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# FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

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## EDITOR'S FORUM.

As autumn arrives we may think of Keats' 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' or share the sentiments of Cyril Connolly - 'Falling leaves lying on the grass in November bring more happiness than the daffodils'.

Our current membership is over 80. Many have enjoyed the organised walks (reported elsewhere) but the area also provided a welcome escape for those who like a spontaneous visit.

The 'Barbeque Evening' attracted a considerable number split between the 'Watch' and our own members. While the hamburgers, bacon and sausages sizzled, soup, rolls and various drinks were available to all. A great success and an opportunity to meet each other in a sociable atmosphere. A special thanks recorded to Mrs. Jennings and all the willing helpers.

## COMMITTEE REPORT

### Mellingriffith

Concern had been expressed as to the naming of the new housing estate. It transpires that "Millbrook" is a marketing term only. Following correspondence with McInerney, contractors, it was agreed that the next stage will be to approach the Post Office re incorporation of "Mellingriffith" in the address of those in the area.

### British Telecom

A transport depot of this organisation based near the Reserve will be operational by August next year. Comments on this event will not be printed here in what is intended to be a family newsletter!

## Industrial Archaeology

Mr. Roger John has joined us as an advisor. One of his current projects is the restoration of the Mellingriffith pump. However, we enjoyed a guided walk in which we were able to share his enthusiasm for the archaeology of the Country Park as a whole.

## Discussion Item

We would like your views regarding next season's walks. Do we organise the walk for Saturday or Sunday, and morning or afternoon? Opinions are divided. E.G. some find morning inconvenient because of meal preparation or church attendance. Others think the menfolk are inclined to fall asleep after a mid-day meal! There is £5 on offer for the best letter on the subject.

We are grateful to all contributors for their efforts. Snippets of news and views will be welcome, as this is your Newsletter.

Please write to the address below.

Ken Patterson.

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## RESERVE NEWS, SUMMER 1990.

This summer on the Reserve reminded me of the hot summer of '76, when the canal dried up, leaving thousands of fish floundering in small puddles of water. The suffering fish were transported to Roath Park lake. With the fear of this happening again, the canal was never restocked. But over the past few years remedial work has been undertaken on the canal banks, rebuilding the walls where necessary, i.e. stopping up the leaks.

This year, despite the hot weather, there is still a good level of water. (Perhaps another look at restocking is in order?)

It has been a marvellous summer for fruit on the Reserve, with blackberries, elderberries and hazlenuts in profusion. Bees and wasps seem to have had a good year too. Whilst cutting back some bramble the other day, I failed to notice a bee's nest, and almost cut through it with a sickle. I was lucky to get away with only three stings!

Earlier in the summer we heard of a meadow full of orchids about to be turned into a hypermarket. With the help of the "British Trust for Conservation Volunteers" turfs containing the flowers were dug up and transplanted to a meadow on the reserve which already contained some orchids. At the time, I was a bit dubious of their chances, as it was hot and dry, but last month I surveyed the meadow, and was pleased to find 105 flowering spikes of common spotted orchid (*Dactylorhiza Fuchsii*) and early march orchid (*Dactylorhiza Incarnata*). We have five species of orchid on the Reserve, amongst them the not common bee orchid (*Ophrys Apifera*).

"That's the good news"! The bad is that British Telecom have begun the groundwork for their new complex adjacent to the Reserve.

If you enter the Reserve from the southern entrance (Velindre Road) you will see a lot of work going on at the end of the feeder, just before it goes under the bridge and is culverted.

McInerney Homes are building in a large grill screen in order to stop branches, trees, etc. from entering, and thus blocking, the culvert.

The quality of the feeder water is a wonder to behold. Whereas a few years ago it was just a dirty, smelly mess, it now is clean and has a variety of aquatic vegetation. It was stocked recently with young chubb and perch by the National River Authority, who hope to use it as a nursery.

The feeder is also responsible for a new species of damselfly to the Reserve, the "Beautiful Demoiselle" (*Agrion Virgo*). This lovely Damselfly has been seen infrequently over the years as a single specimen here and there. This year, however, I've counted at least 60 male and female. In flight they resemble butterflies with a slow, fluttering flight.

I recently saw a "Hobby" flying across the Wentloog levels. It reminded me of the male I saw flying over one of the Reserve meadows last year. I was transfixed by the graceful, agile flight, resembling a miniature peregrine with its long, scythe-like wings and short tail. Its food consists mainly of small birds and insects (swallows and dragonflies) which it catches on the wing.

Our August Friends monthly walk took in the new pond area which the Friends helped plant up with burra reed and reedmace. The plants have all taken, and are looking healthy. Whilst there, a kingfisher flew across the ponds and over us.

The summer estate management is nearly over for another year, the meadows have been cut and the final rite of summer will be over with the annual towpath cut.

M. Wiley

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Mr. Ted Edwards is giving a number of lectures in the coming months and would be glad to receive any material relevant to the L.N.R.



## FOREST FARM WATCH GROUP

The group has been active during its summer programme at a variety of sites. A geological trip to Lavernock in May enabled the children to collect a selection of Late Triassic and early Jurassic fossils. A chance find in the Planorbis beds (around 200 million years old) of a large piece of a bony fish was exciting. This is now with the Watch group but will shortly be returned to the National Museum of Wales where it will be placed in their collection.

The annual outing this year was a trip to the Stackpole National Nature Reserve in South Pembrokeshire. The group of 52 adults and children were able to enjoy the sights and sounds of the reserve in fine June weather. Most spectacular of these sights and sounds were, undoubtedly, the sea bird colonies along the cliffs on this part of the coast. Gulls, auks, fulmars, the occasional gannet and shearwaters were seen. Many of the group encountered razorbills and guillemots at a distance of five metres or less. The rare member of the crow family, the chough, was to be seen at several sites and was also heard giving its characteristic "kiaow" call. After time on the cliffs, the main party moved to the beautiful bay at Barafundle, formerly the private beach of the Cawder family, but now in the hands of the National Trust. Here there was time for exploration, swimming, picnic-ing and other seaside activities. All good things have to come to an end, or so we are told, so we reluctantly left Stackpole. However, our obliging bus driver brought us home via the Eileug Stacks and The Green Bridge of Wales on the Castle-martin peninsula - a perfect end to a perfect day.

Our next meeting was at the Craft Fayre, Forest Farm, eight days after our annual outing. What a difference in the weather! Friends of Forest Farm who were at the event still feel damp at the thought of standing in the rain recruiting new members from the many thousand equally wet visitors.

Idyllic weather for the July meeting - an insect safari on the Reserve. Hay fever permitting, twenty or so intrepid hunters, armed with nets and collecting pots, skipped and ran and stalked in the uncut hay meadow above Middle Lock. The field was teeming with insects of many types, including grasshoppers, meadow brown and gatekeeper butterflies.

The joint Watch/Friends of Forest Farm barbeque in September was a most enjoyable evening. For the Watch children it included a successful bat watch. The first bat seen was a noctule prior to sunset. In the twilight the children saw and heard bats on a bat detector. A week after this event the group erected bat boxes on the Reserve. The boxes had been assembled by Watch group members at the Charles Street Festival.

Future meetings of the Group are as follows :-

Saturday, 20th October 1990  
Forest Farm, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Help build a butterfly garden

Saturday, 17th November 1990  
City Farm, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Meet at City Farm, Sloper Road.  
The charge for this visit will be advised in Newsletter No.10.

Saturday, 8th December 1990  
Forest Farm, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
National Tree Week - Hedge/Tree  
Planting

Saturday, 22nd December 1990  
Forest Farm, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Christmas Party

Saturday, 19th January 1991  
Roath Park, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Gulls, Ducks and Geese. Meet at Scott Monument at 10 a.m. Bring binoculars.

Saturday, 16th February 1991  
Forest Farm, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Checking and cleaning bird boxes

Saturday, 16th March 1991  
Forest Farm, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.  
Woodland Walk and Spring Flowers

For more details ring :

Chris Powell, 751235, Ext. 4575  
Chris James, 611342



## THE 1990 WILDFLOWER WALKS

Wildflower week in May was blessed with a pleasant weather and just over 50 people turned up for the walk on the 21st. Weatherwise the Sunday walk on 1st July fell in the wet June period rather than the July heatwave and the number braving the steady rain was 30. The bulk of this walk was along the canal towpath, where a larger number jostling to view one humble bloom might have initiated a splashy catastrophe, so it was as well that some were put off.

In May we started at the Forest Farm picnic site, where festoons of creamy flowers dangled from the false acacia branches and little green nuts were swelling on the big walnut tree. We followed the River Taff to Radyr Weir and cut back along the Melin-Griffith feeder, but went first to look at Forest Farm pond, which was in the peak of its spring finery. It was difficult to believe that this had only been dug out and lined with polythene 6 or 7 years before.

The golden kingcups were over, but a fine stand of greater spearwort with equally showy flowers had taken over, to vie with lesser spearwort and yellow iris. Pink-flowered spikes of water milfoil peppered the water surface and spiky bobble fruits were rounding up on the branching bur-reed. Terminal columns of yellow stamens were emerging at the tips of the greater reedmace or bulrush stems, the leafy bracts gradually falling away to reveal the massed green female flowers below. Soon the male parts would break away and the fruiting spikes change to the familiar chocolate-brown cat-tails. Marginal yellow broom and mauve ragged robin led on to the later show of yellow tansy and purple willow herb.

Out past starry, gentian-blue flowers of green alkanet, bush vetch and back-by-the-hedge to the newly embanked section of the Taff, we found a wealth of newcomers more characteristic of newly turned arable land. Pushing through the lacy mat of the swine's-cress were elegant fumitory and field pansies, overshadowed by splaying sun spurge and plum poppies. The usual mayweed cissies were largely replaced by wild chamomile which makes an adequate substitute for the real thing in chamomile tea. Handsome spikes of dame's violet

outshone the wild radish and a thicket of welled thistle added distinction to the riot of Composites.

In the more settled community by the riverside path, wild hops climbed among the hedgerow bindweeds; maples were in fruit and holly in flower. Blue borage and scarlet poppies marked disturbed ground by the footbridge across the river to Radyr and then we were traversing a more permanent woodland community with yellow archangel, red campion and greater stitchwort. The bluebells, wild garlic and Jack-in-the pulpit were over now - yielding to the first flowers of the all pervasive ground elder or bishop's weed.

Five mallard ducklings paddled dutifully upstream behind their parents but the resident kingfisher failed to oblige. A detour around the old lock system by the new fish pass at Radyr Weir revealed a tree formerly used as a fence post, with three peripheral bulges above constrictions where the fence wires had blocked the passage of goodies from the leaves to the roots, causing these to accumulate.

Beeches alongside the feeder were thick with nuts, oaks with acorns and alders with expanding 'cones'. 1990, after the amenable summer of 1989, was definitely a mast year - for lime and hornbeam as well, and the grey squirrels would soon be having a ball with all those hazel nuts.

Mary Gillham

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Editor's Note. Regrettably, through lack of space, Dr. Mary Gillham's informative description of the July walk has had to be omitted.

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### Events Programme

The 'Friends' winter meetings will be held at Bethel Baptist Hall at 7.30 p.m. on the following dates :-

21st November 1990  
23rd January 1991  
20th March 1991

Further advice will be issued to members in due course. We look forward to seeing you there.