

Editorial

So much has happened at Foxglove Covert since the last issue of 'Undergrowth', but without a doubt the most fantastic occurrence is the creation of the Wet Meadow area. Tony Crease has given an up-date on this amazing project. If you have not been to see it yet, I suggest you do so very soon before it greens over. Be warned, a pair of wellington boots is essential footwear.

Two walks took place over the holiday period, the weather being kind to us on both occasions. We have also had the Christmas 'Do', and a volunteer work day. Sandie, Sue and Elizabeth have written reports for us.

Jenny reports on the AGM, the most noteworthy result of which was the election of Guy Deacon as Chairman.

Tom Dewdney has given us an insight into 'Storm Petrel Ringing at Cape Wrath'. Cape Wrath is the north-western tip of Scotland and is regularly visited by bird ringers based at Foxglove Covert.

100 Club

A draw took place recently, and I am happy to report that it was won by Elizabeth Dickinson. Elizabeth is a regular visitor to Foxglove Covert and her visits are always appreciated. The fact that she brings in lovely cakes could have something to do with this!

RSPB Reserve at Saltholme

I know that many of you are keen to visit this new RSPB reserve. If I were you I'd wait a little longer. According to the RSPB it opened on 21st January. Only the northern tip has opened, along with the main building and a hide. Most of the reserve is not yet available to the public. Kate Humble is to officially open Saltholme on Friday 6th March.

Ray Harper

Wet Meadow Project - Latest Update

As many readers will be aware the groundworks for the project were completed just before Christmas and in retrospect the engineering work proved slightly more complex than first thought. Certainly the time taken to produce the end result was considerably more than envisaged initially but the consensus is that the product has met all the requirements.

We have achieved something remarkably similar to and possibly

better than initial artist's impression with water on seven different levels providing a terraced effect. As with all newly constructed wet areas the site currently looks raw and disturbed, but it will not be long before the first green shoots appear (am I allowed to say that these days!?) and by mid-summer it will be well on the way to full recovery. Already we have seen ducks in the pools, Snipe, and Woodcock on at least two occasions. This augers well.



Facing the Management Group now is the decision on how to continue with the hide and walkways. The cost of the wetlands was £4k over what we raised but we can cover that reasonably easily from capital. The paths and hide are likely to cost at least another £30k so we are currently awaiting answers on several grant applications and looking at every possible option to continue. Ideally we would like to proceed, but no one will grant fund a project in retrospect, neither will they fund a grant to repay capital. It is a dilemma we are considering carefully!

A final major benefit of the work already done is that we were able to protect almost all of the tiny ponds on the moor surveyed earlier in the year and others in addition; as a consequence the habitats of the newts and snails on the national Biodiversity Action Plan list are completely isolated from the water being fed to the wetland as a whole.

With luck, as the irrigation grows we will see the results of the latest increment to our mosaic but whilst it settles we will have to keep access to the minimum. The Management Group are as keen as anyone to let our regulars enjoy this new habitat but we may have to be slightly patient whilst the bunds firm up.

There is no doubt this area will prove popular with all visitors and the hide – when we get it – will be the icing on this particular cake!

Tony Crease

A Note from the Chairman of Foxglove.

Happy New Year to all Undergrowth readers! And fingers crossed for a good one. Looking back on the last year a lot seems to have happened, most before I became intimately involved in Foxglove. But even as one drives through the gate it is possible to see change. Perhaps spurred on by the gales early last year, huge effort has gone into managing the trees on the reserve. Some of this through necessity, some through desire, some done by contractors but a huge amount of work has been done by the loyal volunteers who have turned out regularly for work weekends to get on with the essential business of clearing up the carnage.

There has of course been no rest for the volunteers, and once most of the treefall and brash was sorted it was onto gorse clearing and preparation for the wetlands to take shape. And take shape they have - a huge thank you to everyone who helped raise money and/or contributed to the cost of the project. Well done! The Management Group is now focusing on the hide and access to the wetlands.

So what can we look forward to? Hm... a period of steady improvement would be nice. And I am confident that we can enjoy that. Marion and Sophie are already compiling developing a "development agenda" which is prioritising all the jobs we need to get done over the year, some of which are of course routine but others are out and out improvements. We have some grand ideas and there is always a need to keep funds coming in, so the Management Group will remain busy. In the meantime I am working closely with the hierarchy of Defence Estates to ensure their continued support. I would love to say that we will be immune to the Credit Crunch, but I fear that we are not entirely. But we are secure and I know our main benefactors - the MOD - are very much onside and will help us where they can.

So Foxglove will certainly remain a haven not just for flora and fauna next year but for everyone else too.

I look forward to seeing you at Foxglove Covert, either visiting or on a work weekend perhaps!

Guy Deacon

January Volunteer Day



I was introduced to the joys of shredding the previous week. Enjoyable, fun, good exercise, plenty of fresh air.

January Volunteer Day - this time properly prepared - layers, old coat, wellies, hat and scarf and old specs (new ones last week kept slipping down my nose so I couldn't see what I was doing!)



We started to shred the rather large heaps of conifer branches – amazing what the shredder could deal with, especially with er, "gentle" encouragement. During the morning we worked, bringing the branches to the shredder for shredding, and it was soon noticeable that we were making an impression.

After lunch some people who had worked in the morning went to do other jobs whilst other people joined in. By the time I left in the early afternoon, the heaps were much smaller and hopefully by the end of the day, the land would have been cleared ready for planting the next day.

I have always appreciated the hard work the reserve managers and the volunteers play in keeping the Reserve in good condition. Work that is often not seen by people who visit and enjoy the special place that Foxglove Covert is. Today made me appreciate that work even more.

As always when I visit Foxglove Covert, I was made welcome. Good company, laughter and smiles, working with people, fresh air, exercise, getting mucky – I thoroughly enjoyed my day, thank you.

Elizabeth Dickinson.

Annual General Meeting

The 8th Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve Annual General Meeting was held at Lizzie's Bar, Piave Lines on the 23rd January. The meeting was attended by members of the Management Group, (with apologies from Sandie Byrne and Rima Berry), the Reserve Managers and 15 Friends and Volunteers. Our new chairman Colonel Guy Deacon opened the meeting with a warm welcome, expressing his gratitude to the dedication and hard work of the Volunteers and Reserve Managers.

The Annual Report 2008 was reviewed and key points

highlighted. The workshop has now been started and hopefully will soon be completed by Carillion. There has been a significant increase in visitor numbers this year and Colonel Guy explained how important Foxglove is to families and the community in the Garrison.

The ground work for the Wet Meadow Project has now been completed by Dinsdale Moorland Services in an impressive series of ditches, gravity fed over seven levels. It will be formally opened by Lady Margaret Houghton on 13th February. The next priority is to raise money to pay for the new hide and access route which will cost approximately £40,000.

Brigadier Mark Conroy has stepped down as Chairman of the Management Group after seven years of dedicated service. Colonel Guy Deacon volunteered to take his place and was officially voted in as the new Chairman. Rima Berry who has worked hard on many grant applications for Foxglove was voted onto the management group and Tom Dewdney and Sandie Byrne were voted in as elected members.

Jenny Butler.

Storm Petrel Ringing at Cape Wrath (1994 - 2007)

Every year, a ringing team from Foxglove has visited Cape Wrath in north west Scotland with the specific aim of catching and ringing Storm Petrel (*Hydrobates pelagicus*) which is a small sea bird, the size of a small thrush about 16cm long, with a wing span of 38 cm and weighting about ca 27 g.



The bird breeds in colonies close to the sea across coastal areas of NW Europe. In the UK, colonies are found along the west and north coast of Scotland; latest estimates suggest that there are about

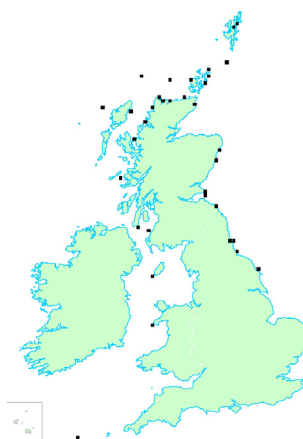
32,000 pairs breeding in the UK. The Storm Petrel spends its days at sea where it is able to feed on plankton and small fish on the surface of the sea and comes ashore at night to coastal colonies where it uses crevices and burrows to nest.

The Storm Petrel is an interesting bird to study as most of the birds that are handled are caught as fully-grown birds, using tape luring along the coast at night. As the birds spend the winter and much of the spring and autumn south of the breeding grounds in NW Europe, it is not surprising that catches of this species in NW Europe are restricted to the months of June, July, August and September.

Up to the end of 2007, 4421 Storm petrels had been ringed by the group at Faraid Head, 88 birds ringed elsewhere (>50km away) have been controlled there and 6 birds, initially ringed at

Faraid Head have been recaptured there in subsequent seasons. In addition, 54 birds ringed at Faraid Head have been found at

least 50 km from Faraid Head and reported via the BTO; interestingly 52 of these reports involved recaptures by ringers and only 2 involved reports of dead birds.



The map shows all the locations of movements within the UK of birds moving to and from Faraid Head, which have been reported via the BTO to the group before the end of 2007.

1. The capture/recapture data for Storm Petrels is not typical as no pullus or juveniles have been caught by our group, all birds are caught at night using a tape lure and most of the birds recovered are recaptures by other ringers.

2. The numbers of new birds caught varies from 11 to 817 in one year and recaptures show a similar year on year variation. This reflects variations in weather conditions and our limited activity rather than variations in numbers.

3. Recoveries of birds from Faraid Head together with initial ringing details of controls show many interesting movements within the NW European breeding area and also down to the wintering areas. These are best summarised as:

Quickest movement Souter Point, Tyne and Wear to Faraid Head - 456km in less than 2 days

Longest movement Faraid Head to Port Elizabeth, RSA - 10619km

Most northerly Faraid Head to Hovden, Norway 62°9'N 5°5'E

Longest-lived bird 2406090 at 14 years 29 days and still counting?

Since this data was summarised at the end of 2007 season, we have had another successful trip to Faraid Head and caught another 800+ birds and also captured 32 birds ringed by other ringers (which include 3 from Norway) and are awaiting details from the BTO. If you want more details of this work please contact Tony Crease or Tom Dewdney.

Tom Dewdney

Guided Walks

Two guided walks were organized by Foxglove Covert LNR during the holiday season, one on Boxing Day, led by Tony Crease, and one on New Year's Day, led by Sophie Benaiges.

Each walk met at 11:00, allowing even the previous nights' party-goers to make it to the Field Centre for the start, and each walk

lasted about two hours, and covered fairly easy ground, making them perfect for family outings.

On each day we were a diverse group of all ages, degrees of fitness, and knowledge of the natural environment. Luckily for those of us in the lower end of the latter categories, the Foxglove wardens, treasurer, and volunteers, all at the top of the range in each category (other than age, obviously), were on hand to assist with identification of foliage, bird-calls, foot-prints, and, where necessary, to lend a hand on muddy slopes.



The weather was more than kind on both occasions. Boxing Day was clear and sunny, affording wonderful views from the heathland, and the frost on New Year's Day encased every twig, frond and thorn in a perfect sheath, and hung every tree with soft white blossom.

Tony and Sophie provided background information about the reserve as well as pointing out things of particular interest. The routes they had chosen illustrated one of the great strengths of Foxglove: its rich variety of habitats, flora and fauna. For the younger members of the groups, the highlight of the walk was perhaps feeding the Highland Cattle, who obliging ran to the rattle of the buckets, and adopted photogenic poses whilst enjoying their food. For others, it was the evidence that our water-vole population is still thriving, and of the continued presence in the reserve of (among other residents) deer and fox. We ended with a tour of the newest addition to the reserve, the wet meadows, and a few words on the biodiversity these will bring. As always, my favourite walk is through the broad-leaved woodland with the sound of running water never far away, but these two excursions were a reminder that each of the habitats: alder and willow carr; standing water; water margins; heath; raised bog; woodland... is beautiful and enjoyable in its own way.

As an additional treat, the wardens and volunteers provided mulled wine and mince pies in the Field Centre after the Boxing Day walk, and hot drinks and cakes on New Year's Day. These were the perfect occasions on which to toast the well-deserved success of Foxglove Covert LNR in 2009.

Sandie Byrne

Foxglove Covert Christmas Dinner

I have to admit, it was with just a little trepidation that I put my name down for the Christmas party to be held at Piave lines on 18th December. I had heard murmurings of 'I don't think it will be as good as last year' and 'The food was excellent last year at Downholme.' As this was only my second Foxglove Christmas 'do' I had ~~nothing to compare to. The day duly arrived and~~ I got dressed for the occasion. Not my 'posh frock' but non-the-less, my black trousers and 'posh top' instead. Let the party begin! The weather was truly seasonal and walking down the steps to 'Lizzie's bar' it felt as if Christmas had already begun.

Ray and I were greeted by our two charming hostesses for the night - Marion and Sophie, and handed a piece of paper with our first 'task' for the evening which was text with a number of birds' names hidden inside it. This had been provided by Jack and certainly started those 'little grey cells' working. Well done, Jack! There was a dogged determination within the group of ringers, to find all the names. (The very nature of 'ringers' meant we would find them very quickly?) We did find them all, as did other people, so names were put into a hat, and Tony was the lucky recipient of a prize.

Next was the 'baby photo' quiz. It was interesting to see how some people had changed over time whilst others were instantly recognisable! Needless to say this quiz caused much mirth and merriment, and the 'cutest babies' were quickly pointed out. Soon it was time to eat. There was plenty of choice with tasty main courses and delicious desserts to replenish body and mind. I can personally vouch for the chocolate gâteau! It was a good time to 'catch up' with friends and those not seen for a while.

Two more quizzes remained, and a raffle, which included a magnificent Christmas cake baked and decorated by Marion. (Luckily won by Jenny who had had her eye on it all evening!) The 'pop' quiz thought up by Marion and aided by daughter Naomi sorted the men / women from the boys / girls figuratively speaking. It was generally a good indicator of age. The 'spring chickens' struggled with the titles from the '60's' while the 'more senior members' struggled with the modern titles.

The night came to an end after the 'Foxglove' quiz which was very interesting and quite taxing to the brain, with its photos taken at unusual angles. It had been a thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining evening made possible by the efforts of Marion and Sophie - a special 'Thank you' goes to them for the hard work they continue to do.

I conclude by saying it is not the setting that necessarily makes for a good evening. Most importantly, it is who is there and how they interact together that makes all the difference between a 'good' evening and one which is 'thoroughly enjoyable.'

Sue Harper