



Registered charity 1076362

Newsletter

Volume 20 Issue 1 January 2019

YACWAG's 20th anniversary



There will be celebrations all year to mark YACWAG's 20th birthday. It's not too late for a New Year's resolution to make this the year you and your household get involved in some of the local wildlife fun. Each month there will be a special opportunity to look at YACWAG's achievements, kicking off in Claverham Village Hall with Sarah Dale's talk (see right). Other events planned include a talk on 20 flagship species important to YACWAG's history, a walk to see 20 special trees, a walk on Cadbury Hill to identify 20 significant wild flowers, a bioblitz day on our Stowey Nature Reserve, a look at 20 woodland species in Littlewood and lots more.

We will be giving out a calendar of events well in advance so please put the dates in your diary to be sure not to miss out on what promises to be an interesting and never-before-experienced programme of YACWAG events.



an illustrated talk by Sarah Dale, ecologist,
on her work with the dormice of Kings Wood, Cleeve

FRIDAY 1st FEBRUARY 2019

7.30pm at CLAVERHAM VILLAGE HALL

ALL WELCOME - ADMISSION FREE

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Bird News

As mentioned in the last newsletter the BTO is running a tawny owl calling survey and that seemed to be the cue for our local tawnies to fall silent. Sadly a dead tawny owl was found near Yatton railway bridge in late November, probably it had been hit by a vehicle. Then on Christmas Eve a female tawny called from near the old railway bridge in Wemberham Lane. There was another report of one, possibility two, calling from the Yatton churchyard area.

The farmer from the south end of Wemberham Lane saw a barn owl around the farmyard one evening recently and two were seen at Ham Lane, Kingston Seymour. Turning to our diurnal raptors there have been plenty of kestrel sightings, probably (and hopefully) indicative of a productive breeding season in 2019. November saw the return of local peregrines to pylons right from Congresbury Moor through Wemberham Lane and Kingston Seymour to Kenn Moor. A male and a female (not necessarily a pair) have been regular on calm days. They use the pylons as look-out posts and as feeding points. Crows and magpies fly up to clear any leftovers.

Our local song thrush started singing on Christmas Day and another on the Strawberry Line was using a small stone as an 'anvil' to deal with a snail. Their northern relatives, redwings and fieldfares, have been present in below average numbers this winter.

Great white egrets hadn't nested in the UK until 2014 but have been very successful and a member sent in a photo of one on the River Kenn by Nailsea Wall. A few days later, after heavy rain, the same or another was feeding by the Blackditch, visible from Kenn Moor Road.

Photo thanks to Higgy : Great white egret and little egret together, at Backwell Lake

In early December there were 20 Snipe on the Congresbury Moor Reserve and eight, plus a Jack Snipe, at Kenn Moor Reserve. In early January, following the dry spell, the Snipe numbers had dropped to 14 and three respectively with no Jack Snipe. However, Kestrels were seen at both sites on the later visits and the restored hedge at Kenn Moor was alive with small birds.



Photo above, thanks to Higgy, Great white egret and little egret together at Backwell Lake

Photo right, a photo by David Lumkin of Kingston Seymour of a peregrine on the distant pylon, photographed from his office/observatory



Trevor Riddle

New Year's Day Bird Walk

There can have rarely been a better New Year's Day weather-wise: sunny, calm and mild. YACWAG members and friends met in Kingston Seymour village for a walk to and around the conservation areas owned and created by our member, Roland Griffin. Roland was recuperating from an operation so sadly he was unable to show us around this time.

The generally mild weather in November and December has meant that winter bird numbers have been lower than average but as we passed through the churchyard Robins were singing to stake their breeding territories. Further on a Song Thrush was trying to sing above the noise of the M5 traffic, but the motorway bridge did give us a view of at least 50 Mute Swans in a field nearby.

Redwings and Fieldfares appeared once we reached an area with tall hedges but a Pied Wagtail perched on the top of another tall hedge was a surprise, they rarely perch on trees or bushes. Two more were feeding near a flock of sheep and a Buzzard glided past and landed in a tree. We stopped in the conservation area where Helen very kindly provided us all with Christmas cake as we took in the view. Cormorant and Kestrel flew over before we headed back hearing, but not seeing, a Great Spotted Woodpecker in the village.

Trevor Riddle



Members on the New Year's Day walk: photo thanks to Paul Richards

Recycling benefits YACWAG

The Earth's dynamic systems reuse and recycle all 'waste'. In fact there is no waste. I remember my awed feeling when I learnt about the nitrogen and carbon cycles that our planet has. These closed systems are amazing but are being disrupted by human activity - well, to be honest, Western human activity, because the rest of the world was happy living sustainably until Europeans came along.

Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed by the doom and gloom of predictions for the future - but there is a local answer - YACWAG! Global issues can be tackled locally. The management of YACWAG reserves is low intensity. We use no fertilisers or pesticides. We aim to 'tread more lightly upon the Earth'. We know also that our slightly wild fields are a refuge for wildlife and a repository for carbon. They hold up flood water and reduce soil erosion. We believe they make a difference.

YACWAG, as well as all of us as individuals, can help reduce pollution by lessening demand for non-recyclable goods, especially single-use plastic, avoiding plastic packaging where possible and recycling all we can to prevent waste and ground pollution when these items go to landfill. The good news is that some items that the council cannot recycle can even make money for YACWAG!



Recycle Toiletries/Cosmetics Packaging

We are very grateful to Libby Watts who has been collecting for Terracycle the packaging from cosmetics and toiletries which cannot normally be recycled. Terracycle is a global company offering recycling initiatives for hard-to-recycle waste. Libby collects beauty packaging from all brands. Items like spray pumps, trigger sprays, facial wipes' packaging (not baby wipes), plastic pots and tubes, roll-on deodorants, hair-dye tubes that cannot go in the recycling box can be left in the bin outside the front door at 132 Mendip Road, Yatton, BS49 4EX. Shampoo bottles and items that can normally be recycled should be put in the recycling box as usual.



Dental Products

Libby is now also collecting toothpaste tubes (as empty as possible), used toothbrushes and the packaging they come in, and heads from electric toothbrushes. All these would otherwise go to landfill but they can be collected for recycling by Terracycle!. And the bonus is that YACWAG benefits from the recycling credits! Please take your dental products for recycling to the address mentioned above - but please fit it in with another journey, or the good you are doing will be negated by the drive!

If you need any more information about the programme or the types of acceptable waste please visit <https://www.terracycle.co.uk/en-UK/brigades/personal-care-and-beauty-brigade>



Biscuit Wrappers

Non-savoury biscuit wrappers - what you and I might call sweet biscuit wrappers - can be left at 3 Barberry Farm Road, Yatton, BS49 4QY, thanks to Juley Howard, who is collecting these for Terracycle in partnership with McVities. They do not have to be McVities brand, but they must be biscuits, not savoury snacks, etc. Juley raised £22 for YACWAG in the last year and saved a vast quantity of wrappers from landfill.

Other Things to Do at Home

Get and use a compost heap or bin for your garden and kitchen waste if you don't already. Consider buying large items secondhand or buy the best quality you can afford ('buy cheap buy twice!') Remove plastic tape from cardboard boxes before putting out for recycling. Wash out the food containers you put out for recycling or they might go to landfill instead - worse, they might contaminate other clean containers and stop them being recycled too.

Environmental Policy

YACWAG has just revised its Environmental Policy, which can be viewed on the YACWAG website. It is intended to carry out an environmental audit of the charity's activities during the coming year to make sure we are considering our environmental impact in everything we do. Many of our actions are hard to quantify, but we will consider things like the impact of volunteers using a petrol-driven strimmer rather than employing a company with 'green' tools and quicker operation, or the use of recycled paper for all YACWAG's activities even though it is more expensive. It might take a few more minutes to make a decision but at the end of the year we should be able to reassure our members that our environmental impact has been assessed and is as low as we can make it. Hopefully it will be obvious that it is more than outweighed by the benefits of our work.

Land Acquisition Policy

A second policy has been reviewed in the last quarter - our Land Acquisition Policy - and the new version will be available on the charity's website. Broadly speaking YACWAG is interested in acquiring more land in the two parishes to manage for the benefit of wildlife. The Land Management sub-committee will hold a confidential wish-list of sites with regard to potential purchases which meet criteria such as being on, or adjoining, a SSSI, or the Strawberry Line.

All land purchases are, of course, subject to funding being available and a willing seller. YACWAG cannot go to auction to buy land but must enter into private treaty arrangements with current owners. Almost all of YACWAG's fields have been purchased following an approach from the owners, who were then willing to wait while we raised the funds.

If you know of any land coming onto the market, especially if you think the owner would be willing to sell to YACWAG, please get in touch.

Reserves Policy

YACWAG's main charitable objective is to create and maintain nature reserves and the wish to acquire more land brings readers of this newsletter to YACWAG's Financial Reserves Policy which was revised about six months ago. YACWAG is building up a fund specifically in order to pump-prime or match-fund future land purchase that meets our criteria for land acquisition. The target set is £50,000. If you should wish to consider a donation to a land purchase fund, or to leave YACWAG a bequest in your will for that purpose, this could enable us to save more local land for nature in the future.

Christmas Bird Survey 2018

Thanks to all who took part in the YACWAG Christmas bird survey. We were pleased that many non-members also took part. We received 100 in all. The prize draw winner was K Pierce.

The blackbird and the wood pigeon had a very close run race for the top bird of the year seen in most gardens, but the blackbird just won - seen in 93 gardens, while the wood pigeon was recorded in 92 gardens. The other eight other species in order of abundance were robin, blue tit, magpie, house sparrow (in 68 gardens), great tit, dunnock and goldfinch (the latter two in joint ninth position appearing in 55 gardens), and the collared dove.

Trevor Riddle said that the number of wintering birds in southern Britain was lower than average and this was reflected in the number of birds seen in gardens. The weather during the survey period was calm and mild and not the conditions that compel birds to visit gardens.



However, in spite of this, the number of birds seen per garden over the survey period had slightly risen from 38 in 2017 to 39. The most striking and pleasing statistic was the number of house sparrows reported, up a whopping 30 percent on last year. This is a good indication that numbers are recovering locally. The fine spring and summer weather last year is likely to have led to a productive breeding season for house sparrows as well as other small bird species. Blue tits and great tits also had a successful season and good numbers of those were recorded. Goldfinches also increased again. Every year Trevor thinks they must surely reach an optimum level soon!

Unsurprisingly there were few redwings and fieldfares and indeed numbers in the nearby countryside have been low. The mild weather meant that blackcaps were less prevalent and the same applied to reed buntings.

A few tawny owls were recorded in gardens and Trevor would be interested in any sight or sound records of this species as the BTO have an ongoing survey. Please contact Trevor on trid@btinternet.com.

Tree Dressing 2018



Tree Dressing Day always falls on the first Saturday in December and YACWAG has a tradition of celebrating local trees each year in an eye-catching and educational way to let people know how important trees are to our health and well-being.

This year YACWAG worked in partnership with local youth organisations to raise awareness of the amount of non-recyclable plastic in our bins each week. Young people from Yeo Vale Forest School and Cleeve, Claverham and Yatton Scout groups, as well as some YACWAG members, helped make eco-bricks, which Bob, Win and Tony, above, used to decorate a tree in Yatton Library forecourt. Young people also made wooden 'cookies' to hang on the trees with messages about recycling and the danger of plastic to our wildlife.

Plastic is too precious to use just once, and we now know that when it is thrown away it gets into our rivers and seas. It breaks into smaller and smaller pieces until they are small enough to get into food and water, even under our skin. The idea of eco-bricks is to trap harmful non-recyclable plastic, such as plastic films, bags and wrappers inside plastic bottles. Once trapped these items cannot pollute air through being burnt, sea through being discarded, or land through breaking down in the soil. And, as those of you who have tried know, it is astonishing how much plastic can be stuffed into a small plastic bottle.

Eco-bricks are being used in building projects in developing countries, and in the UK various uses are being found for them. The bricks that were used for tree dressing in Yatton and Congresbury will be passed to a project in Weston-super-Mare.



Eco-bricks: Plastic bottles rammed full of non-recyclable plastic trap it to keep it out of the wider environment

Eco-bricks were also used to decorate the trees in Congresbury precinct, thanks to Sue and Graham Lovesey.

YACWAG produced a poster explaining in simple language that every sweet packet and biscuit wrapper each of us ever uses will still be polluting the Earth in hundreds of years' time, constantly increasing the problem of disposal. Eco-bricks are a grassroots solution to the over-production of plastic.



Owl Boxes Replaced

At the end of 2018, Alan Walker made YACWAG four new owl boxes to replace those that had come to the end of their natural lives. YACWAG has had huge success with its owl boxes to date, breeding on its nature reserves a total of 58 barn owl chicks. Alan's boxes are especially well engineered - the photo on the left shows him with Box 2 which he made in 2011. The new



boxes are of an even better design and are made of marine ply to give even longer service. The idea was to use the top grade of materials this time so that the boxes will need renewing less frequently.

YACWAG is very grateful for Alan's time and expertise in making the boxes and is also very grateful to Andrew and Joe Hunt who used an ingenious method with a cage mounted on a tractor in order to fix two new boxes to the poles in Meakers and Phippens. The box in Stowey Reserve was also due to be replaced but a roosting barn owl put paid to that and the box will be replaced next year. The box in Footmead was also due to be replaced but the very muddy access has postponed that operation too.

Photo below: Alan Walker with one of the barn owl chicks reared in 'his' box in 2015. The owlets are ringed under licence and returned to the box.



YACWAGger Profile - Libby Watts

If you have been reading this newsletter cover to cover, you will already have come across Libby's name in connection with recycling. Libby is a passionate recycler and one of our newest members. You may have come across her on YAWAG's Facebook group where she has been an active contributor for a couple of years. Libby is also the administrator for the new popular Facebook group 'North Somerset Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'.

When did you move to Yatton?

I moved to Yatton almost three years ago from Devon but I am originally from Ireland.

How long have you been interested in the natural environment?

I honestly can't remember when a time when I didn't like wildlife and had an interest in the natural environment from an early age. I went to university to study fashion but once I started working in the industry I didn't like it. Fashion is very unsustainable and while I was working I decided to study for an environmental degree with the Open University. I am currently on maternity leave from my role in the West of England Waste Partnership. My four-month old twin boys keep me busy. I try to get out with them as much as possible and look forward to teaching them about trees and nature.

How did you get to know about YACWAG?

More or less as soon as I moved to Yatton, I googled 'conservation groups in Yatton' and found YACWAG. I liked conservation work - I had previously volunteered with Avon Wildlife Trust so I went along and joined one of YACWAG's work parties. When I began recycling cosmetic packaging through Terracycle I contacted YACWAG to see if they would like to receive the payments from goods recycled.

How would you like to be involved with YACWAG?

I have volunteered to help keep the YACWAG website up-to-date and perhaps with other administrative tasks. The twins have to come first so although I would like to do more I have to be realistic about the possibility that I might not be able to work to deadlines so I don't want to take on too much. However, I do know quite a few young families in Yatton and would like to see more YACWAG activities for children and families, so it is possible that in five years time I might be able to get involved in children's events. In the meantime I will do whatever I can so long as it fits in with my schedule.

How would you like to see YACWAG develop?

As I said, I would like to see the group cater more for young children and it would be nice to think I could help with that in the future. I am very interested in the wider environment, issues of pollution and climate change and would like to see a bigger emphasis on sustainability, perhaps helping and encouraging all the YACWAG members to look more closely at how their lives impact on the environment.



Get Stuck In in 2019



Whether you fancy a bit of a workout with others in the fresh air, making or improving habitat for wildlife ...



or a summer stroll to see the wildlife on YACWAG's reserves,
do join us in 2019 to meet your neighbours -

NATURE IS YOUR NEIGHBOUR

Please contact the Editor via the website if you have a story or photo to share with members.

Join our Facebook group!

Keep your eyes open for Win's informative emails.

www.yacwag.org.uk

Membership subs due 1st March 2019