



Newsletter

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www.yacwag.org.uk

YACWAG is 21 and Coming of Age

It has been a strange couple of years and, like other organisations both large and small, YACWAG has been adapting to change. Little did we know at the tail end of 2019, when many members celebrated YACWAG's 20th birthday at a party in Claverham Village Hall, that we would not be getting together for a long time. Behind the scenes, however, work has gone on and although some of our older trustees are taking a well-earned retirement, new people have come on board to continue to carry the YACWAG vision forward.

YACWAG is bound by its Constitution and its charitable objects, which are to establish and maintain nature reserves in Yatton and Congresbury and to promote education about nature and its conservation. A lot of hidden work provides the money for these activities but the main resource of the charity is undoubtedly its people. We are grateful to all who contribute to the smooth running of YACWAG and for those who have volunteered to help us take YACWAG into the future. We are proud to have a new and growing presence on social media and hope that through it more young people locally will be attracted to caring for the natural environment and will come to understand what YACWAG stands for and how they can also take action.

YACWAG has formulated a Five Year Plan focusing on the many challenges faced by wildlife as a result of climate change, habitat destruction and species decline. It is inevitable that our work will be increasingly impacted in the future and, just as we personally will have to adapt, so YACWAG's committee will also have to make tough decisions about our nature reserves and our use of resources, particularly in view of the ecological emergency which threatens 10 percent of our UK species with extinction. We will be joining with other local organisations to promote what is being known as 'nature recovery' and encourage our communities to make space for nature - in their lives, in their gardens, in their neighbourhoods - and to share the benefits of having 'nature as your neighbour'.

Covid19 continues to cast a shadow over public involvement in YACWAG's work, and it is anticipated that for the time being there may be no returning to the social public events of previous years. However, during the winter we cut our teeth on a programme of talks using Zoom (now available in the website library section), and more talks are planned for the autumn. A programme of summer nature walks will bring the experience 'to a screen near you', allowing people to follow trails and learn from a virtual guide. Keep your eye on the website for details.

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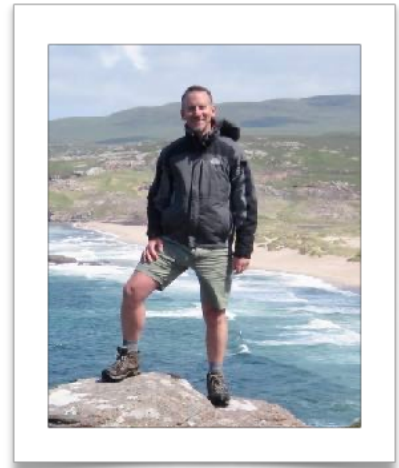
PHOTOS, ARTICLES AND ANYTHING ELSE OF INTEREST are always welcome for the YACWAG newsletter, and your feedback is appreciated.

Please contact the editor at yacwag@gmail.com.

Our New Trustees Introduce Themselves

Jonathan Clayden

Julie and I moved to the area in 2015 from the town of Marple on the edge of the Peak District. We bought a house in Claverham with about two acres of land, and our aim was that over the years we'd bring back some biodiversity to what had previously been a rather barren sheep field (before that it had been an orchard). We soon became aware of YACWAG and aimed to align the work we are doing in our small patch with broader vision of YACWAG to conserve and enhance the precious and hugely varied natural environment in the Yatton and Congresbury areas. We've had lots of very useful and interesting interactions with several YACWAG members and as time goes on we hope to deepen and strengthen these links.



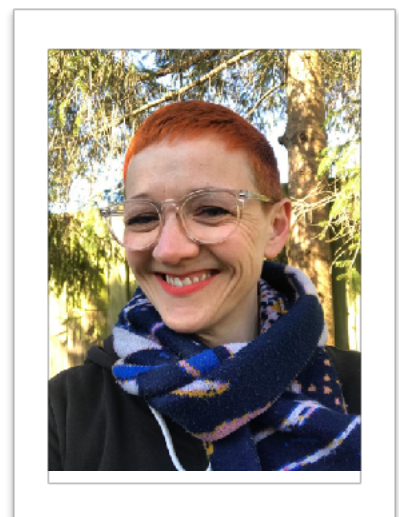
The challenges to the wild environment are evident all around us, and I've seen them in different guises in the various rural places I have lived – the Essex coast, the Greater Manchester fringe, and here in North Somerset. There is pressure on nature on all sides from agriculture and (especially in this area) from housing and other development. Many people are aware that something needs to be done to protect our environment, but are often at a loss as to what that should be. This is where I think YACWAG can take a powerful role – engaging with the public, with farmers, and with the inescapable housing developers to improve the natural environment and to educate and inform our neighbours about the wealth of their natural surroundings. YACWAG has a superb resource of species-rich land already, but from this has the opportunity to grow and be a beacon for what can be done to protect and enhance the environment both locally and more widely.

Jo Chambers

I grew up in Luton, but after studying Art & Textiles in Bath in my early twenties I've spent most of my life since then in the West Country.

I decided to join YACWAG on moving to Yatton last October and became unwittingly involved with the organisation due to my concerns about the local environment.

Over the past 15 years, having worked mostly with younger people due to my job as a university lecturer, I am keen to reach the younger generation and listen to their voice on nature conservation topics. One of the first tasks I have already tackled is starting YACWAG's Instagram page and connecting with groups, organisations and people who want to know more and are interested in protecting wildlife and natural habitats. I look forward to getting more involved as a Trustee.



Chris Moore, YACWAG's New Secretary

Having worked all my life in the finance and insurance industry I decided to do something different when I retired and joining and helping YACWAG was a good fit with my interests. I have always been a keen gardener and enjoyed wildlife and the countryside in general. In my own garden I have created a large wildlife pond and planted a small woodland of native trees which has become home to a clattering of jackdaws. When attending a YACWAG meeting in 2019 and hearing that new trustees were needed I volunteered and became a trustee at the AGM that year.

YACWAG has achieved a lot since its inauguration over 20 years ago and when the secretarial role became available I was happy to take it on and help drive forward the charity.

I see the new Cobthorn Way development as a key initiative for the charity which should help raise our profile in the area. With the growth in numbers of residents of Yatton and Congresbury I am looking forward to YACWAG flourishing in the years to come.



Chris Moore

The Land Management Sub-Committee Gets Help in the Field

New recruit Emily Lomas introduces herself:

I have always loved animals and the outdoors, and was lucky enough to spend my younger days exploring the countryside on my horse. As I have grown older, I have become more aware of the wildlife around me, and what I took for granted when I was younger has now become more precious and needs a helping hand as we face a climate emergency.

I enjoy birdwatching, and have recently developed an interest in photography, so you will see me on my days off walking my dog with a camera over my shoulder trying to capture what I find. It seems that with every photo I learn more about my local wildlife, and this interest led me to YACWAG. When I saw the opportunity to become a part of the Land Management Group, I literally jumped at the chance! It was the perfect opportunity to find out more about the nature on my doorstep whilst learning about conservation at a local and national level. I am looking forward to my new role and hope to help protect and enhance the habitats of the YACWAG reserves for future generations.



Emily Lomas



Emily, Tony and Richard at Stowey Reserve in April

Bat Box Project Feedback

In 2017 YACWAG members Sam Olney and Tim Clark, who are professional ecologists, were invited to set up a bat box monitoring scheme on Cadbury Hill, Yatton/Congresbury and also reinstate a bat box monitoring scheme in Kings Wood, Cleeve/Congresbury.

In 2018 they put up 10 bat boxes donated by YACWAG on Cadbury Hill. The boxes are spread across the west and north side of the hill fort and, outside of Covid, the aim is to check them twice a year along with YACWAG members who would like to come and see what species have been found. Due to Covid and it being a new scheme, no bats have been recorded in the boxes to date.

The other monitoring scheme however, in Kings Wood, has yielded more results. Kings Wood is a large patch of predominantly broadleaved woodland on the opposite side of the road to Goblin Combe; together they form one of the largest wooded areas in Somerset.

A bat box monitoring project had previously been implemented on the site during the 1990s and 'noughties' but due to the sale of the woods this had stopped by 2011. Efforts are being made to track down the data from this time.

In 2018 the current owners very kindly offered to fund some new bat boxes, to increase the few that were still in place from the previous scheme. In total 76 boxes have now been set up in strategic locations spread right across the woodland.

The aim is to check the boxes three times a year. Due to Covid, so far only a single year of full checks has been completed (in 2019), but some socially distanced, ground level inspections were carried out in 2020/21 as roughly half of the boxes can be either partially or fully inspected from ground level. During the most recent check in April 2021 an inspection camera on a pole was used to look inside some of the boxes, and this allowed pictures to be taken of anything found,

such as the one (left) of four noctules (*Nyctalus noctula*) found during the check. So far on the site three species have been found using the boxes; noctule, brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*).

Once conditions allow, volunteers will be invited to assist with the checks, and Sam and Tim also have plans to use other monitoring techniques (such as night time mist netting) in the future. They look forward to welcoming you out soon, and when allowed they will let YACWAG members know about the opportunities to join them on the check visits. In the meantime, if anyone has any information about the previous monitoring scheme, please let them know through yacwag@gmail.com.



Sam and Tim receiving the YACWAG bat box donation for their project from Tony Moulin



Noctule bats in bat box in Kings Wood, Cleeve/Congresbury

Thanks to Sam and Tim for the update,

National Moth Night 8-10 July

The theme of this year's Moth Night is reedbeds and wetlands, so it provides a wonderful opportunity for YACWAG to get involved and showcase the importance of our own local wetland habitats for insects at the height of the summer.

We will only hold public events if it is safe to do so, but in any case we will be running moth traps and using other techniques to survey moths on our reserves. We would hope to be able to show night-flying moths to at least some of our members, and may be able to hold morning events to look at the previous night's catch. The National Moth Night criteria also includes day-flying moths so this will also give you a chance to get into nature reserves, or even in your garden, or local wildlife sites, and record moths.

YACWAG has been able to lend out moth traps and give local people the experience of finding out what flies in their garden at night. If you would like to try this please get in touch through yacwag@gmail.com.



'Yes, I think it's a Reed Dagger'

PTES Needs Water Vole Surveyors

The water vole is the UK's fastest declining mammal. In 2015 The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) launched a national survey and they are still looking for people to take part in the National Water Vole Monitoring Programme. To take part you need to survey one 500m length of riverbank at an allocated site once a year between 15th April and 15th June. This will provide annual information on water vole presence/absence as well as relative abundance, and records of mink and otters at these sites as well. Full information on how to take part is available on the PTES website, ptes.org.

Taking Note of 'Weeds'

During lockdown many people were taking their exercise on the streets and enjoying the new situation that had developed when the usual traffic flow and spraying of weed-killer paused. Lots of the wild flowers that grow quite comfortably in the gutters have pollen and nectar available to bees and butterflies; some are the food plants of caterpillars, some provide cover for tiny mini-beasts living on the roadside. It's all nature!

Last summer I enjoyed seeing many wild flowers and I became concerned that some people have been conditioned to think they are 'untidy'. When did wild flowers come to be thought of as untidy? It seems that people can happily walk past human litter, but not a flower, which they think the council should kill. North Somerset Council has acknowledged that we are living in an ecological emergency and hopefully we will begin to see a change in practice.

YACWAG would love to see some of your photos of wild flowers in the village gutters. You can upload them @yacwag on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, or email them to yacwag@gmail.com.



Goodbye but not Farewell to Bob & Win

We can't believe it's been 22 years since a group of us met in a pub garden in Congresbury and discussed what we would call this wildlife charity we were proposing to set up - thus YACWAG was born! It was an exciting time - the dream of purchasing land which we could manage for the benefit of wildlife got off to great start with the purchase of 10 acres and over the years more reserves have provided varied habitat. The progress made has been very rewarding. Bob and I have both been Trustees since the formation of the group.

Some of the highlights over the years: I am particularly proud of a photo taken on the Strawberry Line in Yatton when I got to use a crome – a very heavy tool to remove weed from the ditch – to be honest I was pretty useless using this but one of the strengths of YACWAG is giving members opportunities to try something new. I wouldn't call it a highlight but I did once slip, very gently, into the ditch in our Stowey Reserve while doing an amphibian survey - it took 2 people to pull me out and I was quite a picture walking home covered

in mud. It has been really thrilling watching barn owls using YACWAG's owl boxes, taking part in bat surveys and moth trapping, helping with tree dressing in December and, a real highlight of my year, the Christmas Bird Survey which has been running since 2006 – thanks to Trevor Riddle for his help with the survey. Big events like *Know the Yeo*, the *Strawberry Special* event in 2000 and *Nature as your Neighbour* at Stowey Reserve in 2019 live in the memory!

Bob has enjoyed looking after the YACWAG tools and getting involved with workparties especially when YACWAG was able to offer Duke of Edinburgh Award participants the opportunity to do their volunteering

section. For many years, almost from the start, we took over the YACWAG website from Peter Archdale and developed it – this was a steep learning curve!

There have been lots of funny moments to look back on – constructing floating rafts for 10 Acres to detect the possible presence of mink – they were supposed to leave their footprints on the raft; sitting in the corner of the Village Club in Claverham planning our first bat survey with maps, recording devices, wires and earphones but nobody asked what we were doing!

As Secretary of the charity I have really enjoyed the contact I have had with members and this has been a real highlight of the difficult year we have all had with Covid. So many members have shared their photos and sightings of wildlife – it has really boosted my morale and, I'm sure, that of members.

Bob and I will still be available to help with YACWAG activities and hope that new Trustees enjoy their involvement as much as we have.



Win Lowman

Meriel's Tweets and Blogs Spread the Word

Meriel Harrison introduces herself:

I joined YACWAG when I moved to Yatton with my husband and two young children in 2019. I saw YACWAG's signs on the Strawberry Line and was excited to find there was such a local group focused on wildlife - and even better, that they have their own reserves!

I currently work for RSPB Cymru as a Nature Policy Officer, and I have also worked in policy roles for the English National Parks. Influencing Government policy to provide better protection for nature in law is important, but at times it can feel a bit distant from what's actually happening on the ground. Volunteering with YACWAG gives me an opportunity to learn about the species and habitats in our local patch, and to be part of a group making a difference in a more direct way for the wildlife here.

I'm currently running YACWAG's twitter account at www.twitter.com/yacwag and writing blogs for the website. I hope this will engage a wider audience with all the great things YACWAG is doing, and encourage more people to get involved and take action for wildlife.



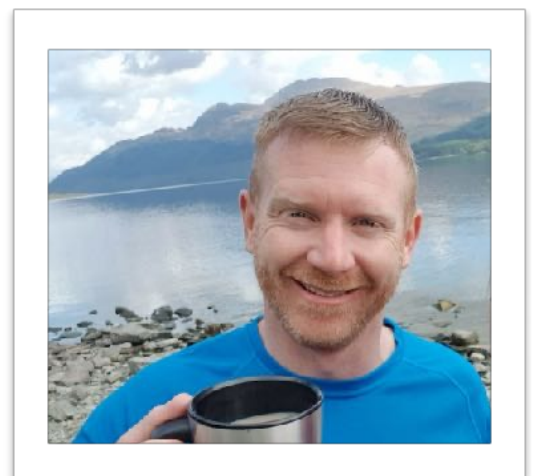
Meriel by the Yeo with her daughter

Dave Volunteers to Help Littlewood

I moved to Yatton a few years ago and have always been interested in wildlife, with a particular interest in Wilding activity. Having explored the local area on walks, I had noticed a number of YACWAG sites and after having done some Google exploration, felt that I could add some value through volunteering with the Charity.

The aim of the Charity to establish and maintain nature reserves in North Somerset is a great initiative that allows a more individual approach to be taken for local habitats, yet still facilitates working with local and national agencies. I believe this gives a strong footing to influence wider policies going forwards, through demonstrating solutions that work.

My motivation is to be part of this and to help protect our diverse wildlife in the area. As I love woodlands, I am looking forward to helping YACWAG take steps to safeguard the future of Littlewood.



Dave Bishop

Littlewood - an Oasis for Wildlife

All of YACWAG's reserves provide a safe place for wildlife and a refuge in the middle of more intensively managed land. Littlewood is particularly important on the Kenn Moor SSSI because on the flat, windswept farmland it provides shelter from the weather as well as a hiding-place. This is especially noticeable when viewed from the air, and we are very grateful to have the opportunity to monitor changes on our reserves in a new way, thanks to the photos taken by Peter Speight from his drone.

Peter is Acting Chair and Trustee of Backwell Environment Trust (BET) and a drone photography enthusiast. He has kindly agreed to photograph YACWAG's reserves and provide a set of photos and videos through the seasons over all our fields and Littlewood. Look out for these on the YACWAG website soon.



Littlewood viewed from the north with the River Kenn on the left of the photo.



An overhead view shows the open areas in the wood. Eastern Drove is at the bottom.



John Croxton has been YACWAG's Reserve Warden at Littlewood for many years, working with Trevor Riddle on the bird box scheme and bird surveys. We are pleased to welcome Dave Bishop as an addition to our team. He will be using Peter's aerial drone photographs to help create a new baseline map of the wood and a new management plan. This is essential in order to guide our management decisions in the future, and in particular to anticipate the impacts of ash die-back disease and climate change on the wood.

The wood has dried out considerably since we bought it in 2003 and that is affecting both plants and animals. YACWAG will be lobbying higher authorities to try and address this urgent issue which affects the whole of the Nailsea, Tickenham and Kenn Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest.



On the left the top photo shows Dave (centre) with Tony and Richard at Littlewood.

The bottom photo shows one of the 200 year old alder trees at Littlewood. The draining of the moor has made the peat shrink so much that the roots of the old trees are now exposed - sometimes by as much as a metre - leaving the poor old veterans literally 'high and dry'.

Bird News from Trevor Riddle

February

The monthly Snipe counts produced 12 birds on Congresbury Moor plus a Barn Owl peeping out of one of our boxes. Kenn Moor Reserve held 30 Snipe along with two Jack Snipe, it is usually the most productive of our sites. Song Thrushes were singing and wintering Stonechats were present at several locations. A party of 15 Siskins in the Littlewood Reserve was the best for a few years.

Goosanders are becoming regular winter birds on the River Yeo and Kingfishers were seen there and on the Little River in February. Peregrine Falcons still inhabited towers (pylons) on calm days - what will the new tall T towers mean for them?



*Kenn Moor Reserve in February.
YACWAG receives payment under its
Higher Tier Countryside
Stewardship Agreement to manage
this field for overwintering wading
birds.*

March

Kingfisher sightings became less frequent as the birds moved to their breeding sites, but Goosanders were up to six birds. March is a good month to look for our resident woodland birds and Cadbury Hill provided Marsh Tits, Nuthatches, Treecreepers, Goldcrests and both woodpeckers. The warden found three Treecreepers in Littlewood - they are surprisingly elusive in a relatively small woodland. Chiffchaffs arrived in good numbers from mid month with Blackcaps a couple of weeks later. Buzzards were starting to display by soaring on fine mornings.

April

The month was dry, sunny and cold. A few Swallows were seen early on but there weren't many at their nesting sites throughout the month. The cold nights led to fewer insects on the wing and flocks of birds were seen feeding up at favoured insect-rich areas. The resident Cetti's Warblers became more vocal and Reed and Sedge Warblers, Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats all arrived during the month. A few Willow Warblers held territory for a few days and then moved on and a single Garden Warbler did the same for just one day.

Wheatears and a Redstart were noted near the Littlewood Reserve and suddenly Siskins started turning up at garden feeders. The Cuckoo was first heard at Mendip Spring Golf Course on the 18th but was calling daily towards the end of the month. A couple of Ospreys passed through on passage and several Red Kites were seen but the star raptor was the Hen Harrier seen on Kenn and Nailsea Moors over an 18 day period.

Trevor Riddle

Trevor is always interested to hear of your bird observations. You can contact him on trid@btinternet.com.

Wetland Features on the Line



Hairy dragonfly photographed on the Strawberry Line



Since 2010, with the encouragement and support of Natural England and funded through YACWAG's agri-environment scheme, a total of 17 'pondlings' have been created along the Strawberry Line between Yatton station and the Congresbury Yeo river. The aim of these mini-water features (berms) is to widen the ditches in places in order to increase the amount of unshaded wetland and water habitat. They are gently graded so that different plants can find a niche.

The Strawberry Line ditches are part of Biddle Street Site of Special Scientific Interest, a nationally important wetland that was recognised in 1994 in order to protect and conserve water plants, molluscs and insects.

This year in January, six new pondlings were excavated by Trevor Richards, a drainage contractor from Congresbury. He also 'keeched' some of the older pondlings, removing reeds and other vegetation to restore the amount of open water. It is always important to have a good variety of habitats. Some species of dragonfly, for example, lay their eggs on vegetation in open water whereas others seek out overgrown and shaded spots.

Look out for the special Hairy Dragonfly in May. This is a very attractive medium-sized dragonfly, and if you have the chance to get close to it you will see the reason for its name! It is covered with ginger hair.

Impressive Fly-By

Having survived the “Blackthorn Winter”, an old rural term describing late frosts that accompany the white blossom of the blackthorn hedgerows, our wildlife has been dealt another blow through an indifferent, dry, and largely cool, April. Nesting birds have particularly struggled to find the insects so vital to feed their young. For instance the Orange tip butterfly, my spring favourite, has not had sufficient continuous periods of sun and warmth to sustain activity for mating and egg laying.

On one day in the last week of April I witnessed a large flock of house martins over YACWAG 's Stowey fields followed by an even larger flock of swallows over the same fields the next. It was an encouraging experience to see that these intrepid travellers had safely reached us. Slightly worrying, however, was the fact that they had not yet dispersed to their nesting sites and were still needing to feed up to fortify themselves for this task.

This year's delayed spring is also evidenced by the late emergence of the St Mark's fly, so named in medieval times because of its notable emergence around the time of the feast day of St Mark on the 25th April when thousands – or probably millions - could be seen over fields and along hedgerows. Although not so abundant now, the shiny black flies can still be seen in numbers hanging over vegetation displaying their distinctive long trailing hind legs. They do not bite or sting. The female lays its eggs in the ground and the larvae feed on rotting vegetation in the soil. The flies are a good example of a natural composter and they also act as a pollinator for crops. The swallows which gave me a head height fly-past were no doubt feasting on these fascinating insects which provide even more added value as a welcome food source at this important time.



St Mark's Fly (Bibio marci)

Looking ahead into May I wonder how many of you are taking part in Plantlife's No Mow May campaign. Research has shown that cutting lawns only once every four weeks attracts up to ten times more pollinators to our gardens. This mowing regime suits nectar-rich flowers such as daisies and clovers. Perhaps we could also consider a No Mow May to explore the biodiversity in our own gardens and benefit wildlife at the same time? If you prefer a traditional lawn, you might consider leaving a small plot just a metre square and observe what happens in it. I believe that for those of us who love nature, the interest, appeal and satisfaction we feel at making a space for nature in our gardens will far outweigh the pleasure we used to get from those mower stripes. As a bonus, it gives us more time to enjoy what is around us and an excuse to talk to the neighbours about the importance of nature for our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

Tony Moulin

Where to Watch Birds Locally

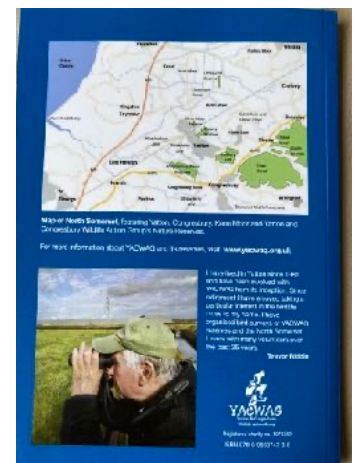
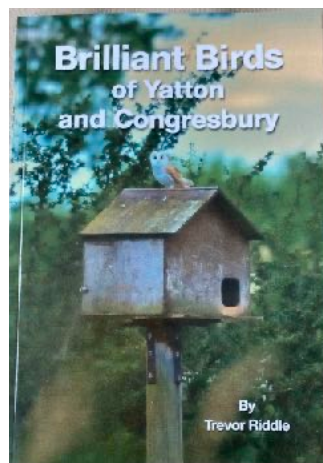
Trevor Riddle's popular book for local birdwatchers has now gone to its second reprint, much to our - and his - delight. The book is the culmination of Trevor's local birding experiences since 1981 so he is able to give an authoritative picture of the ups and downs of local bird populations.

Trevor is not just another passive birdwatcher. He has put back into our community, through YACWAG and through the (sadly now defunct) Weston-super-Mare RSPB local group, instigating BTO surveys of the North Somerset Levels and Moors in 1995 and carrying them out with a variety of helpers ever since. This dataset will doubtless prove of enormous value in the future. If anyone would like to see it, work to digitise it, or otherwise use it, please get in touch.

In the meantime, if you haven't yet bought your copy of Brilliant Birds, and gifts for friends, please give yourself (and them) a treat. The proceeds will go to YACWAG funds.

You can buy the book in Yatton Post Office or Yatton News (Clive's) or order through www.yacwag.org.uk.

YACWAG's Bird Group is always in need of new volunteers to check and maintain our 90 or so bird boxes and to assist with surveys. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Trevor, trid@btinternet.com.



Cobthorn - A New Reserve in Congresbury

YACWAG is still waiting to take ownership of a seven-acre site off Cobthorn Way in Congresbury. The project is to provide on-site mitigation for the disturbance to Greater Horseshoe bats whose maternity roost is very close to the field. Management will be according to the latest research and best practice, providing non-intensive organic grazing land where the dung provided by cattle at the right time of year supports the insects needed by the bats to feed their young. This interesting project has, from YACWAG's point of view, not quite gone according to plan and expected timescales, but we are looking forward to launching the new reserve and using it to raise awareness of the importance of our local landscape to rare bats and other wildlife.

if you live in Congresbury and would like to get involved in any way, please get in touch.

