

Editorial Comment

Work started to establish Foxglove in 1992 and it took almost 10 years before Richmondshire Council, English Nature (as it was) and the MOD agreed to establish Foxglove as a Local Nature Reserve. Since that time we have continued to develop as a Reserve and our signing of a 10-year High Level Stewardship agreement last year takes us another major step forward. **The OPEN DAY at Foxglove will celebrate both these events.** In this issue Guy outlines our plans for the open day as well as looking back to those early days through the eyes of two of our stalwarts, John and Tony.

Join the Celebration

Planning for our special Open Day on 23rd July is well advanced and you are all invited!

Professor David Bellamy, who spoke at the last Open Day, is coming to join the fun and will formally open the new hide overlooking the extended lake area. He said he really enjoyed meeting everybody last time and looks forward to chatting with you all again.



There will be loads of fun activities for all the family including pond-dipping, bug hunts, making bird boxes, guided walks, butterfly and moth recording, dissecting owl pellets and various special children's activities. Also planned are demonstrations of bird ringing, bee keeping, horse logging, tree climbing and chainsaw sculpture. You will even be invited to design your own Nature Reserve! In addition, many local groups representing wildlife interests will be manning stalls providing information about their activities.

We also aim to mark the development of new facilities provided through the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and Professor David Hill, Deputy Chair of Natural England who run the scheme, will open the magnificent new open-air classroom.

The open day will run from 10.00am to 4.00pm and admission is free so do come along and bring all of your friends! The full programme will be published on our website www.foxglovecovert.org.uk or look out for more information in the Field Centre nearer the time.



Can you help?

As you would expect, a day like this takes a lot of organising and running. If any of you are willing to be a volunteer assistant for part or all of the day we would really appreciate your help. If you can please let Marion or Sophie know, your help will be very welcome.

Guy Deacon

The Reflections of One Volunteer

I first visited Foxglove Covert 19 years ago (1992) after a phone call from an enthusiastic (and much younger!) Tony Crease to a friend inviting us to view a potential ringing site. We met one man and his dog(s) on site and I remember being impressed at the diverse habitat of Foxglove - a real hidden gem. To access the site we had to walk from a dirt road across the moor and negotiate a barbed wire fence (this remained the only access to Foxglove for many years until the current access road was built). We concluded this would be an excellent ringing site and so cut out a few net rides and that was the start of a long and happy association with Foxglove. The ringing then, as now, was great, however, no such creature comforts as we now enjoy! We ringed outside a small wooden hut (which remains today as a seed shed).



Later we attached a “lean to” so we were able to ring inside and then we adopted a caravan - sheer luxury! As we continued to develop the net rides the birds increased, as did the ringing team. I would never have dreamt then that we would eventually have a purpose-built ringing room and 18 ringers; however, one man and his dogs DID have this dream and Tony’s vision to create a spectacular nature reserve and ringing station soon became apparent. Slowly it began to take shape. I say slowly because there were just a handful of us. Tony, Beryl and myself spent many a weekend tending this “very large garden”. Soldiers ‘volunteered’ to help and so it was that small seed that Foxglove grew. We gained immense pleasure from the smallest achievements as happens now. I remember being really chuffed at the erection of the first wooden bird feeder, which immediately attracted an array of birds.

Things didn’t always go to plan. I recall when the first pond was dug, the retaining wall started to leak. Tony, Beryl and I spent many days “puddling” mud to block it up. The fact that the pond is still there (with water in it!)



is testimony to how well we puddled!!! The first native water plants in the pond came from my pond at home but eventually we had plants donated by local companies (probably with a little ear bending from Tony), so again, our weekends would be spent planting across the reserve.



In 1996, five young people working towards a Prince’s Trust award spent a week with me building the sand martin colony. They did a great job and we all had lots of fun. In the first year the sand martins loved their new home but regrettably haven’t visited since! Just after the scrape was completed, Tony heard about a pond in Darlington, which was to be filled in for re-development. The pond had an abundance of phragmites, which was to be discarded so we were given permission to take it. We had to dig it out and transplant it on the scrape immediately. A small band of merry men and women set off to Darlington with wellies and spades. The phragmites was well established so it was hard digging but we did succeed and now as I pass the phragmites reed bed at Foxglove, I think back to where it all began with *‘One man and his dog(s)’*

John Bell

From Mighty Oaks do Little Acorns Grow.

It is with amusement, some disbelief and probably a wry smile that I reflect on the early days in the scrubby wilderness we now know as our nature reserve. There was no name even, and I remember the considerable debate before we eventually settled on 'Foxglove' after the remains of the old farmstead on our western boundary.

My two new pups, Floss and Whin, were desperate to get off the lead, and a glance at the map in my office in Cambrai Barracks showed this land locked green patch where there would surely be no other canine activity. There was no link to the barracks, no gate, no road, no paths – and no space! Having lain entirely fallow for over 20 years, it was wall-to-wall wet willow carr in the main with little drainage and pools everywhere. Snipe and Jack Snipe were no strangers.

Having recently returned from Germany the plan was to emulate a productive bird-ringing site cum conservation area, and having been introduced to a young, athletic John Bell, together we set about creating something we would never have imagined would evolve into what we have today. Assisted by Beryl (John's wife), Chris Meller, Dick Temple and Graham Newcombe - who I am certain, thought we were entirely mad – the team very slowly hacked and sawed its way into the site. No power tools in those days – everything was cut by hand.

Access at the time was gained on foot by dodging around the pools in the area of the wetland hide (there was no hard core track there on the training area at the time), forcing our way through an un-brashed conifer plantation - initially on hands and knees - into a clearing the size of the ringing room. This was all the space there was on the entire area. Our base was a £300 garden shed onto which we quickly built a lean-to, and that was our much-prized ringing room. It is now, of course, the seed store!

What we call the 'dogleg' was the first net ride we cut, followed by rides 9 and 10. They took us weeks to achieve, and I remember being thrilled to bits when the first net went in.

The creation of the reserve coincided with the demise of the Royal Armoured Corps Training Regiment in Cambrai so there was considerable manpower looking for gainful employment. Many of the young trainees and staff from my own department gave hours of their time in the creation of hides and the scrape, and we used armoured vehicles quite regularly to ferry equipment up from the camp. The range was still in use at what is



now the front gate, and the tank park to the north was a derelict array of pre-war sheds, mostly broken, beyond repair and crying out for demolition. The area immediately to the right of the tower hide was a sea of oilcans, tank road wheels, tracks, old batteries and torn catwalks – the Technical Quartermaster's scrap compound.



From Mighty Oaks do Little Acorns Grow (Cont.)

Well, the tank park rebuild took place, and on the back of it came a series of benefits as plant being used to create the new buildings was quite routinely ‘borrowed’ to assist with the Covert’s development. The main gate was fitted as the barracks ‘fire gate’, and the spoil from the lake neatly landscaped the scrap metal dump. A damaged Regimental-recruiting caravan became our second-generation ringing room, followed quickly by the large portacabin, which had been the MT office on the old vehicle park.

At the time we aimed to achieve one major project each winter and the scrape, the clearance of the becks, which were smothered by fallen trees, the lake, and the Heligoland Trap are all examples of this strategy. The weir at the lake, which we saw marked on the OS map, was so heavily overgrown it took nine months cutting through dense wet conifers to locate – and when we eventually got there it was broken.



One day a book will be written about Foxglove, but this is not the place and there is insufficient space to expand any further. What has been remarkable from the very beginning is the industry, dedication and benefits accrued from the selfless commitment of many volunteers, all who in their own way have brought something to the Foxglove table. It is testimony to these people that we are where we are today – and long may it continue.

Tony Crease

And the news in brief

At the time of writing we are moving from spring into early summer and the Reserve is really busy with guided walks and school visits.

The Adopt-A-Box season was early, with egg laying starting well ahead of the normal date, but occupation was good (back to the 2008 level) and to date the young are doing well. The addition of our nest box camera and TV screen has allowed visitors to watch the immense effort one pair of Blue Tits has put into the bringing up of a brood of 6 chicks.



Installation of new way markers for our new green Explorer Trail is going well and work is underway on the construction of the new bridge across the Lake, which will complete the circular Easy Access walk.

There is a full programme of events planned for the next three months; so if you want to know more about the plants, moths or butterflies that frequent Foxglove or fancy trying your hand at bonfire cookery, there should be something for you.

Finally, preparations for the Open Day are in full swing; our planning committee is meeting regularly and most of the key elements are in place, but what we need now are some willing volunteers to do the myriad of small tasks on the day to ensure a complete success, please let one of the RMs know if you can help.

Tom Dewdney

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