



Undergrowth

Issue No 7. Winter 05-06

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night! Comets, importing change of times and states, brandish your crystal tresses in the sky, and with them scourge the bad revolting stars!

We utter such Shakespearian cries of woe as a result of bad news: Mark Hewitt, our CLO, has resigned.

Mark has been associated with Foxglove as a bird ringer since 2001 and has worked at Foxglove since March 2004. During his time with us his efforts to maintain and improve the Reserve for our visitors has been tireless. It is largely due to his enthusiasm that the reputation of Foxglove as a good place to spend an afternoon has developed so strongly over the past two years.

Mark has the happy knack of being able to turn his hand to a huge variety of maintenance tasks around the Reserve and also to make our visitors feel that their journey was worthwhile. He has been actively involved in drawing up our management plan for the Reserve - a blueprint of how we see the Reserve developing over the years to come. As we noted at our AGM (see below) he has encouraged school visits and has hugely increased the number of children who come to the Reserve. He has encouraged and developed our volunteers group and has produced a dedicated band of people whose work has made a big impact on our habitats. Overall, his commitment to conservation in general and to Foxglove in particular has been tremendous.

He has achieved all this and more while, at the same time, implementing changes and new ideas put forward by the Management Group. It is a tribute to his sense of humour that he was able to steer a safe course through these often conflicting requirements; it is, perhaps, a tribute to his sense of duty that he stayed so long.

Mark will be much missed by us all but we wish him and his family well in his new venture as a free-lance estate manager.

So, it's goodbye from me . . .

. . . and it's Goodbye from Him

As you will have seen, I am leaving the post of CLO at the end of March.

Obviously, this was not an easy decision to make but for a whole host of reasons, principally for my wife Anne and my children I have decided to move to pastures new. I will continue to be involved with Foxglove as time allows and hope to be in ringing and helping out occasionally.

As we all know, Foxglove is an amazing place and what has made it so very special has been the people. Our Volunteers have been fantastic to work with and all the Friends and visitors have made working on the site a real pleasure. In all of these projects the teamwork is the most crucial aspect and I have been fortunate to be a part of an excellent team.

I thank you all for your hard work, commitment, laughter and friendship and hope to bump into many of you around and about the area. May I wish the Management Group, Volunteers and Friends all the very best in taking Foxglove forward.

Mark

Centre Opening Times

Following on from the news of Mark's resignation, the Management Group has been concerned for some time about the opening times of the Field Centre. As you will probably be aware, it has been open, effectively, only when Mark has been at work. This means that weekends and Bank Holidays are not covered, nor are the long Summer evenings. Also, as the number of people who do bird ringing has diminished recently, it has become increasingly difficult to give Sunday visitors the attention which they deserve as the ringers themselves are just too busy.

Now, with the prospect of a time gap between Mark leaving at the end of March and the appointment of his successor, we need to take some action to keep the Centre open for visitors. To do this the Management Group is conducting a survey of everyone involved

with the Reserve and who lives in the local area to see if anyone is able to help us maintain and extend the times when the Field Centre is open.

If you live within a radius of 20 miles from Foxglove, you will find a letter from Mark Conroy, chairman of the Management Group, enclosed with this issue. We would be grateful if you would complete the survey and send it back to us as soon as possible.

Reserve Extension

Now some good news. After lengthy discussions with the tenant farmer who holds the land to the west of the Reserve, we are going to expand the area of Foxglove by about 15 acres. The new area will extend from Risedale Beck in the South virtually to the northern edge of the Reserve.

This is particularly interesting area because of the habitats which it contains. There is a lot of sheep grazed grassland which is not represented within Foxglove, some small ponds and two areas of raised bog. The bogs are seen as a very significant addition to our current habitats and will, no doubt, increase the number of species which we can record as using the Reserve.

So far we have not drawn up a management plan for the new area and probably won't do so until we are certain what we have actually got. The fence is likely to go up in the next few weeks and, once that is done, the sheep which currently keep the grass short will be gone and we will begin to see what is there as it grows through the spring and summer.

Annual General Meeting

We held our 5th AGM on 11 January and 28 people attended it. We heard reports from various members of the Management Group on the areas of their responsibility. Our Chairman, Mark Conroy commented on the success of the Open Day which we held in May and the fact that, last year, we had visits from no less than 1,200 schoolchildren! As one of the founding principles of the Reserve is to become involved in education, we feel that we might have covered that aspect this year.

At the end of the meeting, the whole committee put themselves up for re-election for the next three years and they were accepted unanimously.

Working Weekend

The working weekend on 21/22 January was very successful. Some 24 or so people turned up over the two days and worked on jobs which Mark had earmarked as needing a good level of input. Two main areas were attacked: the cleared area of conifer plantation on the West side of the Reserve and the bank on the far side of Risedale beck near the start of the Woodland Walk. In both these places some conifers were felled and the whole area tidied up.



We also took the opportunity to sort out some nest boxes in time for the breeding season. Some of our wooden boxes had deteriorated with time and the ravages of the weather and so we replaced 20 of them with new woodcrete boxes.

Our thanks to everyone who helped out but particularly to Ian and Russ who did most of the chain-saw work for us.

We will hold our next working on 18/19 February and we look forward to seeing you if you are able to spare us a few hours of your time. Just come along at any time from 09.00 onwards.

Friends Group

There isn't much news on the Friends scene at the moment. Having said that, we would like to welcome four new members:

Jenny Wood	Leeming Village
Sue Reed	Richmond
Irene Hobbs	Peebles
Tony Metcalf	Preston under Scar

This brings our current membership up to 51. One of our new members, Jenny Wood, is already a supporter

of our work - she regularly invites our bird ringers to her garden in Leeming where she feeds birds on a monumental scale.

One other thing we should mention. We have been heartened by the fact that, when it comes to renewing their membership, our Friends have been very supportive. Only one person has so far failed to renew after the first year. This is excellent news because it shows that people are sufficiently interested in what we are doing to want to continue to support our work. For this we are most grateful.

Bird Ringing

In Issue 5 last Summer we reported that the bird ringers had captured a Crossbill, only the third one in over 10 years. Well, lightning has struck twice because they caught another last week - this time a female and, much more importantly, a different species; this one was a Parrot Crossbill. Although the Common and Parrot Crossbills are very similar there is a marked difference in the beak - that of the Parrot being much deeper than that of the Common. Needless to say this is the first record of a Parrot Crossbill on the Reserve and brings our total of ringed species to 66.



Don't forget that we are still looking to recruit new bird ringers. If you would like to take part in this important aspect of our work, please ring Tony Crease on 01758 875504.

Those of us who watched the excellent BBC programme

on our pair of breeding Eagle Owls will be saddened to hear that the female, who has successfully reared 23 young over the years, was recently found dead. A post mortem revealed that she had been shot. We have no idea what this means for the future. It is possible that a new female may arrive to take the place of the dead bird or the male may move to a new area where females have already established themselves.

Whatever occurs it brings the curtain down on the first genuine records of Eagle Owls breeding wild in the UK. It also shows that we, in this country, have some way to go in our efforts to conserve our wildlife.

Adopt-a-Box Scheme

As I write this I can report that we have had a tremendous response from everyone we have asked to renew their sponsorship for the coming years. Last year people sponsored 132 out of the 152 boxes on the Reserve which is about 87%. Of these, some 91 were sponsored for a single year and were, therefore, due for renewal during January. So far, 68 boxes have been responsored with, we hope, more to come. This means that, if we add in those boxes which were originally sponsored for more than one year, we have already reached a total of 110 (72%) sponsored boxes for the coming year. A big thank you to everyone who has supported us.

At last we have found time to extend our Adopt-a-Box scheme to include our bat boxes. There will be a display in the Field Centre from next week, assuming the weather is good enough to take a photograph of the few remaining boxes. We are likely to start with about 53 boxes and all of them will be available on the same basis as our Standard nestboxes (£2.00 per year). There are no Special bat boxes.

Foxglove Party

On 3 February we held a party in Lizzie's Bar which was open to everyone. The party was designed to replace our Christmas party which we used to hold between Christmas and New Year but which people felt was a difficult time.

In all some 40 people came to the party. We had a Tombola stall, managed by John and Jean Gabriel and Sylvia Broadwith who did an excellent job as always and helped to ensure we made a modest surplus of £145 on the night as a whole. We also had a wildlife quiz devised and presented by Mark which certainly kept everyone on their toes. Five teams battled it out

and the result was a tie between two of them with 24 marks out of 26. (If my team had only remembered that there were two species of toad, there would have been a three-way tie!)

In a departure from our usual pattern we had a live band in the form of John Deighton and three of his players, hot from the Black Bull in Richmond, and Tony played his electric bagpipes. They gave us two sessions of traditional music which were most enjoyable.

We also had a slide show of the bird ringers at Cape Wrath last year with some really good photographs of the area and the local birdlife. Some of the views were very spectacular, particularly those from the cliff tops.

Our thanks to all who made this a very enjoyable evening and particularly to the chefs who produced some excellent food for us.

News in Brief

Richard Francis has been at it again. Our readers will be aware that it was he who made the original suggestion of our Adopt-a-Box scheme. He has now come up with Fill-a-Feeder which allows people who buy 1 kilo bags of bird food to colour in a square on a chart. Whoever fills in the last square wins a prize. All the details are on display in the Field Centre.

For the past few weeks the contractors have been on the Reserve again as they attack our latest area of coppicing. This time it's mainly the turn of the area on either side of the road as one approaches the Field Centre. As usual, it looks a bit chewed up at the moment but it won't take long to recover.

We are also having some work done to resurface the path which forms our disabled route around the Reserve. Anyone who has pushed a wheelchair on the route will be aware of the difficulty caused by the large tufts of grass which have taken root on it. The current work will make wheelchair access much easier, and, to Gillian's relief, much more comfortable!

We have commissioned a new trail guide and a new Reserve map to replace the one on the outside of the Field Centre. The existing ones have gradually become

less useful as we have made quite a few changes to the Reserve over the past few years. In particular, the guide and map will show the Woodland Walk for the first time.

In our last issue we mentioned that we were developing an education pack with the help of Elizabeth Dickinson, one of our Friends. At the time, the pack amounted to some 40 pages. This has now stretched to over 200 pages!

Competition Corner

We wish to register a complaint. When we set the competition last time we chose something really easy - list all the words of three letters or more which you could find in the word UNDERGROWTH. What could be easier than that? Almost anything, that's what. It wasn't the competition which was difficult it was checking the answers which gave us the problem! We thought that some of you might come up with a hundred words or so but just look at these entries:

Gillian Mackenzie	85
Jean Gabriel	179
Janet Hall	261
David Gray	322
Richard Brown	414

That's 1262 words which we needed to check. And that's not all, one or two of them were not the sort of thing one usually encounters in polite competitions and brought a blush to our cheeks! It may be some time before we repeat this idea and we may well choose a word like "Foxglove" and ask for words with 6 letters or more! Still, at least picking a winner didn't involve my hat. Well done, Richard a small token of my ~~displeasure~~ appreciation is on its way to you.

This time we thought we would give your dictionaries a rest and ask you to write a limerick or two on a conservation theme. Up to 5 entries each to my hat by 31 March. That should fix you!

And Finally

Why do elephants have big ears?

Because Noddy wouldn't pay the ransom