



# Undergrowth

Issue No 26 Spring 2011

The Newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

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## Editorial Comment

In our lead article, our Chairman sets the scene for 2011, which will undoubtedly prove to be a very challenging year in the current economic climate. One of three key objectives in the management plan for the Reserve is *to provide opportunities for education, public enjoyment and interpretation*. The main theme of this issue is **education** in its broadest sense. The articles presented illustrate some of the many ways we try to achieve our educational objective at Foxglove and, with the new facilities available to us, will seek to develop this objective in the coming years.

Please keep Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July free as we are planning to hold an OPEN DAY at Foxglove to celebrate our first 10 years as a Local Nature Reserve

Tom Dewdney

## Our AGM and the year ahead

We are now well into 2011 and we can only afford a glance over our shoulders at what has been achieved to date. The consistent efforts of a few plus the considerable support and effort of many friends and volunteers has seen Foxglove Covert LNR become part of the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and what better way to mark our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary? The Management Group has decided to mark both achievements - the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the benefits that HLS membership brings - with a special celebration and details will follow shortly. I would like to see everyone who reads Undergrowth be involved in some way.

But as we move into our second decade, I wish to remind you of my statement at the Annual General Meeting held in January. In short, we now have an excellent facility that has benefited from considerable investment of late. Without dwelling on the economic weather, we must recognise that we have been luckier than many organisations, although luck is not quite the right expression. We have benefited purely as a result of very, very hard work of a few, but there will not be much more for a while after we complete the on-going projects. But that is all right, provided we can keep up with planned maintenance and running costs. We must now go out of our way to let people know what we have achieved and get more people to use our facilities. Increasing visitor numbers is important but that is not what is in my mind. We must now develop the educational benefits of Foxglove Covert.

That should not be too difficult. The Field Centre is already excellent, we have just built an outdoor classroom, membership of the HLS encourages and rewards school visits and we have members of the management who are educationally minded. The prize is to increase school parties (in number rather than size!) and for Foxglove Covert to be on every local school's list of outdoor activities. To achieve this we will have to focus our thoughts and adjust our practices slightly, but not much more than that. We will also need ideas and perhaps a little help from time to time, so stand by!

Spring approaches, yet it is snowing again! But the followers of the Blog and frequent visitors will be aware of what is going on. Well done to the Reserve Managers and volunteers especially for the excellent work and the effort you expend keeping Foxglove as attractive as it is.

Guy Deacon

## What's on at Foxglove

We have a range of educational activities planned over the next three months: Bird Watching for Beginners, Nest Box Walks, Bird Song Breakfasts, Wild Flower Forays and Mothing for Beginners. If you want more details of these please look on our website at [www.foxglovecovert.org.uk](http://www.foxglovecovert.org.uk) or check the details with the Reserve Managers before making your booking.

## Eco Club is almost two years old!

Our second birthday will be in May 2011. We meet throughout the year, on the last Saturday of the month, when the weather does not have its say! Our activities have ranged from flower identification to pond dipping, to demonstrations of bird ringing, craftwork, story telling and hunting mini beasts including finding some species new for the Reserve. Those of us who have a love of nature and the countryside have a responsibility to pass on our knowledge, enthusiasm and interest to the younger generation, to open their eyes to the wonders around them. Deer tracks in the mud, rabbit droppings, fungi and flowers, gory stories of food consumption by beetle larvae and sideways walking spiders engage the children and encourage them to be observant.



Handling wildlife correctly shows the children how to care for living creatures and the importance of special places for that wildlife. Our countryside, forests and moors, farmland and wetlands are all under different kinds of threat. Nature reserves and national parks provide sanctuary for so much of our wildlife and it is so important that children learn to respect and look after these special places.

Many of us involved in nature from photography to the study of beetles and insects, bird ringing, fungi and flower identification are not as young as we once were and so it is vital that we pass on our knowledge so that the seeds planted with the youngsters can germinate as they grow. These young people can take our place and so protect and love our countryside and everything that lives in it.

**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> January** was a cold but sunny day and ideal to illustrate winter. After a short introduction including hibernation, migration and preparation for winter we got ready to head off. Hats, gloves, scarves and coats for us but our dogs, Strider and Tolly already had their thick fur! The new hide was visited. The decreasing water levels in the lake were noticed both by sight and smell! On our way back we collected the thin pieces of wood, specially cut for us, and carried them to the new log pile at the outdoor classroom.

We noted the different temperatures from the reserve to the moorland. Frost had melted where the sun reached and we talked about the effect this had on the flora in the summer. We looked at buds and the emerging honeysuckle leaves, listened to a woodpecker drumming and this all before having refreshments.

During refreshments we talked about the winter survival strategies adopted by variety of animals and then the children completed some questions. A 15-minute bird watch from the Activity Room included Brambling, Bullfinch, Greenfinch, Blackbird and Coal Tit. Observations were recorded on the whiteboard. A round up of winter was discussed before the children headed home with their information about Badgers.



Elizabeth Dickinson



## Dales School

The Dales School at Morton-on-Swale is a school for students between the ages of 2 to 19. Students who attend The Dales School have severe or profound learning difficulties. At the age of 16 some students also join our Post 16 Department from other schools for the final 3 years of their education.

Every Tuesday a group from the Post 16 Department work at Foxglove Covert. Their work covers curriculum areas such as Work-Related Learning, Health and Safety at Work and Local Environmental Issues. Students need to prepare for work by wearing suitable clothing, which might include waterproofs and sturdy boots depending on the weather. They learn about the safe use of specialist equipment such as secateurs, loppers, forks and spades. They appreciate the importance of wearing suede work gloves especially when handling gorse!



Enjoying the reserve



Students hard at work

Everyone is actively involved in a variety of environmental projects such as willow, birch and gorse removal. Their enthusiasm when disposing of these branches on a bonfire is the perfect reward for all their hard work. Willow weaving to make new fences, tree planting and laying a bark path provide opportunities for the students to improve the community for themselves and others. Working alongside other volunteers gives the students a real sense of purpose and provides excellent opportunities for social interaction and the building of self-esteem and confidence. To top it all, it keeps you fit!

Foxglove Covert provides a perfect environment for students to learn valuable work skills in a realistic setting. They are able to stay focussed for increasing periods of time, they learn to work as part of a team and discover that working means taking the rough with the smooth. All this helps prepare them for life after school. Above all being part of Foxglove Nature Reserve is fun!

Bev Lawrence and Tricia Tremayne

## Educational facilities

As part of the HLS Scheme we have been able to improve and develop the range of our educational facilities. We have this new outdoor classroom to provide protection in the most hostile of conditions!



Outdoor Classroom

We have new projection facilities for the main classroom including a state-of-the-art whiteboard and overhead projection system and a whole range of smaller items including projection facilities so that we can hook up to a microscope and project what is visible in the eyepiece onto the large screen.

Any of these facilities can be hired on any day of the week at very reasonable rates by contacting the Reserve Managers.



In door facilities

Marion and Sophie



## Adopt-A-Box

As the Reserve gets bigger so do the number of potential sites for nest boxes and we were quick to take advantage of the additional woodland we have just acquired. As the picture shows, we have been able to erect some new boxes and will enter the 2011 season with a total of 170 nest boxes on the Reserve. We are also hoping to show live pictures from a nest box on the TV screen in the Field Centre, if the birds oblige!

As well as looking after the boxes we have been reviewing the way we manage the 'adoption process' and to that end have reviewed the database we hold to ensure that it is both up to date and accurate. If there is anyone reading this article that feels that we have not fully met our obligations please let me know via the Reserve Managers.

Looking forward, with the new season almost upon us, all our supporters whose subscriptions have lapsed have been mailed with a reminder that there are still plenty of small and special bird boxes and several bat boxes available for adoption.

We are also looking into the possibility of using the Internet to contact 'adoptees' that have given us their e-mail address rather than use the postal services to save money and wonder what you think about the proposal. Comments by e-mail or post to Adopt-A-Box at Foxglove.

Tom Dewdney



Box 164 ready for adoption

## Other 'snippets' of news!

The proposed extension of the Lake should be well underway by the time this issue is published, the project is designed to double the surface area of the lake and greatly enhance the opportunities to observe water life from the new hide, but in the short term the work may present additional hazards so please take extra care.

In response to a request from British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) the ringing team has sent data relating to the summer breeding activities of Chaffinch, Bullfinch and Willow Warbler which we have collected over the last decade and they were overwhelmed! "This is a dream dataset!" was their comment. So all our many hours of slogging round nets at unearthly hours in the morning are starting to get recognised at a national level.

You know the saying "*what comes round, goes round*". Last autumn the ringing team travelled all the way to Sweden to handle some new species of birds, and amongst other things we caught over a 1000 Mealy (Common) Redpoll. Well, earlier this winter we caught several of this species at Foxglove; another first for our Species List!

## Who is Foxglove's answer to the Stig?

(Do you know a man with two chainsaws?)



Answers in writing to the editor by 1<sup>st</sup> June 2011

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Articles for inclusion in future issues are welcomed by the editor at: [foxglove@btinternet.com](mailto:foxglove@btinternet.com).

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