



Newsletter

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Nature As Your Neighbour - Cobthorn Reserve Open Day

Cobthorn Reserve in Congresbury enjoyed its first open day in May with up to 200 local residents turning out to see what YACWAG was doing with the reserve.

Children enjoyed making bat wands and bouncing bat hats and won prizes for completing the *Spotter's Nature Trail*, while people of all ages had fun playing Meriel's *Return to the Roost* bat game with Dan Thomas. Rob Collard helped people launch seed balls to make the reserve flora more diverse and Higgy helped visitors make bug houses to take home. Natasha Pester and Helen Richards showed people some of the birds of the reserve, to the soundtrack of Chiffchaff and chirpy house sparrows. Jo and Andy Milward's livestock were a great draw to the bottom of the field where visitors were also able to learn more about the plants of the field from Pam Millman and join Max and Richard in making a slow worm hibernaculum. Thanks to all those who helped in any way, including Jo Chambers and James Dobson who dug the important hole!



In the evening, Chris Barrington, Tony Moulin and Irene Mills led a bat walk from the Millennium Green, with spectacular views of Daubentons bats feeding over the river. Lesser Horseshoe, Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, Noctule, Serotine and a Brown Long-eared bat were all heard or seen.



Making seed balls - a great excuse to get your hands dirty for nature.



The 'batbags' had to be returned to their roosts, in a house, a cave or a tree. Thanks to Dan Thomas for his help in construction, and for his fairground skills on the day, also to Meriel for the idea and the skilful execution of it. Thanks to Trevor for putting up a prize for the winner with the most points scored.



Jo Milward was able to show off the seven Dorset Horn lambs she had hand-reared, as well as Buddy and Ruby the Dexter cattle who make up our grazing team at the reserve. The animals, especially their dung, are important to provide the right conditions for insects that juvenile Greater Horseshoe Bats feed on.

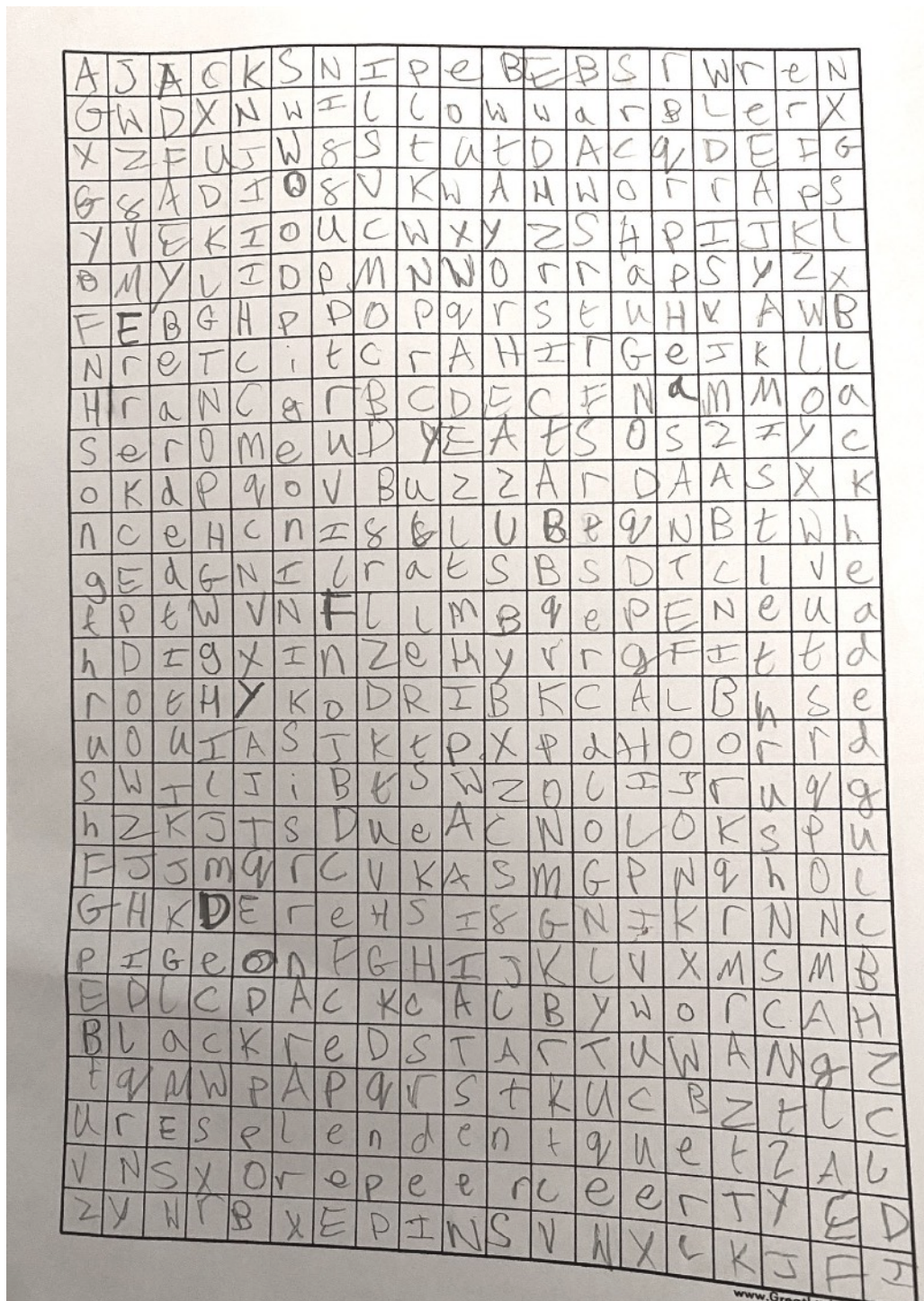


The Bat Cave was full of information about bats, especially the Greater Horseshoe bats that are special to the site.

Elliot's Bird Search

Elliot, aged 9, has made a word search puzzle for us. Elliot lives in North End, Yatton and enjoys reading National Geographic Kids and, as well as football and cricket, he likes helping his mum Emily identify species when they are out walking. The birds in Elliot's word search are all from the UK except the surprise RESPLENDENT QUETZAL. You can find them by searching up and down as well as reversed.

Birds to find: PUFFIN, BLACKCAP, MISTLE THRUSH, BLACKBIRD, ROBIN, BLACK REDSTART, WOODPECKER, ARCTIC TERN, KINGFISHER, JAY, BUZZARD, SNIPE, WREN, STARLING, SPARROWHAWK, PIGEON, BLACKHEADED GULL, CROW, SPARROW, JACK SNIPE, WOOD PIGEON, PHEASANT, WILLOW WARBLER, TREE CREEPER, SONG THRUSH, BULLFINCH, BEARDED TIT, GOLD CREST, KESTREL.



Yatton Junction Sign Unveiled



Tony Moulin (YACWAG chair), Julie (whose father Malcolm Wathen took the historic railway photo on the board), Harry Ellis (Bristol Airport), Sue Saunders (President Yatton WI Strawberry Hearts) and Mark Stanford (YACWAG website manager and designer of the sign).

Thanks to funding from Bristol Airport and the Yatton WI Strawberry Hearts, YACWAG has been able to put up a new information board near Yatton station. The purchase of a 2-hectare site from British Rail in 1997 was essential to the development of the Strawberry Line as a cycle path and footpath from Yatton station, enabling more sustainable journeys as well as a leisure route. The ownership was transferred from the community to North Somerset Council and the land surrounding the path has been managed by YACWAG for over 20 years as part of the Local Nature Reserve. It is hoped this is the first of many improvements to the start of the Strawberry Line at Yatton. Special wildlife on the site includes slow worms, common blue butterflies, marsh woundwort, birdsfoot trefoil, song thrushes and blackcaps.

Online Shopping?

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If you don't use Amazon, another easy way to raise money for YACWAG for free is to go through Give As You Live (GAYL for short). Almost £650 has now been raised this way since we joined the scheme. It is completely free to join and use and you can shop at over 5,000 stores to benefit, including holidays, train tickets and large household items like computers and televisions. With the app on your computer or phone you will be nudged to remember to add that extra click before you shop and then a donation will be made by the retailer. You can also find loads of great offers and voucher codes. GAYL has won many awards because it is really easy to use and includes all your favourite online shops whether you are looking for baby clothes, saucepans or a chest freezer. You can find a link and more information about GAYL and Amazon Smile on the YACWAG website under Support Us.

YACWAGger Profile - James Dobson

James is a fitness coach living in Yatton in Chescombe Road near the entrance to the Strawberry Line. He has been very helpful over the last year because as a stronger younger person we have been able to call on him to do some heavy-duty jobs for YACWAG. James shares his experience of YACWAG below:

I have lived in Yatton for one and a half years. I previously lived in Nailsea for 20 years so I know the area but my budget at the time didn't afford me the chance to buy a house in Nailsea so I looked further afield to Yatton.

When did your interest in the natural environment begin?

I have always had a keen interest in nature and have tried to live as close to it as I can. My upbringing was in quiet suburban areas away from city life. Now as a young man in my thirties and a homeowner, I, like many of my generation, find myself increasingly concerned and affected by the seemingly relentless destruction of and encroachment on nature and our culture's incessant need for 'growth' at any cost.



How did you come to join YACWAG?

After I moved to Yatton, a letter appeared at my door for the proposed development of 100 houses at Rectory Farm. My house currently enjoys views of open landscape and I can see the Strawberry Line. We found out about YACWAG from a neighbour and signed up for membership through the website.

I think becoming a home-owner has allowed me to become grounded and concerned for the place that I find myself in. This is important for all of us I believe - to become invested in the places we live in - as the quality of our environment has a profound effect on us in ways that aren't always immediately apparent but place a heavy burden on our individual and collective psyches. I have seen the effect of over-development in Nailsea and the loss of nature and community. I don't have the level of knowledge that some people have in YACWAG but that's primarily why I signed up to the group so I could learn more and begin to play my part. The Facebook group has been particularly helpful in gaining further knowledge and participating in things like No Mow May and understanding the importance of pollinators.

What could YACWAG do better?

YACWAG's presence on social media is picking up but I think we need even more engagement on social media and more visibility generally. People don't understand there are these groups in the area working on their behalf.

What is the future for YACWAG?

"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in."

I think YACWAG is that diamond in the rough. At this time unfortunately a lot of hard work does go unnoticed. But I believe there will come a time when the 'trees' that have been planted will be appreciated and talked about by generations to come. As a young person I feel very grateful that YACWAG and the individuals that make it are striving to leave the place in a better state than they found it.

During lockdowns and in the storms of life the Strawberry Line has been a solace to James and he wrote this poem:



Ten Thirty Strawberry Line

Ten thirty Strawberry line
Spring melting away into Summer
A ridge of beauty
White wings dance in front of me, desperately
courting
Time is precious
Clock fragments brush my cheeks, descending to
new ground and growth,
The natives fighting for voice amongst each other
Against the infrequent, bellowing aviation
The air clearing once again and back to their
pews they go
But alas still traffic, I hear droning in the distance
Nevertheless, one's soul finds solace on the ridge
of beauty
A train line turned round
A belt of green grandeur
On the boundary of the machine



James Dobson

My Journey to Achieving a Wild and Healthy Lawn

Richard Croucher (YACWAG's Vice Chair) tells us why he is mowing his lawn less:

It all started about 8 years ago when we went away for Easter to visit friends in Dusseldorf. Before that time I regularly mowed the grass and tried to create a flower border around our front lawn.

The lawn is on the north side of our house and the grass struggled to compete with moss, and with harsh clay soil the flowers were never very successful. That year it had been miserable weather and I hadn't cut the grass for a while, it was at that stage where 'it needed a cut' before we went away but it didn't get done. When we arrived home, much to our surprise, among the grass, daisies and dandelions there were cuckoo flowers in bloom. We weren't even aware we had cuckoo



Richard's front lawn May 2022

flowers in the lawn because I would have always cut them off before they had a chance! From that point on I started looking out for wild flowers in both our front and back lawns and going round them with the mower.

A year or two later I was inspired by my friends and fellow YACWAG trustees Tony and Faith Moulin to follow their example and try leaving our front lawn completely uncut until at least August. Faith gave me some cowslip seeds to grow and introduce into our lawn. In our back lawn I had discovered that we had knapweed growing, a different knapweed from the one that grows in the YACWAG reserves but still a native plant. I was able to grow some plants from seed and plant in our front lawn too.

Over the years the moss has almost gone from the front lawn and each year the grass seems to grow a little less strongly. I think this is because it is putting energy and nutrients into seed production so this is gradually weakening it. The introduced cowslips are spreading as are the cuckoo flowers. We still get plenty of daisies and self heal and the occasional dandelion. Also thyme-leaved speedwell, sorrel and clover have grown naturally. These are all providers of nectar for bees and other insects. I am thinking of trying to introduce some yellow rattle too. What is really ironic is that some of the flowers like the polyanthus that I was struggling to grow in the border are now thriving and even starting to spread into the area that was always grass.

I have learned that to leave our front lawn completely untouched does make it look a bit abandoned. To avoid this I do cut once with the mower on its longest setting in the first two weeks in March, before the flowers have come through, and then occasionally I cut one mower strip around the outside to prevent encroachment on to our path and driveway. See photo above. I then cut in late August and at least once in September before allowing it to thicken up for the winter.

In the last two years I have cut our back lawn much less too. Last year I left an area uncut completely. Since this is an area we use to sit out on in hot weather I have decided on a compromise. Around a half gets cut fairly regularly with the mower on a

medium setting to give a space for putting the garden chairs out on hot days. One half of the remainder wasn't cut until early June, within an hour of being cut it had at least 10 starlings feeding on it. The rest had an occasional cut with the mower in March and April on its longest setting and will get no cuts in May, June, July and August so there will always be an uncut area. We have learned to appreciate that grass going off to seed can look as attractive as flowers and is just as important for insect and birds. This area currently has buttercups, cranesbill, daisies and common vetch in flower, red clover will soon be in flower too. The common vetch was introduced by collecting seeds and just dropping in the lawn: it is a great favourite with bumble bees.



Richard's back lawn from a bedroom window. The area on the right has not been cut since April. In flower in May were buttercups, common vetch and cranesbill. In June clover will begin to flower. The area at the back with the bird feeder had its first cut on 2nd June. The largest section on the front left is cut fairly often but has 'flower islands' with buttercups and ox-eye daisies. The biggest clump of green is knapweed.

This year we have noticed that there is an increase in grasshoppers and for the first time we have seen cockchafer, also known as maybugs, in the garden. Last year we had a couple of slow worms too. I have been watching goldfinches eating the dandelion seeds.

If anyone would like some advice or help with improving their lawn for wildlife and are prepared to use the mower less I will be happy to advise and even pass on some seeds or plants.

Richard Croucher

Round the Reserves Walk

Meriel, who writes a monthly blog for the YACWAG website, reports back on her day out with other YACWAGgers visiting the grassland reserves.

On 4th June Richard Croucher, YACWAG Vice Chair, led a six-mile walk taking in all of YACWAG's grassland reserves around Yatton and Congresbury. Although the forecast threatened rain our luck held out with the weather staying fresh and dry, if rather overcast.

The group gathered first at Kenn Moor orchard, planted by YACWAG in 2020 to make a wildlife haven from a small field and to continue the tradition of local orchards and apple varieties. From there we skirted the fields of the Kenn Moor and Stowey Reserves and heard from Richard about the importance of rhynes and their surrounding habitats, and the recent discoveries of rare species including the Yellow-loosestrife Bee and Great Silver Diving Beetle on these reserves. We then crossed the fields to the final reserve on the north side of Yatton, a small parcel of land off Claverham Close called Harry's Plot. This land was bequeathed to YACWAG in 2017 by Harry Hailes and contains a magnificent English oak, now known as Harry's oak. In accordance with Harry's wishes and thanks to sponsorship from the MacArthur family in memory of their mother and her friend, YACWAG planted another oak tree in this field in December 2020, creating a legacy for generations to come.



A stroll down to Congresbury brought us to Cobthorn Reserve, YACWAG's most recent acquisition and our lunch stop, where the sun very obligingly made an appearance. Also very obliging was a Kestrel that swooped low over the top end of the field, giving a real close-up view. Management of Cobthorn Reserve is centred on the Greater Horseshoe bats that roost in King's Wood and forage around Congresbury, with careful consideration given to supporting a variety of insect food for the bats. The Dexter cattle and friendly Dorset Horn lambs that graze the reserve are doing their bit to ensure a good supply of dung beetles.



From Cobthorn we crossed the Yeo and joined the Strawberry Line which took us to Nortons, one of the fields that make up the Congresbury Moor Reserve. Barn owls had a very successful breeding season in YACWAG's owl boxes here in 2021, and this year a new box has been installed to replace one that had become rather dilapidated. From Nortons we followed the track past the adjacent fields of Meakers and Phippens, a graceful Roe deer keeping one eye on us as it made its way through these fields. Richard explained how YACWAG has made land acquisitions over the years from sympathetic landowners such as Mary Meaker who wanted to know that these places would continue to be havens for wildlife. In recent years, increasing land prices and pressures on land use locally have made these acquisitions much harder. Another Kestrel showed itself nicely as we passed Ten Acres, home to the 'wiggly ditch' created by YACWAG to provide wildlife-rich wetland habitat.

It was a real joy to stop off at New Croft and spend some time admiring the wonderful diversity of species in this traditional hay meadow. Under YACWAG's management, with an annual hay cut late in summer, flowering plants including knapweed, wild carrot and pepper saxifrage are thriving and increasing, and a rare horsefly species has been discovered to be present in the field. The final point of call for the walk was Footmead, the last of the Congresbury Moor Reserve fields, which is overlooked by the Gang Wall causeway. Footmead is undergoing long-term restoration as a traditionally managed hay meadow, and is already showing impressive results.



Thank you to Richard for leading such an enjoyable walk and sharing his wonderful knowledge of YACWAG's reserves and their wildlife and history. It was a great opportunity to meet other YACWAG members and get an on-the-ground view of YACWAG's practical work.

Meriel Harrison

YACWAG welcomes your photos, articles, comment and feedback for the newsletter.

Please contact the Editor via contact@yacwag.org.uk.

YACWAG Wins Funding for Wildlife Wellness Walks

Thanks to funding from WeSport via the Sport England Together Fund, YACWAG is proud to be part of a social prescribing pilot project running within North Somerset. The funding will cover 16 'Wellness Wildlife Walks' running from both Yatton and Congresbury between June 2022 and March 2023.

The walks are open to anyone who feels that they would benefit. Most will be two hours long and one to four miles in total, depending on the activity. YACWAG has been awarded the funding as part of a wider drive to help reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 and the widening of the inequalities in sport and physical activity. Anyone who has a long-term physical or mental health condition or who has felt socially isolated is particularly encouraged to participate. This includes YACWAG members as well as anyone from local communities. Given the difficulties of the last few years, this could include many of us. If you know anyone who could particularly benefit, please let them know. We will be contacting local GP practices too.

Social prescribing offers a community-led route to refer people to local, non-clinical services which may be of benefit. Groups like YACWAG have offered these services for many years. The hope is that, through the current pilot project, the benefits can be quantified and used to encourage more investment in local groups and services which benefit health outcomes. Studies have shown that walking in natural environments has a positive effect on stress relief, reducing blood pressure, releasing natural endorphins to reduce feelings of depression or low mood and supporting weight management. It can also help the management of long-term conditions such as arthritis or diabetes.

The walks will be led by an expert ecologist/naturalist. A community nurse who is a YACWAG member will also be in attendance for any informal discussions, although it is not a clinical setting.

24 th June	10am-12pm	Start/End: The Star pub car park, Congresbury/Cleeve	Woodland walk, approximately 3 miles
1 st July	1-3pm	Start: Car Park between 136-144 Stowey Road End: Strawberry Line, Chescombe Road	Wetland walk, approximately 3 miles
16 th July	10.30-12.30	Start/End: Millennium Green car park, Congresbury	Pollinator walk, approximately 3 miles
29 th July	8.45-10.30 pm	Start/End: Cadbury Hill Car Park	Bat walk, approximately 1 mile
12 th August	1-3pm	Start/End: Millennium Green Car Park, Congresbury	Wetland walk, 2-3 miles
27 th August	1-4 or 5pm	Start/End: Yatton Precinct	Wildlife garden walk, 3-4 miles
11 th September	7.30-9pm	Start/End: Millennium Green Car Park, Congresbury	Bat walk, 1-2 miles
23 rd September	1-3pm	Kingston Seymour tour. To be confirmed	Wetlands and meadows, 2 miles

The programme shows walks from June to September but further dates will be published later. The dates can be found on the YACWAG website calendar.

Call for Gardens with Wildlife Features

If you have a garden with features for wildlife in either Yatton or Congresbury which you would be willing for a small group of people to visit on 27th August, please get in touch with Sarah Dale at sarahjanedale@gmail.com. It doesn't have to be a tidy garden; in fact, the more 'messy corners', the better. If this event is popular, we may have two small groups visiting gardens throughout the afternoon but would give you a time slot for visitors to suit you. Any suggestions or requests for walks or events which would be compatible with the objectives of the project would also be very welcomed.

To book onto any of the Wildlife Wellness Walks, please email yacwagwww@gmail.com. Please do book to ensure walks are not oversubscribed. Updates on the project will be provided in future newsletters.

YACWAG's 23rd AGM

WEDNESDAY 6TH JULY 2022

**at 7.30pm via Zoom followed by a talk by
Tony and Faith Moulin on *The Cobthorn Story*.**

The meeting will be recorded.

**The link for the meeting is in the email from the
Secretary dated 11 June.**

We look forward to seeing you!

Emily's Little River Walk - Book Now for Saturday 2nd July

Emily Lomas lives in Blackcap Avenue in North End Yatton. Where she lives is very apt as Emily likes to spend her free time watching and photographing birds. Increasingly since Emily joined YACWAG's Land Management sub-committee last year, she also records and photographs different species on the YACWAG reserves and looks after a trail-cam as well to help us monitor wildlife. Emily is becoming very knowledgeable about wildlife in all its forms.



Emily's favourite local walk is along Little River and she is looking forward to sharing it with other members on Saturday 2nd July starting at 10.30am. The walk will start in Arnolds Way. Booking is essential by emailing yacwag@gmail.com. The walk will last about two hours and will involve crossing stiles and there may be livestock in the fields. Please dress appropriately for the weather and wear stout footwear. Sorry no dogs.

If the walk has to be cancelled due to the weather, it will take place on Sunday 3rd.

www.yacwag.org.uk

Use the website to check out the latest blogs for local bird news and topical articles. If you are concerned about the use of chemicals in the environment, please read Meriel's blog and sign Faith's petition (link included in the blog).