



Newsletter

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www.yacwag.org.uk

How Can We Feel Better About the Climate and Nature Crisis?

The international non-profit online activist organisation Avaaz funded the biggest-ever survey on climate anxiety in children and young people, surveying 10,000 people in 10 countries around the world. The research was led by Bath University in collaboration with five other universities. In every country the survey shows that anxiety about the planetary crisis is very high and it's linked to governments failing to take decisive, meaningful action to stop the crisis.

The study found that nearly half of global youth surveyed (45%) say climate anxiety is affecting their daily lives, with two-thirds feeling sad, afraid and anxious. The survey quotes one 16 year-old who said, "It's different for young people – for us, the destruction of the planet is personal." More than seven in ten believe 'the future is frightening' – jumping to 81% of youth surveyed in Portugal and 92% in the Philippines.

Almost four in ten youngsters (39%) said they are now hesitant about having children. Over half said they believed humanity is 'doomed'.

These results are alarming, and it's not only children who are affected. Eco anxiety is being felt by people of all ages, everywhere.

What is Eco Anxiety?

It is the worry, frustration, grief and even anger linked to the reality of the climate crisis and the ongoing failure of governments to respond with the urgency it requires. While feeling scared about the future is perhaps a perfectly normal and healthy response to the destruction of the natural world and the political inaction, we have to learn to live with it. It helps to acknowledge how we feel and engage in the crisis without falling into despair or denial. Our feelings of love for nature and the Earth are not the problem but can be the solution.

On the next page YACWAG Trustee Jo Chambers recommends a book that has helped her. You are not alone - many of us are feeling sad and frustrated but we can spend time in nature, connect with it and enjoy it. That is therapeutic and our love for nature can provide us with the inspiration to do more to protect it. Joining with others in organisations like YACWAG can help make a difference.

IN THIS ISSUE

Eco Anxiety	1,2
Out and About	3
Window Wanderland	4
Dark Skies	5
Glow-worms, Stonewort	6
A Childhood in Yatton	7,8
Nestbox News	9
Bird Survey, Walks	10,11
Strawberry Line Work	12
YACWAGger Les Millar	13
Unsolicited Donations	14
Tree Dressing	14
Summer Mothing	15,16
Members Survey	17,18
Frogspawn Count	19

PHOTOS, ARTICLES AND ANYTHING ELSE OF INTEREST are always welcome for the YACWAG newsletter, and your feedback is appreciated. Contact yagwag@gmail.com

The Wild Edge of Sorrow by Francis Weller



Several years ago I was recommended a book to read around the subject of grief, this beautiful book was, *The Wild Edge Of Sorrow* by Francis Weller.

This was suggested to me because of the deaths that had occurred in my family from my first year since birth to my early 40s, and how it appeared that I, and those closest and affected, had not given much time or space to fully sit with these events.

Although these family deaths had huge impacts on me both physically and mentally, I never had really given much thought to the subject of grief. In fact, I'm not sure I had given it any. Because I have come to realise now that a lot of the ways I,

and we as a society, deal with tragic and heartbreaking events is to numb out, distract and try and forget, or as Francis Weller puts it, we in the West 'use amnesia and anaesthesia as a way to cope with our personal and collective sorrows.' This however does nothing for us as communities and individuals and 'the grief that accumulates at these thresholds remains untouched, and we feel the growing weight of unattended sorrows. This is often misdiagnosed as depression.'

I feel this describes where we are as a collective with the events happening globally - not to mention the rise of depression, mental illness and addictions afflicting the young and old alike.

In the book, the author talks about the Five Gates Of Grief, and in recent years he has found that the most common thing that people are contacting him about is their 'unheld' grief for the state of the planet: The Sorrows of The World, which is the Third Gate he describes in the list below.

The First Gate: Everything We Love, We Will Lose

The Second Gate: The Places That Have Not Known Love

The Third Gate: The Sorrows Of The World

The Fourth Gate: What We Expected And Did Not Receive

The Fifth Gate: Ancestral Grief

Eco Anxiety is defined as 'extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change'. Sadly we do not have the systems in place, in most communities, to manage and hold these worries.

Francis Weller's book helped me to consider grief and the benefits that arise from allowing myself to truly feel. Having witnesses for that grief is also hugely important, because when we share we realise that it is not only my grief and sadness, but our grief and sadness. This sense of not being alone generates stronger connections and with those connections we gain strength.

The rise of individualism and consumerism has created disconnection from nature and from what is truly important to us as human beings and also from what is fundamentally good for our souls. By leaning into grief and trusting ourselves to feel the range of emotions, we can begin to feel the pain we are inflicting on the world which possibly is our route to beginning to heal it.

Jo Chambers

Out in Claverham and Congresbury



A few of our volunteers made tentative steps towards a post-Covid existence when they dusted down the display stands and, after a long absence, took YACWAG on the road to two local community events.

Tony, Faith and Meriel enjoyed a morning in the sun in early September at Claverham Village Hall as part of a sustainable community living festival called *Love Cleeve*. They enjoyed talking to visitors about local wildlife and staffed a 'nature table' displaying items of interest. Tony said, *'It was great to be out there again talking to people about YACWAG and its work. We shall look forward to more outdoor events in 2022.'*

YACWAG is grateful to Yatton WI for donating the takings for refreshments for a new information sign at Yatton Junction.



In December as part of the Congresbury Christmas Fair Sue and Graham Lovesey took to the street with an illuminated display about YACWAG's new Cobthorn Reserve. They found visitors to the stand had a high level of awareness of the reserve and most were very interested in how the reserve is going to be managed and why.

The display featured facts about Greater Horseshoe Bats and the importance of the nature reserve to our local population of this very rare bat. Sue said, *'We were lucky the rain held off and our display boards coped well with the high winds. It was nice to be taking part in a community event and we hope to be doing more again soon.'*



Set Our Communities Ablaze with Light and Love for Local Wildlife!

Thanks to some key YACWAG volunteers, and grants from Yatton and Congresbury Parish Councils, preparations are being made for the *Wildlife Window Wanderland* which will be taking place on the weekend of the 11th-13th February 2022. It is a magical neighbourhood walking trail that can be explored and enjoyed by the whole community. YACWAG's Wildlife Window Wanderland will be held across Yatton, Claverham and Congresbury and we will be encouraging local households, community groups and businesses to take part by decorating their windows along the theme of *Love Your Local Wildlife*.

This Covid-safe event deliberately coincides with Valentine's weekend and will encourage those taking part to think about local wildlife and create a themed window about love in a different way – to show how we observe, engage with and appreciate our beautiful natural surroundings. From birds and bats to bugs and wild flowers, we hope everyone will be inspired to celebrate the variety of wildlife that makes our area so special.



Street-facing windows all over our communities will be lit up to make wildlife window walking trails that are free for everyone to enjoy over those three evenings. For YACWAG it will be a showcase for the happiness and inspiration we get from living in communities surrounded by a huge variety of wonderful wildlife.

Whether you fancy creating a display using colour and light, or only have time to put up a big green heart to show your love of wildlife, we would love all our members to join in. Although it is an ideal family activity, there is no age limit! Your

display will be put on a map for people to follow, giving local residents an incentive to explore their neighbourhood on a dark winter's evening and enjoy it in a whole new light. Please join in the fun.

What to do next

1. Promote this event and help people to participate — we want everyone to get the chance to get take part. Direct people to our Facebook page [@yattoncongresburyww](#) where they will find all the information and sign-up details.
2. Make a window display — you can find [plenty of inspiration here](#) and [practical advice here](#). Go to the Yatton and Congresbury event page at www.windowwanderland.com to sign up and put your display on the map
3. Please get in touch with us at yacwag2@gmail.com if you would like YACWAG to provide you with tissue paper, black card or tracing paper.

Get Out in the Dark Again and Count the Stars

There is now much evidence that wildlife is being harmed by artificial lighting. YACWAG member Amanda Boyd took part in a training course delivered by Cranborne Chase AONB Dark Skies Project in November 2021. (See <http://cranbornechase.org.uk/our-work/dark-night-skies/>). Below she tells us more about it.

In 2019 Cranborne Chase AONB became an International Dark Sky Reserve (IDSR). Any organisation, individual or business can sign up to the same Dark Night Sky Charter by agreeing to principles and actions to help preserve the dark sky.

The training sessions were delivered by Steven Tonkin. Steven is an astronomer with a monthly column in the *BBC Sky at Night* magazine. He supported Cranborne Chase AONB's International Dark Sky Reserve bid as a volunteer and is a Dark Skies Advisor to the project. Steven takes sky quality readings and supports the stargazing evenings by giving talks and showing people the night sky.

The training workshops aimed to encourage people to volunteer as Dark Sky Custodians. These volunteers monitor the quality of dark skies, raise awareness of light pollution and engage with the public through events. I was struck by the information that was shared. The daytime and night-time rhythms of creatures that have evolved over millions of years and need the dark are being disrupted by human artificial lights. Lighting our streets accounts for around 30 percent of councils' carbon emissions. The amount of waste electricity due to light escaping into the sky worldwide releases 21 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

Since the training I have become much more aware of bad lighting in North Somerset's villages and towns. There is a lot of unnecessary glare from streetlights, sky glow, light spillage, misdirected lighting with little shielding and overuse by business owners who may not realise the negative effects. Steven's passion for the night sky was really inspiring and I came away thinking we can be pro-active here in North Somerset. We can start by looking around the outside of our own homes and see if we can make improvements. We could create our own YACWAG Dark Skies Charter, become Dark Sky Custodians, attend council meetings and raise awareness with them, our neighbours, friends and local businesses. We can attend star-gazing events, buy dark sky meters and take our own readings to record changes over time.

Steven suggested this device: <https://www.firstlightoptics.com/unihedron-sky-quality-meters/unihedron-sqm-l-sky-quality-meter.html>.

Before finding out about Cranborne Chase I also watched two superb webinars online. They were delivered by Bob Mizon MBE from the UK Commission for Dark Skies - <https://www.britastro.org/dark-skies/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQTiZv0FSB8>

And the Butterfly Conservation Trust: <https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/events/previous-events/an-introduction-to-moths-and-their-declines-devon-dark-skies-week-webinar/>

Amanda Boyd

CPRE STAR COUNT 26 February - 6 March 2022

Download a free family activity pack and other resources to help you join in with Star Count 2022. Experience one of the most magical sights our countryside has to offer.

<https://takeaction.cpre.org.uk/page/95329/data/1?ea.tracking.id=campaigns-update-eneus>

“Looking up at a starry night sky is a magical sight and one we believe everyone should be able to experience.”

Emma Marrington,
CPRE Dark Skies
campaigner

Living with Wild Neighbours - Glow worms

In August YACWAG members set out to find glow worms in two previously known local sites. It was very exciting to find a single feeble glow on the Strawberry Line at Congresbury. Sadly our search on Cadbury Hill in pouring rain yielded nothing except a very vocal tawny owl following us about, but when our son visited us a couple of weeks later he and his friend saw one of the unmistakable insects glowing close to the spot where I had last seen them in 2003.



Photo: Chris Moulin

The male glow worm looks like an ordinary beetle with hard wing cases but the larger female has no wings at all. She produces a bright greenish-yellow glow from the underside of the last two sections of her body. The glow is caused by a chemical reaction and is used to attract a mate. The females glow for several hours at a time from dusk onwards but switch off their light once they have mated. Young glow-worms of both sexes also produce a weak intermittent light.

In 2022 would you like to help to re-discover them in Yatton and Congresbury and experience the extraordinary sight of glow worms 'on our doorstep'? We very much want to confirm the sightings so we can help protect their habitat - which may fit in well with campaigning against unnecessary bright lighting. The Strawberry Line walk was particularly disappointing in terms of very bright light-spill which we know disturbs nocturnal wildlife, including glow worms.

It is amazing that such magical insects still survive in our parishes and we would like to be able to protect them. The more people we can get out on summer evenings looking for them, the more we will learn about their distribution.

If you can help survey for glow worms, please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.

Faith Moulin

Stonewort Spotted at Stowey

When the Botany section of Bristol Naturalists Society (BNS) came to visit Stowey Reserve last summer, we were introduced to a new discovery. On the right is a stonewort in a specimen jar. You can make out the hair-like threads of complex-structured algae. Stoneworts are not plants but close to the fore-runners of plants: earliest fossil records date back 460 million years. They do not have true leaves or roots and take up nutrients through the outer cells of their branchlets and stems. Because of this, stoneworts are indicators of exceptional water quality. They are also sensitive to competition from filamentous algae (blanket weed etc) which often result from nutrient enrichment by nitrates and phosphates from agricultural and urban run-off. The rhyme in which the stonewort was found also contains nationally rare water plants like frogbit.

Thanks to John and Jenny from BNS.



Remembering a Smaller Rural Yatton



YACWAG member Chris Wathen (above with his father and uncle in Chescombe Road) grew up close to Rectory Farm in Yatton and the current planning application for 100 houses reminded him of his childhood stomping ground that could be lost. He shares here the Yatton he remembers before other developments enlarged the village.

For my own part I have some cowslips that are the descendants of those that had been growing in the fields at Rectory Farm for centuries. An old neighbour of mine brought me a seed tray full of cowslips in about 2000. She told me that they were descended from plants that grew in 'Mr Price's farm' (Rectory Farm) and she thought it would be good if YACWAG could put them back into the local fields. Mr Price had offered her any she wanted from his fields as he was about to spray them all out. When we moved here in the 1970s there were plenty of cowslips. I remember them in the field next to Cadbury House, in the churchyard, in Hangstones, along the Strawberry Line embankments, and along the grassy margins of Gangwall. There were still even a couple of plants in the High Street on the grassy area outside the Gateway supermarket!

Faith Moulin

Chris Wathen writes:

My earliest memories of 'the fields' date back to 1969. One Sunday morning Dad walked me up Chescombe Road, towards the village. He then took us left at the alleyway by the electrical substation, which took us behind our own houses. From there we entered the land of adventure known as Biddle Street. The route was deliberate. He knew I'd try to do it myself, via the same paths, and the route would therefore buy time to stop me as I wandered past my own back fence.

Mum and Dad moved into Number 60 in 1965, as newly-weds, when the house was just 9 years old. The end part of Chescombe Road was originally known as Mendip Gardens. Dad remembered the road before that - as Biddle Street.

A Smaller Rural Yatton continued

Dad was born in the village in 1934 and this meant that his local knowledge was extensive. That day he took me past the farm and then on to what he then called the old Cheddar Valley line track-bed. In 1969 the line had only just closed and clean ballast was everywhere. It was so peaceful. It's worth remembering that the M5 was either not there or just a construction project then. Once you crossed the main railway line, it was possible to walk all the way from our house in Yatton to the Bristol Channel without crossing any roads.

The immediate landscape there was dominated by 'The Pit' and what Dad called 'The Footpath'. I soon got to know the latter as 'The Junglo' from my friends. Later I learnt that it was really called Gang Wall. The Pit is a large pond which is now completely surrounded by undergrowth and trees. Back then, it was possible to fish for pike on the bank end, nearest the farm. The weed covered water was visible from the track-bed and beautiful bulrushes ran along that side. The mysterious wooden projection in the centre of the pond appeared to be a broken telegraph pole. I'm ashamed to say that in the winter of 1981 a number of us reached that piece of wood in a Narnia like transformed world of ice and frost.

Back at the time of *Plant A Tree in 73*, our class teacher wanted teasels. I was so proud to be the only child who turned up with one the next day. Dad went for a rummage on the banks of 'The Pit' and knew exactly what he was looking for. It was by The Pit that I used to encounter dragonflies. I didn't give butterflies a second look as they were so common. As I crossed the old railway after the Pit, one day I encountered my first water-boatman in a smaller rhyne. Tadpoles and grass-snakes were common finds too. Sticklebacks and minnows were regular spots in the rhyne. One thing that reassures me is that Gang Wall (The Junglo) has remained largely as it was then.

I began to learn more about my Mum's ancestors as time went on. They lived in both Horsecastle and Hewish. Walking that footpath and the Yeo river bank shows how close those communities were before the A370. The fields and the farming were vital links. It's apparent at the far end of the footpath now that buildings are creeping ever closer.

We often walked up as far as the River Yeo, on the old track-bed, to Congresbury. The old line ran right up to the river edge then, which was much closer to the main road (the river course was slightly re-routed back in recent times). One 70s highlight of that walk was removed in the late 70s: a signal pillar complete with ladder, adjacent to Cadbury Farm Road. Up there the wind blew and you could survey our kingdom for miles. This of course was pre Health and Safety too. On that walk, the swans on Binhay Rhyne were and still are, always a beautiful highlight.



The impact of possible development on the two fields at the end of Chescombe Road concerns me most. I used to spend a lot of time outdoors on winter evenings, aged 10-14. The hoots of owls and circling of bats were easy to spot in the main field before before Mendip Road was fully joined up. The gardens of the cottages at the head of the Binhay/Chescombe intersection merged with Mrs Day's orchard which ran all the way down to those fields. That interdependent eco-system is being forced backwards more and more.

Chris Wathen

Thanks very much to Chris Wathen for sharing his childhood memories.

If any other reader would like to share their reminiscences about our shared natural histories, perhaps in other parts of our area. please get in touch.

Nestbox News from Trevor Riddle

Soon after YACWAG was formed, the first Reserve, Ten Acres on Congresbury Moor, was purchased and a Barn Owl nesting box was erected in 2000. One of our members sourced an old telegraph pole (which was very heavy!) and a work party from Yatton Rotary Club manhandled it across the field, helped mount the box on top and heaved the pole upright. This box and its replacements (the original pole is still standing) have been very successful and there are now four other Barn Owl boxes on Congresbury Moor, plus others at Stowey, Kenn Moor and Littlewood. Our latest replacement box in Norton's is made of recycled plastic which we hope will have a much longer life than our traditional marine plywood boxes.



Ten Acres, November 2000 - up it goes!

Advice from Chris Sperring persuaded us that a second owl box would be beneficial for the male to roost in away from the female and hoped-for young. The first birds to use one of these boxes were Kestrels in 2002 when they reared three young then in 2004, eureka!, Barn Owls nested and fledged four Owlets. By summer 2021 the total number of Owlets fledged from boxes on our Reserves stood at an impressive 68. We have put up a number of boxes designed for Kestrels over the years but no Kestrel has ever shown any interest - they are designed by humans after all, but Kestrels do like our Barn Owl boxes.

In 2004 Littlewood was purchased and 12 tit boxes and a Tawny Owl box were put up. Three more Tawny and 14 tit boxes followed so we now have about 30 boxes but despite this lots of birds are happy to take advantage of the boxes provided and designed for bats. The entrance holes in the bat boxes are supposed to be too small for birds to enter but obviously they are not! We are changing our bird boxes from traditional wood to Woodstone/woodcrete which have a much longer life.

There are a number of boxes in Stowey with others on our members' adjacent field, more in the wooded parts of the Strawberry Line and a few in the Kenn Moor Reserve.

Yatton, Kenn, Kingston Seymour and Kenn churchyards also host our boxes with a couple on nearby Glebelands at Yatton. There are boxes at Yatton and Congresbury schools where pupils have been able to watch and assist box cleaning in pre COVID times.

We have boxes in the private fishing pond in Wemberham Lane including (just installed) a Kingfisher nesting chamber and tunnel. This is a new venture and a trial. Kingfishers have visited the pond in the recent past so fingers crossed.

All of these boxes need emptying and sometimes maintenance and replacement in winter and there is a loyal band of volunteers who do this. I have a series of sketch maps of varying accuracy to help us locate the boxes - it's surprising how easy it is to miss them. I keep a record of the results in two hardback books and the data has been and is digitised for safe keeping by more volunteers. Generally about two thirds of our small boxes have nests, although it is not possible to say how successful they have been.

YACWAG member Barbara Evans sponsored two new replacement Tawny Owl boxes on Cadbury Hill this year and Barbara has generously offered to sponsor further boxes needed to replace life-expired ones. Most of our boxes have been serviced this winter: November and December is the main nestbox season, but if any member would like to assist next winter

please email me at birds@YACWAG.org.uk.



Kingfisher box and tunnel, now completely concealed except tunnel hole

Trevor Riddle

Christmas Bird Survey Results

Win Lowman has been conducting a Christmas Bird Survey for YACWAG for many years and she reports here on this year's survey.

Over Christmas 2021 87 surveys were completed. Thanks to all who took part - members of YACWAG, Backwell Environment Trust and non-members. Also many thanks to Mark Stanford for setting up the online reporting system which gave surveyors an alternative way of reporting their sightings.

The Top Ten Birds Which Appeared in Most Gardens

1.	Blackbird	84 gardens
2.	Robin	83 gardens
3.	Wood Pigeon	78 gardens
4.	Blue Tit	73 gardens
5.	House Sparrow and Magpie	equal with appearances in 61 gardens
7.	Goldfinch	49 gardens
8.	Great Tit	47 gardens
9.	Collared Dove	45 gardens
10.	Dunnock	44 gardens

The number of species which landed = 44, those that only flew over = 11 and species only heard = 1. A total of 56 species was recorded - two more species than in the 2020 survey.

Trevor Riddle reports that the 2021 survey attracted two thirds of the 2020 'lockdown' participants so he has extrapolated the data to provide a comparison with the 2020 results. Overall the change in numbers of birds recorded was in line with national figures. This is an early initial report and it may be possible to provide more in depth analysis later.

Trevor selected 17 of the most regular garden birds (bigger numbers give more accurate statistics) and of these seven species had increased, three had remained stable and seven had declined. Unsurprisingly most of the increases were in generalist species which are faring well nationally: Wood Pigeon, Magpie and Jackdaw for example. 530 Jackdaws were counted which Trevor reckons is about the number in Yatton but the survey covered Congresbury and other local areas. Some 2,500 were seen flying over so there was almost certainly some duplication there. Starling also showed a big increase which is slightly more surprising as numbers at the big Somerset Levels roost have been a bit smaller this winter. Some Starlings have been reported roosting at the former airfield at Weston super Mare.

Many passerines and in particular 'farmland' birds are struggling but the Goldfinch always provides a ray of hope - our survey birds increased by 30 percent. Greenfinches are steadily recovering from the trichomoniasis disease and were up by around 20 percent while Chaffinches, which have been struck by the disease more recently, were recorded in virtually the same numbers as last year. House Sparrows remained stable, still much fewer than the 1970s but there has been a steady increase locally over the last ten years.



*Male house sparrow
Photo: Emily Lomas*

The dry Spring in 2021 was noted as reducing the productivity of our Tit species but looking at Blue, Great, Coal and Long Tailed collectively we recorded equal numbers to 2021. Blue and Great Tits both increased whilst Coal and Long Tailed Tits were down. There is some concern that garden feeding and nestbox provision helps Blue and Great Tits to the detriment of more specialist species such as Coal and, where they occur, Marsh Tits. It is likely to be some time before science is able to be definite about this.

Bird Survey Report Continued

This year's star bird was the Black Redstart seen and photographed in a garden in North Yatton probably attracted by an infusion of bark mulch spread by the owner. They love the insects that come in the mulch. Black Redstarts are rare birds but probably quite a few go unrecorded if they frequent private gardens.

It would be an interesting but impossible task to assess the area of the 87 gardens and measure a similar area of countryside then compare the numbers of birds and species using the two habitats. Trevor's guess is that gardens would win by a very considerable margin.

Other wildlife visiting gardens this year were badgers, squirrels and a large rat!

Judy Ashley from Congresbury was the winner of the prize draw.



*Black Redstart in rain
Photo: Emily Lomas*

Bird Song Walk and Others



*Male Chaffinch
Photo: Emily Lomas*

If you would like to accompany Trevor on a bird song walk, this will take place on Monday Bank Holiday 2nd May, meeting at 7am by the mosaic seat on the Yatton section of the Strawberry Line (near top of Chescombe Road). This two-hour walk is strictly limited to those who book. Please do so via birds@yacwag.org.uk.

Trevor is also generously able to share his experience and expertise with members when he goes out on regular BTO transects and other local walks. If you would be interested in learning from him, or training to do some bird survey work, please email him on birds@yacwag.org.uk.

Watch out for other opportunities to join a YACWAG guided walk. These will be notified via an email from the Secretary and may be organised at short notice to make the most of spells of settled good weather. It may be necessary to invite you to book a place.

We hope to be able to visit our reserves and show you some of the special wildlife interest there - 'nature as your neighbour' - as well as leading some longer walks on local footpaths. We also hope you will support any public events we may be able to put on this year (Covid permitting). We would like to think we will be arranging pond dipping, bug hunts and other fun activities on our Stowey Reserve, and we are looking forward to giving all our members the chance to see Cobthorn Reserve. At the moment those events remain on the drawing board. We hope by the time of the next newsletter in April we will have some firm dates and some better Covid news.

In the meantime if you would like to get more involved, please get in touch. YACWAG has a list of admin tasks and volunteering roles that we would love to share with anyone who has the time to join in behind the scenes of running a small charity.

YACWAG Work on the Strawberry Line

YACWAG's new agreement with DEFRA includes some funding for work on the Strawberry Line between Yatton and Congresbury (part of Biddle Street SSSI). YACWAG has been involved in management of the margins of the dual-use path for nature conservation for over 20 years. The money can be spent hiring contractors to create and maintain water features along the Line, and to remove some of the bramble.

Although bramble is an excellent plant for wildlife, providing first-class food and shelter, you can have too much of a good thing - especially along the edges of a busy path.



Scabious on the Strawberry Line



Red campion in a glade at Yatton Junction

Late autumn cutting in recent times has enabled plants like knapweed, scabious and red campion to re-establish a presence, and in places a grassy margin has developed again. At the other end, Andrew Hunt, with careful cutting at the Congresbury end of the path, has opened up views of St Andrew's Church across the fields.

The area of land forming part of the Local Nature Reserve near Yatton station is known as Yatton Junction. Over the last few years YACWAG has been using its regular contractors Green Mantle to manage grassland in three glades on this four acres of land once occupied by the railway. The wild flowers have responded to the new light coming in and, as well as truly native plants, there are large patches of those rampant garden escapes, Canadian Golden-rod and Michaelmas Daisy. These certainly bring in the insects! YACWAG also pays for a triangle of grass near the Millennium Arch to be cut annually and this makes an ideal sunny area for butterflies. YACWAG is planning to do more work at Yatton Junction, including a new information board which has been funded by Bristol Airport and Yatton WI. It was always earmarked as the gateway to the Mendips and YACWAG would like to make a welcoming area that is visibly good for wildlife. If this is a project you would like to help with, please let us know (contact@yacwag.org.uk). There are jobs to be done on the ground and from the comfort of your armchair!

YACWAGger Profile - Les Millar

Les Millar became YACWAG's Honorary Treasurer only a few months ago when he responded to an appeal to members following the resignation of Viv French as a Trustee of YACWAG. Viv is now YACWAG's Finance Officer dealing with book-keeping and membership, while Les has joined the Trustees and deals with more strategic and accounting matters.

Les was born on an Agricultural College farm in County Durham so it was inevitable that he would have an interest in the countryside. I asked him to tell me about his background.

Escape to the Country

I took a degree in Agriculture and it coincided with the start of the implementation of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which moved nature conservation forward considerably. In my first job I worked for an advisory branch of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Later I worked in financial roles and qualified as an accountant, first working in the Ministry of Agriculture and then for the Ministry of Defence in Bristol. I went out to Germany for five years and when I came back to Bristol we started looking for a house. One we were planning to buy in Portishead fell through and we came to look in Yatton. It was like *Escape to the Country*.

On my first day in Chescombe Road, Yatton, I discovered the Strawberry Line, thanks to a tip from Mark Templer, our estate agent, who was a fellow runner. I read something about a group doing some hedge-laying on Cadbury Hill and I wandered up to have a look and saw a YACWAG team in action. That was my first encounter.



What is your main interest in nature and wildlife?

I have always been interested in land management and as part of my agricultural degree I studied Biology and Botany. Our tutor was very interested in buttercups and some of the Botany course stuck and strangely I can remember more of that than the agricultural matters.

How do you see YACWAG developing?

I think it is important to have more land - and in bigger blocks managed a certain way, but I also worry about the educational objective. How do we get a larger body of people understanding the importance of how the land we own is managed? How can we reach more people and encourage them to work in the same way? I think the best way is by sharing with them our land, so they see it regenerated and biodiverse. The environment is very easy to avoid these days. Young people don't walk much and are turned off by having their grandparents teaching them about wild flowers but we do need to reach them.

Is there anything we could be doing better?

There is always more to do. We need to do more information sharing and more education. That will always be the case. We need people to know that biodiversity is good for us. I know it will always be a challenge.

Why did you want to volunteer with YACWAG?

I have got a little more time now and I want to use it productively. I am interested in the countryside and its management and I wanted to do something to meet that interest. As an accountant I am able to use my skills to help the organisation develop robust financial systems. I think it is interesting to consider when the clock rolls forward what YACWAG's land will be like and I am glad I have been able to join the Land Management sub committee which I think will be very interesting.

Waitrose and AXA Support YACWAG Work

YACWAG has had a few unexpected donations over the last couple of months. The surprise of being given money without asking for it increases the gratitude for receiving funds to carry out more of our work. The first came from a professional photographer from South Somerset who had been conducting a photo shoot on Cadbury Hill. She had lost a very special lens and was doing all she could to find it. Amazingly, a dog walker found it the next day and Faith just happened to notice it in her hand! The photographer was so pleased to get it back that she made a sizeable donation to YACWAG funds.

Not long after, YACWAG received an email from Waitrose, Nailsea. We were told that the younger branch partners wanted to give an award to an environmental group in the area. They had been studying local charities' websites and chose YACWAG! We were delighted to receive an unexpected community award of £500.

Lastly, just before Christmas we heard from AXA that YACWAG had been nominated, again by staff of the local branch, for an award of £2000 for a community group working for biodiversity and climate resilience. For the second time we were told that YACWAG's website had helped the decision. These unsolicited gifts have been so welcome because they enable us to do more than we expected. In the coming year we hope to put up some more new information boards and get involved in new educational work. These donations will make those plans easier to resource.

YACWAG relies on members' subscriptions and donations to keep the charity running and meet our costs. We are always grateful for your thoughtful donations, of whatever value, as our costs are inevitably rising. Just like a household we have to pay for insurance, costs associated with having a first-class website and contractors to do jobs on our land. Your help with this unglamorous work is always very much appreciated.



Trees Dressed with Bees and Hearts in Yatton, Claverham and Congresbury

Tree Dressing Day was again celebrated in YACWAG's patch with a colourful display of knitted bees, hearts and pompom bees. YACWAG is very grateful for the hard work of all those who knitted hearts and bees for us and for the lovely pompoms made by CCY Scouts, CCY Cubs, Yeo Valley Forest School Forest Tots, Yatton Juniors Forest School After-School Club, Yatton Infants Forest School After-School Club, St Andrew's School Years 5 and 6, Congresbury Youth Partnership and Stepping Stones Pre-School.



Summer Moth-trapping in Littlewood

Richard Nokes and Rebecca Wilson from YACWAG's contractors, the wildlife habitat management company Green Mantle, were fascinated by Littlewood and its moths. They share their experience:

Back in the hazy, lazy days of August 2021 we were given kind permission to have a go at moth trapping in Littlewood, a stunning hidden gem of a woodland owned by YACWAG. For those not familiar with the site it's tucked away in the fields between Yatton and Nailsea and is home to majestic ancient alders, wizened oaks and a plenty of interesting wildlife.

It was one of those hazy midsummer evenings, the sort that poets past would have written about with enthusiasm as they extolled the virtues of the bucolic and pastoral. The sun was slowly, lazily sinking down toward the horizon, yet it was taking its time, enjoying its slow mellowing. No one would have wanted it any other way. The narrow country lanes wound across a landscape flat and alluring in its seeming openness with luscious green grass delineated by deep rhyndes or ditches.

We were using Heath traps this evening. Simple but effective these traps, baited with the glow of an ultra violet bulb, would lure in moths. Once they come to the light the moths circle it and some end up dropping or flying into the body of the trap below. At least, that's the plan, but sometimes the moths forget to read the script. Heath traps are humane, the lamp does them no harm, accept perhaps temporarily dazzling them when they get close, and the moths are provided with old egg cartons in the body of the trap on which to settle until morning. No one is really sure why moths are so attracted to the glow of the lamp. One theory is that they mistake the lamp for the moon, this throws off their navigation and they end up circling it in confusion. I suppose we'll never know the true reason they fly to the light until we learn to speak moth.

We laid our traps out in two woodland clearings towards the back of the wood; these spots seemed to offer the greatest proximity to the greatest diversity of habitats, a good bet for a diverse haul of moths. The night slowly drew in and soon it was time to fire up the lamps. We sat with them for a while and took in the ephemeral beauty of the dusk, watched the first stars rise into view as the last warmth of day fell to the shadows.

The moths came in dribs and drabs at first, which gave us a chance to try out the bat detectors we had been lent. I had never used them before but was amazed how much more can be heard with them. Sometimes the larger bat species can be heard by ear, being bigger and thus having deeper voices, but the detectors opened up frequencies beyond human range. Common Pipistrelle and Soprano Pipistrelle flew and crackled overhead with the odd Natterer's bat there too. It was good to see such healthy numbers of bats in Littlewood, it shows that YACWAG's management is doing some good.

The next morning we returned to check the traps. You have to return before it warms up as, if the moths get warm, they'll start to try and fly out of the trap. They get battered about in their fluttering and this doesn't do them any good. So, when we got there early (inhumanly early) we were in time to still feel the chill of the dawn and examine the moths before they got too warm.

We counted 25 different species in total, with a haul of over 50 individuals. A full list can be made available on request but there were a few that stood out from the crowd, one of which was the Bee moth. The Bee Moth feeds on debris left over from bee and wasp nests, its presence here could indicate a healthy bumble bee population. The Poplar Hawk Moth was a good find too, it's a large charismatic moth that favours damper woodlands such as Littlewood.



Poplar hawk moth at Littlewood

Moth trapping in Littlewood continued

Alongside these we caught a good selection of more common species, some of which are quite distinctive such as the Magpie Moth, Large Yellow Underwing and Brimstone moths. Take a look at some pictures of these latter three, there's a good chance you might see them in your garden in the summer.



Green carpet moth at Littlewood

It was with a little sorrow we packed up and left Littlewood, it was still fairly early in the morning when we moved off and the woodland was still bathed in a hint of golden dawn light. The countryside was quiet, although it was rising with bird song and the sound of alder leaves rattling to the faintest of summer breezes. It really is a gorgeous little spot and, thanks to the continued work of yourselves at YACWAG, it looks set to be kept that way for a good long time. Thank you for keeping these places special.

Thanks to Richard and Rebecca for sharing their experience, and to Green Mantle for helping us at Littlewood and many of our other sites. The management of Littlewood is largely passive with little intervention - 'leave it to nature' but in order to carry out surveys and move about safely it is necessary to clear a path and sometimes move some fallen wood. Littlewood, like our other reserves, provides a safe haven for wildlife and YACWAG therefore provides access for educational purposes by appointment only.



In Littlewood, when a tree falls, nature slowly recycles it and re-shapes the wood.

Members' Survey Results

In November YACWAG invited its members to complete a simple questionnaire to help us understand the priorities of those who support us. Thank you to all those who responded - there were 88 members who submitted their forms. Tony Moulin reports on what we learned.

Your responses were very positive and encouraging about our work. You have endorsed the progress we have made over the years, and especially during the last difficult years during the pandemic. Below I give some of the numbers and draw out what I believe to be some of the key points.

1. How do you stay informed about YACWAG's activities?

Both the quarterly newsletter and the occasional email communication from our Secretary were clearly very important to members, each being mentioned in almost 90 percent of the responses. Over half mentioned the use of the website, and it seems its use is growing. The Facebook group was also mentioned in 32 percent of replies, reflecting the steady increase in its use, particularly acting as a forum for members and non members alike during the lockdowns. It is an important vehicle for membership recruitment. 6 percent were using Twitter, and 5 percent using Instagram. It is early days for both of the latter and it is expected these will grow and provide important platforms for outreach.

2. What three words come into your head when you think about YACWAG?

I found the responses to this question very interesting as they reflected a consistent understanding of our charitable purpose. The words 'wildlife' and 'nature' were unsurprisingly in over half of the responses (55 percent); 'conservation' and words with similar meaning were given in 39 percent of the replies. The next most mentioned word was 'local' (35 percent). I liked the word 'vital' which was used once - an important affirmation in these times of species decline, and one member's three words: 'effective, efficient and essential' summed up for me our approach. Members often coupled the three words to make a phrase: 'caring for nature', 'local active organisation' and 'wonderful local achievement'. Last but not least, 'I love YACWAG!'

3. What is your main nature interest?

The replies let us know what you are interested in, but are also important for us to encourage interest in other groups you may not have mentioned. Birds are very close to us and we see them every day so their popularity is not surprising. Bats are a significant part of our work, particularly because of the threat to our local landscapes through development. It may be important for us to raise an interest in invertebrates since they are the food source for both bats and many birds.

Your main nature interests

Birds	83%
Nature conservation	82%
Trees	66%
Climate/ecological emergency	64%
Plants	60%
Mammals	44%
Reptiles and amphibians	35%
Bats	34%
Invertebrates	31%

4. YACWAG has two main aims - to create and maintain nature reserves and to educate and inform people about nature and its conservation. Choose three priorities.

The most frequently chosen priority was acquisition of land (69 percent). Second came work with children and schools (47 percent), third responding to planning applications (41 percent), followed by fourth, influencing landowners and decision makers (35 percent). Over 20 percent of respondents mentioned guided walks. We are going to try and meet that need in the coming year.

“Buy more land; get a strategic vision for climate emergency”

5. Membership rates

YACWAG has not put up its membership rates for a very long time. It has always been YACWAG's intention to keep membership affordable for everyone and not to take funds from other local deserving causes. We have all become more aware of the importance of nature to our health and well-being and we would not want to put barriers in the way of people seeking an expression of their need for nature, including membership of YACWAG.

In response to the question about membership rates, 90 percent of responses said it should be £6.50 per annum or above. The Trustees have taken this information into account in reviewing our membership fee.

6. What do you go to the website for?

We were glad to get strong evidence that the website is being so well used by members, as well as by potential donors and those new to the area looking for information about local wildlife.

Monthly blogs	61%
Other topical information	57%
Calendar	36%
Wildlife advice and information	35.%
Information about YACWAG	61%
To make a donation	5%
To renew membership	35%
Browsing, viewing drone videos etc	28%
Other reasons	12% in total

Some of the encouraging comments received:

“I like what YACWAG is doing and the means I have to access its resources. There is plenty of information out there!”

“Keep doing what you are doing”

“In these rapidly changing times and a climate emergency we need more groups like YACWAG, keep up the good work.”

“The more we educate - at all ages - the more we raise awareness of local conservation issues, the more we invest in future conservators, raising our profile and increasing revenue to sustain that education.”

Thank you very much for all your comments and feedback. We had some interesting suggestions and we will try to take all your positive ideas into account. Volunteers are putting in many hours of work and I am sure your responses will be appreciated. I feel they show that Trustees can be confident that we are on the right path.

Tony Moulin

Frog and Toad Spawn Count on Now

Take part in this year's Frog and Toad Spawn Count by recording any frog or toad spawn you encounter this spring - whether in your garden pond or in one of your local green spaces, Avon Reptile and Amphibian Group (ARAG) wants to hear about it!

Taking the lead from the Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) who are running the count as a citizen science project for the first time this year, ARAG thought it was a great idea and one to join in around Bristol. A Bristol iNaturalist group for the count has been set up: <https://uk.inaturalist.org/.../bristol-frog-toad-spawn-count>.

Details on how to set up and use an iNaturalist account and a free Guide on Frog and Toad Spawn can be found on the SWT website: <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/.../grea.../frog-toad-count>

Why take part?

Frogs and toads are often under recorded, largely due to them being so familiar that many people don't expect a record to be of significant value. However, frogs and toads are indicator species, as they absorb water directly through their skin, making them especially vulnerable to water pollutants like pesticides. Recording these species can show potential fluctuations in population and distribution and also any changes in seasonality and effects of climate change.

When?

Frog spawn usually starts appearing as early as January into February. Toad spawn usually starts appearing in February into March. So start keeping an eye out now and remember to record any sightings!



Frogspawn in a Yatton garden pond January 2021