



# NEWSLETTER

Registered charity no. 1076362

## LAND AHOY!

In spite of members' aspirations for more nature reserves, with all the local development pressure it was seeming unlikely that YACWAG would ever be able to purchase any more land. High land prices would push it way above the kind of money that could be raised from grants or donations.

It is therefore a surprise, and even more of a pleasure to be able to report in this newsletter on TWO new pieces of land which YACWAG's ownership will save from development. In YACWAG's hands both will be of benefit to wildlife 'in perpetuity'.

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Trustees visiting land in Congresbury in January

[www.yacwag.org.uk](http://www.yacwag.org.uk)

A huge thankyou to member Mark Stanford, a professional web designer who has been working voluntarily for months on a new YACWAG website. Our aim has been to provide information in a way that will save volunteers time and save the charity money.

Just use the existing address and within a couple of weeks you will find a brand new website with full details of our activity - past, present and future. You will soon be able to pay your membership or make a donation online and keep up-to-date with everything going on.

# HARRY'S PLOT off Claverham Close

More than ten years ago residents near Claverham Close bought the field near their houses in order to retain the green space and their views. It was divided into seven parts about twelve years ago, although most of the boundaries are not formally marked.

One of the plots in the centre was bought by Harry Hailes, an elderly man with no close relatives. As he wanted to preserve his share of the field for the community, Harry approached YACWAG to see what could be arranged.

It was agreed that after Harry's death YACWAG would be happy to look after the land 'forever'. The terms of our charity registration mean that if the charity should ever need to be wound up, its assets must be passed to an organisation with similar aims.

Sadly, Harry has recently died but he generously left YACWAG some money to help with our work, as well as his part of the field - known as Harry's Plot. Harry's Plot includes a bonus - a lovely mature oak tree, but the field itself has exceptional ancient hedges and a wild flower-rich grassland.

Members will have the opportunity to see this new landholding in the summer (and hug the tree for themselves) when a walk will be arranged. Photos show Tony Moulin hugging Harry's Oak.





# Land off Cobthorn Way, Congresbury

Kings Wood Congresbury is a very important site for Greater Horseshoe Bats. This species has a very high level of protection because the UK holds the largest population in Europe, and this area is especially important because of a nearby maternity roost site.

Developers of a new housing estate in Congresbury, off Cobthorn Way, had to satisfy North Somerset Council (NSC) planners that the bats would come to no harm because of the 38 houses they were going to build on the bats' foraging grounds. YACWAG was approached by the Council to see if we would be prepared to take over a few acres of grassland and manage it as mitigation for the housing in accordance with an agreed management plan for the benefit of the bats.

As the fields in question are immediately adjacent to Cobthorn Farm, giving the Dexter cattle which graze Congresbury Moor easy access, and as we have members close by who are willing to act as Wardens, this seemed an ideal arrangement.

It has been agreed that YACWAG will pay a nominal sum of £1 for the land and NSC will pay all legal costs associated with the land transfer. The developer has agreed to fence and hedge the field and their ecological consultant is drawing up a management plan which will be monitored at the developer's expense to ensure its effectiveness. YACWAG will also receive a lump sum of money from the developer to help us manage the land based on costs for the first fifteen years.

This is a four-way win: the community knowing the fields will remain undeveloped, NSC not having to manage the fields themselves to safeguard the bats, YACWAG acquiring a new nature reserve in Congresbury, and the bats being able to continue to fly over green fields, feeding on the beetles attracted by cattle dung, along a green corridor running from Kings Wood down to the River Yeo.

The land will not be handed over until the houses are built, but in a couple of years we will be able to show our members the ancient hedges (and some newly planted ones) and rougher pasture on our new Cobthorn Reserve.



## CO-OP SUPPORT

***We are very grateful to the Co-op Foodstore in Yatton for making us one of the first local community groups to benefit from their new membership arrangements. Thank you to all members who have chosen YACWAG as their benefiting charity. All those pennies mount up. The scheme continues until the end of March and it looks as if we will have raised about £800 from the scheme.***

***In January YACWAG put up a display in the store showing the kind of work we do in the community. We intend to use the money raised by the Co-op to buy more simple bat detectors. These will be used with groups (such as Congresbury Guides below with Chris Barrington) as well as children from local schools, allowing better access to a bat detector when YACWAG takes them on bat walks.***



# The History of YACWAG Part 9



In **2007** YACWAG member and wildlife artist Claire Shellis painted a picture of Littlewood. This image was made into greetings cards and sold to members. The painting was on show at Kenn Church Room in April when an exhibition was mounted about Littlewood.

Churchill Community School pupils made some bird nesting boxes for YACWAG reserves from wood donated by Staddons, a Clevedon timber merchant. As a result of this donation one tawny owl box was put up on Congresbury Station and one in Littlewood. The other boxes were for starlings, and these were put up at Stowey Reserve.

James Field, the North Somerset Levels and Moors Officer, helped with YACWAG bat work, monitoring the 35 boxes provided on our reserves. Three new bat boxes were put up in the grounds of St Andrews School, Congresbury, following classroom sessions on bat habitats and ecology. A very successful evening and bat walk was held at the school in conjunction with the PTA.



A project began on Cadbury Hill to restore a 200 year old stone-lined pond. The pond had been filled in with rubbish and damaged when a drainage ditch was dug in the mid 1900s. However, with advice from Tina Bath, the Mendip Warden, who had carried out a similar project, and Sam Powell, a local stonemason, the small YACWAG 'Cadbury Hill team' not only cleared the rubbish and vegetation but also decided to rake out all the stone joints and re-point the whole thing using a hydraulic lime mortar mix. Yatton Parish Council gave a £350 grant and a time capsule was buried under one section of the pond. The project won the Transformation category of the CSV National Awards for Conservation Projects, with another prize of £300. A small plaque on a stone plinth was erected at the site and the pond was fenced for public safety.

## Other 2007 highlights

included a visit by three classes of Yatton Junior School to Stowey Reserve, Open Days at Kenn Moor Reserve and at Littlewood. YACWAG took part in the launch of the Strawberry Line Heritage Trail after a lottery award had funded improvements.

YACWAG discovered that Claverham was a UK hotspot for bats, with the Serotine count in the National Bat Monitoring Programme coming out the highest in the country.





## 2007 - Kenn Moor Reserve is Born

In Yatton there was great consternation about gypsies being encamped without planning permission on the SSSI off Kenn Moor Road, close to the rear of Bramblewood houses. By the beginning of 2006 the council had done what it could to persuade the gypsies (who had bought the land and had water and telephones installed) to leave. YACWAG was then approached by local residents who were negotiating to purchase the land and donate it to YACWAG.

Eventually, just before Christmas 2006, a consortium of local residents raised the money to enable YACWAG to purchase the land and manage the two fields for nature in perpetuity.

YACWAG volunteers had a lot of work to do. The small bare field nearest the road was cleared of rubbish, spread with topsoil which had been scraped off and dumped in the larger field, and sown with a special SSSI wild flower mix paid for by Natural England. Thanks to Andrew Sheppy, grazing was introduced to the larger field.

During the clearing up a volunteer found the one and only great crested newt ever found on a YACWAG reserve.



*Volunteers shifting soil at Kenn Moor Reserve. The great crested newt was torpid in the soil.*

The field is now managed as rough pasture and is home to overwintering snipe (one year reaching 150!)

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## Do You Ever Shop Online? Give As You Live!

### A new, very easy way to support your local conservation charity

When you shop online you can now benefit YACWAG with every purchase, furthering our work in schools and local groups, enabling us to do more and meet our running costs.

Under a great, safe, tried and tested scheme used by many leading national charities, with just one extra click of the mouse you can now shop at Amazon, John Lewis, Argos, Sainsburys, Tesco, Waitrose, WH Smith, Marks & Spencer, Boots, Debenhams and a whole load more popular stores (4000 of them - see Give As You Live website for a full list.) Instead of going to the store website, go to the Give As You Live website whenever you want to buy a new fridge, find a special door handle or just do your weekly supermarket shop. Click on the icon of the shop you want to use and enter YACWAG as your benefiting charity. When you check out YACWAG will automatically receive a percentage of the purchase price. It will cost you nothing at all - the retailer makes the donation - and it is safe to use. You just need to sign up and put the icon on your desktop so it is easy to remember.

Even more exciting for the many of us who buy online is the chance to purchase your holidays, air and train tickets through Give As You Live.

Please start the pennies rolling in. Every little counts!

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## Do You Enjoy Arranging and Organising Things?

YACWAG is looking for someone to help sort out our archive and bring it up to date. This is not a very onerous task but needs someone with the time and interest to put news cuttings, photos and other documents in order, clearly labelled and indexed. Work in your own home at your own pace! There is no rush for this and no deadline but it is a job that our busy secretary and other administrators find it hard to accommodate. The plus point is that you will get to know more about YACWAG's background. If you would like to help in this way, please contact Win at [winlowman@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:winlowman@hotmail.co.uk).

# YACWAGger Profile - Chris Barrington

*Members will know Chris Barrington from his work as a co-ordinator of YACWAG's bat activities. Chris is also a close neighbour to our Stowey Reserve and now the proud owner of the field through which we gain access.*

## How Did Your Interest in Nature Begin?

I grew up in the countryside and spent a lot of time learning about butterflies and crossing off all the species I could find. I had an early encounter with bats when we demolished an old porch. I vividly remember sitting outside with my lunchtime sandwiches and squash and looking at these two odd looking bits of brown wood on the floor. Eventually I went to look at them and realised they were bats. I picked them up and brought them into the house to show everyone. Sadly one died but the other one came out of torpor and flew off - it was pretty amazing and stuck with me. To this day I have no idea what species they were but they were probably pipistrelles. They seemed quite big to me when I picked them up but I was about eight years old so even a 'pip' would have seemed big.



We moved to Yatton in February 2010 just down from our previous house that we were renting in in Flax Bourton, We weren't particularly interested in buying but when we saw the house with a little bit of field we were smitten and we've been here ever since. My big plan was to make the garden into a snake habitat. We seem to have succeeded because in the summer if you lift the lid on the compost bin it's like a scene from Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom.

Although more recently I've been pretty focused on the bats, I keep learning about other wildlife accidentally and I had an encounter with a dog otter last year which will stay with me forever. I had no idea how big they are, but they are huge (well compared to bats anyway).

## How Did You Become Involved with YACWAG?

We moved into our house on the Friday and on the lamppost outside Clive the newsagent's there was a flyer for a talk on Saturday about bats by a chap called Daniel Hargreaves. My wife Kath suggested I go because "You like stuff like that". I went to Dan's talk and came away thinking I want to get involved with this. So I joined YACWAG and never looked back. Having a young family I decided to try and limit my time to one species (well 17 actually) and bats became my thing.

## What Activities Do You Most Enjoy with YACWAG?

At the moment bats take up quite a lot of my time. As well as YACWAG I'm also the bat person for Tasker and Watkins - they have been really good to us and donated some medicine to help with the bat care work which has really helped and in return I found the Whiskered bat that got out of its box and hid in the operating theatre (I found it hanging off the side of a fridge). Since obtaining my bat licence I also do some bat box checks for Avon Bat Group and Avon Wildlife Trust, but I did find time to do some hedge laying with YACWAG which I really enjoyed.

## What Do You Think About What YACWAG Does? What Could Be Improved?

I think YACWAG epitomises what a wildlife action group should be doing, acting locally and getting things done. There are many larger organisations that should take a leaf out of YACWAG's book and learn how to engage more effectively at a grass roots level. I'm really proud to be a member of YACWAG. I think it's one of the best groups in the country.

## What Else Should YACWAG Be Doing in the Future?

More of the same, I wouldn't actually change a thing, YACWAG is making a difference to wildlife and encouraging people to interact with nature, without seeking to become some huge organisation that loses sight of what it's really trying to do,



## YACWAGger Profile continues...



### What is Your Favourite Animal Joke?

My snake was very thin and sick , so I took it to the vet. The vet took a quick look and said, Sorry, your snake is going to die, that will be \$20. I said is that all I get for \$20 ? He took the snake over to a floppy-eared rabbit, and the rabbit pointed his ears straight up to the ceiling ... He took it to a Black Labrador dog, and the dog stuck out his tongue and shook its head ... He took it to a cat, the cat opened her eyes very wide and then shook its head violently ... He said, "That will be \$350..... \$50 for the second opinion, \$75 for Lab tests and \$225 for the CAT scan.

*Chris showing Janice and Andrew Hunter a bat*

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*Chris and his daughter with a prize for their mini-raft at the Know the Yeo event in 2015*



# Volunteers Work at Junction Reserve



Thanks to young people with learning disabilities aged 16-20 studying Conservation at Weston College, some further work was carried out at Yatton Junction Reserve in February. The young people got stuck in to help make habitat on the reserve. They enjoyed the varied tasks we were able to give them and we hope they will come again!



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## Do You Eat Biscuits?

Terracycle and McVities now offer free recycling of any brand of biscuit wrapper and YACWAG is using the scheme to raise funds. The wrappers can be from any brand of 'non-savoury' (I think they mean 'sweet') biscuits. They can come from multi-pack bars and chocolate biscuits like Penguins, or from a packet like Hobnobs, but any brand is acceptable. The wrappers can be saved up until you have a few, and then when you are passing along Yatton High Street you can put them through the door at 3 Barberry Farm Road (near the zebra crossing at the station end of the village.) When Juley Howard has collected enough she will send them to Terracycle where they will be cleaned and melted into hard plastic to make new recycled products. YACWAG will then receive a payment.

**Please consider helping raise funds while you munch.**

## Printer Cartridge Recycling

YACWAG IS NO LONGER COLLECTING PRINTER CARTRIDGES FOR RECYCLING, BUT WE HAVE SOME PREPAID ENVELOPES SO YOU CAN SEND THEM OFF. Thank you to all who have supported our fundraising over the years.

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YACWAG is no longer collecting postage stamps. Please give them to one of the local churches.

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To get in touch, contact Win Lowman on 01934 833596 or by email to: [winlowman@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:winlowman@hotmail.co.uk).



# YACWAG's New Citizen Science Project



Daniel Hargreaves gave a talk in the Friends' Meeting House, Claverham, in mid February. This launched a new YACWAG project to focus on the Greater Horseshoe and Serotine bats. The project is aimed at finding out more about their lives in and around our part of North Somerset. At the meeting Tony Moulin gave a history of YACWAG's bat work, and Chris Barrington talked about his ideas for carrying the project out.

*Win Lowman explains:*

YACWAG's bat monitoring activities are a good example of citizen science. There are 17 species of bat in the UK – 13 of these are present in our area and over the years we have been able to study them using basic bat detectors and graduating to more sophisticated equipment which enables us to do computer analysis of bat recordings. We take part in the National Bat Monitoring Project with surveys at Congresbury for Daubentons bats and at Claverham for four species of bats including Serotines - our results for the latter are among the highest in the country. In 2011, under the leadership of Daniel Hargreaves, we increased our knowledge through using equipment to radio-track a Serotine bat caught in Littlewood.

Daniel's inspiring talk looked at bats in general, the work we have already done and introduced an exciting new conservation project. It has been known for some time that Greater Horseshoe bats are present in this area and the spate of planning applications for housing has raised concerns about the effects developments will have on wildlife. Bristol Airport has given YACWAG a grant of £2,500 to buy new up-to-date equipment to track Greater Horseshoes in King's Wood, Cleeve and the local area. Greater Horseshoe and Serotine bats have also been found by consultant ecologists in the area of the Sunley development in Congresbury, very close to their roost in Kings Wood; in mitigation for the loss of habitat an area of land has been set aside and will be given to YACWAG by North Somerset Council for a nominal sum with a commuted sum payable to YACWAG for 15 years. We will graze and manage the land for Greater Horseshoe bats and continue to monitor the bat activity. The developers have also agreed to assist with monitoring of the site.

There are lots of ways in which people can help with this new project. It is not necessary to have any experience or prior knowledge, nor is it essential to be fit and walking about the countryside at night. Some survey work can be done from the car, or by sitting at the end of a hedge with a cup of hot chocolate, and there are also opportunities to join the project by working indoors – analysing data collected by others. Whatever you choose to do, full training will be given and support available. We will also need help to put up and maintain bat boxes and to plant more trees and shrubs to improve habitat.

There will be a meeting for project participants on Friday 17th March at 7.30pm in the Wake Worlock Room at Yatton Library, Yatton High Street. If you cannot make the meeting, or want further information please let Tony Moulin know by emailing [tonymoulin@icloud.com](mailto:tonymoulin@icloud.com).



# Hedgelaying on Cadbury Hill, Year Three



YACWAG was grateful to Malcolm Dowling for his help laying a hedge on Cadbury Hill Local Nature Reserve for the third year running. Twenty volunteers took part over the two days in pleasant weather and producing an extremely satisfying result. The laid hedge will provide a corridor for wildlife to move about and, for a season, let sunlight reach the area beside it.





# Bird News from Trevor Riddle

Fieldfares and Redwings arrived with winter in good numbers along the Strawberry Line and proceeded to demolish the hawthorn berry crop. Numbers dropped off after Christmas and by then the birds were feeding on invertebrates on the fields. This is a reversal of behaviour from a few years ago when the berries were only taken when the fields were frozen.

The dry winter has made conditions less suitable for roosting Snipe and our best count has been 18 on Congresbury Moor. A Kingfisher was on the Reserve during one of the counts and there have also been regular sightings from Wemberham Lane and Claverham Drove and one reported by a member of the public from Congresbury.

The electricity pylons west of Yatton have been visited by a Peregrine on calm days - I think that it or they has/ have been feeding on Starlings - they take prey to the pylons to eat and avoid unwanted attention from Crows.

Our reserves have lots of vole runs and there are pellets under several of the boxes so we hope that our Barn Owls have wintered well and that 2017 will be another productive year.

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## Oxford Instruments at Yatton Junction



Last year Oxford Instruments (a large company based in North End Road, Yatton) asked for YACWAG's advice on how to bring wildlife closer to their work premises. A group had been formed to carry out environmental improvements, ranging from improving recycling rates, turning off lights in empty rooms and finding out how to make their grounds better for wildlife.

Trevor Riddle and Faith Moulin met Oxford Instruments' employee Louise Bailey, who had once lived locally and been a YACWAG member, and gave advice. Following this the group asked if they could help with conservation work on our reserves or on the Strawberry Line.



On a warm and sunny February afternoon Faith, Trevor and Tony worked alongside a group of their volunteers to create dead hedging on the Yatton Junction reserve by Yatton station. The need for this work was urgent as sheep were escaping from the adjacent field and eating new growth in the open grassy glades which YACWAG has been creating away from the public path area. The dead material, packed together to create a hedge-like barrier along the broken fence-line will not only keep out the sheep but has created nesting opportunities for small birds like wrens, habitat for invertebrates and a sheltered woody corridor for mammals and amphibians.



# Higgy Goes Birdwatching in Backwell

Having been suffering with this awful virus that has been doing the rounds for weeks, and waking up to sunshine following my first full night's sleep for five days, the decision was easy; some good old fashioned 'medicinal' fresh air was required!

Where to go? Having grown up in Backwell but moved away when my wife and I bought our first home some 25 years ago, I couldn't resist a visit to my old 'stomping ground' of Backwell Hill! Despite living in Yatton I rarely get back and enjoy those long walks up over the top of the quarry and out to Long Lane so with some excitement I left home and drove to the Jubilee Stone Reserve now managed by Backwell Environmental Trust (BET). Having long been involved with YACWAG it's always a treat to go and see the good work that other local groups are doing.

Parking up I could immediately hear the usual suspects in the form of Bluetits, Great Tits and of course a friendly Robin who was first to greet me at the gate. I moved down the path towards the Jubilee Stone and bumped into a small flock of Goldcrest who were actually being quite vocal for a change! Following the usual wrestling match with my camera whilst trying to get a snap of this tiny but beautiful bird as it flitted in and out of branches was difficult, but I was finally rewarded with a couple of pictures that might be OK as a 'record shot'.

Moving on the sound of bird song was obvious and I was accompanied through the wood by the alarm calls and chattering of Tits who clearly gave away my position and any hope of a stealthy approach!

With my cover blown I veered left and crossed the road over into Badger Wood Reserve. I noticed straight away the work that has been carried out to make the site accessible to fellow nature lovers. I was heartened to hear the sound of birdsong actually increasing on this side of the road and at the top of the slope I was met with an amazing view over the old quarry and across Backwell and beyond. The clear sunny February day made it a pleasure to stand there and take in this wonder! Unfortunately a huge flock of Jackdaws were in full voice and although I do enjoy Corvids they can tend to be a bit noisy! But I'm stuck to the spot at the amazing aerial display that these unappreciated birds were now giving me, tumbling and diving one after the other, truly spectacular!

'Honk Honk' the Ravens are also in full voice but beyond the trees and, out of sight, a Buzzard calls high up on the thermals but again is as mystical as the Ravens.

Over the stile which is always a bit tricky with one false hip but with no-one watching I take the chance and luckily land on both feet! I love this section now on top of the quarry or, as kids forty years ago we would shout 'On top of the world!'.





I pass the horses feeding and then I'm in the open of a field but keeping close to the fence I can observe the Buddleia, Gorse and Hawthorn bushes that abound the top of the quarry and I strike gold! The February sun has bought out hordes of Bullfinches that are stripping the berries and seedheads. Although wearing camouflaged clothing, I'm exposed and only manage a couple of snaps before they take to the air like a squadron of RAF fighter jets with their pale rumps following them!. I sit and wait to see if they will come



back and I'm joined instead by another small flock of Goldcrest after the same seedheads. They 'pose' a little just long enough for me to get a couple of slightly better snaps. I spot some Fieldfare, a Wren and of course plenty more Finches and Tits before I turn around

to head back, but something catches my eye - a Peacock butterfly heading in the opposite direction!. I must come back here for butterflies this summer...



I wander back to the viewing platform and something is wrong! It's quiet, ghostly quiet! One of those moments when in a horror film a 'mad axeman' might run out of the dark damp woods! but it's clear and bright and the sun is causing me to pull the peak of my cap over my eyes - and then there it is right in front of me! 'Aaagh I hadn't expected that' I exclaim as I wrestle with camera and binocular straps to get a shot at this beautiful predator and the reason why not a bird can be heard. The Peregrine must have been sat up right under my nose and now it's racing across the huge void of the quarry and I'm struggling to get focus on it or even keep my camera following it! I snap as many pictures as I can, I think I may have a blur that looks partially like a Peregrine but it's proof if nothing else! Then a huge Buzzard comes over my head, probably only twenty feet above me and now firmly in my sights

Fulfilled and content I stroll back across the coombe and back up into the Jubilee Wood Reserve and then take five minutes on the wooden bench by the two 'dipping ponds' to have a sip of tea from my flask.

It really is time to go now and although I could stay here for several more hours easily I have chores to do. I head back to the entrance of the reserve and I'm happy to see more Goldcrest and then in the top clearing I come across a family of Long-tailed Tits chattering away together. they always make me smile and it's now that I realise what a tonic nature is, even when feeling ill or in a low mood the wonder of simple pleasures is unquestionable. I'm close to the gate and a Coal tit darts across in front of me. Finally I'm back at the car and it's time for another quick brew before I leave this wonderful place. But of course I couldn't leave without my new best friend 'Mr Robin' coming to wave me off!!

