



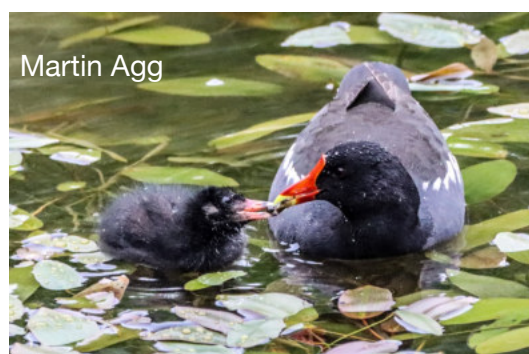
Friends of Forest Farm

SUMMER 2023

128

"It was June, and the world smelled of roses. The sunshine was like powdered gold over the grassy hillside." Maud Hart Lovelace

Spring and Summer are beautiful seasons with those long evenings which go on for ever. A time to enjoy the beauty of nature and relax in the sunshine and the warmth. It is however a busy time for the wildlife on Forest Farm with new life and growth bursting out all around. We probably all have different emblems signifying what this means to us - the swifts screaming overhead, the orchids blooming, dragonflies returning, nesting woodpeckers or the quaint moorhen chicks. The rangers report from Alec gives you a taste of these joys.



A Conservation Veteran - Raj Chettri: Many of you will know Raj, a very familiar figure around Forest Farm and other Cardiff open spaces. On 28 April he retired after over 27 years of employment on Cardiff Council's ranger team.

Raj has devoted his entire working life to conservation, including Nepal's Chitwan National Park Tiger Project. He has been with Forest Farm since its inception, and has contributed a huge amount to make the reserve what it is today. As you see, he wouldn't stop working even to have his photograph taken!

The Friends of Forest Farm wish to say a huge thank you to Raj, and to wish him a long and happy retirement. If you ever get bored, Raj, you can always come back as a volunteer.

The Talks programme has been particularly well attended with capacity audiences. Our thanks go to Duncan for all his efforts in making the programme such a success. Martin has kindly agreed to assume the mantle for the 2023/24 season. The Sunday Volunteers programme continues to be well attended and the hard graft goes on and is enjoyed by those taking part - it feels good to make a difference.

Our plans proceed with improving the bird hides. They continue to be well used although minor vandalism does continue to be an issue. We are now more hopeful that Cardiff Council will be dealing with the derelict barn in the not too distant future.

Our Annual General Meeting took place in April. Details of the officers and Committee are provided. Thanks go to all those who have given their time and energy in the work of supporting the reserve.

Naomi & Paul

RANGERS' REPORT APRIL - JUNE 2023



As I write this report we are moving into early summer, in a matter of weeks the trees have gone from bare skeletons to already covered in bright green leaves. Where has the time gone?

Well, it has been busy around the reserve, especially with corporate groups. Sections of paths have had a new covering of stone and dust to help when it rains. The wildflower areas were all seeded and now have started to grow and, in a few weeks, should be flowering. This will provide a great food source for pollinating insects and later in the year a seed bank for

the birds when times are tough in the winter. New hibernacula have been constructed around the reserve for translocating of reptiles such as grass snakes. Indeed, under one of the sheets I discovered two grass snakes sheltering.

We have also planted out some Monkshood a native plant which although poisonous is an excellent plant for invertebrates. This was placed on the opposite bank of the feeder canal so no one can come in contact with it. Most of the work around the reserve through the late spring and summer will consist of repairs to infrastructure and no doubt balsam pulling...! Friends of forest farm volunteers, yes, it's that time of year again.



Wildlife wise the main interest was provided by the Tawny owl family along the canal.

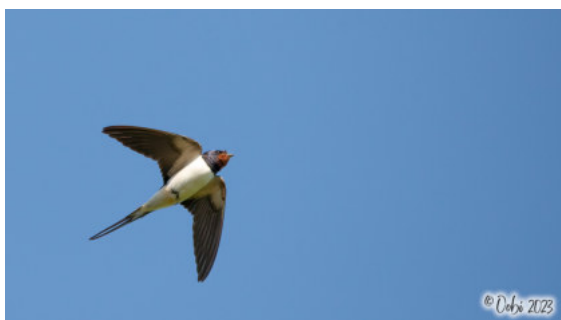
They proved very popular, and a lot of people had good views and photographs. Most people respect the owls and stayed on the tow path. Unfortunately, a few did not. When treated to such an event like this it is very important to respect and put the subject's

welfare first. Then all can enjoy and hopefully they will be around next year. We have also had grey wagtail nesting in our yard along with a wren. The male swallow arrived at the end of March and the female was seen by the nest area on the 6th of April. Since then, they have laid and hatched three chicks and seem to be doing well.

We have had some wildlife cameras



installed and are testing out how everything works. The idea is that we will be able to release video clips of wildlife around the reserve. More on this later as it develops.



At the time of writing, preparation is underway for the summer open day on the 10th of June, hoping for some nice weather and an enjoyable event. You can read about this later, in a separate article.

Grass snake: Andre Van De Sande;
Monkshood: Bing Photos
Tawney Owl: Mark Ann Wright;
Grey Wagtail: Dave Kitson
Swallow Oobi Benub

Alec Stewart, Ranger

ORCHIDS AT FOREST FARM

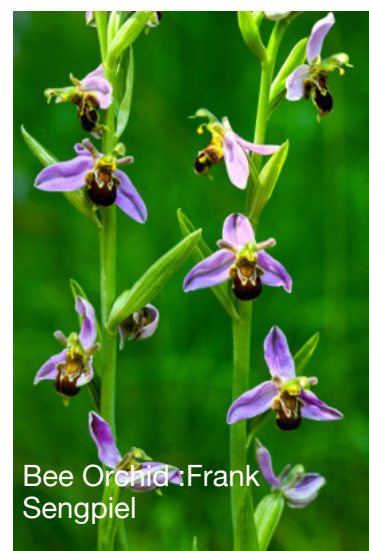


Orchidaceae is one of the largest families of flowering plants. It encompasses about 6-11% of all species of seed plants. None-the-less, in the UK we do not have large numbers, and the sighting of an orchid or group of orchids is always a very special sight when the warmer weather comes. Like all wildflowers, orchids are protected under Section 13 of the Wildlife and Countryside act (1981).

The two orchids that you can almost guarantee to see at Forest Farm during late May and throughout the summer are the Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) and the Common

Spotted Orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*). If you are very lucky, you may see a Bee Orchid. If you do, please let us know when and where!

This year, the Southern marsh orchids at the second hide have been spectacular, growing together in a large patch of purple spikes. They arrived at Forest Farm when Raj and Alec, two of our rangers, scattered 'green haying' cuttings from the Howardian nature reserve. This was an excellent result since, although the commonest and most widespread of the marsh orchids, they have disappeared from at least 20% of their historical range due to changing agricultural practices and draining of damp pastures. At Forest Farm they are now thriving in the marshy area just next to the Reed beds, and are one reason why it is necessary to cut back the reeds each year. Marsh orchids love chalky, damp soil and their range is not just limited to marshes and wet fens.



In appearance, although colours vary from pale pink to purple, Southern marsh orchids flowers tend to be a darker purple than the Common spotted orchid, which gets its name from its 7-12 usually dark-spotted leaves. At Forest Farm, it usually follows the Marsh orchids a few weeks later and then continues beyond them into August and may be seen more widely around the reserve. Its flowers tend to be paler and the petals to

be more speckled with flecks of darker purple. Both species produce a spire of waxy, lipped flowers, and exact identification of these two orchids is not always easy, since they can cross-fertilise producing hybrids with mixed features.

These beautiful flowers are iconic symbols of our wonderful nature reserve and I hope you have been able to enjoy them this year as much as I have. It's not too late yet for you to go and look for them!

Source: The Wildlife Trusts and Wikipedia

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM TALKS 2023

The series of evening talks for 2022 - 2023 has been extremely popular and the final talks on local geology and Insole Court finished the series. Our thanks to Duncan Hockridge for all his hard work in organising them.

The Insole Family and Insole Court - Rhondda's Coal - Cardiff's Gold

The talk was given by John Prior-Morris in costume as the late George Frederick Insole, the last of a pioneering line of South Wales coal entrepreneurs.



The son of a Worcestershire farmer, the first George Insole moved to Cardiff in 1827. Initially in partnership with William Biddle, a coal dealer, Insole had good fortune when left a legacy. He bought a yard near the Glamorganshire canal and began to buy coal by the barge load from the smaller collieries served by the canal. He shipped the coal across Britain. By 1832 he leased a small colliery.

In 1836 the coal trade was revolutionised by the opening of the Taff Vale Railway down from Merthyr. A new, larger dock in Cardiff opened in 1839. In 1844 Insole leased the Cymmer Colliery and coke ovens near Porth in

the Rhondda. This colliery, typically of the time, had rather basic construction, with rudimentary ventilation, a fire at the pit bottom which drew air through the mine. The miners were using candles for lighting.

George died in 1851. The colliery was successful and George was allegedly regarded as a benevolent employer and was well liked by the workforce.

His son, James Harvey Insole, took over the business. At the time he lived in Queen Street, but an outbreak of cholera persuaded him to move to a healthier area. The Cardiff area was owned by the Bute family, who would not sell land, so he had to move from town to obtain land. He bought an estate at Llandaf, known as Ely Court, and had a substantial house built there, into which he moved in 1856.

On July 16th 1856 Cymmer pit exploded killing 144 men and boys. This was then the worst pit disaster ever recorded and the first where the death toll exceeded 100. The Mine's Inspector recommended significant remedial works. He also said safety had been neglected.

Understandably, this accident left a bitter legacy in the area.

James Insole continued to be heavily involved with shipping coal. As tonnages increased the Cardiff docks became congested. So Insole became a major backer of the new Penarth dock. He leased land near Treorchy for a new pit but in 1866 there was a cholera outbreak due to the poor living conditions.

His two sons were apprenticed to learn the coal trade. The eldest, James Walter, became a director of the Insole business in 1868, though it was managed on a day to day basis by a

manager. James Insole senior spent money on doubling the size of the house and decorating it in the neo-Gothic style favoured by the Marquis of Bute, complete with a mural of the four seasons.

His younger son George Fred married Jessy, daughter of a local landowner, and moved into her family home, Fairwater House. The older brother Walter also had a house in the Llandaf area and became a director of the highly successful Barry dock and Railway Company in 1890. After James was widowed he remarried a much younger woman and in 1889 made further additions to Insole Court. His widow remarried in 1905 and moved out of Insole Court.

George Fred Insole and family moved into the house. He made major alterations including a new wing doubling the size of the house again. He died in 1917. His eldest son, Claude, was killed in World War I. The youngest son, Alan, was wounded in action and suffered shell shock; subsequently estranged from the family he moved abroad. The middle son, Claude, suffered from ill health, was unable to run the business and after the war mainly lived in London.

Jessy continued to live at Insole Court with her daughter, employing 10 servants and 12 gardeners. She gradually sold off the business as the steam coal trade was in decline. In 1932 the Insoles sold the entire estate to Cardiff Council but remained as tenants at Insole Court. In 1938 Jessy moved to London, and the house contents were sold. She died in 1938 and Claude died in 1946. The estate was developed for new housing.

During the World War II Insole Court was used as the HQ for the local Royal Observer Corps and Auxiliary Fire Service. After the war the house was used for various purposes by the council, but by 1988 was in disrepair and the council wished to sell it. It was only saved after much lobbying. In 1992 it gained Grade II listing. Cardiff Council undertook some restoration in 1995, but by 2006 it was closed as unsafe. After much community lobbying, further restoration work was undertaken. In 2014 a Community Trust was formed to own the house and enable lottery money to be used to fully restore it. There is now a café with rooms for groups and societies to hire. The gardens and ground floor of the main house are open to the public but more work is needed on the upper floors. The Trust still needs more help and finance for restoration and maintenance.

Albyn Austin

The Geology and Landscapes of North Cardiff

This fascinating talk by local geologist and naturalist Andy Kendall, provided a packed audience with a truly interesting evening.

Andy began by outlining the geological periods over the life of the earth, the types of rocks found and the main geological features forming our landscape. A short video showed how the continents have changed over the earth's lifetime, plate tectonics in action. These movements gave rise to folding and faulting, creating the landscapes we see today.

South Wales forms a basin underlain by Devonian Sandstone, created when the area was part of a vast desert some 400 million years ago (MYA). The bedding planes still show the shapes of vast sand dunes later covered by yet more sand. The Brecon Beacons are formed from this sandstone.

Above this is Carboniferous Limestone formed 300-350 MYA when the area was a shallow tropical sea. Andy showed us a picture of fossilised ripple marks taken at the top of Pen y Fan! The sea shallowed, marsh developed and sediments were washed downstream. Peat deposits and forests developed which were periodically buried by sediments. These inundations occurred repeatedly and the buried vegetation eventually became coal.

The Merthyr area, Caerphilly and Tongwynlais, are formed from Carboniferous limestone, which became buried under the coal bearing strata.

In the Cardiff and Barry area the older rocks are sometimes overlain by newer Triassic (250-200MYA) desert sandstone, but mostly by later (Jurassic) rocks from about 200-140 MYA. Called Lias, these are made of eroded mud and limestones from further north. They can be seen in the cliffs from Penarth to Ogmere and the rock was much used for building in Cardiff, including Whitchurch.



Much more recently the whole area was changed by the Ice Ages (0.45 MYA to current). Cardiff was on the Southern edge of the ice sheet which covered the Brecon Beacons. As glaciers moved down from the ice sheet they gouged out rocks forming screes, which became clays, silts and gravel and were deposited locally. A major fault runs north-south, eventually resulting in the River Taff and Taff Valley.

Andy spoke

about the Triassic (250-200 MYA) rocks to be found in the Vale of Glamorgan and Sully, and showed pictures of tracks of dinosaur footprints in these rocks! Further photos showed the wonderful layered cliffs at Southerndown, formed from mud and lime laid down in shallow seas. He warned against getting too close to these spectacular but dangerously unstable cliffs.



Andy showed pictures of some well-known local landmarks. For example, the Garth formed from Pennant Sandstone with burial mounds on top and Craig yr Allt, also Pennant Sandstone, with faulting causing the characteristic dipping Northwards. The coal measures at Georgetown, form a valley because these rocks are more easily eroded than the Garth or Lesser Garth. The large quarry at Taffs Well is from the Pembrokeshire Limestone group. There were other surprises, such as the nearby entrance to old Iron Mines in Garth Woods, and the extensive caves at Lesser Garth and Ffynnon Taf.

Andy finally spoke about Mary Gillham MBE, a key founder of Forest Farm reserve, who documented the geology, natural history and development of this area. He showed fascinating pictures of our canal and reserve taken from her archives.

Albyn Austin

Note: We are hoping next year, to have a talk all about Mary Gillham and her work.

Whoa - slow down there!

Many thanks to all who campaigned for new traffic speed signs around the reserve. At last, Forest Farm Road and the area around the farmhouse have 20mph speed limits.

Thank you everyone!



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The meeting took place on 19 April 2023 at Ararat Church, Whitchurch, and was quorate. Apologies were received, and minutes from the 2022 AGM were agreed with no matters arising.

The chairman, Anthony Matthews, presented his report, and thanked all members of the committee for their work during the previous year. The Secretary, Martin Chamberlain also presented a brief report. Duncan Hockridge was particularly thanked for all his hard work in organising the winter talks programme, a role which he is now ending, plus his long standing committee membership.

The accounts, presented by the treasurer Phil Baker, were accepted and a copy can be obtained from p.baker1@ntlworld.com

Officers were elected (see below). For any other business, a member suggested that the Friends need to improve signage on the reserve and wider publicity for the group. Some existing actions already underway were described, but it was also agreed that further actions could be taken, and that this would be discussed again by the committee.

Your committee members are:

- Chairman: Anthony Matthews; Vice Chairman: John Harding
- Secretary: Martin Chamberlain; Treasurer: Phil Baker
- Membership Secretary: Pauline Fisher
- Social Media and Volunteering Co-ordinator: Jon Wallis
- Newsletter Editors: Paul and Naomi Brightmore
- Sheila Austin; Sarah Germain; Barry Clarke

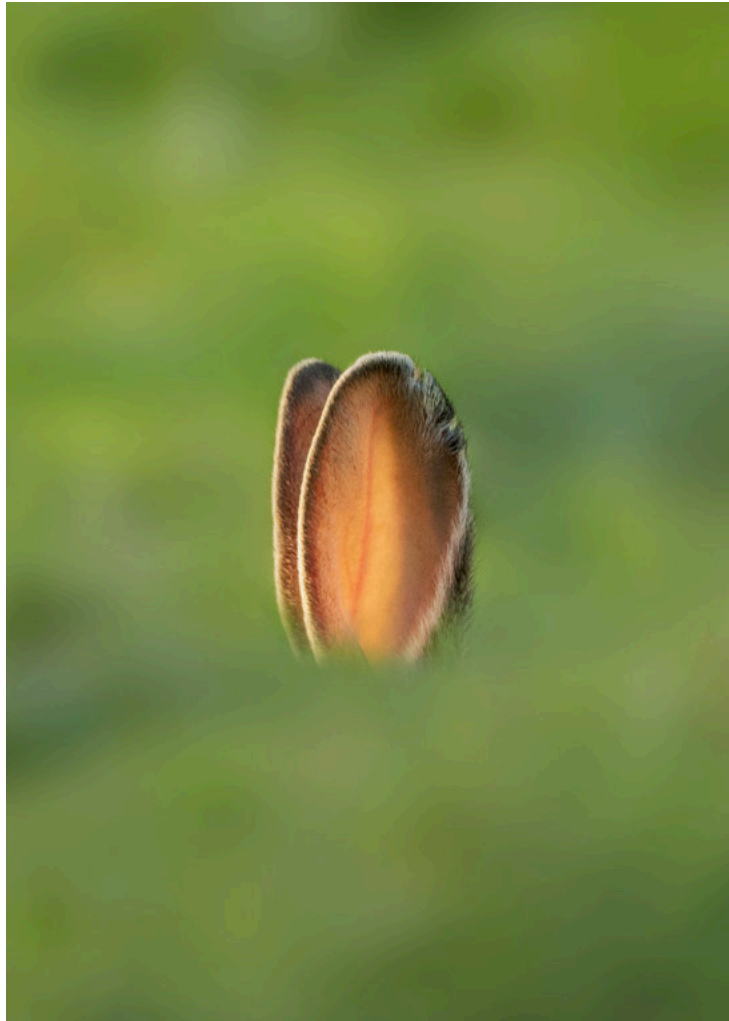
GREEN ROOFS FOR HIDES: UPDATE



Plans are still in progress to install green roofs on both the hides. As well as giving a far more environmentally acceptable look and feel to the hides, these will greatly help to keep the temperature balanced - less cold in winter and less hot in summer.

The Friends are covering the cost of the roofs and are working with the rangers to have them installed. The type selected will have Sedum-based plants and, although flat rather than sloping, will be similar to the one illustrated in this photograph. We hope you agree that these will be an interesting and valuable addition to the reserve. A firm date has not yet been agreed, but watch this space!

MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPH



Fiona Christina's favourite photo

When asked to contribute to 'My Favourite Photograph' for the newsletter, I was overjoyed, but then thought, "oh no, which one do I choose?". Like most of the regular photographers, I have rather a few to choose from. For quite a while now, my favourite photo has been of the Forest Farm weasel who was featured on the BBC's Winterwatch (January 2022), but recently it has been trumped. My current favourite photo is of a pair of ears that belong to my favourite residents of Forest Farm. If you know me, I can often be found twisting awkwardly through the bottom viewing holes at hide 2 photographing the rabbits.

I took this photo in April this year. This is a photo I had been trying to get for a number of months now, and that day it all came together. I like to try and take photos that allow me to explore my artistic side, whilst showcasing an animal's features or behaviour (and banking a few to be drawn or painted later once I am home). For me, this photo does just that. A rabbit's ears are their best safety feature, allowing them to not only regulate their temperature, but listen out for predators from huge distances away (I have read they can hear noise from up to 3km away). To create the photo, I sat on the floor with my camera out of the bottom viewing hole and waited for an obliging rabbit

to just drop down the hill to the left of hide 2. This allowed me to obtain the smooth foreground whilst focusing in on the ears. I have included the technical details at the bottom of this article.

Forest Farm is literally my happy place, artist's studio and occasional gym. It allows me to immerse myself in nature and channel my creativity whether that be with the camera, or on a run planning shots. I have learnt so much more about nature and wildlife from being down at Forest Farm and from the people I have met, who I like to think of as my Forest Farm family.

Nikon D5 with the Nikon 500mm PF F5.6

Aperture - F5.6

Shutter speed - 1/640s

ISO - 1600

Processed using Adobe Photoshop

A SUMMER POEM

On the Grasshopper and Cricket

The Poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead
In summer luxury,—he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun

He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.

The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.



BY JOHN KEATS

Photograph: Great Green Bush-Cricket. Alun Glee.

IN LOVE WITH LAWNS

Our lawns are so much more than just a patch of grass. They're the bridge between our living space and the wild world that surrounds it. A central part of many gardens. A place to play and relax, whilst still making room for wildlife.

Lawn and order:

Lawns have traditionally been strictly managed, with grass mown as short as possible. But all that constant cutting costs time and money, and deprives both us and wildlife of the joys of a wilder lawn. It's time for a more forward-thinking fashion.

Grow wild:

The difference between weeds and wildflowers is simply how you see it - embrace the daisies, dandelions, clovers and other naturally flowering plants and you won't have a weed in sight. A lawn full of wildflowers provides vital food for bees and butterflies. So, ditch the weedkiller, mow less often, and let the flowers flourish!

To make the most of your lovely lawn, mix up the mowing routine. Keep some areas short as pathways or sunbathing spots - and of course hunting grounds for worm-eating birds. For the rest, let the grass grow a little longer, offering shelter to caterpillars, grasshoppers and other insects.



✳️ Many moth and butterfly caterpillars feed on grasses, including the large skipper and the meadow brown.

✳️ The UK has lost over 97% of its wildflower meadows since the 1930s, so every wildflower we can grow provides a boost to our pollinating insects!

✳️ Around 3/4 of all wild bee species nest in the soil.

✳️ There could be around 200 earthworms per square metre beneath your lawn!

✳️ Several studies have found that clovers, which are common in wildflower lawns, are one of the most frequently visited flowers by bumblebees.

A NATURAL SOLUTION

The climate crisis is already bringing dramatic changes to the UK, from heatwaves to flash flooding. But nature has solutions and lawns can play their part.

Cooling off:

As summer heatwaves become more common, keeping cool at home is increasingly important. A lawn can help! Areas covered in grass stay cooler than patches of concrete or stone. Urban greening is reducing costs of cooling and helping people live more comfortably through heatwaves.

Soaking up:

Climate change is increasing the chances of extreme rainfall. Lawns and other garden greenery can reduce the risk. Rainwater is slowly filtered through the grass and down into the soil, rather

than running off as floodwater. Letting your grass grow a little longer, and allowing a mix of plants to flourish, helps a lawn to soak up even more water.

Let it grow:

Everything grass does, it does better when it's longer! Longer grass has deeper roots, which makes it more resilient to dry spells, less likely to go brown and needs less watering. Long grass even provides places for wildlife to escape the heat, too.

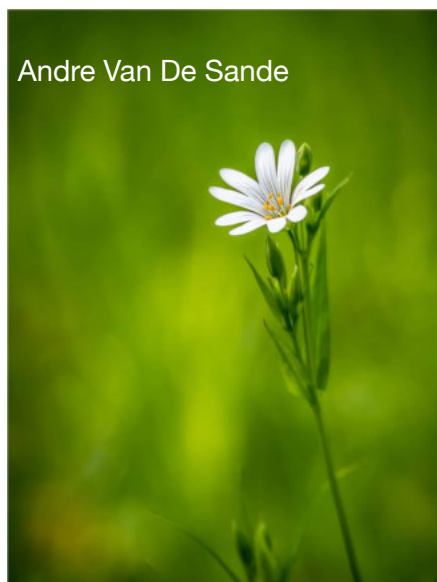
LOOKING AFTER YOUR LAWN

Mowing your lawn:

Traditional lawns were mown weekly. This suits some creatures like ants and worms but if you only mow once every 3-4 weeks this allows flowers such as dandelion and speedwell to bloom, helping out pollinators. If you let some of your lawn stay long all summer, you'll give caterpillars chance to feed on the grass and transform into moths or butterflies.

Feeding your lawn:

If you want to encourage wildlife into your lawn don't use artificial fertilisers. The best way to support your lawn and the insects that live there is to leave it be! When you mow the lawn leave the short clippings in place as an easy mulch. Add longer clippings to your compost heap.



Feeling shady:

If your lawn does not get much sunlight it may start to look a bit thin. Moss can help a lawn look luscious but if your lawn is very bare you might want to consider a more shade-friendly variety of lawn grass. Alternatively, you could grow something else in its place. Elephant's ears (*Bergenia*) or lungwort (*Pulmonaria*) for example, are shade-tolerant groundcover perennial plants that will produce pollinator-friendly flowers in spring.

Alternative lawns:

Lawns don't have to be all grass. Try experimenting with other herbs and flowers. Why not try chamomile or creeping thyme? Both are beautifully fragrant although they aren't as tough as grass, so best grown where there is less foot traffic.

Water: You do not need to water an established lawn! Even if it looks parched and brown in dry weather your grass will bounce back come the next rainfall. Add drought-tolerant wildflowers such as yarrow for an even more resilient lawn.

Adapted from : Wild about lawns. Bring your lawn to life. wildaboutgardens.org.uk

For more detail Go To: https://www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/230306%20RSWT%20Wild%20about%20Lawns_Booklet%202023%20web%20no%20logo.pdf

FOREST FARM RANGERS OPEN DAY: SATURDAY 10 JUNE

What a wonderful family day this was, and enjoyed by well over 300 people. Just about every child wanted to take part in the pond-dipping and bug-sweeping. The rangers were kept very busy!

The Wildlife Trust were there too, with lots of information, wild-life searches, and wooden jewellery/ key-rings to make. In the warden's hut simple refreshments, provided by the Friends, could be enjoyed whilst resting or looking at the displays and information boards.

Up behind the orchard and dipping pond, the Dog show took place with categories for the best junior handler, prettiest bitch, handsomest dog, waggiest tail, most beautiful eyes and the dog the judge would most like to take home!

Coed Caerdydd had a volunteer session on the same day giving visitors the chance to see again the work that they do. To date, over 30,000 trees have been planted in and around Cardiff and a further 7,000 are currently being nurtured in the nursery at Forest Farm.



In the farm courtyard, Cardiff and district woodcraft demonstrated wood-turning and had beautiful wooden items for sale. Leading off from the courtyard, in the old dairy, lovely hand-painted cards were again on sale in aid of Alzheimers, and a huge variety of knitted toys for City Hospice. Children enjoyed trying their hand at willow-crafts, with Seren Willows, making hearts, stars or fish to take home.

Cardiff Bee-keepers, who also care for the bees at Forest Farm, offered the opportunity to taste honeys made in various parts of Cardiff. They were all interestingly different! I bought a jar of Forest Farm bee honey to enjoy later at home.

The next open day at Forest Farm will be organised by the Friends and will take place on **Saturday 14 October**. Try not to miss it!

VOLUNTEER REPORT: SPRING 2023

There may have only been five volunteers at March's session, but they had a very productive morning's work. They planted two 'standard' silver birches in the Scout Field (the one on the right across the bridge at Forest Lock), along with six 'whips' of silver birch and rowan. They also dug up some bramble, in what might, perhaps, be an over-optimistic attempt to keep it under control – but if you don't try...]

Sowing wildflower seeds was the order of the day for the fifteen volunteers at April's session. The main place was the strip of land that runs alongside the path between the end of Forest Farm Road and the Melingriffith feeder – what would be called a 'sacrifice strip' on a working farm.



After that, the volunteers moved on to the bed by the old pig pens, which needed a bit of loosening up, and then the patch of rough ground behind the Wardens Centre. That needed a lot of digging over, which, given the amount of clay in some of it, was quite hard work. They also seeded a small area near the remains of the old stable block.

The seedlings are now growing well (despite the lack of rain) and hopefully there should be a riot of colour by the

time you're reading this, with the flowers attracting pollinators galore. Then, when they go to seed in the late summer and autumn, they'll provide a useful source of food for birds.

The main activity at May's session wasn't exactly glamorous – shovelling, barrowing and raking a couple of tonnes of stone, to repair paths near the hides – but it's just one of the many essential jobs that have to be done to keep the reserve running. And the Friends' volunteers are never ones to shy away from hard work.



And whilst the path repairs were underway, some people cut back overhanging vegetation along the sides, to keep it under control. They were even helped by a young passer-by, out for a walk with his family, who was very keen to lend a hand!

As ever, many thanks to everyone who came along to any of our volunteer sessions, regulars & first-timers, old & young alike.

Volunteering sessions for the rest of 2023 are on 18 June, 23 July, 20 August, 24 September, 22 October, 26 November and 17 December. Meet 10am at The Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road.

Sunday Volunteer sessions are 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!

Jon Wallis.

The following was first published on the 'Friends of Forest Farm' Facebook page in April 2023.

RANGERS FLOORED BY FIND AT FOREST FARM!

Back in March, the full-time and volunteer Rangers were clearing up an area by the farmhouse at Forest Farm, behind the old pig-pens, ready for the installation of a new polytunnel.

The area had previously been brick paved, and had raised beds built on it. At some point, two bay trees had been planted in the raised beds. Unfortunately, both grew too big for the space, and their roots caused the walls of raised beds to collapse. Then one tree fell over and the other then had to be removed for safety reasons. That left a large area covered with soil and bricks, which just happened to be the right size for a new polytunnel, so the full-time and volunteer Rangers set about clearing it up.

Imagine their surprise when, after a couple of hours of hard work, they glimpsed something unusual under some of the brick paving that had been disturbed by the tree roots.



The "something unusual" turned out to be the remains of a mosaic floor. The Rangers are familiar with what's often called "a mosaic of habitats" in conservation circles, but this was definitely a rare find!

Professor Will Sommers, from the South Wales Institute of Classical Archaeology, estimates that the mosaic floor dates back to the mid-fourth century, just before the Romans

abandoned Cardiff in 370AD and Wales entirely in 383AD.

According to Professor Sommers, the floor would have been in a villa, which probably belonged to a military official connected with the Roman fort that existed where Cardiff Castle now stands. It's obviously productive land here – there was a working farm here until relatively recently, after all – and the Taff would have provided fish and fresh water.

Even after the Roman legions were withdrawn, the villa would almost certainly have remained occupied by Romano-Britons until at least the early sixth century, just like the former Roman town of Venta Silurum at Caerwent, near Newport, which is only 20 miles away.

Further investigation is needed to see if anything more of the villa remains under the current farm buildings.

[More Photos at <https://www.facebook.com/forestfarmuk/posts/pfbid0dGmgXK8LNxm4mi4Y28Y9RevHH3LwqVM7UBTVDVHY8E13Gv1bQe87Qmsh4BykwBCI>]

At this point, I should probably mention that the date of the Facebook post was April 1st.

Finally, I'd like to apologise to the people who turned up a month later, during the Early May Bank Holiday, to look at the mosaic. However, to ensure its safety, it was moved to the island of San Seriffe, where it's now on display under the famous spaghetti tree.

Jon Wallis.

PAWS FOR THOUGHT

Dogs are our most popular pet, with some 13 million in the UK. They bring companionship and joy to their owners. They help us be more active and spend time in nature, giving the opportunity to enhance our understanding of nature.

It is clear that the vast majority of people taking their dogs to Forest Farm care deeply about both their pets and the resident wildlife and do not want harm to come to either. However, even the most mild mannered of our four legged friends sends danger signals to wild animals, who will see them as a predator. A dog chasing birds, squirrels or other animals - or even just its presence, can cause them to stop feeding, become stressed, or even abandon a nest. Many birds nest or feed on the ground where they become vulnerable; they may not return to the nest or the eggs won't hatch. Keeping a dog on a lead means less chance of disturbing wildlife.

Man's best friend can directly influence wild places too. The chemicals in flea treatments can wash into rivers and ponds damaging wildlife. Dog fouling, as well as being unpleasant to tread in, over- enriches the soil. Wee does the same. This encourages plants like nettles and grasses to crowd out rare plants such as orchids which require low nutrient levels.



Not removing dog poo (and bags are not always biodegradable) damages the environment and is a hazard to visitors, staff and volunteers. It also can have negative implications for visitors seeking to observe wildlife

Damage can sometimes be caused to the physical environment, for example, when dogs jump into water courses and then erode river banks or harm reed beds.

Forest Farm is a nature reserve, part of which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This is a formal conservation designation. At Forest Farm, this covers Longwood, the canal and Sheep's Bane wood. Nature reserves are special places and need to be supported, protected and conserved. They are accessible to all and there is a need to find a balance between encouraging access and protecting habitats. Dog walking is one area where the balance is difficult.

Unfortunately, we do experience some problems at Forest Farm and there is currently some debate about what action, if any, needs to be taken. We realise this is a controversial issue but would really be interested to hear the opinion of our members.

Do you think a problem exists? Have you seen any untoward incidents or damage? How do we properly balance the competing needs? Do you have any suggestions about what can be done - Do nothing, put up information signs, ask that dogs are kept on leads in places, or even ban dogs from certain areas altogether?

Committee

Source: Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales. Scottish Wildlife Trust

COMING EVENTS AT FOREST FARM

Sunday Volunteering events meet at the Warden's Hut, Forest Farm Rd, CF14 7JH
and last from 10am to 12.00

23 July	Volunteering.	Jon Wallis
20 August	Volunteering.	Jon Wallis
24 September	Volunteering.	Jon Wallis
14 October	Friends Open Day	Friends Committee
22 October	Volunteering.	Jon Wallis

Friends of Forest Farm
Autumn Open Day at Forest Farm Country Park
10am-15.00pm Saturday 14 October 2023
Join the Friends, the Community Park Rangers, Wildlife Trust, and others for a variety of
fun activities for all ages including Pond-dipping, Crafts, apple pressing and pop-up
café.

For more up-to-date information about events please go to our website and Facebook
pages.

Please send your contributions for the next edition to the editors
by **23 SEPTEMBER 2023**. Thank you!

For more information about Friends of Forest Farm or to join see our website:
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. Published on behalf of The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Nature Reserve by Paul and Naomi Brightmore. CONTACT: Email editor@forestfarm.org.uk

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