

COMING UP

Thursday 15 October 7.30-9pm Zoom talk *The Right Light at Night* (see p2)

Sat 19 October 10-1 work party at Congresbury station and reedbed
Book congresburystation@outlook.com

Tuesday 22 October 9.30-1.30
dormouse survey at Kings Wood.
Book sarahjanedale@gmail.com

Sat 9 November 10-2 work party at St Andrew's School, Congresbury. Book contact@yacwag.org.uk

Sun 17 November 1-4 dormouse survey at Cleeve Hill.
Book sarahjanedale@gmail.com

Tuesday 19 November 9.30-1.30
dormouse survey at Kings Wood
Book sarahjanedale@gmail.com

Thursday 21 November 7.30-9pm Talk on 25 years of bird surveying on the Strawberry Line by Trevor Riddle at Horsecastle Chapel Yatton BS49 4QQ
Free to members, £3 visitors. All welcome, just turn up.

Sat 23 November 10-1 work party at Congresbury station and reedbed
Book congresburystation@outlook.com

Tuesday 10 December 10-3 hedge laying training and hedge planting at Cobthorn Reserve. Fully booked for hedgelaying but volunteers welcome for other tasks.

DID YOU KNOW...? You can find information about events on YACWAG's online calendar www.yacwag.org.uk.



Registered charity no. 1076362



Key volunteers Sue, Linda and Trevor met MP Tessa Munt (3rd from left) when she dropped in to a 'Meet the Community' event for voluntary groups arranged by Yatton PACT in September.

CONTENTS of this issue

Dark Skies Talk via Zoom	2
Watercress Farm Visit	3
Thank You to Tim Clark	3
Research Project	4
Stowey Bridge Repaired	4
Congresbury Caterpillars	5
Cobthorn Moth Survey	6
Littlewood Tree Work	6
A Life with Buzzards	7,8

Zoom in on The Right Light at Night



Steve Tonkin is the Dark Skies Advisor for Cranborne Chase National Landscape. He is an astronomy educator and regular contributor to BBC Sky at Night magazine. YACWAG has invited Steve to talk to us about the effects of artificial light on the natural world. Members will have already received an email giving the Zoom link, meeting ID and passcode, on 1st October. If you would like to invite friends or family to hear about this important topic, please feel free to pass the link on to them, but we would not otherwise want to post the zoom link publicly.

The Right Light at Night will be presented by Steve Tonkin starting at 7.30pm on Tuesday 15th October.



Broad Street Congresbury Christmas Fair
Wednesday 4th December 6-8.30 pm

Pop along and visit the YACWAG stall
at this local seasonal event

YACWAG Visit to Watercress Farm



On 20th August over 20 YACWAG members visited the Belmont Project in Wraxall to see regenerative farming in action. Watercress Farm was purchased in 2019 by the Rossiter family to extend the Belmont Estate which they had bought in 2012. There was much to challenge and stimulate interest - from the restoration of biodiversity by the introduction of rewilding pigs and cattle and the removal of internal

fences, to the rewetting project with introduced meanders to the Land Yeo river. The visit gave a demonstration and justification for a new approach to land management. We are grateful to Gil Martin, the Belmont Estate manager, for his time and enthusiasm in sharing his vision with YACWAG. We all learned so much.

YACWAG Chair's Thank-you to Tim Clark

Every year Tony Moulin makes awards to YACWAG volunteers who have in some way been exceptionally supportive and helpful in furthering YACWAG's work.

Tim Clark is a member who is a professional ecologist. Tim helps YACWAG with bat monitoring on Cadbury Hill and Kings Wood. Following his encouragement to investigate the benefits to YACWAG, he offered to help with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). YACWAG registered with North Somerset Council as an organisation which could help deliver BNG and Tim volunteered to draw up the scheme when a 'customer' came along, giving Tony reliable and solid support and advice throughout the process.



Tim with Tony and his personalised mug.

Biodiversity Credits have been sold on land at Cobthorn Paddocks, for the creation of wood pasture for the benefit of Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bats. The income will offset the costs of land purchase and enable YACWAG to buy more land for nature conservation.

Research Project on YACWAG Land

A university project looking at the potential ecological impacts of housing developments on water quality and land use focused on YACWAG's Congresbury Moor Reserve, where rough grassland and wetland habitats support freshwater ecosystems. There are global concerns over the impacts of land use change and management on deteriorating water quality and ecology. Ellie Aizlewood from Yatton decided to study bio-indicators such as aquatic macro-invertebrates, amphibians and fish alongside chemical and physical analysis to assess current water quality on YACWAG sites and look at the possible impacts of future land development at Rectory Farm.



The project supported the need for sustainable development policies and practices and highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between conservation and land developments to ensure minimal negative effects on the health of ecosystems.

Ellie achieved a 2:1 grade for her degree but the project mark was a First. Congratulations Ellie on such an interesting and topical piece of work. If anyone would like to read the dissertation please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.

Stowey Reserve Bridge Repaired

The bridge made by the former owner of Stowey Reserve finally came to the end of its life and YACWAG has been waiting for the go-ahead to get it repaired. At last this summer contractor Andrew Hunt was able to obtain the materials needed and renew both the steel girders and replace the broken sleepers with 'new' secondhand timber.

The bridge is essential for visitors on foot to our fields, and needs to be able to take the weight of tractor and trailer when the hay is cut. Other visitors using the bridge include the National Grid tree team to inspect and pollard trees that might encroach on the overhead cables, and the Internal Drainage Board (IDB) who look after Middle Rhyne running between the two fields. We are grateful to the IDB for their financial support of this project.



Congresbury Caterpillars

Two young members were amazed and intrigued by the discovery of an elephant hawk moth caterpillar in their grandparents' Congresbury garden in September.

In the autumn the large caterpillars stop feeding and seek a place to pupate in the ground to pass the winter. This is often when they are seen scurrying about.



Elephant hawk moth caterpillar. In the wild they feed on willow-herbs and bedstraws but in gardens they are often found on fuchsia. Photo: Tony Moulin.



The colourful moth that will emerge next spring. Photo: Higgy, Somerset Wildlife Photography.

Cobthorn Caterpillars



*The Miller
Photos: Faith Moulin*



Vapourer



Grey Dagger

The young trees planted in Cobthorn Paddocks last winter have proved popular with moth larvae as well as other insects. The caterpillars are interesting and valuable in their own right, but the adult moths are also welcome at Cobthorn as bat food.

Moth Survey at Cobthorn Paddocks



Tony and I were encouraged to find the larvae of Vapourer, Grey Dagger and The Miller in August. While these moths are not exceptionally rare, the caterpillars are very attractive. A decade ago these species would have been expected to be seen in gardens as well as the wider countryside. Our surveys are not necessarily about discovering the rare, but rather reassuring ourselves that the ecosystem is functioning OK.

Two moth traps were used at YACWAG's Cobthorn Paddocks in Congresbury on a cool evening at the end of September. Thanks to Higgy for his help and support, the mercury vapour traps drew in a few seasonal moths, like Large Yellow Underwing, Hebrew Character, Square-spot Rustic, Lunar Underwing, Willow

Beauty, Black Rustic and Deep-brown Dart as well as a range of flies and wasps, including many caddisflies. Higgy sought identification from the Natural History Museum of one tiny but interesting wasp. This was a species of *Mesochorus*, a hyperparasitoid, making a living by attacking other parasitoids' larvae.



Littlewood Reaches Out

The photo on the left, taken in April this year, shows the tremendous lean on some of the alder trees on the eastern side of Littlewood. The neighbouring landowner is not happy about the risk to his fence and the shading of his field, so YACWAG has undertaken a lengthy and expensive exercise, employing an arboricultural consultant, gaining consent under the Tree Preservation Order that protects the wood, carrying out a bat survey and employing a tree surgeon to start a rolling programme of trimming, coppicing and felling trees along the ditch edge. When some of the priority trees have been removed, work will be undertaken to clear the ditch of debris.

A Life with Buzzards - Robin Prytherch

Robin Prytherch was a BBC Natural History Unit researcher and a founding member of the Bristol Ornithological Club. He was an active bird ringer, a founder member and former Chairman of Chew Valley Ringing Station in Somerset where he was mostly involved in the ringing of songbirds. In 1993 he started ringing nestling buzzards, which provided useful data about the survival and dispersal of young buzzards.

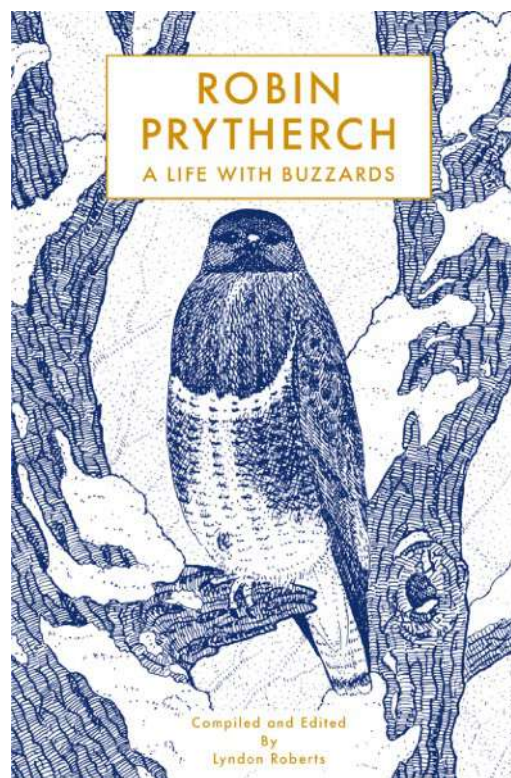
Lyndon Roberts, who often accompanied Robin when he was ringing buzzard chicks, said, 'He became known as the buzzard man. He would climb trees and tie himself to the trunk and lower chicks down to me for ringing and measuring. He made detailed notes and wrote countless articles passing on his knowledge.'

Robin Prytherch identified 120 buzzard territories in North Somerset and could distinguish individual birds in the field, recognising them by their plumage variations and other characteristics. He was an old-school field naturalist with rare field skills and he noticed behaviour that the casual observer would miss.

Robin documented the often complex life histories of the buzzards he studied in the Gordano Valley, including in many cases their deaths. Most of the buzzards were individually named by him. He visited their territories often and once commented that he wasn't sure who was studying who.



Robin sent his friends homemade Christmas cards with sketches and descriptions of buzzards for 26 years between 1995 and 2020. These make up a large part of the book, *Robin Prytherch - A Life with Buzzards*.



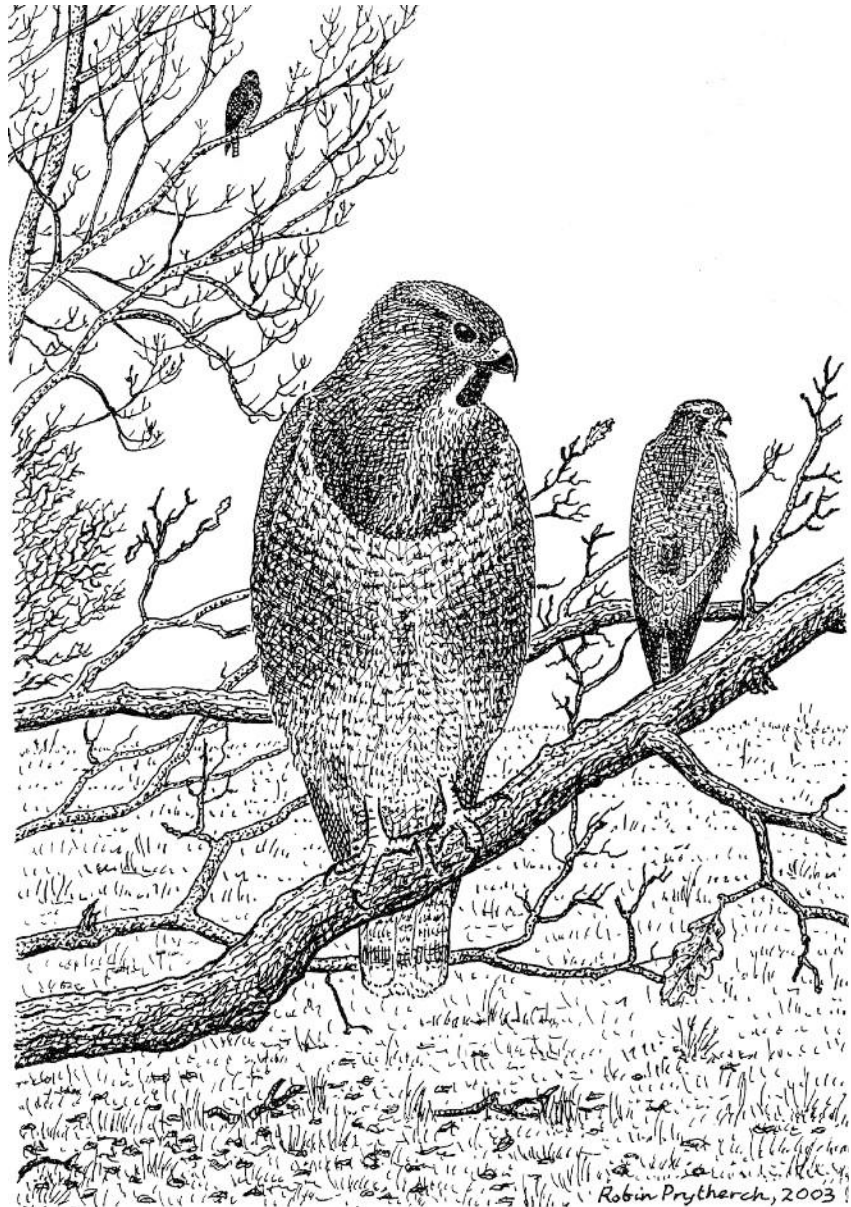
Robin shared his observations and let other people into his world of buzzards. He was a fine storyteller and a good illustrator too. He contributed illustrations to books professionally but, even if not the finest examples of his work, the collection of buzzard illustrations in *A Life with Buzzards* were probably the ones closest to his heart.

After Robin's death aged 81 in 2021, his family, friends, the Bristol Naturalists Society and Bristol Ornithological Club brought the cards together and joined forces with Bristol Books to make sure his sketches and observations would reach a wider audience and not be forgotten.

Although others have studied buzzards, Robin's contribution at both local and national level was very significant and the book gives an excellent insight for bird-lovers.

YACWAG is grateful to member Clive Burlton for his help with this article.

A Life with Buzzards is available online at www.bristolbooks.org.



Your photos, articles, observations and other contributions to the newsletter are much appreciated. Please get in touch with the editor, Faith Moulin, via contact@yacwag.org.uk. Next deadline 1st December 2024.