



# *Friends of Forest Farm*

## WINTER 2022/2023

## 126

A Happy New Year to you all. It is wonderful to anticipate the trips to Forest Farm that we can enjoy during 2023, and the pleasure of watching the new nature-cycle begin to unfold once again.

We are all aware that 2022 has been an eventful year on the national and international stage for many reasons. It has also been eventful for Forest Farm.

Final decisions have been made and physical work has commenced on the new Velindre Cancer Centre. This development has a long common boundary with the Forest Farm reserve. Martin our secretary, wrote in the last newsletter explaining the current position as we know it. We will monitor this development closely and we will communicate with and challenge the developers when necessary.

Climate change becomes more evident, even at a local level. Alec, the Ranger talks in his report about droughts and floods we have seen recently and the implications for maintenance of the reserve.

Despite these changes the natural world continues to enchant and surprise us. We have provided a selection of articles which should give you a flavour of this, including items about foxes, dippers and fungi.



Most of our regular activities are now re-established. Articles about the Nature Walks, the Winter Talks programme and the Volunteers Activities explain what is happening. Thanks to all those members who work hard to make these events a success.

The bird hides are now functioning again. Thanks to the rangers for all their hard work installing the new containers. You'll be interested to learn about the plans to cover them both with a green roof, making them more comfortable and more able to blend in with their surroundings.

Thank you all for your support for our beautiful Forest Farm Nature reserve, and also thanks to the wonderful photographers whose photos illustrate and brighten up this newsletter. We look forward to hearing from you and as always would love to have any suggestions and contributions for the Newsletter.

Best wishes for 2023.

Paul and Naomi Brightmore

## RANGERS' REPORT WINTER 2022

October commenced with the Friends Open Day. The weather was fair and the Friends, aided by the Rangers, put on a good show with plenty of people turning up to enjoy the day. As usual the pond-dipping proved a great success, with the stalls, apple-juicing and pop-up café enjoying a roaring trade. What a great start to the Autumn season!



As most people will know, the ponds and wetlands have suffered badly during the dry year we experienced. For the first time in my memory the ponds, wetland and canal all dried up completely. However, October through to December saw a dramatic increase in rainfall, and water levels have started to increase to the point of flooding! This seems as though it will be the pattern we will experience in the future. Therefore, we have carried out repairs to as many leaks as we could find and also re-routed some pipes to improve the flow of water into the wetland. This work, carried out by the rangers and

volunteers, has made a big difference, and by Christmas Hide 1 pond was slowly refilling, flooding and saturating the soil and surrounding area. Hide 2 pond was also starting to refill but at a slower rate, due to the large area required to flood, and also the level of the canal.

This section's water level is affected by not only the water flowing in from the stream at Tongwynlais, but also the level of water at the end of the canal where it flows back into the feeder canal. We control this with a simple board system and it works well. However, due to erosion on the towpath and a possible breach of the canal, we have had to keep this level lower than is ideal. It now looks as though we have funding, and contractors will be able to carry out reinforcing work at some time in the new year. This will in turn mean that we can raise the level of the canal and push as much water as possible into the wetland system. Hopefully this will mean we can keep levels higher during dry periods in the future.



Nature decided to have a late autumn this year with some trees still in full leaf into December. It has been a wet, humid and colourful autumn, though, and was particularly good for fungi early on and good numbers of waxcap species in our meadows. Bird-wise fairly quiet but some Snipe have returned, with the Kingfisher starting to return to the ponds as they fill. The Dipper and Cormorant have been spotted on the feeder canal and a Teal briefly showed up on the ponds during the cold period. We have had good sightings of a Weasel between Hide 1 and 2.

Work has started to get back to normal after Covid, with a backlog of work being attacked by the Friends, Rangers and other volunteer groups such as Cardiff Conservation Volunteers, Cardiff Rivers Group, and Innovate Trust.

I would like to thank all the people involved, for the work and commitment they show every week. I would like to thank Jon Wallis personally for his work with the Friends and helping me to



organise the monthly workdays and make them a success. Further special thanks go to the ranger volunteers, who turn up twice a week and work on the reserve and around Cardiff.

Forest farm is a special place, a diverse habitat with a wide range of wildlife, especially considering the urban situation of the reserve. Thank you to all who help work and volunteer. Let's keep Forest Farm for future generations to enjoy.

Happy New Year to you all!

**Alec Stewart, Ranger**

Photographs: Snipe: Andrea Dean Seldon, Teal: Cliff Woodhead, Weasel: Fiona Christina Clark.

## NATURE WALK AT FOREST FARM

A bright if cold morning made for a beautiful autumn walk in Forest Farm on 19 November. The trees were still holding their best colours, as well as those leaves on the path making for a magical halo. Having experienced a dearth of birds for several weeks (both sight and sound), we had a spectacular morning, probably contributed to by the large leaf fall, bearing more branches than of late.

First, we saw lots of Chaffinches - four together. These are a common sight in Forest Farm but unusual to see so many at once and at such close quarters. We saw the ever-present Blue and Great tits, and the Robins were very bold as always.



Proceeding to the first hide, we only spotted a lot of photographers and a couple of Moorhens! The second hide was more rewarding, with many Reed buntings, mainly females, enjoying a sun bath at the top of the reeds. Unfortunately, my camera was not up to the occasion but I'm sure a few photographers went home happy. There was also a drab looking lbj (little brown job) which I can only imagine was a late sighting of a reed warbler. Unfortunately a consensus could not be agreed upon, and it didn't make a sound, making identification a little tricky. There was a lone Goosander on the river, and the white domestic duck keeping company with the Mallards was still in evidence.

Proceeding to the canal, the huddle of photographers suggested there may be a Kingfisher or two, and we caught them up just in time to catch a glimpse. Some wonderful photos were shown to us. Tracking back towards the warden's hut, the high-pitched tweeting en route indicated Gold crests and we did catch a glimpse high up in the branches.

We all went home feeling renewed, blessed and ready to face another week!

**Elaine Olsen**

*Editor's note: This was the first of the new series of Nature walks, restarted at the end of the pandemic. The plan is to hold them once again, on the third Saturday of each month at 10am. I joined the next one on 17 December, on a freezing cold morning, and we saw over 25 species of birds! Do come along and join in - no expertise is needed.*



## DIPPERS

What a joy it is at this time of year to see so many of the smaller birds that are often hidden from view in the summer months. One of my favourites along the canal and river is the Dipper. Its curious bobbing motion as it stands on the rocks and its distinctive peeping call make it difficult to miss when it's about, and you are on the lookout!

Dippers (*Cinclus cinclus*) are members of the bird family Cinclidae, so-called because of their bobbing or dipping movements. They are unique among passerines for their ability to dive and swim underwater, and this is a fascinating sight to watch. They are small (about the size of a Blackbird), chunky, stout, short-tailed, strong-legged birds. Their short wings give them a distinctive whirring flight.



Dippers are found in many suitable freshwater habitats, in the highlands of the Americas, Europe and Asia. In Africa they are only found in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. They inhabit the banks of fast-moving upland rivers with cold, clear waters, though, outside the breeding season, they may visit lake shores and sea coasts.

At Forest Farm, they are resident all year around. We have the European Dipper, which is generally dark brown (sometimes nearly black), or brown and white in colour. Males are larger than females. Whilst under water, they are covered by a thin, silvery film of air, due to small bubbles being trapped on the surface of their plumage. They are insulated from chilly waters by a thick coat of waterproof feathers, and their blood carries extra oxygen to enable them to stay submerged whilst they forage.

They feed primarily on small invertebrates, such as the nymphs of larvae or mayflies, blackflies, stoneflies and caddisflies, as well as small fish and fish eggs. Their average lifespan is three years. Most European populations are resident, though they may move to lower altitude valleys during winter and some more Northern birds are partially migrant.



Dippers are highly territorial, and a pair will strongly defend a length of stream. In winter, they often sleep in a communal roost, mostly of two birds but sometimes more, in nooks and crannies under bridges. Even in midwinter, residents sing strongly to re-establish their territories and anticipate the breeding season.

Their nest, usually in the middle of the territory, is a well-constructed cup, often placed under a bridge or overhang. A clutch of 4-5 white eggs is laid at daily intervals, and this normally starts between March and May. They are monogamous, but the pair-bond usually lasts only for the breeding season. It is however possible for pairs to remain together for several years, maybe due to

attachment to a certain territory or a low Dipper population within the area.

**Naomi Brightmore**

Source RSPB and Wikipedia

Photos: 1. Dipper at Radyr Weir: Andre Van De Sande, 2. Dipper on Canal: Colin Harvey

## FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM WINTER TALKS 2022/23

We are really pleased that after the prolonged break due to COVID our talks programme is back. Our thanks go to Duncan for all his hard work in organising this for us.



Over forty people attended the first of the Winter talks this year, at the Ararat Centre for the Community. Mr Tony Moon, project Secretary for the Rhondda Tunnel Society presented the history of the tunnel and the Society's present proposals. We heard that the aim is to re-open the disused and buried Rhondda Tunnel, to be utilised as a cycle and pedestrian route, re-connecting the communities of the Rhondda and Afan valleys. Being just 77 yards short of two miles long, the

Rhondda Tunnel will be the second longest cycle tunnel in the World, and this very fact will generate income from tourism, benefitting these two areas.

Due to the lack of industry and investment since the closure of coal mines, both valleys have needed regeneration. The Society has already provided rewards for both communities by bringing volunteers together. New friendships are being made and people of all ages and backgrounds are being united to help with the running of the Society. Residents from both valleys are now seeing their community in a different light and working towards building its future, with the common goal of re-opening the tunnel. When the tunnel is open, the cycle track which is planned to be a part of the Rhondda Fawr cycle route 882, will not only be for recreational purposes but it will provide an opportunity for both communities to commute long distances to work without the need for motor transport. There are also ambitious plans to create fascinating exhibition space within the centre of the tunnel.



Meriel Jones

The second talk, presented by Meriel Jones, followed on from the Bees article in the last newsletter, and provided a wealth of information about Bee-keeping as a Hobby. Meriel talked of her own experience and learning-path, with many useful tips and she explained about the training and commitment needed. It was a very interesting insight into a hobby that is not for the faint-hearted, requiring extraordinary commitment, patience, a love of bees and occasionally (although a honey bee stings just once and only if it feels threatened) a tough skin!

She also shared her expertise about honey bees and their behaviour. They live in large colonies with one queen, many sterile female workers and only a small number of male drones. Queens live for several years, but summer-born workers live for only a few weeks. Those maturing later usually survive the winter huddling together, with the queen, and eating stored food. This makes it very important for their keepers not

to harvest too much honey. Drones, on the other hand, are turned out of the hive in autumn and left to die.

Honey bees are important flower pollinators, but Meriel also told us how important it is to ensure, before establishing a new colony of honey-bees, that they will not detrimentally impact the success of other pollinators in the same area: since a single honey-bee produces only a teaspoonful of honey in a year, each hive needs to house up to fifty thousand bees!

*More talks will take place until Easter, so see Coming Events for details.*

Duncan Hockridge and Naomi Brightmore

## FOREST FARM NURSERY FOR COED CAERDYDD

When you've passed the Coed Caerdydd nursery at Forest Farm recently, you may have noticed a prominent new line of small trees against the fence. These were delivered on a freezing cold Friday a week before Christmas. Project volunteers gathered to assist with the unloading, trench-digging and heeling in, ably organised by Chloe Jenkins, the project's volunteer co-ordinator. However, since the ground was frozen-solid, only temporary trenches were dug and the trees placed in them still in their bags for protection.



The first delivery included mainly 'feathers' - medium sized trees about 12 foot in height and in a wide range of species such as oak, birch, elder and a variety of fruit trees. There are plans to plant these throughout Cardiff parks and open spaces during the Spring.

The second delivery was hundreds of small whips, again of many species. These were all unpacked and sorted and some will be used in the free trees to every household part of the project.

Further information about this project can be found on the Coed Caerdydd website. [What is Coed Caerdydd? - Outdoor Cardiff](#)

## ARSON AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR (ASB) AT FOREST FARM

You will be well aware of the detrimental impact of arson and ASB at Forest Farm over the years. Unfortunately the adjoining allotments have also had problems with arson and vandalism this year and Cardiff Council is installing a new perimeter fence.

On behalf of the committee, I attended an on-line meeting on this matter, chaired by Councillor Kate Carr, with others representing their concerns and frustration. Suggestions and options for action were discussed but, as a start, it was agreed that the nature of the ASB was highly varied, there was little information or evidence around perpetrators ...[and] that more reporting is required to build data and insight into the issues.

So **please**, if you see or are aware of any such issues, it is really important to report them. The advice is just to ring **101**.

A full report **will** be in the next edition, and we are hopeful that this will contain some specific actions.

Sheila Austin



## MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPH



It was about 7 or 8 years ago when I started developing my wildlife photography interest, and my many visits to Forest Farm over these years has certainly helped hone what techniques I have picked up from other keen photographers.

Wildlife photography requires a different skill set to capture good images, but these skills are achievable by most wishing to improve upon the technical mastery of the camera they already have. Above all else, patience is a prerequisite.

Over the years I have been weaned off any sort of reliance on automatic camera settings and now exclusively utilise manual settings. The exception being if I have my camera with me walking to the hides I usually have the camera on semi-automatic (usually on Auto ISO) just in case something catches my eye and I don't have time to manually adjust.

This shot was taken from hide 2 a couple of years ago (before it was destroyed). It was early in the morning and there had been quite a few sightings of a young fox here for a few weeks. I had gone looking for it, but it hadn't showed up for a few days. But on this particular day I was in the hide, camera all set up on a tripod, with manual settings ready to shoot whatever came into view. The usual suspects made an appearance, rabbits, squirrels, various species of birds.

I looked to the left out of the hide I could see the top half of the ears of the fox which was basking in the sun. It was in front of the reeds just out of sight. The camera settings were selected and a few test shots made to make sure I had the right exposure.

The camera was now ready, focussed and pointed in the right direction ready to go.

Once or twice the fox moved a little and popped its head above the small embankment in front of it and I took a few shots just to make sure focus and exposure were all ok. They were, but the images were nothing special.

20 minutes later the fox was still napping and I was beginning to think it would be there for hours and I'd never get the shot.

But it moved and popped its head up, looking directly towards the hide I was sat in. It was as if it knew there was someone there. I had the camera set for 'burst' mode (the camera takes several shots a second). This image was one of those taken in burst mode. If it had been taken in single shot mode I may not have had that direct look into the lens feature which I think makes the photograph so personal. Just me and the fox. Within a second or two, the fox disappeared behind the embankment again.

Nikon D850 Camera

500mm lens with 1.4 converter - effectively 700mm focal length

1/640<sup>th</sup> second at ISO 500.

**Anthony Mathews**

## FUNGI AT FOREST FARM

Although some fungi can be seen all year around, every Autumn I am fascinated by the large numbers that suddenly emerge from nowhere! I love their weird shapes and bright, often shiny, colours.

Let's find out more about our local fungi, and what better place to start than at Forest Farm! The clever local photographers have produced some wonderful fungi images, and I thought I'd introduce a selection of them.

**Are fungi poisonous?** There are only a dozen deadly poisonous fungi in Europe, and most cases of mushroom poisoning are due to insufficient knowledge. Apparently, many wild mushrooms taste wonderful but some have 'look-a-likes' which can cause illness. Unfortunately, there is no relationship between the look, smell and taste of a mushroom and how poisonous it is. It's best to admire but not eat wild-grown fungi.

**What are fungi?** Unlike flowering plants, they do not contain chlorophyll and cannot live by photosynthesis. Instead, they break down organic matter in their environment, and thus reintroduce life-giving nutrients into the eco-system. Fungi are placed alongside plants and animals in a separate order of classification (phylum), 'the fungi'.

**How do they appear so suddenly?** Most grow in soil or on wood and plant materials. They consist of individual threads (hyphae), which form a dense white structure, a mycelium. The visible 'mushroom' is actually the fruiting body, producing many spores which enable the fungus to reproduce.

**Appearance.** There are thousands of species, in different shapes and colours, but they have a simple and similar anatomy - an anchored stem and a cap beneath which the spore-bearing layer is found. Colour, shape and size often change according to maturity and weather conditions, which can make accurate identification difficult.

**Do they harm other plants?** There are three groups: 'mycorrhizal fungi' which have a symbiotic (mutually beneficial) relationship with a tree or plant; 'saprophytic fungi' which live on dead plant matter and assist in decomposition; and 'parasitic fungi' which can attack plants and kill them.



**Can they grow anywhere?** Fungi always live in harmony with their environment: They are only found beneath particular species of tree, in grassland, or where trees grow sparsely. Identification of the surroundings often enables identification of the fungi.



The Artist's Bracket fungus (*Ganoderma applanatum*) grow near the base of old beech trees or their stumps. This large fungus feeds on the living wood by producing enzymes that break it down. The rust-coloured dust, seen in the image is actually millions of spores that the fungus releases to reproduce. It can be seen all year around, and is plentiful in Longwood at Forest Farm. This one has been there so long that it has become covered with moss.



Another large bracket fungus is Blushing Bracket (*Daedaleopsis confragosa*). Its' brackets are 8-22 cm wide and are characterised by having a sharp edge. Pale brown on the upper surface with circumferential bands. The white to cream porous underside bruises pink when scratched, hence the common name. When old and no longer viable the brackets age to a striking red-brown colour. It can be found all year around on dead Willow or Birch,



A totally different-looking fungus is Amber Jelly (*Exidia recisa*), mainly a winter fungus, appearing on dead twigs of standing or fallen willows. It forms orange-brown or amber, gelatinous fruit bodies that are firm and shallowly conical at first, but become lax and pendulous with age, and around 2.5 cm (1 in) across. It is often seen glistening at head height on a crisp clear day when sunlight makes the amber fruitbodies glow brilliantly. This remarkable fungus can dry out and shrink to almost nothing, but don't be fooled: it is not dead. After rain, or simply a heavy early

morning fall of dew, the fruitbodies can rehydrate and recommence releasing their unseen clouds of microscopically tiny spores.



A smaller but striking fungus with a more traditional 'toadstool' like appearance is Sulphur Tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*). It is a common woodland mushroom, often seen when hardly any others are to be found. It grows prolifically in large clumps on stumps, dead roots or rotting trunks of broadleaved trees. The hemispherical cap ranges from 2-6 cm in diameter. It is smooth and sulphur yellow with an orange-brown centre and whitish margin. The crowded gills are initially yellow but darken to a distinctive green colour as the blackish spores develop on the yellow flesh. It is a glorious and exotic sight in an autumn woodland as the picture shows!



Another small cluster-forming fungus common at Forest Farm is Mycena, with at least two varieties found (*M. galopus* and *M. galericulata*). It produces small grayish-brown, mushrooms often bell-shaped, radially-grooved caps, with gills beneath, up to 2.5 cm wide on slender stems up to 8cm long. The shape, size and colour of the caps vary considerably. They occur during summer and autumn in coniferous and deciduous woodland. *M. galopus*, grows on leaf litter, and is an important leaf-litter decomposer. Its' stems exude a white latex-like liquid if broken. Hence, its' common names are Milk-drop

Mycena or Milking Bonnet. *M. galericulata* grows on wood, into which the hollow stems often root deeply, and has popular names such as Common Bonnet, Common Mycena or Rosy-gill Fairy Helmet .

Naomi Brightmore

Sources: Field Guide to Mushrooms and other Fungi and Wikipedia

Photos: Artists Bracket: Andre Van De Sande, Blushing Bracket: Cliff Woodhead, Amber Jelly: Mark Ann Wright, Sulphur Tuft: Andre Van De Sande, Mycena: Andre Van De Sande

## HISTORY OF THE MELINGRIFFITH WATER PUMP

The history of the water pump, on the far East side of the Forest Farm reserve, can be traced back for almost nine hundred years. The 1126 Concord of Woodstock refers to mills and weirs at Llandaf, and it is thought probable that monks worked a corn mill at the Melingriffith site before the Norman conquest.



In 1178 the Lord of Senghenydd, Ifor ap Meurig, raided Cardiff Castle and forced William Earl of Gloucester and Lord of Glamorgan to return stolen land and property. The land was then given to Ifor's son Griffith, hence the name Griffithsmill or Melingriffith.

The original corn mill changed ownership many times and was burned down in 1316 as part of a revolt against the Normans. It was not until 1735 that water power was provided to it, from Radyr Weir and Melingriffith feeder canal.

In 1740 Rees Powell of Llanharan adapted the mill for Iron working. Ownership

passed in 1760 to the Bristol Society of Merchants, who erected an adjoining Tinsplate factory. However, when the Glamorganshire Canal was built, it drew water from the same feed as the Melingriffith Tinsplate factory in order to operate the Melingriffith lock. The lock drew so much water that the works had to often cease operation in dry weather, despite a clause in the Glamorgan Canal Navigation Act requiring the company to protect the water supplies of local industries.

The ensuing legal battle led to an agreement to pump water from the tail race of the tinsplate factory to a height of 12 feet (3.7 m) back into the canal. The canal company installed the pump, probably built by Watkin George of Cyfarthfa, around 1793, to return precious water from the Melingriffith Tinsplate factory to the Glamorganshire Canal.

Iron was supplied to the tinsplate factory by the Pentyrch Iron works, which transported the iron by tub boats on the River Taf and via a locks system at Radyr Weir, to the feeder and on to the works site. The Melingriffith feeder still exists today and is controlled by penstock valves located upstream of Radyr Weir. There is also evidence of locks in this area, proving that the feeder was also used as a means of transport before the development of the tramway. The system involved a combination of mule pack, river transport and tubs on the feeder. This method of transport continued until it was replaced by a horse-drawn tramway, 1815-1871. This in turn was superseded by a steam tanker engine, which continued until the tin works were closed in 1958.

The tinsplate factory operated for almost 200 years, and was one of the biggest employers in the area, as well as one of the oldest industrial undertakings in South Wales - as late as 1913 it had over 800 employees. In the 1980's the site was finally demolished, and then replaced by the housing estate you see today

The pump continued to operate regularly until 1927, and probably after that, until the canal effectively closed in 1942. It is a scheduled monument and has been restored twice since it ceased operation in the 1940s. When the second restoration was completed in 1989 the pump was put in the care of Cardiff City Council.

Further restoration work was carried out in 2009-11. Bats roosting in the rocker beams delayed the restoration but the pump ran again on 1 July 2010, now operated by electric power. The restoration work, costing £100,000 was funded by Cadw and Cardiff Council. Although the pump was operated regularly for a few years, it has now fallen into disrepair again and since 2016 has not worked.

Naomi Brightmore and Martin Chamberlain

Source Wikipedia. Photograph Chris Allen: Wikipedia



## VOLUNTEER REPORT: AUTUMN/WINTER

October's session was, to borrow a football cliché, a volunteering event of two halves. The first half was a bright sunny autumn morning, spent planting wild garlic and native bluebells in the woodland adjoining what's known as the parish road. This runs along the edge of the Openreach compound, until it turns towards the canal. It may seem odd to plant 'wild' species, but the woodland is relatively new and we want to give native plants a helping-hand in getting established.

The second half was spent in torrential rain under a gunmetal-grey sky, cutting down self-seeded sycamore. Although non-native, sycamore is considered a potential replacement, at least in part, for ash killed by 'dieback' fungus. However, it can easily become dominant – it's fast growing, comes into leaf early, and produces a dense canopy that shades out plants on the woodland floor. (That said, it does make them good for sheltering under when it's raining!)

November saw the volunteers pruning in the orchard, on what was a beautifully sunny late autumn day. Indeed, the weather was still mild enough for dragonflies to get passionate over the dipping pond.



With over 40 apple trees, all now mature, pruning is a big undertaking, so we're very grateful to everyone who came along. Because the trees weren't actively pruned for the first several years, many of them have become somewhat overgrown and 'unruly', so a lot of the pruning work is still trying to get the trees into the shape they really should be in – a sort of 'goblet' shape, that allows light and air to reach all parts of the tree and which makes picking easier.

However, the process of "renovating" a mature tree has to be done over several years, as too much pruning in one go will stress the tree. This can cause vigorous, uncontrolled growth in response, typified by lots of "watershoots" – thin branches that grow straight upwards, produce no flowers or fruit, but drain energy from the tree. Unfortunately, we have definitely been guilty of over-zealous pruning in the past. We're far from experts, but we're trying to learn from our mistakes!



And in early December, around a dozen volunteers spent the morning working opposite the farm house, undeterred by quite a lot of rain that had definitely not been on the forecast. The first task was to clear willow, brambles, reeds and other vegetation from the 'dragonfly pond', which is still mysteriously lacking water - the hunt for a leak continues. On the bright side, the empty pond provided an opportunity to give the dragonfly sculpture a bit of a clean. They also cleared brambles and other overgrowth from the raised bed

by the old milking shed, coppiced some excess hazel (which generated a lot of useful stakes for fencing, etc), built a habitat pile, and planted some bluebells. **Jon Wallis.**

Sunday Volunteer sessions are usually monthly from 10am to 12 noon, and are advertised on FoFF Facebook and in our newsletter when possible.

**Come and join us if you can!**



## GREEN ROOF FOR THE BIRD HIDES

Now that both new bird hides are finally in place, the Friends plan to install green roofs on both of them.

Following the first hide being destroyed, our local Councillor set up a just-giving page to replace the hide. However, fortunately the Council's insurers were able provide cover and both hides have now been replaced with metal containers.

Also, during this period, following the loss of two of our regular photographers, both of whom were avid and much-loved photographers at Forest Farm, their family and friends provided funds to be spent on the reserve. We are arranging for two memorial trees (Rowans ) to be planted near the wardens' Centre.

Now that both new bird hides are finally in place, there are issues with the metal construction, hot in summer and condensation issues in winter. Using the funds for the just-giving donations and also from the bequests, we are working with the rangers to provide solutions. Obviously, we cannot use any materials that will be flammable.

Whilst the customised shipping containers were really the only practical choice, in terms of making the new hides as vandal-proof as possible, we're aware that they don't seem as 'natural' as the wooden hides they replaced. A green roof can do something to redress this.

So, what is a green roof? It's basically a layer of growing medium, plus some sort of vegetation. There are various different types of green roof, but the one we have in mind is a sedum 'mat', which is made from a base-layer of coconut fibre, covered with a peat-free growth substrate, and topped with a mixture of pregrown sedum species, all designed for durability and low maintenance.

*Example sedum roof (Photo by Lamiot, Wikimedia Commons, Licence: CC BY-SA 2.5.)*

You may now be asking, so what are sedum? They're a genus of flowering, leaf succulents, also known as "stonecrops". They're shallow-rooted, so they don't need deep substrate, which minimizes the weight of the green roof. They're hardy and drought-resistant, which keeps maintenance low. And they provide year-round cover.



Even though the hides are in the middle of a nature reserve, the green roofs will add to the existing mosaic of habitats, attracting even more beneficial insects, birds and butterflies. And the high degree of insulation they provide should also help with the problem of the hides getting too hot in the summer, when the sun beats down on the currently bare metal roofs.

There's no definite schedule for installing the roofs yet, but we'll let you know as soon as there's more news. Keep an eye on Facebook and the next Newsletter!

**Jon Wallis**

## A YEAR AT FOREST FARM CALENDAR 2023

A full-colour calendar, packed with photographs of Forest Farm through the seasons.



**Only £7 per calendar!**

It's a full-colour wall calendar, with lots of photos of Forest Farm through the seasons.

It opens out to A3 size, with the photos at the top and space at the bottom to add daily appointments, events and reminders.

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# KEEP YOUR GARDEN BIRDS HEALTHY

Did you know that Greenfinches are in serious trouble and are now on the 'red' list? One of the reasons for the decline is because of a severe outbreak of the disease trichomonosis, which can be spread by contaminated food and drinking water. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) advise that we can help to stop disease spreading by keeping our feeders, bird tables and bird baths clean to help keep our garden birds, fit, healthy and disease free. This article, taken from their website, tells you how:

## Cleaning your bird feeders and bird table

- Put your rubber gloves on and remove any old food, by hand or with your scraper, and throw it away - do not reuse or compost.
- If possible, take feeders apart to make them easier to clean
- With hot soapy water and a brush, scrub and clean the feeders and bird bath, removing any old food or residue.
- Rinse thoroughly with cold water, preferably outside. For the birdbath a garden hose is ideal.
- Let them dry completely, ideally outside.
- Spray with disinfectant, following the instructions.
- Rinse again and then let them dry out once more before refilling.
- Ideally, clean water should be provided every day in the bird bath.

## Frequently asked questions

- How often should I do it? - At least every few weeks, but ideally once a week if possible.
- How long will it take? - Unless you have lots of feeders, no more than 15 minutes
- Can I use bleach? - We recommend using an animal safe disinfectant, but a weak solution of domestic bleach can be used as an alternative

## What else can I do?

- Don't overfill feeders - try and make sure they are being emptied every few days
- If possible, set up several different feeding stations to reduce the number of birds in one place.
- Move your feeders, to prevent the build-up of bird food and droppings potentially contaminating the ground below.
- Avoid putting feeders under where birds roost, such as under trees, to avoid droppings.
- If possible clean away any old food or droppings from beneath feeders too

**If I see a sick bird or birds what should I do?** - If you think the birds have been affected by disease, it is best to stop feeding for at least two weeks and empty any bird baths. Only start feeding again if you are no longer seeing birds with any signs of disease.

**Can I help the sick birds?** - Treatment for wild birds is rarely an appropriate action and often it may be in the bird's interests to be left in the wild.

*There is a lot more information on the RSPB website <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/how-you-can-help-birds/disease-and-garden-wildlife/diseases-in-garden-birds/>*



## The Winter Talks Programme

We're really pleased to let you know that the Winter Talks programme is back. All talks will be in Ararat Community Hall, Whitchurch Common, on Wednesdays, from 7 until 8pm, with doors open from 6.30.

18 January 2023	Cyfarthfa Castle and the Crawshay family	Christopher Parry
15 February 2023	Nantgarw China Works, past and present	Charles Fountain
15 March 2023	Geology of Cardiff, particularly the North	Andy Kendall
19 April 2023 <b>Followed by the AGM. NOTE EARLY TALK START TIME 6.45 PM.</b>	The story of Insole Court and the family who made it	John Prior, in costume!

If you have any queries about any of the talks please contact **Duncan on 07870362607**.

## COMING EVENTS AT FOREST FARM

All events meet at the Warden's Hut, Forest Farm Rd, CF14 7JH  
and last from 10am-12/12.30 unless otherwise stated.

15 January	Volunteering. Task tbc.	Jon Wallis
21 January	Nature Walk	Naomi Brightmore
12 February	Volunteering. Task tbc.	Jon Wallis
18 February	Nature Walk	Naomi Brightmore
18 March	Nature Walk	Leader tbc
26 March	Volunteering. Task tbc.	Jon Wallis
16 April	Volunteering. Task tbc.	Jon Wallis
19 April	AGM – Ararat Community Hall	8 pm, Following talk at 6.45
22 April	Nature Walk	Leader tbc

More events or details, including volunteering event tasks, will be posted on our website, so please remember to visit at [www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk)

## EMAIL OR PAPER?

Do you get a paper copy of the newsletter delivered to your home at the moment?  
Could you consider changing to receiving it by email instead? It might be better for you, better for the Friends and better for the environment.

We appreciate that not everyone is able to receive an electronic copy of the newsletter or might not want to. There are however some definite advantages in doing so.

1 **You will receive a better looking Newsletter.** The majority of issues are printed in Black & White to reduce costs. We use a lot of photographs in the newsletter and they do not look as good in B/W. The electronic version is full colour.

2 **It reduces costs for the Friends.** The newsletter is expensive to print and these costs will rise (the last issue cost £1.50 per copy plus delivery costs). It is also expensive and time consuming to deliver. Reduced costs means we can put your membership fee to better use on improvement projects within Forest Farm.

3 **It is better for the Environment.** Printing uses a lot of resources, namely paper, energy and chemicals, which have an environmental impact. Delivery also has a negative environmental impact.

This is your decision which we will respect. No changes will be made unless you tell us to do so. However if you are willing to change to the electronic version please send us an email.

Email [editor@forestfarm.org.uk](mailto:editor@forestfarm.org.uk)

Please provide:      Name  
                             Address  
                             Email Address

Thank you.

## BEST WISHES TO YOU FOR 2023

Please send your contributions for the next edition to the editors by **21 March 2023**. Thank you!

For more information about Friends of Forest Farm or to join see our website:  
[www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk)

Also on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/forestfarmuk/>

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

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