



Yatton & Congresbury Wildlife Action Group

New Land Purchase!

YACWAG has bought another two fields on Congresbury Moor, in addition to the three purchased in January! The new fields bring our landholding on Biddle Street SSSI to 60 acres (11 fields) !

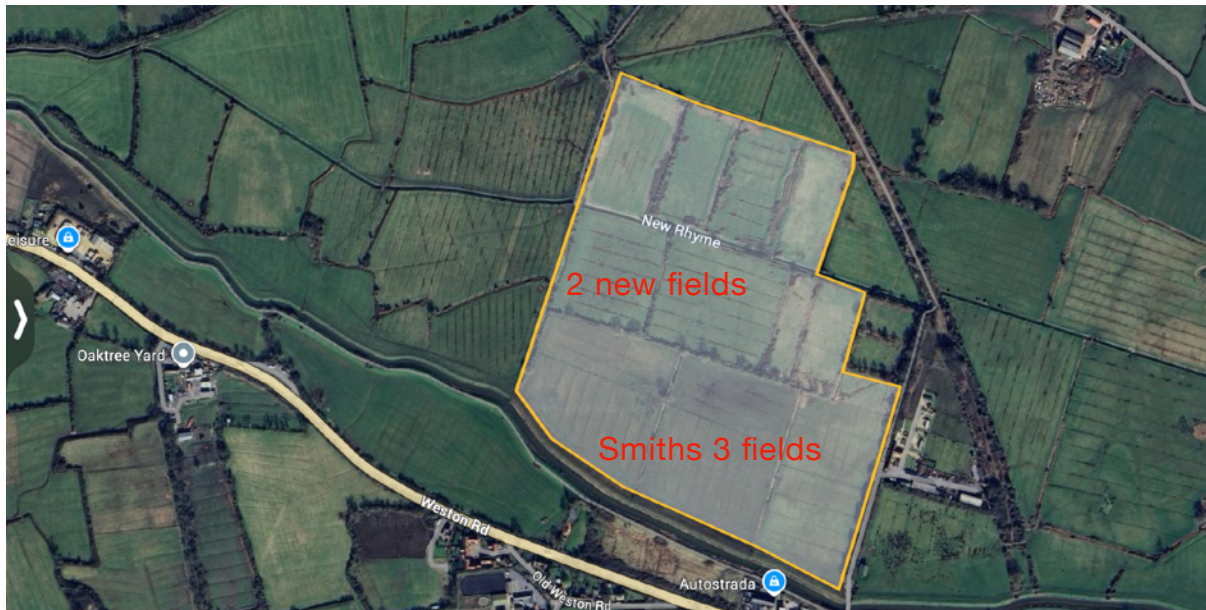
Biddle Street SSSI was designated 30 years ago for its rare wetland wildlife and YACWAG's first ten acre field was bought there in 1999. Gradually over the years the charity has been able to add piece after piece and the two fields just acquired have completed the jigsaw!



The land on Biddle Street SSSI is a flat floodplain, part of a landscape known as the North Somerset Levels and Moors. All YACWAG's fields in this location are coastal floodplain grazing marsh, traditionally supporting grazing by cattle and with natural wetland habitat.

YACWAG's five new fields will double the land available for local Barn owls and Kestrels to hunt over and YACWAG will be making improvements to increase biodiversity. There will be a series of walks over the next few months to give members the opportunity to see the land, and anyone particularly interested in helping the project should get in touch via contact@yacwag.org.uk.

YACWAG's Congresbury Moor Reserve



The grey fields outlined above in yellow show the extent of YACWAG's Congresbury Moor Reserve following the new purchase. This block can make a real difference for nature. The fields with no explanatory text are the original landholding. The Strawberry Line is to the right (east) of the block and the A370 and Congresbury Yeo show at the bottom (south). Owning a 500 metre section of the river bank may give YACWAG more influence over its management too.

There has been a permissive route along the river bank for many years and YACWAG will continue to allow public access. To safeguard grazing livestock and wildlife a fence and later a hedge will separate the improved access path from the farmed area. Other plans include tree planting, disabled access and a nature trail.

Thanks to Trevor Riddle, Jon Thobroe and Steve Ellis who are YACWAG wardens for Congresbury Moor.

YACWAG is thankful for the legacy of Mrs Irmgard Owen, which facilitated the purchase of Smiths fields through a chain of events. With Mrs Owen's bequest YACWAG bought Paddocks to extend the Cobthorn Reserve. In Paddocks 'Habitat Evaluation Procedure' (HEP) units have been sold to improve off-site habitat for bats to mitigate for a new SEND school being built in Langford. This HEP unit sale in turn enabled YACWAG to extend Congresbury Moor - a complicated but beautiful result from Mrs Owen's gift.

World Wetlands Day - 2nd February

World Wetlands Day is celebrated on 2nd February each year. Its foundation was the adoption of the Ramsar convention in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 when environmentalists gathered to reaffirm protection and love for wetlands.

The day is celebrated in order to raise global awareness of wetlands' importance and recognise what wetlands have done both for humans and for nature. This year with the acquisition of 500 metres of riverbank and some wet fields, there was a lot for YACWAG to celebrate.



Tony Moulin, YACWAG's chair, with North Somerset Cllr Annemieke Waite (Cabinet member for Planning and Environment) and local member, Cllr Dan Thomas, on World Wetlands Day on a walk over YACWAG's new land.



Members also enjoyed a celebratory walk led by Tony and Faith Moulin to celebrate World Wetlands Day on Congresbury Moor a few days later.

Big Schools Birdwatch at St Andrew's School

Once again YACWAG was invited to assist with the RSPB Big schools birdwatch at St Andrews School, Congresbury. Fortunately the day chosen, 28th January, was a dry and sunny day (unusual this winter) and four classes came out to identify and record the birds that they saw. The school has plenty of children's binoculars, and provided recording sheets and clipboards for all the participants. Sue, Jon and Trevor joined in to assist with identification. The most unusual sighting was a pair of Mistle Thrushes and a Great Spotted Woodpecker commanded a lot of attention. The children were keen and the school reported subsequently that they thought there were a few potential new birdwatchers resulting from the event.



After a cup of tea in the staff room we moved on to checking and cleaning out the nest-boxes and were amazed and delighted to discover that all eight boxes in the school grounds had been used and contained nests from 2025. There are two boxes outside the grounds and these had not been used (one of them usually is) but an overall 80 percent occupancy rate is excellent. The 'target' for box occupancy on nature reserves is just 66 percent!

A couple of the wooden boxes were life-expired so a month later the team returned with two new Woodcrete boxes provided by a benefactor to YACWAG and erected these to replace the worn-out boxes.

Trevor Riddle

What's New on the YACWAG Website

Be Tick Aware

Infections from tick bites are on the rise. We don't want the risk of illness to stop you enjoying the countryside as the weather improves, so we have produced a blog to tell you all you need to know about protecting yourself from tick bites and reducing the risk of catching Lyme Disease and co-infections. You can read it [here](#).

Reflections of Winter on the Reserves

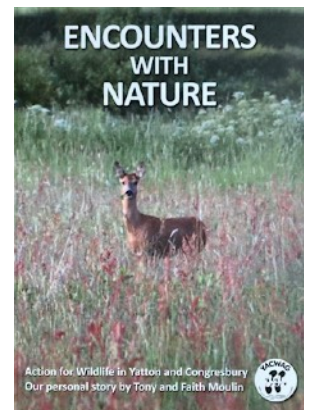
With more YACWAG land, and more interest in it, Richard Croucher explains that YACWAG and its reserves are far from empty and asleep during the winter months. This blog gives members an idea of what has been going on. You can read it [here](#).

YACWAG's Online Shop

If you want to know more about the local area and its wildlife, especially as it relates to YACWAG's history, you will enjoy Tony and Faith Moulin's book 'Encounters with Nature'. The YACWAG story of hope through action is told via 31 encounters with wildlife locally, providing an insight into changes in the environment over the last 25 years and what can be done to improve things for nature.

Our Teemill shop (accessed through www.yacwag.org.uk) is not just about tee shirts - although there is a nice range of garments - you can also show your support for the charity by toting a bag, or pulling out a notebook emblazoned with our logo.

YACWAG's mustard 14 litre recycled backpack with a handy roll-top is a great size, secure and very stylish. Equally at home in town as in the countryside, easy to grab on your way out of the door, the bag is also available in sage green and is ideal for all those summer trips coming up. Take a look at yacwag.teemill.com.



YACWAG Talks Season Closed

Three excellent talks ended the YACWAG talks season on a high note. Patrick Vincent from Green Mantle shared his personal story in January, explaining his 'ecosophy' and illustrated by photos from his life.

Higgy's lovely photos of wildlife are further enhanced by the enthusiasm he brings with him. On this occasion those attending his talk were also able to purchase some of his beautiful greetings cards. Higgy talked about moths and inspired YACWAG members to get involved in recording moths and supporting them with more wildlife-friendly gardens in Yatton and Congresbury.



Large Red Underwing

YACWAG has some moth traps for members to use in their gardens and it would be very useful to build up a more comprehensive picture of what moths can be found around Yatton and Congresbury. If you would like to borrow a moth trap more experienced recorders can help with identification. Why not have a go this summer?



Having talked about moths, our last talk of the season was about one of their amazing predators. Dani Walker from the North Somerset Bat Project was joined by Esther Coffin-Smith from North Somerset Council to share the results of the ongoing North Somerset Bat Survey so far. On the whole there is reason to be optimistic as bats' protection from harm is becoming more prevalent in North Somerset through the planning system. Unfortunately bat numbers, particularly the rare Greater Horseshoe Bat, continue to fall in this area. Dani encouraged more YACWAG members to get involved in surveying when the programme re-starts in the spring.

Susan Oldaker is already booking up next season's speakers and can promise us some more very interesting talks in the autumn and winter.

Early Bird Walks on May Bank Holidays

On Monday 4th May at 7 am Trevor and Mark will lead a walk to listen to warblers and other birds along the Strawberry Line. The walk will begin at the mosaic seat near the top of Chescombe Road, Yatton (What3words heats.alike.striving). This is a chance to hear some of our resident birds as well as the summer visitors like reed and sedge warblers. The walk will take about two hours and can be followed by a breakfast in the Strawberry Line Cafe about 9 am.

On Monday 25th May beginning at 7 am from the old Congresbury station site on the Strawberry Line (What3words defended.door.chaos) Trevor and Peter Grainger will lead a similar walk heading south. For more information please contact birds@yacwag.org.uk.

BTO Greenspaces Project

YACWAG members are invited to take part in a BTO survey of local green spaces. It is not a requirement to be a BTO member, you just need a smart phone, and Trevor is happy to provide advice if you contact him via the email above. To find out more click [here](#).

Black Redstarts

Black Redstarts are rare breeding birds in the UK (estimated 85 pairs) and uncommon winter visitors. Their preferred nesting sites are in disused industrial premises - old gasworks used to be a favourite. Nuclear power stations also attract them and Black Redstarts have nested at Sizewell Nuclear Power Station in Suffolk for 60 years. Sizewell A is being decommissioned and to provide mitigation where building used for nesting were being demolished nest boxes were erected in 2023. Two pairs successfully nested in boxes. This is the first recorded use of nest boxes by this species in the UK.

This note draws on information published in British Birds journal, March 2026.



Black Redstart photo by Emily Lomas: Brean Down in March

New housing estates often attract Black Redstarts. Look out for them where bark is laid around new landscaping!

New Nest boxes for St Mary's Churchyard

An anonymous donor approached YACWAG wishing to purchase bird or bat boxes in memory of a loved one who enjoyed nature. YACWAG has provided nest boxes in Yatton churchyard for two decades and those provided for great tits and blue tits are always used by breeding birds. Trevor and Jon kindly arranged the purchase of four new long-lasting 'Woodcrete' boxes which were a timely replacement for old wooden boxes that had seen better days. The new boxes were put up in March and it is hoped the birds using them will bring joy to grieving visitors to the churchyard for many years.



Boxes designed for starlings but not used by them have been re-purposed by the clever addition of an aluminium plate to reduce the size of the nesting hole. YACWAG volunteer Jon Thobroe has adapted two of the Schwegler nest boxes to provide a safer 30 mm hole for tit species (to date the only residents found in a starling box).

Woodcrete boxes are guaranteed to last for 25 years and save the bird volunteer team a lot of work.

Volunteer Vacancy Board

YACWAG achieves a lot and is rightly proud of its success. However, there are no paid staff and the charity depends entirely on the hard work of its members to keep things ticking over. That includes the strategic thinking of Trustees, who make policy and decide how YACWAG can achieve its aims. It also includes the running of stalls, the making of posters, the writing of blogs, the maintenance of nest-boxes, the hiring of contractors, and as many other jobs as can be thought of! Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers for all you do! It is amazing!

These roles are vacant at the moment and it would be very good to welcome some new people on board the active team.

- * Trustee - at our AGM in the summer there will be a couple of vacancies on the executive committee. If you would be interested in helping steer the charity in this way, please get in touch. The committee meets just four times a year, with the main work being done in sub-committees.
- * Charity Secretary - the main focus for enquiries and liaison with the Charity Commission, this role would suit a young person wishing to develop their CV to include charity or business administration or someone older with interest in YACWAG and time to devote a few hours a week. There is lots of admin support from a strong team so the role is not as onerous as may be thought.
- * Practical Workparty Leader - there are volunteers who would like to help with practical tasks on YACWAG's reserves. At present we often pay contractors to do jobs that could be done by volunteers if we had someone to run work parties occasionally or regularly during the winter months. If you feel you have the skills to help please get in touch via contact@yacwag.org.uk.

Swift Action



*Swift photo courtesy of
Swift Conservation UK*

YACWAG is delighted to be working with the Eco Church Group at St Andrew's Church in Congresbury. Following a survey the church tower is known to be suitable for the installation of swift boxes. YACWAG is currently fundraising in order to share the cost of this project. If you can help in any way, please contact Meriel via contact@yacwag.org.uk.

YACWAGger Profile - Petrina Daws

Petrina has been helping YACWAG with administrative tasks for over a year, having confessed that she likes to get things organised. Petrina monitors the YACWAG emails coming in via contact@yacwag.org.uk and the online forms being sent through the website. She also maintains spreadsheets and information about YACWAG's trail cameras. Petrina is one of the new team of volunteers who have been trained in updating and maintaining the YACWAG website.



What brought you to Yatton?

I was born and brought up in Weston-super-Mare and know this area well but I went away and came back with my husband, looking for a home for our family. Towards the end of the search the estate agent recommended we visit a house newly on the market in Yatton. We immediately loved the location and countryside views and we have been here in Yatton over 30 years.

Do you have a special interest in nature?

My early interest was sparked by the Girl Guides and I learnt the names of flowers, birds and trees from the leader.

How did you get involved with YACWAG?

When YACWAG bought land near our house we wholeheartedly supported the preservation of land around the local area and have been members ever since. More recently, with our children having left home, I saw an appeal for volunteers to help the charity. I thought I could help with some admin in my own time as needed and am happy to do that.

What could YACWAG do better?

I have thoroughly enjoyed Tony and Faith's book *Encounters with Nature* and I think everybody should read it because it gives such a good understanding of what is behind YACWAG. Perhaps regular items on Facebook groups like Yatton Community might reach more people and draw them in to get involved. It's not just members that are needed but volunteers.

What will YACWAG be like in 50 years?

I hope people will still be involved in the land and YACWAG will be flourishing.

WhatsApp for YACWAG members

YACWAG has a YACWAG Community space on WhatsApp to make it easy for all members with smart phones to get involved in our groups and activities.

Although phone numbers aren't shared in the Announcements chat or across the YACWAG Community, once you join a group within the community your phone number can be visible to other members of that group. However, if you want to reduce how much personal information is shared you can adjust your WhatsApp privacy settings. In the interests of remaining a friendly group we do not allow anonymous posts so your name must be visible.

You don't have to be part of a WhatsApp group to take part in YACWAG activities and we can send you information directly instead. For example, if you are interested in insects but not wanting to join a WhatsApp group if you email contact@yacwag.org.uk we can make sure you hear about any events that might be relevant. What you will miss out on is the sharing of members' photos, sightings and enthusiastic chat about what insects are about and their interesting behaviour, for example.

There are six YACWAG WhatsApp groups so far. These are exclusively for YACWAG members to share information about local sightings and activities. Once you join the YACWAG Community you can then see the other groups and if you are interested, join them too. More may be added in the future!

- * Insects
- * Mammals
- * Amphibians and Reptiles
- * Hedgelaying
- * Birdwatching
- * Cobthorn Reserve Watering



If you would like to join the WhatsApp Community send your name and phone number to contact@yacwag.org.uk. Please also let us know if there are any groups you would like to add because of a special interest.

These WhatsApp groups are run for members' interest and comments made in them may not necessarily be accurate or YACWAG policy.