

FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 48

JUNE 2003

<i>Editor's Forum</i>	Ken Patterson	MEMBERSHIP
<p><i>I trust new readers situated near the Country Park enjoyed their free copy of our Newsletter. If this taster encourages you to give us your support, we will be delighted to have you as members.</i></p> <p><i>This will enable more maintenance and development required for the Country Park. Also it encourages more information on the local history and the environment through Newsletter contributions. Snippets of information from members are always welcome too.</i></p> <p><i>Regretfully, once again there has been vandalism in the two hides. Both have been subjected to damage of the internal structure, with benches smashed and parts removed. Our Warden will now have to obtain new timber to replace them. Despite reports to the police, it seems that little can be done to catch these mindless vandals. Twenty-four hour surveillance is the only way—and that is quite impossible.</i></p> <p><i>I am grateful to Les Gibbon and Richard Lawrence for their excellent contributions.</i></p> <p><i>Enjoy Summer at the Country Park!</i></p>		<p>Noel Gale Membership Secretary</p> <p>Membership renewals for the current year are flowing in thick and fast. For those members whose minds it may have slipped, or who have mislaid their renewal form, I have arranged for another slip to be delivered with this Quarter's Newsletter.</p> <p>The final membership figure for last year was 258 Families and 2 Groups—another record year. Thank you all for your continued support.</p> <p>May I also say 'thank you' to those members who donate a 'little extra' along with their subscriptions. Last year, donations from individual members boosted our funds by some £253.</p>

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Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**
Countryside Warden

On the whole the weather has been kind this Spring, with some unusually hot and sunny days which will hopefully lead to a good breeding season for the birds on the Reserve. However, the early *Riparian* nesters, such as **Mallard**, **Moorhen** and **Little Grebe** have taken a hammering; whole



Moorhen

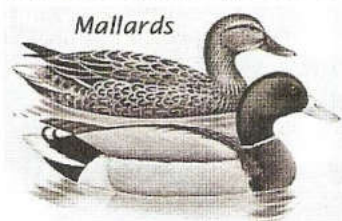
broods have been taken out in a single hit. For instance, I knew of a **Moorhen's** nest containing ten eggs which I kept my eye on. The whole clutch hatched, and were wiped out in a single day. young, two of which went third a couple of days later. The nesting again to try and raise a seem to have given up the idea



Little Grebe

The **Little Grebe** raised three almost immediately, and the parent birds seemed to be second brood, but now they and left the Reserve. Two made it through, although the disappeared, probably trying

Mallard ducklings out of a clutch of nine have mother seems to have to defend her young.



Mallards

Predation of these birds is always high—hence the large number of eggs laid. Herons, crows, magpies, terrapin and the Fox, given a chance, will always have a few, but this wholesale destruction points to

one predator—the **American Mink**. A couple of years ago the Vincent Trust (an authority on mammals) said that Mink numbers in Wales were crashing due to the comeback of the Otter. Recently it was stated on national radio that Otter numbers were definitely on the increase across Britain. Let's hope that these two statements are correct.



American Mink

On a brighter note, we had a good response for our Spring Clean around the Reserve; sixteen volunteers turned out, and a lot of litter was collected that morning. I would like to thank everyone who gave up their time and came along.

Our Winter bird-feeding programme has finished (at the end of April). This has been a great success—both for the birds who benefit, and for the public who come to see them. As far as I know, the only **Brambling** recorded in South Glamorgan this season was seen feeding here. An unexpected beneficiary turned up one morning. I had finished laying the seed down, and made my way back to the hide to see what had come down to feed. To my amazement there was a large red dog Fox following my trail of seed, eating it as it went. The crafty old devil must have been watching me putting it out, and as soon as my back was turned started on his breakfast cereal!



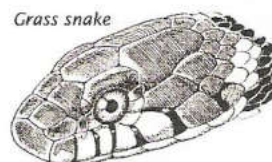
Brambling



Grey Heron

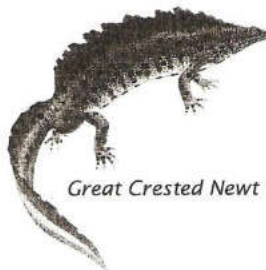
I have just returned from a break in writing this article (18th May). I had a walk around the garden, and counted four nesting pairs of Pied Flycatchers. I knew that there were three, but a brown male which had been singing for the past three weeks has finally found a mate. Perseverance finally paid off in this case.

Back to the Reserve ... one day I watched a **Heron** wrestle with a **Grass Snake**. The snake, some two feet in length, was putting up a fight, but the Heron won the day.



Grass snake

A few days later I watched another Heron taking what I thought were Frogs from one of the ponds, but I was aghast when I trained my binoculars on it; it wasn't Frogs, but **Great Crested Newts** (a very large and very rare newt). I know and agree all about nature being nature and so on, but there are limits; I just couldn't sit there and watch it decimate the Great Crested Newt population, so I have to admit that I did scare it off. Another recent sighting I had on the Reserve was of a **Hare** grazing in one of the meadows. These animals aren't at all common around here and, as they are usually crepuscular (they feed around dawn and dusk), I was lucky to see this one. Let's hope that they are left alone to breed.



Great Crested Newt



Brown Hare

The new method of revetting the Canal tow path is looking good and, if proved a success, we shall be using the same method in future in badly eroded sections.

Finally, on our way back to the Warden's Centre one day we were stopped on the approach to Forest Farm. The police had set up a road block, and were stopping everyone. Apparently it was the last day of the recent firearms amnesty, and a chap had walked into the local police station with a live Second World war hand grenade in his pocket with the pin still in it. The army bomb squad had been called out from Hereford and had set up a controlled detonation in the car park at Forest Farm. They had dug a hole and had covered it with sand bags. The explosion when it came was deafening, and the sand bags were hurled several yards into the air. I think I'll stick to habitat management—it's safer!

To Mrs Dell from the Chairman and Editor

The Chairman and myself wish to convey our apologies, and regret any upset caused to Mrs Jacqueline Dell, for the use in the March Newsletter of an article written by her deceased husband, Mr Norman Dell.

The assumption was that permission had already been granted for its use when the Chairman passed the article to me.

Ken Patterson

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

The '03 AGM

by Dennis Davies

Some thirty members attended the **Annual General Meeting** on **April 16th**. Ted Edwards was in the Chair.

After the usual routine of "Minutes of the last meeting", etc., the Chairman reported on the work of the Committee over the past twelve months. The Bird Feeding Programme had been successful this year again, and £500 of our funds had been allocated to this work. There had been a good response to **John Harding**, our Treasurer's appeal for specific contributions to the bird feeding; £200 had been received. This made a total sum of £700 available for the programme to continue until May. Very many thanks to those who responded so generously.

The major work programme this year has been the complete resurfacing of the towpath, and a start was made on repairing the Canal wall with the new concept of a base of a roll of hazel twigs topped by another roll of coir containing waterside vegetation. It will be remembered that the damage caused to the wall was by dogs getting out of the water, and the fear is that the same thing will happen to the new stretch of wall again. The Council notices on the footpath ask that dogs be kept under control, and dog-walkers are asked to remember this.

The funding of the path and wall work was organised by the Friends with a substantial grant from **ENTRUST**, through their agents, the **Prince's Trust** and resourced from monies from the **Landfill Tax**. In the coming year the Committee has agreed to contribute £3,000 towards a £20,000 project to make the Forest Farm car park more visible from the road, to improve the surface, and to create better picnic facilities alongside it. It is hoped that the major contribution will come from a fund set up to help the tourist industry cope with the effect of "foot and mouth".

Membership Secretary **Noel Gale** reported a 'best ever' membership record of 258 families and 2 groups. Newsletter Editor **Ken Patterson** thanked members who had written letters to the Newsletter, and hoped that more would come. Publicity Officer **Pauline Linck** reminded the meeting that she has T-shirts etc. for sale. Speakers Secretary **D. Hocking** has arranged an excellent winter programme, as listed in the Membership Card. Our Treasurer **John Harding** thanked **Neil Salmon** for auditing the Accounts presented to the meeting. He also thanked **Harry Linck** for his help in setting out the Accounts Sheet.

The Chairman, officers and members were re-elected for the coming year, and were thanked for the work done last year. On behalf of the officers and Committee members the Secretary thanked **Ted Edwards** for his leadership, his commitment to the Reserve, and contribution he makes almost every day of the week.

Some Summer Events at Forest Farm

Sunday	June 22nd	Learn how to build bird nest boxes.
	11 a.m.—1 p.m.	Nest boxes for Pied Flycatchers in Cardiff's woodland.
	FREE	Meet at Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road .
Sunday	July 6th	Nature ramble with Mike Wiley & Chris James around the Glamorgan
	9.30—11.30 a.m.	Canal Nature Reserve. All kinds of wildlife, from wild flowers to
	FREE	insects and birds. Meet at Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road .

SPRING at TAFFS WELL

A letter from ... Mr Richard Lawrence

There was a Spring of healing water at Taffs Well, the only warm water spring in South Wales. The water gushed from the rock at the rate of from sixty to eighty gallons a minute. The temperature never varied from 67 degrees Fahrenheit, and the overflow ran out only a few yards into the River Taff. An analysis of the water showed that it was similar to that at Bath, a pea-green colour with its surface broken by the rise of Carbonic Acid gas and Nitrogen.

Legend had it that the Romans used this spa water as a cure for Rheumatism, and that for many years afterwards it remained in disuse.

When the local mines closed, and the area was hit by trade depression in the 1920's, the villagers had the idea of re-opening the spring with a view to attracting people to its curative properties, in competition to the likes of Bath, Harrogate, Droitwich and Buxton.

Some forty of the villagers put down the cash; the old well was cleaned out, and a modest building built to cover it, in the hope that it would return as a healing spa of some standing.

About ten persons could use the bath at one time, and it was said that the Well used to be surrounded by crutches and sticks which patients had left behind as a sign that they had been cured—although there was a suspicion that some of these had been left there by the villagers themselves!

Apparently, when women used the Well a bonnet was hung outside, as it was the custom to bathe naked.

If anyone suffered badly from rheumatism they were told to try Taffs Well, and many people used to come from the Valleys. There does not seem to be any systematic record kept of proven cures, and eventually the hopes and optimism of the villagers for an expansion of the area—and a possible new hotel—were never realised. The Well fell into disrepair, and was eventually totally abandoned.

Many of these observations were made some eighty years ago by H.V.Morton, but no doubt the spring is still bubbling into the River Taff and giving its health-giving and healing properties to the fish and fauna along that stretch of the river.

A Bit More Of Melin

A letter from ... Mr Les Gibbon

*I was talking to my good friend Mr Harry Davies a while ago, and he told me of a piece of ground just before you come to the houses of **Sunny Banks**, which was quaintly called the DUNGLE. This was where the people put their household refuse, and covered it with ashes; it was then cleared up by the Council every few weeks. The rents were three shillings and sixpence in the 1930's.*

In the photograph (on the next page) that's me standing at the back of Mr Evans' house, No. 7; the pantry can clearly be seen bricked up in the hospital wall, which was known as 'the white wall' at that time.



SUNNY BANKS PANTRY in Hospital Wall

Coming down to New Houses, there was a shop at No. 11 owned by Mr Alf Robins; in this shop the people paid a penny a week towards the annual outing to Barry island.

There was also a shop at No. 17, which was run by two sisters—Aunt Mary and Aunt Cassie Richards.

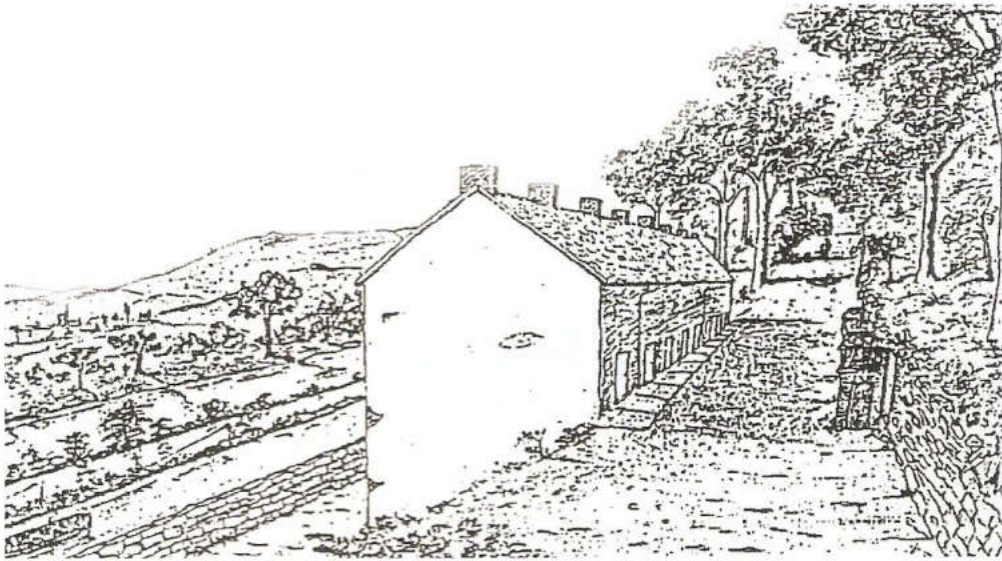
When we lived at No. 7 there was a family tragedy; my elder brother Gordon, who was two years old, ran out into the snow with nothing on his feet. He caught Pneumonia, and died on Christmas Day.

Going up the road there was a Weighbridge just this side of the entrance to C.H.O.B.. It was called 'COX'S CABIN' - after the man who worked there. I don't remember him very well, but the man I do remember was Mr Bill Warrington, who lived in Pantmawr Road; he would always give us a wave as we passed by.

A little further on there was a large house called FOREST HALL, where the Manager of the works lived; his name was Mr Shivley Gazard. It is now a picnic area.

Across the road stands FOREST FARM, which was run by Mr Sam Perry. I still remember the Sunday morning he caught a bunch of us groping apples in his orchard; he was a small man, but what a temper!

Going up to the Weir, there was a man known as 'Harry the Herbalist'; he lived down the salmon trap in the late 1930's—a brave man! He made a living by collecting herbs around Melin Griffith and selling them, mainly to DRANES the chemist on Queen Street. Some of the residents of Velindre Road would remember him, as he was sometimes asked in for a cup of tea and a bite to eat.



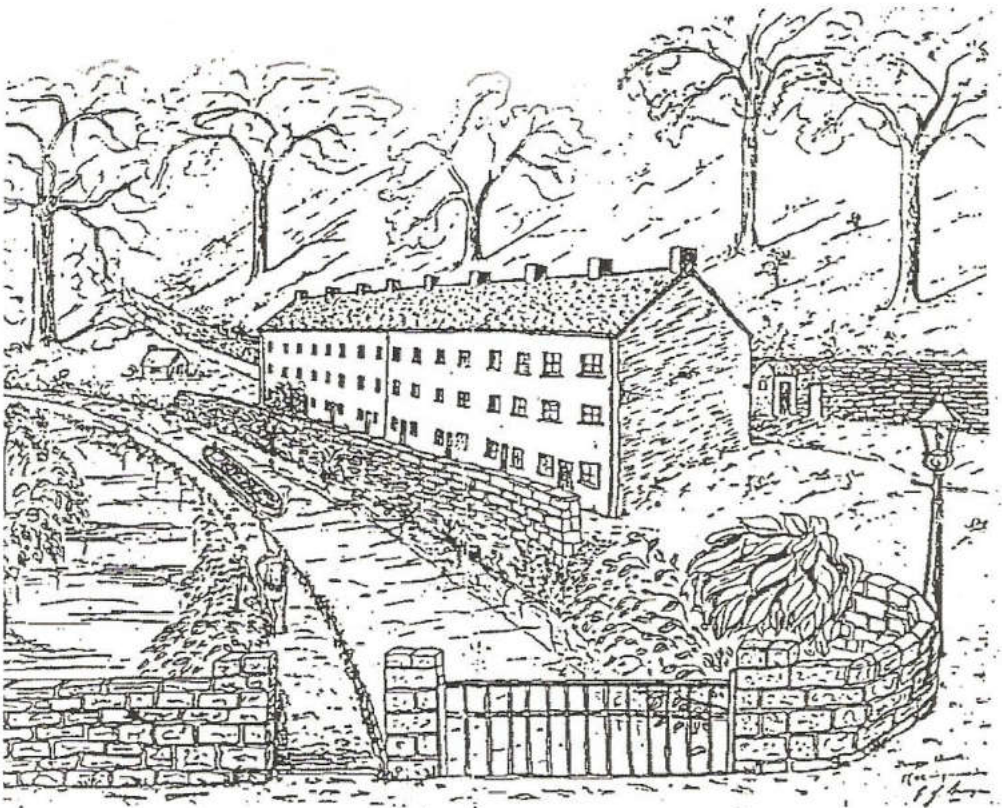
Here are two sketches by **Idris Morgan** of Sunnybanks Houses.

The lower picture is viewed from the Melingriffith entrance to the Glamorgan Canal.

Entrance to the houses was via the path between the wall at the canal side and the houses.

At the rear was a small backyard, a lavatory, and a pantry built into the wall.

Behind the houses can be seen the Canal, a Barge and the Towpath.



From E.O.E to 'Anon'

Dear Anon,

The following article appeared in the **Wildlife Trusts** magazine "Natural World", and I thought it might be of interest to you. It was the sonic collars that caught my attention. I have never seen one, and wondered if you knew anything about them and where they could be purchased to safeguard our Wildlife in whatever way possible.

Hope to meet up with you one day.

E.O.E.



HUNTING CATS NOW ON TRIAL

IS YOUR CAT wildlife-friendly? New research has shown that cats catch significantly less prey if they are fitted with collar-mounted early warning devices.

A trial, partly funded by the Wildlife Trusts and conducted by the RSPB, has shown that fitting a simple bell collar to a cat reduces predation of a variety of creatures, including birds, mammals, insects and fish, by 35 per cent.

This figure rose to 44 per cent in the case of animals wearing sonic collars (as shown above). The survey revealed the favourite prey of cats was the Field Vole. The most common bird victims were House Sparrow, Robin and Blackbird.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

If you are interested in taking part in further trials, write to ...

Sarah Nelson, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, SG19 2DL. E-mail: sarah.nelson@rspb.org.uk

Some Autumn & Winter Events at Forest Farm

- | | | | |
|----------|----------------|-----------------|---|
| Saturday | September 13th | 6 p.m. | A stroll around Forest Farm to taste Nature's tasty treats.
Meet at Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| | Cost | £1 | |
| Sunday | September 21st | 12-2.30 p.m. | Join the Rangers making bat boxes for bats.
Meet at Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| | Cost | £1.50 | |
| Sunday | October 12th | 1-4.30 p.m. | 'Out of the Woods' Festival. Celtic music & dance.
Woodland crafts. Recycling damaged trees.
Organised in association with BTCV (Wales), Coed Cymru & Amersham plc. |
| | FREE | | |
| Sunday | November 16th | 2-4 p.m. | Build your own bird box and bird feeders.
Meet at Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| | Nest boxes | £1.50 | Bird feeders 50p |
| Sunday | December 14th | 10 a.m.-12 noon | Identifying winter bird visitors and local birds.
Meet at Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| | FREE | | Bring binoculars |

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