

## Eco Club

In October our meeting was about bats and started with a quiz – What do you know about bats? This was followed by a short slide presentation. On our walk, through the heath and along Risedale Beck and then to the middle moor gate, we checked any bat boxes for activity using the bat detector box, but not a sound was heard. We identified different areas for bats to feed, roost and hibernate and looked at the new hedge lines on the moor which could provide extra feeding areas for bats.

Refreshments were bat biscuits and activities to take home included the pattern for making of a paper bat with a furry coat.

Plan A, Bird Ringing, was to be our topic in November, but the forecast was terrible so Plan B was prepared. Saturday morning arrived and the conditions were good, so Plan A was put into operation!

The children were given a talk and slide presentation about birds. In the ringing room Tony told them about bird ringing. He showed them how the birds were caught in the mist net by allowing them to throw the birds into the net, the stuffed toy birds I hasten to add! (Megan was very puzzled by this!)



The birds were ringed, measured and the information recorded. We went on a "net round" and the children watched how the birds were carefully removed from the mist net and brought back to the ringing room. The children were shown how to release the birds and they found the experience amazing.

After having such good weather on Eco Club Saturdays, our December meeting was cancelled due to the snow!

Many people have been involved to ensure the success of all our Eco Club meetings and I would like to thank them for their help and support. The programme is organised for 2010, weather permitting.

*Elizabeth Dickinson*



## Foxglove Christmas dinner 2009

The annual Foxglove Christmas dinner held on the 10th December at Wathgill, was again a most popular and entertaining evening.

The weather was suitably seasonal; a sharp frost filled the lungs with icy blasts.

We were greeted warmly at the door by our charming hostesses, wardens Marion and Sophie, and welcome beverages were handed out. To sharpen 'the little grey cells', straight away, sheets with quizzes were laid out on tables, and everyone set to work to solve them. The first was a 'body parts' quiz, the second a 'word within words'. They were harder than thought at first, it took a while to 'crack them' and answers were worked out with help from friends.

The photo competition unfortunately held only a few photos, however they were of a very high standard, and Elizabeth richly deserved the main prize with her stunning photo of the lake and hide in winter.

It seemed no time at all before we were ushered into the officers' mess to eat. Sophie and Marion had done an amazing job of decorating the tables, and the additional touch of a willow wand on individual place settings gave a 'magical' touch to the occasion.

The chefs and servers certainly did Wathgill proud, as the meal was a gargantuan feast, with a starter, main course with three different kinds of meat, and the traditional Christmas pudding to finish.

The evening passed very quickly and all too soon it was time to go home and bid farewell to hostesses and friends. I speak for everyone when I say that the camaraderie and friendship amongst all the people who attend Foxglove Covert in different ways, is 'second to none'.

*Sue Harper*



# Undergrowth

Issue No 22 Winter 2009/2010

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

This edition of 'Undergrowth' is rather late and we hope that we will be forgiven for this. We knew that we would be receiving some major news and felt that a delay in publication was justified. Tony has outlined this in 'Headline News'.

The Annual General Meeting of the Friends Group was held on the 5th February, at Wathgill. It was a miracle that anybody turned up as it was extremely foggy. Bob Longridge was elected to the Management Group, and all the current members were re-elected.

I am happy to report that the recent 100 Club draw was won by Miss Angela Bartley. This is another worthwhile way of supporting Foxglove Covert, and if you are not already a member, we would ask you to consider joining.

I am sure that most of you are aware that Foxglove Covert has a web-site ([www.foxglovecovert.org.uk](http://www.foxglovecovert.org.uk)). It has a blog which is updated on a daily basis, and looking at this is a good way of keeping up-to-date with events. There is also a separate page which shows forthcoming events. At this point could I please ask you to send your e-mail address, if you have one, as we use this to keep you informed of events, or when we have need of help. We did send out e-mails recently concerning the AGM, but many were returned as incorrect, so would you please check to see if we have your up-to-date address.

The Swaledale Ringing Group had a very successful year in 2009, processing a record 12314 birds.

*Ray Harper*

## HEADLINE NEWS

### Foxglove Covert: The Future

March 1st marked the beginning of a ten-year contract with Natural England that has been under negotiation for 12 months. The impact it will have should not be underestimated, for not only will it ensure the security and stability of Foxglove for the foreseeable future but it will maintain continuity and improvement of habitats and species management, it will provide serious funding for tangible and much-needed capital projects, and it will ensure our educational aspirations are developed in line with current technological advances.

Among the new capital works projects will be an interactive, fully-supported website, a third hide with a 35m access bridge, an outdoor classroom, better signage and information facilities across the site, a reference library, new information technology and presentation gadgetry in the field centre including microscopes, the virtual complete renewal - and in some cases re-alignment - of much of the footpath network, the replacement of the walkway and dipping platforms in the scrape, and the provision of an information shelter complete with site map and notice board at the stone pile car park. All of this work will be achieved IN YEAR ONE!!

Regular visitors to Foxglove will appreciate the significance of this monumental opportunity which will place the site in a league of its own within the Local Nature Reserve community in UK. This contract has been awarded in recognition of the commitment shown by the many different hard-working achievers within the reserve which includes the volunteers, the ringers, the Reserve Managers, members of the Management Group – and additionally, the mosaic of habitats and species which we all work so hard to enhance and maintain.

Make no mistake, this is a unique arrangement involving a bespoke Environment Stewardship Scheme for which we, as a team, are hugely grateful to Natural England and their representatives with whom the contract has been drawn up.

We continue to need the support of our Friends and Volunteers who are so fundamental to the reserve. Please continue to support us and bring along your friends as well. Come and see the developments as they occur, but please be patient if areas are placed out-of-bounds for the duration of the works.

Finally, two other points of interest. The MOD has agreed a contract, from April 1st, to finance the

Reserve Managers for the foreseeable future, the necessary statutory inspections in the Field Centre, and some of the impending 'green works' needed to replace the existing conifer blocks. And within the first year's Natural England grant money will be funding for the conduct of a survey which will ultimately allow the 'lake' as we know it to be doubled in size.

So there is much to consider, to look forward to and be enthusiastic about! We have been authorised to trigger the works from March 8th so be prepared for some inconvenience, but please join us and watch this exciting transformation take place.

*Tony Crease*



*Coltsfoot at Foxglove, Sunday 21st March, the first of the Spring flowers this year.*

## Royal Visit.

On the 18th February, HRH Prince Charles visited Foxglove. HRH was greeted at the layby on the access road and lead through the reserve by Tony, Marion and Sophie. At the field centre he was introduced to Diane Cloughton from Wathgill who does a tremendous amount of administration work for Foxglove. HRH enjoyed a cup of tea, whilst having a quick tour of the Field Centre. He took great interest in the work carried out by volunteers and students, and showed a particular interest in our wildlife and future plans. Before leaving, he was presented with two jars of Foxglove honey and a Foxglove gilet which he promised to wear whilst gardening at Highgrove!

*Sophie Benaiges.*



## The new Management Group Secretary.

Bob Longridge was elected to the Management Group at the recent AGM with a view to filling the Secretary's position following Rima Berry's resignation because of other work pressures. Bob and his wife have lived in Hudswell Lane, Richmond, since 2001 having moved from Low Dinsdale when he opted for early retirement from a management post in Social Services to pursue his interest in conservation. He then became a Trustee and Hon. Sec. of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust for a 3 year term. He has been a Foxglove Friend for the last 2 years. After creating a pond in his garden he says he is trying to learn about dragonflies and all the fascinating life under water so that he can give accurate information to his granddaughter when she does her pond dipping. "An ideal way to introduce children to wildlife!"

*Bob Longridge.*



## My first anniversary

On the 10th January 2009, I arrived at Foxglove Covert not knowing quite what to expect. I was there to volunteer for the first time, as I was interested in fulfilling the service part of my Bronze Duke of Edinburgh at the reserve. I had only been to Foxglove twice before, and as a visitor, so I had no idea who the people behind this amazing place were. However, as soon as I walked through the door to the Field Centre, it was like I had made several new best friends! Everyone was incredibly welcoming and I felt very much at ease. And so, I joined the Foxglove team.

I tried, if possible, to work every other Saturday and over time I have done some varied but always fun work. One week I would be trying to get the shredder out of the mud, the next burning foliage to make way for new growth.

I've filled hoppers, checked cattle, lopped trees and even tried my hand at bird-ringing. Oh, and of course, I have drunk a colossal amount of tea! I have found my time there invaluable and hope to carry on for many years to come.

I would recommend volunteering at Foxglove to absolutely anyone, however my only disappointment as I reach my 1-year anniversary, is that I no longer hold the title of 'youngest volunteer' as I think that Lewis Benaiges may have earned it!

Many thanks to everyone who has helped me enjoy my time so far.

*Emma Atkins*

## Autumn at Foxglove Covert, 10th October.

The Autumn Guided walk took place on a warm, sunny morning in October, lead by Sophie, who made us all very welcome. There were six adults, and a small group of boys who were given some identification sheets. They quickly spotted fungi; Earth Ball, Candle Snuff, and Hares Foot Ink Cap were noted. Lichen were also observed, of which one in particular was seen on a stone near to the Field Centre. Our walk continued on to the moorlands hoping to see the highland cattle, but only Fraser was to be found.

We went on to the hide in the wet meadows area. Here a water vole was seen, damsel flies too. The two hours went by all too quickly. A welcome coffee and biscuits awaited us on our return.

*Jean Gabriel.*

## The Congo – Part 3

Well, your Chairman is now back in the Congo after an excellent and extremely different Christmas in Yorkshire in a slightly new job. Now I am focused on trying to get the guerillas to disarm and sadly my involvement with the gorillas will be less. But on the upside I hope to find more time to get out and about a bit more as I travel to meet up with rebel groups. This should allow me more opportunity to get out and see the flora and fauna of this part of the world.

But the big news is that one of our volcanoes is erupting. This part of the world has been seismically active for ever, and is perhaps one of the world's most interesting areas – if you are a volcanologist. Nyirongongo – the biggest one with the molten lava crater lake is the best known, but not the most troublesome. Nyanulagira is! Last week it split its sides and there is now a river of lava running from its wound. Although less than 10 miles away, I have not seen it, but the effect is that we live in a sort of permanent state of overcast, and the sun is somewhat blotted out. Even the usually excellent views of the mountains have gone. Although the lava was moving at 700 m an hour initially it has slowed up as it has spread out. This is good news as there is a real danger it will cut the main road to the West, but worse, it could reach the lake. You may recall in a previous epistle that Lake Kivu is famous for dissolved methane and carbon dioxide; the doom-mongers say that if the lava flows into the lake and reaches deep enough before solidifying, it will cause the gases to rise to the surface and then ignite. If so, we will be in real trouble! Whilst not impossible it is however unlikely, and we will get plenty of warning – I hope. The last time it erupted in a similar place and manner, it flowed for 3 years, hardening into a huge fan before reaching the lake, so I should be OK!

Gradually, in the meantime, I am getting better at identifying my birds out here. I now know my Pin Tailed why-dahs from Wagtails and African Harrier Hawks from my Kites. Still a bit confused by the myriads of sun birds, but getting better at them too. Soon I am going to find an excuse to get to Entebbe, where the bird life along the shores of Victoria is fabulous.

But what a contrast to Foxglove. I visited 3 or 4 times over Christmas, skiing there over the training area twice, and it was spectacular. I certainly was not moaning about the snow (even if flights were affected and I was cold!). The place was beautiful. Even under the snow it was clear how much work has been going on while I have been absent, and Tony and Marion gave me all the details as to how hard the volunteers have been working throughout the winter to keep the place under control. Thank you to all those who have put those hours in.

Can I also take this opportunity to wish everyone involved in Foxglove a belated but sincere Happy New Year.

And finally, I have great pleasure in announcing that not only did I buy loads of the excellent postcards which are on sale, but I am now a fully paid up friend of Foxglove Covert, so I can walk tall and no one can nag me for at least 12 months!!!



*Guy Deacon*



**Black Crownd Crane**