



FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY
PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 44

JUNE 2002

Editor's Forum Ken Patterson

It is most encouraging to have further contributions and comments from our members for our June Newsletter.

As we appear to be heading for another eight-pager as I write, - which will challenge the ingenuity of our layout expert Robin - I am being brief.

May we all look forward to a warm, welcoming and enjoyable summer season.

Bird Feed Report from the Treasurer

During last Winter we used £455 worth of bird feed. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who made a donation towards the cost. The total donations we received were £83.

This means of feeding the birds has been a great success, and we would appreciate any donations towards the bird feed for the coming Winter 2002/2003.

One way of donating would be to send a cheque payable to **Friends of Forest Farm**; please write on the back of the cheque "**BIRD FEED DONATION**" and send to:

Mr John Harding,
63 Fairwater Grove West, Llandaff, Cardiff, CF5 2JN

NEWS OF A.G.M. **from Denis Davies**

Thirty six members attended the AGM on the 10th of April 2002. This is a brief report on some of the items discussed.

Chairman **Ted Edwards** reported on the work of the Committee during last year. Despite the great promises of creating a "real farm experience" project at Forest Farm, and finding funds for basic maintenance of the footpaths, by Councillor Michael Michael and the Operations Manager when we met them in January 2001, nothing further has been heard from them on these promises. A working party would be set up immediately, and we would be consulted !!

In December last year we were called to a meeting with a middle-rank officer, who told us of another plan for Forest Farm. The proposal is to use the Country Park as a storage place for big tree-trunks cut down in the county, to saw them periodically with a portable saw, and to repair the big barn to store and season the timber. The barn has been repaired and a saw purchased. Last year we asked local councillors to meet us regarding our concerns about Forest Farm. Four of the councillors did not even bother to acknowledge receipt of our letters. All of this just about sums up the attitude of the Council, the senior members, the local councillors and senior officers in terms of the value they place on Forest Farm.

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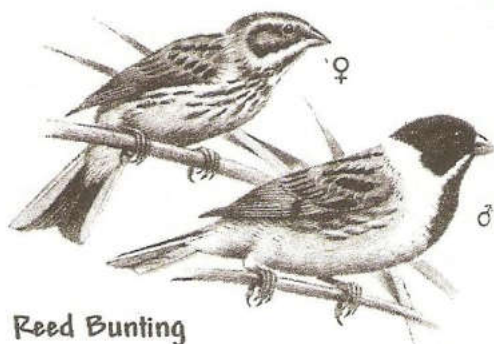
Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**
Countryside Warden

I don't know if it's a sign of ageing, but Spring seems to fly by. March and April seem to be gone before they are here. As I write this article on the 8th of May, everything on the Reserve is busily nesting—that is, everything except the **Sand Martins**.

They were seen to be exploring the artificial cliff on Llyn y Brwynog on the 18th of April. Unfortunately, that evening we had a load of idiots having an all-night party in the bird hide; this included lighting a large fire outside the hide near the water's edge, where one of our benches was used as firewood. I can only guess at the amount of disturbance they created, and I don't think it is a coincidence that the Sand Martins seem to have abandoned the cliff; they haven't been seen in the area since. Let us hope they find somewhere else to nest this year.

On a brighter note, the pair of **Little Grebe** are feeding two young; they had three, but one seems to have vanished. **Sedge** and **Reed Warblers** are singing from the reed beds, and a pair of **Reed Buntings**



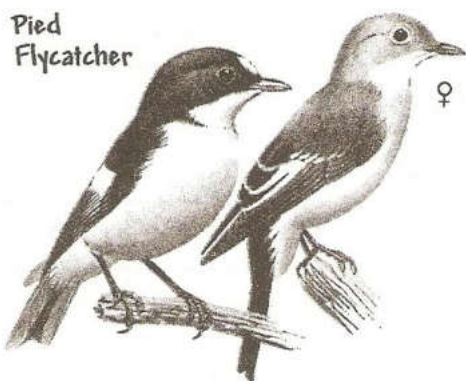
Reed Bunting

seem to have staked a claim to a patch of bramble nearby. **Chiff Chaffs** have been calling for weeks, but I still haven't heard a **Willow Warbler**. I don't know if their numbers are down nationally, as in the past their populations have crashed as a result of drought in their wintering area of the Sahel region of Africa.



Chiff-chaff

Another bird you don't hear any more on the Reserve is the **Cuckoo**. I hear it calling every day at home—the first was on the 21st of April this year. I'm sitting on a bench in the garden writing this, and a very elegant male **Pied Flycatcher** sporting a black and white dinner jacket is singing from a nearby tree containing a bird box. Hopefully it will find a mate, and nest.



Pied Flycatcher

As part of our ongoing access improvement programme this Summer, we will be resurfacing another section of the towpath some two hundred and fifty metres in length at the southern end of the Reserve. There may be some disruption associated with this work, as we will need to take a small dumper up and down the narrow towpath. We will also be tackling some of the worst collapses of the Canal wall.



Little Grebe

Both of these schemes will be funded by you, the Friends.

(A.G.M. report—continued from page 1)

Membership Secretary Noel Gale reported a membership of 232 families and 2 groups at the end of the year.

Treasurer **John Harding** presented written audited accounts for the preceding three years; these were approved. He noted that £1000 had been paid to the Council for the purchase of materials for the repair of the towpath, but fortunately £500 had been recovered through a grant from the Principality Building Society. The Treasurer expressed concern about the future finances of the Friends since we lost the support of the Frazer Strong Trust. The only way to sustain the present level of work was to increase the membership subscription to £5 for families and groups; this would be the first increase since the Friends came into being. The A.G.M. agreed, and this will become effective for April 2003.

Because of the difficulty in getting relevant speakers, the Chairman proposed that the indoor meetings (except the A.G.M.) be discontinued the next year. The A.G.M. agreed. **Mr D. Hockridge** offered to act as **Speakers Secretary**; the Committee will discuss this with him.

Winter Bird-feeding started two years ago; this has resulted in an increase the number of species in the Reserve. It costs about £500 each winter, and this has to be met out of our funds. **Mr Eric Smith** (tel. No. 2062 5667) has kindly donated a 28lb bag of seed (valued at £14 to £15) to the Friends. He has also said that if any member wishes to do the same sort of thing, he would gladly order the seed for them. (Please note that further information is provided by our Treasurer on page 1).

These cottages were situated on the right hand side of the Canal as you walk up from the Iron Bridge, at a distance of about twenty yards.

The wall that you see in front in the picture is still there today, giving us the exact location. Was the wall there before the Canal was built?

E.O.Edwards



Sunnybank Cottages

I have received a letter from one of our members ... **Mr Brian Bird** ... of 16 Porthamal Gardens, Rhiwbina. His grandparents are listed in the 1881 Census mentioned in our last Newsletter ...

"The article regarding Sunnybank was particularly interesting, as my father was born there.

I brought your publication to the notice of my two sisters, who now wish to become members."

Noel Gale

How Boats Pass on the Canal - 1

by **Ted Edwards**

The question I posed in the last issue of the Newsletter as to how two boats, one going up and the other going down the canal, both drawn by a horse attached to the boat by a 22-yard rope and now approaching each other head-on on the one towpath, could pass each other, has not been answered.

My guess is ... The 'up' boat would keep to the towpath side because the rope would always be under strain, pulling against the current. The 'down' boat could drift with the current, allowing the rope to slacken. The rope was attached to a 5-foot pole, which was slotted into a recess situated about six feet from the prow of the boat. This pole could be lifted out of the recess, let into the water and pulled into the bank by the horse handler, thus allowing the 'up' horse to pass unhindered. The 'down' boat would then drift to the towpath, retrieve the towrope, and move on. That's my theory, anyway !

Incidentally, I understood that the Feeder was called The Pound because it cost a pound a yard to build.

FOX RESCUE ON DOG WALK

BY Ken Tilley

Three weeks ago (at the end of February) the weather was what one can only describe as horrendous. I was kept awake most of the night because of the conditions, so at 4.50 a.m. I got out of bed, dressed and put my dogs (three of them—a GSD, a Labrador and a Springer Spaniel) in my car and drove to the Glamorgan Canal.

Upon arrival at the Canal the wind was blowing quite violently. I decided to walk up the path that circles the Whitchurch Hospital, just to see what everything looked like from up there, and to see if any damage was caused in the area by the weather.

Having completed our walk, the dogs and myself were coming to the end of the canal by the iron bridge. The dogs were just ahead of me. Just before the bridge the GSD stopped and was looking in the direction of the Feeder in a dominant stance.

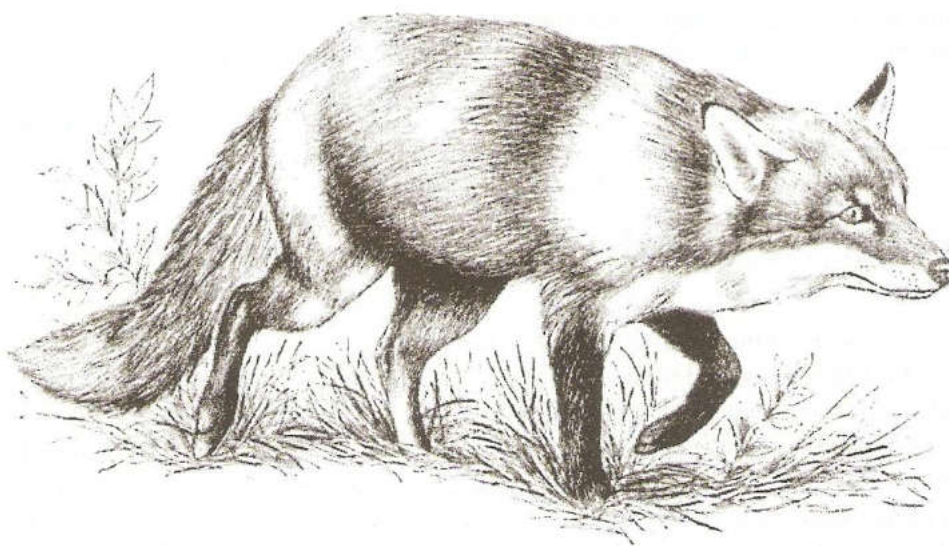
As I got close I could see what he was looking at. Stuck fast in the Feeder edge I could see a Fox, looking very tired and bedraggled; it was stuck about shoulder height in the mud.

I took my dogs and put them in the cage in my vehicle. Then I took my slip lead, and two towels that I carry in my vehicle, back to where the fox was. I looked around; it was like a ghost town—not a soul in sight—just me and the fox. I got down the bank, and put the slip lead over the fox's head.

I tried to give it a tug, but no way was that fox coming out like that. I thought—plan two. I got my hankie out of my pocket and split it in two. The fox was no more than two or three feet from the bank, but it was stuck fast. I looked around and thought, "If you bite me, mate, you're on your own."

I stood in the water and mud nearly knee high, and approached the fox. It looked really tired, wet and covered in mud; its ears were horizontal, as if it had given up. I placed the makeshift muzzle over its muzzle and tied it on the back of its head. It looked at me with no spirit of freedom in its eyes. I thought, "I don't think you're going to make it."

I just moved the mud away from the fox, and with a little effort got it free. In no time I got us both up onto the path, both the fox and me covered in mud. I took the fox to the end of the canal by the iron bridge. At the edge of the canal I washed the fox down as well as I could, and again I looked at him. He just stood there shivering, making no effort to escape. How long it had been there I have no idea, but it must have been a long time.



Having got the mud off, I used the towels and rubbed the fox vigorously, trying to dry him. Then I looked at him, released the muzzle and stood back. Well, don't ask me because I don't know, but that tired, bedraggled and weary fox took off like Lynford Christie. It got about fifty metres away, and stopped. It looked back at me as if to say, "That mud bath and massage did me a power of good." And off it went.

I went back to my vehicle. I stood there covered in mud. I chuckled to myself and split a plastic bin liner to fit over my car seat. Then I thought to myself, "Just retired after being a Police Dog handler for twenty one years. There is always something to do; it hasn't changed."



from
Hugh Harrison

RSPB Phoenix Group
turned out for a **Litter**

Pick on the Longwood Drive section during March. At the end of the morning session you are always amazed at the amount of bags that have been filled with rubbish left by customers of that well-known eating place.

May has seen us having a go at the problematical **Japanese Knotweed**, though it looks as if our efforts are paying off. Bluebells, primroses, ferns and wild orchids are taking a hold.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank **Paul Kent**, the warden, for his help, advice and knowledge he has given this group over the many years we've all enjoyed working with him. We wish him well in his new job, though he's not moved far; he's next door—BTCV.

RSPB WILDLIFE EXPLORERS

The Group has had another enjoyable and successful six months. We have had a varied programme including ...

Video Evening Quiz Games

Craftwork Guest Speakers Project work.

In September we will be looking for new members, so if any children aged 7 - 12 are interested in joining, please telephone me ...

Sue Walters
registered Leader

Tel. No. 2075 1760

The Big Garden Birdwatch

from **M.J.Chamberlain**

An estimated 262,000 people took part in this year's **Big Garden Birdwatch** during a particularly wet weekend in January. The average number of birds spotted during the hour were ...

Starlings 4.52

House Sparrow 4.33

Blue Tit 2.93

Blackbird 2.63



Chaffinch 2.38

Greenfinch 1.98

Collared Dove 1.62

Great Tit 1.48

Wood Pigeon 1.26

Robin 1.26

In my garden in Whitchurch I recorded a total of two House Sparrows. The local bird population has plummeted in the last five years. Has anyone else noticed this? And, any thoughts why?

My feeling is that this is due to the large feral and domestic population, as as the local Magpies

RSPB - Cardiff and District Members Group - Field Trips

Sunday July 21st Pottering around **West Glamorgan**. A wander around woodland and upland sites.

Sunday August 18th **Horner Wood Nature Reserve, Somerset**. Birds of moorland and woodland.

Sunday September 22nd **Lodmoor and Portland Bill, Weymouth**. Autumn migrants on passage.

A non-refundable deposit of **£10** will secure a seat on the coach. If you would like to book a place, please contact **Joy Lyman**—Field Secretary—Tel. No. **2077 0031**

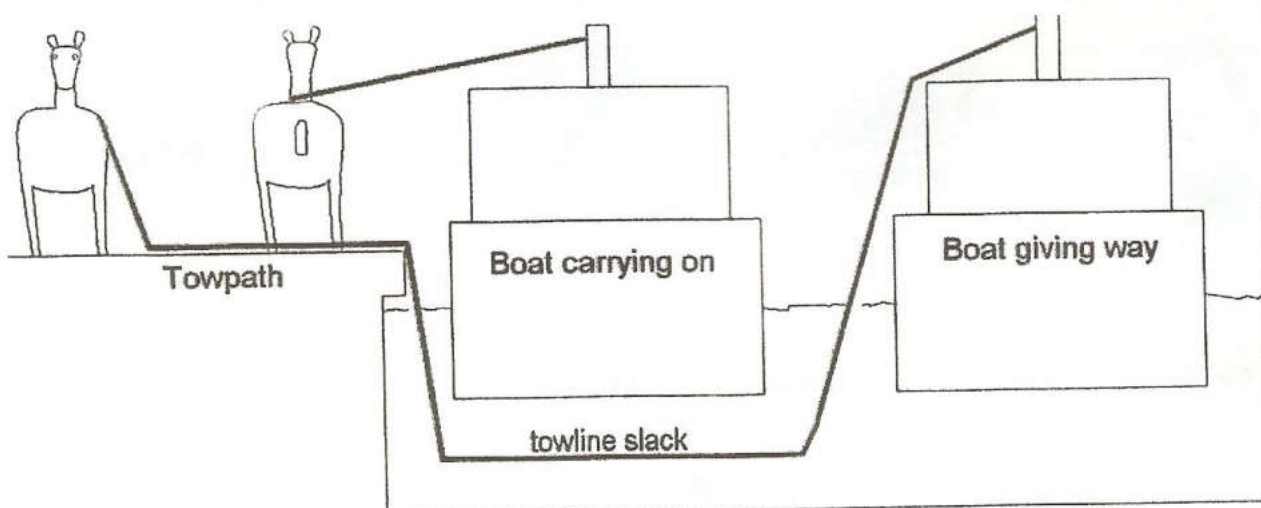
How Boats Pass on the Canal - 2 from Harry Linck

In a recent Newsletter the question was asked, 'How could two canal boats pass each other?'

The author C.S.Forester, best known for his Hornblower tales, was meticulous about technical details, and so we can take his description of two boats passing as being reliable.

In the book, "Hornblower and the Atropos" a canal journey is described in a fast boat, The Charlotte, having right of way over other boats and temporarily steered by Hornblower. The Charlotte is approaching a barge travelling in the opposite direction. I quote ...

'The bargee at the tow horse's head brought the beast to a standstill, edging him over into the hedge beside the towpath; the bargee's wife put her tiller over and the barge swerved majestically, with her residual way, towards the reeds that lined the opposite bank; so between the horse and barge the tow rope sank to the ground on the towpath, and into the water in a deep bight. Over the tow rope cantered Jenkin's horses and Hornblower headed the passage boat for the narrow space between the barge and the towpath.'



This seems to be a general answer to the question, and the method would also work if one boat was overtaking another. How priorities were decided between working boats on the Glamorganshire Canal I do not know, but it seems likely that a boat returning unloaded to Merthyr would give way to a loaded boat coming down to Cardiff.

The Glamorganshire Canal

from Noel Gale

Readers might well be interested in a book I recently came across. It is entitled, 'Old Cardiff Winds - songs from Tiger Bay and far beyond' by Mike Johnson. In amongst twenty three songs (words and music) is one relating to the Glamorganshire Canal. The words of the song are prefaced in the book by the following ...

"The Glamorganshire Canal, which opened in 1794, was originally sponsored by Richard Crawshaw and other Merthyr Ironmasters, replacing the pack-horse as the major means of hauling iron. Twenty five miles long, and having some fifty locks, the canal became the main coal artery right up to the 1840's, when the Taff Valley Railway extension to Cardiff opened. Use of the canal gradually dwindled. One section survived to service a single Pontypridd business 'til the 1940's. But by 1950 all that remained was a small section north of the Sea Lock in Butetown. Just before midnight on the 5th of December 1951 the sand-dredger CATHERINE ETHEL rammed the inner gates of the Sea Lock. The force of the escaping water blasted the entire structure, together with CATHERINE ETHEL, spectacularly out to sea"

From the Cynon valley mines to the Cardiff City line
rolled the old Glamorganshire Canal;
Where the pack horse used to load now the iron barges flowed
down the old Glamorganshire Canal.

**And it rolled, and it flowed, down the old Glamorganshire Canal.
And it rolled, and it flowed, down the old Glamorganshire Canal.**

Then the iron was no more, and the coal began to pour
down the old Glamorganshire Canal;
Moving down through fifty locks, destination Cardiff docks,
on the old Glamorganshire Canal.

Chorus

Tail to tail the barges filed and twenty dusty miles
down the old Glamorganshire Canal;
Then Brunel surveyed the line, and effectively called time
on the Old Glamorganshire Canal.

Chorus

1841's the year, and the railway tracks appeared
near the old Glamorganshire Canal;
And the trains began to roll with the precious loads they stole
from the old Glamorganshire Canal.

Chorus

Now, by 1951 nearly all of her had gone,
though her basin gates remained there for a while;
When the Catherine Ethel rammed she was well and truly damned,
and she blew into oblivion in style.

Chorus (twice)

(The editor wishes to thank Mike Johnson for his kind permission for the above to be reproduced)

Extracts of a letter from ... **Annette and Dave Lockwood** ... 12 Warren Evans Court, Whitchurch

We had a walk around the Reserve last Tuesday. It was a lovely day, and we saw all our favourites ... a pair of **Buzzards** enjoying the thermals, two **Hérons** enjoying the **Frogs** or **Tadpoles**, a **Little Grebe**, and half a dozen **Moorhens**—all from the Hide.

We spotted many little birds along the Canal, but were sad to see a drowned **Hedgehog**—looking for a drink, I expect. We also saw a tree full of **Wagtails**. We usually see them only on our lawn and front paths. We are near the brook, and often see **Yellow Wagtails** there.

We both enjoyed the last Newsletter. Eric and Jean Tucker were our neighbours for years when our children were small. I was born in Whitchurch, and have lived here all my life because my Dad worked at the Melingriffith.



Grey
Heron



Moorhen



Buzzard



Hedgehog



Newt watching

MEMBERSHIP

Membership renewals for the current year are flowing in.

The final figure for last year was **232 Family** and **2 Group** members. We are already receiving new members, and I am hopeful that this year we can reach a total of 250 for the first time since our group was formed.

For those members whose minds it may have slipped, or who have mislaid their renewal forms, I have arranged for another slip to be delivered with this quarter's Newsletter. Thank you for your continued support.

May I also say 'thank you' to those members who donate a 'little extra' with their subscriptions. Last year individual members donations boosted our funds by some **£153**.

N.J.Gale (Membership Secretary)

029-2091 5665

T-shirts Sweatshirts Polos

with **Friends of Forest Farm** logo

Good quality Raglan sleeve

Price: **£16.5** Children's: **£10.75**

PAULINE LINCK

029-2061 7012

Layout by Robin Sotheby

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