



Newsletter

1999-2019

Registered charity no 1076362

August 2019 Vol 21 Issue 3

IN THIS ISSUE:

Donation of bat detectors
 Stowey event -Nature as Your
 Neighbour, And, After the Show
 Summer Events
 Marsh Tits on Cadbury Hill
 Dormouse box monitoring
 Irene's Award
 YACWAGger Profile: Brian Winter
 Court de Wyck School Project
 20th birthday party - come!
 Help for Hedgehogs
 What Are We Doing to Our World
 Why Fight Climate Change
 Rare Horsefly Update
 NSLM Bird Survey
 Strawberry Line Survey 2019
 Owl Box Provided
 Website Improvements
 Small Changes in Court Avenue

20 Littlewood Birds 2.30-4.30 pm Saturday 7th September

at YACWAG's Littlewood
Reserve off Claverham
Drove.

Please walk or cycle, or
contact YACWAG for a
lift (or to offer lifts to
others) as parking is very
limited.

More information on
www.yacwag.org.uk.

Atkins Donate Bat Detectors

Ecologists from the office of SNC Lavalin Atkins in Bristol had been out to work on YACWAG's Congresbury Moor Reserve on an employee volunteer day earlier in the year so when it came to disposing of two Anabat II bat detectors, they kindly thought of YACWAG again.

This very generous donation increases the stock of static bat detectors owned by YACWAG and will enable greater monitoring of bats in the local area. Thanks to Irene Mills and Phil Rundle for refurbishing and fitting new batteries.

YACWAG is especially grateful to Atkins' ecologist Catherine Hunter, pictured on the right below with her father, Andrew, a regular YACWAG volunteer, when they presented the Anabats to Irene at Cleeve. (See page 5 for more news about Irene's role in YACWAG.)



Stowey Focus on Young People

It was a delight to welcome over a hundred visitors to Stowey Nature Reserve in Yatton on May Day Bank Holiday Monday. Younger visitors were especially pleased with the hands-on activities and were able to get a close look at water wildlife and dissect owl pellets to find out what barn owls had been eating. The children were able to mount the bones of voles, mice and shrews on black paper to take home as a rather gruesome souvenir. Some also made badges from natural materials.



The event also had its serious side with a kind of inventory being taken of all the species that could be seen and identified on that day. This produced an impressive list, although the cool weather meant that many creatures decided to stay hidden.

YACWAG has been managing the two fields for wildlife since 2006. As they are close to Yatton Schools, it was always YACWAG's intention to use them for educational purposes so we were especially pleased to see so many young faces eager to learn about their local natural environment.

The event was timely as it coincided with the report on biodiversity loss published by the world's leading scientists. As is the case with all YACWAG's land, a lot of wildlife can be helped in a very small area and it was good to demonstrate that to a wider audience.



Thanks to all who helped with the event, showing that 'Nature is Your Neighbour'. Special thanks are due to Michelle Walker, Sue and Graham Lovesey for leading the rhyme-dipping while Francis Farr-Cox intrigued visitors with his modified outdoor vacuum cleaner for collecting invertebrates unharmed from the long grass. Owl pellet dissection was popular with children and their parents, and Chris Barrington's bat walk in the evening was also very popular with local residents of Stowey Road.



Photo: Penny Broad

And, After the Show...

Committee member Sue Lovesey and her husband, Graham, are key volunteers with YACWAG, always ready to help with events and YACWAG activities behind the scenes, and they know how to get youngsters involved! Their grand-daughter Freya got really stuck in helping to clean up the pond-dipping equipment after the Nature as Your Neighbour event at Stowey Reserve. Graham said there is always work to be done after an event and they thought it was important to involve future generations in that. Freya thought it was great fun too!



*Left: Graham and Freya cleaning the equipment
Photo by Sue Lovesey*

Summer Events

The Congresbury Village Fete was this year on a cricket theme to celebrate Congresbury Cricket Club's anniversary. Naturally, the first thing that came to mind was - bats!

YACWAG's bat cave was re-created and children made bouncing bat hats and learnt about the importance of Congresbury to the rare Greater Horseshoe Bat.

(Photo right: Sue Lovesey)

YACWAG also supported Yatton Schools' Carnival and Fair, with children creating a large butterfly 'sculpture' with colourful plastic bottle tops (later recycled). YACWAG joined with Plastic Free North Somerset to raise awareness of the harm done by single-use plastics to wildlife and provided information on how to help wildlife in residents' own gardens.

In July YACWAG promoted composting at the Yatton Horticultural Society's Summer Show. As well as the benefit to the wider environment, compost bins/heels can house a lot of wildlife.

Thank you to Roger Lawrence, Viv French, Penny Broad and Roger Wood for their help.



Marsh Tits Return to Cadbury Hill



Marsh Tits have been present on Cadbury Hill for many years in very small numbers but this year member Richard Tompkins had a family party in his garden. This is thought to be the first actual confirmed breeding of the species on the Hill in recent years, perhaps ever.

Despite their name, Marsh Tits inhabit deciduous woodland, especially oak woods. They have been declining in numbers for some years but there is a reasonable population in Kings Wood and the deciduous woodland to the east of the A370. Several pairs have taken to nesting in dormouse boxes there. (Dormouse boxes have the entrance holes facing inwards towards the stem of the tree.) Marsh Tits are very sedentary and it's not known if the Kings Wood birds would make the (for them) long flight across to Cadbury and vice versa.

Trevor Riddle

Dormouse Quads Found Fast Asleep



The June monthly Dormouse box-check in a local wood yielded a special treat - a handful of torpid triplets. A fourth sleepy sibling was also to be found buried deep in the nesting material.

All four remained sound asleep whilst being weighed and checked over, before being safely returned to their box to continue their slumbers.

It is likely that this was a litter of last year's youngsters who have stayed together. All four appeared healthy and were a good weight for the time of year.

Monthly box-checking will continue into Autumn. If anyone would like to help, please tell Win so she can keep you informed.

Photo and text: Andrew Hunter

Award for Irene

At YACWAG's 20th AGM held in May at Middlecombe Nursery, Congresbury, thanks to the generous support of the North family, YACWAG stalwart volunteer, Irene Mills, was presented by Chairperson Tony Moulin with a personalised mug and certificate.

Tony said that Irene's expertise with small mammals, and her dormouse licence, was extremely helpful to YACWAG. Irene had stepped into the breach with regard to bats also. Her competence and willingness to train others in the use of the technical equipment needed for studying and monitoring bats had been greatly appreciated during the past year. It was no exaggeration to say that without her support for a bat survey in Cleeve, it was likely that a planning application would not have been refused on the grounds of harm to bats.



YACWAGger Profile - Brian Winter

Brian and his wife, Debbie, have lived in Claverham since 2008 when they moved out of Bristol. Brian is originally from Dundee and is one of our newest members.

Brian has taken the winning photo in the Lions' UK Environmental Photography competition three times. (The photos on this page are those three winning photos which are included for YACWAG members' pleasure.)



When did you first become interested in wildlife?

I have always had an interest. My brother was a very keen bird-watcher and I grew up surrounded by nature books. I also became a keen bird-watcher and

have been active in that hobby for over 30 years. I go abroad with a group of guys every year birdwatching, but in recent years they have had to put up with my re-kindled interest in photography. I can spend a long time waiting for the right shot and I would say my main interest is now in the photographing of birds rather than the birds themselves.



*Sparrowhawk chicks: Photo by Brian Winter
Overall Winner in UK Lions Environmental Comp 2019
Below: Winners 2014 (swan) and 2016 (red squirrel)*

Are you active in nature conservation?

I am a volunteer at the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust's Steart Marshes. This 'working wetlands' reserve was created by the WWT and the Environment Agency to protect homes from rising sea levels. New flood banks are protected by this natural buffer. The UK Government paid £22 million towards the project, which has

created saltmarsh, brackish and freshwater habitats as compensation for loss of natural habitats further up the Bristol Channel. This more sustainable way protects against flooding and saltmarsh is one of the most efficient ways to lock-up and store carbon, additionally it has created a much-needed space for wildlife.



YACWAGger Profile - Brian Winter - continued

What is your favourite species?

The first time I saw a black guillemot I fell in love with it. This black sea bird has red feet and a red gape and is totally stunning.

Why did you join YACWAG?

I have been thinking about joining YACWAG for a long time. In fact I am rather surprised I hadn't joined before now. I have followed with interest YACWAG's work with birds, especially the barn owls, which I sometimes see on Kenn Moor at night in the car headlights.

I am concerned about the decline in species and the effects of climate change. I think now is the time for wildlife groups to get more involved with these issues and now is the time for groups to gain more members.

I have recently been inspired by a book called *Rebirding: Restoring Britain's Birds* by Benedict Macdonald. The author puts forward economic solutions to commonly stated problems. It is often said that we don't have enough space in the UK for re-wilding schemes, but we have large areas within what we call 'National Parks' - in fact Snowdonia is bigger than Kenya's Maasai Mara; and Scotland's Cairngorm National Park is half the size of the massive Yellowstone Park in the USA yet the Highlands only have a fraction of Yellowstone's wildlife, its natural landscape or associated job opportunities. The author argues that we need to get the management of these areas right in terms of prioritising wildlife rather than compromising with agriculture and the hunting fraternity. Changing direction could make a huge impact to the landscape, the wildlife and to eco-tourism in these regions.

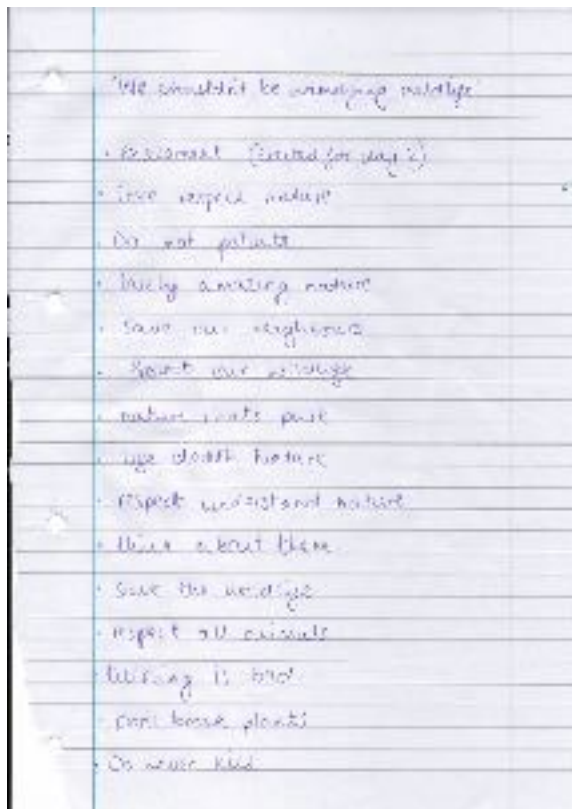


I am President of the Yeo Valley Lions this year and I want to make a difference for the local environment. I would like to see the Lions working closely in partnership with YACWAG on a new tree planting project. Each group can work to its strengths: YACWAG has experience and knowledge of tree planting and the Lions are very good at fundraising. This aim also supports one of the Lions international key projects which recognises that we urgently need more trees - native trees - to sustain wildlife and fight climate change. We hope to work in partnership with YACWAG to encourage local residents to plant trees in their gardens and are interested in planting a community orchard on public land.

How would you like to see YACWAG develop?

The newly elected members of North Somerset Council have shown themselves ready to work with local people to tackle climate change and biodiversity decline. I think there is an opportunity for YACWAG to be in the forefront of this movement. I would like to see re-wilding projects involving local farmers. There is a lot more we could do in this area.

Court de Wyck Pupils Study Nature



Three Key Stage 2 classes from Court de Wyck School took part in a multi-discipline two-day programme of learning about and expressing feelings about nature. The brainchild of Michael Loader, from Somerset Storyfest, was inspired by reports that children need contact with nature to boost their development, supporting physical and mental health.

Richard Croucher, Tony and Faith Moulin represented YACWAG, helping children learn about the wildlife on Cadbury Hill, while dramatist Heidi Hollis, artist Angela Jones and local vicar Nigel Thomas also led the children in producing work that expressed their learning.

On the second day the children took a picnic and spent time on the hill in guided creative activities. On their return, the children were invited to give three words summing up their experience, and this is reproduced on the left, forming a kind of poem or rap.

The programme, funded by Yatton Parish Council, will be repeated at Yatton School in October.

20th Birthday - It's Party Time!



Please join us to celebrate 20 years of YACWAG! A party will be staged at Claverham Village Hall on Saturday 30th November. Invitations have gone out and the Committee looks forward to hearing from you!

There will be entertainment and light refreshments for children and their parents beginning at 5.30 pm and at 7 pm the bar will open. Anyone can attend any part of the evening but the first part will be more suitable for younger families while the later part may be more suitable for adults. Will it be boring then? No! There will be a range of activities to inform and entertain as well as a chance to hear about YACWAG's achievements and mingle with other members and invited guests.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR THIS UNIQUE OCCASION!

Help for Hedgehogs!



My name is Julia Wallis and I have been fortunate to have seen hedgehogs in my lifetime but not many are that lucky. I became more aware that hedgehogs needed our help about ten years ago when the kids were out playing and came running in to tell me they had seen a young Chogg (as our family affectionately call them) out in the day and covered in ticks. I came armed with gardening gloves and a box to take this little fella to our local vets. They de-ticked, helped him to get well and gave him back to me to release. I then heard about Prickles Hedgehog rescue (where my 16 year old daughter has just started volunteering) and took several poorly Choggs there. Also we are now often asked to re-home others which my neighbours and I continue to support, feeding them throughout their awake times.



Hedgehogs are declining in number partly due to their habitat changing so they are not able to roam without danger. They often travel at least two miles every night and sadly we are seeing too many hedgehog roadkills - just this year alone I have seen 20 in and around our area!

I began making enquires about putting up hedgehog road warning signs to raise drivers' awareness that Yatton is a hedgehog hot spot! There are currently no suitable approved Department of Transport (DoT) approved signs available and so they are not currently allowed on the public highways - although it has recently been announced that they are now in the consultation period and hedgehog highways will be added to all new-builds. I contacted a

sign company and have had some designed which I have included with any email enquiries.

When approved by the DoT, councils won't be allocated extra funds to cover these costs out of their tight budget. This is why we are asking for public help to raise as much money as we can to make sure we get these signs in our area and help hedgehogs along on their travels.

I was invited to apply for a grant from Yatton Parish Council and was awarded £500 payable when the signs are approved. I set up a crowd fund and so far we have raised £280.

I have, with the help of Richard Croucher, emailed the DoT and local MPs plus Hedgehog Street who are campaigning to help this declining species, to try and speed the process along. If you want to help, please make a donation through the website below:



https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/julia-wallis?utm_term=yP46Wzrv5

What Are We Doing to Our World?

The Spotlight Sparklers, a choir of children from Years 5 and 6 at Yatton Junior School directed by Alison Francis-Black, wrote this song with Tom Veck, a singer/songwriter from Frome.

What are we doing to our world?
Why are we letting it slip away?
Now is the time to change our ways,
Or else we'll have to pay.

Pollution and plastic are harming animals,
It's not just the ocean, there's plastic everywhere.
There's way too much plastic, packaging in stores,
It all gets thrown away, let's not use it any more.
We know what to do, but we need some help from you.
Now is the time to change.

What are we doing to our world?
Why are we letting it slip away?
Now is the time to change our ways,
Or else we'll have to pay.

Because global warming is heating all the ice,
It's all gonna melt, and that's not very nice.
If the sun is bright, then turn off all the lights.
Don't use all the power, the world will be sour.
We know what to do, but we need some help from you,
Now is the time to change.

What are we doing to our world?
Why are we letting it slip away?
Now is the time to change our ways,
Or else we'll have to pay.

Why are we killing trees, we need them all to breathe,
Animals are dying, it's horrible to see.
Stop using petrol, and try to walk instead.
Stop being lazy, or soon we'll all be dead.
We know what's at stake, now we're finally awake,
Now is the time to change.

What are we doing to our world?
Why are we letting it slip away?
Now is the time to change our ways,
Or else we'll have to pay.



You can hear the song: https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=OaJZDm_QhJw

Why I Have to Fight Climate Change

I recently read an article in a newspaper quoting philosopher Walter Sinnott-Armstrong. He had written a paper in 2005, entitled *It's Not My Fault*, arguing that none of us has a moral obligation to reduce our carbon emissions. He did not deny the looming emergency; he just couldn't see why individuals should take action. If I stop driving, he said, it won't affect the incidence of storms, floods, droughts or heatwaves. He misses the point, I think, that lots of people stopping driving might be able to make a difference. Oliver Burkeman, a popular psychologist, pointed out in his article that it could also be considered irrational to vote in an election, given that your individual vote is very unlikely to alter the result.

In February this year North Somerset Council declared a Climate Emergency. It might seem that nothing much has happened as a result. However in July the new administration unanimously passed a motion committing the council to put in place a re-wilding programme, actively seeking to identify as many areas as possible of the verges, parks and open spaces it operates where this can be done. This, Councillor Catherine Gibbons said, will be beneficial in creating additional habitats for bees, insects and other wildlife and provide attractive 'wild' areas of educational value to the community. This motion was passed unanimously.

The benefits of such a policy will be immediate as there will be a reduction in CO2 emissions from burning fossil fuel in mowers and strimmers. The council should also be able to save money on its grass-cutting bill. A huge effort, however, will be required to change the attitudes of many people who like to see council areas kept 'tidy'. A public information campaign will be necessary with every innovative argument employed if there is to be a return to a more relaxed look to roadside verges and parks. This is where local people can make a difference: reporting areas that need cutting back for safety reasons and suggesting areas that could be left uncut for longer. The council will also need some moral support as it is inundated with complaints about long grass.

The council should also be wary of the dubious practice of sowing what have become known as 'wildflower meadow' areas. These are often created with non-native annual species with imported seed and can have little benefit to wildlife. They look pretty and people think they are 'natural' when they are not. We need to be a bit less selective about the wild flowers we think are acceptable. A bunch of 'weeds' on the verges, uncut to allow invertebrates to complete their lifecycles, is likely to be a lot more beneficial to the environment than

a newly created 'wildflower meadow', none of whose flowers are actually 'wild'. These are a great substitute for formal bedding plants but not for a 're-wilded' area.

The present council contract for grass management is inconsistent; the schedules erratic. As I walk around Yatton and Congresbury I find many pavements narrowed by encroaching vegetation. Sometimes I have to step into the road. This is OK for me - I am able to judge the speed of oncoming vehicles and can deal with the kerb. It is not OK for elderly or disabled people, or young parents with pushchairs, small children on bikes and scooters, wheelchair users, etc. who literally have their lives put at risk. Other areas, like the roundabout at North End, are a source of frustration to the community, watching as wild flowers are cut down and community bulb plantings destroyed.



North Somerset can do better than this and it is great that the new administration has recognised it and wants things to change. YACWAG will help in any way possible to change the direction of the juggernaut and fly a flag for Yatton and Congresbury as more sustainable villages whose residents are trying, in their own small way, to address some of the waste of finite resources and unnecessary persecution of wildlife that comes from cutting grass in an ever more destructive and unsustainable way.

With late summer comes a flood of complaints that the Strawberry Line is 'untidy', 'needs cutting back', etc. The path needs to be kept open but the lack of management of the margins during the summer months is deliberate. This Local Nature Reserve has harvest mice, slow worms, toads, shrews, voles, grass snakes, reed and sedge warblers and other species hiding in the narrow margins. They would not be there if the areas on either side of the path looked like a lawn. Please help us get this message across.



YACWAG has been working for 20 years trying to preserve biodiversity on the Strawberry Line. It might look scruffy to some, but we need to help people look at it and see much-needed wildlife habitat, rather than an absence of care.

These changes in attitude are a small part - a very small part - of the changes we are going to have to make if we are going to mitigate for climate change in our communities.

But to return to my individual response to the climate emergency and biodiversity decline, there is another perspective that should help guide YACWAG members. Charles Eisenstein's book, *Climate: A New Story*, points out that there is a tendency for us to tackle climate change in a 'war mentality' focused on fear. We try to treat nature as a 'thing' separate from ourselves, that we need to control. Eisenstein argues for a deeper revolution in which we understand that we ARE nature. He says we should care for the Earth out of love for the Earth. The environmentalist Derrick Jensen has written that when people ask why he bothers, he tells them: 'Because I'm in love. With salmon, with trees outside my window, with baby lampreys living in sandy stream bottoms ... If you love, you act to defend your beloved.'

There is a kinder way of living: 'treading more lightly upon the Earth'. We all need to show a little kindness to the things we love. We are part of nature, we ignore its cries for help at our peril but above all, if we love nature then we will act for it out of love, not out of fear for our own survival.

Faith Moulin

Horsefly Update - An Even Bigger Catch!

Many of you will remember that I found what we believed to be a rare horsefly last summer and we identified it after a lot of shuffling reference books and surfing various internet pages as the Saltmarsh Horsefly (*Atylotus latistriatus*). Unfortunately this identification wasn't accepted by the county recorder (Ray Barnett) without actually seeing a specimen and, I'm afraid, dissecting genitalia to get the exact species! This sounds a bit drastic but is important to establish exact species and, if rare, this could affect our land management.

Having missed the season to get Ray on site last summer we had a long wait until Tony and I could accompany Ray on what turned out to be a very exciting and educational field trip into our Congresbury Moor Reserve.

Eventually the morning of June 26th arrived and I was buzzing with excitement to show Ray not only the horseflies but the amazing work that YACWAG has done over the last 20 years to turn these few fields into what I can only describe as a wildlife showcase!

At 2pm I met Ray by the River Yeo and we took a slow stroll down towards the reserve. By the time I met Tony by the gate to the drove I could see that there was already a good number of butterflies flying. As we carried on along the drove between the YACWAG fields we were met with clouds of Meadow Brown butterflies that came up out of the grass in front of us until we were surrounded by a huge number like I haven't seen since I was a boy growing up in the seventies! A cloud of butterflies like this really is a sight to behold and I could see that Ray was liking what he had seen so far!

We ventured into New Croft where we had recorded huge numbers of the target species last year. The grass was shorter than I remembered it being at this time last year and the thistles we found them on in 2018 weren't yet in flower! My heart sank as I envisaged a fruitless journey but Ray seemed more that happy to see the huge number of Marbled White and Meadow Brown butterflies using the wild flowers that are slowly recolonising the old hay meadow. The odd Small Skipper floated by and Ray netted an Essex Skipper that we identified by the dark 'inky' tips to its antennae.

We seemed to be a bit early for the horsefly but we found a few more butterflies

including Small Tortoiseshell, that tragically seems to now be a rare butterfly despite it's 'common' status only a few years ago!

Tony pointed out the rare umbellifer, Pepper Saxifrage, that has started to recolonise the meadow and its pretty yellow flowers were covered in pollinating insects such as the common Thick Thighed Beetle (*Oedermera Nobilis*), a couple of hoverfly species and.... YES! one of our horseflies! I called Ray and Tony over and Ray confirmed that it was a female and he believed that it was a rare *Atylotus* species - probably not the Saltmarsh Horsefly but an even rarer '*rusticus*' species that is on the Endangered Species Red List!



This was extremely exciting but to confirm the exact species he would need a male and female specimen to take away, and in our excitement our first specimen had managed to escape so we still required both.

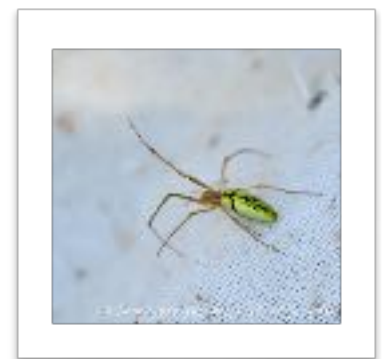
The hunt was on again and we didn't have the few hundred flies we had seen in 2018 with the thistles appearing to flower later this year! But I had my eye in and eventually found another and shouted over to Ray who swiftly netted it and potted another female. "Another.. female," I shouted, "And another.. female," Tony replied! We spent what seemed an age spotting female horseflies but just couldn't find a male specimen anywhere! "Number 19.. female," I counted, "24..." and so it went on but at least we had proved they were here and shown the county recorder just what we have conserved here in North Somerset!

Eventually we managed to locate and very carefully net a male specimen that Ray took back to Bristol Museum for proper identification. It may seem strange to actually collect live specimens like this but this is the very first record of this species within the old Avon area so the identification must be beyond question. These two specimens will now be mounted and preserved in Bristol Museum and may even go on display - a fabulous opportunity to promote the good work that we are doing here on our reserves.

So after the excitement of the horseflies we had a stroll back along the drove and a walk into a couple of the other fields that are part of Congresbury Moor Reserve. It was amazing to be in the presence of a skilled and experienced entomologist like Ray who was so generous with his time and knowledge. I learnt so much from him and with every sweep of his net we found something else that he could name and tell me more about than I could ever have read in a reference book. We caught bugs such as *Capsus ater* (*Miridae*) as well as male and female Grass bugs (*Leptopterna dolabrata*) that I would have thought were different species without Ray's expert knowledge. Spiders also didn't escape our gaze and the beautifully marked green spider, the Long Jawed Orb Weaver (*Tetragnatha extensa*) amazed even me by its beauty! A sweep of the largest patch of chamomile that I have ever seen produced two caterpillars that neither Ray nor I recognised. We guessed they could be different life stages of the caterpillar of the Chamomile Shark moth, and this was confirmed by a little detective work by me later.

Although you may wonder why a horsefly is worth all this fuss, it clearly proves that YACWAG is doing amazing work and to have a Red List species reliant on a conserved and managed habitat such as this should not be taken lightly. Also this species was simply 'stumbled across' by me a few years ago so who knows what else is still out there to discover? Without insects the whole eco-system will fail so please don't under-estimate the importance of this find - it really does matter!

For those of you who have a phobia about horseflies please note: only females bite - the males have weak mouthparts. The female needs blood for protein in order to make her eggs, which she lays on the muddy edges of the rhyes. The larvae are legless grubs tapering at both ends and predatory on other water invertebrates. We have observed the adult flies, both male and female, generally spending their time feeding on nectar, predominantly on thistles, without much interest in sucking blood from your arm! The horseflies that are biting you are different species, locally known as clegs, such as the Notch-horned Cleg (*Haematopota pluvialis*) or even one of the Deerfly family (*Chrysops*).



Long-Jawed Orb Weaver



Chamomile Shark

North Somerset Levels and Moors Bird Surveys - 25 Years of Data!

In 1994 members of the RSPB Weston-super-Mare group were prompted to start carrying out a survey of breeding birds and winter birds on the North Somerset Levels and Moors. This work has been carried out every year since.

When the RSPB group was unable to continue, YACWAG took over the task, Trevor Riddle continuing with enthusiasm and diligence to organise birdwatchers to go out and survey the areas of North Somerset according to British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) protocol. The result is an impressive set of data. Watch out in the next newsletter for an analysis of the 25 year trends.



Trevor Riddle

2019 Strawberry Line Bird Survey (Yatton-Congresbury)

This year showed about a 15 per cent increase in passerine (small perching birds likely to be breeding) over 2018. It was the best year for passerine records since 2012. You may recall that 2012 was the wet 'Olympic' summer which was a very poor breeding season and numbers dropped markedly after that so it is good to see a recovery.

The 2012 surveys were conducted on the occasional dry days and perhaps the 'after the rain' effect resulted in birds being visible and vocal. Thanks to Trevor, Mark and Viv for carrying out the survey which adds to the important dataset of bird records.

Owls' New Home (thanks to Alan Walker)



Trevor was approached by a local farmer who knew that a barn owl had been using a derelict cottage in an overgrown location on his land. YACWAG was only too pleased to provide a nesting box within the cottage in the hope of encouraging breeding. Several local people helped with the transport of the large box and its erection in the derelict cottage, thanks to Trevor who organised the whole process and Alan Walker who provided expert supervision. *(Photos above: Alan Walker)*

Website Improvements

Thanks to Mark Stanford the YACWAG website is undergoing a period of improvement. He has been working page by page to rebuild the site in WordPress format. The website will now be optimised for mobile phones as well as being easier to edit, and it will be also be simpler to implement advanced features in the future. YACWAG is extremely grateful to Mark for giving his time so generously.

In case you haven't been online lately, you can go to the website find out about upcoming events through the online calendar (sometimes good to check in case of changes from the advertised programme) and always find the last YACWAG newsletter if you want to remind yourself of something you read there. There is a potted history of YACWAG and lots of nice photos of our achievements over the years, with descriptions of our reserves. You can also buy or renew your membership online and make a donation. Go to www.yacwag.org.uk.

Small Changes Bring Big Rewards

The photo below shows our grass verge outside our house in Court Avenue, Yatton, in July. We manage our garden with wildlife in mind, even though it isn't a 'pure' wildlife garden, but a couple of years ago we decided to ease off on the mowing of the front verge. To make sure the neighbours knew it was uncut on purpose, we put up a sign which said it was



deliberately uncut to support wildlife.

One neighbour said he was thinking of putting up a sign to let people know he cut his verge in order to keep it looking tidy! But on the whole people have embraced the idea, even if it isn't for them, and our next-door neighbour has decided to do the same. We are going to help them introduce more flowers for next year.

One of the delightful things has been watching new species come in unaided - although we will deadhead the ragwort that has appeared this year! We have birdsfoot trefoil on the verge, which is spreading through the sward. This is the

food plant of the caterpillars of the common blue butterfly. Although it is important to provide nectar for adult butterflies, they also need somewhere to lay eggs and provide food for their larvae. We were thrilled to see a female common blue 'sniffing around' the plants, and really enjoyed later watching a male darting about the plants looking for a female.

The good thing about this sunny spot is that we usually pass it several times a day so it brings us lots of joy all through the summer. The time has now come for it to be cut. We will cut the grass and then let it lie on the ground to dry. Once dry we will give it a few turns to make sure the seeds are shaken out of the hay, and we will then keep it cut until next spring, when once again it will be given its head.

It doesn't take a large area to provide a huge amount of enjoyment - to us, but also to the butterflies and bees, and we also feel it is PR for wildlife and a 'statement'.

Tony and Faith Moulin