

AGM Report and Thoughts for 2012

As we approach the end of winter, we have plenty to look forward to; regular visitors and readers of Undergrowth will be well aware of what's happened and those who were at the AGM will have been party to discussions on where we want to go next.

First, we have survived another year with our finances intact and I am optimistic that, with some extra effort, they will remain so over the next year.

Second, we welcomed 2 new members who will be joining the Management Group. Shirley Hayes will be very important in helping us to raise money as she has a very strong connection with Tesco's in the garrison. Although our finances are sound, we cannot afford to miss any opportunity to raise money to ensure we have funds available. It was a pleasure to meet Richard Witham who has been a very productive volunteer over last year and can bring a range of skills and advice to the Management Group as we develop applications and use technology to capture some of the things that we do at Foxglove.

Third, it was a pleasure to meet Lawrence Mannion, a new volunteer, who works at PRAC, the new facility on the square by the gate at Foxglove which will rehabilitate wounded soldiers coming back from Afghanistan. This gives us a really strong link to our immediate neighbours and will allow us to demonstrate to a needy group of people; just what a wonderful place Foxglove can be to restore both mind and body.

I hope that visitors, volunteers and readers of Undergrowth will see Foxglove just get better and better as Spring turns to Summer and all the hard work done over the winter months start to pay off.

Guy Deacon

Fundraising Expert Needed

In these cash-strapped times some of the sources of funding that have supported Foxglove Covert have dried up. Consequently we need to try harder than ever to raise funds. Recently I put in an application for help from the Big Lottery Fund and we got £10,000, but I am no expert and we must have had a stroke of lottery luck to get it! We are also now getting help from the Community Champion at Tesco, which should prove lucrative in the long term (and every little helps!). The picture below shows volunteers collecting for Foxglove in the Tesco Store.



In the last few days, an experienced fund raiser has come forward and has offered help, for which we are really grateful, but if there is anyone else out there with this kind of experience then your support would also be appreciated as the more we can do the more likely we are to be successful.

The Big Lottery Fund was drawn to our attention by a volunteer after it had been featured on BBC's Spring Watch programme, so another way in which you can help is to keep your eyes open for grant opportunities and let us know if you spot one for which we might be eligible.

John Ginnever

Woodland Management

The Theory

The picture below illustrates the on-going wind damage that was occurring in the conifer blocks and highlights the need for long-term management.



The HLS agreement provides an annual payment for the restoration of woodland on the Reserve. The aim of this HLS option is to benefit wildlife and protect and strengthen the local landscape character. The vehicle used to meet this option is an agreed Woodland Management Plan, which needed to be produced by Foxglove Covert LNR and agreed by Natural England in Year 1 of the HLS scheme.

I prepared the Woodland Plan with support and input from members of the Management Group and the reserve managers. The format of our Plan is based on the template used by the Forestry Commission. The Plan contains details of the site and a description of the woodlands and the management objectives and long-term vision formed a crucial part of the document. The long-term vision of the Reserve's Woodland can be summarised as to:

- Maintain, restore and/or improve the quality of forest/woodland cover across the reserve so as to continue to provide a sustainable resource;
- Continue to manage the plantations and allow them to regenerate naturally and diversify species and age class distribution;
- Halt the decline of the broadleaved woodlands.

Protection will aim to facilitate renewed regeneration so as to improve woodland viability and maintain biodiversity value.

To achieve this vision a series of management prescriptions and operations have been detailed and agreed. These include:

- Undertaking harvesting and thinning work in the coniferous blocks and then subsequently replanting these areas using appropriate species;
- Coppicing the Willow Carr. The coppicing will be undertaken as a series of compartments. Five compartments have been identified and one compartment will be cut every two years. The cycle will therefore be completed in 2020 when it will start all over again.

Enhancing Biodiversity forms another key element of the plan and the measures that are to be implemented are as follows.

- Incorporation of glades and scalloped ride edges to encourage the associated specialist wildlife communities. Individual trees including veteran will be identified for Long Term Retention;
- Natural regeneration will be actively encouraged in order to improve plantation structure and age class, eventually leading to continuous cover;
- Gradual thinning of conifer species will take place. Regeneration of broadleaves will be encouraged as canopy replacements;
- Forest operations will take place outside of the nesting season and will avoid sensitive sites. Harvesting operations will take place in accordance with Habitat Regulations relating to European Protected Species (EPS);
- The provision of deadwood habitat will be encouraged across the site;
- Invasive species will be removed or reduced where suppression of native flora occurs;
- Education forms a key part of the social values of the plan's output.

The plan stipulates that there will be focus on providing woodland and conservation education for groups; the Outdoor Classroom and Field Centre are crucial to delivering this education aim.

Graham Newcombe

Ed: Veteran trees are defined by Natural England as trees with '*a significant part of historic, cultural and ecological heritage treasured by many generations*'.

Putting the Theory into Practice

The western side of the Reserve used to be protected from the prevailing wind by a shelterbelt of coniferous trees. This strip of plantation consisted mainly of Sitka Spruce with an outer fringe of Scots Pine. Although enjoyed by species such as Goldcrest, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Roe Deer, the trees were planted with timber yield in mind, then neglected and had become old and unstable. After stormy weather many trees had fallen and presented a logistical nightmare in terms of removing the timber from the site. A decision was made to replace this plantation with a mixture of broadleaved trees. This will be done gradually to minimise disturbance and spread the cost of the felling and timber extraction. Two years ago, three small areas of Sitka Spruce were felled and the Scots Pine was left standing. Those areas were subsequently re-planted and the trees are now growing well. This work has now been absorbed into the Woodland Management Plan.



This winter Phase Two of this forestry plan has taken place and the second 'clear fell' site has been created. One man carried out all of the felling and the timber was carefully extracted and taken to the sawmill for manufacture of saw logs and pallets.



This area has been re-planted with a variety of broadleaved species, predominantly Oak and Hazel. Rather than 'slit planting' where a 'spades width' line is cut in the ground and the sapling is heeled in, a lot of both time and care were taken to give the young trees the best possible start in life. A small hole was dug for each one and the roots were shaken out to help them spread in all directions and to give the tree maximum stability in the future. Each tree was then protected from Roe Deer and Rabbits with a tall tree guard. The photograph shows volunteers from the R.E.M.E. in action.



A great deal of work has been taking place across the Reserve in order to open up areas and to create glades. These are vital habitats for wildflowers and consequently provide food and shelter for a wide variety of invertebrates including butterflies, dragonflies and small mammals. In addition to this, an area has been left deliberately free of trees in the newly planted area to create a further open space. Where Hazel has been coppiced selectively, dappled light will provide ideal conditions for spring flowers such as Bluebells, Violets and Primroses.



Sophie

We Couldn't Have Done It Without You!

The volunteers began clearing away brash on Tuesday 18th October and this continued on several subsequent Tuesdays. All that brash had to be cleared and some of it was lovely and muddy! On Saturday 12th November, a beautiful, warm and sunny day, greeted over 30 people, young and not so young, for the first Worky Day. A family out for a walk joined in the fun!! This huge support made a tremendous difference on the day!

On 3rd December, over 30 people arrived to help with the continued clearing, this time well wrapped up against the rain that appeared throughout the day. The wet weather had made the brash and ground rather 'clarty', and by the end of the day it was realised that washing machines would be working overtime! It was well worth all the effort as once the fires finally started to burn, the piles of brash disappeared before our very eyes.

On 7th January there was record turnout of 46 people for any Worky Day and the emphasis shifted to disposing of the brash from coppicing Hazel and Willow and in February another 30+ volunteers helped to clear a glade alongside Risedale Beck.

Heartfelt thanks go out to all our volunteers who have helped to make this first year of the Woodland Management Plan work so successfully.



Elizabeth

Ed. Thanks to Richard Witham and Elizabeth for providing the photographs used to illustrate this Issue.

Birds of Foxglove – Blue Tits

Few people that come and watch us ringing fail to identify a Blue Tit in the hand. They are one of our regulars on the bird feeders and appear to be with us all the year round, but what is the real story? Well we have ringed over 3500 adult Blue Tits and another 530 pullus in our nest boxes at Foxglove over the last 20 years and more interestingly we ringed a record number (357) of new birds in 2011.



We started ringing pullus in boxes in 2006 and of the 530 young birds ringed to date, we have recaptured 63 individuals as fully grown birds during their first year of life but interestingly only 11 of these were around for two or more years. The longest-lived bird recorded so far is over 4 years old and one has been recaptured 15 times in 3 years!

We have ringed many more adults than pullus. A total of 33 adults have been caught again more than 5 years after they were initially ringed and our longevity record is a bird that has been around for over 8 years. Interestingly there are only five recorded movements to or from Foxglove. We have had 3 Foxglove ringed birds move away, one moved 3 km to Scotton, and two others were caught breeding in nest boxes at Downholme. Our longest inward movement is a bird initially ringed in Ripon moving to the Catterick Garrison area where it remained for at least 4 years!

So what have we learnt so far, apart from the fact Blue Tits are very photogenic? Well, this is a relatively sedentary species with a few long-lived individuals that seem to thrive on the environment we have created at Foxglove.

Tom Dewdney

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