



Friends

of FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
and GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE
Issue No: 117 September 2020

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Chris James

For newer members who will not know him, this is Chris James, the man who came up with the idea for a Friends group for Forest Farm back in 1990.

In recognition of this and as a token of our thanks for all his many years helping the Friends of Forest Farm, Chris was recently presented with a photobook containing old and new photographs of the Reserve. Some familiar faces were included!

The Committee wanted to formally acknowledge Chris' much valued contribution as Voluntary Warden, leader of many walks and for readily sharing his vast knowledge. He was also a long-standing member of the committee.

We are delighted to say that he is very pleased with the photobook and it brings back a lot of happy memories for him. We wish Chris well for the future.

Sheila Austin

Chris enjoying his Forest Farm photobook.



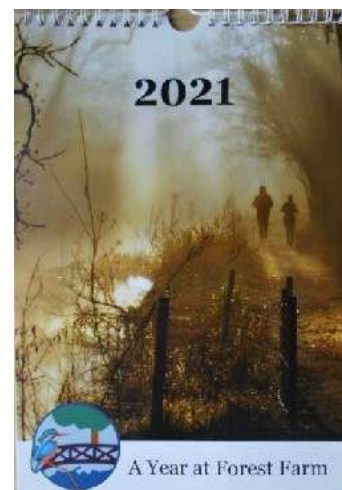
An earlier photo of Chris checking a field mouse (for which he had the necessary authorisation).

A Year at Forest Farm

Our Calendar for 2021

In this Covid year, so many plans to celebrate our 30th Anniversary have come to naught. However, the photographic competition went ahead and here is the promised calendar.

For details on how to order, and more pictures, see pp 6/7.



Update on the proposed new Velindre Cancer Centre

At the beginning of August, Velindre University NHS Trust released two reports commissioned from Mott MacDonald — a "Green Infrastructure Management Strategy" and an "Initial Construction Environmental Management Plan".

Both reports are available on the Cardiff Council Planning Portal — <https://planningonline.cardiff.gov.uk> — filed under application references 20/01481/MJR and 20/01515/MJR respectively.

The two documents are long (97 pages and 42 pages) and detailed.

At the time of writing, members of the committee are reading them carefully, with a view to submitting our comments and concerns to Cardiff Council by the very short deadline of 26 August.

Continued on P4

Hello Friends,

Considering the severe dip in activity over the last 3 months, where has the time gone? I hope all of you have kept well and able to enjoy as much of the 'free' time we have had as possible.

*You will see this edition is shorter than usual - but it is in colour! With all the usual activities stopped, material for this edition has reduced. So I am particularly grateful to **Charis White** both for the lovely article (P5) and her photographs.. I am always delighted to receive articles from our members and visitors to the Reserve.*

I felt it was fitting to publicise Chris James' long and valued contribution to the Friends of Forest Farm - especially as he was the instigator of our Friends group.

*I've included the first Wardens' report (P3) from **Mike Wiley**, almost exactly 30 years ago - I hope you enjoy it. **Martin**, our Secretary has also submitted an interesting article about a former lock keeper (p6). And, I know it's early to mention what follows that celebration in December, but information is included about our **2021 Calendar** with photos and details of how to order etc. (pp6/7). Only £5; sales will raise money for our funds.*

Last but not least, you don't need me to tell you that the latest weighty planning documents from Velindre were published earlier this month - responses required by 26th August and will be in the public domain. As always, these need careful scrutiny which your Committee is doing.

I wonder if we will be approaching anything like 'normal' for the December edition?

Best wishes - stay safe.

Sheila Austin

Volunteering sessions

Sadly, our regular volunteering sessions, usually held on the second Sunday of each month, are still suspended because of Covid-19. But as soon as we get the ok from Cardiff Council (since the events are held on their land) we'll start them up again.

The health and safety of our volunteers is paramount, of course. So, whilst Covid-19 remains a threat, we may have to run the sessions somewhat differently, to minimise any risk. As soon as we have any more news about this, we'll publicise it.

Jon Wallis.

Membership ...

... is now at 363, an increase on last time. Even with the lockdown, we have had 22 new members join via Paypal. So, a very warm welcome to you! Many thanks to them and all our members for their support of the Friends.

We do hope to see you when we are allowed to hold any events again.

Pauline Fisher
Membership Secretary

30th Anniversary Booklet

Covid 19 has prevented all our special events planned to celebrate this year to be cancelled. However, we are still intent on producing a booklet to cover our 30 years.

If there is anything you would like to contribute, a memory, an article or maybe a photograph - you still can. Contact me. Ed

See back page for contact details

Deadline for articles for next newsletter - 10th November 2020

See back page for contact details

Contents	Page	Contents	Page
Reserve report - from July 1990!	3	Forest Lock - Keeper's Grave	6
Update on Cancer centre cont'd	4	Friends' calendar	6
Forest Farm Giant/No litter after lockdown (KWT campaign)	4	Calendar winning photos	7
A June visit to the Reserve	5	AGM/Vandalism/New bird Hide	11

Reserve Report from July 1990!!

SPRING BIRDS

It has been a good season for birds on the nature reserve. I think that Spring is the best time to watch birds, just before the leaves fully open upon the trees.

I've had sightings of Buzzard, Peregrine, Cuckoo, plus all the usual warblers. Around the middle of March, a Kingfisher was found on the towpath with a broken wing. I was told that it subsequently died. I thought at the time that this might affect the population, as breeding was about to commence. A few weeks later, in about mid April, I discovered a pair nesting on the banks of the River Taff, near the Reserve.



Photographer: Colin Harvey

It was obvious that they were feeding young, as both parents were to be seen flying up and down the river carrying small fish. On leaving the nest, the parents will be seen to dip several times in the river, not fishing, but to wash themselves, as their nests are extremely dirty places. A few weeks later, both parents were seen, plus three young flying together.

The Kingfisher is double brooded (it rears young twice in the same year), and sometimes it uses the same nest to rear the second brood, so I'll have to keep an eye on the nest site. Some people still attempt to collect birds' eggs, so it is fortunate that the nest site is inaccessible.

For me, one of the best things about birdwatching is that you never know what you might see. An example of this is the Greylag goose I recently saw on the river; whether or not this was a truly wild bird, or feral (semi-wild) I do not know.

There was also a female Mallard with 15 young, swimming on the river. Although 15 may seem a large number, because of predation by Gulls, Mink, Rats and even Pike (they get attacked from below as well as above), the parent will be lucky if it ends up with half of them.

Another day, I noticed that all the Tits around the farm were calling, and seemed very agitated. On looking up I saw a Sparrowhawk circling overhead. A few of the braver Tits were even going up and trying to mob him.

The nature reserve, with its many different and varied habitats, is a particularly good place for bird watching, and over the years, more than 90 different species have been recorded.

Our WATCH club (the local group of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation for children between 8 and 14) has helped the breeding population by providing 30 nest boxes. They constructed and erected these themselves - at the last count 21 were occupied.

Let's hope we have a nice summer...

Mike Wiley
Reserve Warden



Sparrowhawk photo taken 2006
- photographer not known.

From newsletter no 2.

A cuckoo - how long is it since we have heard one of those locally? Also - 90 species of birds. Amazing. Ed.

Update on the proposed new Velindre Cancer Centre

(continued from front page)

The Committee was, however, deeply disappointed by certain factual inaccuracies and misleading statements in the "Green Infrastructure Management Strategy", which sadly led to some regrettable insinuations being made on social media, regarding the Committee's motives.

Suffice to say that the Committee has not been involved in any discussions relating to any financial contribution aimed at reducing the impact of the development on the local community (also known as a Section 106 agreement) that Velindre University NHS Trust may make. And in any case, the Friends of Forest Farm would not receive any money as a result of any such contribution.

As ever, we welcome comments from our members regarding the construction of the proposed new Velindre Cancer Centre.

Comments can be sent via the 'contact' form on our website — <http://forestfarm.org.uk/contact/> — or by using 'send message' on our Facebook page — <http://www.facebook.com/forestfarmuk/> — or by letter to The Secretary, Friends of Forest Farm 62 Tyn y Pwll Rd, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1AT.

The Forest Farm Giant



Blue tits - early May 2020

Bees- end of June 2020

(The easing of lockdown has made litter national news after dreadful pictures of discarded rubbish on beaches and in beauty spots. I know I am 'preaching to the converted' with our members but this is a very timely and relevant reminder from Keep Wales Today which we can share. Ed)

"No Litter after Lockdown". A message Chief Executive Lesley Jones.

"Caring for our environment is not the sole responsibility of local authorities. We all need to pull together. It is not good enough to expect somebody else to pick up the rubbish that you create."
"I am asking each and every one of you that loves our beautiful country to take responsibility. Take your rubbish home and dispose of it in your own bins. Ask everybody that you know to do the same. Share the message across your social media. This one simple change will make a big difference."

<http://keepwalestidy.cymru/news/no-litter-after-lockdown>

A visit to Forest Farm Reserve in June 2020 – Charis White

I must admit that I have not appreciated Forest Farm enough, and there is still a lot of it for me to explore or spend more time; retirement, coinciding with covid-19, is changing all that. A visit in late June reminded me what an extraordinary place it is. I spent most of my three hours there that day just around the canal! It must surely be one of the most varied habitats in a Reserve anywhere – with ponds, stretches of canal, moving water, meadows, woodland and marshy areas, to name but a few.

No wonder, the place is just rammed with wildlife and plants, all thriving in their chosen environments and all apparently successful in their place in the ecosystem. It was one of those hot days we had in late June and my mission at the time, in terms of my photography, was to take pictures of dragonflies and damselflies, particularly demoiselles. I had found a good spot elsewhere to see Beautiful Demoiselles locally and finally nailed (!) some so I consulted Pauline, a Forest Farm committee member, about the possibilities of Banded Demoiselles at the Reserve and Pauline knew where I could look.

My first thought, when I got to the canal, was just how many damselflies

were around, mostly blue ones of various types, and it was alive with them. Almost immediately I spotted a couple of Banded Demoiselles and although they were across the canal and sunning themselves on the leaves of the trees above, it was a thrill to know that they were there. During my walk along the towpath, I saw large dragonflies hunting and defending their stretch of the canal as well as a variety of damselflies and demoiselles, butterflies and other insects, some of which were forming lunch for the creatures I had come to see!

The canal is a beautiful place with clear serene stretches of water sometimes covered in yellow water lilies. Where the ducks cruised through them, they appeared to be sitting on glass – but with their legs and feet underneath! There were reed beds for the dragonflies to land on and the ducklings and moorhen chicks to hide. Where trees have fallen into the canal, there they remain, creating another whole new environment for the fish to hide and ducks to sunbathe.



Golden-ringed dragonfly.
Not mentioned in Charis' report,
but she saw it at the lock.



Banded Demoiselle -
eating Mayfly

There were plenty of visitors (and some big camera lenses!) and I think that one of the most noticeable things about the whole Reserve is just how close we can all get to the wildlife. The flowers and the insects are right there and can really be studied, and many of the birds are also tolerant of people. I watched a moorhen building up her nest, ripping up lily leaves and running across the lily pads with sticks in her beak, looking like some fancy tropical bird we see in wildlife programmes from around the world.

I think that this proximity to the wildlife, combined with the easy physical access to the Reserve, is what makes it so popular. People kept telling me how lucky we are to have it available to us, especially during lock-down when we couldn't go far. Senior citizens were enjoying the ease of the good, flat footpaths and there were also plenty of young families out. All around me were conversations about the wildlife and the environment, and I heard four fascinated children discussing an ant trying to move a caterpillar beside the path. Something about all this made me wonder if these will be the scientists of tomorrow – or at the very least, people who will care about their environment and wildlife generally. Maybe the beautiful things which exist in Forest Farm will help to make a beautiful future.



(All photos by Charis White)

(Sincere thanks to Charis for this evocative report. Ed)

Forest Lock - Grave of a Lock Keeper



With volunteering at Forest Farm suspended, I answered a call from St Mary's church Whitchurch asking for help from people with a strimmer.

The churchyard had not been cut since the start of lockdown and the grass was very high in some places. (The church is also looking into developing a more environmentally managed churchyard.)

After the cutting, I discovered a gravestone for John and Mary Thomas. John Thomas was the lock keeper at Forest Lock and died in 1902 aged 88, four months after his wife Mary.

Martin Chamberlain

(I wanted to include the whole photograph as I think it is quite a beautiful and elaborate gravestone. Unfortunately, the inscription does not show up all that well and some of it is worn, but the text about the people buried there reads:

"In loving memory of Mary, the beloved wife of John Thomas who died Oct 16th 1901 aged 77 years. Also of the above John Thomas, late of Forrest Lock, who died Feb 10th(?) 1902 aged 88 years."

I wonder if there are any relatives locally out there? Ed.)

**** Forest Farm Calendar 2021 ****

Now available. Only £5.

To order these quality wall calendars contact:

John Harding: mob. 07977 881757

Sheila Austin: contact details on back page

OR

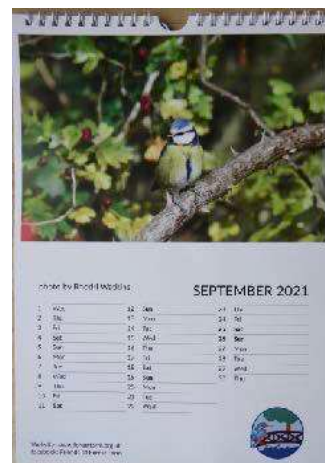
<https://forestfarm.org.uk/calendar-2021/>

Payment: Cheque, cash or via Paypal (no account needed)

Postage available: example costs: 1 copy £1.40, 4-8 copies £2.95.

Dates/times will be arranged when calendars can be collected from Forest Farm (restrictions permitting)

See the above website for more details about payment and postage.



Sample page

The competition brought some outstanding results. 42 people entered the competition with 225 entries in all. 12 winning photographs were selected for the calendar. Also, 18 photographs were highly commended by our judge, Alec Stewart, Community Park Ranger who is based at Forest Farm. Alec is an accomplished photographer and veteran of many photography competitions. All 30 photographs, including Alec's comments on why he chose the winners, are on our website.

Winning photographs

*from the competition
for the*

2021 Forest Farm Calendar

These are not in month order.

Names of the winners are: Ade Ward – Canal; Andre Van De Sande – Fungi and Long-Tailed Tit; Anthony Matthews – Woodpecker and Fox; Stephen Turner – Heron and Robin; Gabi Simon – Rabbits; Nick Dallimore – Snake; Frank Sengpiel – Dragonfly; Cliff Woodhead – Poppy; Rhodri Watkins – Blue Tit.



Annual General Meeting

It is a requirement of our constitution that we hold the AGM within 4 months of the end of our financial year.

We had prepared for the AGM as usual in April and the minutes of the previous AGM and agenda were published.

However, due to the pandemic, this had to be cancelled. At present, and for the foreseeable future, we will not be able to hold a 'normal' meeting for our members.

Hopefully, matters will improve and we will be able to hold a combined AGM in April 2021. If matters do change in the mean time, we will review this.

Our accounts however for 2019 have been audited. If you do require a copy please email:

treasurer@forestfarm.org.uk

or send an sae to: Mr P Baker,
9 Branshill Drive,
Pontprennau,
Cardiff. CF23 8NX

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary

Progress on the New Bird Hide.

In early June, with the weather on their side and the Reserve having a 'quiet visitor day', the Rangers took the opportunity to make a start on preparing the ground for the new bird hide. At the time



of 'going to press' there is not a date or time frame for delivery.

And talking of bird hides, our Facebook page recently sent out a plea to visitors to please be considerate when using the one remaining wetland bird hide. Lockdown, with the inevitable social distancing has meant fewer people can use the hide at any one time, so spaces are in great demand. So please, limit your stay so as many people as possible can use it. Hopefully it won't be too long till the new one arrives. Thanks.

Sheila Austin (plagiarised from our Facebook!)

Sadly, more vandalism at Forest Farm.



Our facebook page on 28th July reported that both the Wardens' Centre and farmhouse office buildings at Forest Farm had been vandalised overnight.



These pictures from the Ranger service show some of the damage and the comment that "Forest Farm, like all areas. has been targeted by large groups of youths lately with damage

to fencing, the polytunnel destroyed and last night thousands of pounds worth of damage. CCTV footage is now being looked at."

If you should see or hear something suspicious, call 101.

Or

If you believe a crime is in progress and there is likely to be:

- danger to life
- use, or immediate threat of use, of violence
- serious injury to a person and/or
- serious damage to property

Ring 999

Published on behalf of The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve by
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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.

Printed by Hodge Printers Ltd. 97 Broadway, Roath, Cardiff CF24 1QE