



Registered charity no. 1076362

We wish all our members and supporters *Season's Greetings* and a *Happy New Year.*

Thank you all of you who are already volunteers with YACWAG, and also those who make donations towards our work. If you can help please talk it through: contact@yacwag.org.uk.



YACWAG stall at Broad Street Christmas Fair. Thanks to volunteers who raised over £100 and all who came to have a look.

COMING UP

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

Saturday 11th January 10-1 Trees for Climate tree-planting at Cobthorn Reserve. All welcome. Children under 16 must be supervised by an adult.

Thursday 23rd January 7.30-9 pm 'Connections in the Landscape' - an illustrated talk by Nathan Orr of Mendip Hills Natural Landscapes at Horsecastle Chapel, BS49 4QQ.

Thursday 13th February 7.30-9 pm 'The State of our Rivers' (and what we can do about it) - illustrated talk by Michelle Walker of The Rivers Trust at Horsecastle Chapel, BS49 4QQ.

AND A DATE FOR YOUR NEW CALENDAR or DIARY:

SATURDAY 5TH JULY 2025
from 4pm -10pm at Claverham Village Hall for YACWAG's 25th birthday party - family fun and games, buffet, cake and soft drinks, AGM 6.30pm, displays, exhibitions, bar from 7pm.

DID YOU KNOW...?

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



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Make it a Merry Swiftmas!



If you're still doing your Christmas shopping, don't forget you can give the gift of a wildlife home to help our local hedgehogs, bats and birds – especially the red-listed Swift which is the focus of [YACWAG's Swift Project](#).

Swifts are in decline both nationally and in our local area, and loss of nesting sites is one of the main reasons for this. Swifts nest in cavities in the roofs and eaves of buildings, and when roofs are replaced or modernised these nesting sites are often lost. Putting up purpose-built Swift boxes on your house for them to nest in will give them more of a chance to continue nesting in our communities. They are excellent mess-free neighbours as the parent birds eat the droppings produced by the babies! If you are planning renovation projects in the New Year, include nest bricks or tiles in your project requirements to provide a durable no-maintenance solution; they cost from around £30 each and you can also have bricks retro-fitted into house walls.

Swifts can take a little while to discover new nest boxes and bricks, but in the meantime you may find they will be used by a range of other bird species including Sparrows and Starlings. Playing Swift calls for a few hours a day from May to July can encourage the Swifts to come and investigate, as they like to nest in colonies. For this reason it is also best to put up more than one box or brick, or a larger multi-chamber box, if you can do this – but even one box can make a difference.

Meriel Harrison



YACWAG swift boxes ready for installation in Wrigton Lane, Congresbury in 2023.

Photos thanks to Clive Burlton.



Boxes going up ready for the swifts. Hopefully in 2025 more swifts will return to the colony in Wrigton Lane.

Exciting Extension at Kenn Moor!



YACWAG has just doubled the size of its Kenn Moor nature reserve! The field next to our original landholding came up for sale and that prompted a discussion between local residents and YACWAG about a potential partnership to purchase the four-acre site.

In part this felt like history repeating itself. YACWAG had worked with residents of Bramblewood back in 2006

when they raised the money to purchase the original reserve near their homes. Some of you will have walked over the larger field assisting Trevor with a snipe count recently. Others will know the reserve because they have visited the orchard we planted in the smaller field in 2021.

If we hadn't had money in the bank thanks to two bequests, we would not have been able to respond to this opportunity. However, our Land Acquisition Policy prioritises the purchase of land to extend our existing nature reserves, and particularly on SSSIs. This four acre field and small paddock fitted the bill on both counts and we had money to spend right away. It was agreed that we would part-fund the purchase if the residents could raise the rest. Within two weeks their money was in YACWAG's bank and the owner had agreed to withdraw from auction and proceed with a private treaty sale. The field now belongs to YACWAG!

The land will be allowed to recover slowly from years of horse grazing and we will be keeping a close eye on what nature does next. However, we have already agreed with our grazier to create a new access so the four Red Devon cattle who have spent the summer months on our existing land next door can munch on the grass and deposit some dung to encourage invertebrates.

Soon members will be invited to come along and celebrate the generosity and far-sightedness of the Bramblewood residents who have guaranteed they will have a nature reserve on their doorstep for ever. We will also remember with gratitude the local people who have left money to YACWAG in their wills. Land purchase is the best way to preserve the countryside around our villages, while we still have some, and our fields won't just be green, they will be bursting with life as YACWAG provides a space for nature in perpetuity.

YACWAG's Winter Talks

In November Trevor Riddle, especially for YACWAG's 25th anniversary, gave a talk on 25 years of bird surveys on the Strawberry Line between Yatton and Congresbury. His talk featured 70 species seen and heard on the disused railway nature reserve and he shared a wealth of knowledge about the birds on our patch. We are especially grateful for the splendid photos supplied by members that illustrated his talk. If you missed this treat we are hoping to have a recording available in the near future.



Thanks to the generous support of Horsecastle Chapel, two more in-person talks are planned for this winter season. All are welcome - members free, non-members £3 on the door. We are conscious that this venue may not be so convenient for our members in Congresbury and we used to alternate the talks so Congresbury members did not have to travel to Yatton every time. However, the facilities at the chapel are superb and free of charge to community groups, whereas we have to pay for less comfortable rooms in Congresbury, where there is not always a venue available with the technology we need. If you would like a lift to talks in Yatton, please let us arrange transport for you.

On 23rd January at 7.30pm (refreshments from 7.15pm) Nathan Orr will talk about Connectivity in the Local Landscape.

Nathan is the Nature Recovery Ranger for the Mendip Hills Natural Landscapes (MHNL - formerly the AONB) and will be talking about the importance of reconnecting our wildlife rich sites. Nathan has found that using the MHNL champion species as the focus for his work has highlighted the importance of connectivity. If you would like to learn a little more about Nathan's Champion Species you can watch a short film about each of them on their You Tube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/@mendiphillsNL5963>.

On 13th February at 7.30pm (refreshments from 7.15pm) Michelle Walker will talk about The State of Our Rivers (And What We Can Do About It!)

Michelle is Technical Director at The Rivers Trust leading a team of geospatial data specialists who support the network of 65 member Rivers Trusts to take an evidence-based approach to planning, collaborating and delivering measures to improve the health of rivers across the UK and Ireland. She is a geospatial data specialist with 30 years experience, based in Congresbury, and in her spare time she is a keen outdoor swimmer and volunteers for Bristol Avon Rivers Trust and YACWAG on education and citizen science activities.

Rodent Surveying in Cobthorn and Paddocks – Update from Andrew and Janice Hunter

Regular readers of the YACWAG Newsletter may remember earlier articles regarding work undertaken by YACWAG volunteers to survey for the possible presence of Hazel Dormice in YACWAG’s adjacent reserves of Cobthorn and Paddocks in Congresbury.



Dormouse Tube in Paddocks hedge

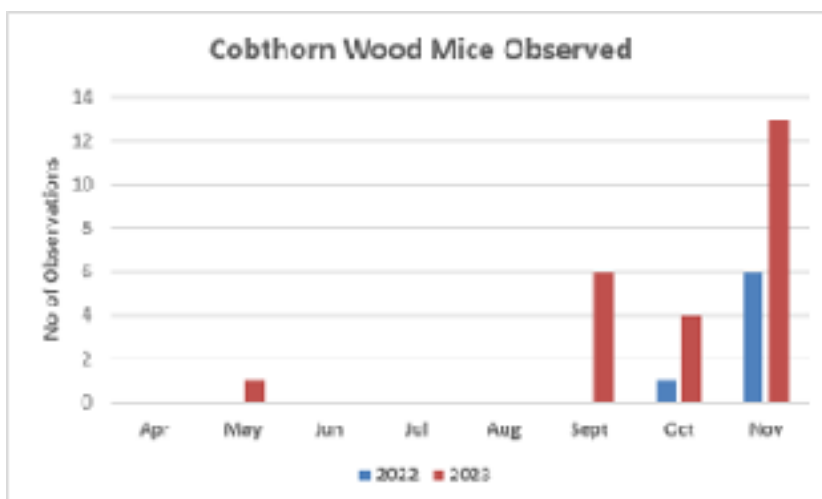
A recognised methodology for checking for the possible presence of Dormice is to place so-called “Dormouse Tubes” at intervals around the survey site. Dormouse Tubes are rectangular plastic tubes which are sealed at one end, and provide a safe, dry space for Dormice and other animals to shelter in. Since April 2022, licensed YACWAG volunteers have been undertaking monthly inspections of approximately 30 such tubes around the hedgerow perimeters of both reserves to check for any evidence of Dormouse activity.

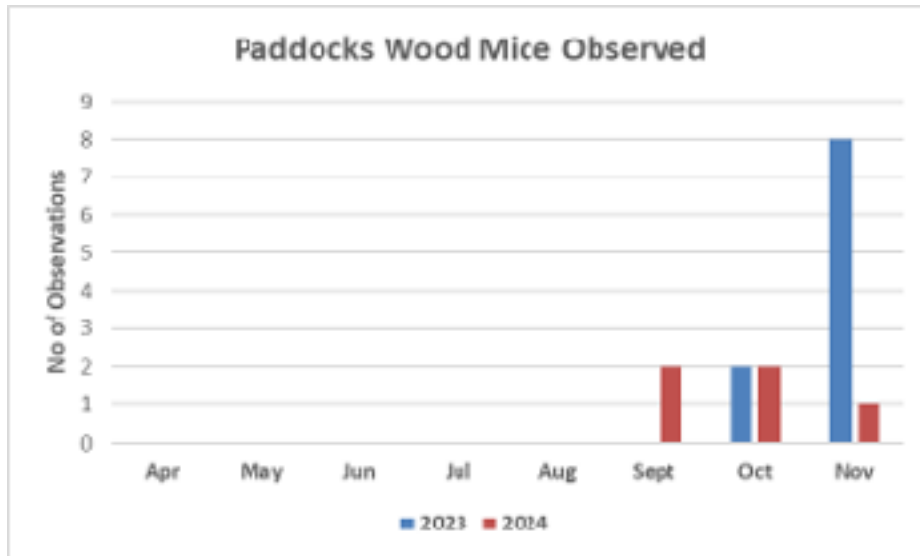
Dormice weave neat, structured and often spherical, nests typically constructed from stripped bark and green leaves. Such nests differ considerably in appearance from the rather messy and unstructured nests made by the more common and non-endangered Wood Mouse, which are typically constructed of dry, brown leaves.

Unfortunately, to date there has been no definitive evidence of any Dormouse presence. However, we are pleased to report a very healthy and thriving population of Wood Mice in the hedgerows surrounding both reserves.

Results April 2022 – November 2024

Surveys were carried out monthly between April and November over a 3 year period. In terms of Wood Mice actually seen, there is a clear pattern as to when the mice are observed: typically towards the autumn/winter months.





It is no surprise that the Wood Mice are making more use of the tubes as shelter in the colder months. In addition, in the early months of April and May, we often find the remnants of caches of berries or seeds that the mice have stock-piled to help them through the winter. In all cases, whenever we do find a Wood Mouse, once they are weighed, they are released safely back into the hedgerow where they came from.

Left: photo by Andrew Hunter - a Paddocks wood mouse

The Future

After three years of monthly surveys, we now intend to take a break from monthly surveying. Whilst it is clearly disappointing that to date we have not found any definitive evidence of Dormouse presence, it remains a pleasure to see that the local Wood Mouse population is thriving.

Currently, construction work continues on the nearby new housing development in the fields adjacent to Wrington Road and the YACWAG Cobthorn Reserve. Once this activity completes and things calm down again, our intention is to recommence surveying activity and our hunt for any evidence of the elusive Hazel Dormouse.

YACWAG monitors dormice in nearby woodland, both in Congresbury and Cleeve, and the photo on the right is a sleepy dormouse sitting on Andrew's hand. Andrew and Janice are both licensed to handle dormice.



More Trees for Climate at Cobthorn

YACWAG has been successful in being awarded another Trees for Climate grant from the Forest of Avon. This grant is designed to get more trees in the ground in order to help mitigate climate change and support nature recovery. YACWAG soon saw the potential for creating more excellent bat habitat at its Cobthorn Reserve by tree planting. Wood pasture is an ancient manmade habitat that has animals grazing among scattered trees. Unlike a woodland, the trees are far enough apart to allow the grass to grow while they provide food, shelter and shade for livestock and wild animals alike.



Last winter we planted 46 trees at Cobthorn and in January we will be planting a further 14. These are again mainly big forest trees that will attain a height of 20-30 metres in 50-100 years. This year's selection includes willow, poplar, sweet chestnut, walnut and wild cherry. We hope local people will again join in watering the trees in the drier months. Last year the waterers did an invaluable job keeping the young trees happy. Not only were the trees happy but many of the volunteers reported enjoying the peaceful surroundings at Cobthorn on warm still evenings and watching a barn owl hunt over the fields. The Trees for Climate grant allows us to claim for volunteer time and the efforts of the waterers in 2024 will soon be repaid to YACWAG to the tune of £1000! Owl watching while earning money for your favourite charity!

Would you like to come and plant trees on **Saturday 11th January**? All ages welcome but sorry, no dogs. For information email contact@yacwag.org.uk.

You can watch a video about the Cobthorn project on YACWAG's website thanks to our volunteer Sam Roberts. Scroll down the page to Videos. <https://yacwag.org.uk/our-reserves-cobthorn/>

Harry's Huggable Oak Tree



Harry's Oak sits in a plot of land YACWAG named 'Harry's Plot'. Harry Hailes, who lived in Claverham Close, Yatton, had clubbed together in 2005 with neighbours to buy the field behind their homes. Harry, having first discussed the matter with Tony Moulin, and with no family to leave his plot to, bequeathed it to YACWAG along with a sum of money for maintenance. In January 2017 YACWAG took ownership of the one-seventh portion of the field and will look after it forever in Harry's memory and for the benefit of wildlife. It is stipulated in Harry's will that no fences are to be erected but that another oak tree could be planted.

In 2020 YACWAG planted another English oak tree in the field. This tree is known as the Memorial Oak, as donations for its planting and protection were raised in memory of local friends, Bobby MacArthur and Joan Rees.



Memorial Oak August 2024



April 2024



August 2024

Harry's Oak and the Memorial Oak can be seen from the public footpath that goes from Stowey Road in Yatton to Streamcross in Claverham.

Black Poplars in New Croft



In 2002 I took some cuttings from black poplar trees growing along Claverham Drove. These old trees were part of the planting carried out by John Hugh Smyth-Piggot of Brockley Hall, who owned most of the land between Bristol and Weston-super-Mare. Around 1820 he had planted black poplars in groups across the newly enclosed Kenn Moor, as well as the alder plantation at Littlewood which YACWAG now owns.

I put the cuttings in a jar of water on my kitchen window-sill and the jar soon filled with white roots like spaghetti. They graduated to pots of compost and were shoved behind a shed where they remained for a couple of years.

When YACWAG purchased New Croft, the field next to it had many tall hybrid black poplars whistling in the wind. We planted out the tiny poplars I had grown in 2004, into tree guards made by YACWAG's Action Team to a BTCV pattern. Those tree guards are still going strong, and so are the trees! They aren't native black poplars but are a close hybrid with some black poplar DNA.

Last winter when the leaves had fallen off the trees it was exciting to see balls of mistletoe developing on the branches. These poplar trees are now adding to the biodiversity of New Croft and are part of YACWAG's story.

Faith Moulín

Workparty at St Andrew's Jubilee Wood



















An autumn work party maintaining trees YACWAG planted in 2012: 60 trees for Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee celebrating 60 years. We also put up a sign to help St Andrew's School pupils identify the species growing there. There will be at least one more work party - possibly 25th January 2025. Please email contact@yacwag.org.uk to register interest.

Test Your YACWAG Tree Knowledge

1. What royal occasion did YACWAG celebrate with the planting of 60 trees in Yatton and 60 in Congresbury?
2. YACWAG planted 10 of which native species at Cobthorn Reserve in January and had planted one in Mendip Road, Yatton in 2012. (Clue: French instrument before a ray of sunlight).
3. What are the special trees at Cobthorn Paddocks that make a 'ghost hedge'? (Clue: shares its name with a fruit).
4. Which species are three trees that YACWAG planted on the roundabout at North End, Yatton?
5. What is the most abundant tree in Littlewood, YACWAG's woodland reserve?

For answers to these questions and those on p.11, see the last page

Christmas Tree Quiz - Name the Tree

1.   = 
2.   = 
3.   = 
4.   = 
5.    = 
6.  = 
7.   = 
8.    = 
9.  = 
10.   = 

Treasured Trees of Yatton and Congresbury

An interesting, informative, colourful little 46 page book about local trees notable for historical or cultural reasons was produced by YACWAG for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. The late David Bellamy, one of the most well-known botanists of his time, wrote the Foreword and YACWAG sent a copy of *Treasured Trees of Yatton and Congresbury* to the Queen.... and got a reply! The sale of the book then helped fund the planting of 120 trees in Yatton and Congresbury.



Above: photo of an inside page. Each page includes suggestions on where to go to see the tree species featured on that page.

A re-print is now on sale at £5.95, making an ideal gift for tree-lovers anywhere but particularly in our parishes. Each book includes a loose-leaf update.

Walking Tree Trails can be used in conjunction with the book if the reader has more than an armchair interest in exploring the trees of the two villages. These re-worked trails with new maps designed by Cloudbird Studios can be downloaded free of charge from the YACWAG website or can be purchased in print form at 50p each, one for Congresbury, one for Yatton.

Purchase of this book will provide funds for continuing tree planting and maintenance in Yatton and Congresbury. Please email your order to contact@yacwag.org.uk.

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 February 2025.

What You Can Do About Light Pollution



We are grateful to YACWAG member Amanda Boyd, Dark Skies Champion, and astronomer Steve Tonkin whose talk in October opened our eyes to the wonder of the night sky and showed us how to get involved in protecting it for the benefit of wildlife (and human health).

Quiz Answers

p.10

1. Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee
2. Hornbeam
3. Small-leaved lime
4. Scots Pine
5. Common alder

p.11

1. Crab apple
2. Walnut
3. Dogwood
4. Spindle (dill)
5. Sweet chestnut
6. Ash
7. Hazel
8. Horse chestnut
9. Box
10. Willow

Please consider becoming a volunteer in 2025!

There are so many ways of supporting YACWAG: coming along to events, helping with one-off tasks (both outside and in), and as ongoing support with our admin team or on our reserves. If you have a skill to share or some time to give, please get in touch and talk it through by emailing us at contact@yacwag.org.uk - many volunteers have met like-minded people and learnt a lot more about nature too.