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# Newsletter

January 2023 Vol 24



[www.yacwag.org.uk](http://www.yacwag.org.uk)

## Brilliant British Birds Window Wanderland

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### This Weekend

Enjoy a magical illuminated walking tour of our villages from 6-9 pm on Friday, Saturday, Sunday 3rd-5th February.

Maps will be available from local shops or on our website.



*There has been excellent community support for this year's theme, with schools, nurseries and businesses adding it to the previous weekend's RSPB Big Birdwatch. Young members will enjoy popping into Yatton Library for some fun birdie*



*YACWAG's Education and Events volunteers helped participants get started on their window designs. There will be a full report in the next newsletter but special thanks to Yatton Library, Yatton Youth Club and Congar's Cafe for their support in the preparation*





# Restoring History and Habitat on the Strawberry Line at Congresbury

*YACWAG's new project on the Strawberry Line at Congresbury's former station site got off to a flying start with over 20 volunteers turning up for the first work party session.*

*Thanks to the support of North Somerset Council and YACWAG volunteer, Steve Rea, who is leading the project, (pictured right) there will be more work parties on Sunday 5th February and Saturday 25th February.*

If you are interested in helping at the above work parties, or if you can support in other ways, please email Steve at:  
**[congresburystation@outlook.com](mailto:congresburystation@outlook.com)**



*Uncovering the stonework of the platform edges was particularly satisfying!*

## Wildlife Advice Needed? Ask our New Wildlife Responder



Amy Symonds,  
YACWAG's Wildlife Responder

YACWAG is delighted to welcome Amy Symonds to the team. Over the years local people have occasionally contacted YACWAG because they have found an injured animal, or their cat has brought in a young bird and they are not sure what to do for the best. Advice will now be available through our new volunteer, Amy.

**Please note if the wildlife you are concerned about requires emergency medical care please contact Secret World Rescue on 01278 783250.**

Amy is a volunteer and although she has worked as an animal wildlife rehabilitator before, without being employed for this role and with no facilities, she is unable to medically treat or rehabilitate any animals. However, if you are looking for some advice or help because a wild animal is in need, or somewhere you wish them not to be, please message Amy on **07919 323190** with a brief description of your issue and, if Amy is available, you will receive a call back in 15 minutes. Amy will share her experience-based knowledge with you, allowing you to make a more informed decision on what you would like to do. Amy lives in Congresbury so may be available to come down and help out in person.

Amy has a degree in animal behaviour and welfare and post graduating she worked in a wildlife rehabilitation centre. She started her career working on farms and zoos caring for all types of animals and also has a certificate in pet and hedgehog first aid.

### Wildlife Emergencies

**For urgent medical care Secret World Rescue - 01278 783250**

**For wildlife care, advice and support - Amy 07919 323190**





## New Oak Trees for Cobthorn Reserve

YACWAG was very pleased to receive some oak saplings from Oakupy, a Bristol-based project organised by the Arkbound Foundation and run in collaboration with Bristol Tree Forum. The small oak trees were surplus to requirements and have been 'rescued' from destruction. The bare-rooted trees were collected by Rob Collard and will be planted out on our reserves by Rob and his Micropod School which is based in Congresbury close to Cobthorn Reserve.

The 1000 trees provided by the Oakupy Project this year follow a successful donation of 1000 trees in 2021, given free of charge to community groups, schools and private woodlands in Bristol and the West.

The Micropod School will be keeping a close eye on them as they grow and will water them in dry spells.



Two species of oak are native to Britain and in this area the oaks you see are *Quercus robur*, the English or pedunculate oak. *Robur* is from the same root as our word robust, meaning sturdy. Pedunculate means hanging, and refers to the long stalks of the acorns, while the leaves are virtually without stalks. Our other oak, the sessile oak, grows on lighter, more acid soils, the word sessile meaning unstalked, distinguishing the acorns from those on the English oak.

Until the advent of iron cutting tools, the oak was safe from felling. Later it became one of the best construction materials because it could be shaped as it grew to provide the curved shapes needed for the cruck frames of houses and the frame supports of ships. In fact it was such an important wood that by 1600 laws had to be passed to protect the trees that were left. Extensive plantings were made in royal forests after that time and many still survive in the Forest of Dean and the New Forest among others.



YACWAG has planted around 20 oak trees during the last 20 years. Even as a sapling an oak provides food and homes for wildlife, but as it gets older it can support its own mini eco-system and can harbour up to 2000 species.

The male flowers, called catkins, dangle from the tree in April/May and provide pollen to fertilise small red flowers. The pollen is popular with bees, including the rare oak mining-bee. The fruits are nuts called acorns which are enjoyed by a wide range of birds and when ripe are a favourite food of badgers, wild boar and wood mice.

# Harry's Plot - YACWAG's Ownership Confirmed

One thing I have learnt through being Chair of YACWAG for over 20 years is that legal matters are a trial of our patience. However, after a tedious drawn-out wait the end result is all the more satisfying!

Harry's Plot is a small piece of land off Claverham Close. Harry Hailes left it to YACWAG in his will, which was proved in 2017. The acquisition was complicated because the field, of which the plot is one seventh, is owned by local residents who bought it to prevent development near their homes. There are no physical boundary markers. We have been patiently waiting while the legal process chugged on in the background - and at last I am pleased to say that YACWAG has the official deeds and the Plot has been legally transferred to us by the Land Registry. At present it is held in the name of two Trustees but in 2025 we will be able to transfer it to the Official Custodian for Charities, who hold most of YACWAG's land on our behalf.

The most beautiful thing about Harry's Plot is a mature oak tree which we know as Harry's Oak. However, the whole field has been designated a County Wildlife Site. This status confers no protection on the grassland but it does give recognition to the uncommon wildlife to be found in the field, particularly the wild flowers.

The residents' group get some income from the field from a local farmer who cuts the grass and grazes the field with sheep. While this means the grass is kept short most of the year, the regime has sustained wild flowers like knapweed, meadowsweet, buttercup, hogweed, wild carrot and pepper saxifrage.

The hedges around the whole field are exceptionally rich in biodiversity, with many shrub species including purging buckthorn, spindle, field maple, dogwood, hazel, hawthorn, wild privet and blackthorn, and are known to be ancient. The area was managed as small narrow fields for centuries and it is possible that Harry's Oak and another one further down the field are remnants of a dividing hedge, left to grow when the field was enlarged by removing the rest of the hedgerow.

In 2020, with the agreement of the other owners, and having discussed it with Harry before he died, YACWAG planted another oak between the two existing ones. This tree was sponsored by the MacArthur family in memory of the late Bobby MacArthur and her friend, Joan Rees, who both lived in Claverham.

*Tony Moulin*

*Photo right: Memorial oak tree planted in December 2020*



*Giving Harry's Oak a hug in 2005*



*And a bigger hug in 2016*





# Harry's Oak - Gall Central

## What are galls?

These are abnormal growths produced by a plant as a result of a virus, bacterium, fungus, plant or animal. Cells proliferate and enlarge to form a structure that provides shelter and food for the gall-maker. The different types of gall are distinctive in form and are not just damage by insects nibbling on a leaf, for example.

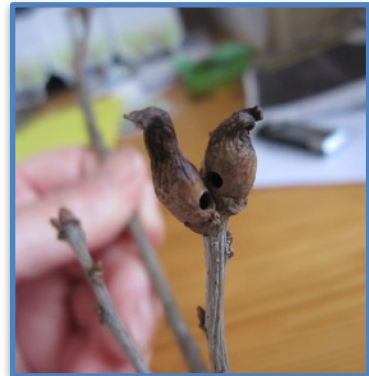
Oaks are prone to galls. In medieval Britain oak galls (known as oak apples) were collected to make dyes and ink. Marble galls from Italy were introduced to Devon in the 1830s for ink making and by 1860 could be found all over Britain as far north as Scotland. There was concern that this introduction would reduce the crop of acorns, which were an important winter food for pigs, but that was unfounded. More recently the abundance of the knopper gall, which has only been in England since the 1960s, was similarly feared likely to reduce acorn production, but after an initial boom, the tiny wasp that makes the knopper galls is not threatening the continuity of our oaks. The knopper gall wasp requires the Turkey oak to complete its life-cycle.



*Marble gall on oak planted by YACWAG St Andrew's School 2012*



*Knopper gall on Harry's Oak. Introduced in early 1960s now ubiquitous.*



*Galls on oak buds could be made by one of many different insects.*



*Cotton-wool gall on Harry's Oak. The insect also forms bud galls. This was a rare record in the Bristol area.*



*Silk button spangle galls on underside of Harry's Oak leaf. Each gall contains at least one tiny wasp larva.*



*Smooth spangle galls under a leaf. These are often found on the same leaves as silk button spangle galls.*

There are literally hundreds of gall-making wasps and flies busy around Harry's Oak in the spring. These are great food for birds like swallows, swifts and martins and for bats.

# Swift Project Update

YACWAG's Swift Project is picking up pace as we look forward to the swifts returning for their summer stay. Thank you to everyone who has been in touch about the project since the last newsletter.

The volunteer team at Nailsea Shedders is currently making up 20 swift boxes for the project, to tried-and-tested designs provided by [Bristol Swifts](#).

We are now looking for swift box hosts in Yatton and Congresbury who would be willing to have one or more swift boxes installed. YACWAG will be providing the boxes and installation for free to suitable hosts.

*Photo right:  
Meriel with the Nailsea Shedders checking out  
the boxes in production*



## What does being a swift box host involve?

🦇 Swifts are only in the UK from April to August each year and they are excellent tenants, as they make little or no mess when they nest. We are keen to hear from potential swift box hosts in the coming weeks, so that we can allocate the boxes and make plans for installation.

Being a swift box host will involve:

### 🦇 **Being close to existing swift nest sites:**

We have a limited number of boxes for this year and need to make sure they have the best possible chance of being eventually used by nesting swifts. Swifts are colonial nesters, so we are looking for hosts close to existing nest sites in Yatton and Congresbury. For this reason we are particularly keen to hear from potential hosts in and around these locations:

#### **Yatton:**

**Derham Park and Derham Close; Barberry Farm Road and northern part of Stowey Road; Cadbury Farm Road**

#### **Congresbury:**

**Wrighton Lane; The Causeway**

If you're not in one of these locations but know of swifts nesting near you, please do get in touch.

## What else?



### **Having a suitable building and permission from the owner:**

Swift boxes need to be placed under the eaves of a building and up high, ideally with a minimum 5m clear drop beneath and in front of the box. They cannot be placed above doors or windows. There needs to be a clear flight path to the box, without trees or wires in the way. The boxes can be fitted to any aspect, although if they are to go on a south-facing aspect there would need to be enough shade from the eaves to keep the box cool during heatwaves.



### **Letting YACWAG know whether your box(es) are used:**

We would like to stay in touch with swift box hosts over the coming years to monitor whether the boxes are being used by swifts or any other birds. It can take several years for swifts to find and use a box, and in the meantime other birds like house sparrows might use it.

## How you can help the Swift Project



We will be adding more information about the Swift Project to the YACWAG website soon. If you are interested in being a swift box host or in helping with the project in other ways (e.g. delivering leaflets in the locations mentioned), please get in touch with Meriel at [meriel.martin@gmail.com](mailto:meriel.martin@gmail.com).



We are also looking for volunteers with the skills to install the swift boxes. This involves working at height with ladders, and so we would be particularly keen to hear from people who have this experience already and may have their own insurance for such work.

## Eric Allcock 1930 - 2023

Few YACWAG members will have known Eric. He was never a member but put in countless hours of volunteering, producing, printing and later providing electronic bird survey reports for the Strawberry Line and Littlewood Reserves.

When I approached him in 1999 he readily agreed to print survey sheets and the reports of the Strawberry Line surveys and he then took on the Littlewood surveys in 2005. He finally 'retired' after the 2021 season when he was over 90 years of age, but only because his eyesight had deteriorated. Eric had worked as a compositor with hot metal letterpress and taught himself digital work including creating his own summary sheets almost before the days of Excel! His reports are in the YACWAG archive and have all been provided to Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre. That is one of his many legacies.

Thank you Eric.

*Trevor Riddle.*



# YACWAG Changes Subscription Rate

YACWAG's Executive Committee has decided to increase the subscription rates this year to cover the increased costs of running the charity. It is ten years since membership rates were last reviewed. YACWAG is celebrating its 25th anniversary next year and in that time has achieved many positive effects on the countryside around our villages as well as helping with wildlife education for residents young and old.

YACWAG has acquired 12 fields and a small wood, totalling 19 hectares (47 acres), and continues to maintain part of the Strawberry Line in association with North Somerset Council. Our eight owl nestboxes have produced 87 Barn Owl chicks and 44 Kestrel chicks. We maintain 90 bird boxes and 50 bat boxes. Our latest Cobthorn Reserve is being maintained to support the local bat populations, in particular Greater Horseshoe bats.

To date we have submitted over 360,000 bird records to the national biodiversity database as well as those for other animals and plants. To carry out our work we have raised over £630,000 from grants, bequests and donations.

In order to continue this work the committee agreed to modify the subscription rate for annual members to be a one-size-fits-all household rate, rather than the existing individual and family rates. The committee does recognise that these are difficult times financially, so although in our members' survey there was great support for a rise in membership, it has been decided that members may choose what level they want to subscribe at based on the following range: £5 per year, £10 per year or £15 per year. Any donations above these rates are welcome too. In addition we have decided to re-introduce lifetime membership for a one-off payment of £200.

Please remember when you renew your membership to donate using Gift Aid if you can as this allows YACWAG to reclaim 25p for every £1 donated. Renewal is a simple process through the website or using bank transfer.

YACWAG is working towards using an online membership management tool to improve the experience of members and cut down on administrative work needed to maintain membership records.



# YACWAG Christmas Bird Survey



*Wood Pigeon - joint top bird, seen in all participating gardens.*

## Trevor's Overview

The weather over Christmas 2022 was mild as has been the norm for some years now. Hence fewer birds were attracted into gardens with just a handful of winter thrushes. That said, Redwings and Fieldfares have not been plentiful in the local countryside excepting a few large flocks stopping for a day on passage.

Perhaps the most unexpected statistic was the number of Long tailed tits recorded. Who would have thought that they would ever exceed Blue Tit and Great Tit numbers? Long tailed tits have been abundant in the last year or two and when they do come to feeders it is generally en masse. Only the still ubiquitous Goldfinch was seen in greater numbers in gardens than the Long

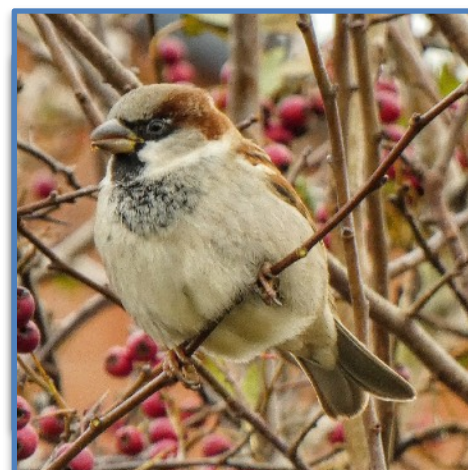
tailed tits. Hundreds of Jackdaws flew over and a few of us recorded their flights to roost - the real number of Yatton Jackdaws is around 400 - 500.

Collared Doves seem to be recovering with 40 recorded. They are prone to predation by Sparrowhawks but perhaps are evolving in urban areas to avoid this. The most remarkable sighting was a Rook in a garden. And after the survey had ended our chairman had two Rooks visit his garden. In recent years Rooks have moved away from some of their traditional sites (including YACWAG's Littlewood Reserve) and have moved to roadside and school grounds locations. Maybe, just maybe, this species is learning to live alongside humans.

A Grey Wagtail was a good garden bird but perhaps the one Treecreeper recorded was the most 'exotic'. 26 Bird surveys were recorded from YACWAG members. The number of surveys was lower than previous years, perhaps partly due to the survey being restricted to YACWAG members. Thanks to all those who took part and Mark Stanford for setting up the online reporting system.

## The Top 10 Birds

1 Robin	seen in all 26 gardens
1 Wood Pigeon	seen in all 26 gardens
3 Blackbird	seen in 25 gardens
4 Blue Tit	seen in 24 gardens
4 Magpie	seen in 24 gardens
6 Great Tit	seen in 20 gardens
7 House Sparrow	seen in 19 gardens
8 Dunnock	seen in 18 gardens
8 Goldfinch	seen in 18 gardens
10 Collared Dove	seen in 17 gardens.



*Male house sparrow  
Photo: Emily Lomas*

The number of species that landed were 35 and seven flew overhead without landing, making a total of 42 species.

Frances Osborne won the draw prize.