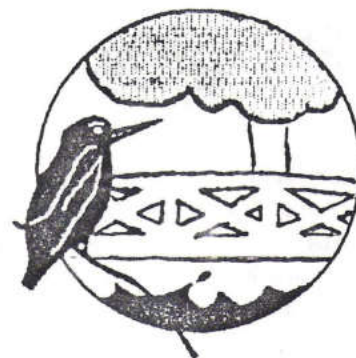


# FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM



## and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

### EDITOR'S FORUM

It is with much pride that the **Friends Executive Committee** can look back over the past 12 months and survey the progress made in the area achieving **Country Park** status. Another goal was the **Reserve Ramp**, topped off by the opening ceremony attended by the Lord Mayor of Cardiff - the result of many hours hard work but much enthusiasm. Full reports of both events are included in this issue. Further plans for our Country Park proceed apace, which you will hear about in due course. Many thanks to Robin Sotheby and Neil Salmon as always, and to all contributors for their efforts. On behalf of the Executive Committee, I wish you all a Happy Christmas and New Year.

### "WELL DONE!" SAYS LORD MAYOR

On the 5th of November, the Lord Mayor, Cllr **Derek Allinson**, accompanied by the Lady Mayoress, formerly opened the **Ramp** at the Melingriffith entrance to the Reserve. He praised the 'Friends' for their initiative, their effort and the manner in which they had worked with the Leisure Services Dept to make it easier for people in wheelchairs and parents with push-chairs to visit the Reserve.

Cllr **Ron Longworth**, Chair of the City's Leisure & Amenities Committee, spoke of his Committee's desire to make it possible for all members of the community to visit the Reserve; he thanked the 'Friends' for their work and continuing support. Building the ramp, he said, became possible only with the financial help of **Environment Wales**, the **Frazer Trust** and the **Lord Mayor's Fund** and the voluntary work of the 'Friends' and BTCV.

Chairman **Ted Edwards** had organised a 'before-during-after' photo display and was dashing about with his camera during the opening. **Dennis Davies** deputised for the Chairman in welcoming the Lord Mayor, and thanking him for his attendance. Despite the rain, **Mike Wiley** managed to provide a welcome cup of tea from the back of his pick-up.

The real joy of the occasion was when two people in wheel chairs tried out the ramp and gave it the 'thumbs up'.

**Dennis Davies**

### BIRD FEEDING STATION

The success of the nest box project - 400 Blue & Great Tit chicks counted - alerted us to the fact that the birds would need support to survive the Winter. A Bird Feeding Station has been erected alongside the Butterfly Garden, and it will be very interesting to see what birds make use of it during the Winter months, and whether the vandals will leave it alone. If successful, a more permanent station will be considered.

**E.O. Edwards**

### FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK DESIGNATION!

After a wait of nearly 3 years the City Council finally received confirmation from the **Countryside Council for Wales** that the area would be designated as a Country Park.

The Park will include an area covering Forest Farm, the Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve, Tongwynlais Recreation Ground, Hailey Park Extension and the Cardiff High School Old Boys Recreation Area. It is hoped that the 150 acres described above will eventually be enlarged to incorporate vacant neighbouring land subject to discussion with adjacent landowners.

The improved status for the area will hopefully encourage a more sensitive approach to development of the surrounding areas and through improved access to grant aid will encourage appropriate development in the Valley. The priorities are:

1. Improved access from the North with better car parking.
2. Better facilities at Forest Farm.
3. Improved wardening.

The Friends are also seeking to encourage better access into the Valley, particularly for disabled visitors.

It is intended that whatever scheme is proposed, it will be discussed fully with the local community and voluntary organisations. The Friends of Forest Farm are actively involved in the discussion.

**Chris Powell**

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## DRAGONFLIES

Dragonflies and damselflies derive from ancient orders of insects and have been on earth for around 300 million years, predating man by almost the same amount of time. They are often spectacular insects and have captivated man's imagination; they have been depicted in works of art from earliest times.

Names such as 'horse stingers' and 'devil's darning needles' suggest that these often brightly coloured insects are harmful - they neither sting nor have a harmful bite.

The difference between damselflies and dragonflies is in the way their wings are held at rest. Dragonfly wings are held at right angles to their bodies, whereas damselflies fold their wings rooflike above and parallel to their bodies.

Most damselflies and some dragonflies insert their eggs into aquatic plant tissue. Others deposit them at the water surface or onto plants. The eggs soon develop after laying and hatch into larvæ in about two weeks. Sometimes, however, autumn-laid eggs will not complete development until the following spring. The larva is exclusively an aquatic organism feeding on a wide range of aquatic animals. Larger larvæ prey on the tadpoles of frogs, toads and newts. They are voracious feeders under favorable conditions, and complete their development in one or two years with approximately ten moults.

On completion of development the larva emerges from the water, usually on a warm sunny day, to climb the stem of a piece of emergent vegetation. Shortly after leaving the water the larva skin splits, and the adult emerges to harden its skin and expand its wings in the sunlight. It is during this stage that the adults are most vulnerable, falling prey to frogs, spiders, other dragonflies and birds. The life of an adult is usually measured in weeks, enough time to mate and lay eggs.

The adult has a highly developed sight and mastery of flight, which enables it to be a very effective hunter of other insects. The compound eyes are large, and more than 80% of the brain is devoted to analysis of visual information. The large eyes permit almost 'all-round' vision. Small damselflies are capable in flight of picking small aphids from vegetation, and larger dragonflies take larger prey on the wing at high speed.

The UK has 39 breeding species - some arctic species at the southern edge of their range in Scotland, and some southern species at the northern edge of their range in southern England. Several species have become extinct in Britain this century through pollution and loss of habitat. Although the abundance of dragonflies in Britain has dramatically decreased this century through drainage schemes, building, insecticides and pollution, creation of wetlands and insecticide-free areas have locally reversed the national trend. The Glamorgan Canal L.N.R. is an area where dragonflies are benefiting from positive habitat management. As dragonflies are top insect predators, they are susceptible to the effects of pollution. Their presence in an area can be regarded as a measure of the health of that area.

During the Spring and Summer of 1992 I recorded information on the appearance, breeding status and abundance of species at the Glamorgan Canal L.N.R. (see table I). The collected data provides a comparison with previous studies reported in the Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists Society of 1969 and 1974. The results are encouraging and show that since 1967 there has been an increase in the number of species recorded. Dr Gilham's list of 4 species in 1969 was augmented by another 4 by the former Reserve Warden, Mr R.A. Henderson. My own 1992 survey of 13 species adds 8 new species, bringing the total recorded species to 16. This result shows that this is a very important site in South Wales, and is probably of national significance since the rare hairy dragonfly *Brachytron pratense* breeds. The hairy dragonfly is a species considered nationally vulnerable since its breeding sites are restricted. Slow-moving bodies of water with areas of floating dead vegetation provide breeding areas for this early dragonfly. The adults frequently feed in woods quite far away from water but come to the water to lay their eggs in April. The hairy covering of their body is believed to provide insulation against cold weather that can occur in March and April.

During the summer, visitors to the canal will see thousands of damselflies feeding and breeding in the vicinity of the water. Most striking is the beautiful demoiselle *Calopteryx vergo*, with its almost butterfly-like flight and metallic dark blue wings. The most abundant species is the azure damselfly *Coenagrion puella*. This is seen at the same time as the large red damselfly *Pyrrosoma nymphula* and the blue-tailed damselfly *Ishnura elegans*.

The larger and more spectacular dragonflies are represented by the broad-bodies chaser *Libellula depressa*, often seen darting from waterside perches to catch prey or to chase away competitors. The male of this species has a



powder blue body which is short and stumpy. One of our largest dragonflies, the emperor *Anax imperator* with its long blue body with black markings and a wingspan of around 11 cm, flies along hedgerows and above the canal hunting food. It can often be seen laying eggs on submerged vegetation, and will engage in spectacular aerial battles with members of its own species.

In late summer the last of the larger dragonflies, their battered wings damaged in attacks by predators and conflicts with others of their own species, are replaced by the smaller common darter *Sympetrum striolatum*, a reddish bodied insect with 5 cm wingspan. This small dragonfly likes to rest on light patches of ground and can be tempted to pitch on a white handkerchief spread on the towpath.

This summary is intended to encourage people to look a little more closely when they see their next dragonfly. Records of breeding and sightings are welcomed, and can be passed either to the Warden, Mr Mike Wiley or to myself.

Chris James

#### REFERENCES.

1. **Dr Mary Gilham.** 'A New Nature Reserve: Glamorganshire Canal between Tongwynlais and Whitchurch and the adjacent Long Wood'. Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists Society Vol XCIV 1969.
2. **Robert A Henderson.** 'Glamorganshire Canal Nature Reserve: Additional information, 19971-72'. Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists Society Vol XCVI 1974.

TABLE I

Species recorded in 1992

Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>
Beatiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>
Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>
Blue Tailed Damselfly	<i>Ishnura elegans</i>
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>
Hairy Dragonfly	<i>Brachytron pratense</i>
Common Hawker	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Golden-ringed Dragonfly	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>

#### GARDEN BIRDWATCH

Were you able to carry out my suggestions in the last issue? If not, as long as you have a garden and can establish regular feeding areas and food and water, you should now be ready for what can be the most interesting time of the year for garden birdwatching.

If birds cannot get the food they require they migrate locally to look for it. If you tempt them regularly with a supply of suitable food, they will stay in your area. The only other problem, then, is the weather.

Should it turn cold, the birds will migrate south and west to the milder climates. This could increase the number of birds in your area searching for food, and may bring in **Redwing** and **Fieldfare**, followed later by **Siskin** and **Brambling**. **Meadow Pipits** and **Reed Buntings** may also follow. This is the time when you have to look out for the surprise visitor, usually when the temperature drops to 0°C or lower for a few days in January or February.

R.J.WILLIAMS

#### EUROCAST WORKS MELLINGRIFITH

##### Outline Application for Residential Use

The Planning & Development Committee met on 13th October and, because the 'Friends' had presented a petition with more than 50 names opposing the application, I as a representative of the 'Friends' was allowed to address the committee for 3 minutes. The planning officers on the committee stated the case and appeared to favour the application, but some of the points I had emphasised were taken up by committee members; this led to the Chair suggesting a site meeting, and this was agreed to.

The site meeting took place on 3rd November, when representatives from Eurocast met the committee, myself, Mrs Sutherland from the Cardiff Naturalists and occupants of the New Cottages. Eurocast indicated that they wanted to relocate within the city because the present site was unsuitable for their development plans. They needed the money from the sale of the present site to enable them to do this. They were asked if they had seen the 'Friends' proposals and said that they had; the committee indicated that they firmly supported those proposals. It was pointed out that the number of houses envisaged would be nearer to 50 rather than the 80 Eurocast had suggested.

The Planning Committee met on 10th November and granted Eurocast outline planning permission, but with quite stringent conditions, including all those put forward by the 'Friends'.

The application for residential development on the High School Old Boys Sports Field was speedily rejected.

E.O.Edwards





## WOODLAND FAYRE

November 22nd 1992

It may have been Annus horribilis for some - for others at Forest Farm it has proved to be Autumnus aquaticus. The date of Woodland Fayre proved that once again the word 'Fair' or 'Fayre' has become synonymous with 'deluge'. True, this year's Country Craft Fair in June proved an exception, so one shouldn't grumble.

The Woodland Fayre, the first to be held at Forest Farm, proved a hit with the hardy stalwarts who attended, and there were a goodly number of visitors to the show, despite the weather.

The Fayre was organised by the City Council Leisure & Amenities in conjunction with Coed Cymru, an organisation set up to encourage the promotion and management of Welsh woodlands.

The event featured many organisations concerned with the care and management of woodland: BTCV, Forest of Cardiff, World Wild Life Fund for Nature, Cardiff Naturalist Society, Cardiff Conservation Volunteers, Caerphilly Mountain Countryside Service, Forest farm Watch Group and, of course, the Friends of Forest Farm.

Demonstrations were provided in Wood Sculpture, Hedge Laying, Tree Planting, Wood Turning, Basket Making, Hurdle Making, Woodland Thinning, Fencing, Paper Making, Tree Surgery.

The event was sponsored by B.T. and Amersham International.

Chris Powell

### WINTER and SPRING TALKS

All to be held at

**BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH HALL PENLLINE ROAD WHITCHURCH**

WEDNESDAY 27TH JANUARY 1993 AT 7.30 PM

**"POLLUTION AND WILDLIFE"**

DR STEVE ORMEROD

WEDNESDAY 17TH MARCH 1993 AT 7.30 PM

**"ASPECTS OF OLD WHITCHURCH"**

MISS HILARY THOMAS

WEDNESDAY 21ST APRIL 1993 AT 7.30 PM

**"PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: CARDIFF'S ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY"**

MR BRET WILLERS

Further information from **MR CHRIS JAMES (0222 611342)**

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