



Registered charity no. 1076362

Newsletter

Bats R Us

In October, approaching Halloween when people's thoughts turn in a negative way towards bats, YACWAG put on a positive bat-themed event in Cleeve Village Hall in order to report on the research done by the YACWAG Bat Group so far.



Over thirty people listened attentively to Nigel Milbourne, Ken Anstey, Sarah Dale and Andrew Hunter giving short presentations about the Greater Horseshoe Project which had been funded by Bristol Airport. A report will soon be available.

Children had their own workshop and made bouncing bat hats, enjoyed batty wordsearches and other activities. The star of the show, thanks to Heidi Hargreaves, was Princess the Noctule Bat, who is unable to return to the wild but helps the cause of bats by appearing with Heidi at educational events.



Winter Talks

YACWAG members welcomed Andrew Town from Nailsea to Horsecastle Chapel, Yatton, in November when he spoke about the management and wildlife of Trendlewood Park in Nailsea. The 'Green Flag' site has four acres of woodland and ten acres of grassland as well as a children's play area. Established in 2011, Trendlewood Park is managed by North Somerset Council and the Friends group. Andrew's photos of the site through the year showing the wealth of wildlife using the park and the work of the group to enhance it were much appreciated. Friends of Trendlewood Park and YACWAG are partner groups in North Somerset Nature Net.



Fox in Trendlewood Park (photo Andrew Town)

Otters On My Doorstep

*Six years since the launch of YACWAG's Otter Group,
Gill Brown will share her otter knowledge and experiences in a talk
'OTTERS ON MY DOORSTEP' at the
Old Schoolrooms, Congresbury starting at
7.30pm on Thursday 25th January.
ENTRY FREE * REFRESHMENTS*

Farewell to BRERC

Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre is closing its Yatton office at Hangstones. The organisation will be centralising to new accommodation at Blaise Castle. This doesn't affect their need for environmental records. If you spot anything unusual especially on land YACWAG owns or the Strawberry Line, please do submit your records online via www.brerc.org.uk.

Yatton School Learning College



Yatton School held a series of nature-themed activities in the autumn term as part of their 'Learning College'. Thanks to Higgy, Trevor, Bob, Gill, Tony and Faith, YACWAG provided plants and practical support in the school conservation area, cleaned out the school nestboxes, led a session on otters and went for a walk on the Strawberry Line. For the final session the children enjoyed YACWAG's barn owl pellets and dissection kit. In the photo Tony is showing some of the children nature specimens from the Strawberry Line, including his collection of mammal skulls.

Wanted - Can You Help?

YACWAG is looking for some volunteer support in the following areas in order to carry on the great work that has been done for wildlife and the community in the past 17 years:

Workparty Leader

YACWAG is looking to recruit a volunteer to lead workparties on its reserves and other land managed by the charity. A conservation workparty leadership training course would be paid for and all expenses met. YACWAG

has a good range of hand tools which are kept in tip-top condition thanks to Bob Lowman and a bike trailer or handcart to take them onto local sites. Public liability insurance is also provided. If anyone has the time to take on the role of leading workparties it would be of immense value to YACWAG as more work parties could be held and more volunteers engaged. Working in the open air has health benefits both physical and mental but YACWAG is often obliged to pay contractors for work because of the lack of a leader for a volunteer group to carry out the necessary work. If you could lead a group three or four times a year, weekend or weekdays to suit yourself, please talk to Tony in the first instance or send an email through the YACWAG website.

Children's Co-ordinator

YACWAG is very aware of the great need to enthuse children about nature. It is a sad fact that children spend less and less time outdoors and many of them have not yet had the opportunity to learn about nature firsthand. With a volunteer to act as a co-ordinator of opportunities to tailor some of our events and activities towards children, YACWAG could do so much more. If you could help, please contact us through the YACWAG website.

YACWAG Archivist

Would any member like to work in their own time in the comfort of their own home on organising YACWAG's archives? This includes photographs and press cuttings, just to sort them and present them chronologically in such a form that they can be kept 'for posterity' or viewed easily. All expenses would be met.

Unusual Garden Bird Sighting!

This remarkable picture of a water rail eating cotoneaster berries was taken by Matt Cook in Weetwood Road Congresbury early in the morning of 31st October.

Water rails are normally very shy and secretive and spend much of their time hiding and feeding in dense reed beds. So for one to be in such an open and unlikely urban habitat is very unusual. It is likely to have been a tired, disorientated and very hungry migrant that hopefully found its way to its winter home once it had fuelled up.



Yatton Station Garden



Some of the Friends with their 'outstanding' award. The Yatton sign was made by a volunteer.

The Friends of Yatton Station Garden are volunteers who maintain the garden at Yatton station under licence from Network Rail. YACWAG has supported this work from the beginning recognising the benefit to wildlife. The garden was established by GWR employees at least one hundred years ago and, in those days, won prizes for its appearance. Since re-privatisation, the garden has been completely neglected by the railway authorities. The 'lost' garden was restored in 2000 and work continues to improve it for the benefit of rail users and local people alike. Last year a colony of ashy mining bees was discovered in the sunny bank and a nesting box erected and maintained by YACWAG volunteers gave a home to a nest of blue tits.

The Friends group is supported by the Severnside Community Rail Partnership and GWR as well as also locally by Yatton and District Horticultural Society. Thanks to their hard work the garden has been improving over the last few years and in 2017 was judged outstanding in the Its Your Neighbourhood Award; the certificate is displayed in the ticket office along with those from previous years. New volunteers will always be made welcome and will be given a safety briefing and an orange Network Rail safety vest which must be worn when working at the garden. Workparties are generally held on Monday mornings for a couple of hours once or twice a month in the season. They will start again in February. You can work at your own pace doing delicate jobs like pruning, or get stuck in with some more vigorous ground clearance. Please consider joining in. It is rewarding work and sometimes the railway company rewards the gardeners with a surprise!

Litter Clearance at the Station

HEROES ASSEMBLE! as part of the Tidy Britain Campaign. There will be a litter picking workparty meeting at the station for a safety briefing and the issuing of bags and tools on Friday 2nd March at 10am. Volunteers will be joined by employees from Network Rail and the station staff. This is an excellent opportunity to clear up one small area of Yatton as part of a national initiative.

If all our members could pick up litter in their street over that designated weekend at least our patch would be looking a lot better, and some wildlife hazards would be removed from the environment.

Inspiring the Next Generation of River Guardians

YACWAG member Michelle Walker from Congresbury writes:

For the last few years I have been borrowing the YACWAG pond dipping kit for the summer, to help the young people of Congresbury learn more about the hidden life in the Yeo and its tributary streams, rhynes and ditches, so I thought it would be good to share with you some of what I've been up to.

My day job with The Rivers Trust is very desk-bound, so I like to get out on the river as much as possible in my spare time. I find taking groups of young people to the river really rewarding and I've learnt more about freshwater life through teaching others. I'm certainly not an eco-expert, but with some goodguides and equipment, it's possible to discover and identify plenty of hidden life in our waterways.



Congresbury Rainbows exploring freshwater life in a rhyne with safe access near Urchinwood

It's great to see things through a child's eyes and experience their wonder when a stick comes alive as a cased caddis emerges, their horror when a fearsome looking dragonfly nymph devours a fish, their giggles when they learn that a water scorpion or great diving beetle larvae breathes through its bottom, and their fascinated disgust at the wriggling leaches which we usually find. Seeing them learn to use the guides to identify creatures is great, and they have often discovered something in their tray which I haven't seen before.

Over the last three summers, I've led Rainbows, Brownies, Cubs, Scouts, Beavers, pre-school and primary school groups out along the river to see what they can find, armed with nets, jars, trays, magnifying pots and guides. We often use the dipping platforms on the small rhyne at the back of the Millennium Green, or we go up river and dip in a small rhyne on Urchinwood land (with their permission). It's quite tricky to dip the main river Yeo because access is difficult on the steep banks. There is also a lot less invertebrate life to find in the main river due to the impacts of channel management and pollution, so we often talk about this by comparing what we can find in the different habitats.



BBC filming St Andrew's school pupils releasing elvers in to the river Yeo and exploring river life

We also talk about what the children and their families can do to help protect the river ecosystem, and encourage them to think about the link between what they put down the loo or the drain and the impact on the river. I hope that some of them will be inspired to take better care of the water environment as a result.



Last summer's highlight was taking over 70 children from St Andrew's school to the river to release some elvers which we had been rearing in school. This was filmed by the BBC for 'Hugh's Wild West' which is currently airing on BBC2, so we are hoping this will make the final edit.

Planning for the 2018 season is underway, and as word spreads I'm starting to have requests from surrounding villages to run sessions. Juggling family and work, I have limited time to take on more, so if anyone else would like to join me and start to offer dipping sessions in Yatton or surrounding areas then do get in touch, and we can offer more of a coordinated programme.

Tree Maintenance at St Andrew's School



In 2012 YACWAG planted the Jubilee Wood at St Andrew's School, Congresbury. Volunteers recently re-visited the sixty trees planted then to check their progress and remove stakes. All were doing remarkably well, including this magnificent Bhutan Pine.

The late Neil Tuttiet, headteacher, asked YACWAG to plant mainly evergreen trees for contrast with the deciduous ones elsewhere in the grounds.

The History of YACWAG Part 10

In 2008 YACWAG was able to purchase a 2.4acre field shown on 200 year-old maps as Footmead. This small and strangely shaped field is in the parish of Yatton next to Gangwall and close to the Strawberry Line. It was once owned by the Church of England Commissioners to provide an income for the vicar of the parish. In 1856 they sold it to the Bristol Society of Friends who used it to raise money for the poor. 150 years later the Friends were finding that owning a hay field did not really raise much money in modern times and decided to sell it at auction. YACWAG could not contemplate going to auction to buy it but YACWAG's Chair, Tony Moulin, was able to persuade the Society of Friends that it would be good to pass it on to another charity for the benefit of the community and they withdrew it from auction. YACWAG was able to buy it for the very reasonable price of £4000 plus legal costs and Footmead became YACWAG's eighth land purchase.



The muddy access to Footmead

The price reflected the fact that Footmead is not an easy field to manage as the access to it is often too muddy to allow vehicle access. The field is on Biddle Street Site of Special Scientific Interest and it was known that the shared ditches around Footmead were exceptionally rich in uncommon wild flowers such as Tubular Water Dropwort, Creeping Jenny, Brooklime, Ragged Robin and Frogbit. The field had benefited from the low intensity management due to its ownership.



Brooklime, a member of the Speedwell family



Tubular water dropwort



Ragged robin growing in Footmead



Yellow loosestrife on the rhyne bank

At the time, Tony Moulin said, 'We have seized an opportunity to claim and protect another small part of the North Somerset Levels and Moors. The purchase comes at a time when the Government is threatening to cut the work of Natural England and I think that demonstrates how important it is for local communities to take matters into their own hands and do what they can to preserve biodiversity within their own parishes.'

YACWAG put up another barn owl box, brought ditches into management and tried to improve the floral biodiversity of the field.

Elsewhere during the autumn of 2008 a further 1000 daffodil bulbs were planted at North End near the roundabout by YACWAG volunteers. National Tree Week was celebrated with tree dressing at Yatton Library and the giving away of free trees for local people to plant in their gardens.

YACWAG's 10th anniversary cake



One thousand Professor Einstein daffodils planted by YACWAG volunteers



In 2009 YACWAG celebrated its tenth anniversary with a party at the Chapter House in Yatton for all members.

It was also a matter for celebration that thanks to another grant from YANSEC (landfill tax rebate) YACWAG purchased its tenth field in its tenth year.. A farmer from Congresbury, Mr Jones, offered the charity a small field off Moor Lane – the track that runs from the A370 north to join the Strawberry Line by a wooden bridge. YACWAG bought this field for £12,000. In the Tithe

Map (a plan showing the apportionment of land in 1841 to assess for church tax) the field belonged to Anna Norton, which led to the adoption of the name Nortons. Nortons is adjacent to YACWAG's Congresbury Moor fields Meakers and Phippens, forming a sizeable block of damp pasture crossed by an open unshaded rhyne.



Nortons' northern ditch

Yatton's Starling Roost

by Higgy

It was a bitterly cold November day with a north-westerly wind ripping through the inadequate fleece that I had chosen to wear. Apparently according to our local bird expert, Trevor Riddle, starlings had been gathering on the pylons near Wemberham Lane for the last few nights from about 4 pm. With only a robin and stonechat for company I was doubting the appearance of any starlings and trying to stop negative thoughts about over-development and the demise of my beloved local wildlife. I kept scanning the pylons and electricity wires with my binoculars. At last, binoculars in focus, I could see six starlings on a distant pylon! Not quite what I was expecting but a start may be...

With toes numb and fingers turning blue I'm joined by Trevor, dressed rather more sensibly for this cold weather. At 4.30 pm there is the most beautiful sunset that I have seen for some time. This alone is enough to warm my heart and lift my spirits, with its amazing hues of red, pink and gold.



"Here they come!" shouts Trevor. "Coming onto the pylons to pre-roost now!" With my long lens I start to snap a few shots and I'm amazed at how the birds start to tumble out of the sky onto the wires and pylons, jostling for space and squawking at each other in continued disagreement. One of these arguments lifts the birds and they fill the sky in a fabulous flying display, a murmuration that only starlings have the ability to stun you with. The birds fly one way and then in a blink of an eye the whole flock has turned and turned again drawing patterns across the dazzling sunset. This is a magical spectacle that has to be seen to be believed.



"Amazing!" I shout with all thoughts of cold now gone, my body warmed by this wonder of nature. With my camera still snapping, the flock of 2000+ birds turn and dive one last time before dropping in to roost on the small reed beds right next to Smart Systems' ugly building.

"Wow what a superb display! Amazing!" I blurt out unable to control my excitement and enjoyment of such an experience. Despite having watched a million starlings going to roost on the Somerset Levels this is somehow better, more intimate, our very own 'Yatton Starling Roost'!

I want to share this experience, so a couple of days later I'm back in the same spot with my wife (Pam) and ten year old daughter (Chloe). I soon realise that it's even colder but my extra layer is keeping me warm. Looking at Pam I can see that my new-found warmth is not helping her very much against the bitter wind! I want to give Chloe the experience and appreciation for nature while she is at an age to learn and enjoy this time with us out in the natural world. Bang on cue the birds gather on the wires but tonight they are much noisier than earlier evenings. "It won't be long until they display before roosting!" I shout out to Pam and Chloe excitedly.

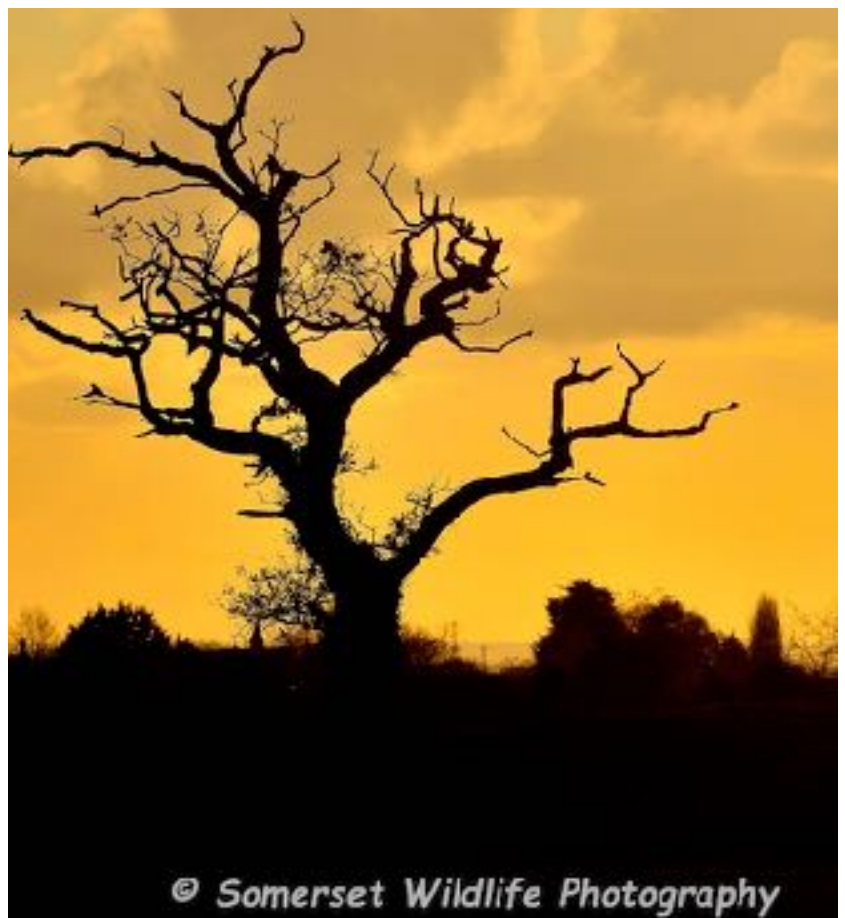
Then for some unknown reason and in much smaller groups than earlier evenings, the birds lift and head into roost simply dropping straight down into the reed beds with no aerial display at all. This is a real shame when you want to share the magical experience with others! However, with the help of Trevor we count close to 3500 birds into the roost which is an amazing number in such a small area and a great record for Yatton.

During this roost a female sparrowhawk is present and at one point she dive-bombs into the reeds right among the roosting birds whose panic is immediately noticeable due to the changed tone of their calls and increased noise.

The following week I return with former work colleagues but find that the increased sparrowhawk attacks and bad weather have really affected numbers. Despite our patience and braving the cold weather the birds never come into roost which was a real disappointment to my 'new to birding' friends!

It's December and I'm sitting in my home office watching three little egrets feeding out on the fields while trying to find some creative inspiration, when I suddenly see a flock of starlings come across my field of vision. One hundred, two hundred, maybe three hundred birds! My spirit lifts because I know that each year they come and forage for food on fields to the rear of my house. Unfortunately, these fields are only 500 metres away from a site that has a planning application on it. It hurts to think what will become of this spectacle that I am so privileged to watch from my kitchen window every winter if houses do get built so closely to it?

We are now in 2018 and as I sit in my office again writing these words, two defined groups of about 200 starlings fly over my garden before turning sharply and swooping back into the fields to feed. I feel so lucky to observe the continued return of these birds and the reed buntings that also return to the garden every winter. But I can't help worrying if this is an experience that I shall lose in coming years, due to the continued and relentless push for more houses on our green fields due to the greed of an unscrupulous few. This year I shall continue to develop my own garden for the benefit of wildlife, adding to over a dozen trees that I have already planted in my garden and along my hedgerow. I really do hope that my own attempt at mitigation for local development is as successful as the little I have seen elsewhere. If reading this you feel similar concerns please do have a think about what mitigation projects you can assist with, or changes you can make in your own garden to help our struggling wildlife. Collectively, the more that we all do to help wildlife in our own gardens, the more we will ensure that we continue to enjoy the wealth of wonderful wildlife that we are currently blessed with in and around Yatton and Congresbury.



Bird News

from Trevor Riddle

As Higgy shared in his previous pages, Yatton enjoyed its own starling murmuration in the autumn. Local breeding birds started to roost in Wemberham Lane, Yatton in the reed bed owned by local concrete business, Stowells, and by early November winter birds started to join them. Numbers built up to an estimated 3,500 birds, but after an evening of persistent sparrowhawk attacks, the roost was deserted.

Kingfishers have also been showing well in Wemberham Lane, along with stonechats and a peregrine using the pylons as both a feeding place and a hunting perch. A magpie was feeding on the very top of a pylon, almost certainly on the remains of a Peregrine kill. A kingfisher has also been seen on the new floodwater pond at Chestnut Park, with a black redstart around the houses, no doubt attracted by the bark mulch on all the new gardens. A small flock of meadow pipits were chased (unsuccessfully) by a merlin along the disused Clevedon branch line.

Winter thrushes have generally been in short supply, perhaps because of a dearth of hawthorn berries. A mixed flock of 1,000 were seen by Higgy on Kenn Moor following the snow in Wales but this had reduced to 150 the next day. There are a few fieldfares feeding in gardens but most have probably gone on to Southern Europe. Snipe numbers on the Congresbury Moor reserve averaged 22 with a peak of 29 on 9th November. A water rail was squealing nearby on the Strawberry Line.

A red kite flew over Cadbury Hill on 7th January and a woodcock was seen on Kenn Moor.

Tree Dressing



Tree Dressing Day falls on the first weekend of December. It was initiated by Common Ground in 1990 and has grown to become a popular expression of a love for trees.

YACWAG has organised tree dressing in Yatton and Congresbury for more than a decade now as a celebration of trees and way of highlighting their importance. In 2017 a small team of volunteers attached about 50 large green 'luggage' labels to prominent trees in the two villages. These reminded passers-by that 'every tree counts' and to make use of the mathematical reference each included a relevant numerical fact, like 3 trees = 12 people's oxygen. These were well received.

If anyone would like to be involved in planning or carrying out practical tasks for Tree Dressing Day this year please get in touch with Win or Faith through the [YACWAG website](#).

Graham and Sue Lovesey
Tree dressing in Congresbury

Behind the Scenes

YACWAG's Jubilee Trees

Every now and again YACWAG organises a workparty to check up on the 60 trees planted in Yatton to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2011. These workparties have for the last few years taken place on occasional weekend afternoons and advertised to members. The trees are inspected, grass is cleared around the base (which helps avoid competition for water but also hopefully deters strimmer operators) and stakes, tree protectors and ties are adjusted as required. Volunteers often get a bit distracted and end up picking up litter or removing bramble from untidy areas in the public eye in Yatton. For example, YACWAG has cleared an untidy verge at the back of Yatton Schools in Stowey Road and agreed with North Somerset Council that it should be included in their schedule for regular cutting. This winter Tony, Faith and Dave Treleven cleared litter, bramble and grass from a strip near Cherry Grove and this will be furnished with suitable plants and maintained by the parish gardener, Megan Thurgur. Most recently nine volunteers picked up litter and coppiced old hazel trees in Rock Road Playing Field to protect them from being flailed. Many thanks to all who helped.

The tree maintenance group would welcome new volunteers for the tree walks and particularly with mapping Yatton's street trees for a national project called Treezilla. A start was made last year but without more help this task has had to be shelved as there are more pressing things to do on our tree rambles. If you can help the tree maintenance group at any time, or would just like to get involved in tree-related activities on other occasions, please get in touch with Faith through the YACWAG website. No particular skills are necessary but you might learn some! If all YACWAG's members managed to help with local events and activities just once a year it would make a tremendous difference. Thank you to all our volunteers who give so much more for the benefit of the whole community.



Tony fixes new plaque



Tony and Dave tidy up in Yatton High Street

Recycling Helps YACWAG

YACWAG is benefitting financially from two recycling initiatives through Terracycle. This recycling company partners with individual collectors like YACWAG's own Juley Howard and Libby Watts as well as major consumer product companies, retailers, manufacturers, councils and small businesses across 20 different countries. With your help, they are able to divert millions of pounds of waste from landfills and incinerators each month. As well as the opportunity to raise funds for YACWAG, you have the opportunity to recycle items which are not collected by the local authority and would otherwise go to landfill.

Juley Howard is still collecting biscuit wrappers. These can be from any non-savoury biscuits, of whatever make. Juley waits until she has enough for a consignment, sends them off and YACWAG receives money for them. Please get in the habit of saving your biscuit wrappers and when you have a few, put them through the letterbox at 3 Barberry Farm Road Yatton or bring them to any YACWAG event.

Libby Watts has just started collecting packaging from beauty products, the collection of which will work in the same way as above. This collection is for items not collected by North Somerset Council in the recycling box, and is for beauty product packaging only, e.g. spray dispensers, pump dispensers, packaging caps, facial wipes packaging, plastic pots and tubes, roll on deodorants, face mask packaging, hair dye tubes and so on. Please note that no cleaning products' packaging, toothpaste tubes, baby wipes' packaging etc are accepted. Plastic shampoo bottles and aerosols should be put into normal council recycling (so are not accepted by Terracycle). For the full list and resources, please visit <https://www.terracycle.co.uk/.../personal-care-and-beauty...> Put your empty containers and packaging in a small black box at the front of 132 Mendip Road, Yatton or bring them along to any YACWAG event.

What is Going on at YACWAG?

As you might imagine, there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work in order to keep the charity going and to make sure it is achieving its objectives. The trustees will shortly be meeting and their key tasks will be: to review the five-year plan; to look at the group's Constitution because constitutional change is being considered; to look at the new data protection law to make sure YACWAG complies and to review policies and financial procedures. In addition the committee will be discussing recruitment of new trustees and talking to North Somerset Council about funding for improvements to the Strawberry Line at the Yatton Junction Reserve.

Stay In Touch

Please get in touch if you have a story or photo to share with fellow-members.

Join the YACWAG Facebook group.

Come to an event or workparty.

Keep up with YACWAG on www.yacwag.org.uk.

Membership renewal due 1st March 2018.