



Newsletter

Registered charity no 1076362

August 2023 Vol 24 Issue 4



www.yacwag.org.uk

Yatton Junction Reserve Blossoms



IN THIS ISSUE

Welcome New Trustees.....	2
ditto	3
Chairperson's Awards.....	4
Barn Owls, Kestrels	5
Emily owl monitor trainee	6
Moth Trapping, Large Whites	7
Brown Argus, Wellness Walks	8
Education and Events	9
Au Revoir Super Swifts	10
From Covid to Creativity ...	11
Looking After Local Bats ...	12
ditto	13
Yellow Loosestrife Bee	14

Welcome to Linda, Carol and Thomas - New Trustees

Three new Trustees were elected at the AGM. Here they tell us a little about themselves, starting with Linda Bourton:

I grew up in Lancashire around 12 miles north of Liverpool. My parents were keen campers and walkers. Many of my childhood holidays were spent in the Lake District and North Wales where we would walk in the hills and along the coastline. This developed my love of the outdoors and the natural world which continues to this day as I find spending time in the countryside really helps to me relax and unwind and put life into perspective.

After training as a nurse in Liverpool, I moved to Bristol working at Southmead Hospital and the Bristol Royal Infirmary in both Renal and ITU nursing and later in my career teaching at UWE in Bristol. I also spent several years living and working in Australia and on return to the UK moved to Congresbury with my family.

Recently I have semi-retired from nursing and with my newly acquired free time I joined YACWAG. I really value the countryside we have around here. I love walking along the Strawberry Line with its abundance of nature and wildlife and along the banks of the Congresbury Yeo. By joining YACWAG my hope is to be able to support its aim of maintaining our local nature reserves. In Spring 2023 I joined other volunteers completing the bird counts at Cobthorn Reserve to learn from them and develop my knowledge which at this time is poor!

I've also become involved with the Education and Events group. This group aims to advance education of nature conservation in our local area and I feel that I can use the skills and experience gained during my time as a nurse and nurse educator to support the work that this group undertakes. I enjoyed interacting with people of all ages in the local community at the Congresbury Fete this year and sharing information about Swifts and YACWAG with them.

Linda Bourton

You can read all the Trustee profiles on the YACWAG website under the heading "About Us": <https://yacwag.org.uk>



Carol Tennant explains why she is looking forward to helping more:

Having been brought up in rural Ireland, my upbringing instilled a love of nature and the outdoors. I moved to the UK in 2012 and, after several years of city living and enjoying urban nature, moved to Yatton in 2022. This move reignited my appreciation for the countryside and the vital need to protect and safeguard it, along with the wildlife, for generations to come. Motivated by these values, I joined YACWAG recognising the incredible work they do within the local community and the opportunity it provides to expand my knowledge of nature and the environment.



Since joining YACWAG I have enjoyed meeting other members at various events including a Bat Walk on Cadbury Hill and some early morning bird walks with Trevor. Additionally, I have been actively involved in volunteering at YACWAG stands during the recent Yatton and Congresbury village events, where we focused on raising awareness about swifts and their remarkable migratory routes.

In essence, my desire to become a trustee of YACWAG stems from my profound connection to nature, the invaluable experiences I have already gained as a member and my determination to use my professional skills as a marketer to support the organisation to reach a wider audience and make a lasting difference in the protection of local wildlife and their habitats.

I firmly believe that by working together with fellow trustees of YACWAG, its members and the local community, we can create a sustainable future where wildlife thrives and the beauty of nature remains a source of inspiration for generations to come.

Carol Tennant

We also have a third new Trustee. YACWAG's constitution allows for a Trustee to be nominated by the parish councils of Yatton and Congresbury. Cllr Roger Wood has represented Yatton Parish Council for a long time, and after a little gap, we are now delighted to welcome Cllr Thomas Daw representing Congresbury.



Thomas is a young member of the Green Party who was elected to the parish council in May 2023 and immediately knew he wanted to take up the opportunity to become a Trustee of YACWAG as a representative of the council. He is enthusiastic about his new role and says he is proud to be a part of the charity.

Chairperson's Awards for 2022

At the AGM held at Middlecombe Nursery in Congresbury in June, YACWAG's Chairperson Tony Moulin made three awards to younger people within the organisation for their exceptional achievements for YACWAG during the year.

He firstly thanked Rowan Peters for his fundraising at Nailsea School, which had entirely met the cost of YACWAG's Swift Project nest-boxes - and with some to spare.

Meriel Harrison's award was also for the Swift Project which she had initiated and carried out, creating publicity material, liaising with Nailsea Sheddars who made the boxes, making a swift migration game for the summer fairs, and handling enquiries from people in swift hotspots in Yatton and Congresbury who wanted to host a YACWAG Swift box.

Meriel also 'recruited' Mark Loader, a volunteer who was able to help by putting up the boxes on house walls to meet the swifts' requirements. Mark was also subsequently presented with a swift-themed mug as a thank-you from YACWAG.

Steve Rea has been a huge help in the past year, coming forward with an idea to restore the station platforms, woodland and reedbed at Congresbury. Steve has managed the project on behalf of YACWAG, resulting in a huge amount of positive publicity and a much improved entrance to the Strawberry Line at Congresbury. He will be organising and leading further work parties in the autumn.



Rowan



Meriel



Steve



**YOUR PHOTOS, ARTICLES,
POEMS etc ARE ALWAYS
WELCOME.**

**Please submit to
contact@yacwag.org.uk**

Photo left by Gary Lovett of a Jersey Tiger moth on the road sign for Wemberham Lane!

Barn Owls, Kestrels and the Weather



2023 hasn't been a productive year for Barn Owls. Unhelpful weather patterns have almost certainly caused low field vole numbers. Several volunteers (my thanks to them) and myself have checked the YACWAG and some neighbouring boxes under licence and Chris Sperring MBE, Conservation Officer with the Hawk & Owl Trust, has ringed five Barn owlets at three sites. Another box held one owlet that for practical reasons was not ringed so four pairs produced an average of 1.5 young. Chris confirmed that this pretty much replicated the pattern across the South West with just a few sites on parts of Mendip doing better. He believes that most, if not all, broods have started bigger but starvation reduced numbers - albeit providing protein for bigger owlet siblings.

During our winter Snipe counts there were plenty of vole runs visible in the fields but by late Spring there was little evidence of voles and we know from pellet analysis that field voles form more than 90 percent of our Barn Owls' diet. It seems likely that the dry spell in May and June prevented normal grass growth and voles need young shoots to feed themselves and their young. Kestrels have fared a little better, and although small mammals comprise a large proportion of their food, they are able to capture young birds and will feed on worms and invertebrates. One YACWAG box yielded three young Kestrels and a pair raised an unknown number of young at another Reserve, probably in a Carrion Crow's old nest. Jon and myself checked the two owl boxes at the Nailsea Environment and Wildlife Trust (NEWT) Reserve and discovered four large Kestrel chicks there. Their volunteers were astonished and delighted in equal measure as they had observed no Kestrel activity whatsoever! Barn Owls don't have a defined nesting period; Kestrels are usually more regular with breeding dates but Chris is aware of some unusually late Kestrel nests this year. As an aside, he has also learned of Peregrines laying three months later than normal and that is exceptional. All is considered to be weather related.



Photo: Tony Moulin

We hope that our Owlets will fledge and that the vole population will recover to enable them to thrive. It will be difficult for them if prey remains scarce but there will be fewer Owls seeking it this year - nature generally has a way of evening things out. The two previous years saw lots of Owlets raised so one poor year after that is not unusual and isn't a problem provided that success returns in ensuing years. There have been years (such as the notoriously wet summer of 2012) when no Owlets survived but numbers recovered.

I'll plan to provide a bit more detail in the next newsletter.

Trevor Riddle

Healthy Kestrel and Hungry Owl



Emily Lomas has been a huge support to YACWAG's Land Management sub-committee, frequently visiting our reserves and keeping an eye on the resident wildlife. She uses YACWAG's trail camera to great effect to help with monitoring, and is also a very good photographer. Emily has also been of great help to Trevor and is about to take on a new monitoring role that will make her even more helpful!



Kestrel chick, above, and barn owl chick, left, photographed in their boxes by Emily Lomas



Emily with an owlet that had just been ringed under license by Chris Sperring MBE from the Hawk and Owl Trust.

Barn Owl Monitoring

I have been helping to survey birds around Yatton for the last few years, by sending reports and photographs to Trevor Riddle and also recording on the BTO Birdtrack app. Two of my favourite birds are the Kestrel and the Barn Owl, and I have been lucky enough to watch the Barn Owl ringing with Chris Sperring from the Hawk and Owl Trust. I am keen to learn more about these beautiful birds and also help to continue the breeding success on the YACWAG reserves. I am looking forward to helping Trevor and training to be a permit holder for the future monitoring of the YACWAG boxes.

Emily Lomas

Moth Trapping for Beginners

After reading the June issue of the YACWAG newsletter we were excited to see that we could borrow a moth trap to see which moths were visiting our garden. Although some moths fly in the day, most are nocturnal and so we had no idea what we might find, or if we would be successful. It was very easy to set up, and as moths are attracted to light, we were successful every time we used it. It was fun trying to identify the moths and also releasing them again. It was great to know that so many beautiful moths were visiting our garden at night as they are important pollinators and a food source for other species such as birds. I would recommend anyone to give it a go!



Small magpie moth



Common rustic moth

Emily Lomas

Moth trapping can be carried out in all seasons but the late summer is one of the best times to attract a variety of moths to light. If you would like to borrow a moth trap and see what is in your garden at night, do get in touch through contact@yacwag.org.uk. We can help with identification too.

Large White Butterflies Are Doing Better

It is not easy to capture butterfly behaviour on camera. However a mobile phone ready to hand increases the chance of a shot. Here a female Large White signals her availability to mate by raising her abdomen to an interested male hovering above.

On this occasion he does not pursue the invitation and tires of the brief interest. Female butterfly abdomens are larger than the male's in order to have capacity to carry eggs. In some species this maybe up to 500 eggs. Female Large Whites are more heavily marked too.

Last year was not great for this species which in better years is supplemented by migrants from Europe. It is is good to see reasonable numbers at the moment.



Tony Moulin

Butterflies to Look Out for Now

It has been good to see the delightful Brown Argus, a small brown butterfly around and about in late summer. It can look slightly silvery grey in strong sunlight. The Brown Argus is more likely to be encountered out in the wider countryside than in gardens. This female (top right) was found on the Strawberry Line at Yatton Junction Reserve taking nectar from Wild Carrot - a plant well-liked by many insects. Females can be distinguished by the orange markings on the forewings which extend to the top of the wing-tip whereas these stop short in the male.



The butterfly can easily be confused with the female Common Blue - photo right also from Yatton Junction in the first days of August. This, however, is a slightly larger butterfly with less uniformly-coloured wings with varying blue shading near the wing bases. Another distinguishing feature is that the orange markings on the hind wings are also mixed with white on female Common Blues. Both species can be seen throughout August and are often flying together in the same habitats.



Tony Moulin

Wellness Walks in August and September

Funded by WeSport and run by YACWAG, the Wellness Walks aim to reduce social isolation and improve mental and physical health through access to nature. YACWAG is grateful to Sarah Dale for organising and running the programme of interesting and varied local nature walks.

Sunday 13th August 20.15-22.15 Bat Walk on Cadbury Hill, meet at the car park at the end of Henley Lane, Yatton (not the cricket club car park)

Saturday 19th August 10.00-12.00 Grasshopper Walk, meet at the Strawberry Line entrance off Chescombe Road, Yatton

Saturday 9th September 10.00-12.00 A Guided tour of Goblin Combe, meet at Goblin Combe car park, Cleeve Hill Road, Cleeve.

Sunday 24th September 14.00-16.30 Dormouse Walk. Book for meeting details.



Booking is essential. For information and to book, email yacwagwww@gmail.com

Education and Events

Have you ever wondered how YACWAG events and activities come about, who plans and organises them? Well, in the autumn of 2021 a small group of members from both Yatton and Congresbury met together (on Zoom, of course!) to do just this, so replacing the somewhat ad hoc basis that had gone before.

With this remit, the Education and Events sub-committee has been responsible for arranging three large public events: the two Wildlife Window Wanderlands and the Cobthorn Open Day in 2022. The Swift Project has been set up and monitored by two members of the group. Smaller events have been on our agenda too: bat-themed displays and stalls at Yatton Carnival and Congresbury Fete in the summer of 2022, and in 2023 swift-themed stalls at the same venues plus another at Court de Wyck School in Claverham. Guided walks have also been organised in both villages and a range of winter talks were held on Zoom.

Our friendly inter-generational group (we range in age from 25-ish to 70-ish) now meets in person and we would love to engage with more people in the coming months and into next year when we will be planning events for YACWAG's 25th birthday. Are you perhaps a member who now has more free time on your hands and would like to be involved with YACWAG in a more practical way? Or are you aware of a new resident who wishes to meet local people? If so, please take a look at the YACWAG calendar and if an upcoming event is of interest email contact@yagwag.org.uk and find out how you can get involved.

More volunteers are always helpful: they bring new skills, fresh ideas, and help spread the load. Today, more than ever, it is vital that the second of YACWAG's charitable objectives - "to advance education in natural history and nature conservation" - is carried out as best it can be and the Education and Events sub-committee aims to do just that. Would you like to join us?



2022



2023

Sue Lovesey

Au Revoir Super Swifts!

The seasons keep on turning, and August's arrival heralds the departure of our local Swifts who are starting to head back south on the long migration towards their wintering grounds in Africa. It was around this time last year that YACWAG's Swift Project started coming together, and thanks to a brilliant team effort we have achieved a lot over the first year.

Thanks to funds raised by Rowan Peters, we were able to pay for materials for the skilled volunteers at Nailsea Shedders to make 20 Swift nest boxes. These have been hosted by Yatton and Congresbury residents who will be monitoring the boxes to see whether Swifts move in. Horsecastle Chapel now has a durable fibreglass 'Swift Hotel' with four nest chambers.

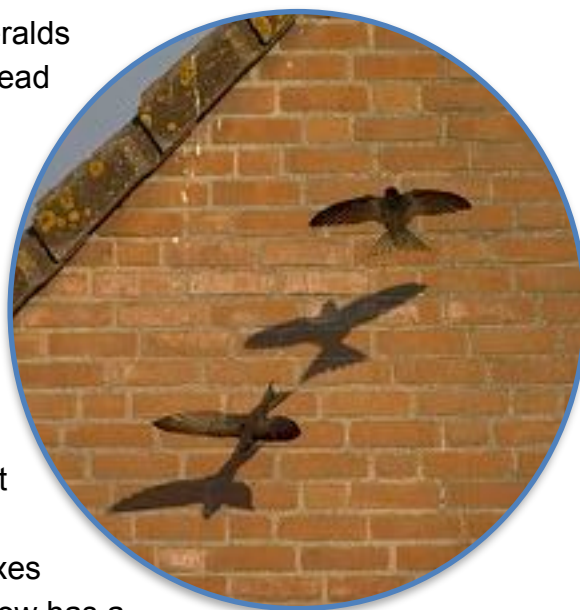


Photo: Marc Guyt

YACWAG's 'Super Swifts' stall was a big hit at Yatton Carnival, Congresbury Village Fete and Court de Wyck School Fete. Our team of events volunteers was kept busy with the many people stopping by to chat about Swifts, Swallows and House Martins and to play the Amazing Migration game. Hopefully we inspired a few to put up a Swift box and take action in other ways too.

The national petition to make Swift bricks compulsory in all new developments, which many YACWAG members will have signed, was debated in Parliament in July. Disappointingly, Government rejected the proposal and so for now this is left up to local authorities. Eight local authorities have already introduced requirements to make provision for Swifts through their planning policies, and we want to see North Somerset added to that list. **Write to your local Councillors** to express your support for making provision for Swifts a condition of new development.

If you've spotted any nesting Swifts or screaming parties of Swifts, please do add them to www.swiftmapper.org.uk to keep building the picture of local Swift activity. We will be taking stock now and planning ahead for the next year of the project. If you have any suggestions or would like to get involved, please contact swifts@yacwag.org.uk.

Meriel Harrison

From Covid to Creativity

New member Sarah Teasdale is a writer and former teacher. She looks back on the positives of lockdown and shares with us a thoughtful message for the summer.



How many of us recall the tranquillity that came with the lockdowns? No longer the constant roar of traffic and planes ripping through the sky and drowning the beauty of bird-song. How can we have forgotten the restorative power of Nature which many of us re-discovered, or even encountered for the first time? Through woods and fields we went, enjoying the company of family and greeting neighbours we hardly knew. Although isolated, we had more chance to communicate with others than ever. We waved and shouted greetings when clapping in the evenings for the NHS and, sometimes, this was the first opportunity to gain a sense of community, to consider what really mattered to us – the chance to care for other others and appreciate our immediate surroundings.

With the summer months upon us, can we not step back from our busy lives and make time for people? Instead of chasing dreams and travelling to distant places where we think the sun will always shine and our troubles will be over, why not explore the secrets of the world around us? A 'staycation' might not sound exciting, but it does not have to be tedious because it's on our door-step.

Just before lockdown, I moved from Clevedon to Nailsea and joined some local walking groups. Until then, I had been completely unaware of how many lovely country walks there were only a few miles from where I lived. Unfortunately, as in most of the country, rampant housing development seems to be spoiling this, but we have to hope and we have to do our best to try keep our countryside.

In his novel, 'The Grapes of Wrath', John Steinbeck describes how 'The Great Dust Bowl' of 1920s America emerged from the greed of huge corporations that drove tenant farmers from their land and killed the soil with over-cultivation and excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides. Yet people are urged to rise up since 'Two are better than one because they have a reward for their labour. . . For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow and a fella 'ain't got no soul his own, but only a piece of a big one.' And this is where we are now. We need to come together, speak out and work hard for the future of the whole.

As local organisations have shown, small actions lead to success – example can lead to incentive. If we believe in ourselves, others will believe in us, but we must remember that none of us is perfect. We make excuses for our consumer-led life-styles and feel extreme guilt, though guilt doesn't help the environment. We need to have a positive attitude, determination and take effective action to protect to ourselves and our precious surroundings, and, who knows, something good may come out of the 'Covid Crisis'....

Looking After Local Bats

YACWAG has had a strong interest in bats over the last 20 years and has built up a wealth of knowledge. We assisted Natural England and North Somerset Council with the development of the Bats Special Area for Conservation (SAC) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and we understand the challenges facing our local bats.

A lot of our time, unfortunately, in the last few years has been spent making detailed objections to planning applications. Every application that we need to oppose has to be thoroughly researched and commented on in an objective manner, not just in a hypothetical way, but on the basis of our own knowledge and picking through the professional ecological assessments with a fine tooth comb. This work is challenging and often 'against the clock' and it takes us away from more positive work we would prefer to be doing. It has been more and more difficult for YACWAG volunteers due to the lack of resources available to the authorities who should be fighting for our wildlife.

Without a Senior Ecologist for several years, the local planning authority has fallen back on information provided by the private-hire ecologists working for developers. Clearly this conflict of interests has an effect on the quality of mitigation for wildlife when their habitat is lost to development. Urbanisation is not generally good for wildlife and is especially damaging to bats, with light-spill being a particular problem for them and their insect prey. Much of our area is covered by the Bats SAC SPD and it is irksome to have to defend it and highlight its existence to planners who may not really understand its significance.

Mitigation for bats has become a big thing to developers. Just because it is provided for in the SPD, it does not mean that it is appropriate in all cases. In fact, not all developments are acceptable and not all harm can be mitigated. Mitigation should only be brought into play where there is a robust justification for development that outweighs the need to protect the SAC habitat. What we have seen, for example at Rectory Farm, Yatton, where the developer won on appeal, is a planning decision that was not based on any reasoned argument to conserve nature, but just a decision to punish the council for not having met its five year land supply quota. We were hoping this would not happen again.



Greater Horseshoe Bat
by Daniel Hargreaves

YACWAG has recently become aware that the local Greater Horseshoe Bat (GHB) population has suffered a decline. This is of real concern as the UK is a European stronghold for these rare and special bats. The current UK population is considered to be around 10,200. The 'favourable conservation status' estimate published in a report in January 2023 was proposed as 62,000. Our important local population has now fallen to under 1,000 and, as each mother has only one young a year, recovery will be slow and it will be an uphill struggle to keep what we have, let alone bring them up to a favourable status.

This decline in the Greater Horseshoe Bat population may be an early sign of the cumulative impact of development in the Yatton, Congresbury, Churchill, Claverham areas. Significant areas of agricultural land in our area are now being held for their investment potential rather than being farmed. The lack of farm animals reduces the insect prey species available to bats and the increase in lighting when development starts is thought to be responsible for a decline in insects generally.

Off-site mitigation, where land is set aside for bats to replace land that has been built on, is akin to creative accountancy. Habitat is not being added as it is often already being used by bats at the density that suits them. In the case of the application for land north of Rectory Farm, what is proposed is hard to see as anything but a Biodiversity Net Loss. Ten fields will be taken out of agricultural use and the proposed mitigation is two fields which are currently already used by bats. The net loss must be ten fields, both actually and potentially. No amount of creative accountancy can alter the fact that there is no 'gain' for the bats.

Another problem with recent applications in Congresbury, including the development that led to our acquisition of Cobthorn Reserve, is that planners do not require so-called 'mitigation' to be put in place before the highly destructive process of development starts. There is no monitoring of bats during the house-building works, and bats are naturally displaced when development starts. In the case of the Persimmon development north of Rectory Farm in Yatton, the mitigation proposed is contrary to planning guidance and unrealistic. The onus should be on the applicant to prove their proposals will not be harmful but this has not been done. An Environmental Impact Assessment on this sensitive site adjoining a SSSI was not considered by the council as being necessary even though their own policies should have been a safeguard.

YACWAG will continue to insist that local decision-makers adhere to their policies and intentions to protect wildlife. We know from 25 years experience that land can be managed in a sensitive way that benefits wildlife and increases biodiversity. We will keep on fighting for local wildlife, and especially for our bats, which should be able to rely on local and national legislation for protection - but can't.

Tony and Faith Moulin

National Bat Monitoring Programme Waterway Survey Congresbury Yeo

YACWAG has been carrying out bat monitoring on the River Yeo at Congresbury for 18 years. The national survey monitors the abundance of Daubentons bats (aka water bats) and they can be seen flying over the river catching prey.

All welcome. Please bring a torch, wear warm clothes and strong footwear.

This walk is by the river and over uneven ground which may be muddy.

Meet in the public car park at the rear of the Congresbury Arms.

Monday 7th August 21.10 and Monday 21st August 20.45



Yellow Loosestrife Bees Are Thriving at YACWAG's Stowey Reserve

The very rare Yellow Loosestrife Bee is doing well at Stowey Reserve and we were pleased to have entomologist Ray Barnett to carry out a more general survey of insects in the reserve during 2023. We have already discovered another rare insect - a sawfly.

Yellow Loosestrife Bees collect pollen (you can see some on the bee's hairy leg above in Higgy's photo) from the Yellow Loosestrife flowers that grow abundantly in our fields. They then make a waterproof oil from it to line their nest burrows in the soil. All very specialised! You can read the story of their discovery on our website under Wildlife - Bees. Yellow Loosestrife is not a common plant locally but is spreading in our fields. It is not much visited by other bees and pollinators because it produces little or no nectar at all.

Busy Bee by Sarah Teasdale

Busy bee,
Bustling in the borage,
Buried in the blueness of its flowers,
Bringing nectar to the hive,
Brushing by blushing blooms,
Bearing pollen as it goes.

What wonder lies in Nature,
How beautifully life flows.
No-one tells the bee what to do,
He just knows.....

