

COMING UP

Friday 2nd May 8.15 pm Family Bat Walk at Cadbury Hill led by Sarah Dale. Meet Henley Lane top car park. Bring a torch. No dogs.

Bank Holiday Monday 5th May 7 am Early Bird Walk on Strawberry Line. Meet mosaic seat nr Chescombe Road Yatton entrance. Sorry no dogs. Optional breakfast afterwards at the Strawberry Line Cafe at 9 am.

Wednesday 7th May 7-9 pm YACWAG Social at the Railway, Yatton. All welcome. See p.8.

Thursday 15th May 7.30 pm Dragonflies and Damselflies Talk by Jon van Gowler followed by:

Saturday 17th May 11 am Dragonflies and Damselflies Walk led by Jon van Gowler. Limited numbers so please check in. Will be cancelled if wet.

Bank Holiday Monday 26th May 7 am Early Bird Walk on Strawberry Line at Congresbury. Meet at the old station site off A370.

Sunday 8th June 12-5 pm Know the Yeo! at Congresbury Millennium Green. YACWAG's contribution to the Festival of Nature in the West of England. Activities for all ages.

Saturday 5th July 4 pm-10 pm YACWAG 25th birthday party and AGM at Claverham Village Hall - family fun, buffet and soft drinks from 4 pm, AGM 6 pm, displays, entertainment, music, bar 7 pm.

Visits to YACWAG's reserves to see the special interest are sometimes arranged at short notice. In order to avoid disturbance or damage to the wildlife, numbers are limited. If you would like to see the uncommon native Yellow Loosestrife and its dependent bee, for example, or the butterflies and wild flowers in YACWAG's hay fields, please register your interest by emailing contact@yacwag.org.uk

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



SPRING AT LAST!



CONTENTS of this issue

Lottery Grant; Thatchers' trees	2
Yatton Junction Strawberry Line	3
Big Schools Birdwatch	4
WhatsApp group for birders	4
City Nature Challenge & Cobthorn	5
Jo Chambers, a sad loss	6
Water Quality Testing	6
Warblers and Wagtails; New Owl Box	7
YACWAG Social; Pollarding Willows	8

Accessible Website Work in Progress



YACWAG has been awarded over £10,000 by the National Lottery Community Fund to develop a new website that will be more accessible to people with disabilities.

Trustee Carol Tennant, who devised and led the project said, ‘YACWAG is all about connecting people with their natural environment. An accessible website will support a more diverse local audience, including people with visual, auditory or motor impairments. We were thrilled the National Lottery wanted to support this development for YACWAG.’

The National Lottery Community Fund distributes money raised by National Lottery players for good causes and is the largest community funder in the UK. The award will enable YACWAG to create a website with easy-to-read text, screen reader compatibility and intuitive navigation. YACWAG hopes the ease of finding resources will lead to more involvement in its activities.

The current website was designed, developed and managed by YACWAG volunteer Mark Stanford. It has been a very large part of YACWAG’s success in attracting funding over the years and is now integrated with a new membership system and online donation platform which has made administration more efficient. The new website will build on Mark’s work but give an opportunity for more technical advances allowing communication to be inclusive. Innovative methods will allow people who cannot physically access YACWAG’s nature reserves to share the benefits the land brings to the community.

Carol would like to receive your views and ideas at an early stage. If you would like to help in any way, please email her through contact@yacwag.org.uk.

Thatchers Donate 10 Apple Trees

Thatchers, the local cider makers, have given YACWAG ten apple trees as part of their Community Orchard Project. The trees will all grow to traditional standard size and came with free stakes, ties and protection from voles and mice. They have been planted in the newly purchased land at Kenn Moor Reserve and are in the former paddock now to be known as Maslens Orchard in recognition of the bequest which enabled YACWAG to buy the land. Residents from Bramblewood joined YACWAG members to plant the trees in March.



Yatton Junction - Volunteers Get Stuck In

Planned improvements to Yatton Junction, which were designed by YACWAG and North Somerset Council with input from the Community Safety team, hope to reduce anti-social behaviour and create undisturbed areas for wildlife. Before contractor Green Mantle could begin, the area was cleared of litter, fly-tipped larger items and the remains of rough sleepers' encampments. Literally tons of rubbish were removed in February and March by volunteers. YACWAG member Kate Graham is pictured with some of the cans she collected and took home for recycling. She washed 132 at home and put them in her green box. Many had to go into the general waste. Even a bath was removed from the site! Libby Watts followed up with another group of volunteers and cleared a second astonishingly large pile of rubbish in unpleasant weather. Thanks to all who helped.

Steve Rea, who has been co-ordinating work at the former station site in Congresbury, also organised the work in Yatton. Sight lines have been created from the Strawberry Line into a wooded area where anti-social behaviour had been occurring out of view. Walkers will now be able to deviate from the Strawberry Line and take a loop through the woodland before returning to the path. The plan is that on the west side of the path the extra footfall and visibility will deter camping, while efforts have been made to protect the scrubby areas on the other side of the path as a refuge for nature. YACWAG has been managing this area for several years with open glades for wildlife habitat.

In March volunteers from YACWAG were joined by North Somerset Council's Jodie Smith and open spaces volunteers from Weston-super-Mare. Limestone replicating railway ballast has been spread on the area closest to the railway car park. It is hoped that this area will be of more value to wildlife within a few years, and a much more inviting start to the Strawberry Line for visitors.

Photos on this page by:

*Tony Moulin,
Faith Moulin,
Libby Watts,
Chris Walker*



RSPB Big Schools' Birdwatch 2025

"Look through here, that's so big!"

"That's so beautiful!"

A couple of excited children were looking at rooks through a telescope as another successful RSPB Big Schools' Birdwatch came to an end. A total of 59 birds, 20 species, were recorded.



At St Andrew's Primary School in Congresbury the crews (classes) are named after birds but unfortunately Kestrel Crew had already returned to class when a real Kestrel appeared. We usually spot a Robin and maybe one day a Jay or an Owl will show, but it's unlikely that the children of Eagle, Falcon, and Kingfisher Crews will ever see "their" bird!

Nest box cleaning (adults only!) followed, which usually passes without incident. This year however, Trevor was taken very much by surprise when, on opening one box, a Wood Mouse jumped out and bounced off his arm closely followed by a second. Jon's experience at another box wasn't quite as pleasant - it was full of slugs! Of the 11 nest boxes, six contained a bird's nest (almost certainly Blue Tit) and one a Wood Mouse nest. Trevor says: "That is excellent. Nature reserves aim for 66% occupancy and St Andrew's achieved that and a mouse nest (just as valuable in my opinion) as well."

Trevor, Jon and I really appreciated being involved once again and the children, as ever, were polite and full of enthusiasm. We have since received a lovely card, the "thank you" message inside featuring in the school's newsletter.

Sue Lovesey

WhatsApp for YACWAG Birders

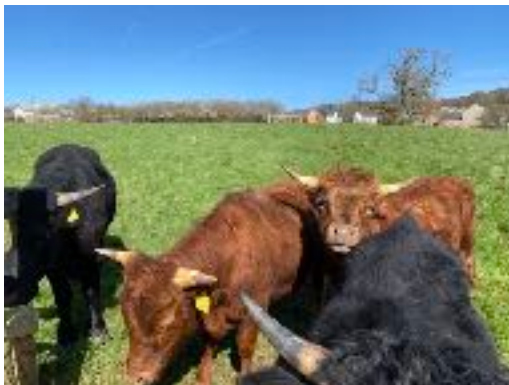


A WhatsApp group has been set up so YACWAG members can share information about birds with each other. If you would like to join, please in the first instance send your mobile phone number with your name to contact@yacwag.org.uk.

City Nature Challenge 25-28 April

Wildlife reporting is an enjoyable way to help nature and improve your identification skills. North Somerset residents can join in a global challenge being promoted by the Natural History Consortium from 25th-28th April. If you've got a smart phone you can take part in a mission to record as much wildlife as possible in four days over all seven continents across the world. Using the free iNaturalist app you can contribute towards conservation efforts both locally and on a global scale. Find out more here: <https://www.bnhc.org.uk/city-nature-challenge/>

Cute Cattle at Cobthorn Reserve - not forgetting the Shapely Sheep!



Four young Dexters and five ewes along with their seven lambs are now enjoying the spring grass at Cobthorn Reserve. They are an important part of the management of the reserve, providing dung for an abundance of insects needed by the local bats. One of the ewes has triplets and is busy grazing to keep her strength up for the frequent suckling by her young lambs.

Nearly 20 volunteers are keeping the new trees watered in the prolonged dry spell experienced in March and which is continuing into April. Each of the trees provided under the Trees for Climate grant awarded last winter has been equipped with an irrigation bag. These bags have to be refilled by hand with 20 gallons of water at a time. This is then slowly released into the soil. The aim is to reduce the number of watering visits each tree needs. Those naughty but cute cattle seen here visited all the new trees they could in the first couple of days and ripped out the mulch mats from under them. Their other new game was to get between the fences so they could eat the wild flowers and new hedging. We soon put paid to that!

Jo Chambers - an Untimely Death

In 2021 Jo Chambers, after several long conversations with Tony Moulin, became a Trustee of YACWAG. Jo was a Further Education lecturer at Bath College, working with young people for whom she had great compassion in this troubled world. Jo set up YACWAG's first Instagram account in order to provide social media content for young people. She was very busy but found time to use her strength, relative young age and fitness to do tough physical jobs when asked for YACWAG.



Jo stepped down as a Trustee after a year but for Tony and me she was a near neighbour and we frequently bumped into her on the Strawberry Line or in Chescombe Road. She was always enthusiastic, encouraging and interested in what we were doing and lit up the street with her smile. We were very shocked to hear of her sudden unexplained death aged 47. Our thoughts go out to her family and friends. Jo's contribution to YACWAG's work will not be forgotten and, speaking personally I am so glad and grateful that our lives touched.

Faith Moulin

Water Quality Testing

YACWAG members were inspired and fascinated by Michelle Walker's talk on the State of Our Rivers in February. Michelle painted a grim picture of England's rivers, none of which are unpolluted. However, she works for the Rivers Trust and volunteers for Bristol Avon Rivers Trust so she is in a position to know that we can all make a difference, however enormous this problem seems to be.

YACWAG owns land on the both Biddle Street SSSI and Kenn Moor SSSI and is very interested in the water management issues affecting our nature reserves. Michelle has offered to help us find out more by carrying out water quality testing and on the night of the talk eight people signed up to do that this summer. If you have already expressed interest there is no need to re-apply but if anyone else would like to join in, please email contact@yacwag.org.uk in the first instance. Training and equipment will be provided.

Warblers and Woodpeckers

For a few weeks now Chiffchaffs have been singing in gardens and on the edge of Congresbury, Yatton and nearby villages. They have been joined more recently by Blackcaps and in the next couple of weeks it is likely that Whitethroats will arrive and join the chorus. Over recent years many birds have moved into 'suburbia' and are content to live nearer to us than in the past. So do listen out for these summer visitors.

Have you noticed the laughing call of the Green Woodpecker recently? I have heard it more regularly over the past twelve months. It is far carrying so it doesn't indicate that there has been a large increase in numbers but perhaps a modest rise. Two of the country names for Green Woodpecker are Yaffle and Rainbird - the first describing its call and the latter as the call was said to predict rain. That doesn't seem to have worked recently!

Trevor Riddle

Boxes for Barn Owls and Other Birds



One of the poles holding up a YACWAG Barn Owl box broke during the winter. The box came tumbling down and spent a few months on the ground. The pole and the wooden box had come to the end of their lives. YACWAG has been replacing older wooden boxes with alternatives where possible as the weather soon rots the wood and even the best marine ply has a short shelf (pole)-life. Trevor's favoured replacement is box made of recycled plastic, as seen on the left.

Fortunately there was an alder tree close to the spot where the pole had broken, so instead of replacing the pole, the new nest box, thanks to Andrew Hunt, has been put up in the tree. The boxes are guaranteed for 25 years. Mounting on a tree gives the bonus of shade in the heat of summer and the manufacturers say this style of box offers better insulation.

Emily Lomas is now able to monitor nest boxes via new technology and she has seen Stock Doves investigating the new box. YACWAG does have another box in the same reserve, so it is hoped that Barn Owls are using that one instead. There will be an update next time.

YACWAG Social at The Railway, Yatton

YACWAG members are all invited to come along to the Railway at Yatton (formerly the Railway Inn) by the station on Wednesday 7th May from 7 pm. All are welcome to meet others at this pilot social. Maybe there are things you are interested in finding out about wildlife in the area, or maybe you just like getting out and meeting like-minded people. Perhaps you want to encourage your friends or neighbours to join YACWAG. Here is a chance in an informal setting with no agenda to just relax and have some of those interesting conversations that have to be cut short when they happen at the end or beginning of a talk or other YACWAG event. Tea and coffee are available as well as the bar.



Pollarding Willows at Kenn Moor Reserve

With the extension to Kenn Moor Reserve came some mature willow trees. Most of them had been previously pollarded (literally had their heads cut off) but two of them had become very large and had never been pollarded. The willows are the species called Crack Willow (*Salix fragilis*), commonly seen along rivers and ditches in Somerset. When they get older they tend to split and crack, often tearing the tree apart. Pollarding - removing the weight from the branches - prolongs the life of the tree, keeps the stem intact and creates a supply of poles as the tree quickly regrows.

Tree surgeon Sam Harris began pollarding the willows at Kenn Moor Reserve. It looks drastic but if not done the trees might have broken apart. Another two or three trees will be re-pollarded next winter. Richard Croucher and Tony used some of the wood chips to level the track when the work was finished.





NEXT NEWSLETTER deadline 1st June

Photos, articles, poems, reports on events,
your thoughts, suggestions and your feedback are always welcome.

Please send to contact@yacwag.org.uk



WELCOME TO ALL NEW MEMBERS!

Hoping you can get to some of YACWAG's spring events.
Please put them in your diary!



Look out for meadow foxtail, often the earliest grass to flower