

From the Editor

After a long dry summer the seasons have returned to normal, with crisp bright autumnal days bringing with them changes in fauna and flora on the reserve. There is a rolling programme of work necessary to keep Foxglove in good condition to provide suitable habitats for our ever-increasing list of wildlife species. Each year brings new names to the list, and this has been no exception, which you can read about in Elizabeth's article on page 4.



Barn Owls bred on the reserve for the first time this year

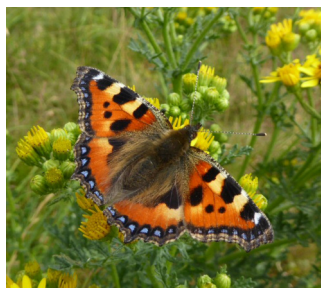
Our 26th year of CES is certainly something to be celebrated, and an update on this along with all of the bird ringing activities, can be found on page 2 of this newsletter. I like hearing about other locations linked to Foxglove, and I hope you'll enjoy reading the delightful account of bird ringer Jack Daw's year on Salisbury Plain, on page 5. In this edition we have a welcome update on access to the reserve, which is outlined on page 6. Hopefully, this will make visiting Foxglove much easier.

If you would like to contribute to future issues of Undergrowth, please contact the Foxglove office. In the meantime, don't forget to keep in touch through following our Blog, on Twitter or Facebook and most importantly, by visiting our fabulous reserve!

Catherine Hayden

Message from the Chair

The dry summer has benefited much of our wildlife. Butterflies have flourished in the prolonged sunny period; Speckled Wood and Small Tortoiseshell were observed in exceptionally high numbers on the reserve. During the summer months hundreds of orchids added a



Small Tortoiseshell butterfly

spectacular splash of colour at Foxglove. As you can read in Elizabeth's update, several new species have been recorded, including an impressive eleven new moths! Two trees have also been added to the species list; although they are not new to the reserve, Dogwood and Wayfaring tree had both previously slipped through

Elizabeth's net! There have been exciting observations of raptors too - a Hobby was sighted for the first time hunting for dragonflies and damselflies over Plover's Pool. Furthermore, for the first time ever, Barn Owls bred in an artificial nest box at Foxglove, and three healthy chicks were ringed. There have never been so many birds on the lake, with Mallard, Tufted Duck and Little Grebe all successfully raising young.

We have welcomed additions to our supporters too. I am pleased to report that two new members have been co-opted on to the Management Group. It is with great pleasure that we welcome Janet Boakes and Mick Lynch to the team. Both are extremely keen to become more involved with Foxglove; brief introductions to them can be found on page 3.

We also welcome Michelle D'arcier as a member of the weekend staff and say thank you to Leanne Stollery who has left this role. Leanne continues to ring at Foxglove and you may well have seen her in the D&S recently in the article about ringing in Norway (read more about this on page 6). On behalf of the Management Group I would like to thank Leanne for all of her hard work.

Lord Zetland, Patron of Foxglove, visited the reserve in August and enjoyed a presentation to bring him up to date with our conservation activities at home and away. There was also a visit from a team of staff from DIO's head office, the military owners and main funders of the LNR. All enjoyed themselves and left positive comments in the visitors' book.

Autumn is now upon us and there is much to look forward to. Keith Thomas will be leading a Fungal Foray on 17th October and the bird ringers will be busy monitoring migrating birds. The ringing group are ever grateful to the staff and volunteers for maintaining the net rides, and have just completed the 26th year of CES, an incredible achievement. The Winter Worky Days will be starting soon and there are several activities over half term for children and adults. Finally, the Christmas Dinner will be on Wednesday 12th December and is open to everyone associated with the reserve including Friends, Volunteers and regular visitors. It is a fantastic night with live music and delicious food and is heavily subsidised as a thank you to all who support the reserve, at only £13 per person for a three-course meal with all the trimmings! Please book early to help us with catering.

Sophie Crease

Join us for the Foxglove Christmas Dinner

At Wathgill
On Wednesday 12th December 7.00pm for 7.30pm

Enjoy an evening of festive fun with live music
and full Christmas Dinner!

All welcome

Tickets £13 – available from the office
or book on the Events section on the website
www.foxglovecovert.org.uk

Please book by 30th November

The early birds catch the birds

The five frenetic summer months that are the key part of the bird ringing year are over and soon the Meadow Pipit migration will conclude, bringing the demanding schedule to a close. As the shorter days and more erratic weather take over, life will become easier and there will be a few quieter months in which to recover before it all begins again. Bird ringing is not like collecting train numbers; the group at Foxglove have made contributions this year to a number of studies including the Nest Recording Scheme, The Constant Effort ringing Scheme (CES), to the Seabird Group, the



The ringing team at the end of the 26th season of CES

Raptor Study Group, to the long term Ecological Study of the reserve at Bellflask, to the migration studies at Dividalen Ringing Station in Norway, and to the BTO Ringing Scheme and therefore the ongoing recording of birds and their phenology at Foxglove. All of this creates quite hard work, many early mornings, long hours, and a way of life that necessitates great patience and determination.

Committing to these activities is a challenge for those involved and this year we have lost some members who found the schedule too exhausting and decided to leave. New members have been welcomed but few stay the course, often disappearing again during the short probation period. To those who have survived the introduction and remained with us, we admire your tenacity and hope you share our sense of achievement.

Rob Robinson, the chief statistician at the BTO, produced a paper earlier in the year which summarised CES performance nationally over the years; once again but in a much more readable way, it showed how the Foxglove results have exceeded the average, time and again – often by a very wide margin. For the first time ever, these details were illustrated by individual species and for many of them Foxglove leads the way.

At Cape Wrath our find of the rare breeding Wood Sandpiper and our report on seabird breeding numbers at the colonies was subsequently very well received; our Peregrine and Merlin data is of real importance where these birds cling on locally. At Bellflask the recoveries and retraps of breeding Reed Warblers are pivotal to the ongoing studies as the reed beds are developed. At Dividalen we caught the first Siberian Jays in 4 years – one of them a retrap - and ringed several owls, some of these retraps too, that were the first of the species ever to be recorded there in August.

In and around Swaledale, our Tawny Owl records, now over 900, have been absorbed into the new BTO Tawny Owl project, and the CES results will become clearer as the numbers are crunched over the winter. The fortunes of our 700+ nest boxes will all go into the BTO database.

In summary, Great Tits had the best breeding season ever known at Foxglove by a very long way, yet Bullfinches, one of our routine success stories over the years, produced, for some reason, less than half the usual number of offspring. Willow



A Siberian Jay, ringed in Norway this summer



Tawny Owl

Warblers saw a modest increase and Chiffchaffs produced almost exactly the same number of chicks as last year with only 25% of the number of adults. Juvenile Chaffinches halved while Blackcap numbers doubled, Garden Warbler chicks doubled while no young Reed Warblers, Sedge Warblers or Whitethroats were caught at all on the reserve, which is very unusual. Kingfishers had an extremely poor season after the 'Beast from the East' closed many of the local ponds and tributaries.

There are numerous other comparisons to make and where we can, we do make a difference – nothing that is worthwhile in life is ever simple to achieve. CES results were 10th in numbers caught over the 26 years. I would like to pay tribute to and thank all of the ringing team, few of whom suffer from insomnia, but all of whom have committed many hours at weekends and during the evenings to produce the very credible results we have accrued this year and in previous years.

Tony Crease

Summer work on the Reserve

Since the last edition of Undergrowth, one job we've been doing is keeping an eye on the Heathland. Work has continued to remove willow, gorse and birch invading the area and we have to thank the efforts of the regular Foxglove Volunteers for this, as well as having help from those doing community service. We have also been looking for signs of growth from the large quantity of seed scattered at the end of last year, but so far there is little to see.



Resurfacing paths

Much of the work has been to maintain the reserve's infrastructure or manage vegetation. We have resurfaced a number of paths and have recently completed the section from the Field Centre to the boardwalk on the Scrapes. The steps down in to Risedale Beck have also been resurfaced along with the path leading to them. The benches around the reserve have been brought in to be cleaned, repaired and re-stained. With the long hot period being followed by the return to the more normal summer weather of rain and warmth, there has been an explosion in growth, and keeping paths, the access road and net rides open for ringing has continued throughout the season. This has also included clearing reed growth in front of the Easy Access Hide to keep the views of the lake open. The hay meadow was cut and baled during August.

We have had five pupils from schools from as far afield as Scarborough spending a week at a time on work experience. Two stand out as being particularly good and we are glad that we could help them



Upkeep of the net rides

learn more about work in conservation, while they in turn made valuable contributions during their placements. One of them spent a day helping Colin as he worked on making new Mink rafts or refurbishing the old ones, so that now we have six of these around the reserve.

Lark and Taurus, the Exmoor Pony workforce, have continued to eat their way through a variety of vegetation including thistles, Soft Rush and Reedmace. They have spent time in the Plover's Pool area, the Heathland and the Wetland over the summer.

Away from habitat management, it has been a busy time with schools and events, with 15 school visits taking place, not including the weekly visits from the Dales School, who have been coming during term-time for many years. We have also had a regular group from Risedale School who have helped with practical tasks over several weeks.

Work to come during the winter months will focus on some of the outputs under our Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement with Natural England. The highest priority within this will be the coppicing of the last of five blocks of willow under this 10-year agreement. This will see the area around the Field Centre and between the Heathland and the Scrapes cleared of willow growth to leave the stumps for regrowth, and selective felling of birch and hawthorn within this area. This will allow the area to remain wet and control the colonisation by other species. Vegetation removal from ponds on the Wetlands and Scrapes and work on the Conifer Woodlands and along Risedale Beck will also feature heavily in the work programme. Thank you to everyone who helps with these on-going tasks. It's going to be a busy time!

Ian Wilson, Reserve Manager

Introducing two new members of the Management Group

Janet Boakes worked for over 40 years in the NHS in management before retiring at the end of October 2017. She moved from Newcastle to Hunton with her husband 3 years ago and is currently renovating their bungalow, whilst looking after her 4 pet Alpaca! She has a keen interest in ornithology and a Barn Owl box in her garden has produced 3 chicks for the last 2 years. She is excited to join the Management Group to extend her conservation knowledge and support the existing team.

Major Mick Lynch retired from the army in March 2018, after 30 years service, to start a second career with the Civil Service as the Training Safety Officer at Warcop Training Centre in Cumbria. Since taking up his new post he has developed an already keen interest in Natural History and has recently taken a seat on the Foxglove Covert Management Group.



New Management Group members Maj Mick Lynch (back row, right) and Janet Boakes (middle of the middle row), with our Patron Lord Zetland front right.

Species Update

We are continually adding to our species observations lists at Foxglove, and this season has been no exception. Monthly flower walks are carried out on the reserve, checking which species are actually in flower. Bluebells continued to appear in many different locations and all the orchids did well this year, although flowering was over fairly quickly due to the hot weather. Pepper Saxifrage always causes us concern as it appears not to flower, and then suddenly it is there! It is found in the Sand Martin meadow and also near net ride 27, and some flowers can be found in the scrapes and on the far moor, near the



Eyed Hawkmoth caterpillar

hedgerow. Marsh Cinquefoil is growing in more ponds on the wetland and Pillwort is doing well, including some plants transplanted into Plover's Pool. The moth trap is set every Tuesday night, weather permitting, and the moths identified the next morning, when Chris Meek and Pauline Cordner input the moth data into our Species Programme. Two or three times a year it is collated and sent to Dr Fletcher, the VC65 moth recorder. This year Eyed Hawkmoth was recorded for the first time in several years, both as adults and caterpillars. Small Tortoiseshell butterflies have done exceptionally well this summer after a very poor year in 2017. In fact butterflies in general have been seen in good numbers, although butterfly surveys were not recorded this year. Nevertheless first and last sightings have been made.

Plover's Pool has been excellent for damsel and dragonflies, as well as for House Martins and Swallows coming to drink. Barn Owls bred on the reserve for the first time and the chicks were ringed.

So far this year there have been 3 new species of fungi, 2 birds,



Gymnosporangium cornutum, a rust gall, on Rowan



Hobby - a new bird species for the reserve

1 millipede, 1 leaf miner, 1 lacewing, 1 bee, 1 ichneumon fly, 1 aphid, 3 galls, 2 trees (that have been there for several years but not on the species list!) 4 bugs, 2 beetles, 1 hoverfly, 18 caddis, 3 mayfly, 2 stonefly and 11 moths!

We are grateful to have been supported by our experts in various fields, including Anne Carter from the Freshwater Habitats Trust who looked at our Pillwort, Keith and June Gittens who ran a dragonfly walk, and Dr Roger Key who ran a course for adults and two children's activities. Dr Charles Fletcher held the moth morning, while Peter and Sharon Flint checked the caddis flies in the moth traps at the same time.

Thank you to everyone for your support with sightings; our reserve species count to date is an impressive 2747.

Elizabeth Dickinson



Pillwort assessment on the Wetlands

Thursday 8th November, 9am to 12noon
Join our volunteers at our fundraising
Coffee Morning

at Richmond Town Hall
Raffle, tombola and
cake stall

All welcome!



A Year on the Plain

The Ringers at Foxglove and those who regularly read the blog will hear mention of some of my bird ringing activities down here on Salisbury Plain. Foxglove is a most wonderful place and has ringing facilities second to none, although the team up there are always extremely busy and produce very important data. Here on the Plain I'm a bit more relaxed and go at my own pace.



Sunrise over Salisbury Plain

The beginning of the year is very bleak on the Plain; barren, often cold, wet and windy, but sometimes calm and sunny – or all of these conditions together! The summer migrant birds are gone and most resident species have generally abandoned the Plain and moved to nearby towns. Ringing from the back of a vehicle on the open plain in the winter is definitely character-building! Some birds that don't venture into towns can be caught in small numbers - such as Yellowhammer, Linnet and Reed Bunting, with some Meadow Pipit around and the odd Stonechat. Redwing and Fieldfare are about in good numbers but are not keen on the open plain. The habitat does not support the small numbers of Redpoll, Siskin and Brambling which pass through occasionally, but it's good to see several Short-eared Owls.

Spring is always slow to get going on the Plain but it heralds the arrival of about 60% of the bird population. By May the Plain bursts into bird activity and a very busy few months for me start with the Breeding Bird Survey, Nest Recording and my passion of pulli (nestling) ringing. Boxing Hares are also wonderful to see.



A nest of Blackcap chicks

Summer months offer a sight to behold on the Plain for anyone interested in natural history. During my ringing I see too much to mention, and the chalk grassland heaves with wild flowers including numerous orchids. Butterflies including five species of Blues, Marsh Fritillary, Clouded Yellow, Hairstreaks, Heath Browns and Marbled Whites, are flying, and small pools contain all our newt species, Fairy Shrimps, frogs and toads. Muntjac and Roe Deer are common. Migrant birds make up most of the summer activity with areas of low scrub, mainly hawthorn, gorse and bramble, supporting good numbers of Whitethroat, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. The open grassland supports Whinchat, Stonechat, Skylark and Pipits; heard but not often seen, are Quail and Stone Curlew. I sometimes just sit and watch to get random views of Montagu's Harriers, Hobby and, if I'm really lucky, Cuckoo. Resident species also thrive in the scrub and you can still find small colonies of Linnet breeding,

along with

Yellowhammer, Blackbird, Robin and Dunnock. Grey Partridge are uncommon, but there.

Autumn sees a good movement of migrant species across the Plain and often includes rarities such as Wryneck. Migrants not breeding on the Plain also pass through, such as Sedge and Reed Warbler. This is the time when it's mist nets up, and I manage to catch a variety of warblers, Redstart, Tree Pipit and Chiffchaff. And then it's time to prepare myself for another long winter.

Jack Daw



Adonis Blue butterfly

Keep in touch!



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Browse the Blog on the website at www.foxglovecovert.org.uk

Update on Access/Egress Procedures

Many of you will be frustrated with the 'gate' issues, as are the Management Group and staff. Despite our best efforts and significant MoD expenditure we have been stuck with an inadequate facility for many months.

The good and positive news is that more money has been expended on it, the Garrison Headquarters has recognised the difficulties and dangers on the corner, and the whole project has been revamped. When finished this will include a lay-by outside the gate and speed bumps to slow down the traffic.

In future there will be 2 categories of entry available and they are as follows:

1. Those who successfully complete a Security Questionnaire will be granted an ID Card, Car Pass and Fob which will give them unfettered access in and out of the reserve. The Security Clearance will be valid for 3 years, but the ID Card and Car Pass will have to be renewed annually before the expiry date. This will be done at the Pass Office on a 'while you wait' basis. If the ID Card and Car Pass are allowed to expire then the whole process will have to be gone through again, including Security Clearance. Fobs can be individually programmed in the Guard Room by the Provost staff.

2. Friends, volunteers and random visitors with no Security Clearance will have to book in at the Guard Room and leave some form of photographic ID. They will then be escorted up to and through the gate. When leaving they will press the intercom button from the inside of the gate and will be escorted from the gate back to the Guard Room. Photographic ID will then be retrieved from the Guard Room on the way out. If a Security Cleared individual is leaving at the same time they are permitted to escort visitors back to the Guard Room instead of calling the guard.

It is emphasised that the gate operation is quite sensitive and has to work on a full cycle basis, ie. it cannot be opened or closed early in the cycle, which must be allowed to complete. No attempt should ever be made to interrupt or manhandle the gate because this will disrupt the programme and the access will revert to escorts, padlock and chain. Personal Security Clearance is definitely the way forward – it will take a few minutes to fill out the form, but this will guarantee 3 years relatively free access.

Tony Crease

Dividalen 2018

I was really excited in August, to have the opportunity to join a small team of Tony, Sophie, and Roger on the ringing group's third visit to Dividalen in Norway. I had visited with Foxglove bird ringers in September last year, and we were delighted to be invited back. Our station was in a stunning location, surrounded by towering pine forests and snow-capped mountains, situated in north Norway, above the Arctic Circle within the Ovre Dividalen National Park. All kinds of berries grow on the forest floor there, especially blueberries which we regularly sampled - and were delicious! The accommodation was very basic with limited electricity and no running water, which meant a refreshing wash in the glacial stream each morning! There

is no phone signal so we were completely cut off from the outside world, which I won't deny was absolute bliss! It was lovely to see our hosts Vigdis Frivoll and Karl-Birger Strann (KB) again; after a year apart, it didn't feel like a day had passed. They are very welcoming and kind people with a great sense of humour. Vigdis made sure we were constantly fuelled, as well as helping KB run the ringing station. There was always bread, cheese, meats and smoked salmon/sea trout on the table - pretty much our diet for the entire week. We were also treated to one of Vigdis's specialities, a dessert that consists of whipped cream, sugar and cloudberry, which we all thoroughly enjoyed!



The beautiful Bluethroat

Our week was non-stop, as we were ringing round the clock to make the most of the 24-hour daylight at that time of year. We took turns to catch some sleep between shifts, but were often woken when other members of the group had a new species to show the rest of the team. We ringed 1050 new birds during our week there, many of which are species that would never be seen in the UK, like the stunning Bluethroat and some amazing owls, such as the Pygmy Owls which we were told could fit in to a 32mm Great Tit hole! My favourite though, has to be the Hawk Owl - they are such powerful birds with strong talons and a feisty attitude! My second favourite was the Siberian Jay; we caught a pair of them and they make the most comical noises like a domestic parakeet. We were told that the other ringing groups visiting there from the UK would be highly jealous as some had been going for nearly 10 years and had never seen one.



A pair of Pygmy Owls

It was an exhausting but amazing experience in such a beautiful place. I feel privileged to have had the chance to ring with some amazing people and helped with the research which KB is so dedicated to - tracking bird migration in northern Norway.

Leanne Stollery