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Cobthorn Paddocks Community Day

YACWAG took part in the West of England Festival of Nature this year for the first time, opening up Cobthorn Paddocks to give local people a chance to have a look at our latest land purchase and what is being done there. YACWAG's plan is to create high quality habitat for the Greater Horseshoe Bat - which will benefit many other species too - and over time develop an area of scattered trees and livestock grazing with tall hedges. This will be similar to the wood pasture that exists in some ancient grazed landscapes like the Forest of Dean.

Visitors were able to learn about the old hedges on the site and children enjoyed a super-size nature trail. The event was not crowded, giving volunteers a chance to chat and children time to play the ever-popular YACWAG Bats Return to the Roost game.



More Cobthorn News

It was good to see the sheep back at Cobthorn. Just three ewes and five lambs are busy munching down the grass and making dung to sustain invertebrates, especially beetles for bats. We hope they will be joined by Dexter cattle soon.



YACWAG was pleased to be able to help Sam Payne attain his Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. Part of the Award involves volunteering in the community and Sam chose to support the environment with 15 hours of voluntary work. He helped YACWAG by delivering leaflets and working at Cobthorn Reserve planting trees and hedges as well as doing work at Congresbury Station with Steve Rea. Photo on the right shows Sam with his father Nick, who came along and worked with him.



National Grid has started work to put the high-voltage electricity cables at Cobthorn under ground. This is good news as the cables are known to affect bats negatively. As well as improving views to the Mendips, the more exciting news is that Strongvox have agreed to sell YACWAG the piece of land on which the pylons are situated. This extension to Cobthorn will be good for bats and other wildlife as a hedge and new trees will provide a better connection with other bat habitat.

Watering at Cobthorn

A dozen volunteers have come forward to water the newly planted trees at Cobthorn. YACWAG is very grateful to the Cobthorn Waterers for their support. A large tree when planted from a pot needs about 50 litres of water a week in order to make strong roots, so it is a huge undertaking to keep over 50 new trees alive. YACWAG has purchased some tree irrigation bags to reduce the amount of trips it requires to provide water, but there is no getting away from the fact that it is hard work. However, it is extremely rewarding and a very beautiful place to stand and stare on a warm summer evening. We hope that our watering volunteers will be rewarded by many lovely wildlife experiences too. Volunteers have already reported seeing a barn owl hunting over the fields at dusk and deer standing under our special small leaved lime trees.

YACWAG is grateful to everyone who has been able to help with watering. This will literally make the difference between life and death for the young trees. To lighten the load on the current volunteers we would love to have more people come forward to take a turn in prolonged dry spells. If you can help, please let us know at contact@yacwag.org.uk or text 07443 843356.

The mature tree on the right is Harry's Oak in a field off Claverham Close, owned by YACWAG thanks to a bequest.



Now



What we are hoping to achieve

Wide Open Meadows



Two meadows owned by YACWAG members were open to other members to visit at the beginning of June.

Two acres at Cottage Farm in Claverham were originally part of the Court de Wyck estate and had been an orchard. In the last 50 years it had been grazed but has never been ploughed. Since 2016 a late summer hay crop and the sowing of native wild flowers has encouraged a growing variety of plants and insects to return. Trees have also been planted around the margin in connection with the Hinkley Point mitigation project. Jonathan and Julie showed visitors round the meadow and also gave access to their beautiful garden.



A walk up the bridlepath to the top of the hill allowed members to see the second meadow at Henley Wood Cottage. Before 2012 this field had been grazed by sheep for many years. For a couple of years it was left fallow and then since 2014 it has been managed by one late hay crop per year. Many native plants have reasserted themselves since then, including Common Spotted and Green-winged orchids. The uncommon Grass Vetchling was a rare and interesting sight.

YACWAG members were lucky to have Mark Walker as their guide. The meadow was his dream project and he helped the owner achieve the natural space which is still 'finding its roots'.





A big thank you to all who made the afternoon so interesting and pleasant.

Fun and Games

YACWAG's Education and Events sub committee planned an afternoon of fun and games for the village events in Yatton and Congresbury this year. Yatton Schools Carnival was the first outing for giant Snakes and Ladders, aka Ups and Downs for Nature and the high winds made the giant inflatable dice even more fun than anticipated! Bees vs Ladybirds was also popular, as were various craft activities safely out of the wind in the gazebo.





Thanks to all volunteers who helped out on the day. There will be a repeat performance at Congresbury Village Fete on Saturday 29th June. If you had time to help with setting up or taking down, or to support the activities or talk to people about wildlife in the afternoon, you would be very welcome. Please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.

 **Come along to YACWAG's 25th AGM!** 

Horsecastle Chapel, Horsecastle Farm Road, Yatton BS49 4QQ

7.15 for 7.30 pm Wednesday 3rd July

business will be followed by a short talk on YACWAG's Swift Project
and a short walk to see wildlife on Chestnut Park Estate

YACWAGger Profile

Amy Symonds has been volunteering with YACWAG for the last three years as our Wildlife Responder. Last year she joined the Education and Events sub-committee and has been supporting events, including sessions in local schools and youth clubs. Amy has just decided to stand for election as a Trustee of YACWAG and explained why.*

When did you first become interested in nature?

As a child I had a lot of curiosity and always wanted to be outside turning over stones. For my birthday each year my request was always to go camping to spend more time in nature. When I left school I didn't know what to do but my love of animals led me to work on a farm. My desire to develop my understanding of animals took me to university where I completed my BSc degree in Animal Behaviour and Welfare in Gloucester. During my course I volunteered at Vale Wildlife Hospital in Evesham where I was lucky enough to then be employed as a wildlife rehabilitator. Unfortunately in challenging times I was unable to give myself financial security in this role so had to step back from my passion and get some savings behind me to secure an easier future. I have finally achieved this goal and learnt some valuable skills along the way and I am excited to be able to use these skills to make a difference in what I believe really matters.



What brought you to YACWAG?

Covid brought me back to Weston-super-mare to live with my parents. Once I got settled I was able to rent a flat in Congresbury and was thinking about what to do next. One day I went into my neglected garden and saw dragonflies. I was used to caring for animals but these had nothing to do with me – I hadn't provided water or anything else for them. They were wild and visiting my garden! I realised that day that this was what I wanted to focus on: my local environment! I didn't want to lose those dragonflies. They are special and they were in my garden. What could I do to ensure it stayed that way?

I started looking for a local group and discovered YACWAG – who owned land locally. What could be a better organisation for how I was feeling? I met Tony and Faith and became a member. I wasn't able to get involved as much as I wanted to start with as my job at the time exploded with responsibilities. Nevertheless it has given me training in changing people's opinions, and I was paid enough to finalise my savings allowing me enough security to now look for a job related to my love of nature, a job that means something much more to me than money.

I am looking forward to becoming a Trustee of YACWAG so I can help maintain the rich environment we have in the local area. I don't want to lose dragonflies in the villages.

What could YACWAG do better?

YACWAG acquires land and manages its nature reserves well but there is a big opportunity to share those successes with people and change what they think the landscape should look like. I would like to challenge the concept of untidiness in gardens, in the countryside.

The future is bright. The younger generations coming along behind us will do the right thing if they are given opportunities to see what nature has to offer and YACWAG are doing so well at providing opportunity for people to do just that! I was recently helping at a YACWAG session at Congresbury Youth Club which involved going out into the park to look for bats. The kids' faces lit up when they saw and heard the bats on the detectors. They wouldn't have known they were there if we hadn't shown them.

I would like to see YACWAG sharing our knowledge and also extending the care of nature into people's gardens as they are interlinked with the ecosystem in our fields. Gardens can provide essential corridors for nature to thrive over a much larger area. If we could persuade people to be less regimented and challenge the 'normal', the area would really be buzzing.

* *Wildlife Responder - first port of call for local wildlife help. Before you take an injured animal or bird to Secret World, ask Amy for advice. 07919 323190.*

Yatton and Congresbury Tree Trails Updated

Thanks to Craig and Rita from Cloudbird Studio, who generously gave their time free of charge to YACWAG, we now have updated downloadable Tree Trails for both Yatton and Congresbury. These can be followed on your smart phone and each stands alone as a walking trail to help you discover some of the special trees in the two villages. They will also be available in printed form at events.

The trails can also be paired with the YACWAG book, ***Treasured Trees of Yatton and Congresbury***, which can be ordered from the YACWAG online shop. The book packs in a lot of information about local trees from a cultural, historical and biological perspective and will definitely enhance your walks.



❖ Yatton Tree Trail ❖

This walk has been produced by YACWAG to promote our amazing trees and encourage us to care for them. You can follow the trail using this leaflet alone, following the red dotted line, but if you have access to a copy of the book ***TREASURED TREES of Yatton and Congresbury*** you will find more information on the pages noted in brackets throughout this text.



The walk is wheelchair-friendly, except for the crossing of Rock Road Playing Field. An alternative route is suggested in the text. Much of this walk goes along the High Street, which can be busy and noisy at certain times.



❖ Congresbury Tree Trail ❖

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Start your walk at the entrance to Broad Street near the market cross. Some Lime (p.8) trees were planted in the 1990s and others added in 2012 to replace an older avenue of Limes. The walk is mostly wheelchair friendly. You may need to avoid parts of the church paddock and orchard (but you can look over towards these from the tarmac path) to get to Pauls Causeway. Green dashed lines mark two other detours. To avoid the kissing gate entrance to the King George V field, turn left along The Causeway, and after about 50 metres right through a metal gate onto a path which leads directly to the exit onto Stonewell Drive.

Dormouse Walks

Join Sarah Dale and the YACWAG dormouse monitoring team for a Dormouse Walk at Cleeve Hill on July 21st at 1pm or August 25th at 1pm. Dormouse Walks at King's Wood will take place on 19th July and 13th August, both starting at 9.30am.

BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL. Please email Sarah on sarahjanedale@gmail.com.



Peregrine Watch

An invitation from **BRISTOL ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB**

You are invited to see the famous Avon Gorge Peregrines at the Peregrine Watch on Clifton Down on Saturday 22nd June and Sunday 23rd June and also Saturday 13th July and Sunday 14th July from 9am-5pm. Volunteers will be found by the Circular Road on the Bristol Downs overlooking the Avon Gorge near the Ladies Mile end of the road. Grid Reference ST 564741.

The YACWAG newsletter comes out six times a year. Readers' feedback, photos, news, articles and anything else of interest would be gratefully received.

We would especially be interested at the moment in any photos of YACWAG activities in the early days from 1999.

Please email the editor on contact@yacwag.org.uk.

On the Wing Now



Marbled White by Tony Moulin
Phippens 22 June 2024

Already this season we have seen Marbled White butterflies on three bits of land we manage. They are breeding on the small grassy triangle near the Millennium Arch at Yatton Junction, and also in our hay field, New Croft, as well as some of our rough pasture on Congresbury Moor. Marbled Whites need a variety of grass species for their caterpillars so they are not able to breed in many parks or gardens, for example. They are a beautiful reason for YACWAG to leave our grass long through the summer months.



Large Skipper by Faith Moulin
Phippens 18 June 2013

The Large Skipper is not as large as its name suggests, and is often mistaken for a moth, as it holds its wings in a very uncharacteristic pose for a butterfly. Large Skippers are on the wing before the Small Skippers which are a similar orange colour, and emergence time can help with identification. The other distinguishing feature is the spots on the forewing. The Large Skipper is mottled with spots, whereas the wings of Small and Essex Skippers are a uniform orange. All three species should be seen round and about long grass in the next month or so.

**Join the Big Butterfly Count from 12th July to 4th August -
it's easy on the app.**

<https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/>

Spring Bird Walks

We were lucky to have a dry, calm morning for the first May bank holiday walk which attracted 19 adults and three juniors. Chiffchaff and Reed Warbler were audible from the meeting point and it wasn't long before the first of several Cetti's Warblers exploded into song. However most of the party were more captivated by tiny Moorhen chicks scooting over the weed on the pathside ditch.

A Sedge Warbler sang and gave us quite reasonable views but a pair of Stonechats on the Strawberry Line was more unexpected. For many years Stonechats were winter visitors to the YACWAG area but the occasional pair is nesting now and we spotted a second pair on Congresbury Moor. We heard several Common Whitethroats and saw a couple of them but Lesser Whitethroat proved more elusive, just one very distant bird heard.

A Kestrel and a Buzzard provided raptor interest while a Heron flew over heading towards the heronry at Cleeve. A detour to try to find a nearer Lesser Whitethroat wasn't successful so several of the participants headed off to the Strawberry Line Cafe for breakfast.

Thanks to Mark Savage for leading us.



Stonechat
Photo: Emily Lomas

Trevor Riddle



Song Thrush
Photo: Emily Lomas

On 27th May 13 of us including two juniors assembled on a sunny morning at Congresbury station on the Strawberry Line while a Green Woodpecker called loudly very close to us as we were about to set off. A Raven flew over and with Mark Savage leading we were soon hearing Chiffchaff and Blackcap in full song. Two Song Thrushes were singing stridently at each other across the Strawberry Line almost drowning out a Robin and Wren.

When we reached the more open sections of the line Cetti's Warblers exploded into song whilst Reed Warblers were singing in a much more measured manner. It is likely that the Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were about to commence second nesting attempts as they seemed to be everywhere.

Conversely it took us a while to locate a Whitethroat which suggests that they were in the middle of their first nesting attempt. A few Swallows flew over and there were plenty of Greenfinches, seen and heard. A Skylark was singing and spotted high up in the blue over a field adjacent to the Line. As we returned to the station the Song Thrushes were still singing well.

Trevor Riddle



Trevor, who holds a BTO licence to inspect YACWAG's Barn Owl and Kestrel nest boxes, returns an owlet to the nest box after ringing by the Hawk and Owl Trust.

YACWAG has a strong bird section led by Trevor Riddle and with growing numbers of volunteers supporting YACWAG's bird work. For the last 25 years Trevor has been leading public bird walks for YACWAG and maintaining a large number of nest boxes. These have to be inspected, cleaned out and maintained and have now reached a three-figure number! Anyone able to give time to help with this in the autumn will be very welcome.

A very important task carried out by Trevor and his team is the co-ordination of breeding bird surveys and winter bird surveys around the locality. This has provided a unique dataset going back longer than YACWAG has been in existence as we took over when RSPB Weston-super-Mare group disbanded. New volunteers are always welcome to be trained up and carry on this vital work.

Trevor writes a monthly blog for the YACWAG website which is a very good way of finding out what birds are around our area. You can find past editions on the website as well. In order to keep him fully in the picture, Trevor is always glad to receive photos, observations and sightings by email to birds@yacwag.org.uk.