

COMING UP

Thursday 6th February 7.30-9 pm

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

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.

Sunday 9th February 10am-1pm

Workparty at Congresbury Station, Strawberry Line, off A370 Congresbury. Please register with Steve Rea on congresburystation@outlook.com

Sunday 9th March 7.45-10pm

General knowledge YACWAG fundraising quiz at the Plough Inn, Congresbury. Donations of raffle prizes welcome. £1 for quiz. £1 for strip of raffle tickets. Bring a team or join one on the night.

Saturday 5th July 4pm-10pm

YACWAG 25th birthday party and AGM at Claverham Village Hall - family fun, buffet and soft drinks from 4pm, AGM 6pm, displays, entertainment, music, bar 7pm.

DID YOU KNOW...?

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

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Registered charity no. 1076362

MORE SPACE FOR NATURE!



Residents of Bramblewood in Yatton joined with YACWAG members and trustees to celebrate the news of land purchase to extend YACWAG's Kenn Moor Reserve.



YACWAG volunteers and local residents have restored and renewed a bank of compost bins for wildlife, while YACWAG's newly trained hedge layers have laid two hedges on the reserve, one in the old and one in the new land.



Winter Work at Cobthorn Reserve



In December the countryside charity, CPRE, supported YACWAG with a free hedge-laying course for eight people. The aim was to train volunteers so that in future we could 'do-it-ourselves' rather than pay a professional. The eight who were lucky enough to win a place had a very enjoyable day and were rightly proud of their finished hedge at Cobthorn Paddocks. As highlighted on the front page, some of them have since gone on to lay hedges at Kenn Moor Reserve.

Hedgelaying looks brutal but is a traditional, sustainable way of managing hedges that increases longevity and provides many benefits for wildlife.



CPRE also provided plants and volunteers on the same day to plant up gaps in the hedge originally supplied by the developer's contractors. There has been a lot of disturbance to parts of the hedge but now the electricity pylons and cables are underground, the hedge along the footpath will hopefully be able to thicken up.

In January YACWAG volunteers planted more trees under the Trees for Climate grant scheme supported through the Forest of Avon. Cobthorn Reserve will eventually become wood pasture, a traditional habitat with livestock grazing among tall trees. Wood pasture, orchards and high hedges are particularly liked by Greater Horseshoe bats.

The trees are protected by triangular tree-guards made by Andrew Hunt.



YACWAG is Seeking a Social Media Savvy Volunteer to Manage YACWAG's Social Media Presence

Do you ❤️ social media? Are you full of creative ideas to help YACWAG grow online? If so, we'd love to hear from you!

We're looking for a volunteer to take charge of our social media presence. This is your chance to make a real impact by helping us:

- 👉 Share our work and successes.
- 👉 Create fun and engaging content that inspires our community.
- 👉 Help grow our existing social media platforms.
- 👉 Explore exciting new platforms and formats, like videos, reels and more!

With your help, we can reach even more people in our community who care about making a difference 🌍.

 Interested? Drop us a line at contact@yacwag.org.uk

Let's work together to take YACWAG to new heights. Thank you for being part of our amazing community! 💕

YACWAG is EXPANDING!

Welcome to all our new members, and thank you to all who have come forward recently to spread the work load. You are making a difference!

If you would like to share a close encounter you have had with wildlife, a poem, a photo, a book review or anything else to inspire and amuse others, please send to editor@yacwag.org.uk. Next deadline 1st April.

Cadbury Hill Project Yields its First Bats!



In 2018 licensed ecologists and YACWAG members Tim Clark and Sam Olney set up a bat box monitoring scheme on Cadbury Hill and reinstated a scheme in Kings Wood. Kings Wood's previous scheme had been running since the 1990s but had stopped by 2011 when the wood changed hands. Unfortunately a lot of historic data has not been available but the project to reinstate the boxes has been very successful. Within a couple of years Noctule, Brown Long-eared and Soprano Pipistrelle bats had been found using the 76 boxes in Kings Wood provided by the current owners. The 10 boxes donated by YACWAG and placed on the north and west slopes of the Iron Age hill-fort at Cadbury Hill have been a little slower to produce results.

Tim and Sam aim to check the boxes three times a year and will continue to give YACWAG volunteers the chance to assist when possible. Members can express their interest in joining bat activities through their membership accounts on membermojo, or by email to bats@yacwag.org.uk. Tim and Sam also have plans for some other monitoring techniques such as night-time mist netting in the future.

Although the Cadbury Hill boxes have generally been empty at survey time, Tim and Sam had a lovely first find of three Noctule bats tucked up in one of the bat boxes in October. The moss in the foreground has been brought in by birds, who are prolific bat box users!

YACWAG needs more volunteers to help monitor wildlife of all kinds. If you can help please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.



Three Duke of Edinburgh Award Candidates Volunteer with YACWAG

YACWAG is delighted to have three new young volunteers this Spring: two candidates for Silver Awards will be monitoring bats and other wildlife at Cobthorn Reserve, and YACWAG's first Gold Award candidate will be working on Stowey Reserve, starting with a regular reptile and amphibian survey and monitoring the marsh marigolds.

Every Snipe Counts



*Snipe flushed from Kenn Moor Reserve at dusk.
Photo: Chris Walker.*

Members may have noticed invitations to experience Snipe counts at our Kenn Moor Reserve over the winter. A dedicated group of volunteer counters has been recording Snipe numbers at both Kenn Moor and Congresbury Moor Reserves since 2013. It all started by accident but more of that later. All the data is held by YACWAG.

Common Snipe (Snipe) nested all across the North Somerset Moors and the Somerset Levels until drainage of the grassland rendered conditions less suitable. A few pairs of Snipe hung on in the Gordano Valley until the 1980s but they then ceased to breed in North Somerset. A few pairs still nest on the huge grassland nature reserves on the South Somerset Levels.

Common Snipe (Snipe) nested all across the North Somerset Moors and the Somerset Levels until

A few Jack Snipe winter on our fields but they are solely a winter species here that arrive in the UK from Eastern and Northern Europe. The Snipe that we see and count probably come from their breeding grounds in Iceland although, as there aren't any records of ringed (marked) Snipe from South West England, this is my speculation. It is known that Icelandic Snipe winter in numbers in Ireland so it seems plausible that some travel a bit further to South West England. Until I find a ringed Snipe dead or a ringer re-traps a live one we can't be sure. Both of these scenarios are highly unlikely. Snipe from Eastern Europe winter in Britain but all records come from the east of England. If birds can find suitable wintering habitat there they are unlikely to continue their migration further west. Our warmer winters make Eastern England a more suitable winter area.

Like many wading birds Snipe feed at night. They roost in wet marshy areas in the day and their strategy is designed to avoid mammal and avian predators. We count on late afternoons, once a month and this minimises disturbance, as the birds would be flying off to feed anyway.

Back now to January 2013, John Croxton the warden at the time and myself were checking and cleaning out bird boxes at Kenn Moor Reserve when we flushed a couple of Snipe. We wandered through the rushes and Snipe started coming up all around us. Then a Sparrowhawk joined in! We estimated - and it was a very conservative estimate - that at least 120 Snipe had flushed, a record unbeaten to date. Our next highest score has been 73 in March last year.

What we have discovered is that the water level is key; too wet or too dry decreases the numbers of roosting birds to the extent that in March 2023 it was zero, my note reads 'completely dry'.



Jack Snipe left and Common Snipe right Photo: Mark Savage (taken in Northants)

Snipe also roost on YACWAG's Congresbury Moor Reserve but numbers there are much lower; they have reduced in numbers over recent years perhaps because the blind ditch known as the Wiggly Ditch has more dense Reed cover making it difficult for birds to fly quickly if a predator (or YACWAG volunteer) approaches.

Jack Snipe are very secretive small birds and only flush at short distance, while Snipe screech as they leave cover and fly high (they are said by shooters to 'tower'). Jacks only fly at close range, they are silent and fly low to another roosting spot. Snipe provide an exacting target for shooters - hence the term used for marksmen - Sniper.

The plan is to invite members to observe future counts but dates can only be advised with short notice. It isn't pleasant for humans in the rain and it creates unnecessary disturbance for the birds in rain or frost conditions. Perhaps one day a Short Eared Owl will rise from the vegetation. It hasn't happened yet and we will be lucky if it happens in future, but who knows?

Trevor Riddle

YACWAGger Profile - Carol Tennant

Carol became a Trustee of YACWAG only last year but she has made her mark already! Carol works in marketing and management and felt she could use her skills to help YACWAG. After a chat with Tony he said the best way she could get involved and use her experience and business knowledge was as a Trustee, helping the charity to take significant decisions and meet challenges.



Carol has become an active member of the Education and Events sub-committee, turning out to support the charity's events in a practical, hands-on way as well as co-ordinating and encouraging volunteers behind the scenes. She has helped with the recruitment of two more volunteer Administrative Assistants, Emily and Petrina, who are busy helping with initiatives to get the organisation running more smoothly. She was instrumental in getting the membership app, membermojo, working effectively and is working on many other fronts to help YACWAG modernise and become more sustainable. Recently she has also joined the new Finance and Administration sub-committee. I talked to Carol about her motivation.

How long have you been interested in nature?

My interest in nature stretches back as far as I can remember. Growing up, I spent countless hours outdoors. I was always curious about wildlife and conservation and those experiences helped cultivate a deep appreciation for the beauty and complexity of the natural world. Observing animals in their habitats and learning how ecosystems function only fuelled my fascination and love for nature over the years.

What is your favourite wildlife species?

Choosing a favourite species is always difficult because there's so much incredible diversity. However, lately, I've developed a particular fondness for barn owls. I've been fortunate enough to witness them breeding in YACWAG's reserves, which was a truly magical experience. There's something captivating about their adaptability, intelligence and their striking white plumage. Watching them silently glide through the sky at dusk is a sight I'll never forget.

How did you get to know about YACWAG?

I first discovered YACWAG through social media. I saw a post highlighting the fantastic efforts in habitat conservation and wildlife protection. It caught my attention and inspired me to dig deeper into the work YACWAG does. I went on some early morning bird walks with Trevor and a bat walk on Cadbury Hill before joining up. The more I learned, the more I admired the values of YACWAG and the positive work being done and decided to get involved.

What do you like about your involvement with YACWAG?

What stands out most about YACWAG is how it blends education, advocacy and hands-on conservation work. It's incredibly inspiring to see a group of like-minded individuals coming together to make a real difference for nature and wildlife in our community.



Carol on the right with Trevor and Linda at a stall promoting YACWAG in Yatton

What could YACWAG do better?

YACWAG is already achieving so much, but there's always room to grow. One area of opportunity is to get the next generation interested and more involved in the work we do. Sparking interest in conservation early could help nurture the next generation of environmental stewards. Additionally, sharing more frequent success stories, project updates and behind-the-scenes glimpses from the nature reserves could inspire even more support and involvement from the community.

Where will YACWAG be in ten years time?

In ten years, I see YACWAG with a deep community reach and an even greater impact on preserving biodiversity within that community. Perhaps there will be more nature reserves and more volunteers so that YACWAG will continue to restore habitats, protect endangered species and influence positive change.

Working for Wildlife in the Community



Photo: Sue Lovesey

Volunteers put in another solid session at St Andrew's School, Congresbury, working to give the schoolchildren access to Jubilee Wood. Sixty trees were planted by YACWAG in 2012 to provide an educational resource for the school and the children will now be able to play among them and enjoy the wildlife using the area.

YACWAG has finished for this season but will return in the autumn to finish off the work. It is intended that the school's grounds maintenance contractors will now keep the pathways clear.



Photo: Tony Moulin

At the entrance to the Strawberry Line at Yatton Junction, thanks to funding from North Somerset Council, a tractor has made light work of clearing a very overgrown area.

The intention is for volunteers to work on the soil here so wild flowers can come up and flourish, which will in turn benefit insects such as bees and butterflies. Further work is planned for February and March, so if you are interested in joining in please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.

Moles at Stowey Reserve



I read something recently that took an interesting perspective: that persecution of animals to the brink of extinction has a beneficial effect. The argument was that rarity causes us to look at species with renewed wonder and to treasure them for what they are. Moles, however, have been a victim of the old view of nature and man's right to destroy the animals they didn't approve of (which was most things that couldn't be eaten). People I know are now relatively pleased to see molehills and although mole killers and mole deterrents will be found in the garden centre, I like to think most people nowadays are more inclined to 'live and let live'.

When talking to people about nature-spotting it is important to emphasise that, unlike David Attenborough, most of us have chance encounters with wildlife rather than planned ones. To find out about the animals around us we need to be 'nature detectives' and find the signs and tracks of the wild animals that are surviving out of sight in our neighbourhood. This is especially true of moles, whose presence is mostly only known from their molehills.

The world's top weight-lifters can lift twice their own bodyweight. That is nothing to a mole. The little mole lifts around 2 kilograms of soil, twenty times their own body weight, in a 20 minute burst of energy to get it out of the tunnel and onto the surface. Creating molehills doesn't even contribute to producing food. Every molehill uses energy that could be used tunnelling, which is how the moles find their underground prey. The spoil from the tunnels has to be disposed of somehow so the mole makes as few molehills as possible. It doesn't always look like it. There must be quite a lot of tunnels under Stowey Reserve! Tony and I were delighted to see so many in January. Clearly the ground isn't as wet as we might have thought.

Faith Moulin