

**Foxglove Covert Local Nature Reserve Report**  
**Conservation Group Meeting – Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025**

Carl Watts and El Biggs

**Reserve Management**

- **Foxglove Covert security gate** – functioning for the past few months, allowing for significant increase in public engagement, especially through school holiday.
- **Foxglove Covert lease renewal** – ongoing.
- **Foxglove Covert Management Plan** – Autumn 2025 revision ongoing.
- **Staffing changes** – Carl has resigned as Reserve Manager with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> October, El will temporarily fill the role until the new Reserve Manager starts.
  
- **Habitat works:**
  - Grassland development – work on new woodmeadow continues, last workshop with Plantlife completed August 2025.
  - Meadows around the reserve currently being cut and raked using scythes, power scythe and strimmers.
  - Woodland management – coppicing of willow and hazel to commence this winter.
  - Scrub removal on heathland (Personal Learning College, Northallerton) ongoing.
  - Wetland management – started scything vegetation in pond-dipping ponds, to be continued through Autumn in ponds around site.
  
- **Infrastructure works:**
  - Dead hedging - along edge of conifer plantation started to deter visitors from leaving the path and going into the plantation. Hedge created along back edge of main meadow.
  - Boardwalk and bridge repairs – ongoing.
  - Path maintenance – ongoing. Plan being developed for improved path network – see section on 2027 developments.
  - The Lake dam – shutter boards added to raise lake level taken out due to leak beyond a certain level (which is lower than ideal for breeding birds).
  - Outdoor Classroom – whole roof has been replaced.
  - Upper lake hide still closed due to structural concerns.
  - Stepping stones created across Risedale Beck as an alternative to weak bridge.
  - Wetland tower hide was temporarily closed due to wasps nest.
  - Defibrillator introduced into Foxglove Covert Field Centre.
  - Launch of revamped shop within Field Centre.

- Bullet catcher declared out of bounds and added to MOD demolition list.
- Assault Course inspected and due to be fenced off.

## **Monitoring & Surveying**

- Weekly monitoring of species groups is ongoing as applicable to the season.
- Revised UK BMS transect is in operation and transects have been submitted to UK BMS by volunteers.
- 2025 Reptile survey ongoing for Amphibian & Reptile Conservation.
- Arrangements made for casual bird ringing to commence at the reserve.
- Small bird boxes monitored. Successful breeding year for Great Tits, Coal Tits and Blue Tits on the reserve.
- Dragonfly surveys throughout the summer, and well attended Dragonfly Walk with County Recorder, Keith Gittens.
- Bat boxes surveyed 5<sup>th</sup> September; no roosting bats found.
- Moth trapping continues with success, Moth Day 2025 with visiting Charlie Fletcher (county recorder) went ahead July 30<sup>th</sup>. New moth species continue to be identified.
- Concerning number of dead small mammals (mice, voles, shrews) found consistently in spring & early summer, likely due to drought conditions (less frequent but sightings continue into September).
- No breeding waders on Spigot Mere due to drought and disturbance by corvids, gulls and geese.
- Amphibians (toads and frogs) seemingly unaffected by drought despite incredibly low water levels in ponds with tadpoles.
- Common Lizard sightings continue into September.
- Hedgehog seen (last record in 2013).
- Merlin sighted in August.
- Breeding Stonechat confirmed, 2 juveniles sighted.
- Little Grebes successfully bred on lake again this year, 3 juveniles.
- Spotted Flycatcher seen in the garden.
- Flocks of approx. 30 Crossbills seen starting 29<sup>th</sup> July, sightings consistent and ongoing.
- Consistent kingfisher sightings (2 individuals).
- Grasshopper warbler heard for three weeks in summer.
- Consistent sightings of Green Woodpecker, including on the ground in the car park.
- Fantastic year for Silver Washed Fritillary butterflies (and for many other butterfly species).
- Sudden explosion of rats in August have required control measures.

## **Engagement**

- Footfall has noticeably increased following improved gate performance.
- Work with Plantlife and the Woodmeadow Network of local groups has now concluded, but the Personnel Recovery Centre will continue to contribute to Woodmeadow project.
- Visit by staff from Northeast and Yorkshire Regions of Forestry Commission to discuss ringbarking in conifer plantation.
- Hosted Richmond & District Beekeepers' Association Introduction to Beekeeping training at the end of May.
- Loan of taxidermy Curlew to Kirkleatham Museum, for the extended “The cry of the curlew” exhibition.
- Hosted a 4<sup>th</sup> Birthday party, including pond dipping.
- National Meadows Day in July held at Hazel Brow Farm, Swaledale. Scything demonstration from Foxglove Covert staff.
- School education sessions delivered to a range of local schools.
- U3A, heritage & naturalist group guided walks
- Personalised Learning College (Northallerton) at Foxglove Covert every week, supporting learning disabled young adults.
- Employee action days with a range of organisations delivered, including Environment Agency, Tilbury Douglas and Babcock.
- New website successfully launched, integrated with Eventbrite event booking site.
- Scything courses to teach how to scythe delivered.
- Weekly event held over the school summer holidays a strong success, with lots of new and returning visitors.

### **Engagement with the military**

- Major Nicola Lancaster is now established as one of our Trustees.
- Redevelopment of Munster Barracks 2027 – Multiple meetings with MOD/DIO staff, including Lt Col Anderson, Lt Col Jenkins, Major Udy, Major Leighton has led to the development of a new entrance to Foxglove Covert – see separate section below.
- Armed Forces Covenant Trust bid – unsuccessful.
- MOD Rehabilitation Team practical task and team building.
- Personnel Recovery Centre (PRC) continue working on wood meadow project.
- PRC created new stepping stones across Risedale Beck
- PRU involved in Army Welfare Day - 8<sup>th</sup> May
- Risedale School / Army Welfare Service – Bushcraft/Outdoor Scheme established, with more sessions planned.
- Field centre hired for Army team building sessions.

## **New Entrance**

- Lt Col Anderson and Lt Col Jenkins met on site with Tilbury Douglas (TD) to scope out TD's involvement in the project. TD were keen to progress works as a Social Value project.
- Works completed after 4 weeks include entrance track to reserve from Waitwith Road, car park and overflow car park, path from car park to reserve path network.
  - Material for works sourced from recycled waste material at the new medical centre build, which helped reduce environmental impact and carbon footprint.
  - Work completed by TD at no expense to Foxglove Covert or the MOD
- Works still required (underway) include brown tourist signs, additional directional signs, internal path accessibility improvements, welcome signs and interpretation, etc.
  - £30k funding bid for internal path improvements approved by Richard Brooks (DIO) in September 2025
- Possible opening of new entrance in Q1 or 2 of 2026.