



Friends of Forest Farm

AUTUMN 2023

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Autumn is a second spring when every leaf is a flower.
Albert Camus

Autumn is a season of colour and beauty as well as wistfulness. It is also a time of much business and activity at Forest Farm, finalising and tidying all the productivity of summer and preparing for the rigours of winter. It gives us the opportunity to look back and reflect on the joy and pleasure and warmth that summer brought us - even if soggy at times. This is reflected in Alec's rangers report.

The popular Winter talks programme is ready to re-launch with the talks taking place at the Ararat Centre at 7.30 pm on the third Wednesday of each month, starting October. Not all the talks have yet been finalised so please check out the website or Facebook for full details.

Jon Wallis, has provided us with a colourful summary of the Sunday Volunteers programme. It is much enjoyed by participants and although well attended we would be delighted to welcome new faces. Himalayan balsam features strongly, and so we have also provided an article on another seriously invasive species, Japanese Knotweed.

The green roofs have now been installed on the hides. Our project to provide display panels inside the hides is also progressing. The hides continue to be used extensively and the photographers continue to provide their stunning pictures. We are pleased to see that finally an application for planning permission has been submitted in respect of the vandalised barn. How quickly this transforms into construction we wait to see.

Volunteering can be a rewarding experience, and we were indeed thanked again this year by the excellent and enjoyable Ranger's BBQ event on 12 July. This year, the Rangers Award was taken out of storage again, and the well-deserving winners were the Innovate Trust. Here they are at the BBQ, receiving the award and quite rightly looking very pleased with themselves. Well done everyone.

Thanks again to everyone involved in the work of supporting the reserve and making it a vibrant community.



Naomi & Paul

RANGERS' REPORT: SUMMER 2023



The summer for wildlife is always a bit of a mixture with most of the birdlife coming toward the end of their breeding cycles and looking a bit tired and tatty. I know the feeling well! However, the reeds are still full of life with the reed warblers doing well.

Our resident swallows in the Barn have been very successful this year and have had 3 broods consisting of 3 young in the first two broods and 4 in the third. All successfully fledged. The vegetation has flourished this year, with a predominately wet summer, and most of our meadows seem to have had a second flush of growth and look lush and green.

This was actually good news for us

as one of the main things we installed on both hides was a green roof. They have both settled in and are doing well. I have been told that it has made a difference in improving the sound quality when sitting in the hide. Hopefully it will also help maintain a more constant temperature as well.



We have had a lot of Himalayan balsam on site this year and have been active in pulling and cutting. This has been carried out by corporate groups and the friends of forest farm, ranger volunteers and Innovate Trust. For some reason though there just seems to be a lot more of it around and we have not been able to clear as much as I wanted. Next season I intend making a bigger push on this problem and will be asking for extra help in controlling the balsam, so any help will be appreciated.



As I write this it is pouring with rain and very windy. It feels that autumn is now with us. It also means it is time to clear the wetlands ready for the winter and we are gearing up ready for a very hard week of wetland work.

Plans are also being drawn up ready for the Autumn open day so keep an eye out for the posters and please join us for a fun family day out.

Thanks. Alec Stewart, Ranger

photographs:

Reed Warbler: Lisa Mason

Green Roof: Anthony Mathews

Wetlands: Nigel Carl

Little Egret (not looking at all tired or tatty): Colin Harvey



MEADOW CRANESBILL



One of the many lovely flowers you will have seen in abundance at Forest Farm between June and August is the Meadow Cranesbill (*Geranium pratense*). This common but beautiful wild-flower has striking violet flowers which pepper hay meadows, verges and grasslands with colour in early to mid-summer. In Forest Farm you can see it around the hides, along the paths and in the meadows. The saucer-shaped flowers, are 4cm across, and can vary in colour from white, blue or violet. Once pollinated, the flowers turn into pointed, bill-like seed pods that give the plant its common name. Other common names are common cranesbill and crowfoot – a name

derived from its' very deeply lobed leaves.

This clump-forming perennial has hairy stems, attractive foliage and grows up to 75cm in height. Not only is it delicate and beautiful, but it is also a rich provider of nectar and pollen for bees and many other types of pollinating insects. Did you know that it is becoming increasingly popular also as a garden plant? – maybe something you could consider for your wildlife garden?



Source: RHS and Wildlife Trusts

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/7914/geranium-pratense/details>

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/wildflowers/meadow-cranes-bill>

Photographs: Cliff Woodhead

Naomi Brightmore

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM AUTUMN OPEN DAY AT FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK



10am-3pm **Saturday 14 October 2023**

Please come and join the Friends, the Community Park Rangers, Wildlife Trust and other local organisations for a variety of fun activities for all ages including pond-dipping, willow weaving and wood turning and other crafts, apple press and refreshments.

IRON PRODUCTION IN THE FOREST FARM AREA.

Iron smelting in South East Wales has a long history, and in this area may have started with a small ironworks at the foot of the Lesser Garth near the present Ynys Bridge. The Mathews family of Radyr Court - now part of Danescourt - were amongst the first to smelt iron here, using iron ore from the Lesser Garth and the plentiful supply of locally produced charcoal.

A Sussex iron master, Sir Henry Sidney, had by 1564 set up a forge for them at "Pentyrch", prompted no doubt by the Privy Council's decision to ban the felling of mighty oaks in South East England, the wood being needed for warships. Another Sussex iron master, Hugh Lambert, was brought to the area and in the 1570's he built himself Gelynis Farm, which still stands near to the river.

By "Pentyrch" we mean in the parish of Pentyrch, about a half a mile north of the Ynys Bridge on the West Bank of the Taff. This ironworks, together with its later manifestation, were excavated in the late 20th century before the building of a new housing estate in Gwaelod y Garth called Riverglade.

These Elizabethan ironworks were associated with a foundry where small cannon, used to defend merchant shipping, were cast. Water from the streams running off the Garth mountain was collected in a large holding pond - now part of the playing fields at the entrance to Gwaelod y Garth - and used to drive the bellows to get a draft of air to heat the charcoal.



Some of the produce (ordnance) was carried on horseback to Cardiff quay and sent to London, Bristol and the West Country. It came to the notice of the Privy Council in London that some of it might have been exported abroad, especially to the Low Countries, which at the time was a colony of Spain. The ironworks was closed on two occasions, once in the reign of Elizabeth 1 and again in the reign of James 1, although in 1625 the Merchants of Bristol petitioned the Privy Council to be allowed to have 40 guns and other pieces of ordnance made yearly at Cardiff "*where the best ordnance is made*".

However, the Pentyrch Ironworks remained closed until the middle of the 18th century when it quickly became associated with the Melingriffith works on the Whitchurch side of the river. Until that time the Melingriffith mill had been the corn mill for a large area. Situated in the Lordship of Senghenydd before the Norman conquest of Glamorgan, it was reputedly named after one of the sons of Ifor Bach, a 12th century Lord of Senghenydd.



To link the two works a tramway was built, at first horse drawn, but later replaced by a steam locomotive. Iron smelted at Pentyrch was carried in wagons to a quay on the Taff alongside Gelynis Farm and was transhipped in "tubs". These were large metal barges rather like our modern skips. The tubs were floated down as far as Radyr weir and then went through a lock onto the feeder

canal which took them into the heart of the Melingriffith works. The remains of the lock can be seen just to the north of Radyr Weir. This was not entirely satisfactory and a bridge across the Taff was built at Gelynis. The bridge still stands, although the part which used to carry the tramway now carries a large pipe.





Some iron rails from this tramway can be seen on the left of the Taff trail about 100 metres south of the weir. Have you spotted them there? The Taff Vale Railway crossed the Tramway at Gelynis and because the Tramway was built before the Taff Vale Railway, horse drawn trams had precedence over steam locomotives on the TVR at this crossing point.

Illustrations:

Artists Impression of the Pentyrch Ironworks.

Engine on the tramway between Melingriffith and Pentyrch Ironworks c 1950.

View of Gwaelod y Garth and Taffs Well taken from the the Viaduct on the Barry Line completed c 1908. Showing some of the industrial working around Gwaelod.

All Copyright R&M History Society.

Allan Cook, Radyr & Morganstown Historical Society

VELINDRE UPDATE

The groundworks for the New Velindre Cancer Centre are progressing before the main construction works starts. Parts of the reserve have been affected and some parts are now being released back to the community.

Railway Cutting Footpath



This has now been re opened and the building of the bridge from ASDA into the construction site has been completed. However, this has been at a considerable cost to the reserve as we lost part of the top meadow which had previously been managed by the rangers and volunteers to provide a diverse grassland habitat over many years.

Drainage

As I write this report the Public Right Of Way (PROW) from the bottom of the canal to Longwood and the SSSI is closed. Welsh Government Planning Laws require all new

domestic and commercial developments to retain rainwater within the site. The objective is to stop rainwater entering the sewers and at time of high rainfall causing the sewer contents to overflow into rivers and costal areas (a subject that has been in the press lately).

The developers have produced a plan as part of the Planning Consent on how this will be achieved. However, there is also a requirement within the legislation that if the planned water storage cannot deal with excessive rainfall then a discharge facility has to be in place. Natural Resources Wales have agreed that this will be achieved via drainage pipes into the River Taff after the water has been filtered on site.



It is expected that this work should be completed by the end of October 2023.

Martin Chamberlain

BARN REPLACEMENT



At last, after two years, we can report some progress on the barn replacement. A planning permission notice has been submitted. So that we have some 'before' and 'after' memories, here are pictures of the barn now, sadly all too familiar.

The plans can be found if you follow this link: [23/01964/FUL | Proposed rebuild of store room, hyde and shed. | Forest Farm Forest Farm Road Whitchurch Cardiff CF14 7JH \(cardiffidoxcloud.wales\)](https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/23/01964/FUL%20Proposed%20rebuild%20of%20store%20room,%20hyde%20and%20shed.%20Forest%20Farm%20Forest%20Farm%20Road%20Whitchurch%20Cardiff%20CF14%207JH%20(cardiffidoxcloud.wales).). Comments had to be in by 27 September, unfortunately a short time-frame.

It will be wonderful to see the current eyesore removed, and replaced by a usable space. The

proposed design, by Archi-Tech, suggests stone-work and tin-cladded roof to match the existing remains, with wooden cladding windows and door-frames. The building footprint remains as now. Drainage towards the pond is needed, to help to keep the wetland moist.

The accompanying Bat-survey, conducted for Cardiff Council by I&G Ecological consulting, makes interesting reading from a wildlife and conservation viewpoint and contains some interesting conclusions.

During the activity survey three bat species: Common pipistrelle, Soprano pipistrelle and myotis species were using the surrounding environment for foraging and commuting, but no bats were seen to leave or enter any part of the building. Since, no evidence of bats, nesting birds, or signs of owl activity were discovered in the building it receives no ecological protection under wildlife legislation, and there are no ecological constraints.

However, biodiversity enhancement measures are required to ensure the development complies with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Future Wales 2040, and PPW (Edition 11, February 2021). To comply, the report recommended that bat boxes to be affixed to mature trees on site ideally within 50m of the property, and for wall top bat access to be provided on the north-east and south-west gable end walls of the renovated building.

It also recommended 1 x Open-fronted and 1 x Small-holed nest box to be affixed to mature trees on site, ideally within 50m of the property.

For further information on these, it referred to 'Where To Put A Bird Box | Nestboxes' - The RSPB - and 'Putting up your box - Bat Boxes' - Bat Conservation Trust <https://www.bats.org.uk/>



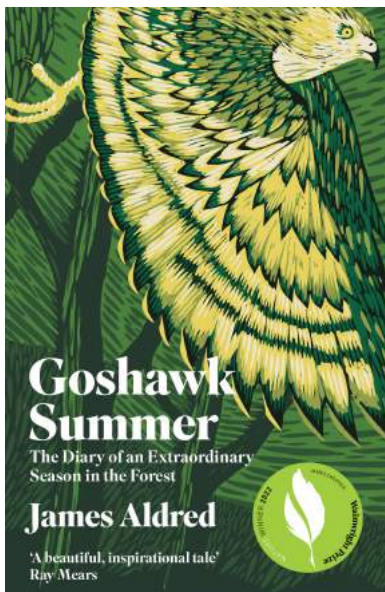
The final recommendation was to reinstate the rainwater run-off from the roof of the building to discharge into the pond and bog/wetland to the rear.

It has been difficult getting information about Cardiff Council's plans for this replacement, but we will give you further information when it becomes available to us. A great pity that Cardiff Council has not consulted with us or any Forest Farm users prior to submitting this application. (editor)

GOSHAWK SUMMER: *A New Forest Season Unlike Any Other.* JAMES ALDRED

Something to read as the longer nights return.

Wildlife cameraman and award-winning documentary-maker James Aldred specialises in filming at height, in the forest canopies; he has spent years in the Amazon, Borneo and Congo, filming the wildlife of the world's most iconic jungles.



His award winning book, *Goshawk Summer*, is a diary of his time spent observing a family of goshawks in the New Forest in southern England. Originally commissioned at the start of 2020 to film the lives of the goshawks, Aldred was granted permission to continue when Covid lockdown struck. The New Forest in lockdown was like nothing he had experienced before. No more cars, no more aeroplanes, no one in the woods, except James, in a place empty of people but filled with birdsong and new life.

"If there is an Elysium, or an afterlife, I would like to think it's the middle of the New Forest during lockdown...It was stunningly beautiful."

"It was magical, I can't imagine ever getting to experience anything like that again. It was like going back in time 1,000 years."

He wrote a book of his experiences, "It's the story of how one family of goshawks living in a timeless corner of England shone like fire through one of our darkest times - and how, for me, they became a symbol of hope for the future,"

"The goshawk. Steel grey, the colour of chainmail. Sharp as a sword. A medieval bird for a medieval forest. A timeless scene. The wood holds its breath, the only sound the begging of the chicks and the gentle breeze sieving through trees. The forest hasn't been this peaceful for a thousand years."

Very soon after humans deserted the forest, wild animals started reclaiming it. Acutely aware that he had been given this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to observe how the wildlife behaved in the forest without humans around.

He spent most of his days perched in a tiny hide lashed onto a fir tree some fifty feet in the air, swaying in the wind. "It was a bit like being below deck on a boat. I'd crouch there in the dark, with a camera, a tripod and everything I need for the day, losing feeling in my legs. And a lot of what I'd do would be just listening, trying to tune in to what the woodlands were telling me."



He is passionate about wildlife. As well as the goshawk nest, he also visits a fox den to film the cubs tumbling and play fighting, the lowland heath to spy the elusive Dartford Warbler and the mires to record the increasingly rare sight of curlews nesting.

His writing is beautiful:

"The bluebells are going to seed; their heavy heads sag as they lean drunkenly against each other. The warm air is now filled with the spicy camphor of unfurling bracken. Each stem seems

to stretch and yawn as if waking up from hibernation and their tightly twisted fiddleheads are covered in soft silver hairs that shimmer like silk."

He also describes human behaviour during those strange and disturbing lockdown times. "When lockdown restrictions eased, it went from one extreme to the other in the forest." people in large numbers suddenly descended upon the national park and there was a big increase of disturbance levels. The numbers of "pandemic puppies" also soared and out-of-control dogs also became a real problem. "I saw so many incidents of mobbing behaviour of ground-nesting birds by dogs. For the birds, it was life and death, because they have invested everything in their nest, but for the dog it was just a game of chase. Often, the owners didn't really understand what was going on."

The TV presenter Ray Mears, said the book was a, "beautiful inspirational tale set in an extraordinary time". "Nature is abundant all around us, if only we could take the time to really look for it".

This book is a joy to read, has much to both enjoy and to reflect upon and I thoroughly recommend it.

Photograph "Goshawk" by Andy Morffew is licensed under CC BY 2.0.

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available at Waterstones <https://www.waterstones.com/book/goshawk-summer/james-aldred/9781783967414>

Paul.

NOTE: If you have a favourite nature book which you would like to recommend, we would love to hear from you.

GREEN ROOFS FOR HIDES: UPDATE



We are pleased to tell you that the green roofs have now been installed on both the hides, by the Rangers team.

It is intended that these will improve the look of the hides and make them more comfortable to use.

Display Panels are also planned for the 2 hides. They will brighten the interiors and more importantly will inform and inspire visitors to the reserve. There will be 4 panels, one for each season, and they will highlight the special wildlife to be found in the wetland areas of Forest Farm. After much discussion, debate and hard work we are now in the detailed design stage. We are hoping that by early 2024 there will be something for you to see.

MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPH



Cheryl Beynon's favourite photo

I was asked to choose one of my favourite photos taken at Forest Farm. It was difficult as I have taken so many in the last year. I've been visiting Forest Farm for a few years but it's only in the last year that I have become a regular visitor, you could say that it's my 'happy place'. I have met many brilliant photographers who have become my friends. I am more than grateful for the advice that I've been given by them! I think that because of this my pictures are improving!

My choice is this female Kingfisher picture. It was taken on the 15th December last year. I remember the day well because it was a beautiful, sunny day and the canal was frozen solid. The kingfisher was oblivious to us being there because it was busy trying to find a gap in the ice to enable it to dive in for a catch.

I used my Canon EOS 760D and Sigma 150-600 Contemporary Lens. ISO 250 f6.3 1/500s. Apart from cropping, the image has not been enhanced in any way.

I will continue to visit this amazing place that we are so lucky to have!

AN AUTUMN POEM (or two)

Autumn Fires



In the other gardens
And all up in the vale,
From the autumn bonfires
See the smoke trail!

Pleasant summer over,
And all the summer flowers,
The red fire blazes,
The grey smoke towers.

Sing a song of seasons!
Something bright in all!
Flowers in the summer,
Fires in the fall!

Robert Louis Stevenson

Fall, Leaves, Fall



Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;
Lengthen night and shorten day;
Every leaf speaks bliss to me
Fluttering from the autumn tree.
I shall smile when wreaths of snow
Blossom where the rose should grow;
I shall sing when night's decay
Ushers in a drearier day.

Emily Brontë

photographs: Ellen Morris Photography
Andre Van De Sande

JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Following our recent article on Himalayan Balsam we thought we would look at another alien invader - the notorious Japanese Knotweed. South Wales is somewhat of a hot-spot in the UK for this invader and it is becoming ever more evident in our locality, including Forest Farm. This article will help you to identify it and know what to do (or not do) if you spot it. More importantly it will also point you to where you can get more detailed advice if you are worried about a possible occurrence, since this article is only an a basic introduction.

Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica* syn. *Fallopia japonica*) was introduced to the UK from Japan in the 19th century as a garden plant, but has since become established in the wild, rampaging across roadside verges, riverbanks and waste ground. It is a fast-growing, invasive weed, which prevents other native species from growing, and is often used to highlight the issues of introducing alien species.

It is a weed that spreads rapidly. In winter the plant dies back to ground level but by early summer the bamboo-like stems emerge from rhizomes (creeping underground stems) deep underground to shoot to over 2.1m (7ft), suppressing all other plant growth. Eradication requires determination as it is very hard to remove by hand or eradicate with chemicals. New legislation now covers its control.

Appearance



In spring, reddish-purple fleshy **shoots** emerge from crimson-pink buds at ground level. These grow rapidly, producing in summer, dense stands of tall bamboo-like **canes** which grow to 2.1m (7ft) tall.



These canes have characteristic purple flecks, and produce branches from nodes along its length. Leaves are heart or shovel-shaped and up to 14cm (5½in) in length and borne

alternately (in a zig zag pattern) along the stems. The stems die

back to ground level in winter, but the dry canes remain for several months or longer.

The creamy-white **flower** tassels produced in late summer and early autumn reach up to 15cm (6in).



Where do invasive knotweeds grow?

Japanese knotweed is able to grow in most, if not all soil conditions found in the UK, though these species show a strong preference for man-made habitats. Common habitats include roadsides, waste ground, railway embankments and cuttings, spoil-tips along rivers and streams.



How do invasive knotweeds spread?

Invasive knotweeds are long-lived (rhizome-forming perennial), competitive, dominant plants that spread by direct rhizome (root) growth and from leaf, stem and rhizome fragments of the parent plant. Pieces of rhizome smaller than 1cm in length can grow into a new plant.

Legislation

Because of negative impacts on the UK environment and economy, all invasive knotweeds are listed under Schedule 9 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which means it is an offence to plant or cause these plants to grow in the wild. Also, knotweed plant material is a 'controlled waste' under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 which means it can only be transported by a registered waste carrier to suitably permitted or exempt sites. Transfer notes must be kept for each load for a minimum of 2 years.

Don'ts and Do's of knotweed treatment (based on gov.wales advice)

- Don't consider undertaking knotweed treatment yourself without the appropriate skills and experience. There are anecdotal reports of mortgages being declined as a result of inadequate/poorly undertaken treatment.
- Don't think there is a quick fix - knotweeds are resilient weeds that cannot be controlled by herbicide in a single year - treatment must be long-term and target both the above ground and extensive below ground parts of the plant.
- Don't undertake treatment methods which are ineffective and risk spreading knotweeds further. Physical control methods are the least effective of the treatments tested and also the most likely to result in further spread. Such methods include: cutting using hand tools, strimmer, mower, flail, thrasher; pulling; surface covering with geomembrane/geotextile; composting and burning.
- Don't try digging out the knotweed yourself, it is easy to miss parts of the rhizome and spread it and you cannot dispose of this plant material along with your garden waste - in fact, it is illegal to do this.
- Don't use unsuitable herbicides - research showed that of the herbicide products currently available, glyphosate applied at the time when knotweeds are most vulnerable to its effects is the most effective control treatment. Anyone using professional herbicides must hold a recognised professional training certificate.
- Don't use animals to control knotweed by grazing - this does not control knotweeds.
- Don't try untested methods of control - these do not work, but are likely to make the problem worse.
- Do: Ignore the hysteria - knotweed can be controlled using glyphosate at the right time of year, though this will usually take three to five years.

- Do: Once knotweed has been effectively controlled using herbicide don't disturb this land, e.g. by digging, as it is likely to come back; even if the above ground parts of the plant are dead, the below ground rhizome system may not be.
- Do use the right control methods - it is an offence to cause invasive knotweeds to grow in the wild and they can cause a private nuisance. This means that allowing actions which cause the spread of knotweed from your land may constitute a criminal offence and/or may give rise to liability under a private nuisance claim.

Forest Farm

If you spot Japanese Knotweed on the Forest Farm reserve please

- Do not try and dig up or remove the plant
- Do not physically cut or interfere with it, or treat it with chemicals

IMPORTANT: Please note that this article is for general information only. If you have any specific legal concerns regarding Japanese knotweed, we recommend that you take legal advice. If you have concerns or are requiring treatment then please seek professional help to identify and correctly treat it.

Photographs: These are copyright of Environet and are used with their kind permission. (We have no direct professional experience of Environet and are not giving a recommendation of their services.)

Further Information:

Welsh Government: Public information on invasive species in Wales

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-03/japanese-knotweed-public-information-controlling-invasive-species-wales.pdf>

North Wales Wildlife Trust: <https://www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-05/NWWT%20INNS%20ID%20Booklet%202019%20Revamp%20FINAL.pdf>

The Royal Horticultural Society: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/weeds/japanese-knotweed>

GB Non-native species Secretariat (NNSS): <https://www.nonnativespecies.org/non-native-species/id-sheets/>

Environetuk: <https://www.environetuk.com/japanese-knotweed/identification>

Natural Resources Wales: <https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/environmental-topics/wildlife-and-biodiversity/japanese-knotweed/?lang=en>

Paul

VOLUNTEER REPORT: SUMMER 2023



In June, nine volunteers spent a very humid morning beginning this year's campaign in the battle against Himalayan balsam, pulling it up in one of the fields on the 'opposite' bank of the canal, at the foot of Long Wood. It's hard-going – not to say quite painful when there are both nettles and bramble in the mix – but if it's done diligently for a few years, it really can make a difference. Indeed, prior to COVID-19, we'd achieved visible results in a few areas of Forest

Farm, such as the scout field and the banks of the Melingriffith feeder, with less and less Himalayan balsam appearing in successive years. Unfortunately, the lockdowns and restrictions on group activities put paid to a lot of volunteering for a couple of years, so we've been set back quite a bit. That's why we really appreciate people donating their time and energy to help us catch up!



There was a distinct sense of déjà vu in July, when the volunteering session was spent pulling up yet more Himalayan balsam, this time in the area between the end of the conservation meadow (the one next to hide 2) and the canal. Aside from making some progress in controlling the balsam (even if it doesn't feel like it at times!) we were rewarded by the sight of numerous butterflies, dragon/damselflies, bees, fungi, and even a couple of frogs.

Perversely, the abundance of insects may have been due, at least in part, to the huge amount of Himalayan balsam, which produces a very attractive nectar, and more of it than any native flora. The trouble is that, not only does Himalayan balsam out-compete native plants, it attracts pollinators away from those that remain, which means they don't get pollinated. To add to the problem, the balsam plant doesn't provide a suitable site for egg-laying by our native insects, which consequently reduces their numbers. So, ultimately, Himalayan balsam has a hugely detrimental effect on our native biodiversity.



By August's session, the Himalayan balsam had set seed and the pods were primed to explode at the slightest touch, propelling their seeds up to 7 metres, which meant no more pulling it up, much to many people's relief! Instead, nine volunteers spent a warm and sunny morning cutting back along a couple of bridleways – one between the stone bridge and the weir, and the other running alongside the Taff Trail, from the weir up to the motorway bridge. The latter stretch had become really overgrown, so it was a morning well spent. We even had a couple of horse-riders come along near the end, to check the headroom (no photo of them, sadly).

Jon Wallis.

Volunteering sessions for the rest of 2023 are on 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!

PALMATE NEWTS

Great Britain is home to only 6 native amphibians: one frog, two toads, and three species of newt. At Forest Farm you will probably only see three of them - the Common Toad, the Common Frog and the Palmate Newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*). If you're like me, you're at least familiar with the Frog and Toad, but what do we know about Newts?

First, what is an Amphibian? Unlike reptiles, amphibians need water in which to lay their eggs and complete their life cycle. They are seldom found far from a source of water or a damp environment. Amphibians spend the first part of their lives in an aquatic, water-based phase, before metamorphosing into their adult, land-based forms. In their adult form they are sometimes confused with Lizards, but they are quite different, since they have no scales, have thin, damp skin, through which they can breathe, and also move much more slowly. Also lizards, like all reptiles, do not breed in water.



The Palmate Newt that we mostly have at Forest Farm is the smallest of the three British species. The two others are the Common or Smooth newt and the Great Crested newt. They are all members of the Salamander family.

Like frogs and toads, newts have tadpoles which develop from eggs and swim in the pond. They hide in the oxygenating weed using their gills to breathe underwater, and feed on aquatic insects. At this stage they have no legs, but have frilly gills which are

retained throughout the tadpole stage but reabsorbed during metamorphosis, as is the fin on the tail. Slight changes also then occur in the shape of the head.

Newts are carnivores that eat a variety of insects and animals. Examples of their prey are slugs, worms, small invertebrates, amphibian eggs and insects on land and tadpoles, shrimp, aquatic insects, insect larvae, molluscs, water snails, small crustaceans and sea louse in water.

The Palmate newt is very similar in appearance to the Smooth newt, and is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Its smooth skin ranges in colour from dull olive-green to rusty brown and is marked with darker spots and blotches. The undersides are paler brown or orange. A small crest runs the length of the body and tail. The palmate newt's throat is unspotted, unlike that of the smooth newt. It reaches lengths of around 9 cm (3.54 in.). During the breeding season the male develops distinctive webbing on its hind feet, and this is where it derives its' name. It also develops a thin thread-like extension of the tail.

In winter, you won't see them - they hibernate underground, among tree roots and in old walls. In Spring, they head to the ponds to breed, and the cycle begins again!

Source: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/amphibians/palmate-newt>

<https://www.activewild.com/amphibians-britain/>

Photograph: Adult male palmate newt. H. Krisp

Naomi Brightmore. (Editor's note: If any of you photographers out there can take a picture of a Palmate newt at Forest Farm that is NOT being eaten by a Heron, we would be delighted to receive and print it! Thank you.)

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

Winter talk events take place at Ararat Community rooms, CF14 1PT, at 7:30pm
(note new start time!)

Friends of Forest Farm Autumn Open Day at Forest Farm Country Park 10am-3pm 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.

24 September	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
18 October	Winter Talk - The Dr Mary Gillham Archive Project	Speaker: Andy Kendall
22 October	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
15 November	Winter Talk – The Wildlife Trusts of South and West Wales	Speaker: Rob Pickford
26 November	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
17 December	Volunteering	Jon Wallis

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 **15 DECEMBER 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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