

YACWAG newsletter



We are delighted to announce a significant land purchase on Congresbury Moor!

The three fields are on the wetland Biddle Street Site of Special Scientific Interest and they adjoin our existing fields, more than doubling our Congresbury Moor nature reserve to a whopping 18.95 hectares (approximately 47 acres).

Read all about it inside.



DEADLINE FOR NEXT NEWSLETTER

1st April 2026 articles, photos, member contributions always welcome

contact@yacwag.org.uk

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

YACWAG is active on Facebook (a private group of over 900 members, mostly local) and on Instagram

JOIN YACWAG'S WHATSAPP COMMUNITY

Get instant notifications on your phone about events, wildlife sightings and more.

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Yatton and
Congresbury
Wildlife Action
Group

registered charity
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www.yacwag.org.uk

Newsletter
January 2026

Land Ahoy!

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.” Margaret Mead, the late anthropologist who challenged traditional assumptions.

Well, YACWAG hasn't quite changed the world, but we have certainly changed Yatton and Congresbury!

When it all began in 1999 there were no kestrels nesting, no barn owls, and the land available for wildlife was shrinking due to changes in farming and development. Over the last 26 years YACWAG has made a space for nature by raising money to buy land in the parishes of Yatton and Congresbury. Wild flowers have returned to its fields and the kind of habitat created has attracted and supported wildlife of all kinds.

It all began with a ten-acre field. YACWAG relaxed the management and watched it change from a green desert into a much more nature-filled space. Now there are small YACWAG reserves dotted around Yatton and Congresbury, all of them contributing to local nature recovery and conservation. It is exciting now to see our Congresbury Moor Reserve scale up!



YACWAG has been able to buy three additional fields totalling 27 acres next to the river. The extra space for nature will bring many benefits.

The left Google satellite image above shows Congresbury Moor Reserve as it has been since 2012. The image on the right shows Congresbury Moor now, with the riverside land just purchased to the south sharing boundaries with Nortons, Meakers and Pippens. We now own both sides of more watercourses which will make it much easier to control management and hopefully improve aquatic biodiversity.

We are also excited to own a section of the river bank. It may enable us to have more influence over how the river is managed and give us a stake in decisions concerning the river in the future.

Another advantage of owning adjacent fields is that it will be easier for our grazier to manage the Dexter cattle which provide the main form of land management on Congresbury Moor. The path by the river will remain open for use by the community.

The 'new to us' fields are already in a Countryside Stewardship grant scheme with special reference to management for Greater Horseshoe Bats. YACWAG's intention will be to enhance the land for all wildlife but in particular we are planning to add features to improve the reserve for bats. The purchase will also extend the land available for barn owls and kestrels to hunt over.

There will be opportunities for members to get involved as the project develops and an invitation to come and celebrate the land purchase on site. Look out for more news in the next newsletter or in an email for members.

One of the lovely 'fixtures' on the new land is a mature black poplar tree adorned with mistletoe.



Meet Jo and Andy

Jo and Andy Millward are a key part of the Congresbury Moor team. Their beautiful animals are essential to keep YACWAG's Congresbury Moor pasture in good condition. The trampling and munching may not seem vital but in fact without the Dexter cattle there would not be so many insects on the moor, and with fewer insects there would be fewer birds and bats.

We are very grateful to Jo and Andy for their help both here and at Cobthorn Reserve and look forward to their animals returning when the weather is a bit drier.



YACWAGger Profile - Sally Organ

Sally has lived in Congresbury for about 30 years in the Wrington Lane area. About four years ago she retired from a busy career with the Open University. She was aware of YACWAG and had intended to join for some time. When she heard about the Cobthorn Reserve being acquired just down the road from her that was a catalyst. Sally became a member and offered to help, soon becoming one of the essential team of Cobthorn Waterers.

YACWAG has planted over 70 new trees in the last two years at Cobthorn Reserve as we are working to create wood pasture – a preferred habitat of Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats. Large long-lived specimen trees have been planted through the grazed areas and will eventually imitate the parkland of stately homes. Planting the trees was easy compared with keeping them alive through the scorching dry summer.



What do you enjoy about volunteering with YACWAG?

I was surprised to be asked to be the YACWAGger featured in the newsletter because I don't really feel I do much. As well as watering the trees I was lucky enough to join those being trained in hedge-laying last winter. I spent far too much time at work behind computers so it's good to have incentives to get out and do something physical. It's been great working with Richard on hedge-laying work parties and there are jobs anyone can do, you don't have to be really strong! I've enjoyed meeting new people, learning new skills and getting some fresh air and exercise.

What do you like about YACWAG?

I think it is amazing what YACWAG achieves, especially buying and managing land for nature. I realise what a lot of work that involves and it is wonderful there are so many people wanting to do that for the community's future.

What could YACWAG do better?

I think it would be good if the members and general public could visit the reserves more so they could appreciate more fully the value of them. I understand the reason why open access is not possible but I think it would be nice if sometimes, with some discreet supervision, the public could just go into one of the fields and look around informally, even have a picnic perhaps. Or when the apple trees get big enough at Cobthorn, or at Kenn Moor, perhaps an Apple Day could be held there and people could sample the apples.

YACWAGger Profile continued

Would you like to help with a project about public access?

If an opportunity arises I would be happy to help with a project that was intended to create opportunities for people to get more access to nature through YACWAG's reserves.

And that is the essence of YACWAG and has always been the way we have worked – if someone wants to do something that is feasible and if they are able to add their voice, their time and their hands to make it happen, let's do it! (unless there is a good reason why we cannot.) This welcome to involvement is why we always have so much going on!

Faith Moulin in conversation with Sally Organ, YACWAG volunteer.



Sally (left) with some of the other YACWAG hedgelayers: Clare, Tim, Richard, Steve and Mark.

Two February Talks Coming Up

1. Marvellous Moths

Don't miss Higgy's inspiring talk on Marvellous Moths to be held at Horsecastle Chapel, Yatton on Thursday 12th February starting at 7.30 pm. The chapel will be open from 7.15 for refreshments.

Higgy, also known for his Somerset Wildlife Products and wildlife gardening business, is a moth enthusiast and wildlife photographer. He will be sharing some of his excellent photos of local moths with information about their lifestyles and advice on how we can all get involved in helping moths in our gardens.



Large Emerald Moth

The evening will also launch a new YACWAG initiative for this summer on moths and other insects. If you would like to get involved please come along, or find out more from contact@yacwag.org.uk.

2. North Somerset Bats

Dani Walker, the North Somerset Bat Survey Project Officer, will be giving a talk on Thursday 26th February at 7.30 pm at Horsecastle Chapel, Yatton. The chapel will be open from 7.15 for refreshments.

North Somerset Bat Survey is a citizen science project led by the Bat Conservation Research Lab at the University of Bath. They have been working in partnership with North Somerset Council to find out more about our local bats.

Bats are sensitive to disturbance so they serve as 'bioindicators' which means the health of their populations gives a good picture of how wildlife is faring overall. Over the next 15 years North Somerset Council will be required to build thousands of new homes, many of them in areas used by rare bats. The survey is gathering data on the distribution of bats that will enable North Somerset planners to minimise the impact of development on bats. The project has also been very successful in involving local people in data collection.



Natterer's Bat

© Daniel Haygarth

This talk will share what has been found out so far, how people's perceptions of bats are changing and what we can be hopeful about for the future.

YACWAG's New Digital Mapping Project

Over the past few months, a small team of YACWAG volunteers has been working to develop a detailed digital map of our reserves and the surrounding area. This will help us to both manage the reserves, and to monitor what's happening with the trees, plants and wildlife that live there - you can see the initial version of the map online [here](#).

The next step will be more detailed field surveys, with volunteers using a mobile app to add a range of data to the map, including bat box locations and activity, tree condition, and maintenance information relating to hedges and rhynes. This exercise will start in January and continue in the long term, in order to build up a detailed picture of life in the reserves.

As well as providing important information about what's happening on the reserves, the map and the data on it will help us to fulfill our reporting obligations, as data will be continually added to the database behind the map, and extracted and consolidated for reports as needed. It will also help us to feed data on what is happening locally into national databases, and to examine and analyse trends over time.

A number of field inspections will be carried out over the coming months in order to gather data - if you would like to get involved, please email contact@yacwag.org.uk to express an interest in the first instance and you can be added to the dedicated WhatsApp group for ease of communication.

Antony Scott, YACWAG Mapping Team

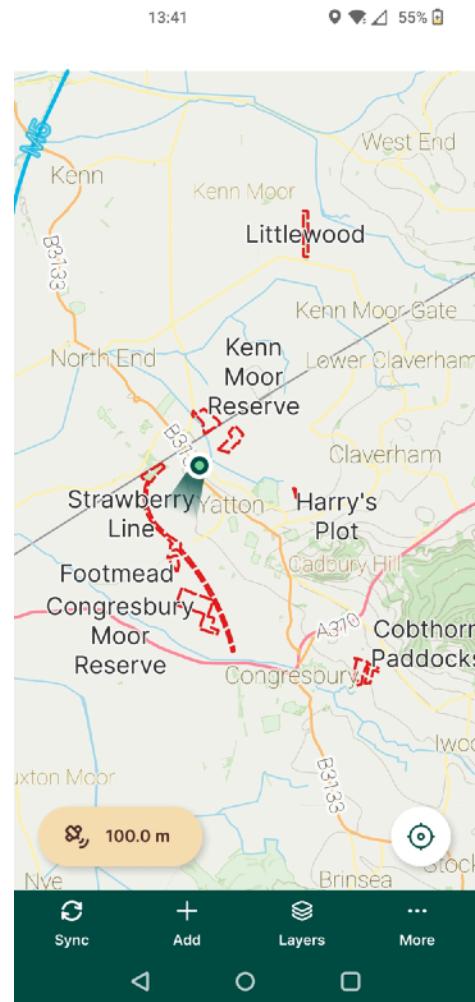


Photo top right is a screenshot by Antony of the top layer map on his phone.

Photo bottom right shows Lucy Joy at the Cobthorn Reserve on a rainy day in January using her phone to add tree locations to the digital layer for trees. It took just a minute per tree!



Bioblitz at Cobthorn Reserve

Hopefully, with the support of the Recorders of the Avalon Marshes - a very experienced group of volunteers with expertise in identifying the more unusual species - YACWAG will be running a bioblitz at Cobthorn Reserve in the late spring. The date is yet to be confirmed.

A bioblitz is an intense period of biological surveying in an attempt to record all the living species within a designated area. It is hoped to encourage more people to get involved and share the excitement of field studies. If you would like to be involved in any way at all, please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.



Bat Goes to School

Yatton School had an exciting morning in November when a Pipistrelle bat had found its way into the school hall. The school called the Bat Conservation advice line, who gave them initial advice about rabies risks and told them to try and find a local wildlife rescue organisation to help them rather than handle it themselves. There was no-one more local than YACWAG and fortunately someone knew a parent who was likely to be able to help.

YACWAG Trustee Meriel was on hand with information about our Wildlife Responder, Amy, who quickly recommended local bat rehabilitator Katie Gibbs as Katie and Amy are both volunteers with Secret World. Fortunately Katie found that the bat was healthy and could be let off school and released straight away.

Photos on the right show Katie rescuing the bat from the hall and the tiny pipistrelle bat in Katie's gloved hand.

Thanks to Yatton Schools for sharing their photos.



Keeping an Eye on YACWAG's Land

With the growing amount of land YACWAG is looking after it has become difficult for the four members of the Land Management Team to get out visiting it all often enough. YACWAG has had reserve wardens since its early days and we are grateful to those who have been involved for years but with YACWAG's expansion their role is now even more important.



Richard, Tony and Ellie taking a look around Congresbury Moor in the winter

With this in mind and thanks to volunteers who have recently come forward, new wardens are now strengthening the existing team. Each YACWAG reserve now has at least one warden and most have two who visit their patch at least once a month. Wardens report on any significant changes - anything from fallen trees to broken gates and can carry out small maintenance tasks. The wardens also note when cattle are on our reserves, enabling us to evaluate the effects of our planned management. Above all they are keeping a note of all the wildlife they see, whether that's a rare bee or a brown hare.

A new role for wardens has been the use of cameras to monitor wildlife on the reserves which is essential to establish a better idea of the wildlife using our land. Some of our wardens are keen to learn other survey techniques too, like using moth traps and bat detectors, and it will be very helpful to build up more knowledge about our reserves. Species records will be passed on to the national biodiversity database and will also eventually form part of YACWAG's digital map.

If you would like to help in any way with YACWAG's land management, please get in touch by emailing contact@yacwag.org.uk.



Visitors to a YACWAG reserve at night captured on a wildlife camera by Elliott Lee.



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Digital Nature Education Resource

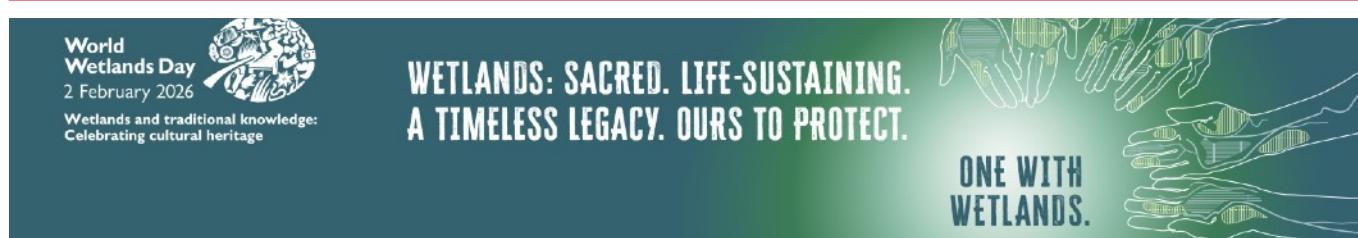
Thanks to volunteer Lucy Joy for all her hard work on digitising YACWAG's records and educational resources! There is now a digital catalogue and 'library' available for use by YACWAG's volunteer education facilitators with games, puzzles, questionnaires, quizzes and ideas for educational activities for children and adults. Lucy has also been transcribing the records of our older wardens, creating an interesting digital file of historic information which will provide a baseline for future research.

WECA Wildlife Index - Free Training

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (WECA for short) is trying to understand nature at a landscape scale across the region. A Wildlife Index is being developed to provide evidence of species abundance so funders and investors can put their money into the most effective areas for nature recovery.

The Index will use 20 new survey sites to establish long-term monitoring and enable trends to be traced over time. One of those sites is on Cadbury Hill. Surveys will be conducted by a professional ecologist as well as citizen scientists who will be trained and supported by various species-relevant National Monitoring Schemes as well as WECA. Training will be available in order to support monitoring of bees, butterflies and plants.

YACWAG is helping with some local knowledge but would like our members to be able to take advantage of training in species identification and recording. If you would like to know more please get in touch via contact@yacwag.org.uk and we will pass your details on to WECA for more information to be sent to you.



Walk for World Wetlands Day



Tony and Faith Moulin shared some of the history and nature of Congresbury Moor on a walk with 13 members just ahead of World Wetlands Day. The rain held off and new members were excited to hear some of YACWAG's plans for the newly acquired land. As a bonus Trevor Riddle and Peter Grainger were carrying out a snipe count in Ten Acres and Phippens. They saw 10 snipe and just three meadow pipits.

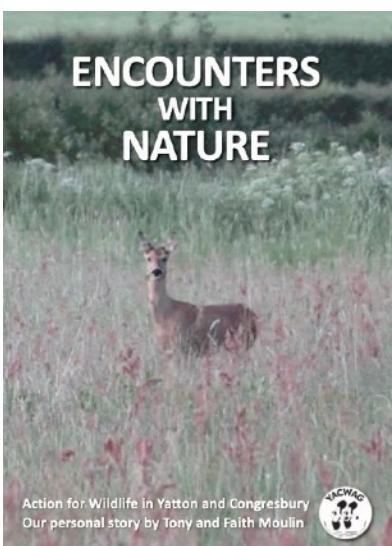
Have You Bought from the YACWAG Shop Yet?

Every purchase from the YACWAG Shop helps protect local wildlife and habitats in Yatton and Congresbury. Cheers!

A small profit goes directly to YACWAG from the shop powered by Teemill, a sustainable company that shares our commitment to sustainability and zero waste. For our tee shirts and other clothing 100 percent certified organic cotton is used. They are sent to you direct from the mill where they have been produced using only solar and wind power and arrive in plant-based, biodegradable packaging. Teemill only makes the items when you order so there is no waste, no surplus. All used garments can then be returned to Teemill to be remade into new ones.

It isn't just clothing though. There are some other items to buy, including the lovely everyday mug shown here with YACWAG's renewed iconic lapwing logo. There are also useful YACWAG branded tote bags, notebooks, stainless steel bottles, roll-top backpacks and tea towels. Why not take a look?

Show your support for YACWAG by choosing something special from the range and wearing or carrying it with pride. You will be investing in a greener, fairer future for people and wildlife alike. <https://yacwag.teemill.com>.



Thank you to all those who have bought one of Tony and Faith's books about their encounters with nature and YACWAG's local action for wildlife. The books are still on sale at £12.95 and have been very well received.

“such a good read!”

“information - observation - history & humour”

“really enjoyable read, well written”

“learning so much about the area!”

Lucy Strikes Gold at Stowey Reserve

Lucy approached YACWAG a year ago in the hope of finding an opportunity to learn more about nature and to carry out voluntary work as part of her community service for the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Lucy lived in Yatton, now studying at Bristol University, and helped with the monitoring of our Stowey Reserve. Lucy wrote about the experience:

Volunteering with the lovely people at YACWAG for my Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award has been a wonderful, rewarding experience. During my time with YACWAG, I gained a deeper understanding of the conservation and surveying of wildlife through various activities. I monitored the growth of marsh marigolds and reptile refuge mats, which taught me how to identify different species of plants, insects and reptiles. One of the highlights was using a trail camera to obtain footage of the wildlife occupying the site. I was pleased to find various animals, such as roe deer, foxes, badgers and many bird species. My favourite part of volunteering was using a bat detector to discover some of the bat species living in Yatton today. I was thrilled to find Pipistrelle, Serotine and the rarer Lesser Horseshoe.

Volunteering with YACWAG was such an enjoyable experience and I have gained valuable skills and knowledge that have greatly enhanced my interest in wildlife conservation. I'm very grateful for the opportunity and would highly recommend YACWAG to anyone looking to volunteer, expand their knowledge or complete their Duke of Edinburgh award.

Lucy Robertson

Do You Want to Help Swifts?

YACWAG is working with local churches to support swifts. This may be a long and expensive process but swifts in many areas of the country have successfully returned to nest in swift boxes in church towers. Preliminary talks with Yatton and Congresbury parish churches are ongoing and the next step is a professional survey by an expert from Devon Swift Project. This will cost around £400 and we thought we would give the opportunity to YACWAG members to sponsor this unusual project. Although swifts are unlikely to be attracted for two or three years, the use of swift calls has been very successful in other towns and villages. If you would like to help with the cost of the survey or in any other way with YACWAG's Swift Project, please email contact@yacwag.org.uk.



Photo courtesy of Swift Conservation

Early member Alan Walker Dies

We are sad to report the death of Alan Walker. Alan was one of the early members of YACWAG and he soon got very much involved in making and putting up our first Barn Owl and Tawny Owl boxes in the early years of this century.

Alan was a cabinet maker by trade and the boxes he made were of a very high standard. He was also involved monitoring the boxes and I can well recall the look on his face when his hand found a furry thing, a dead squirrel, at the bottom of a Tawny Owl box. No doubt the squirrel had been killed by the resident Tawny Owl; there were no marks on it.

When our boxes needed replacing it was Alan and Bob who got on the scaffold to remove the old box and bolt on the new one. The last box Alan made went into a derelict cottage at Wemberham and Barn Owls raised three young in it. The cottage has now fallen down but the box has been moved to a new building and a Barn Owl is currently roosting in it.



*Alan Walker and Bob Lowman
in Ten Acres in 2011*

Trevor Riddle

Alan Speight, Nest Box Plate Maker

Alan Speight sadly passed away in January. He was not a YACWAG member but he was a good supporter and he made dozens of nest box plates for us. He was an engineer and used scrap metals from his place of work. Everything was recycled and the plates were precision made.

I still hold a good stock of his plates. If any member would like one or more to fit onto wooden nest boxes please email birds@yacwag.org.uk. YACWAG is mostly using more durable 'woodcrete' nest boxes now so we have less demand ourselves for Alan's plates.

Trevor Riddle

Website Reflections and Aspirations

YACWAG is very grateful for the generous volunteer input from **Mark Stanford** over the last decade. As our web manager he has been a key volunteer behind the scenes, and also lent his graphic design skills to many other tasks, including interpretation signs like the one at Yatton Junction, where he was photographed. Over several years Mark started and grew YACWAG's YouTube channel, creating the flying birds animation and video editing talks and Window Wonderland films.



In the very beginning of our digital adventure, **Peter Archdale** set up a website for us in 2000 - a brave new initiative for YACWAG. A few years later Peter relocated to Northern Ireland and **Bob, Win and Jenny Lowman** all had a hand in developing the work Peter had started. It was ten years later, with technology steaming ahead, when Mark would arrive a little late to the regular monthly Yatton churchyard work parties. He had been teaching a Yoga class at Cadbury House and his calm and serene presence also brought strength and vitality to the work and was much appreciated. One day during one of these sessions, Mark said out of the blue, "I design websites. I could design a new website for YACWAG if you like."

Mark wanted to use his design skills and was motivated by his interest in protecting nature and the countryside. He completely rebuilt the website twice. The second time in 2020 during lockdown, using WordPress, was in order to meet the need for the website to function well on mobile phones as their usage grew. The YACWAG website was attractive, full of local photos and did the trick! At least two large unsolicited donations came our way because the donor had been impressed by our website. Whenever we applied for a grant we would proudly direct the funders to our website and, almost invariably, we got the money.

Eventually however, the demands of the modern world caught up with the technology we were using. The Charity Commission published requirements for new standards in websites which were hard to achieve using the old template. Thanks to the arrival on YACWAG's Board of Trustees of **Carol Tennant**, who brought business and marketing skills to the charity, and a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, we have been able to engage PACE, a Clevedon web design and marketing agency, to develop and design a new website and incorporate accessibility features so it is compliant with the new standards. You will have a chance to sample it soon, but in the meantime we will never forget the help and support of volunteers to maintain our web presence, and especially the tireless work of Mark in providing a top-class website for us for around 12 years.

The new website will be managed by a team of volunteers to keep it up-to-date. If you have skills you could use in this way, please get in touch via contact@yacwag.org.uk.