

## Winter Work on the Reserve

It has been another busy winter at Foxglove Covert, with a lot of woodland work taking place. A significant portion of this work has been the coppicing and pollarding of willow carr. Working through freezing temperatures and thick mud, volunteers have persevered and coppiced the carr all the way to the conifer woodland which borders this year's coppice coupe.



Coppicing creates a lot of material, some of which has been burnt. A large amount has been saved for use in dead hedges and leaky dams which will be built in the coming months. Already the screen at Spigot Mere has been added to. An additional screen has been started on the other side of the hide, thanks to volunteers Brian and John. These screens will help reduce disturbance to Spigot Mere, encouraging waders such as Lapwing and Little Ringed Plover to nest.



A recurring winter job is dealing with storm damage. There has been quite a lot of it this year at Foxglove Covert, between Storm Darragh, Storm Eowyn and heavy snow fall. Some damage was significant enough to require the skills of a tree surgeon. Others staff and volunteers managed to clear ourselves.





As well as damage to trees, many of the bird feeding stations on the reserve were blown over in the storms, including both the Field Centre garden feeding stations and one feeding station at the lake.



Instead of replacing like-for-like, feeders are now hung in the vegetation. During the February winter worky day, volunteer Brian and family installed a new feeding station in the garden. It provides incredible, close-up views of the birds visiting the feeders, for those watching from the Field Centre.



Also during the winter worky days, ring barking in the conifer plantation has continued, with over 60 trees ring barked.

Ring barking will cause the trees to slowly die and drop their vegetation, opening up the canopy to allow an understory to develop. Find out more about ring barking at Foxglove Covert on our blog.



This winter volunteer John mapped all the leaky dams which were installed last year to 'slow the flow' and reduce the amount of sediment reaching the lake. These leaky dams can now be added to Foxglove Covert's QGIS maps, which have been updated spectacularly by volunteer Mary. This accurate and accessible information about dam locations will allow for efficient maintenance of the dams in the future.





It has been a busy winter and there is much work ahead. As we move into spring, practical work on the reserve will focus more on site maintenance and, later, grassland management. A major maintenance job which will be going ahead soon is the replacement of the outdoor classroom roof.

Species monitoring will increase, with the moth team back in weekly this March, and surveys for amphibians, reptiles, birds, bees and butterflies starting up soon.

The reserve will also be busy with visitors; already many school groups, corporate volunteering groups and events are booked in for the months ahead. Find out about upcoming events on pages 8-9 and keep up to date with all the goings on at the reserve through our blog or Facebook page.

*El Biggs, Reserve Ranger*

## Introducing Trustee Nicky

Thank you all for your warm welcome as a new trustee to Foxglove Covert, I just wanted to introduce myself. I qualified as a Chartered Physiotherapist in 1993 and worked for the NHS until I decided to join the army in 2005.

Over the last 20 years I have worked in the rehabilitation of injured service personnel across all the British Armed Services and in various locations around the UK but also in Germany, The Falkland Islands and a six month tour in Afghanistan. In June 2024 I was very happy to be assigned to Catterick Garrison Medical Centre as it means I can live at home near Northallerton, with my husband and wider family.

I knew about FGC already and when I moved back home I wanted to get involved. I have always loved animals, I have an MSc in Veterinary Physiotherapy and before joining the army I treated dogs and horses. But over the years my love for animals has grown to a love of all wildlife and conservation.



I regularly have hedgehogs and other wildlife visiting my garden that I see on trail cameras dotted around and as a 'hedgehog champion' I raise awareness of their plight locally and support hedgehog charities. But I would like to do more.

I have already met some of the amazing volunteers that are so vital to FGC and I intend to get stuck in with some volunteering and work days myself this year as well as supporting as a trustee so I look forward to meeting more of you through the coming months.

*Nicola Lancaster, Trustee*

## I Love a Good Map!

Species recording has always been a key part of volunteer work at Foxglove Covert and over the years an impressive dataset has been built, with the total number of species recorded now being over 3000. However, many of the more casual records are not associated with a specific location or, if they are, we are often relying on volunteers' memories or anecdotal evidence. Whilst this can be hugely valuable, it needs to be better documented so that it can inform the management of the reserve and be used to support any funding bid applications.

So, just over a year ago I volunteered, along with El and Lizzie Rumble, to take a Field Studies Council online QGIS course. (QGIS is a free and open source geographic information system). Having no previous experience of mapping software I found it quite challenging to begin with but, with the three of us (and a WhatsApp group), we could compare notes and help each other and it gave us the basics to get started.

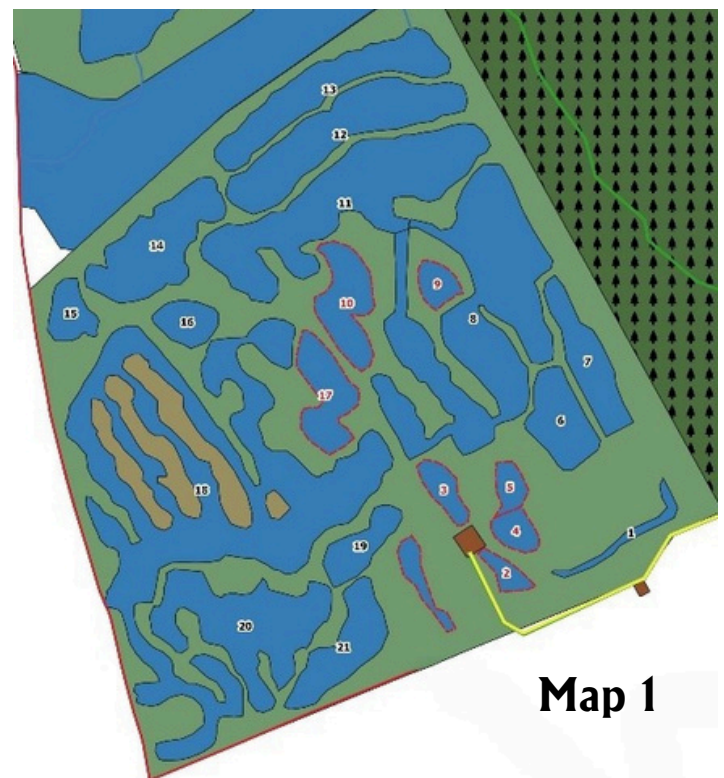
The first step was to create a master map of the reserve. Fortunately, some years ago, a student had worked on this using QGIS so we weren't starting from scratch, but quite a lot had changed and the list of additions and amendments just kept growing (and still is!) as we thought of more things to include. Whilst this new detailed map is very useful in itself, the focus of attention has already moved on to how it might inform habitat management.

As the QGIS mapping system uses layers for all the different features – buildings, habitat areas, waterbodies, paths etc., these can be easily toggled on and off depending on what you want to look at.

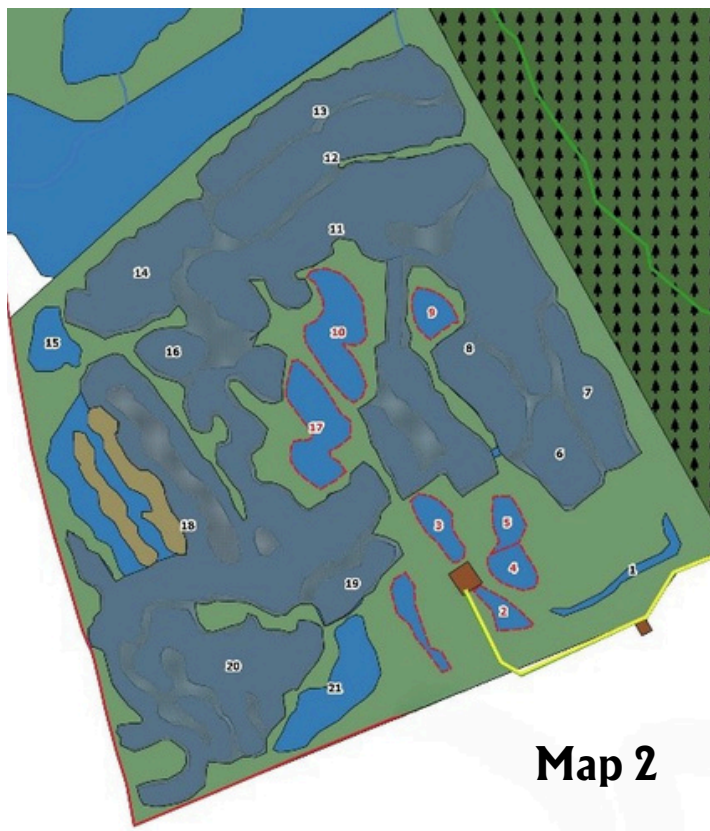
You can also import data, such as species sightings, as additional layers. To do this, each record needs a grid reference associated with it so that it puts it in the right place on the map, giving you a picture of what is where. Whilst we are not planning to do this for 3000 species, it will be really helpful for recording indicator species, rarities and things that we only find in a specific habitat.

You can also import routes from tracking apps such as OS maps, Outdoor Active etc. as layers, which is proving useful for setting up bird, butterfly and bumblebee transects or just mapping new areas such as Darter's Pool and the Queen's Green Canopy woodland.

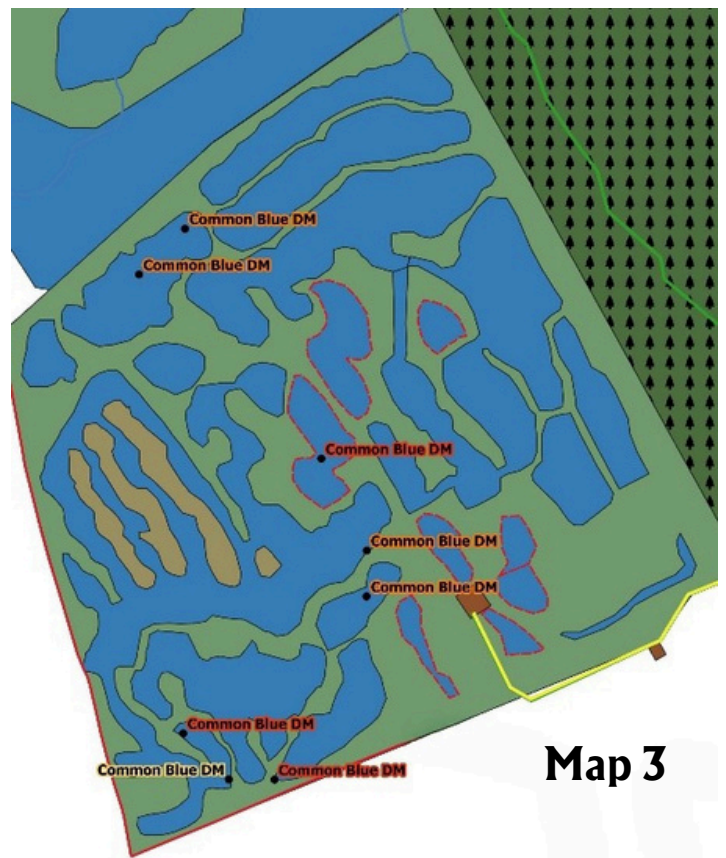
One area that we have already focused on is the Wetland, as this has been identified as a key habitat priority in the Management Plan. Map 1 shows the Wetland as it is today with the Flagship Ponds highlighted in red. Map 2 (page 5) shows the proposed new Wetland with some of the pools merged and reprofiled.







**Map 2**



**Map 3**

Before embarking on a project like this, we need to establish a baseline of what species are currently using this area so that we can then measure the improvements (hopefully!) in biodiversity after the changes have been made.

One species group of particular interest is Dragonflies and Damselflies as we know, from Alison Shepherd's work monitoring these insects, that they are using this wetland habitat. By plotting her 2024 records on to the Wetland map we can start to see which species in particular might be affected by any changes that are planned.

As an illustration, Map 3 shows where Common Blue Damselfly have been recorded on the Wetland. The colour of the label indicates the number seen ranging from cream (1) through yellow (2-5), orange (6-20), red (21-100) to dark red (101-200).

It is still early days with this work but it certainly has the potential to bring the data to life.

Other projects that we have already identified include mapping Waxcap locations (we have recorded 18 different species at Foxglove which puts the site into the 'nationally important' category so we need to know where they are!), creating a detailed hydrology map for the reserve including all the new leaky dams, and monitoring the impact of the ring barking work in the Conifer Plantation. As with all software, if you don't use it you lose it, so at least this should keep us busy!

*Mary Atkins, Volunteer*

## Making sense of life on this Earth - my journey of reconnecting with the rest of nature

Some of you reading this I am sure will have already heard of nature connectedness. I am no expert but my understanding is that it is about how close we feel we are to the rest of nature and, as a part of that, a deep acknowledgement that we as a species are a part of nature. It is not that the human world and the natural world are separate things.

Humans are a part of the natural world, but with the changes in how we live as humans a lot of us have become disconnected. Researchers have strong evidence to show how important having this connection to the natural world is for our wellbeing and for the rest of nature. Humans that feel more connected with the rest of nature are more likely to care for nature and therefore take positive nature actions no matter how small or big these actions are. Connection has been shown to be more effective at producing positive actions than simply learning facts about the natural world. It makes sense right, we protect what we care about. It is in our nature. Sorry I couldn't help myself...

In 2022 I found myself walking into Foxglove Covert nature reserve. At the time I was having career coaching because I had lost the oomph for working in healthcare. The coach asked how I felt going into Foxglove. I was surprised at how easily the answer came; I felt at ease, it was like home, I felt safe and I felt joy. And that was when I started visiting and volunteering on the reserve.

I grew up next to the ancient royal hunting woodland of Epping Forest wedged between an ever expanding London and rural Essex.

I loved nature as a child. In fact one of my first words was “look”, while pointing at some magical being (wildlife, namely rabbits). When I got to secondary school and I “needed to fit in” I desperately wanted to make up for my sensible laced shoes and rucksack when every other girl was in ballet pumps with an oversized handbag. I buried myself in sport and forgot about nature. I did keep my appreciation of being outdoors but not in the same joyful way. I knew it felt good to burn off some energy charging up a mountain but I had forgotten to pause and soak in my surroundings.

Then something changed. I went to Cambodia as a volunteer physio. While I was there I went kayaking with the threatened river dolphins and the experience was magical. On my return I did a yoga teacher course taught by a Zen Buddhist Master. That was when the real magic began. I re-learnt to pause and notice the small things with curiosity and find joy. I reconnected with nature.

This year I am looking forward to doing something a bit different on the reserve. I hope to explore ways of guiding others to connect with nature for their wellbeing and for nature by supporting the reserve with wellbeing activities.

In general humans care for what they love and that is how I have ended up where I am now doing what I do now and if more humans can find some magic in nature then it is a win for all beings.

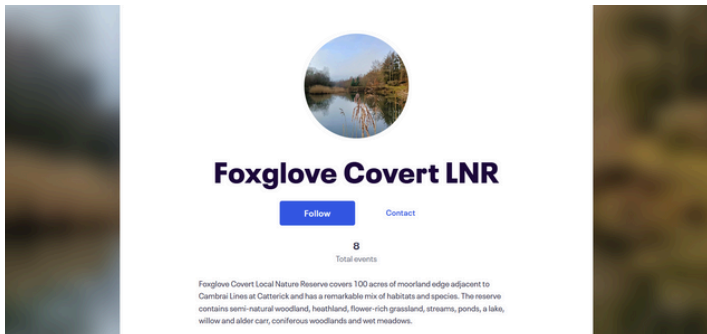
*Lizzie Rumble, Volunteer*

## IT Updates

Following updates to Foxglove Covert's Friends and Adopt-A-Box schemes (see issue 64 for more), we are also updating the website and event booking system.

Foxglove Covert is working with website designer Make Hay to build a new and improved website which will be easier to navigate, more accessible, and with updated information about the reserve.

Although the website is still a ways off from launching, the new method for booking on events is already underway. To improve our booking method, increase our range of ticketing options and to reach a wider audience, Foxglove Covert is now promoting and booking events through Eventbrite.



Check out [foxglovecovertlnr.eventbrite.com](https://foxglovecovertlnr.eventbrite.com) to view Foxglove Covert's profile on Eventbrite and explore the range of events we have on offer.

*El Biggs, Reserve Ranger*

## Message from the Chair

We have let you know that Major Nicola Lancaster has joined the Foundation as a new Trustee and is now part of the team.

Sadly though, one of our other Trustees, Mark Williams has stood down. He gave notice some while ago, so whilst not unexpected it is still a loss as Mark has been an invaluable member of the team for the last 3 years. Mark has made a significant contribution, so he leaves with our thanks and appreciation. We wish him all the best for his future plans.

We are still on the lookout for an additional Trustee so if you know anyone who might be interested please put them in touch with John at [j.walker@thefoxglovecovertfoundation.org.uk](mailto:j.walker@thefoxglovecovertfoundation.org.uk).

We have kept you up to date with the ongoing discussions with the MOD about renewal of the lease from 2027. This is not concluded yet but all moving in the right direction.

Carl and I were invited to a meeting with Lt Col Holden in December 2024, the purpose of which was to give us early notice of major building works affecting the Alma and Cambrai barracks. This involves significant demolition and rebuilding with works planned to start in 2027 for 3 to 4 years.

It is just a coincidence that this is also our lease renewal date, but will not impact on the process we have in hand for the lease renewal. What will be affected though, is how we get in and out of the Reserve during construction works and thereafter. This will now be the subject of detailed discussions as the alternatives are considered for organised groups, volunteers and casual visitors. There will be more on this as the scheme develops but our involvement at this early stage is a good sign in being involved in the solutions.

At the time of writing the Foxglove Covert access gate is behaving.

To visit, the public just need to present photo ID to the Pass Office and then use the intercom to activate the security gate. Let's hope it lasts!

We ended 2024 with a small budget surplus which is a good result considering most of our income sources were down but offset to a degree by greater income from funds we have invested and budget savings. So, thanks to Carl and El in helping to manage the budget within an affordable limit. The surplus will be carried forward to manage costs until our next grant from the MOD is due later in 2025. A budget has been set for 2025, against an intended work plan and again careful management of costs through the year will be required.

We have now made an application to the Armed Forces Covenant – Families on the Move Programme. Moving to a new area can be a daunting prospect so the idea is to support families new to the area utilising the unique opportunities that Foxglove presents to bring people together to enjoy what we have to offer and form new social networks. The 'Serving Families Nature Network' if successful will offer introductory and themed events to connect families with the environment, their local community and each other. The bid is for £105,000 over 3 years and provides for a part time member of staff to run the programme and a budget for events etc. It has been a collaborative affair to put the bid together with our thanks to Mary Atkins and Janet Hutchinson for their involvement. We hope the bid will be successful as a unique opportunity to support families new to the area and show case what Foxglove is about.

Work on the Management Plan has now been completed so this will be used to guide the work of the Reserve in future.

The Plan will stay fluid to be adaptive to future circumstances. Our thanks to all those who gave feedback to help shape the final plan. The Plan will come to life through an annual workplan along with seasonal tasks. This is now available for 2025 at the Field Centre and will be online when the new website goes live. One item in the plan is to renew the outdoor classroom roof and work on this should be underway soon.

*Peter Simpson, Chairman of the Trustee Board and on behalf of Trustees John, Tony and Nicola*

## Upcoming Events

For more information on any of our events and to book your place visit [foxglovecovertnr.eventbrite.com](http://foxglovecovertnr.eventbrite.com).

Please note all events must be booked in advance.

### **24th March: Birdwatching for Beginners**

**9:00am – 12:30pm**

Improve your bird spotting and identification skills with this beginner-friendly guided bird watching session. Bring binoculars if you have them. £5 donation per person, free to volunteers and Friends of Foxglove.

### **9th April: Wildlife Photography Workshop**

**10:00am – 3:00pm**

Enjoy a day of photography tuition around the reserve. Donation of £20 per person, £15 for volunteers and Friends of Foxglove.

### **16th April: Spring Crafts and Trails**

**11:00am – 3:00pm**

Explore the reserve in spring and have a go at some kid-friendly crafts in the Field Centre. Donate what you can.



## **24th April: Wildlife Wander**

**2:30pm - 4:00pm**

Enjoy a relaxed wander around Foxglove Covert and discover the wildlife which inhabits the reserve in spring. Binoculars are not a requirement, but bring them along if you have them! Donate what you can.

## **4th May: Dawn Chorus Guided Walk**

**5:30am - 7:30am**

Celebrate International Dawn Chorus Day with a guided walk around the reserve to experience the dawn chorus at Foxglove Covert. Donation of £5 per person. Free for volunteers and Friends of Foxglove.

## **25th May: Learn to Scythe with Steve Tomlin**

**10:00am - 3:00pm**

Learn how to scythe with the UK's leading scythe instructor, Steve Tomlin, at Foxglove Covert LNR!

## **31st May - 1st June: Introduction to Bee Keeping**

**9:45am - 4:00pm**

This event is delivered by Richmond & District Bee Keeper's Association (RDBKA).

A 2-day weekend course on the theory of beekeeping, combined with a practical 'hands-on' experience.

## **18th June: Scything for Beginners**

**10:00am - 3:00pm**

Learn all about scything, from setting up the scythe to suit your height, to maintaining sharpening the blade. You will be taught how to scythe, have a go at scything on Foxglove Covert's meadows, and learn about the applications of scything on nature reserves and at home. All scything kit is provided for the day. Donation of £75 per person, 10% off for Friends of Foxglove.

**Additional Scything for Beginners dates include 30th June and 21st August.**

If you are a volunteer or Friend of Foxglove use code FRIENDS at check-out on eventbrite for discounts on selected events.

### **Keep in touch!**



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#### **X:**

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#### **Read our blog:**

[www.foxglovecovert.org.uk/blog](http://www.foxglovecovert.org.uk/blog)

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Registered Charity No. 1197745

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