



Newsletter

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www.yacwag.org.uk

YACWAG Gets Busy Again!

There have been lots of *'firsts since the start of the pandemic'* since the last newsletter. We have been able to check the bat boxes in Littlewood and elsewhere for the first time in three years, thanks to the help of licensed members Tim Clark and Sam Olney; we have been able to get volunteers together at our Kenn Moor orchard by way of a thank-you for all their hard work keeping the trees at Kenn Moor and at Cobthorn Reserve in good health; we are looking forward to our first in-person indoor talk on 9th November; and thanks to Graham Lovesey there will be a general knowledge quiz fundraising for YACWAG at the Plough Inn in Congresbury on 12th November. Conservation workparties have been arranged by Steve Rea on the Strawberry Line and there are more to follow; we took on the seeding of an area for wild flowers on the Strawberry Line near Yatton station; and we have been awarded funding for further tree planting at our Cobthorn Reserve. These are all things we haven't been able to progress since 2020 and, like everything we do, they all depend on volunteers to make them happen.

We look forward to meeting you at some of our winter season events and hope you will enjoy getting involved. YACWAG depends on its members to deliver the benefits everyone wants from our work. If there is any way you can help support our objectives please don't hesitate to get in touch via contact@yacwag.org.uk.



Bob, Amanda and Craig inspect a birds nest at Littlewood for bat droppings. Photo: Tony Moulin

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Window Wanderland Mark 3

YACWAG's Education and Events sub-committee is already working on next year's Window Wanderland. This event encourages people of all ages in the local villages to unleash their creativity and show their love for wildlife by making a display in their street-facing window and lighting it up over three evenings. A lovely illuminated walking trail is created which, however cold and miserable the February weather is, warms up the participants on both sides of the window glass.

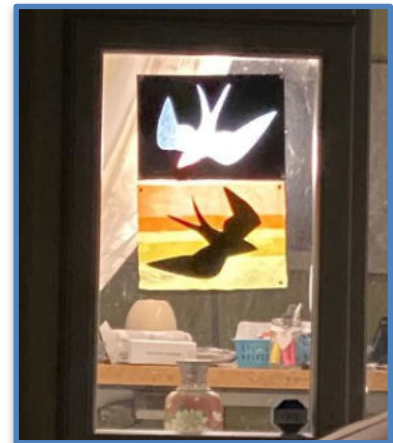
Responding to comments from this year's creatives, the 2024 event will start at 5.30 pm and finish at 8.30 pm making it easier to get bedroom lights off for bedtime. The evenings chosen have shifted too, so that Sunday preparations for getting back to school and work are not hindered. Window Wanderland will be held on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings at the end of the February half-term: 15th, 16th, 17th. Make a note in your diaries now!

We are looking for even more participation, particularly from businesses and houses in prominent public positions and YACWAG members of all ages. It is not important to be artistic, just to want to join in the fun and share your passion for nature. The theme will be *Nature Is Our Neighbour*, giving plenty of scope to depict all kinds of familiar wildlife. This phrase, in various forms, has become a slogan or strap-line for YACWAG, aptly capturing our work to bring our communities closer to nature. You can be sure you will hear it more often in the coming months as we prepare not just for Window Wanderland, but also for YACWAG's 25th anniversary celebrations.

We would love to hear from anyone who would like to help us prepare for this community-wide indoor/outdoor event. There is a lot to do and not much time to do it! Email yacwag2@gmail.com.



2023 Window Wanderland
Photo: Meriel Harrison



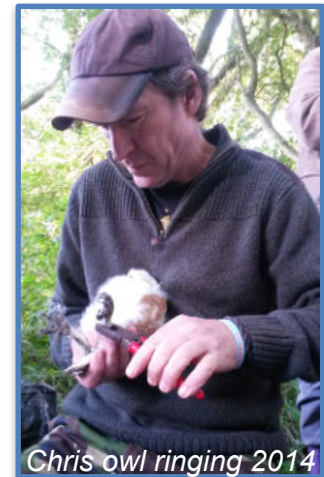
Could You Lead a Walk?

You don't necessarily need to know anything about nature, just know of some good places to take people locally where they can experience wildlife on a short-medium length walk. It is a chance to learn from others and to help YACWAG deliver more 'wellness walks' to help people struggling with their health to get out in our beautiful wildlife-rich local countryside. Ideally you will be an organised person who can promote the walks and advertise to local people, make a commitment to turn up on the day, show people the lovely local places you know of and work with someone who might know a bit more about nature than you do. That isn't the important part, however. What we need is just people available to lead others and look after them on a walk. Nature will do the rest! If you can help please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.



Over the Bridge and Back Again

It is always about connection. What I mean is that in nature you cannot avoid observing the connection between species and species and species and habitat. This also applies to the wildlife organisations that are doing their best for nature. The connection between Hawk and Owl Trust and YACWAG is robust, it is brought about by years of networking and friendships. Way back when time began, Tony and Faith Moulin watched what I was doing at Royal Portbury Dock - it would have been around the early 1990s. I was attempting to bring Barn Owls back to what is now the old county of Avon, where they had been missing as a breeding bird for some six years. I was creating the optimal habitat for the main prey item of the Barn Owl called the Short-tailed Field Vole. This vole will live in grasslands and flourish quite happily in standing grass about 15 cm high, however, I wanted to take it to the next level and leave grass standing at maximum height for enough time for it to create its own microclimate at the soil level. This worked well and I was able to observe at close quarters voles rising in number then after a period these numbers reached a plateau: in some fields, this would be after two years of not cutting, and in other fields, three years. The Portbury story of what happened next is well documented and indeed will be written about again in a book yet to be published. Tony and Faith could see our success in establishing breeding pairs of Barn Owls and I do remember well discussing with Tony the amazing effect these new habitats had on Grassland Butterflies such as Marbled White, Ringlets, and both Large and Small Skippers.



It's not surprising then that when YACWAG bought its first nature reserve, "Ten Acres," the habitat followed the Portbury model. I know at times Tony and Faith had issues persuading the nature gods on high that this would work when the gods, of course, wanted more management, more human control of nature, but Tony and Faith never faltered, and the results from over the years from this field stand the test of time. The next time you speak to YACWAG's Trevor Riddle ask him this question: "How many young Kestrels and Barn Owlets have fledged from this field since it was purchased?" And do ask Tony about the number of butterflies and other invertebrates in this field compared to the surrounding more managed landscape. I think you, like me, will just say, WOW!

While I'm at the owl nests with Trevor and the crew, we are counting the owlets and under licence I'm placing an aluminium numbered ring on each of their legs. This then creates another story and more connections with other areas. One example of this is from Portbury: a Barn Owlet I have rung at nest turned up knocked down on Junction 21a of the M25 motorway, the bird was taken to a vet where sadly its injuries meant it had to be put to sleep, however, this vet decided to do a full post mortem and found that it was a female. From the look of her ovaries she had had at least two lots of owlets herself, so to conclude this, a conservation project at Portbury had a direct and positive effect on an area at the other side of the country. Of course, not all Barn Owl movements are so distant. We now know one of the YACWAG owlets I rung in 2021 was recaptured (so alive) 575 days after being rung; it was recaptured 12km from the site where it began its journey of life. The place it was found was ... Portbury.

Well done to YACWAG for what it does for nature, and you see it really is all about connections.

Chris Sperring MBE, Hawk and Owl Trust

A Year in the Life of a Yatton Wildlife Camera

Jenny Oldaker writes:

We're so lucky to live in this village where nature is a constant neighbour and our gardens are brimming with creatures of all shapes and sizes. But many of these animals are also timid or nocturnal and not easy to spot in person. That's where the trail cam comes in... by placing our movement-triggered camera in and around the garden we've been able to see some of the wildlife that's passed through during the course of the year, giving us a sense of what's going on out there when we're not around...

WINTER



Badger

We'd noticed some dig marks, and the camera soon showed us what had been snuffling around the frozen ground – a beautiful badger was captured one night and then cropped up on regular occasions throughout the year. Often shy of the camera, but once getting close enough that his enthusiastic sniffing knocked it right over!



Grey squirrel

Another common garden visitor and one of the cutest characters to grace the trail cam, the garden squirrels are always entertaining to watch, taking a bold interest in this alien object and always busy – industriously carrying acorns, nuts and berries – only pausing briefly to pose.

SPRING



Fox

It was no surprise to see a fox on the trail cam – they're ubiquitous across North Somerset – and they have appeared regularly throughout the year. The photos proved a great way to become more familiar with them, discovering when they are active, seeing them close-up and even, in spring, glimpsing a couple of fluffball cubs.



Moorhen

With a rhyme and large pond at the bottom of the garden there's plenty of aquatic wildlife close by, and shy moorhens have been easier to spot on the wildlife cam than in person (when sightings tend to be of a startled flapping as they beat a hasty retreat).



Heron

If we're still and quiet we're sometimes lucky enough to watch the grey heron hunting on the rhyne, but it's always at a distance. We were able to appreciate this stately bird in more detail when the camera snapped him in all his lanky magnificence.



Deer

It was quite a surprise when a couple of roe deer turned up on the camera! The first capture was a misty-lensed morning and we assumed it was a one-off, but the pair came back regularly for the next few weeks, looking especially magnificent in the early morning light.

SUMMER



Egret

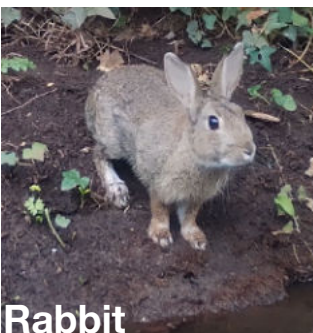
With its enormous yellow feet and dagger-sharp beak, a little egret was a dramatic capture one day in late summer. Although we've startled it a few times during the year, this was the only time his languid wading was caught on camera.



Woodpecker

We hear the manic laughter of the green woodpecker's call fairly regularly, so we knew they were around, but it was nice to have confirmation of it when this one turned up for a bath in the rhyne during the summer months.

AUTUMN



Rabbit

They may be abundant, but it was still lovely to glimpse a rabbit in the garden – and even lovelier when one stopped for long enough for the camera to capture this cute portrait!



Otter

It may not be the clearest of photos but this otter, caught on camera in September was hands-down my favourite of all the creatures that the trail cam revealed. Super shy and elusive, we'd seen signs that otters might be about, but this was the first real evidence.



Sparrowhawk

They've caused havoc in the garden with their attacks on resident birds, and the tell-tale debris of feathers left in their wake, but this sparrowhawk was a picture of calm when he popped down to the rhyne for a drink and was papped by the trail cam.

Jenny Oldaker

Grasshoppers and Crickets Wellness Walk



As part of the 2023 series of Wellness Walks, a small group of YACWAG members were treated to lovely walk and talk with the purpose being to learn a little about how to recognise and differentiate between the various species of grasshoppers and crickets to be found in one of our grassland reserves.

The walk was led by Fred Giles, who is an extremely knowledgeable volunteer with RoAM (Recorders of the Avalon Marshes), and the venue was Meakers Reserve. Meakers is a field in Congresbury Moor Reserve and was purchased by YACWAG from Mary Meaker in 2000. It is a small field where, apart from the erection of a couple of Barn Owl boxes, it has been largely left alone and is generally not open to the public. With minimal human disturbance and long grass, it proved to be a great choice for finding a range of insects and we found a very healthy population of both Meadow Grasshoppers and Lesser Marsh Grasshoppers. Unusually, we also found a young Meadow Grasshopper nymph. August is late in the season for nymphs of this species, which are normally found from April to June. Presence in August may be weather-related, or evidence of a second brood.

Fred was able to demonstrate how to identify different species of grasshopper by way of a series of questions including:

- Ø Body Length – over/under 25mm
- Ø Antennae – clubbed/not clubbed
- Ø Hairy chest – yes / no (yes really!!)
- Ø Colour of knees on hind legs
- Ø Length of wings
- Ø Shape and markings of the Pronotum (the bit behind the head)

It was fascinating stuff and required either excellent eyesight or a good magnifying glass. It was very satisfying to learn to tell the difference between grasshoppers and crickets. Crickets can often be heard before they are seen. This was the case for the Dark Bush Cricket for us. Several could be heard ... but none could be found. We had more luck with some of the other species and were pleased to find examples of Speckled Bush Cricket, Long-winged Conehead and Roesel's Bush Cricket (Macropeterous and its long-winged variant).



Roesel's Bush Cricket
Photo: Tony Moulin

All in all it was a lovely way to spend a Saturday morning, and if the weather had been kinder, then Fred was sure there were many more species of both grasshoppers and crickets to be found in Meakers. It certainly opened my eyes to the marvellous beauty and variety of the critters we disturb when walking through the long grass.

Andrew Hunter

If you missed the walk, don't miss the talk!

Learn More about Grasshoppers and Crickets

YACWAG is encouraging the use of Eventbrite for booking tickets to our future events. It would help us with organisation and offers a user-friendly experience. It will help us keep tabs on attendance, particularly for events with refreshments where it is helpful to have confirmed numbers in advance. Moreover, it simplifies the tracking of event details and attendee information.

Rest assured, for those who may not have the chance to pre-register, walk-ins on the day of any event will be warmly welcomed.

Join us for a light-hearted but comprehensive look at the life, habits and diversity of our British Crickets and Grasshoppers with speaker Fred Giles. The talk will be suitable for anyone who wants to be inspired and learn more.

Please book your ticket in advance on Eventbrite, click [here](#).
But if you can't, come along anyway!

We look forward to seeing you at our first in-person face-to-face talk since 2020!

‘Little Jumpers’

Grasshoppers and Crickets

by Fred Giles

at the Chapter House, St Mary's Church, Yatton

Thursday 9th November at 7.30pm
(Talk starts at 8pm)

FREE to members; £3 non-members (accompanied children free) with a refund if you become a member on the evening. Refreshments will be served at 7.30 pm.



Kestrel Chicks Found Dead on Congresbury Moor

Following the piece in the last news letter I have to report that our late summer inspection of the boxes revealed three dead Kestrel chicks in the Meakers box on Congresbury Moor. We are reasonably certain that at least one youngster fledged, perhaps two as I think that two deaths occurred before the summer inspection. We didn't see the corpses then as the three live chicks were blocking the view and we try to create as little disturbance as possible when checking the boxes.



*Kestrel on Congresbury Moor
Photo: Emily Lomas*

As far as I can tell, the young Barn Owls have done ok. We haven't found any dead ones and there have been sightings from the areas where they were reared. It's been a lean year nationally but there are enough Owls to hopefully nest and produce more young in 2024.

Danger to Barn Owls Averted at Cobthorn

With the development of the Cobthorn Reserve I have been considering installation of a Barn Owl nesting box or perhaps two boxes there, as the habitat looks suitable and indeed a Barn Owl has been spotted on site. Then Faith mentioned the cattle drinking troughs and the danger they posed to owls. There are national reports every year of owls drowning in troughs; like other birds they like to wash in water and natural places to bathe all have rough sides for grip. Slippery metal troughs with their deep straight sides mean that barn owls can't climb out and often drown in troughs. All of our existing reserves are surrounded by rhynes and/or ditches so we haven't needed to install troughs for livestock before.

Volunteer Jon Thobroe amended a Barn Owl Trust design for floats. These floating mesh rafts allow animals to drink from the troughs but the floats prevent owls or other birds from drowning. Our thanks to Jon for organising the design, materials and construction of these important pieces of kit.

Trevor Riddle



Jon with Trevor fitting the first trough guard at Cobthorn Reserve. Photos: Graham Lovesey

Cobthorn Bat Survey



YACWAG volunteer Irene Mills placed two static bat detectors in different parts of the Cobthorn Reserve in September for three consecutive nights. The way bats are recorded in surveys is to count the number of times bats pass by the recorder (these are known as 'passes' as it is impossible to tell whether one bat is flying past several times or several bats have been detected just once). The Anabat detectors recorded 53 Lesser Horseshoe passes and 11 Greater Horseshoe passes. Other bats recorded during the survey were: Common and Soprano pipistrelles, Serotines, Noctules, Leislars, and more than one type of myotis species, but all in small numbers.

Thanks to Irene for carrying out this important survey which showed an increase in the bats using the fields over last year's survey. We are hoping to see numbers increase further as our habitat improvements develop.

Littlewood Bat Box Checks

After a long absence, YACWAG's Bat Group volunteers were at last able to check out the bat boxes at Littlewood. They were pleased to see the number of bats using the wood had not declined over the period since Covid19 started. Bats were found in five boxes at Littlewood but the bats do move about between the boxes and evidence of their occupation was found in many others. Soprano Pipistrelle and Natterers bats were found, the latter being a woodland specialist.

There is a strict protocol around preventing the passing of the Covid-19 coronavirus to bats. When Sam Olney, a licensed bat worker, opened the bat boxes and handled the bats, not only were gloves worn as usual to protect himself, but other volunteers had to keep a distance of two metres or wear a mask if they had not taken a negative Covid test.

YACWAG has bat boxes in other places, including 13 bat boxes on the Congresbury station site on the Strawberry Line. These will also be checked out in due course, thanks to the support of Sam Olney and Tim Clark.

If you would like to join the YACWAG Bat Group and get involved in our work to monitor and protect these amazing creatures, please send an email to bats@yacwag.org.uk.



*Craig and Sam check out the health, sex and maturity of the bats to see how healthy the Littlewood bat population is. Sam is fully trained to handle bats appropriately without causing them any harm or distress.
Photo: Tony Moulin*



RETURN OF QUIZ NIGHT SUNDAY 12TH NOVEMBER

The Covid pandemic interrupted the Sunday evening fundraising quizzes at **The Plough in Congresbury** but YACWAG is making our return on **Sunday 12th November, start 8.00 p.m.** – be there before that to bag a table and start the picture round! £1 per person to enter. Organise a team, or turn up and join others to make a team on the night.

The quiz is a social / fun event – not to be taken too seriously! There are no prizes for the winning team – so no pressures there. It's general knowledge based, plus a picture round - We are grateful to Graham Lovesey for devising the quiz and he will be our quiz master.

Teams are asked to bring prizes for a raffle – usually drink (alcoholic or otherwise), chocolates, or preferably anything consumable. Other members who may wish to give a prize but cannot attend, please leave donations in advance at either 22, Stonewell Park Road, Congresbury, BS49 5DP or 33, Court Avenue, Yatton, BS49 4EP.

Thanks to the generosity of the Plough Inn landlords, all the proceeds of the quiz entry and raffle go to YACWAG. This event used to be a significant fundraiser for the charity and we hope you are able to support us.

Volunteers Looking for Volunteers

YACWAG was represented at the Volunteering event held at Chestnut Park School, Yatton in September and Trevor, Linda and Carol are seen below with the YACWAG stand. They were able to talk to people about the work that YACWAG does and the kind of opportunities we can offer to volunteers. The event coincided with the publication in Congresbury of a new newsletter to be delivered free of charge to every household. The first month's edition contained a synopsis from the local community groups in Congresbury, and YACWAG was able to feature in that as well and raise awareness of our need for more volunteers.



YACWAG has no paid staff and we can only achieve what we do through the volunteers who give their time to help us. We are still seeking some volunteers for important administrative roles: membership secretary, events co-ordinator, committee minutes secretary, and also people to help with one-off tasks, such as organising our archives, or planning walks and talks for next year. If you have a little time to spare we would be very pleased to speak to you about the ways in which you could help us make a difference for nature.

Rodent Surveying in Cobthorn and Paddocks

Regular readers of the YACWAG Newsletter may remember an earlier article (Vol 23, Issue 5, November 2022) regarding work to survey for the possible presence of Hazel Dormice in YACWAG's Cobthorn reserve in Congresbury. A recognised methodology for checking for the possible presence of Dormice is to place so-called "Dormouse Tubes" at intervals around the survey site. Dormouse Tubes are rectangular plastic tubes which are sealed at one end, and provide a safe, dry space for Dormice and other animals to shelter in.

In April 2022, licensed YACWAG Volunteers placed 20 such tubes around the Cobthorn perimeter and have since then undertaken monthly inspections to check for any evidence of Dormouse activity. Dormice weave neat, structured and often spherical, nests from stripped bark and green leaves. Such nests differ considerably in appearance from the rather messy and unstructured nests constructed of usually brown leaves which are made by the more common and non-endangered Wood Mouse. This work has continued, and now following the acquisition of the adjacent Paddocks reserve in late Spring 2023, a further 30 tubes have been placed around the Paddocks perimeter making 50 tubes in total over the combined site. Whilst to date there has been no definitive evidence of any Dormouse presence, we are pleased to report a very healthy and thriving population of Wood Mice in the hedgerows surrounding both reserves.

Wood Mouse vs House Mouse

Most of us will have seen a mouse in our house at some point, particularly those of us who own cats. However, did you know that there are several different species of mice to be found locally, including House Mice, Wood Mice (aka Field Mice), Yellow-necked Mice and Harvest Mice? Wood Mice and House Mice are the two species that most of us are likely to have encountered. The most distinguishing feature between these two species is fur colour, where Wood Mice are a pale brown colour, with a grey or white belly. In contrast, House Mice are consistently grey/brown all over and lack the paler underside. In addition, Wood Mice have a longer, more curved face, and much larger eyes, whereas House Mice have smaller ears and less protruding eyes.

Results for Cobthorn

The first Cobthorn Wood Mouse was a juvenile female weighing in at 15.3g, and she was discovered relaxing in a tube in October 2022. A further six adult mice were discovered in November that year, distributed across several tubes on the reserve, making seven mice in total for 2022. We don't undertake surveys in the winter months.

In 2023, numbers have increased in the original Cobthorn Reserve, and as at October 2023 we have discovered 11 adult mice to date. Wood Mice make more use of the tubes both as shelter and as places to cache food supplies as the weather gets colder in the winter months. Hence, we would expect this number to increase further following the November survey.



*A Cobthorn Wood Mouse
Photo: Andrew Hunter*



As most readers will recall, YACWAG was able to purchase an adjacent field earlier this year. Those who speak to Birdman Trevor will know that he often refers to it in terms of its shape - 'the Hammerhead'. On old maps we discovered that this field, formerly subdivided into two or three, was noted as 'Cobthorn Paddocks'. YACWAG's intention will be to physically join our landholdings into one Cobthorn Reserve, and the newer portion will be called 'Paddocks' and accessed through our first field.

Left:

The first Wood Mouse found in Cobthorn Paddocks

Photo: Andrew Hunter

Results for Paddocks

The 30 new tubes were put in place in May 2023 with monthly surveys thereafter. It was very exciting to see the first evidence of tube usage in the September survey, when we found two Wood Mice nests and a cache of Sloes, albeit no mice were present that month. Then in the October survey, activity jumped significantly with the discovery of 12 nests, with two adult males present in separate tubes.

The First Paddocks Wood Mouse

In all cases, whenever we do find a Wood Mouse, once they are weighed, they are all released safely back into the hedgerow where they came from. It is truly rewarding and satisfying to see just how quickly the local rodent population has found and made use of the shelter we have provided for them in our two newest reserves.

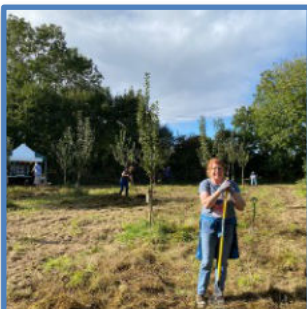
The Future

The last monthly surveys for 2023 will take place in November. We will then take a break over the winter and look to recommence in the Spring of 2024.

The ultimate prize is the hope that we may one day find definitive evidence of the presence of the rare and endangered Hazel Dormouse on one of our reserves. However, in the meantime, it remains a pleasure to see that our tubes are being appreciated and well used by Wood Mice.

Andrew Hunter

Thanks to Tree Waterers, Yatton and Congresbury



Apple Day was celebrated at Kenn Moor orchard when volunteers who had kept our young trees thriving were thanked for their great work. Cut grass was also raked up in the orchard and seasonally appropriate refreshments served, thanks to the generous gift of cider from Thatchers. YACWAG's orchard is in good shape.

WINTER BIRD WALK

led by Mark Savage and Trevor Riddle
on Cadbury Hill



Photo: Marsh Tit on Cadbury Hill, by Mark Savage

Saturday 2nd December

9.30 am -
11.30 am

Meet at the car park at the end of Henley Lane Yatton (not the cricket club car park) to start at 9.30. Wear stout boots.

The walk is free but booking is essential so we can let you know if bad weather or poor ground conditions prevent the walk taking place. To book: email birds@yacwag.org.uk

YACWAG is a registered charity no. 1076362

BACK IN PRINT!



If you are interested in trees, or know someone who is, you will enjoy this little book which has lots of information about the history and culture of some of our most prized local trees. It was produced by Faith Moulin with full-colour photos on every page for the celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, when YACWAG joined the *Big Tree Plant* and planted 60 trees in Yatton and 60 in Congresbury. Proceeds from the sale of the book helped with the cost of planting and maintaining these trees and profit from the reprinted book (with insert update) similarly will help fund further tree planting and maintenance. Still only £5.95, this book will be greatly appreciated by new members. Please purchase through the YACWAG website online shop: www.yacwag.org.uk.

TREE CARERS NEEDED!

Volunteers are needed to join a small tree group to look after the trees YACWAG planted ten years ago and keep an eye on more recent plantings too. Please email contact@yacwag.org.uk for more information and dates of upcoming tree walks.