



Registered charity no 1076362

Newsletter

25
years



www.yacwag.org.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Thanks to feedback from members who found this new approach helpful, we give below notice of forthcoming YACWAG events. All events are listed on the YACWAG website calendar.

Friday 3rd May 8.20pm - 10pm. Cadbury Hill Family Bat Walk led by Sarah Dale. Please wear sensible footwear and warm clothing and bring a torch. Sorry no dogs. Discover the wonderful world of bats using detectors. Meet Henley Lane car park (not cricket club).

Bank Holiday Monday 6th May 7-9am. Early Birdsong Walk on Strawberry Line and Congresbury Moor including YACWAG's Reserve. Meet at the Mosaic Seat on the Strawberry Line (access from Chescombe Road Yatton). Finishing with optional post-walk breakfast in the Strawberry Line Cafe at Yatton Station. Sorry no dogs. Booking essential birds@yacwag.org.uk.

Sunday 26th May 1pm Cleeve Hill Dormouse Survey. More information on [page 9](#)

Bank Holiday Monday 27th May 7-9.30am Early Birdsong Walk. Meet at Congresbury old station on the Strawberry Line for a walk listening to resident birds and summer visitors. Sorry no dogs. Booking essential birds@yacwag.org.uk.

Tuesday 28th May 9.30am King's Wood. Dormouse Survey. More information on [page 9](#).

Sunday 2nd June from 2pm Members' Open Meadows. An opportunity to visit two members' beautiful wild flower meadows. For further information please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.

Sunday 9th June 2-4pm Nature is Your Neighbour at Cobthorn. Festival of Nature Community Day. Join bird, bat and small mammal guided walks at Cobthorn and see YACWAG's new field with Trees for Climate planting. Family nature trail and hedgerow ID. Sorry no dogs.

Friday 14th June Evening farm walk at Kingston Seymour thanks to Roland Griffin. For information email contact@yacwag.org.uk

Saturday 15th June 2.30-5.15 Yatton Schools Carnival. YACWAG stall.

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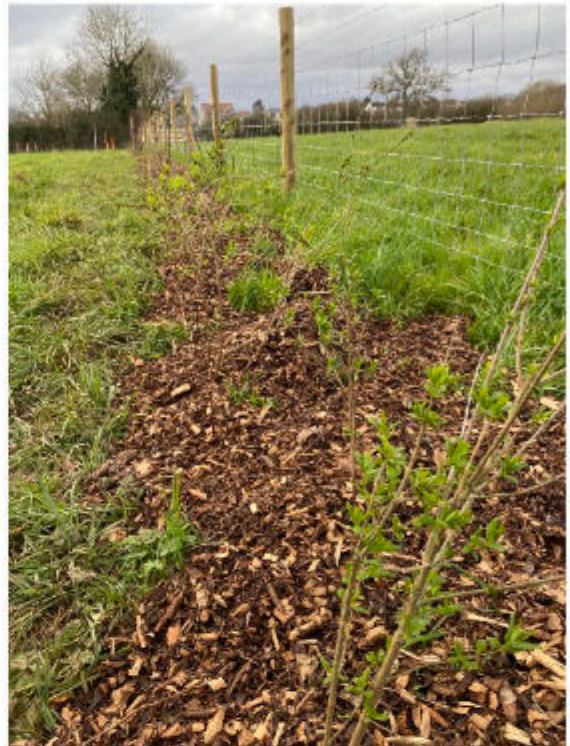
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Trees and Hedging at Cobthorn

Following the winter planting of 42 standard trees at Cobthorn Paddocks, a new hedge was planted there in March, using shrubs donated by the Woodland Trust and others that were rescued from a planting at Cobthorn which is threatened by the under grounding proposals for pylons. The new hedge recreates an old field boundary and re-creates two smaller fields. The hedge plants comprise native species with blossom and fruit including hazel, elder, crab apple, dog rose, blackthorn, holly, hawthorn, goat willow. YACWAG added in wild privet and field maple.

Thanks to all the volunteers who helped us with this project. You can come and check out how the hedge and trees are growing on Sunday 9th June.

You can find out more about the project here:
<https://youtu.be/YxmXpkzt1o?feature=shared>



A Little Bird Told Us ...



Introducing Emily and John Appleton, who recently moved to Congresbury. They were looking for properties in the area and were impressed with the friendliness of Congresbury, and by chance saw a YACWAG poster for a dawn chorus walk around Congresbury Moor in May 2023. They already had a keen interest in nature and wildlife, and joined the walk. Suffice to say YACWAG was one of the reasons Emily and John decided to move here, and they have become Life Members and enthusiastically supported YACWAG events.

The photo above is from their wedding on 17th February, when they hired Bluey, the Congresbury minibus, to take them and some of their guests to and from their wedding venue at Secret World Wildlife Rescue in East Huntspill. You may also recognise Graham as the driver! We wish them every happiness, and look forward to their future involvement with YACWAG.

YACWAG is pleased to receive contributions for this newsletter from members. If you have any photos, articles or anything else of interest, please share them with us!

contact@yacwag.org.uk Next deadline: 1st June 2024

Nature on our Doorstep Youth Project

YACWAG's 'Nature on our Doorstep' Project has been awarded £10,220 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Community Grants Programme administered by North Somerset Council.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is a central pillar of the UK government's 'levelling up' agenda and is providing £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, people and skills.

YACWAG will be working closely with Congresbury Youth Partnership and After-School Club to deliver exciting activities that will encourage greater engagement with nature over the next twelve months. Volunteers from YACWAG's Education and Events team will work with professionals to share amazing encounters with nature including bats and dark skies, and using crafts and games, music and art. The aim is to raise awareness of local conservation issues and expose young people to positive feelings of being in nature which will improve their wellbeing and reduce anxiety.

The programme of activities has already started and we are grateful to Amanda Boyd, who has taken on the role of project leader. If you would like to know more please contact her by email at bats@yacwag.org.uk.



Funded by
UK Government

POWERED BY
**LEVELLING
UP**



Strawberry Line Annual Cut

The photo on the right shows Andrew Hunt cutting about two metres of the margin to the Strawberry Line at Yatton Junction. This work is undertaken every year during the winter and is funded by YACWAG from our Higher Level Countryside Stewardship grant.

YACWAG maintains the nature interest on the Local Nature Reserve in partnership with North Somerset Council. We are looking forward to enjoying the wild flowers on the side of the path this year in the area where a 'butterfly bank' has been created. The improvements to drainage and the path surface have certainly been welcome this wet winter.



Spring Bird Walk, Cadbury Hill

Sixteen members gathered on a dull but thankfully dry and still March morning, the first rain-free morning for some time. The paths were muddy and slippery as expected so most of us carried walking poles or sticks and we all finished unscathed despite the glutinous conditions.

A Song Thrush was singing as Mark led off, the first of half a dozen that we heard; Song Thrushes are clearly doing well here. There were almost as many singing Chiffchaffs, recently arrived from Southern Europe. We stopped to admire the huge Wellingtonia tree and Sue read the relevant extract from Faith's 'Treasured Trees of Yatton and Congresbury' to us. Then a Goldcrest was watched, a Great Spotted Woodpecker called but didn't show itself but a Treecreeper was more obliging, a good spot as they are often elusive.



Photo: Sue Lovesey

The hilltop didn't yield many birds but we could view Cobthorn Paddocks or at least the tree guard fences from there. Despite listening and searching we couldn't find a Marsh Tit and it took a good while to locate a Nuthatch; they are usually quite bold but scanning one of the big Oaks eventually proved successful. A second Nuthatch called stridently as we finished and a Raven flew over cackling loudly. Thanks to Mark Savage for leading.

Trevor Riddle

YACWAG on the Road



YACWAG attended Nailsea Methodist Church's Eco-Fair in March, networking and displaying our achievements. In April we supported Middlecombe Nursery's launch of a new Wildlife Den retail area with a display about our nearby Cobthorn Reserve.

Photo left: Tony Moulin talking to visitors at the Fair
Photo right: Linda set up at Middlecombe Nursery.

North Somerset Levels Winter Bird Survey

The Winter Bird Survey and the Spring/Summer Bird Survey were born out of the North Somerset Levels and Moors Project, an Avon Wildlife Trust initiative. Surveys commenced in 1994 and were conducted by members of the RSPB Weston super Mare Local Group until 2016. That group closed in 2016 and YACWAG members and friends took over and have continued the survey. The data is sent to Bristol Region Environmental Records Centre and to Natural England.

We have recently completed the Winter 2023/24 survey and the report which has been collated and produced by Jon Thobroe (many thanks to Jon) with all the data has been published. Winter counts provide population trends for common resident birds but can be skewed by large flocks of Gulls, Corvids or Starlings for example, the Gulls appearing in large numbers on flooded fields this winter.



Siskin
Photo: Somerset Wildlife Products

Thirteen observers counted over 10,000 birds in a total of just under 40 hours and recorded a record 71 species. A Short Eared Owl was the first ever winter record, not statistically important but much enjoyed by the observers. The winter was notable for a mass arrival of Siskins and the report reflects this.

Our small resident birds are doing well, there has been little freezing weather and they seem to cope with the wet weather well. Robins, Wrens, House Sparrows and Blue Tits were all seen in above average numbers. Greenfinches declined dramatically due to a parasitic disease (trichomoniasis) but have recovered equally quickly, but now Chaffinches are suffering.



Robin
Photo: Emily Lomas

The report is freely available as a PDF, please email birds@yacwag.org.uk if you would like one. It runs to 30 pages but you don't have to read them all!

Trevor Riddle



Chaffinch
Photo: Emily Lomas

Do you enjoy Trevor's Bird News?

Are you aware that Trevor posts a regular monthly bird blog on the YACWAG website, usually illustrated with photos from one of YACWAG's member-photographers?

Trevor is always pleased to hear from you with your sightings or observations and would love to hear from members who would like to be involved in bird surveys or bird box maintenance. Email birds@yacwag.org.uk in the first instance.

Spring into Life

Judging by the early blossoming of some garden plants, Spring is well under way. Taking a closer look at Nature one can see there is not necessarily a consistent pattern. The marsh marigold in our garden pond is well out, as is a wonderful patch of the plant in a ditch along the Strawberry Line near Brinsea which I have known for a very long time. The picture on our Stowey Reserve is entirely different: very few emergent plants and certainly no

flowers present. The extremely wet and exposed conditions there may have taken their toll this year. However, traditionally this plant was picked for St Mary's celebrations on 1st May so there is still hope for Nature to catch up and surprise us with a good show.

Our garden has been managed for wildlife for over 30 years and it has certainly given us new surprises this year. There are few sizeable garden ponds in our immediate neighbourhood and ours appears to draw in all the frogs and newts in the locality.

We managed to restore the pond during the first coronavirus lockdown and judging by the results our work has been a great success. We paid attention to providing a gradual shelving side to benefit birds and emergent plants. Starlings and Jackdaws are frequent visitors to bathe and they are often joined by our resident House Sparrows. Frogs have continued to visit and leave their spawn in the Spring in great quantity.

The masses of tadpoles are soon devoured

by a growing number of smooth newts which reached a record number of near 40 adults this year.

The blackbirds nesting in our hedge nearby are often seen circumnavigating the pond taking a tadpole breakfast on the spot or as a takeaway for their young. Nesting birds are doing well in our garden despite the paucity of insects. Our apple tree currently supports nesting Great Tits and Blue Tits in boxes 15 feet from one another. We had no success last year with tit boxes.

We have also witnessed for the first time Wrens nesting very close to the house. We had deliberately constructed two trellises to stand off the wall on battens to encourage nest construction and positioned about six feet apart.



**23 % of total
urban land in
the UK is
home gardens**

The idea of mounting trellis on battens is recommended in Chris Baines' seminal work '*How to Make a Wildlife Garden*'. One of panels is for a Winter Jasmine, the other for honeysuckle. The plant growth was rather sparse following severe pruning to allow replacement of the trellis, but this did not deter the Wren and a nest was duly constructed in the Jasmine. A lot of activity was noted but it abruptly stopped. A few days later however the Wren was spotted setting up home in the honeysuckle. After many years of trying, the extra depth provided by battens has eventually worked. It is a common practice for male Wrens to construct several nests. They are often polygamous and set up homes for two females. Our Wren has been a joy to watch and we hear its song particularly at dusk singing in chorus with Blackbird, Dunnock, Great Tit and Robin. This week we saw Blackbirds and Robins feeding young in our garden, the latter nesting in an old kettle we placed at the bottom of one of the hedges.

We are very pleased with our Spring garden experience this year. Nature, despite the challenges it faces, continues to deliver and surprise us. We just have to make our garden more neighbourly towards them.

Seven out of eight homes in Britain have a garden. This gives a huge potential for bird-friendly habitat. There are so many things that can be done: plant a tree, plant some berry-bearing shrubs, let at least some of your grass grow long from May onwards, clothe your walls and fences with plant growth, and of course most importantly be tolerant of insects and molluscs and stop using pesticides. Why not give it a go and let Nature surprise you?

Tony Moulin

Get More Involved!



There couldn't be a better time of year to join a growing team of volunteers helping to run the charity and advocate for nature in our communities. It is the time when YACWAG volunteers can get to know our land and how it is managed, learn more about wildlife and learn from each other. We are not all experts but we all share a passion to 'do something' to turn the tide for the natural environment. Join us and meet like-minded people.

We would love to hear from anyone with a few hours to spare who might like to help us actively promoting YACWAG on social media, or submitting records to the national biodiversity database. We would like to find someone who could organise an order for YACWAG clothing for members, or catalogue all the photos we have acquired over the last 25 years. If you would like to get more involved, don't hang back! There is a place for you in the team and you will be made very welcome. We need people to take on a regular role as well as people who can do a small one-off task, indoors or out. The more volunteers YACWAG has, the more we can achieve and the better we can do things.

If you have management or financial skills you may be interested in becoming a Trustee and helping to steer the charity during a critical period of its life. Please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.

Dormouse Survey Walks for YACWAG

YACWAG, in conjunction with the landowners, monitors dormice in two local woods. This year Sarah Dale, the project leader, would like to offer members the chance to go along and, hopefully, see dormice. Two or three members can accompany the survey team on each of the following dates, but people will need to book in with Sarah, who will give directions or sort out car-sharing. Both sites are a bit hilly but the walking is mainly on tracks. At Cleeve Hill the walk is about 3 km and in Kings Wood about 5-6 km. To book a place please email Sarah on sarahjanedale@gmail.com.

Cleeve Hill (all Sundays except June)

Survey lasts 2.5 hours usually.

May 26th 1pm

Saturday June 22nd 10am

July 21st 1pm

August 25th 1pm

September 15th 1pm

October 20th 1pm

November 17th 1pm

King's Wood (all Tuesdays except July)

Survey lasts 3-4 hours usually.

May 28th 9.30am

June 18th 9.30am

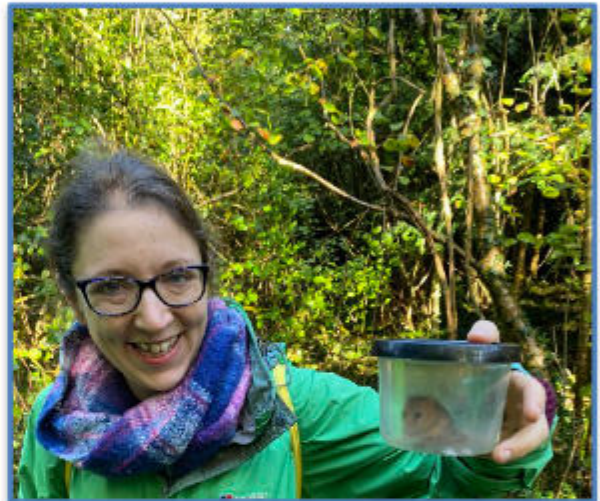
Friday July 19th 9.30am

August 13th 9.30am

September 17th 9.30am

October 22nd 9.30am

November 19th 9.30am



*Sarah Dale above with dormouse in pot.
Dormice are protected and can be handled by people trained and licensed to do so. Great care is taken to minimise stress for the animals while their health is checked*

Photos: Tony Moulin October 2023



Swifts are on their Way!

It's that time of year again when the turning of the seasons gathers pace and every day seems to see the fresh return of yet more familiar friends: hawthorn blossoming in the hedges, warblers singing on the Strawberry Line, and bats flickering in the twilight of the lengthening days. It's time then to start keeping an eye and an ear on the skies for one of our most beloved spring arrivals, the Swifts, bringing with them the promise of summer days ahead.

Our local Swifts usually arrive at the start of May, but the first sightings of Swifts arriving back in the UK have already started to come in so we know that they are not far off now. These birds have completed an epic migration journey from Africa and once they have secured a suitable nesting spot, they will remain faithful to that site and return year on year to breed in the same place. As Swifts nest mainly in buildings, often in crevices and cavities in eaves and roofs, their nest sites are vulnerable to destruction when buildings are renovated or demolished. This is thought to be one of the key reasons that over half of the UK's Swifts have been lost since the 1990s.



*Swift overhead
near Wemberham
Lane, Yatton.
Photo: Jon Thobroe*

YACWAG's Swift Project aims to support our local Swift population by providing more nest boxes and Swift bricks for the birds to nest in, and we are currently waiting to see whether the 20 boxes installed in Yatton and Congresbury last year will be used by Swifts this year. Because Swifts are so site-faithful, avoiding the loss of existing nest sites is also very important and as Swifts are not messy or obtrusive neighbours then people are not always aware when they have Swifts nesting in their building.

YACWAG members can help by spreading the word to friends and neighbours to consider Swifts when having any building work done, especially during nesting season, as it is an offence to disturb any nesting birds. And of course planning renovations or building projects provides the ideal opportunity to install Swift bricks or nest boxes. These are low-cost additions that can provide a real boost to Swifts by offering more places to nest.

We are now networking with other local Swift groups so that we can all share our learning and coordinate efforts to help Swifts across North Somerset. Within Yatton and Congresbury a WhatsApp group has been set up for those with nest boxes or bricks, or just a general interest in Swifts, to be able to keep in touch and share observations and ideas. If you would like to get involved in the WhatsApp group or the YACWAG Swift Project more generally, please contact swifts@yacwag.org.uk.

Meriel Harrison

House martin



Swallow



Swift



Sand martin

