

Annual Report

March 2014-

February 2015



Registered charity no. 1076362

It has been another busy year for YACWAG in which volunteers have been active in many areas, especially practical conservation work on its own reserves and other nature reserves in the parishes.

YACWAG continues to develop in terms of membership growth, volunteer participation and public profile. YACWAG is financially robust and balanced in terms of reserves to meet contingent liabilities and has sufficient funds to progress its charitable objectives.

The Executive Committee wishes to express its gratitude for the support of the membership and partnership organizations during the year.



Communication

We hope members will like this new approach to presenting YACWAG's achievements and performance during the previous year. As part of the Executive Committee's review of communication and publicity, the newsletter changed from paper to digital. This has enabled more flexibility in its production and an enlarged format with new features. The serialised history of YACWAG and profiles of some of its key volunteers have proved very popular.

Reserves Management



YACWAG invested over £6000 in management work on its reserves. Professional help was used for tree pollarding, hedge-laying and scrub clearance. A programme of works to improve water levels in ditches on Congresbury Moor was completed.

Work was carried out at Kenn Moor Reserve, with hedges on all four sides of the smaller field now renovated by traditional hedge-laying skills. YACWAG's Action Team worked closely with contractors and carried out the time-consuming clearing

and burning the brash. This work not only saved money but provided an opportunity for exercise and sociability on seven occasions.

Six volunteer workparties improved the scrub areas on the Strawberry Line Junction Reserve near Yatton station. The team carried out coppicing, creating open glades for biodiversity and making habitat piles with the cut material. An area further south near Biddle Street was also opened up to allow more sunlight in.



In St Mary's Churchyard, Yatton, over seven Saturday mornings, volunteers improved a large area and laid a hedge on the boundary with the support of local contractor, Malcolm Dowling. The work was much appreciated by the church and the community.

A hedgelaying training day was also held on North Somerset Council land at Cadbury Hill and Bob Young and his team worked hard to clear away the brash.



Some tasks during the year involved ingenuity and planning. A team of six made and installed new owl boxes on Kenn Moor Reserve, Stowey Reserve and the Strawberry Line Junction Reserve. In all at least 26 people regularly joined in with the practical work.



Species Surveying

YACWAG continues to collect data through regular bird, otter, bat, small mammal and invertebrate surveys. The annual Christmas bird survey was complemented with a suburban bird survey. The year started with YACWAG's second mini-conference with its various specialised recording groups displaying their wares, presenting results and plans for further work. The conference also gave an opportunity to discuss YACWAG's future direction and generate ideas for action.



It was clear that YACWAG had a developing team of committed volunteers with a wide range of experience and skills. The results of all surveys are passed onto the Bristol Region Environmental Records Centre.

Protecting Local Species



YACWAG was successful with barn owls and tawny owls nesting on Congresbury Moor and Littlewood reserves. Barn owls reared a record 14 young. Jack and common snipe overwinter in the reserve fields, proving that they provide stepping stones for moving across the landscape. YACWAG's understanding of this movement is enhanced by volunteers visiting and recording throughout the year.

Water shrews, harvest mice and the hairy dragonfly point to a diverse and welcoming habitat on YACWAG's reserves. Brown hare and roe deer are common sights on our small parcels of land..



YACWAG is grateful to Chris Sperring, MBE, of the Hawk and Owl Trust for his assistance with ringing and recording.

Working with Young People

YACWAG's work has been strengthened and developed in all the local primary schools. Volunteers have also worked with the Congresbury Youth Partnership, Congresbury Children's Centre and Guides groups.



Other Events

YACWAG's long-running fund-raising quiz at the Plough Inn was held four times during the year, thanks to the support of the landlord. Bird and bat walks proved popular and brought new members to the group. Garden moth trapping featured as part of National Moth Day and YACWAG also joined in with an event at North Somerset Butterfly House. Tree walks were held in conjunction with Treezilla - a national project aiming to map all public trees. Two bumble bee walks were led by Ellie Higginson along the Strawberry Line and members got the chance to try out scything on Congresbury Moor, on a very hot day.



Each year the committee chooses a theme and the March mini-conference was entitled *Nature as Your Neighbour*, with the emphasis on discovering what is in gardens and how they could be improved for wildlife. A display was placed in Yatton library and further featured at Yatton's Summer Show and at Congresbury. Higgy gave an illustrated talk on gardening for wildlife at last year's AGM. A social event was held at Christmas. Tree Dressing Day (first weekend in December) involved more people last year as members knitted scarves and they were tied round prominent trees in Yatton, Claverham and Congresbury to show that YACWAG cares about and cares for trees.



Working in Partnership

A representative from the Trustees regularly attends meetings of the Strawberry Line Management Committee, which is made up of stakeholders including the Strawberry Line Society and North Somerset Council. YACWAG comments on matters beyond those connected with nature conservation because access to nature reserves is important to people's appreciation of the natural environment. However conditions of access are matters for North Somerset Council as the landowner. This year saw two challenging issues, with unsympathetic work carried out on the Strawberry Line by North Somerset Levels Internal Drainage Board and Western Power. YACWAG's representative attended three meetings and has worked hard to ensure mitigation has been achieved.

YACWAG is working with Avon Wildlife Trust and the owners of Kings Wood in relation to bats and dormice. YACWAG also provides input to the management plan for Cadbury Hill.

There are numerous enquiries every year about wildlife matters from members and the public and YACWAG has built new relationships with Prickles Hedgehog Rescue and North Somerset Sustainable Beekeeping.

YACWAG's bat group works with Avon Bat Group and others and is receiving help to obtain bat licences for two of our volunteers, Chris Barrington and Nigel Milbourne.

And finally, a most demanding request was to investigate the death of three swans discovered on Biddle Street SSSI. This involved recovery of the bodies, organising and funding a trip for x-ray at the local vet, arranging storage in YACWAG's otter freezer and onward transmission to a scientific research centre in Dorset.

Tony Moulin, Chair, Yatton and Congresbury Wildlife Action Group.