

How old is Foxglove?

Whilst we celebrated our first 10 years since Foxglove was recognised as a Local Nature Reserve, it is 20 years in September since the potential for Foxglove was recognised and work on creating the reserve began. This theme is picked up in our lead article written by Tony in the centre page and our development is reflected in the range of events listed in 'What's On?'

Oh What a Spring!!

You cannot blame the birds for feeling confused; after one of the warmest Marchs on record we followed with one of the wettest Aprils. In March we reported early flowers, early nests in the nest boxes and plenty of moths in the traps. This all changed in April when the rain started. Luckily many of the birds had had the good sense not to be lulled by the warm weather and held back from breeding. The plants continued to produce flowers but the moths dried up. In May we fared little better and the wind and rain tried hard to extinguish the flame in early June.

The photograph below, taken at the exit from the lake, gives an idea of just how much rain we have had in recent weeks.



What's On?

14th July – Moth Morning at Marne Barracks,
Event starts at 0730. The event is lead by local moth recorder Charlie Fletcher.

21st July – Fund raising at TESCO, Catterick Garrison.

Have you got an hour to spare to come and help us build on the success of the events we held earlier in the year and help bolster our funds?

21st July – Wild Flower Walk

This is your opportunity to explore every corner of the Reserve in the company of our own botanical experts. Help to record new species as well as the old.

5th August – Dragonfly Discovery

Learn more about this fascinating family of species in the company of Keith Gittons, our local expert!

Volunteer wanted!

The time has come for another volunteer to step forward and produce your magazine, Undergrowth. Historically, a willing volunteer has produced Undergrowth to keep the growing army of Friends and Volunteers of Foxglove up to date with news and views from the Reserve.

It is not a difficult job to produce 4 Issues a year, but I feel that after 2 ½ years it is time for someone fresh to step forward and have a go! So if you are interested, please contact me through the Reserve Managers and please do not leave it too long as the next issue is due at the printers in early September!

Tom Dewdney

It is Twenty Years Since the Discovery of Foxglove

I was half way through writing this note when I stopped to have lunch with staff from the Durham Wildlife Trust who were visiting Foxglove on an away day. Having considered the Editor's instructions once again and the comments from the Durham staff, I have decided on a re-write; this is because they have described the habitat mosaic at Foxglove far better than I had and used the analogy 'it is like visiting all regions of the UK together at the same time on one reserve.' And that, in many ways is exactly what it is, but perhaps we are so used to it we don't really notice.

From the very early days we aimed to retain a bit of everything and that has always been the objective. Hence, the willow carr was coppiced and the heathland which was underneath some of it was carefully protected and allocated its own boundaries. The water bodies in the scrapes and the lake were recognised from the outset as being essential, and subsequently the reed bed was added and the lake extended to create further diversity.



Conifers are often criticised, but they too have their rightful place. The larch and areas of Scots Pine are really quite valuable to us and again provide habitat, which is quite special. We have tried to ring-fence and protect these areas as we have removed the Sitka Spruce and Grand Fir because the Crossbills, Siskins and Goldcrests depend on them. The mixed woodland replanted will also bring its own handsome benefits.



Later we added the moorland and the wetland which, combined with the hazel thickets, bluebell and primrose banks and then the beck sides, provide the unique variety I heard the Durham group commenting on...'At Low Barns it is a bus ride to another habitat, whereas at Foxglove it is often two or three paces!'



We are extremely fortunate to have this amazing array but without doubt it creates work and it is a challenge to us all. For the Reserve Managers and the volunteers it can be a headache to maintain but the species potential is considerable, and generally speaking the different tasks generated as a result help to keep our visits interesting and rewarding. The habitat mix at Foxglove has been deliberate, and the patchwork constitutes the very essence of the quality of the reserve. Bring on the winter seed crop and the orchard!!

Tony

Moths at Foxglove

Tuesday, before finishing work, check the weather. No rain, no strong winds, not too cold, then the moth trap can be set on the log in the garden. Possible wind and rain; then set on the veranda. Lay the sheet out, put out the moth trap with egg boxes spread around inside it. SWITCH ON the light! And double check.

Wednesday morning and it is like Christmas; what is going to be in the trap? Pencils were used to help remove the moths from the egg boxes to the plastic containers but Glennis bought us some wooden coffee stirrers and they are so much better.

We do tend to get slightly different species recorded depending on where the trap is set. On the moth mornings when the traps are set around the reserve there are different species caught. Moths can be caught throughout the year, although our season tends to be from March through to October or November depending on the weather.

As each month passes so the species of moths change; some have quite a short flight season, some fly for several months. Each moth is identified and recorded. All the records from each trapping is entered into *Mapmate* and sent to Dr Charlie Fletcher, the moth recorder for VC65. Any moths that we are unable to identify are photographed and sent to him usually with some suggestion of a name. We were convinced of a moth's ID but unfortunately Dr Fletcher did not agree. The moth we thought we had caught had been extinct for several years!

Foxglove Covert's mosaic of habitats and wide range of plant species is excellent for both the adult and larva. Some species survive the winter as a pupa and then hatch during the spring and summer. The larvae that feed on the trees are, of course, food for many birds during the nesting season and the adult moths are food for bats. To date 399 species of moth have been recorded at Foxglove Covert and no doubt there are a few more still waiting to be discovered!

Amazingly we are still finding new species of moth on the Reserve. The most recent one, caught through the evening on the 27th April, was a Pale Pinion Moth. The reference books indicated that it was not to be found this far north, but on consulting with Dr Fletcher he confirmed its identity and stated that 55 recordings of this moth had been made since 2003.



Male moths are usually the ones caught, as in several species the female is insignificant and has no wings. These females attract their mate by producing pheromones, which the males find irresistible. Some moths are unable to feed. Most of the larvae are herbivorous but the odd one likes a tasty meal of other moth caterpillars, the Satellite being one!

Although we do trap the moths there are occasions when they can be seen 'in the wild'. During early August last year a walk across the moor revealed the Antler Moths feeding from the thistle flowers. A great help for ID is that the pattern on its wing is shaped like an antler!



Micro moths, which are rather small but often beautifully marked and coloured, can be spotted. Brian found one in May and we wondered how it could manage to move without getting entangled in its long antennae! It was identified as *Nemphora degeerella* and was another new species.

Elizabeth and Brian

Birds of Foxglove – Chiffchaff

The Chiffchaff is a small leaf warbler, similar in size (11-13cm) to a Blue Tit. It is a mainly a summer migrant to Britain and is one of the first migrant songbirds to arrive at Foxglove in the spring. Chiffchaffs mainly winter around the Mediterranean and in western Africa, but increasingly a few spend their winter in the UK. Chiffchaffs that arrive in March and early April and brighten up or early spring mornings are mainly males and these are followed a week or two later by the females, then nesting begins in earnest.



In our first year (1992) the bird-ringers captured and ringed 9 Chiffchaffs at Foxglove and this number has risen remarkably over the last 20 years. To date, the most successful year by far at Foxglove was 2011 with 128 birds being ringed. This number includes adults that migrated to the UK during 2011 as well as those youngsters hatched here during the current breeding season. At Foxglove we also recaptured 45 birds that had been ringed prior to 2011 at either Foxglove or another ringing station. This made an overall total of 173 birds processed that year.

Considering the small size of the Chiffchaff, their small weight (6 to 9 grams) and the distance they travel during migration we have witnessed their surprising longevity!

A male captured and ringed on his migration to Foxglove May 1994 was subsequently recaptured here in June 1996, June 1997 and April 1998, giving him an age of at least 5 years. Another Chiffchaff was ringed as a juvenile in August 1994 at Foxglove and then returned in May 1996 and March 1998, giving a period of 3 years and 197 days between first and last capture. These compare favourably with the UK longevity record of 7 years.

Our records show that over the last 20 years we have ringed 114 juvenile Chiffchaffs and 40 (35%) of them were recaptured on their return the following year. It should be remembered that whilst Chiffchaff do breed on Foxglove we are likely to attract young birds into the Reserve once they are able to leave their natal area.

All bird ringers will no doubt agree that one of the highlights of their voluntary work is receiving information from the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) advising of their ringed birds being recaptured or found at other sites, whether at home or abroad, especially in the case of migrants such as Chiffchaffs. We have had one bird recovered close on it's wintering grounds when a Chiffchaff ringed at Foxglove in September 2009 was recaptured 199 days later in Gibraltar in March 2010, a total distance of 2045 km. Our only other recovery was a juvenile ringed at Foxglove in July 1998 and recaptured 15 days later at Bellflask.

At the time of writing (mid April), the 2012 season is just starting and already this year we have ringed 6 new birds and recaptured one ringed initially two years ago. Only time will tell whether this will be another successful year for the Chiffchaff at Foxglove.

Lesley Garbutt

In the Next Issue Elizabeth and Brian will tell you all about the many varieties of ladybird that you can find in the Reserve. Why not spend some time over the summer looking for ladybirds, you never know when a new species for the Reserve will appear.



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

Telephone: 01748 831113 – Mobile: 07754 270980. Web site: www.foxglovecovert.org.uk

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