

Message from the Chair

It is great news to welcome Carl Watts to Foxglove as our new Senior Reserve Manager. Carl brings a wealth of experience, and it is good to have him on the team. Carl will be out and about as part of his induction to meet as many people as possible and I know you will make him welcome as he settles into the role.

It is a shame that the tree planting for the Queen's Canopy had to be cancelled on 4th February due to problems with a water main as all the Trustees and Lord Zetland (as Patron) were planning to attend. Nevertheless, our volunteers came good as ever and got the trees planted as soon as it was possible and created a woodland that we can be proud of not only as a woodland and habitat but to mark the significant service of Queen Elizabeth II as our Monarch. Many thanks to the Darlington & Stockton Times on 24th February for their write-up.

As we welcome Carl, I was going to use the tree-planting occasion as an opportunity to say a well-deserved thank you to Sophie as she moves on to her new job. Sophie has made a significant difference at Foxglove and had a custodianship of which she can be rightly proud. I know Sophie wants to remain part of the Foxglove family and we will see her about at the Reserve but for now a heartfelt thank you from everyone for what you have done and achieved.

Peter and on behalf of the Trustees - John, Mark and Tony

The long and winding road...



Carl Watts

Well, I'm here at last! Things often go full circle and as someone whose first job was at Richmond School long ago in 1992, it's lovely to be back with a smashing job on 'my patch'. Some of you will be wondering why a bloke with a history degree has been let loose at Foxglove Covert as a new member of the team. It's a long story, but I'll try to keep it quick. After a decade of teaching, I was ready for a change – a very specific change in an attempt to make

a positive difference in the environmental sector. Volunteering was my route in – with the Wildlife Trusts and local authority countryside sites, through which I gained

enough experience to land my first paid work in my chosen new field. It was at this point that I had my first experience of the wonderful Foxglove Covert LNR. I became Group Leader of the newly formed RSPB Richmondshire and Hambleton Local Group, and we held meetings here and enjoyed coming to see Ringing events, with the ever-enthusiastic Major Tony Crease at the helm.

Through further work at Teesmouth and Lindisfarne National Nature Reserves, and with the RSPB and Yorkshire Wildlife Trust I just kept learning more, somewhat akin to the first few days I've experienced here at Foxglove (I've gone into what I refer to as 'sponge mode'!) My last role was with the North York Moors National Park, working on environmental schemes with the farming community. I wasn't even looking for a change of job, and then it appeared – the advert for Senior Reserve Manager at Foxglove Covert LNR. I simply had to put in an application, and I'm very pleased I did, as it's given me a chance to say 'hello' to you through Undergrowth.

I'm fascinated by wildlife, love being in the great outdoors and am very much enjoying getting started with the team here at Foxglove Covert. It's a great time of year to get involved as the first frogs have appeared (in something of a frisky mood!) and primroses have been spotted on the reserve. I would write more, but I'm afraid that the competing male bullfinches near the feeding station are just too distracting...

I'm looking forward to seeing you the next time you visit Foxglove – please come and say hello.

Carl Watts – Senior Reserve Manager

IMPORTANT – Changes to Undergrowth

As a nature based charity we are always looking for ways to make ourselves more environmentally friendly. Like many offices we are trying to become 'paperless' and only print out what is absolutely necessary. This has become even more forefront in our mind after we had to fell so many Ash trees due to Ash dieback.

We have therefore taken the decision to make this the last printed edition of Undergrowth. Nearly two thirds of our Friends have kindly supported us moving in this direction over the last couple of years agreeing to have their copy emailed to them. With postage costs continuing to rise and charity funding becoming harder to obtain by making this change we will save our £600 annually as well as volunteer time fulfilling the mailing.

Please see the enclosed information sheet and form for more details and options should you not have access to email (we don't want anyone to miss out). Many thanks.

In the year 3000

If you have walked around the red route in the last few weeks, you might have seen our new forest of plastic. 301 biodegradable tree tubes sticking out of the ground in what was once an Ash woodland.

I have written about Ash dieback in a previous Undergrowth article, so I will keep this bit short. Simply, we decided that if an Ash tree is near any public access space it would be felled for safety reasons. In other areas that the public do not enter we chose to monitor them, to see if they survive.

One area of concern for us was the outdoor classroom, tall but thin Ash trees covered the whole area. Some trees began to show signs of the disease, so before rushing ahead we consulted with the Forestry Commission. Their main aim is “protecting, promoting and expanding the sustainable management of woodlands”. They advised us that even trees that seemed okay actually had the disease and that the whole area needed to be felled.

This is no easy task. We had to look at the bigger picture. We couldn't work in the area until the winter period so that nothing would be disturbed such as bird nests. Safety barriers had to be put in place and find someone with the skill to fell Ash trees safely. Luckily, we have Sean our singing tree surgeon. Felling the trees took over two weeks, with tonnes of logs being produced.

How do you get around 100 tonnes of logs out of the wood? With a mini forwarder, of which only two are in the UK. This machine was able to move 3 tonnes of logs at a time and over a few days managed to remove the logs to a collection site. Whilst the forwarder was working Mother Nature decided to intervene and heavy rain made the whole process very difficult. The ground became saturated and the wild flower meadow had two rivers flowing through it.

Brash was then burnt over many days whilst other volunteers and contractors cleared and landscaped the area, a huge task. Finally, we finished in January 2023.

In October 2021 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II created a nationwide initiative called the Queens Green Canopy (QGC) to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee. This was only planned for one planting season, however, a one-year extension of the QGC initiative was given as a lasting tribute to Her Majesty's extraordinary service to her country and her people. The QGC will now finish in March 2023. So, with one 'Worky day' left this winter, we decided to go for it. A plaque to unveil and 301 trees planted at Foxglove in a single day was our goal! The shiny spade was polished with Lord Zetland, our Patron, invited to plant the first tree. The local press and a photographer had also been invited and a curry lunch for 50 volunteers booked. Hayley and myself had planned everything to the last detail, apart from having no water!



Souvenir Square

Severn Trent water had broken the main water supply pipe to the reserve and also to Catterick. On advice from Severn Trent, we had to cancel the event; morale in the office was low. This did not last long; on Tuesday we decided that the trees needed to be planted and we went for it. A DIY VIP was chosen, and the planting began.



Brian, our chosen VIP planting the first tree

The following species have all been planted, Birch, Hornbeam, Willow, Rowan, Cherry, Sessile Oak and Field Maple.

We finished the same day, thank you everybody who took part and assisted us in becoming part of the QGC. Please go to the website and find us on their map!

So why have I called this “In the year 3000”?

In Cowdray Park West Sussex stands the Queen Elizabeth Oak, this Oak is a Sessile Oak and is between 800 and 1000 years old. Our volunteers have just planted 50 of these Sessile Oaks. Who knows, maybe one of them will still be here in the year 3000.

I hope so.

Gerry Dorrington, Reserve Manager

Moorhen Colour Ringing Project

Despite being common birds, relatively little is known about the survival and movements of Moorhens. To better understand this species, and to inform conservation, the Waterbird Colour-Marking Group has set up a colour ringing project across Britain and Ireland. Each bird is fitted with a bright orange plastic colour ring in addition to the British Trust for Ornithology metal ring for easier identification in the field.

Several individuals have now been caught and colour-ringed at Foxglove. These birds can be aged by looking at the colour of their beak and shield, and the whiteness of the feathers on their chin and front. The sex of each individual can be determined by the length of the wing. All have green legs and very large feet, perfect for the freshwater habitats they are found in.



A19



A19 showing his colours!



A22 - an adult male

A19, a male bird born last year, has quickly become a favourite at Foxglove. Since his initial ringing he has been caught several more times in the duck trap, apparently unable to resist the delicious bird food inside! The colours on his beak and shield have developed considerably since he was first caught in December. Interestingly, it is thought that the brightness of the red and yellow bill are indicators of the health of an individual Moorhen, with brighter colours relating to lower levels of bacterial infection. Moorhens are also interesting in that they are one of only two cooperatively breeding bird species in the UK, with older chicks helping their parents to rear younger ones.

Please let a Reserve Manager know if you spot A19 or any of the other colour-ringed individuals or report your sightings to the Waterbird Colour-Marking Group (<https://waterbirdcolourmarking.org/moorhen>) as this will provide vital information about their movements and survival.

Thank you to everyone involved in this important conservation project!

Hayley Land
Reserve Manager

Spot the Ladybird!

Foxglove is home to many ladybirds, as shown in the table below. Most of our ladybirds are common and widespread across England. However, the Striped Ladybird is very local and has not been recorded at Foxglove since 2012, which reflects generally on the sightings and recording of Foxglove's ladybirds over the last few years.



Seven-spot Ladybird

Ladybird	Food	Habitat
Cream-spot Ladybird	Aphids	Deciduous trees, especially Ash but also on Beech, Lime and Oak
Eyed Ladybird	Aphids	Conifers and mixed woods
Fourteen-spot Ladybird	Aphids	Various habitats including grasslands, scrub and woodland
Heather Ladybird	Scale insects	Heathland but also on Bracken, Bramble and Gorse
Hieroglyphic Ladybird	Larvae feed on larvae of Heather Leaf Beetle, whilst adults also feed on Heather Aphid	Heathland
Kidney-spot Ladybird	Scale insects	Diverse range of habitats, at Foxglove they have been found on Ash and Willow
Larch Ladybird	Adelgids, (a type of aphid) also aphids and Scale insects	Mainly in Conifer areas
Orange Ladybird	Mildew on deciduous trees	Woodland, mainly on Sycamore, Oak and Ash
Pine Ladybird	Scale insects and Woolly Aphids	Conifers
Seven-spot Ladybird	Greenfly	Many different habitats
Sixteen-spot Ladybird	Pollen, nectar and fungi	Grasslands
Striped Ladybird	Large brown aphids	Conifers
Ten-spot Ladybird	Aphids	Deciduous trees
Two-spot Ladybird	Aphids	Varied habitats, deciduous trees

Ladybirds are insects with a head, thorax, abdomen, three pairs of legs and two pairs of wings. One pair of wings is hardened and forms a case over the body. The flight wings are folded and are protected by the outer hardened wings. In flight the hardened wings are held at an angle away from the body. Red, yellow and orange colouring gives a warning to predators that they do not taste nice!

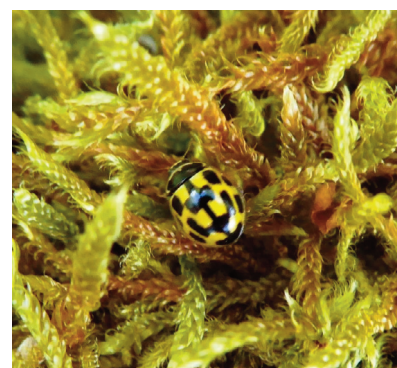
Eggs are laid and then the larvae hatches. These larvae are voracious feeders. They undergo several moults (shedding of its skin) to enable them to grow. Once fully grown they pupate and finally hatch into ladybirds.



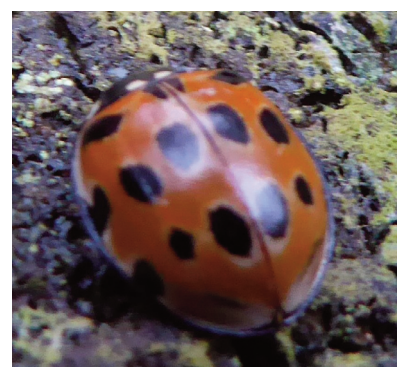
Kidney-spot Ladybirds

We are asking visitors, volunteers, staff and experts to record any ladybird sightings. Dates and place would be useful additions to our data. There will be photographs of the various species on the observation board, but if you are unsure then a photograph would be helpful and can be sent to foxglovelnr@btinternet.com and we will do our best to identify the species.

Elizabeth Dickinson



Fourteen-spot Ladybird



Eyed Ladybird

Portland Trip 2022

In October 2022, there was an exciting change to the normal Foxglove Covert ringing routine. Four members of the ringing group (Sophie, Hayley, Vix and Aaron) travelled 350 miles South to the Portland Bird Observatory on the Dorset Coast for a week's ringing trip. Here, we met up with the Southern arm of Swaledale Ringing Group (Jack Daw), plus other members of the wider ringing network: Ian Grier, and Army Ornithological Society members Mark Cutts and Roger Dickey. Armed with tea supplies and plenty of baked treats, the team arrived at the Observatory looking forward to six days of good company, different birds, and learning all we could - for both the trainees and experienced ringers! Ask about our new net furling technique next time you see us around Foxglove!

Portland Bird Observatory and its associated field centre has been based at Portland's Old Lower Lighthouse since the early 1960s. Due to its prime location on the South Coast, sticking nearly six miles out into the English Channel, Portland Bill is often the first point in the UK where birds make land after flying from Europe. As a result, the Bird Observatory is ideally situated for encountering migratory species, as well as the odd vagrant from the continent (if the wind is blowing the right way). The site draws people from the UK and beyond, and during our stay there were a constant stream of keen birders plus overnight visitors hoping to strike lucky by spotting a rarity. Even on the first day, there was excitement as a Wryneck had taken up temporary residence in a nearby quarry, and a short bit of birdwatching rewarded us with a glimpse too.

We faced one big challenge during the week: the weather! Howling gales did not make for ideal mist netting conditions, but did create entertainment when we were trying to keep on our feet in the strong "sea breezes". While this limited our opportunities to get the mist nets up, we nevertheless managed to squeeze in a few good morning sessions at both the Observatory and another site just down the road (Culverwell), which was managed by one of the AOS ringers. The nets proved fruitful, and highlights included a beautiful Firecrest near the beginning of the week and early-season Redwings on the final day.



Firecrest

We were not to be beaten by a little bit of wind, and the expertise and creativity of the experienced ringers in our group meant there were plenty of opportunities to use some alternative capture techniques for other species. At times when it was too windy to put out the nets, we re-focused our efforts down onto the shoreline to try our luck at catching Rock Pipits using spring traps. These traps consisted of a sprung wired net attached to a board and were baited with a nice wriggling mealworm. Once a bird grabbed the worm, the trap sprung to catch it in the net, and one of us would dash over (carefully, across slippery seaweed!) to extract the individual. This was a new species for many of our group, and it was amazing to see these hardy little birds. They also outwitted us humans a couple of times, managing to get the worms without springing the traps. Finally, thanks to this new-found practice with the spring traps, one particular highlight came in the middle of the week: we were lucky to catch a young Black Redstart

which appeared just outside the Observatory kitchen one afternoon. This involved setting a trap on a shed roof, leaving a trail of mealworms, and then retreating to watch from the kitchen window with baited breath!

Overall, we ringed just over 100 birds during the trip, which was a really good total considering the conditions. This included a wide array of species, with some of the usual suspects at Foxglove, plus more unusual encounters: Blackbird (including some likely "continental" individuals, judged by their plumage), Blackcap, Black Redstart, Blue Tit, Chaffinch, Chiffchaff, Dunnock, Firecrest, Goldcrest, Goldfinch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Great Tit, Linnet, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Redwing, Reed Bunting, Robin, Rock Pipit, Song Thrush, Stonechat, Whinchat, Wren... and not counting the other species we saw, but didn't catch.

It was a week filled with valuable learning experiences, good humour, excellent food (Masterchef had no competition on us), and of course, some brilliant birds. The ringing team is looking forward to returning in 2023!

Vix Franks



Home for the week!



Hayley and Sophie wrapped up for the wild

Upcoming Events

For more information on any of our events or to book your place please visit our website -

<https://www.foxglovecovert.org.uk/events>

Monday 3rd April

Wildlife Photo Workshop 10am -3pm

£8 per adult, £5 for Friends of Foxglove, free U16.

Booking is essential as places are limited.

Saturday 15th April

Bilberry Bee Event - all day

Wednesday 26th April

Spring Walk 2-4pm

£5 donation - free for Friends of Foxglove and volunteers.

Booking is essential as places are limited.

Monday 8th May

Dawn Chorus Walk 5.30-7.30am

£5 donation - free for Friends of Foxglove and volunteers.

Booking is essential as places are limited.

Wednesday 9th August

Family Discovery Day 10am-3pm

A minimum donation of £5 per child (well behaved adults and under 3's go free)!

Booking is essential as places are limited.

Wednesday 30th August

Family Discovery Day 10am-3pm

A minimum donation of £5 per child (well behaved adults and under 3's go free)!

Booking is essential as places are limited.

Keep in touch!

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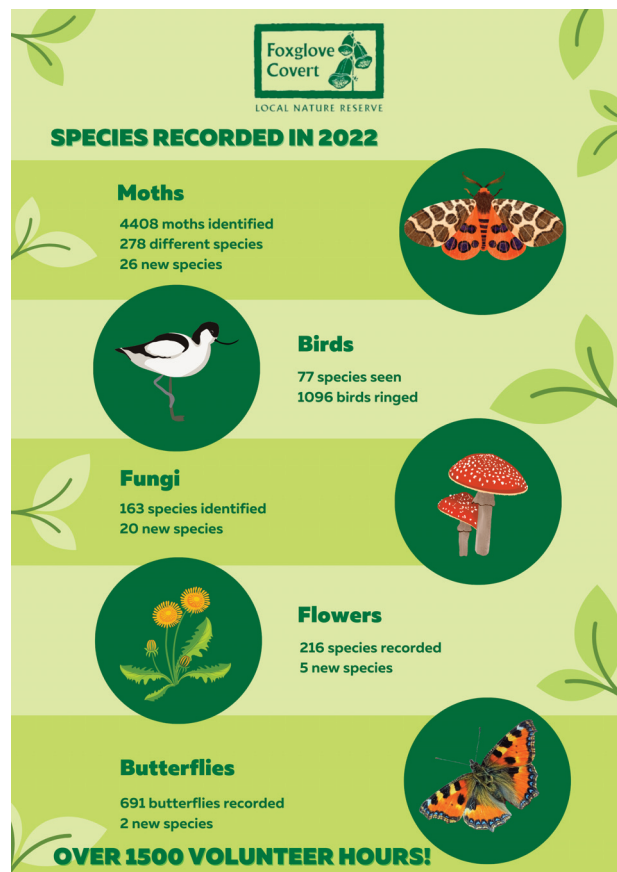
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2022 – The results are in!



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

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