

## Moth Trapping at Foxglove Covert

The moth group arrive every Wednesday morning, full of anticipation to discover what is in the moth trap. Sometimes it is totally empty and other times it can have more than 200 moths to identify! We have a system – those to be identified are on the table nearest the window, whilst



Releasing and photographing the moths

those counted and recorded go on the next table. The records are entered into the Species Programme and every three or four months they are sent to Dr Charlie Fletcher, the VC65 Moth Recorder. There is always an opportunity to photograph the moths as we release them. Sometimes they can be most helpful and sit exactly where we place them, but more often they fly quickly off into the depths of the vegetation, leaving us saying ‘better luck next time’! Although we do like to put the trap out all year round, it is controlled by the weather; wet, windy and very cold conditions are not suitable. Unfortunately, the weather has not been ideal over the last couple of months, ranging from mild temperatures but with strong winds, to freezing temperatures with not a breeze. We always keep an eye on the ten-day forecasts and remain hopeful!



Eyed Hawk-moth

The moth trap is often placed on the back verandah of the Field Centre, but on fine nights it can be placed in a variety of habitats. We applied to the MoD Conservation Group Fund for an additional moth trap and containers – and we have been successful! We would like to thank Richard Brooks, Head of MoD Conservation, Dr Moira Owen (BSc PhD MCIEEM) and Hannah Mintram, for their support and assistance. The second trap will enable us to expand our horizons and place the traps in more varied habitats. We have a Moth Morning lead by Dr Charlie Fletcher on Saturday 8th June commencing at 8am. There will be several traps set out around the reserve, which will be returned to the Field Centre where Dr Fletcher will expertly identify the species we find. We are also holding our own Foxglove Moth Morning on Wednesday 3rd July, beginning at 9am. More details for both of these activities are on the Events Page on our website.



Recording and identifying with Charlie Fletcher

If you are interested in finding out more about our regular days, a warm welcome will await you on any Wednesday morning when we identify the moths, fortified by a cup of tea and biscuits. Until the warmer weather it would be best to contact the Reserve Managers on a Tuesday afternoon to see if the trap is out, if you wish to attend.

*Elizabeth Dickinson*

## Introducing our local Wildlife Crime Officers

It's a great pleasure for myself, PC 1908 Mark Wood and my colleague PC 558 Julian Sutcliffe, to be able to contribute to Undergrowth. Julian is based in Leyburn and is the Beat Manager and a Wildlife Crime Officer, I'm based in Richmond and am the Rural Beat Manager for Richmond and also a Wildlife Crime Officer. We work together dealing with all manner of incidents, anything from cross-border crime, to vulnerable people, thefts, damage – the list goes on, but thankfully we live in a very safe part of the country. Julian and I specialise in wildlife crime, which is why we are contributing to this newsletter. The main thing for us to say and express to you all, is that we totally rely on people like yourselves to report incidents to us. Wildlife crime is high on North Yorkshire Police's agenda. We take reports seriously and will investigate them fully. We have one of the worst records for raptor persecution in the country, but as you can appreciate, finding offenders and dealing with them, is incredibly difficult. However, some of our best evidence comes from people who are out walking and enjoying the countryside, seeing something they are not comfortable with, or know is illegal. In our next article I will be giving you some ideas of what things to look for when you're out and about in the countryside, and what to do if you do discover something you think may be illegal. In the meantime, if you want to contact us about anything, you can email us: mark.wood@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk or Julian.sutcliffe@northyorkshire.pnn.police.uk – or report it on 101. We also actively encourage people to sign up to 'community messenger' as a great way to find out what's going on in your area. If you go on to the North Yorkshire Police home page you will find a link to this, and it's free.

*Mark Wood*

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# Undergrowth

Issue number 49 Winter to Spring 2019

The newsletter of Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve

## From the Editor

After a very cold spell in January, suddenly it is feeling a lot more like spring; the dawn chorus is starting to be more noticeable each morning, and a Brimstone butterfly was spotted on the reserve this week! Everything is getting ready for the new season's growth,



Brimstone butterfly

including the wetlands and woodland, after the hard work that the Reserve Managers and volunteers have been putting in to their maintenance and restoration. We have lovely reports on fungi and moths in this issue of Undergrowth, and an update on the Ringing Group, as we look forward to our 28th season of CES, which is a remarkable feat of dedication!

It's a busy time on the reserve as we work hard to complete projects, with spring hot on our heels!

*Catherine Hayden*

## Message from the Chair

I am delighted to introduce myself as the new Chair of Foxglove Covert Management Group; I have taken on the role as our previous Chairperson, Sophie Crease, has returned to the Reserve as our new Senior Manager.



Chair of the Management Group,  
Janet Boakes

I live only a few miles from the reserve and my husband and I have been keen visitors since we moved to the area. We have an exciting year ahead with two new members joining the Management Group: Ken Ezard and Mick Lynch; and two new Reserve Managers: Sophie, and Imogen Lloyd. We are embracing

technology with more involvement in social media, a new website and a card reader which will allow us to take direct payments for sales from the shop and events.

There is indeed a lot of work to do and one of our aims this year is to increase the number of volunteers who work on the reserve, without whom we couldn't manage.

With the help of our volunteers we would like to expand the number of fundraising and community events we are involved in, and are always keen to hear about any ideas for projects that our visitors have.

An example of one such project is the Tesco Bags of Help Scheme. We have been successful in an application for a grant and will be put forward to a customer vote during March and April. Each time you shop at Tesco in Catterick Garrison you should get a blue token to cast a vote in a container near the front door. We could receive up to £4,000, so as they say "Every Little Helps"!



Tesco tokens

*Janet Boakes*

## First impressions

When I first visited Foxglove, I was amazed by the vast array of habitats, from the Scrapes to the Wetland, to the Woodlands and Willow Carr, and discovered how it really is a special place. Hidden away on the edge of a military camp, it is a fantastic place for wildlife.

I graduated in 2017 from the University of Leeds with a degree in Zoology having always had a passion for wildlife and the outdoors. I then undertook a six month Traineeship with the Wildlife Trust in Oxfordshire, followed by a six month post as a Seabird Research Volunteer with the RSPB at Bempton Cliffs, where my passion for birds really grew. I started working at



Imogen, making friends with the Exmoor ponies

Foxglove in October of last year, where I have been lucky to be able to combine my love for the outdoors, with my interest in birds and bird ringing.

While Foxglove may not be huge in size, its variety certainly keeps us on our toes as Reserve Managers. Every day throws up new challenges (and jobs!), we could be coppicing, pulling reeds from the wetland, clearing fallen trees, mending bridges and boardwalks, leading events and walks, or planning activities for the many school groups who enjoy coming to Foxglove. The variety of the job is what makes it so unique, and there are certainly very few other places where every day is quite so different. It has been great to get to know the regular volunteers, as well as meeting new ones, and we are very grateful for all their help, we couldn't do it without them!

*Imogen Lloyd, Reserve Manager*

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## Major Projects on the Reserve

If you have visited Foxglove in recent months you may have heard the clanking of a digger, the humming of a dumper truck or the constant whirring of a chainsaw, as there have been some major habitat improvement projects taking place. Firstly, an area of old conifer plantation adjacent to Risedale Beck has been thinned. This work was recommended by botanist Martin Hammond who surveyed the beck last summer. His advice was to thin out some of the old Sitka Spruce trees in order to allow more light to reach the woodland floor. He explained that there are many species of dormant wildflower that will flourish in this area as a result. Foxgloves, Wood Anemone and Bluebells are some of the flowers that it is hoped will appear in the newly created glades over the next few years. The felling is now complete, with staff and volunteers working hard to tidy the area by burning the pine brash and re-edging the footpaths.

Secondly, the main wetland to the south-west of the reserve is being restored. This wetland, originally constructed in 2009, was in much need of some TLC. When it was first created, it was an excellent breeding ground for wader birds such as Curlew, Lapwing, Oystercatcher and Redshank; all of these waders enjoy a low sward of vegetation alongside



Restoring the wetland

new one will be easily visible from the green trail and the path will be shielded by a bank of earth to minimize disturbance to the birds. In the long term, it is hoped that a small hide can be installed for visitors to enjoy viewing the area. The works will no doubt be closely supervised by the resident Exmoor ponies! Foxglove is certainly a dynamic place with something new and exciting around every corner!

*Sophie Crease, Senior Reserve Manager*



Thinning the conifer plantation

wet margins. Sadly, years of livestock grazing, along with incredible summer growth, meant that many of the original bunds, dams and sluices were in need of repair, and several pools were completely overgrown with rushes and reeds. Unfortunately, there are not enough funds to restore the whole of the wet meadows, however around half of them will be cleared by March. Some of the ponds are of UK flagship quality in terms of biodiversity and are home to a rare mud snail. These will remain untouched (they are not joined to the artificial pools) as their ecosystems are too delicate to be disturbed.

Finally, a fundraising appeal is being launched to raise money for a new wetland scrape on the far moor. The plan is to carve a large, new, shallow pool with varying depths to encourage more waders on to the reserve. Similar to Plover’s pool, the

## Fascinated with Fungi

There are about 15,000 species of fungi in the UK. They tend to be more abundant with damp, cool autumn conditions, when they can most often be seen in woodlands and grassland, but can be found all year round. Fungi fulfil a range of varied and vital roles, from helping plants draw water and nutrients from the soil, and breaking down dead plant and animal material, to their use in medicines that can lower blood cholesterol or enable organ transplants; parasitic fungi cause disease and eventual death to trees and plants – however, many organisms take advantage of the habitats this provides for food and shelter.

As a child I enjoyed collecting Field mushrooms, *Agaricus campestris*, with my father, in our fields, and seeking out more colourful species in local woods, which I had always been told never to touch, as, whilst many fungi are edible, some are extremely poisonous. I was totally unaware that the colourful shapes I saw above ground were the fruiting bodies of the fungus, whose role was to produce and release spores, and that the main structure was hidden from view. In most instances, fungi



Copper Spike

are composed of thin hair-like filaments, hyphae, a dense network of which forms the mycelium, which lies hidden and grows continuously to gather new food reserves. They cannot photosynthesise their food, as they lack chlorophyll, but they are able to exploit most natural raw materials and derive their energy from a saprophytic or parasitic existence, dissolving substances on which they are living, into simple compounds. Some have very specific requirements, whilst others are associated with a wide range of tree or plant species. They play a complex role in food chains and are a vital part of the cycle of life. Fungi themselves are favoured by many insect species, including moths, flies, beetles and weevils, and also slugs and snails. The hairy fungus beetle, *Mycetophagus piceus*, feeds on the mycelium of Chicken of the Woods, *Laetiporus sulphureus*, whilst its fruiting bodies appear to be the key larval habitat for the beetles, *Eledona agricola* and *Hallomenus binotatus*. Ranging in size from pinhead moulds, which grow on bread and other food, to giant puffballs, found in grassland, the variety of shapes, colours, sizes and lifestyle of fungi, can be fascinating and absorbing. Descriptive English names such as Copper Spike, Elfin Saddle, Blushing Bracket, Plums and Custard, Bleeding Broadleaf Crust, Horsehair Parachute, Glistening Inkcap and Turkey Tail, to name but a few, increase interest and aid identification. These, and many more, are found at Foxglove. Up to date 337 fungi species have been recorded here, but there are more still to discover. Armed with cameras, lenses and reference books, we regularly enjoy a wander around the reserve to see what we can find. There’s such a wealth, that our searches are always rewarding and enjoyable.

*Pauline Cordner*



Field mushrooms

## Bird Ringing Update

The nucleus of the Ringing Team held their annual meeting recently to discuss the forthcoming season, covering a multitude of topics from nest recording to the Constant Effort Scheme (CES) and future possibilities locally and further afield.

The ringing totals from 2018 were down and whilst still significant it is obvious that fewer species flourished during last summer’s hot weather. Winter catches had also been poor and outings fewer, with wet and windy weather often on the cards.

With reduced numbers of ringers due to people moving on, the challenge of 12 CES days in 2019 was high on the agenda. These are long days from an hour or so before dawn (often 0230) to well into the afternoon. I’m pleased to report there was support to continue the scheme for the 28th successive season and a commitment from the floor to help wherever possible. Only time will tell what is achievable.

Our 750 or so nest boxes were another topic of conversation and it is our intention that various people will take on responsibilities for certain woodlands requesting help from the others as necessary. The moorland waders are to be dealt with using the same principle.

The advantages of the many additional ringing locations were covered and it is hoped that as many as possible will be visited when time permits. We are very lucky indeed to have some outstanding ringing sites.

Operation Auk at Cape Wrath will run for the 28th year and the accommodation is already booked. We have also confirmed that five ringers will again go to Dividalen in Norway, which is a truly unique experience.

There were many other issues on the agenda including the potential upgrading of some of our younger and newer members. The new year offers lots of interesting and exciting opportunities which we hope will be matched by reasonable weather.

Recent months have produced several interesting recoveries of birds we have ringed which have been found dead or alive, producing further data on the movements and life expectancy of various species. Over 100 recoveries are received every year.

In conclusion, all Friends and Volunteers reading this should be aware they are welcome to join us for any of our ringing sessions at almost any time and should contact the Field Centre office for further details.

*Tony Crease*



Operation Auk