

Editorial Comment

Over the summer we have celebrated our 10th Anniversary as a Local Nature Reserve and received massive funding from the High Level Stewardship Scheme, which is vital to the on-going success of the Reserve, so it would seem appropriate to look at some of the things that we have learnt about the flora and fauna, which can be found at Foxglove Covert. In this issue of Undergrowth, Elizabeth summarises the on-going work being done to list the species to be found on the Reserve, Bob reports on 10 years of Butterfly surveys and I have started to analyse some of the facts that we have learnt about birds. I start with Lesser Redpoll, one of the bird species, which has been attracted to the Reserve in increasing numbers. To complete this issue Sophie updates us on the programme of events for the next three months.

Tom Dewdney

The Chairman's Introduction

This edition of Undergrowth marks not just the end of our tenth year as a Local Nature Reserve, but more specifically the work that has occurred over that period. Much has been made of the infrastructure improvements in previous editions in the lead up to and during our membership of the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, but let us now give a thought to the reasons for Foxglove Covert. Encouraging visitors to see the bio diversity on their doorstep is particularly important, and noting, recording and reporting just what exists at Foxglove is key to this. I would like to pay special homage to the enthusiasm of the genuine experts who visit Foxglove and whose sharp eyes have put Foxglove Covert on the map not just locally, but regionally.

I would also like to remind you of the next AGM, to be held on 1st February 2012. This is your chance to be brought up to date on the Management Group's work and for you to raise your own ideas thoughts and if you have any concerns too. There is always lots going on at Foxglove, and the Management Group appreciates the value of fresh views and observations on both daily business and future plans. I look forward to seeing you there.

For now, lets hope the winter is gentle, and members of the Management Group do not get stuck in the snow as last year! An early Happy Christmas.

Guy Deacon

Foxglove's Fascinating Flora and Fauna

Late August and we were walking through the woodland to check all was well. As usual we got a little lost on the paths and so had to cut through the trees to reach the one we wanted. Head down, Tolly and I scrambled through the trees. Something quite bright yellow caught my eye, so of course we had to stop. It was horrible and slimy and ugly and beautiful – and I had no idea what it was – although conditions were somewhat dark, photographs were taken and we continued back to the path and finished our walk.

Back home, the photos were downloaded and the investigation as to what this 'thing' was, started. After a little hunting its name was found - Eggshell Slime Mould. Great!! Then check the Species List and another new species was added.



Slime Mould

Foxglove's Fascinating Flora and Fauna (continued)

The heathland has had a lot of attention this summer and in the middle of it a flower was found, Hardheads? It did not look right for that – so out came the books and it was Saw Wort. Must be on the Species List, but careful checking revealed it was not so it was added.



A movement on the boardwalk to the wetland hide on a hot August day – a leaf moving – no it has legs and a stumpy tail – wow - the Common Lizard!! No camera ready and off it scuttled making quite a noise as it ran across the wire. Off to check the vegetation behind the screen and back onto the boardwalk with no hope of it being there again – it was and this time camera ready and photos taken. Although not a new species it had not been seen for some time so an update was made to the Species List.



Another very recent update was the confirmation that the droppings noted in the latrines were actually Badger droppings; as the remote camera set

on Risedale Beck caught him walking across the beck, this is the first actual sighting of a Badger. (See photos in the Blog for 8th November)

The Species List is, as the name suggests a list of the species recorded on the Reserve. An old Friends leaflet recorded the total as 1300. When I was introduced to the Species List it was a little daunting, as many records had not been added, so it was in need of some 't.l.c.' In May 2009 the list stood at 1334 species ranging from birds to beetles, mosses to mammals and ferns to fish.

Searching through the file of new entries it was clear that the list would grow, so after tackling the beetles (*Coleoptera*) and entering the data from the Pond Survey carried out in 2008 for the wetland development, along with other individual entries the species rose to around 1500.

New species continued to be recorded and by the end of 2009 we had reached 1937. Jokingly we said "Bet we can't reach 2000!" During the first 6 months of 2010 people searched for anything that could be a new species and slime moulds, moths, spiders and beetles amongst others were added and the numbers crept up. By the beginning of July we were over the 2000 mark! The continual adding of species makes it very difficult for those volunteers trying to get an exact number for leaflets and maps! Over 2000 seems to be the easiest way!

The last update of the Species List, which includes the recent findings of a sawfly larva, spiders and flowers, shows the number of species is 2090! 35 new species have been added since 1st April.

However we have not stopped there and the numbers continue to rise. This is amazing and a positive reflection on the good health of the reserve. Thank you to everyone both adults and children who go 'rooting about' and are 'eagle eyed' and find so many beautiful living things to record.

The Species List can be viewed on the web site - www.foxglovecovert.org.uk

Elizabeth

The work that has been done to identify and collate the species lists is vitally important to the on-going success of the Reserve and it is something that everyone can help Elizabeth with, please do!

Butterflies at Foxglove 2001 – 2011

Keith Byfield, assisted by Ian Atkin, undertook the first extensive survey of butterflies in 2003. This was repeated in the following two years. It involved walking 'transects' (defined routes across the various habitats) and recording all sightings in a limited time period. In 2010 John Smith and I embarked on a similar approach but without subdividing the Reserve into separate transects. I have continued this in 2011.

What have we learnt? Apart from the fairly obvious, that weather is a major determinant of butterfly numbers year to year. It is fair to assume that habitat, by which I mean food plants for caterpillars, nectar and shelter for the adults, is extremely important. Over the 10 years, more suitable spaces have been opened up for butterflies, with the felling of conifers, clearing of scrub and most recently the grazing of grass by cattle and sheep.

Butterfly larvae are very choosy: not only must the food plant be right but in the optimum condition. For example, there is no shortage of nettles on the Reserve yet how often have you seen black caterpillars (of Peacock and Tortoiseshell) on them? The only clump where larvae were seen last year was in an open position and mixed with other plants such as thistles and brambles. The management of the moorland meadow has created better conditions for the Common Blue and Small Copper, with grasses not too dominant. Traditional dales hay meadows have a plant called Yellow Rattle, which is parasitic on grasses. This, together with poor unfertilised ground, is ideal for wild flower plants such as trefoil and sorrel, the food plants of the above named species.



So – how are butterflies faring on the Reserve? By far the most abundant species is the Ringlet, which can be seen all over the terrain. Recorded numbers totalled 284 in 2003 and 376 in 2010.

Another grassland species, the Meadow Brown, also scores highly. But the most striking change has been in Speckled Wood numbers, not recorded at all in 2003 or 04, and only 3 in 05, but an astonishing 190 in 2010. It must be said

that this is a national trend but the creation of sheltered 'rides' and mixed woodland is ideal for a butterfly whose wing colouring allows it to merge into dappled shade.

The number of species seen over the years has increased from 17 to 21. We can be confident that a sighting of a Fritillary (correctly assumed to be a Dark Green) in 2005 was a precursor to a breeding nucleus. Several records were made in 2010 and four different adults spotted this year. Brimstones are regularly sighted but the Holly Blue rarely (and not picked up in my survey). Migrants such as the Painted Lady are known for wild fluctuations in numbers: 52 recorded in 03, 2 in 04 and none in 05, 10 or 11.



Can we hope to see more species in the future? The Gatekeeper, a smaller version of the Meadow Brown, is abundant in the south of North Yorkshire, so perhaps others are likely to be passing vagrants rather than breeders. The Reserve also needs to be seen in the wider context of changing regional temperatures. At other habitats around Richmond the Small Heath is more evident on e.g. Downholme Moor and there is the potential for local transmigration of the Small Copper that is known to breed in some old meadows within a 2-mile radius.



The life of butterflies is short but there is something about their fragility, colour and flight, which touch the human imagination. Long may they flourish at Foxglove.

Bob Longridge

Birds of Foxglove – Redpolls

Since 1992 we have caught over 1700 Redpolls or should I say Lesser Redpolls in Foxglove. In the early years we were catching between 5 and 81 per year but in the last 5 years the numbers have leapt up and now we are averaging over 200 per year.



Looking at the recovery data we have now for Lesser Redpolls reveals a very interesting picture. It is possible to see Lesser Redpolls in small numbers throughout the year at Foxglove but in recent years the number present has increased in the early autumn and again in the early spring. So where are these birds coming from? Looking at the recapture information individuals appear to be coming in from points north and west of Foxglove as far north as Strathclyde in Scotland and having spent some time in North Yorkshire many birds move further south for the middle of the winter. We have mid-winter ringing recoveries from a number of sites in southern England as well as one to Liege in Belgium. I guess it is not surprising that the birds we catch in March and April with rings from earlier that winter are from the south and the birds are no doubt heading north to breed.

The retrap data for individual Lesser Redpolls we have caught at Foxglove at least twice during a single winter season show that typically the birds stay with us for a month or so before continuing their movements. To date, we have 18 individual birds that we have caught in more than one winter; as you might expect the majority of these recaptures are one winter apart but the maximum so far is a bird that has been recorded 5 winters apart and that makes the bird nearly 6 years old!

Tom Dewdney

Friends and Volunteers

An analysis of the membership list shows that so far this year there have been 12 new Friends (to be precise, households not individuals). An exactly similar total was achieved in the 2 preceding years. Unfortunately there has been a steady lapse of former members so that the total (of addresses) is now 10 less than it was 2 years ago. It is slightly worrying that a large proportion of remaining Friends joined in 2008 & 9. Their continued loyalty is fantastic but cannot be relied upon indefinitely. Somehow we need to recruit at least 20 new Friends per year. Can you help?

The 100 Club also has a loyal following but has been below 40 subscribers for over a year. The winner in the October draw was Tony Martin (who is a regular volunteer as well as a Friend). The odds in favour of winning £25 have never been better! Only £10 to join now, how about it?

It is a great help to have email addresses so if you do change yours can you let me know? Many thanks.

Bob Longridge

What's on in early 2011?

- Saturday 7th Jan. – start the New Year as you mean to go on by joining us on our Winter Worky Day at 10.00a.m.
- Wednesday 1st Feb. – give us some feedback at the AGM at Wathgill at 7.30p.m.
- Thursday 16th Feb. – join the Reserve Managers on a Tree ID Guided Walk and learn more about the fascinating species we have starting at 10.00a.m.
- Tuesday 6th Mar – build a fire and cook your own food in a Bonfire Cookery session starting at 09.30a.m.
- Sat 31st Mar – Easter Willow Weaving starting at 1.00p.m.
- Sun 1st April – a self guided walk along the Easter Bunny Trail from 10.00a.m.

If you would like to attend any or all of these events, please look on the website or talk to the Reserve Managers to obtain more details.

Sophie

Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: foxglovelnr@btinternet.com.

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Registered Charity No. 1089020

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