

## Coronavirus Update

Circumstances globally at the moment are unprecedented and we are in uncharted waters. How life generally will pan out over the next six months is difficult to predict. It has been a fast paced few days with new information dictating new actions.

Firstly, it was after much thought that a decision was taken by the trustees to put a temporary halt on volunteering at Foxglove Covert LNR. Volunteers are the backbone of the reserve and will be seriously missed but in view of the situation this step was unavoidable and we needed to do our part to help prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. The health and wellbeing of the staff, volunteers and visitors will always be the main priority. We would like to thank all volunteers for their hard work to date, it is hugely valued and we hope that you will return as soon as the situation improves. You are a fantastic team and the different skills and knowledge that you bring to the reserve are second to none.

Furthermore, on the 23rd March it was with regret that in line with both government and MoD guidelines and to help prevent the spread of Covid-19, the reserve was closed to the public. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all Undergrowth readers for their continued support during these unusual times and will keep you updated of any changes. We apologise for any inconvenience and hope to be open again soon. Hopefully, it will be business as usual before too long but who knows? The telephones will normally be answered on either 01748 830045 (office) or 07754 270980 (mobile).

Keep well, keep safe and listen carefully to the advice given.



## From the Editor

Welcome to the Winter Edition of Undergrowth although at the time of writing things seem pleasantly spring like!

It has been another winter with little snow although February 2020 has been the wettest February on record for the UK. Widespread flooding and wet conditions will sadly

have taken their toll on some birds and mammals. Certainly, my local Barn Owl has been out hunting earlier

in the evening obviously hungry from struggling on wet days. Reports from the bird ringing team later in the year will perhaps show a more accurate picture of the impact of the weather. Just before Christmas I was privileged to handle a Tawny Owl which had been recovering after being found dazed on the side of a road. It was duly ringed by Tony and I believe it went on to make a full recovery and was released back into the wild near where it was found. To handle such a magnificent bird made my Christmas!

I hope you enjoy this edition of Undergrowth.

*Katie Awdas*

## Message from the Chair

I am pleased to introduce myself as the new Chair of Foxglove Covert LNR's Management Group.



Originally from Teesside, I have lived in North Yorkshire for over 30 years and currently work in one of the local primary schools. My interests outside of Foxglove Covert include cycling, hill-walking, gardening and Zumba. I rarely sit still!

Without doubt, anyone who has ever visited the Field Centre

within the last few years will have seen a picture of me on the information board, in my younger days, holding a Tawny Owl. I joined FGC's bird-ringing team in 2008 and, thanks to the expertise of my trainer, Tony Crease, I have become a much more knowledgeable and proficient bird handler. Bird-ringing sessions usually take place on a Sunday, weather permitting, and the team enjoy explaining what we do to members of the public.

I've been a member of the Management Group for a number of years now and feel that I have a good background knowledge of the 'behind the scenes' running of the reserve.

My husband, Steve, and I have joined in with many winter 'worky days' and understand the positive impact that teamwork has in maintaining the reserve's varied habitats. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to thank all our volunteers for their hard work and dedication. Thanks also go to our Reserve Managers, Sophie and Gerry, for their commitment to ensure that Foxglove Covert goes from strength to strength.

*Lesley Garbutt*

## Buds and Broadleaves, Cones and Conifers

Winter is the best time to observe tree shapes and admire the tracery of twigs and branches. Trees seem to take on a different character, but identification can often be more difficult. We Wednesday volunteers have been busy examining twigs, leaf buds, bark, needles, cones and any remaining leaves, on some of the trees on the reserve.

The arrangement of buds on twigs proved helpful with identification, some in opposite pairs, some alternate, some lying flat against the stem, some on 'shelves' and some on stalks.

An easily recognisable tree was the Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) with its hard black buds, borne in opposite pairs on smooth grey-green twigs. The terminal buds of the Wayfaring-tree (*Viburnum lantana*) were distinctive. Buds and twigs of this species have a mealy coating, whilst the buds of the Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) are purplish with hairy scale edges.

Any confusion between English Oak (*Quercus robur*), also known as Common Oak or Pedunculate Oak and Sessile Oak (*Quercus petrae*) was soon allayed by the discovery of a few remaining leaves and acorns. The leaf stalks of Sessile Oak are longer, the leaf-lobes less deep, and the acorn cups are unstalked. The distinctive drooping branches of Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*) and the silvery grey bark, differentiated this species from the more erect Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*). Examination of the hairless warty twigs also confirmed this.



Female Hazel flower

Bark was a useful guide. The horizontal warts (*lenticels*) were visible on Hazel (*Corylus avellane*) but with catkins and female flowers also to be seen, confirmation here was unnecessary. Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) with 'boxing-glove' shaped buds was also displaying its male and female catkins, while the bark of Aspen (*Populus tremula*) was found to be pitted with diamond-shaped lenticels.

Conifers often proved easier to identify, since most retain their foliage. Cones too were a useful aid. The cones of Sitka

Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) are light brown with crinkled papery scales. Spruces have long hanging cones with thin scales, while those of Scots Pine (*Pinus Sylvestris*) are small, egg-shaped and pointed. The reddish-brown upright cones of Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*) are cylindrical, with hidden bracts exuding a whitish resin.

Smell can also be helpful. Crushing the foliage of the beautiful Grand Fir gave a definite citrus smell. Also, with a pleasant aromatic scent was the Juniper (*Juniperus communis*) recognisable by its sharp-pointed needles in groups of three. Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) which has a corky furrowed bark and hollow twigs containing white pith, had, however, an unpleasant smell.

These are just a few of the trees which can be found on the reserve, and which can make a walk full of interest at any time of the year.

Pauline Cordner



Cones

## Best Laid Plans

Last winter some of the main wetland to the south-west of the reserve was restored. This wetland, originally constructed in 2009, had become completely overgrown. Contractors re-profiled and cleared out some of the ponds and rebuilt many of the dams. The benefits were soon clear with the return of wading birds during the breeding season.

The Management Group decided to ring fence funds for the second phase which was due to be carried out during this winter (2019/2020). This type of work is always carefully timed to minimise disturbance to the wildlife such as the amphibians. Any machinery needs to be removed from the site by the start of March as this is when the frogs and toads begin to return to the pools in order to breed.



A bit wet!

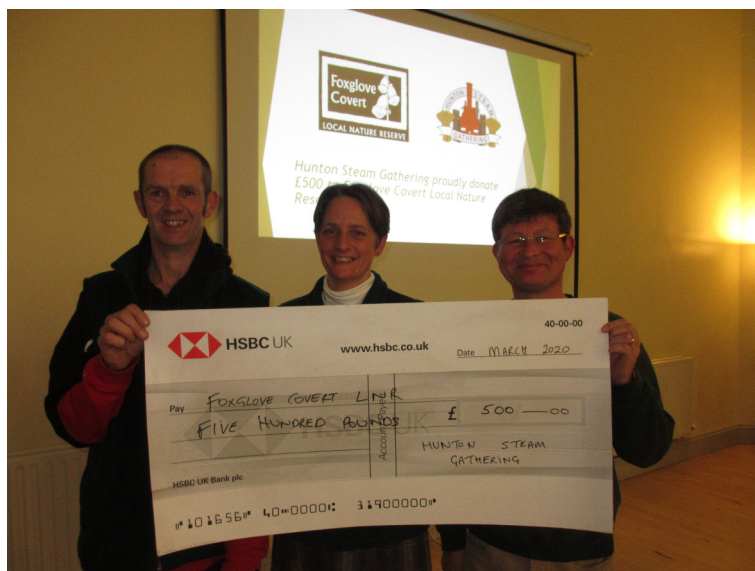


## Hunton Steam Gathering

“Gerry we are doing a presentation in Hunton”. Normally this means getting our PowerPoint slides up to date and making sure everything is ready to show Foxglove at its very best. However, this time Foxglove Covert LNR was going to receive a presentation.

Hunton Steam Gathering has been running for 34 years. This year was their biggest and best so far. The Gathering was originally conceived to raise much needed funds for a play park on the village green. Each year the gathering has grown in size and is now a nationally recognized event. It is run by an army of helpers and enthusiasts, who are passionate about all things steam! Where possible the event aims to make donations to local charities, this year over £10,000 was shared between 13 charities, Foxglove being one of them.

The Hunton Steam Gathering Committee kindly invited representatives from Foxglove Covert to attend a charity evening at Hunton Village hall on Friday 6th March. The hall quickly filled with families from the village, local dignitaries and the various charities that would be benefiting from this evening. After a very interesting presentation about the Gathering the main event



Receiving our donation

began, each charity was called forward to give a small talk about their organisation. We listened to each charity explain how the donation would be spent and how it would change people's lives for the better which was simply brilliant and humbling. This small village has made a real difference to people's lives in and around North Yorkshire and beyond. Then it was Foxglove's turn. After thanking the Chairman, Sophie spoke about the diverse habitats that thrive within Foxglove and how important the reserve is to the local community. She also did a great job explaining we were only seven minutes away and that everybody should visit! It was then time for the giant cheque to be brought out for the photograph. Ian Tunstill was then asked to join us for the picture. Ian is a member of the HSG planning committee and it was his proposal in the first place that a donation of £500 be given to Foxglove LNR. For this we are extremely grateful to him and also to all his colleagues who do so much for Hunton and the wider community.

Afterwards a fantastic buffet was laid on and the bar was open for business, this was also a great opportunity to make new friends and to do some networking. Business cards were exchanged, and ideas shared. The next day a fantastic framed photograph was given to Foxglove by Gareth Seaborne. This was totally unexpected! Thank you!

Hunton Steam Gathering takes place annually in farmland to the east of the Village of Hunton in Lower Wensleydale just off the A684, between Bedale and Leyburn, and is signposted from all main roads (nearest postcode for Sat Nav users is DL8 1QF). The next Gathering is planned for Saturday 12th and Sunday 13th September 2020 with the ploughing event commencing at 11am on the Sunday.

With this winter being one of the wettest on record, James Coxon and Brothers had a real struggle trying to use plant and machinery as the ground was just too soft. With work put on hold for much of November and December hopes were pinned on drier weather after New Year. However, the weather seemed only to get worse in 2020 with three named storms in February alone! The Management Group were left with no choice but to stop the work and postpone it until the end of the year. James Coxon and his team have done a fantastic 'buttering' job (smoothing out the earth) and have now removed all diggers etc from the site. Fingers crossed for a drier winter 2020/21!

In the summer, staff and volunteers worked hard on the wetland to lower the sward and remove scrub; already Lapwing, Oystercatcher, Greylag, Moorhen, Mallard and a Water Rail have been observed prospecting the wetland pools. A perfect Badger footprint has also been found in the clay pad inside the mink raft.



Badger footprint

## Ringling Recoveries – what do they tell us?

There is a great deal of activity going on currently in and around the net rides on the reserve with staff, ringers and volunteers tackling the recent growth of the willows and hawthorn. High vegetation means the birds often fly over the top of the nets so generally, on rotation, the trees adjacent to the rides are brought back into line.

Seeing all this going on I thought it might be worth a short article in Undergrowth to highlight what is achieved by all this hard work and consider some of the results in recent months.

The ringing group over the years has processed 129,962 birds on the reserve and many hundreds of these birds have been re-trapped or recovered elsewhere. Our ringing provides information on many things including site fidelity, life expectancy, migratory routes, year to year sustainability and productivity in the bird populations we catch.

We received recapture notifications in 2019 of 62 birds we had ringed and so far in 2020 we have had 9; together they are of 22 different species. It will surprise some to know our most common recovery is of European Storm-petrels and that has always been the case over the years. They are caught in good numbers overnight in the north of Scotland.

The league table for all last year's recoveries is as follows:

European Storm-petrel	17	Blackcap	2
Blue Tit	10	Siskin	2
Barn Owl	8	Black-headed Gull	2
Pied Flycatcher	5	Sandwich Tern	2
Redpoll	5	Reed Bunting	2
Oystercatcher	3	Tawny Owl	2
Herring Gull	2		



Chiffchaff

One of each was recovered of Guillemot, Razorbill, Arctic Tern, Garden Warbler, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Kestrel, Cormorant, Chiffchaff and Greylag Goose.

Of the birds recovered one Storm-petrel came from the Faroe Islands, a Razorbill and Chiffchaff came from France, and a Sandwich Tern from Italy. The Sandwich Tern was our most distant recovery from Staranzano, Italy and the oldest bird was the Arctic Tern found in Northumberland. Both terns were ringed at Cape Wrath.

To give some idea of the times and distances from ringing site to recovery of these birds I have produced the following random table which may be of interest:

	Days since ringing	Distance (KM)		Days since ringing	Distance (KM)
European Storm-petrel	1783	27	Blackcap	380	418
	707	419 (Faroes)	Siskin	392	212
	1068	26		72	158
	1062	255	Black-headed Gull	4579	264
Blue Tit	888	0		4319	3
	134	24	Sandwich Tern	3745	308
Barn Owl	996	0		2555	1889 (Italy)
	541	51	Tawny Owl	3207	10
	173	9	Guillemot	1949	40
	437	69	Razorbill	631	1121 (France)
Pied Flycatcher	1090	2	Arctic Tern	4747	386
	350	5	Garden Warbler	21	62
	342	53	Great Spotted Woodpecker	133	0
Redpoll	527	34	Reed Bunting	123	3
	1068	373	Cormorant	601	31
	262	84	Chiffchaff	76	1175 (France)
Oystercatcher	808	438	Greylag Goose	592	10
	1287	103	Kestrel	618	5
Herring Gull	6219	6			
	2131	7			
	938	98			

182 days = 6 months, 1095 days = 3 years, 1825 days = 5 years, 2555 days = 7 years, 3285 days = 9 years.

It will be immediately obvious that the larger birds live longer and often travel the greatest distances. But getting back to the Foxglove net rides, and the nest boxes, and the other ringing activities we get up to, this is just a snapshot of the past 29 years and the information we have accumulated over that time, much of which has contributed to various academic papers written by scientists throughout Europe. All of our many Black-headed Gull recoveries are from Ireland which is interesting and many of our smaller migrants, ringed initially as chicks, return to the area of their birth, including Foxglove, to raise their own young the following year. A great deal of information has been achieved from the contribution made by all at Foxglove. I am very grateful indeed to those involved.

As a footnote, opportunities exist for anyone committed and interested to join the ringing group. We have the busiest period of the year ahead of us which is an ideal time to get involved.



## Common Frogs and Common Toads



An army of frogs!

One of the signs of spring is the sound of male Common Frogs croaking in the ponds. They are calling the females. This is soon followed by seeing one, then two, then many

more swimming around in a relatively small area.

There is plenty of frogspawn in some of the ponds. On thinking about this all the spawn seen so far has been laid at the side of the ponds in the shallower areas, which according to folklore means that it is going to be a wet summer! If the spawn is laid in the deeper parts of the ponds, then it means it is going to be a dry summer.

Temperature plays an important role in the timing of the hatching of the spawn. Low temperatures mean it can take many days before hatching whilst warmer conditions see the tadpoles develop more quickly.

When the male frogs first arrive in the ponds having just come out of hibernation they are quite shy and soon they disappear under the water and into the vegetation, but as they become intent on calling in the females so they become much braver and although they disappear on being disturbed, soon come back to the surface and begin calling again.

The females follow the males into the ponds. They, like the males, have spent winter hibernating in log piles, holes in the ground, in mud, and some may even have stayed at the bottom of the ponds.

This year has seen much more activity than last year when sightings of frogs and spawn were low. Our last count reached 30!

If they are later returning to spawn, then they may only remain for a few days. If they reach the ponds early and the temperature drops then they may be seen for weeks, rather than days. Once spawning has finished, they disappear into the reserve to feed and prepare for the winter to come. They are rarely seen back in the ponds.

Once the frogs have left, we await the arrival of the Common Toads. Their call is much higher pitched and

almost sounds like a bird calling. They do not lay their spawn in the same areas as the frogs. The long skeins of eggs are entwined around vegetation.



Toad spawn

The male toads arrive first followed by the larger females.

Foxglove has a large toad population and once they come out of hibernation you must be careful where you walk and drive. Sometimes driving up the access road is a hazardous operation and requires stopping to remove the toads out of harm's way. I just hope that we put them on the right side of the road that they wish to travel to!

## Bonfire Cooking

Several families enjoyed cooking on an open fire as part of our February half term activities. Luckily, the weather was kind and the rain held off all day long.

The day began with some serious measuring and mixing to get the different bread doughs to just the right consistency. There was a bit of trial and error involved as this kind of cooking isn't an exact science!



Twister dough

Next, apples and potatoes wrapped in foil were put into the ash pile from the previous day's fire. They were carefully counted as they went in so that none would be missed when they were raked out again! There were fifteen potatoes or was it sixteen?!

Some of the dough was put into an oiled frying pan. The pan was then placed on the hot ash above the potatoes and apples



Bannock

to make delicious Bannock. This Scottish bread recipe makes a scone-like bread and according to tradition it must never be cut with a knife as this brings bad luck. Instead, it must be torn and

shared! The group decided to add raisins to this batch which worked out well.

Twister dough was cooked on the end of freshly cut willow, this bread requires a flame and two new small fires were made on an existing fire site using flint and steel.

No bonfire cookery event would be complete without a toasted marshmallow, which rounded off the session perfectly.

It was lovely to see the children so focused and enjoying the great outdoors.



Toasting marshmallows!



## A Fruitful Year for Fungus

The high rainfall and humid conditions in 2019, led to a particularly good year for fungi at Foxglove Covert.



Waxcap

In the conifer plantation there was a profusion of Buttercaps, Clouded Funnels and Common Puffballs.

Equally impressive was our discovery of numerous colourful Waxcaps in the short-cropped grass near Plover's Pool. Butter,

Blackening, Heath, Meadow, Parrot, Scarlet, Slimy and Snowy Waxcaps all delighted us.

We were also pleased this season to find Chestnut Dapperling, Dusky Puffball, Grey Knight, Purple Stocking, Webcap, Weeping Bolete and Yellow Stainer.

Yellow Stainer may look just like a Common Field Mushroom, but if eaten, it can cause severe gastric upsets



Green Elfcup

and therefore should be avoided by culinary foragers.

The small cup-shaped fruiting bodies of Green Elfcup are usually difficult to find but were

evident this year. This fungus causes the wood substrate to stain green and was often used in marquetry in the past.

We are looking forward to further discoveries in 2020.

*Pauline Corder and Chris Meek*

## Ways to Support Us

Do you live within 15 miles of Foxglove Covert and shop at the Co-op? If so, please would you be so kind as to select to support us. 1% of what you spend on selected Co-op branded products and services will be donated to us to further help our work on the reserve. Details on how to become a member and choose your cause can be found at [www.coop.co.uk/membership](http://www.coop.co.uk/membership)

Did you know that when buying from Amazon you could help support Foxglove Covert LNR, by making one

simple switch? Amazon will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of any item you buy, if you shop through: [smile.amazon.co.uk](http://smile.amazon.co.uk) selecting Foxglove Covert as your Charity. This is a really simple way to help us, and costs you nothing other than the purchase price of your items.

Looking for a gift for a wildlife enthusiast? We have a wide range of new books in the Field Centre such as Britain's Birds - an ID guide, Moth Snowstorm, Wildlife in Your Garden, British Wildflowers and the Trees Handbook. There are also some fantastic children's books including one of our favourites You're Called What?!

Our adopt a box scheme makes a lovely gift for someone who has everything and starts at just £6. Last year boxes at Foxglove were used by a variety of birds including Blue Tits, Coal Tits, Tawny and Barn Owls and bats. By



Adopt a box

sponsoring a box you will be helping to fund our conservation work, improving habitats for many species.

We also sell a wide range of different foods to meet the needs of all your garden bird visitors.

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