

FRIENDS OF FOREST ARM



and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

EDITOR'S FORUM

The U.K. clime is far from sublime,
With flaming June not yet in tune.
But don't despair, for all's set fair -
Newsletter's here with lots of cheer
And some bright views with all the news;
Our **Country Park** still makes its mark.
Thanks to contributors and distributors
Also Robin with computer throbbin'.
With hopes this verse is not too terse -
Until the 'fall' - Good Luck to all.

Ken Patterson

ROUND

The new **Fish Pass** at Radyr Weir is completed at last - hopefully, to the satisfaction of the fish. I was told a salmon a metre long was caught passing through, and since Mike is not a fisherman, it could be true!

Yes, **more seats** will be sited alongside the Canal; the wood is ready, but labour is in short supply.

The stile alongside the gas main crossing the Feeder will be replaced by a **wheelchair access**.

Completion of work on the **Melingriffith Water Pump** is being discussed by members of the Oxford House Archaeological Trust and by Leisure & Amenities as a matter of urgency. It really will be finished soon ...

The Inspectors' report on the **Hospital Meadows** should be out this month. Mind you, I was told this last month - and the month before ...

E.O. Edwards

RESERVE NEWS

The warm, early May bank holiday brought a lot of visitors to the Reserve - amongst them a **Green Sandpiper** (our first for the Reserve). It stayed all day on the new Wetland Scrape and rewarded us with good views from the Hide. This wader, being an extremely rare breeder in this country, was probably on passage to its breeding grounds in Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile our own breeding birds seem to have done reasonably well, our fickle weather being not too unkind this Spring. The pair of **Great Tits** nesting in the box placed in the gable end of the Wardens Centre have been busy feeding a raucous family, the noise of the hungry chicks reverberating throughout the building.

The ugly head of Myxomatosis has shown itself again this year on the Reserve, with the pitiful sight of infected **Rabbits** showing the usual symptoms of swollen heads, and eyes full of pus. Although not as potent as when man first introduced it, this horrible disease still takes its toll of a lot of rabbits.

The **Odonata Survey** goes on - the number of species currently at 16 (8 species of Damselfly, 8 of Dragonfly). This is a very significant population which we hope to keep, and possibly even improve upon by extending the range of wetlands, and adhering to a sympathetic habitat-management system.

All we need now is a nice warm Summer!

Mike Wiley

MEMBERSHIP

The number of paid-up members at the time of writing is **117**. This is only about half of the number reported at the AGM, but there are quite a number of Friends who have not yet renewed their membership for 1994/1995. If you are one of these, I hope you will let me have your subscription as soon as possible. If you do not, your membership will of course lapse, and you will no longer receive this Newsletter with information about happenings and future events.

Tom Colston

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AND ABOUT

A BRIEF ENCOUNTER

Do you remember the Summer? Of course you do - it was that last weekend in May. The residents of our Crescent were so surprised by this sudden heat after the cold and rain, that they had forsaken their lawn mowing, bonfire lighting and noisy DIY jobs in favour of soaking up the welcome rays of the sun. All was blissfully serene until suddenly the peace was shattered by the alarm cacophony of the local nesting Magpies. Oh, no! Now what was wrong?

Granted, this year they had had a stressful breeding season shared by those of us living close to them. Earlier they had tried to re-use last year's nest in the Copperbeech. In the Autumn it had been attacked by a marauding flock of Starlings, the reason for which I never discovered; and then, when they tried to refurbish it, the Carrion Crows pinched their twigs. Discouraged, they built very high in the next tree, a Plane, the leaves of which were much later coming than the Copperbeech, exposing them to the elements and the daily skirmishes with the chimney-pot-nesting Jackdaws. Nonetheless, all had seemed to have settled down until this disturbance.

Fiona, my daughter, and I went to investigate the commotion. There in the front garden, surrounded by three cats, was a half-fledged Magpie. Inbred instinct told it not to move, as cats prefer moving objects to trigger their responses. Meanwhile one parent Magpie dive-bombed the cats, tweaking tails and pecking heads, while the other in the tree tore off leaves and twigs and rained them down on the enemies in order to distract them. Indeed, so worried was one cat owner that she rushed out and retrieved her cat, leaving us to rescue the bird.

All attempts to return the fledgling to its tree failed; it kept falling out, again and again. On closer examination I discovered it had a club-foot and was unable to perch - no doubt the cause of its first fall from the safety of its tree. What to do? Should we leave it to its fate or try and rear it, eventually return it to the wild. There seemed only one choice as the evening was closing in.

We cleared the conservatory of all plants, put a cardboard box on its side, should the bird wish to shelter from the heat, put in food and water, had a serious talk with our Siamese cat on the principle of 'live and let live', named the bird "Hopalong Cassidy", retired exhausted.

Came the dawn. Had he survived the shock of last evening? Yes, he had, but then for the fun and games. We are not particularly squeamish in our house, but digging up and chopping up worms at first light is not on our list of 'pleasant things to do'. I tried feeding the resultant mess by forceps, but Hopalong would have none of it. Even if I got it into his beak, he just spat it out; so while Fiona held him, I literally shoved it down his gullet with my fingers. It looked like a hot, smelly Summer ahead!

After he was fed, like all good babies he was put out to air in the garden with food under an inverted laundry basket suitably weighed down with a small bird bath. The food he totally ignored, but the resident Blackbird, able to get his head through the holes, cashed in on the free bonanza. Would Hopalong learn from watching the Blackbird and get the general idea of how to feed? ... No.

Meanwhile my cat sat birdwatching at a suitable distance. When the bird didn't move, having a low 'stickability' threshold, Tiki soon got bored, stretched, yawned and, not wishing to lose face, slowly got up and walked off with stiff legs. Luckily, being very lazy he never learned that birds means food, preferring it served from a tin.

But, then, he had always been 'a few Starlings short of a flock' when it comes to brains!



On the third day of this routine the parent Magpies appeared in the garden, saw their offspring and attacked the Rowan Tree as they had done the Plane. Cautiously I released Hopalong and was amazed and delighted when the parents resumed their feeding and coaxed him to flutter up to the distant bird-bath. I was then able to take their picture with a telephoto lens.

As the day wore on, all nerves were getting a little frayed. I had to keep a constant watch in case local predatory cats were attracted by the resident garden birds, with nests in the ivy, scolding the three Magpies in their territory. The cat was less than happy at being evicted from his back garden and locked in, until desperation forced him into the front garden under supervision. This exercise was exhausting us all.

Hopalong's first night of freedom under the hedge was a nail-biting time. Would he survive a night on his own in the cold? First light saw us down, and great was our relief to see all three birds pursuing family life. When the parents had delivered their last feed of the day, and the rain returned, we retrieved Hopalong for a sheltered night in the conservatory.

Encouraged by the progress thus far, the next day I locked the cat in, released Hopalong to the custody of his parents, and went to town. That afternoon we had a storm of wind and rain. Weather beaten and drenched myself, I returned and rushed to the garden. All my Lupins were flattened, pots blown over - and no bird to be seen. Eventually I found our little bundle of feathers *dead* in a clump of ivy. Perhaps the wind had prevented the parents feeding him, or the cold and wet had been that hurdle too much; we will never know. Supper that night was a silent affair, punctuated with the occasional 'if only ...' Perhaps Hopalong would never have made it in a hostile world where only the strong survive. Poor little thing ...

Mairead Sutherland

GUIDED WALKS QUESTIONNAIRE

Cardiff City Council introduced a **Visitor Survey** during its Guided Walks Programme last year. The aim of the survey was to improve the marketing and content in the future "Walks for Town & Country" programmes. The results could be summarised :-

(1) The majority of those attending were Cardiff-based; the biggest proportion came from **Cyncoed** (40%); **Whitchurch** provided 10% of the visitors. Radyr was not mentioned - maybe a marketing black spot, or perhaps Radyr folk have other interests!

(2) The majority of visitors were seeking information on **Natural History** and **Local History**. Healthy exercise came well down the list, but this may be a reflection on the content and distance covered by these particular walks.

(3) The biggest grumble was that many people were not able to hear all of the information provided because of the large numbers attending. Suggestions for overcoming this were for providing more halts, and some means of 'audio assistance' such as a loudspeaker. There are difficulties in this: guides are not readily available, and a piercing loudspeaker could destroy the nature and character of the walk, and frighten away the object of interest. Careful selection is therefore necessary.

(4) Marketing. Leaflets appeared to be the most effective means of informing the public of times and locations of walks.

Would anyone wishing to obtain a leaflet for this season's walks please contact:-

Chris Powell on 0222-822940.



GARDEN BIRDWATCH

Since writing in the last issue, there has been quite a variety of sightings in and near our garden. On the 2nd of January, a male **Blackcap** and a female **Stonechat** were early visitors. A **Grey Heron** landed on a neighbour's roof long enough to be photographed on January 8th, followed by a **Jay** in a neighbour's tree later in the day. A **Song Thrush** sang from a neighbour's garden on the 22nd; total January species - 18.

February 5th saw a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** on our bird table. The next day a **Sparrowhawk** sat in a Cherry Tree from 1005 to 1020, and on the 7th a **Redpoll** was in a nearby Silver Birch from 1555 to 1725. It devoured most of the seeds on the tree, and was there long enough for us to call F.F.F. members C. & M. Thelwall to come over and view (unfortunately my camera had developed a fault which prevented me taking shots of these two). A **Black-headed Gull** on the 14th was followed by a **Song Thrush** on the 16th; total February species - 20.

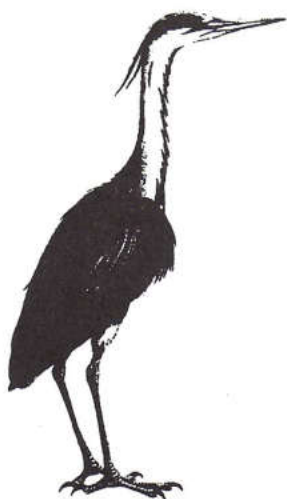
March was a quieter month with 15 species, amongst which a **Blue Tit** was noted collecting moss from the front garden and taking it to our bird-box (this was abandoned later for our neighbour's box).

As expected, April brought migrant movements with a pair of **Linnets** on a tree alongside the bungalow on the 21st, along with a **Willow Warbler** in our front garden *Pyracantha* later in the day. On the 24th a male **Redstart** flew away from the same tree. Six **Goldfinches** perched on a tree in the back garden on the 27th at 0855, followed by a **Willow Warbler** at 1150. A **Swallow** flew through the garden on the 28th; total April species - 19.

The 2nd of May saw a **House Martin** fly low through the back garden; a juvenile **Robin** was noted at 0830 on the 7th. On the 9th a **Whitethroat** sang from a Hawthorn bush alongside and flew away at 1230; total for May - 16.

Since that time, our local **Starlings**, **House Sparrows** and **Blackbirds** have gradually introduced their offspring to us, and are more than ready to devour all the various bird food we put out.

R.J. Williams



BIRD NEWS

The highlight this year was a **Green Sandpiper** on the Scrapes either side of the new pond, passing through on its way to its Northern breeding ground. It stayed one night - a shorter time than the **Wood Warbler** - around for about a week.

A **Reed Warbler** was sighted, and a report in the Hide claimed a **Pied Flycatcher**. The latter is still wary of our nest boxes, but the day will come!

A **Swallow** has shown its appreciation of the new roof on the Barn by nesting inside, and 35 new holes have appeared in the bank where the **Sand Martins** are nesting; a **Grey Wagtail** is also nesting in the middle of the colony.

A young **Heron** has taken up residence on the Scrapes, and chases off the other herons, providing a lot of amusement to watchers in the Hide. Three broods of **Mallard** (4, 5 and 8) and one **Moorhen** with 4 is the count so far. Since October, 66 species have been recorded on the monthly walks.

The bird song this year has been better than ever, with the **Song-thrush** back in full voice competing with the **Blackbird** and backed up by all the other small birds claiming their territory. It will end soon because the breeding season will be over, and with it the need to protect territory. I hope that the **Crow** and **Magpie** outside our bedroom window can read!

E.O. Edwards

FOREST FARM

COUNTRY CRAFT FAIR

26TH JUNE

Now in its 7th year, you are invited to enjoy the many activities and crafts on display on Sunday, 26th June.

Everybody welcome!

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

