



# Newsletter



Registered charity no 1076362

December 2023 Vol 24 Issue 6



[www.yacwag.org.uk](http://www.yacwag.org.uk)

## A Big Thank You

on behalf of our local wildlife to all members of YACWAG and our team of volunteers for their support during the year.

It has been a fantastic year for YACWAG with new people coming forward to join in with our work and share our vision. YACWAG is working very hard to save our local nature.



I personally have enjoyed meeting more of you this year, and with a busy programme already being organised for a very special celebratory 25th anniversary year in 2024, I am looking forward to meeting even more of you next year.

I wish you all a very peaceful and enjoyable Christmas and here's to a Happy New Year for all of us. Inside you will find updates on our recent action and trailers for our first events of 2024. I look forward to bumping into you at some of them.

*Tony Moulin*



### CHRISTMAS



### BIRD SURVEY

YACWAG is pleased to be running an online bird survey over the Christmas period. If you would like to take part please click the link:

<https://yacwag.org.uk/wildlife-birds-bird-survey-christmas-2023/>

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# Trees for Climate Grant

## Wood pasture for bats at Cobthorn Reserve

Thanks to a grant from the Forest of Avon, YACWAG is planting 45 trees at Cobthorn Reserve this winter, along with others that have been donated from elsewhere, including 12 oak trees from Oakupy which Rob Collard was kindly looking after. Rob's Pod Microschool pupils came along to one of our work parties in December to plant them out. These oaks will replace some of the standard trees in the hedge lines which succumbed to drought in the heat of summer 2022. Plus, thanks to a gift of trees from the Woodland Trust, in March YACWAG will be creating two new hedges at Cobthorn Reserve as well as gapping up some of the ones planted by the developer, Strongvox.

The local population of Greater Horseshoe bats (which are the reason we were given the nature reserve) has declined this year. We know their favourite habitat has tall hedges, livestock grazing and scattered trees. We are stepping up our provision of this habitat and have bought an adjacent field. Now we are working with the Forest of Avon to implement improvements which will benefit not just the bats but everyone through capturing carbon to help reduce the impact of climate change.

In December we extended our apple orchard at Cobthorn by four Somerset cider apple trees. In January we will continue tree planting with 42 native trees that will ultimately reach heights up to 30 metres and provide a wood pasture habitat with scattered trees in non-intensively grazed grassland. Wood pasture is the preferred habitat of Greater Horseshoe Bats.

We are grateful for the input of Sam Roberts, who is documenting the Trees for Climate project for YACWAG.

If you would like to consider joining the 'happy band' of Cobthorn Waterers to look after the trees during any dry spells next summer please let us know. A water supply is being installed into our new field and is already working in the existing reserve, so this is not too onerous or time-consuming. We would also be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to sponsor a tree: perhaps to off-set air travel, in memory of loved ones or to commemorate a special birthday.

If you would like to help in any way, please get in touch via [contact@yacwag.org.uk](mailto:contact@yacwag.org.uk).



*Faith and Richard disappear into the freezing mist to plant trees at Cobthorn  
Photo: Craig Mephram*



*Sue, Craig and Graham digging holes for the new apple trees in early December.*



*Richard, Faith and Craig with one of the newly-planted cider apple trees.*

## Pylon-Perching Peregrines (with a few other species)

When I started birdwatching a very long time ago I lived in Northamptonshire, a county noted for its lack of birds of prey with the exception of Kestrel, a species that was much commoner then than it is now. Most new birdwatchers are interested in rare birds and the situation in Northamptonshire probably sparked my special interest in raptors. I remember travelling to the Lake District to see my first Buzzard, Scotland to see a Peregrine and I didn't get Sparrowhawk on my list until I moved to Yatton. It's all very different now!

Peregrines were traditionally birds of rugged coastlines and mountainous country but they have adapted, and are still adapting, to live in towns and cities using tall buildings - often churches - as nest sites, finding suitable ledges there. Nowadays purpose-built nest trays on a high building are not too different from a cliff or mountain ledge. There is now often more prey in urban areas than on our cliffs and uplands.

Fast forward and about six years ago I was delighted to find a Peregrine perching on one of the old steel pylons (the correct designation is 'tower' apparently) viewable from Wemberham Lane, a 20 minute walk or five minute cycle ride from home. The birds used the pylons as a lookout for prey and a place to consume their kills; initially this just happened in the winter months but as time passed birds (occasionally two together) could be seen in most months of the year. Buzzards, Kestrels, Ravens and Crows also used the 'towers' - but not near a Peregrine.

A few of us wondered what impact replacing the towers with the new T pylons would have, but when work began it all went quiet. After a while Crows and Ravens accepted the new T pylons followed by Buzzard and Kestrel, then on the 26th November, a miserable damp morning, there was a Peregrine on a new pylon and the next day this male was back on the same pylon. A week later when I was on Kenn Moor unsuccessfully looking for a Short Eared Owl in the mist, there was a pylon with its top above the mist and a Peregrine was perched there, probably scanning all the birds coming to roost in the wooded areas. It's taken a couple of years but it seems the Peregrines are back.

As for Northamptonshire, Peregrines raised four young on Kettering Parish Church this year - 40 years ago life on Mars seemed much more likely.



*Peregrine falcon on one of Yatton's old towers. Photo: Emily Lomas*



*T shape tower. Photo: Trevor Riddle*

*Trevor Riddle*

# Higgy's Sunrise Surprise

At 05.00hrs on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2023 the day was just beginning and what a beautiful day it was going to be. The sun was just breaking through above Cadbury Hill and the clear sky was an amazing deep blue like the Mediterranean ocean.

Insomniac sleeplessness was about me, and the dawn chorus was my accompaniment as I got out of bed, dressed and went to collect our dog (Willow) from her cosy bed. After reluctantly waking from her canine dreams, she was soon bouncing around and ready for the first walk of this gorgeous summer's day.

The sun was now up in the sky and burning brightly giving a lovely warmth to the early hour. A Blackbird sang loudly from the roof of a nearby house, marking its territory and no doubt showing off its fluty tones. I listened in awe as the lack of busy traffic at this time of the day amplified his song, making our village a magical, peaceful place, before the hustle and bustle of modern life began. As we cornered from Stowey Road onto Well Lane a Robin accompanied us on our journey and when Willow stopped for a sniff, Mr Robin hopped down onto the green and took the chance to pull a quick worm for breakfast!

It was while I had stopped walking and was quietly enjoying the peacefulness that my attention was caught by movement on the top of St Mary's Church. I couldn't see the details but could tell I was watching a good-sized bird and my initial thoughts were of the Ravens that have attempted to nest on the church roof in past years. Wouldn't it be good to have them breeding on top of the village church this summer, I thought to myself.

Intrigued by what I was looking at, we continued along Well Lane past the village bowling club and over the drain covers where the old village 'spring' can be clearly heard running briskly under the road. I always think it's amazing that this is the site of the old vicarage and the grounds actually had a boating lake in them! What a shame that someone decided that more houses were more important than that garden and its boating lake naturally fed by spring water, originating from, I presume, the Mendip Hills. What a village pond that would have made. It must have been an amazing place for our local wildlife which is now struggling to find such habitat! I crossed the High Street on the junction with Church Road by the cottage that used to be the village corner shop, where we bought sweets - how times change!

My view of the bird sitting on the church tower was now clear and I could see that it wasn't a Raven but a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). It was now five minutes after I first spotted the Peregrine and it was still happily sat preening in the warm morning sun. We stood for a good few minutes admiring this fantastic bird, watching it as it opened its wings and preened each individual feather. It's amazing to think this is the fastest living thing on our planet and capable of speeds of up to 200mph! Wow!!

*Higgy's photo, right, shows the peregrine sitting on the left hand side pinnacle.*



When bird watching we often talk about the 'jizz' and this is something you learn over time. It can be the behaviour of the bird or the way it moves, flies or some characteristics that help you identify or understand a particular species. I suppose one of the best examples of this would be a wagtail, as you know from a distance what it is as it continually 'wags' its tail up and down all the time! Well from the jizz of this peregrine I could see that it was very settled on the roof of the church preening and was in no hurry to fly off. In fact it looked as if it would be there for quite some time enjoying the peacefulness of the early hour! Decision made! We were now running home so that I could grab a camera and long lens and try to get some pictures of the amazing bird! Would the peregrine still be there by the time we've got home, found batteries, memory cards and all the other things that might need to be found in a rush?

On rounding the corner into Well Lane with camera in hand, breaking into a sweat, I was relieved to see my feathered friend still on the tower! As I got closer to the church it was still preening so having a proper wash and clean-up on the roof and obviously happy with its comfortable vantage point!



I quickly crossed into Glebelands but didn't have time to admire the amazing floral display that Meg and her team have blessed us with this year, let alone the wildflower area that has been a pleasure to walk past and watch and listen to the bees buzzing on our morning walks. My focus was totally on the Peregrine at this point, but I just couldn't get the angle for the shot that I wanted. A quick step down into the village car park and there it was. Raising the long lens and using it on its full focal range of about 600mm I was able to snap off a range of shots hoping that my makeshift support in the crook of my arm had held the camera steady enough for a few decent pictures!

What an amazing start to a beautiful day! It just shows that we need to get out and about on foot in our village, but more importantly to look around us and take notice of the wonderful wildlife that we have here! Early morning before the motorists get going is by far one of the best times to enjoy our wonderful village and surrounding countryside. Let's hope that my Peregrine returns with a mate next time and decides that our village church overlooking our neighbouring flat open moorland habitat would be the ideal nesting place!

*'Higgy'*

# Christmas is Coming!



*Photo: Sue Lovesey*

Sue Lovesey and Amy Symonds, along with Sue Oldaker and her grandchildren, enjoyed drumming up trade on the YACWAG stall in Broad Street, Congresbury, for the village's annual Christmas Market. A Wildlife Lucky Dip for children proved popular and a display shared information about YACWAG, especially featuring Cobthorn Reserve and our plans for its enhancement in the new year. YACWAG has been stepping up its attendance at events and is preparing for the big community-wide Window Wanderland in February. Our Education and Events sub-committee is always looking for another pair of hands to help out, so if you have any time on your hands and enjoy meeting people, please get in touch via [contact@yacwag.org.uk](mailto:contact@yacwag.org.uk).

YACWAG's Education and Events team is preparing for a busy year in 2024. They are looking forward to supporting Yatton Schools with their Learning College extra-curricular nature studies and helping St Andrew's School with the annual RSPB Big Schools Birdwatch in January and February. Then, also in February, comes the Window Wanderland on a theme of Nature is Our Neighbour, and the group is also looking forward to a series of walks and talks and a party to celebrate YACWAG's 25th anniversary.

There has never been a better time to celebrate our achievements and lay the foundations for doing more for nature in the next 25 years, and we hope you will join us at some of the new year's events.

## **Are You New to YACWAG?**

You can find a wealth of information at [yacwag.org.uk](http://yacwag.org.uk), including recordings of previous talks and articles about local wildlife, especially in Trevor's monthly bird blog. If you have any suggestions, please email [contact@yacwag.org.uk](mailto:contact@yacwag.org.uk).

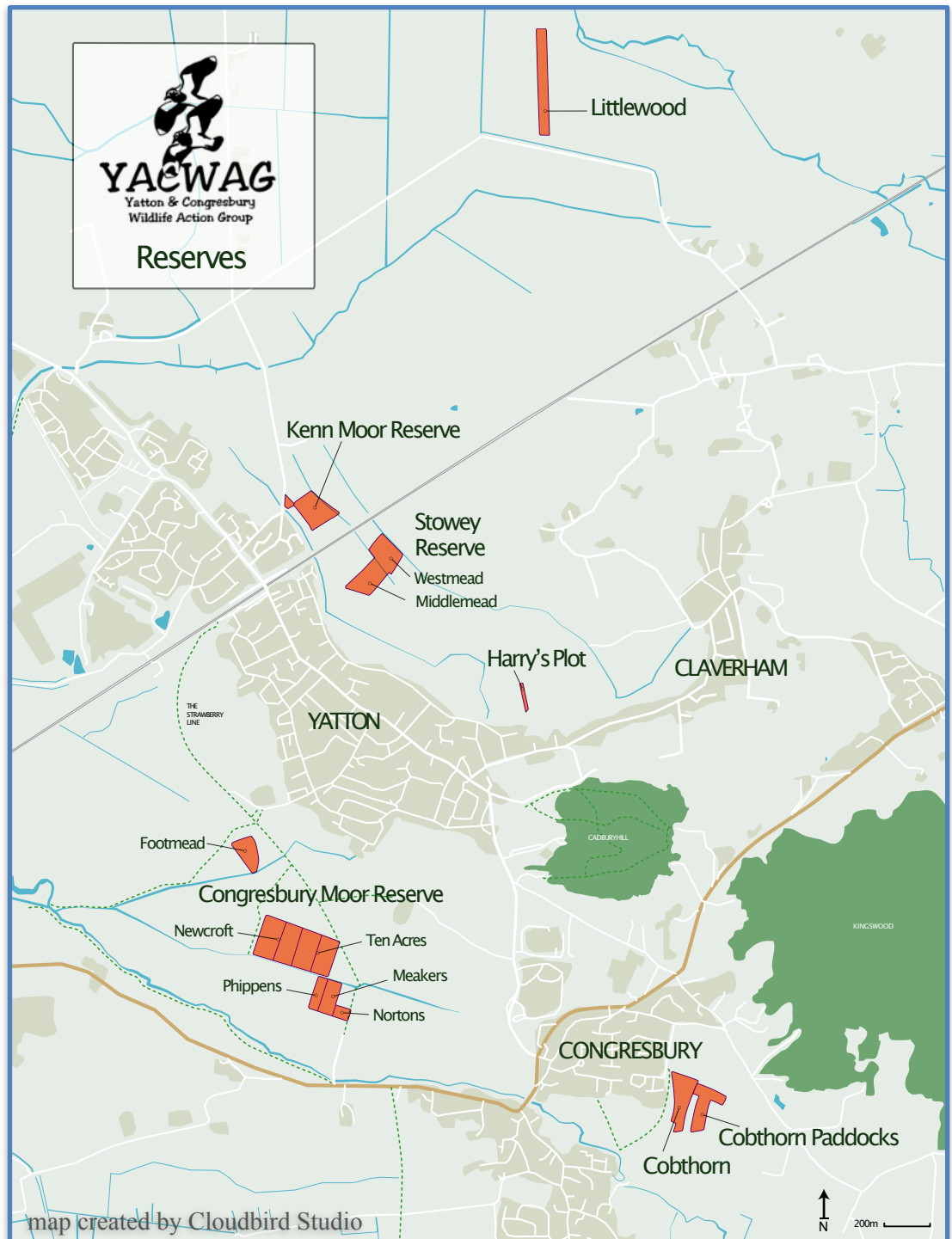
# New Map Shows YACWAG Reserves

Not all YACWAG members get out on our guided walks, so some of you might not be aware exactly where our reserves are. Holding and managing our land as nature reserves is one of our most important tasks as a charity and although we share locations through our website drone photography, sometimes there is nothing like staring at a map and understanding how our reserves fit into the landscape.

YACWAG didn't set out to acquire land strategically around our two communities, but we now have a scatter of reserves around both Yatton and Congresbury, providing much needed habitat in hard-

pressed agricultural land close to housing (apart from our outlier, Littlewood). Their distribution reminds me of an archipelago in a distant warm sea - providing safe stopping-off points for passing birds and insects, as well as undisturbed little havens for more residential species like hares and harvest mice.

We are very grateful to our member Craig Mepham and his wife Rita from Cloudbird Studio who have created this lovely clear map and are also working on updates to our Tree Trails.



# All Hands on Deck for Tree Planting

YACWAG will be planting over 40 standard trees, thanks to funding for the Trees for Climate grant, at Cobthorn Reserve on **Saturday 13th January**, with **Sunday 14th** reserved for back-up if the weather stops play, or if we don't finish the job. We will work from **10am until 3pm** unless we get cold or wet or finish the work quickly. We will stop at 12.30 for a lunch break (Middlecombe Nursery is close by for lunch and a hot drink, or bring your own.) If you haven't planted trees before, this is the chance to learn as well as being part of an exciting project to capture carbon and improve biodiversity. The outcome will hopefully be seen within a few years, but it will take 100 years to see the planting as it has been envisaged!



Please do join us if you can as this is a big job! Dress for the weather, especially in stout boots or shoes. Meet at Cobthorn Reserve off Cobthorn Way, Congresbury, BS49 5DS (what 3 words: tearfully logbook keyboards) at 10am. Sorry no dogs. We look forward to meeting you. If you need more information, or are definitely coming, please let us know on [contact@yacwag.org.uk](mailto:contact@yacwag.org.uk).

## More Dates for Your Diary

**January 16th, 23rd, 30th and 6th February** - if you are *free on a Tuesday morning* and like working with children, please consider coming to help with the YACWAG sessions for Learning College at Yatton Schools. For more information please email [contact@yacwag.org.uk](mailto:contact@yacwag.org.uk).

**Thursday January 25th 7.30pm** at Old School Rooms, Congresbury, BS49 5DY - Gil Martin will talk about the Belmont Estate and its reconnection with nature. Refreshments will be served from 7.15pm before the talk. You will receive an email with this booking link but you are also welcome to just turn up. <https://bit.ly/3TeMefg>

**February 15th, 16th, 17th 5.30-8.30pm** Window Wanderland in Yatton and Congresbury on the theme *Nature is Our Neighbour*. Please create your own window display in a street-facing window and then download a map to follow a magical illuminated walking trail around our villages. <https://www.windowwanderland.com/event/yatton-and-congresbury-2024>

**February 22nd 7.30pm** at Horsecastle Chapel, Horsecastle Farm Road, Yatton, BS49 4QQ - Richard Croucher with an update on what goes on in YACWAG's own Nature Reserves. This talk is suitable for those who saw Richard's previous talk as well as those who are new to the subject. Refreshments will be served before the talk from 7.15pm. You will receive an email with this booking link but you are also welcome to just turn up. <https://bit.ly/41iyBNX>

### Did you know?

**You can always find our events on the YACWAG website calendar.**



## A Very Wintry Bird Walk on Cadbury Hill

On Saturday 2nd December after weeks of rain and boggy paths, a week of fine weather and two frosts had improved walking conditions and our Winter Bird Walk went ahead. It was a misty morning and the forecast sun didn't break through. The mist and cold inhibited bird song; no doubt they were putting all their energy into feeding. It was a slow start but once we found a Goldcrest we came across several more all in hyper feeding mode. Then one of our party spotted a Treecreeper, a Song Thrush flew past and we made our way carefully up the hill.

Mark Savage, who led the walk, heard and located a Marsh Tit both Great Spotted Woodpecker and Coal Tit were seen. Then while half the party were looking at another Marsh Tit the rest of us were enjoying an active Nuthatch. More Goldcrests were noted on the return route and after the group photo below we were all glad to head home and warm up. Thanks to Mark for leading.

*Trevor Riddle*



*Marsh Tit on Cadbury Hill  
Photo: Mark Savage*



*Mark Savage on the right, with Trevor next to him, on the Cadbury Hill Winter Bird Walk. In spite of the cold weather those on the walk enjoyed it and are looking forward to another one, perhaps in the early spring.*

*Photo: Sue Lovesey*

# Membership Matters

We're excited to announce the implementation of our new membership system, MemberMojo, designed to enhance your membership experience with YACWAG. This user-friendly and secure platform will make it easier for you to manage your membership and will further automate and simplify our membership process.

Shortly, you'll receive an email with a link to establish your personal login, allowing you to effortlessly manage membership payments, update your details, and indicate your interests.

MemberMojo will also ensure you stay informed about your membership with timely renewal reminders, making the renewal process hassle-free. If you do encounter any challenges, please email us at [membership@yacwag.org.uk](mailto:membership@yacwag.org.uk) for assistance.

Your feedback is invaluable as we navigate this new system. Feel free to share your questions or comments with us at [membership@yacwag.org.uk](mailto:membership@yacwag.org.uk).

## So Why Does Membership Matter?

The most important reason for becoming a member of YACWAG is to support our work. Every penny counts in a volunteer-run charity. Unlike larger charities which look after local wildlife and local nature reserves, we have no paid staff. This means we make the most of every penny we receive in membership subscriptions and donations.

How many members we have also affects our standing in the community and with bodies like North Somerset Council and Natural England. When we respond to planning applications or other official consultations it helps because our membership numbers give an indication of how many people care about the local environment.



*Shirley Harrison*

We are very grateful to our volunteers who have spent a good deal of time reviewing our membership administration and bringing our system into the 21st century. We are especially grateful to Shirley Harrison (photo on left), who has taken on the role of Membership Secretary and will be on hand to answer your queries and help with any 'teething troubles'. Shirley became interested in the role as a lot of her work at Bristol University involved implementing systems. When she moved to Yatton two years ago she and her partner became very interested in the work that YACWAG was doing, particularly around preserving land for wildlife, and she says she is glad to be able to help in what, we hope, will enable many more local residents to join us.

So now we have an excellent system, we can welcome more members! If everyone could recruit one more member our numbers would double and we would have more income and, very importantly, more influence. Please consider asking your friends and neighbours, if they share our values, to consider joining YACWAG. We need more and more volunteers as our work grows and develops but, even if people can't contribute much of their time, we also need members who are just there showing support, learning and growing a community of nature-lovers. Every member is valuable!



presents

# ***'Reconnecting with Nature' -***

The Belmont Estate experience

an illustrated talk by Gil Martin, Estate Manager

**Thursday 25th January at 7.30pm**

at the Old School Rooms,  
Station Road, Congresbury

Doors open 7.00pm.

Refreshments will be served from 7.15pm.

Booking through Eventbrite (link on page 8) will help us with catering on the evening. If you cannot book, please just turn up.

YACWAG is a registered charity no. 1076362