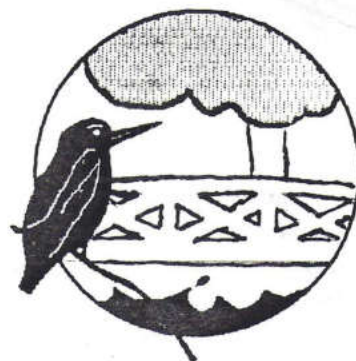


FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM



and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

EDITOR'S FORUM

*Holidays now over, in the main,
Parents are passing their children on
To the schools who will now bear the strain.
These are the signs that summer has gone;
It won't do any good to complain.*

No matter, folks, we can look forward to a varied and interesting programme that has been arranged by your Committee. Your support will be reward enough for their efforts.

In conveying thanks to all our contributors, and to Robin Sotheby for layout, may I add that any ideas or articles of general interest will be gratefully received for future issues.

SUMMER WALKS

The Summer Walks are now complete. The programme started in July with a **Botanical Walk** with Dr Mary Gillham, followed by an **Entomological Walk** reported elsewhere.

The August walk at **Taffs Well** was not led by the advertised leaders due to illness. The lead was ably taken by Dr Mary Gillham and Mr Clive Williams, who covered the Geology, Ecology and railway history of the area.

The final walk was a **Bat Walk** attended by only 4 members, but they were rewarded by sightings of Pipistrelle bats and probable sightings of Natterers, Whiskered and Daubentons bats. The Noctule and Long-eared bats, although resident on the Reserve, were not seen.

Chris James

ACCESS RAMP

As reported in the last Newsletter, work on the Ramp for **wheelchair access** at the southern end of the Reserve was going on apace. The most labour-intensive work was the building of the retaining wall (why did the stones appear to become heavier and heavier as the days went by!!!) In the end it was finished, and it looks good and well worth the effort. Earth and stone were brought from a dump outside the Warden Centre to form a base for the path, and volunteers from B.T.C.V. helped to spread it out evenly. Finally scalplings and stonedust - about 50 tons - were laid and rolled, the stonedust binding it all together to give the path a smooth firm surface. To conform with safety regulations the Leisure & Amenities Department have installed a handrail, a metre high, running the length of the wall.

The Ramp will be officially opened by the Rt Hon the Lord Mayor of Cardiff on **Tuesday, October 20th at 3.15 pm**. Your Committee appeal to all those free on that date to come along and show your support for this project undertaken by the **Friends** to improve the visitability of the Reserve.

E.O.Edwards

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

It was in the middle of June that the Committee heard via Cllr V.Riley and others that **Eurocast**, the factory at the southern entrance to the Reserve, had put in a planning application to be allowed to build 83 houses on the present factory site. This was further compounded by the news in August that the **High School Old Boys** had also applied for housing development status for approximately 1½ acres of the playing field adjoining the Eurocast site.

Two letters were composed, setting out our strongest objections to both applications; a 30-named petition was also presented, which gives us the right to address the Planning Committee for 3 minutes when the Eurocast application is discussed. We also have the support of Cllr V. Riley, and Cllrs N. Salmon and T. Fennessy have written in opposing the applications. The local RSPB group, the Cardiff Naturalists Society and the Glamorgan Wildlife have also indicated their opposition.

E.O.Edwards

TRUST AT A PREMIUM

Mike Wiley informs us that the **stuffed squirrel** which resided in the Warden's Centre at Forest Farm has been stolen. Unless, of course, it decided after many years to make a break for freedom! But seriously, this is a very mean action. Anyone who has heard of its whereabouts, please notify Mike.



BUTTERFLY GARDEN

The next date for work on the Butterfly Garden will be **Sunday 11th October** from **10 am - 12 am**. We shall be cutting back and clearing the spent vegetation.

MEMBERSHIP enquiries to **Ms Esther Jennings**,
5 Alfreda Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF4 2EH.
Tel: (0222) 625021

OUR FRIENDS OF THE NIGHT

Recently, as part of the City Council's guided walks programme, a walk was held on the Reserve, featuring our friends of the night, **THE BATS**. the walk was led by **Chris James** and myself.

The evening was fine and warm; the walk was due to start at 7.30 pm. At 7.15 around 50 people had turned up, and by the appointed time a crowd of over 100 had gathered. With more joining as the walk progressed, the final count was 120. Armed with our bat detectors we set off.

Britain is home to 15 species of bat, ranging from the very rare Greater Horseshoe (*Rhinolophus pipistrellus*) to the common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*). The bat is a nocturnal mammal, which hibernates during the Winter, in the order of *Chiroptera* - hand-winged. They hunt mostly at dusk and dawn, preying on insects. Although bats can see (the common saying, "as blind as a bat", being in fact a fallacy), they catch their prey using echo location. Bats emit ultrasounds - a continuous series of click-like noises, mostly inaudible to humans. These sounds bounce back from any object (even a tiny midge) in their flight path, enabling the bat to home in on its prey. Our bat detectors are finely-tuned instruments, which convert the ultrasounds into lower frequencies, enabling us to hear them.

Our first stop was on the Radyr footbridge over the River Taff at dusk. Our party was so large it almost spanned the bridge. Here we had glimpses of Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), which is a large bat with a wing-span of up to 16 inches. This is a high-flying bat which roosts in hollow trees during the day-time.

From there we made our way to the Glamorgan Canal, where we were hoping to detect, if not see the pipistrelles. By this time it was getting quite dark as our party snaked its way along the towpath. The pipistrelle - our smallest bat, weighing only half-an-ounce - will roost in tree cavities or houses, usually under a fascia board.

We were not disappointed; the pipistrelles were hunting low over the canal, and our detectors were picking up a lot of activity, even hearing the bats going in for a kill as the series of clicks hastened to a brrrrp. The sharp-eyed amongst us were occasionally able to pick out a bat in the light of a torch beam.

All of Britain's 15 species of bat are protected by law. It is now an offence even to disturb them, with a maximum penalty of £2000 per bat killed. During the last 50 years bat numbers in Britain have plummeted, the reasons being threefold:

1. Loss of habitat.
2. Insecticides (penetrating the food chain).
3. Treatment of loft timbers with lethal chemicals.

On the reserve we are doing our bit to stop this decline, with the introduction of bat boxes. Our Watch group/voluntary wardens have made and erected 20 boxes, with another 30 to be constructed during the **Woodland Fayre** due to be held on the Reserve this coming winter on November 22nd.

Our walk was over - judged a success, with everyone seeing and hearing bats - and noone falling into the canal!

Mike Wiley (Reserve Warden)

GARDEN BIRDWATCH

Whilst approaching Autumn may not be the best time of the year to begin recording species visiting the garden, it can be a good time to make plans and implement them.

To attract birds there must be a regular source of food, water, perching places, suitable trees and shrubs and a lawn, if space is available. Planning a garden from scratch may seem to be best, but this is not necessarily true. If you plan from scratch, it takes many years for plants to establish themselves and lawns to mature. If you already have an established garden, it may only mean reorganising to provide the right habitat for local birds to call into your garden.

In order to view the visitors, the feeding stations should be close to windows, and that includes ground feeders. Safety for the birds is essential whilst feeding, drinking

and bathing. (Make it difficult for local cats to hide and pounce).

So, if you have an inviting garden, what should you see? Here it depends on the area around where you live. There is no garden that will not attract birds; all one has to do is tempt them.

At this time of year breeding is nearly over and there are many birds new to the area who may become residents - House Sparrows, Starling, Robin, Blackbird, Wren, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Collared Dove - that's 10 for a start! With encouragement that figure could be increased to 15 to 20 species this winter. Why not give it a try? Keep a weekly or monthly record to start with, and see how you progress.

R.J.Williams

INSECT HUNT

with Dr Mark Jervis - 22nd July 1992

The evening was warm and sultry, just right for the winged hosts - none of which, fortunately, fed on humans. Sunshine highlighted the hogweed flowers alongside the Melingriffith Feeder; and it was from here that we started, vying with each other to catch the greatest number of unsuspecting sun lovers and pop them into glass tubes for viewing.

Bright seven-spot ladybirds (*Adalia septem-punctata*) and their blue and orange larvae were tucking into a supper of aphids, while pill-sized black beetles with downy wing cases minded their own business among narrow-bodied thrips. Randy soldier beetles (*Rhagoletia fulva*) were copulating with their usual abandon, the sex-besotted males riding pick-a-back on the larger females as these prowled around on the lookout for unwary prey insects, unimpressed and unperturbed by their burden.

Caddis flies, newly emerged from the feeder, sunned themselves, more static than the restless grass moths which they rather resembled, though having jaws instead of coiled suction tubes for feeding and hairs instead of scales as wing covering.

Hover flies came in various patterns, all warningly covered, aping wasps. The hairy drone flies (*Eristalis tenax*) resembled drone bees but had emerged from rat-tailed maggots, which can live in stagnant water devoid of oxygen, elevating long breathing tubes above the surface. They hung motionless, as on invisible threads, then darted sideways quicker than the eye could follow, carrying bumble bees at the flowers and deflecting them from the all-important business of pollination.

Some brave soul caught a yellow-jacket wasp (*Vespa vulgaris*) - soon to change from meat eating to jam guzzling. Feeding scraps of prey insects to their grubs all summer, the worker wasps are rewarded with a sweet liquid supplied by their charges. When these have all grown up in Autumn, they feel deprived and turn to humans for their sweets.

Our guest tutor, Dr John Charles of New Zealand, was moved to recount some horror stories of *Vespa*'s conquest of the Antipodes. At Auckland in the north, winters are warm and colonies do not die off as here, leaving only the fertilised queen to overwinter, but thrive and multiply, their complex paper nests reaching 9 to 10 feet high! In the *Nothofagus* beech forests of the south they prey on scale insects, which produce sweet honeydew utilised by nectar-feeding birds, so the birds suffer.

Nettles, attacked with a sweep net, yielded some of the little parasitic wasps that cropped up everywhere, leaf-hoppers that sucked the leaf cells dry, leaving the green patched with white, and broadly flattened green shield bugs (*Palomena prasina*), which emitted an off-putting smell from their temporary glass prisons. Plant bugs (*Eupteryx aurata*), though feeding on nettles, strayed into the trees above, but the webful of infant small tortoiseshell caterpillars had a lot of feeding to do before they were ready to stray.

Alder branches, beaten with a stick to dislodge surprised insect fauna into the catching tray below, yielded less than oak but more than elder. Disorientated on the white cotton spread were Mirid bugs, Psyllid bugs and Capsid bugs. Anthocorid flower bugs resembled bed bugs, and bite if they get into a fold of human skin. Alder sawflies, primitive Hymenopterans lacking the wasp waist, sported each a saw-edged 'machete' at their nether end, and the alder leaves were pocked with pimple and pouch galls produced by the mites, *Eriophyes laevis-inangulis* and *E. brevitarisus*.

The beating of oak branches caused general pandemonium among the displaced population. Startled caterpillars, escaping the main assault, let themselves down on silken threads - to eat their way back up again when the danger passed and continue their interrupted meal. Loper caterpillars let go their tail hold and headed off across the tray, past jumping plant lice, static bark lice and a stray mayfly from the feeder. The inevitable leaf-hoppers here are related to cicadas, and 'sing' - a feeble little song inaudible to human ears. Some lunatic in the Cardiff Zoology Department, who shall remain nameless, spends his leisure hours fixing record styluses to leaves which they they inhabit, and slowing the recorded song down to indulge his musical bent.

Wesmylus lacewings were inspected, both the adults with tent-like wings prettily blotched in buff and the lengthy larvae with big, prey-grabbing mandibles at the front and an abdomen that waggled all ways as they moved. Only the click beetle or skip jack failed to perform. In vain did our tutor turn it on its back as he explained the peg mechanism that enabled it to jump into the air to right itself. "He'll play possum and then leap." This one just played possum.

(continued on page 4)



Almost every leaf on some of the oaks was covered with raised silk-button galls produced by the gall wasp (*Neuroterus numismalis*), and more substantial than the usually common red spangle galls. One knopper gall, caused by *Andricus quercuscalicis*, was found deforming an acorn cup. The first record of these in Britain when the invasion started in the late 1960s was made by a member of the Cardiff Zoology Department.

We looked in vain for 'long-horned' oak and bush crickets (*Meconema thalassinum*), usually common here at this time of year, but the two youngsters in the group proved adept at catching 'short-horned' grasshoppers on the hop. We learned how to distinguish meadow grasshoppers (*Chortippus parallelus*) from field grasshoppers (*C. brunneus*), but only from the captured adults - the youthful hopper stages being indistinguishable.

These were in their element among the flea beetles of the flower meadow by the new ponds, where warden Mike Wiley had counted 242 common spotted orchids this year. Of the 12, possibly 13, dragon and damselflies recorded here this year, only a drab female blue-tailed damsel (*Ishnura elegans*) revealed itself, clamped firmly to a stem, the day's aerial hunt at an end. A solitary meadow brown butterfly indulged in desultory flight, but not a single tiger-striped cinnabar moth caterpillar (*Hypocrita jacobaea*) materialised on the great spread of golden ragwort.

Dusk was fast approaching and we left the watery world of the ponds for another time - but not before our list of species had topped 40 - this without the spiders, woodlice, snails, and other non-insects. Our thanks go to Mark and Charles for an evening with a difference.

Mary E. Gillham

WOODLAND FAIR at FOREST FARM

Sunday 22nd November

The City Council's Leisure and Amenties Department are proposing to hold a new event at Forest Farm this Autumn. The Woodland Fair will take place over a wide area, and will include demonstrations in traditional woodland skills such as Hedge Laying, Coppicing, Hedge Planting, Tree Pruning, etc.

There will also be a variety of craftsmen demonstrating their skills at the event and selling craft items there, such as Walking Sticks, Lovespoons, Wood Carvings and Traditional Furniture.

The event has been supported by Amersham International, British Telecom and Coed Cymru. Many organisations will be represented, including the Caerphilly Mountain Countryside Service, who plan to run a woodland bus in and around all the activities taking place. Also represented is the Forest of Cardiff, who will be involving volunteers in a tree-planting project on British Telecom land.

For those who enjoyed the Country Craft Fair in July - this is a must for your Autumn days outings!

Chris Powell

THE CALL OF WINTER

AS WINTER COMES UPON US SOON
THE RESERVE WILL SEE A WATERY MOON;
SLIM BOUGHS, LEAF STRIPPED, SALUTE THE SKY
WHILE FLOCKS TO PASTURES NEW WILL FLY.
WHEN IMAGES OF SEASON GROW,
ENHANCED BY WIND AND RAIN AND SNOW,
THE SUBTLE HUES WILL NEVER PALL
TO YOUNG AND OLD WHO HEED THE CALL.

K.P.

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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.