other links in the chain. Woodland is an important part of our ecosystem and because our ancestors felled most of our forests many thousands of years ago we must manage what we have left sensibly."

In the event, over 700 people took advantage of the fine sunny day to visit our reserve. On display was green woodworking, horse logging, beekeeping, chainsaw sculpture, face painting and badge making. Guided walks and pond dipping by leading local experts and Foxglove staff were on offer and most were fully subscribed.

The Visitor Centre was given over to an exhibition by many local wildlife and botanical interest groups. Among those present were...

Carillion
Defence Estates
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG)
Flora Locale
Forestry Commission
Fungi Group
Just the Job
Natural England
North Yorkshire County Council
Richmond District Council
Richmond Landscape Trust
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Sodexo
Yorkshire Bat Group
Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority
Yorwoods

Three separate collections were on display. Major Tim Helps' butterfly collection, Jill Warwick's moth collection and a display of lichens by Caroline Falvey and Jenny Woods.

The event was considered a great success, only marred in your editor's case by a slight argument with one of the wooden direction signs that we installed to direct people from the centre of Catterick Garrison to Cambrai Barracks. The resulting sore mouth and cut lips providing an excuse for ice-cream a little later.

Friends and Volunteers did sterling service during this event and indeed in the days before. Without them the event would have been much the poorer, and may not even have happened. The following is hopefully a comprehensive list. Many apologies if your name has been omitted.

Ray and Sue Harper	John Smith
Tony and Pat Crease	Brian Warner
Ann Flecchia	Colin Newlands
Richard, Alison, Philip, Laurence and Charlotte Slater	Ann Luxmoore
Graham Newcombe	Jo Attrill
Kirsty Tannant	Christine Whitehead
Ray Johnson	Liz Holly
Keith and Ivy Hodgson	Elizabeth Dickinson
Paul and Carol Rooney	Nigel and Alison Stanwix
Graham Hodge	David Gray
Deborah Milward	Caroline Falvey
Jenny Woods	Pat Whelan
Tim Helps	Ian Faye
Caroline Stott	Sylvia Broadwith
John and Jean Gabrielle	Tom Dewdney
John Bell	Hillary Bowes
Wes Miners	

Matters ornithological

No two breeding seasons are ever the same and over the past few years the very mixed and unpredictable weather has had a major impact on the results. I often wonder why many of the migrants choose to migrate northwards at all, when so often they are subjected to the vagaries of the summer climate in UK. This year has been no exception.



We started off very well with a prolonged period of warm weather in late April and May. Tawny Owls, among the first to produce, did extremely well and we are likely to have had the best year ever once the calculations are done. Even in Foxglove the increased tawny activity was evident.

Kestrels nested early and they did well too, but then the rains came and seem to have been with us ever since. As a result numbers of small passerines have diminished, and this is particularly evident with young willow warblers and chiffchaffs – both virtually ground nesters – who, at the time of writing, have produced very little. The former are usually our most productive migrant, but this year many of their nests have been washed out. The sylvia warblers like blackcap, garden warbler and whitethroat have also been severely hit at least locally. Their fragile nests are no match for the heavy rain.

Moorland waders and the black grouse have met a similar fate with extremely poor numbers fledging across the board. So far a single black grouse chick only has been found from the Catterick population.

In the Covert the nest boxes were checked by John Bell, Tom Dewdney and John Smith from the ringing group. Numbers were less buoyant than last year with a nest box take up still to be determined when all the results are collated. This, however, is still a major contribution to the productivity and survivability of the species which are mainly titmice.

Peregrines, locally in the dales, did poorly with one site failing (the eggs disappeared) and no birds evident at a second. Slightly further a field six chicks were ringed and all reached the fledging stage which was pleasing.

At a local Sand Martin colony on 24 July only 13 juvenile birds were ringed out of a total of over 200 caught. At this time of the year there should be many more young birds in the population, and indications are that the first broods have failed and most adults were sitting on a second clutch.

Finally, 2007 was the 15th annual expedition to Cape Wrath which our ringers have been involved in. The year 2004 had previously produced the poorest results, but 2005 and 2006 had shown some slight improvement from a fairly depleted state. Sadly, 2007 was found to be a catastrophic disaster, and there were virtually no sea birds at all breeding on the

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entire 16 mile stretch of cliffs along the north west corner of Scotland where 5 years ago there were more than 40 thousand pairs. Subsequently, we have found that this is fairly typical of the sea bird population as a whole for 2007. Depressing results due to a lack of food (particularly sand eels) have been recorded throughout Orkney, Shetland and most of the northern isles.

To finish on an interesting note, we have just received information on a dead Kestrel found on the Training Area by Scott Little from the Infantry Training Centre on 30 Sep 06. The bird, bearing a Finnish ring, had been ringed as a chick three months earlier to the day in Yli Li, Oulu, Finland, some 1959 km to the north east. The cause of death is unknown, but this is a substantial distance for a newly-hatched raptor to have travelled so soon after fledging.

Tony Crease



Botanically speaking...

As most of you, who have visited Foxglove will know the reserve is a beautiful and diverse place in particular when it comes to the flora of reserve. There are currently over 420 recorded species of flowering plants, with several more ferns and other non flowering species. This list seems to be continuously growing almost by the day! Recent editions include cut leaved cranesbill, small flowered cranesbill, common mallow, early marsh orchid, butterwort and jacobs ladder although this is not an exhaustive list.

It is particularly rewarding to see species such as the early marsh orchids (which I have only previously seen in books) and butterwort (which I have only ever seen having hiked half way up a mountain) suddenly making an appearance. These two new and really quite special species have been recorded on the new area where the highland cattle currently graze. Butterwort has now been recorded two years running but the early marsh orchids have only appeared since the inclusion of the highlands, quite probably a coincidence but it would be interesting to know.

As you may already have noticed the weather this year has been slightly different than that of last year, moving from being cooked alive to treading water! It is impossible to tell whether this had an effect on the flora but there are some noticeable differences between this year and last. Columbine appeared for the first (and so far only) time last year, it hasn't appeared again but the ground where it was is a lot more sodden this year. Jacobs ladder quite literally decided to pop its head up in the scrapes one day. In fact I confess I had difficulty in identifying it! Its appearance is most likely to be attributed to a feathered friend, although which one I could not say. Common mallow is not at all a rare plant however, it is not listed in the records of the reserve since these began. It would have been unfortunate that it chose to grow in the middle of the path leading down to the bullet catcher (it is fortunate that this path is not regularly used)!

On top of all these new species of pretty flowering plants lets not forget those slightly less showy. After an in depth survey led by Alan Legg, nearly 40 new species of fungi were added to the list. Finally, those things that most people, when seeing them in their garden, begin to shake, the

horsetails. We have last year added the rather spectacular (and aptly named) greater horsetail to our list.

Sue Rowley

"Ratty" come to Foxglove Introduction of Water Vole

Foxglove Covert is to attempt an introduction of Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris* later in the year and as a precursor to this it is essential to establish the absence of American Mink *Mustela vison*. The Game Conservancy Trust has devised a means of detecting mink which is in essence a camouflaged, floating tray of soft clay known as a Mink Raft. Detection is proved by the appearance of the characteristic mink paw print in the clay. A number of these rafts have been built and located at suitable sites around the reserve with no results yet available.

One of the main components of the detecting pad is Oasis foam, as used in flower arranging and Sue naturally went to a flower shop to get some. The shop assistant asked what such a large quantity was needed for, possibly suspecting competition. Her expression when told it was for use in mink traps was described by Sue as 'interesting'.

The first phase of the introduction is planned for the second week in August with a second phase next Spring. Approximately 140 voles are to be released. They were captive bred in Devon from stock gathered in Teeside and Humberside.

In a similar vein sightings of a very large Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus* continue to come in. I've even seen it myself, on the boardwalk through the scrapes .

New Friends

The following have joined The Friends of Foxglove Covert since the last issue of Undergrowth.

Mr William Lawford	Leyburn
Mrs Audrey Lawford	Leyburn
Mrs Dorothy Oldfield	Thirkleby
Mr Brian Ingham	Eggleston
Mrs Moira Ingham	Eggleston
Mr Raymond Johnson	Cockfield
Mr John Smith	Saltburn by Sea
Mrs Barbara Florentine	Richmond
Mr James Bradshaw	Darlington
Mrs Joanne Gibson	Richmond
Mr Peter Stockdale	Hunton
Mrs Anne Stockdale	Hunton
Mr William Stabler	Brompton on Swale
Mr Paul Roney	Hunstanton
Mrs Iris Eckersley	Leyburn

Volunteers

With 94 acres of mixed habitat to manage and maintain and only two (currently one) paid members of staff to do it, the reserve relies heavily on volunteers to make up the numbers. Many tasks such as bracken and thistle pulling require little or no previous experience and a small work party can be organised at very short notice. Friends and visitors who are not part of the normal volunteer group are always welcome to assist. Even a few hours once or twice a year can make a big difference.

There are however a core of about half a dozen stalwarts who regularly contribute a day or so a week to helping the permanent staff members, often bringing additional expertise into the reserve. Tuesdays are the normal day for

this activity and some of the more heavy duty tasks are often undertaken then. Additions to this workforce are very welcome. Just turning up about 10:00 on a Tuesday morning will be fine, other days, some advance telephone notice will ensure your labour is used to best effect.

And who are these stalwarts? Those that have contributed regularly this summer are...

Ann Luxmore, Brian Warner, Caroline Stott, Ian Fay, John Smith, Ray and Sue Harper and Stan Prentice, not forgetting George Rowley who has unfailingly ensured that all work gloves are suitably soggy when needed. Oh and your editor has pulled the odd thistle and thwacked the odd nail.

Another who has been of great help is Susan Muckle, who recently booked a weeks holiday from work and chose to spend her entire break as a Foxglove volunteer, many thanks Susan.

Paul Roney and Carol who run the RSPB's most successful reserve at Titchwell Marsh, Norfolk have been kind enough to spend some of their sabbatical volunteering at Foxglove. Their huge experience and expertise has proved extremely valuable. Paul has been kind enough to produce a full report containing recommendations on continuing Foxglove's success.

Thoughts of a new volunteer

As a newcomer to Foxglove Covert and having heard only a little about it's reputation as a Nature Reserve, I expected on my first visit, to find a small, relatively 'ordinary' patch of land, squashed behind army barracks.

Far from it, instead I encountered a large and peaceful oasis of diverse natural habitats, meticulously planned and maintained and providing a home for a wide range of flora and fauna.

Since then, I have enjoyed guided walks, an open day and barbeque, and offered my services as a volunteer by helping to pull thistles and tidy paths throughout the site.

On the open day, we had friends who visited from a nature reserve further afield and they were most impressed with the site, the displays and activities provided on the day, not least the weather, as away from the reserve it was atrocious!

As a teacher of young children, I feel Foxglove Covert has much to offer both children and adults of all ages in learning about the natural environment and its conservation.

In today's society which focuses on material possessions and instant gratification the reserve is a vital asset, not only now but for future generations.

Sue Harper

Editorial

For the next few issues of Undergrowth it is likely I shall be your editor, so perhaps I should introduce myself. My name is Graham Bentley. Until my retirement at the end of June I was a programmer with a local IT company. A lifelong bird watcher and fell walker I moved to Richmond from North Shields in 2000. For the last couple of years I have been volunteering with the Yorkshire Dales NPA, involved in survey work, notably their ongoing Red Squirrel program, and leading the odd guided walk. Last year, at the request of SWI, I organised the opening up of an old path off Castle Walk and the building of steps to improve accessibility.

I was introduced to Foxglove Covert last summer when I attended that year's beekeeping weekend and was impressed with the range of habitats condensed into a relatively small area. I have been actively involved with maintaining and running the reserve since March this year.

And finally, Sue informs me, we've got to have a joke, so how about...

Q: Why do hummingbirds hum? (*answer below*)

Editor

Website revamp

Andrew Russell of Moonburst has agreed to revamp our website. Currently using the Army CMS system, our present site is somewhat restricted and confusing to use. Andrew has volunteered to design and create a new website and host it on his own servers free of charge. This will provide Foxglove with a more tailored internet presence and will remove the possibility of getting lost in the larger Army system. The new URL will be www.foxglovecovert.org.uk.

Beekeeping

The four hives in the woods behind the heath continue to be occupied but the terrible weather of June and July has been very unproductive as far as honey is concerned.

The observation hive in the visitor centre was cleaned and refilled with three new frames of bees in late May. The colony seems to be flourishing in terms of bee numbers and the bees are certainly out and about during any suitable sunny spell. I even see there's a little capped honey appearing.

Events still to come

August 3	Friends and Volunteers Barbeque
August 30	Coffee Morning, Richmond Town Hall
September 15	Friends and Volunteers Away Day
September 30	Collection at Sunday Market
November 17	Quiz Night at Lizzie's Bar

However, note that the August the third barbeque is likely to be cancelled due to low interest.



Undergrowth is published four times a year and is free to Friends and Volunteers. Articles for inclusion in future issues or indeed any other comments should be sent to the editor at grahame@bentley000.plus.com, 01748 824776 or Tony Crease at tonycrease@aol.com 01677 427925.

Any opinions included are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foxglove Covert Management Group or the policy of the Ministry of Defence.

A: Because they don't know the words.