



FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 50

DECEMBER 2003

Editor's Forum

Ken Patterson

Welcome to the winter edition of your Newsletter! I can't believe that **fifty issues** have now been produced since 1990, thanks to the hard work of all our contributors.

The **car park** is nearing completion, but the tarmac has to be completed and the hedges still to be trimmed. However, it will be a big step forward for visitors to have a decent place to park.

The **Woodland Fair** went well, with fine weather and many visitors. Our stand was manned by members of the committee, who distributed Newsletters and chatted to people who displayed an interest in our work.

I would like to thank **Paul Davies** for his informative article. Now one of our wardens, I remember Paul from those days when I was a volunteer publicity officer for the BTCV—a period of much activity in the development of Forest Farm.

The Committee, Robin and myself wish you all The Compliments of the Season!

INDOOR MEETINGS

At **Whitchurch Community Centre, Old Church Road, Whitchurch.**

On Wednesdays at 7.30 pm.

11th February 2004

An illustrated talk on the **Glamorgan Heritage Coast.**

14th April 2004

An illustrated talk on the **National Cycle Network.**

The talk will be followed by a cup of tea, and then by the **Annual General Meeting.**

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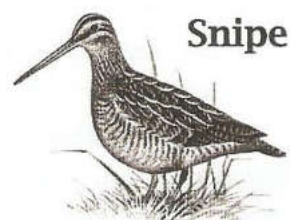
Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**
Countryside Warden

It's Saturday 1st November and I'm sitting in the garden writing this article; it's a glorious autumn day. A Red Kite is floating languidly overhead, and a Raven calls in the distance.

Well, we've had a bit of rain since I wrote my last article, but nothing to talk about. The Canal is desperately low, with only puddles of water left down the southern end. A couple of days ago I donned a pair of waders (as the depth of silt is well over my wellies), netted around five hundred small fish from these ever diminishing little puddles, and moved them further upstream to where the water levels aren't so critical.

The scrapes around the wetlands are still dry, and the **Snipe** which have recently arrived are feeding around the edges of the sunken ponds instead. Another recent arrival is the Water Rail. I saw two on Llyn y Brwyniog (the larger of the ponds) recently. I'm sure we will get the rain, but it's a long time coming.



Snipe

I was walking along the Melingriffith feeder path near the stone bridge at the end of October when, to my astonishment, I heard a beautiful melodic bird song. My first thought was it was an escaped canary-type song bird. I stood entranced, listening to this warbling. I scanned the bushes with my binoculars but saw nothing; then I realised that the sound was coming from the water. Looking down, in front of me perched on a stone in the middle of the feeder was a **Dipper** (*Cinclus cinclus*). I've seen lots of dippers over the years and heard their *zit zit* call notes many times, but I've never witnessed a dipper singing before. I had no idea that this little bird had such a beautiful song. It was obviously taking advantage of the low water levels, as it hunts the shallows, turning stones and searching the bottom for aquatic insects and small molluscs, etc.



Recently I attended a one-day course on **Dormice** surveying techniques run by the Brecon Beacons National Park and the Brecknock Wildlife Trust. The course was held in Talgarth. The morning was spent learning about their habitat requirements, and how to manage woodlands with these requirements in mind. The afternoon was spent in a woodland actively searching for evidence of these dormice—i.e. Hazelnuts that have been opened in a certain way (small neat spherical holes with a smooth inside edge). Even though we knew that dormice were active in this woodland, it wasn't at all easy to locate the nuts. After much searching I managed to find just one.

Dormice are nocturnal, arboreal and shy. They also hibernate during the winter, so the chances of actually seeing one are very slim. This woodland had special dormice boxes which had been constructed and erected by the Wildlife Trust. Sometimes the dormice use these boxes to sleep in during the day, and the course ended with the instructor opening one of these boxes which contained a nest and a sleeping dormouse. He held the still sleeping dormouse in the palm of his hand while we all had a good look. This was another *first* for me. It was a beautiful little creature, orangey brown with furry ears, a bushy tail and very long whiskers.



Common Dormouse

(continued on next page)

After a couple of minutes the dormouse was put back into his nest in the box, and the box replaced onto the tree with the dormouse still fast asleep and none the worse for its experience. It must be pointed out that these lovely little creatures are quite rare and very vulnerable; they are fully protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*. A special licence is required to handle them. We do have dormice in some of our woodlands to the north of Cardiff and south of the M4 corridor, but their requirements are quite specific—i.e. they must have Bramble, Honeysuckle and Hazel in close proximity. As I mentioned earlier, they are arboreal and rarely come into contact with the ground, running along connecting overhanging branches, so cover has to be continuous. The fact is they are easily overlooked, so if anyone thinks they know of any suitable habitat in the Cardiff area, please give me a ring (Tel: 02920-612213).

Back to the Reserve. Ted Edwards, chairman of the Friends, has recently made up some **new benches for the bird hides** (the last ones were burnt by vandals) by bolting together some surplus chairs. Many thanks, Ted! Let's hope that the idiots leave these alone.

We will be starting our **Winter Bird Feeding Programme** some time this month (November) depending on the weather, the seed being provided by the Friends. So once again good views will be afforded from the bird hide overlooking Llyn y Brwyniog. Have a look; you never know what you might see!

Membership

Our current membership figure stands at 266 Families plus 2 Groups. This passes our last year's record figure of 260.

At a recent survey carried out on the Reserve some 86 of those interviewed showed an interest in our 'Friends Group'. They were all sent a membership application form, information and one of our Newsletters. To date 12 Families have joined, and hopefully more will follow. Might I take this opportunity of saying 'welcome' to those Families who have joined us.

Newsletter Distribution

It is possible in the near future that our Distributor in the Ffordd Morgannwg / Melingriffith Drive area will be moving from the district. In the event I will be looking for someone who would be willing to take over.

There are about 28 Newsletters to be distributed each quarter. If anyone is able to help, please ring me on ...

2091 5665

Noel Gale - Membership Secretary

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 Saturday Morning RSPB / FRIENDS Walk

At a committee meeting of the newly formed RSPB Cardiff group it was decided that short walks be established to help new members identify local birds, and thereby increase their interest and hopefully make them committed bird watchers.

Three such walks were established—one in Caerphilly led by David Stone, another in Dinas Powis led by Philip Atkin (an expert on bird song), and one led by myself around the Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve at Whitchurch on the first Saturday morning of every month from 10.00 am to 12.30 pm.

My records show that, from October 1979 to December 1981, 66 species were seen including **Skylark, Stonechat, Whinchat, Tree Sparrow and Yellowhammer**; none of these are seen there today.

Betty and Ron Williams then took over the Canal walk, and I started another walk from Hailey Park, Llandaff North, down the west side of the River Taff as far as Blackwier, across the bridge, and up the East side of the Taff back to Hailey Park. It was a good walk for Redwing and Fieldfare, but not much life on the river.

By the beginning of 1988 I was back leading the Group around the Canal instead of Betty and Ron, who had moved on after doing a marvellous job keeping the walk going and increasing the numbers.

In March 1990 the Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve was formed. It started its own Saturday morning walk, but it soon became evident that two walks in the same place was not viable, and so the combined walk was established.

The Friends have increased to 260 family members and countless numbers of Friends and RSPB members have joined the walk and assimilated enough bird knowledge to give them the confidence to move on and gain further knowledge further afield. By now we have recorded over one hundred species on the Reserve, losing some but gaining others. The Hides and Winter Feeding Station have increased the interest through making it easier to identify the birds and marvel at the beautiful colours displayed.

I find it hard to admit that it is time for me to step down and make way for another to have the pleasure of leading a group which, although having a large turnover of members, still has a core of faithful members who have turned out through rain, hail and sunshine throughout the year; I am grateful for their support, and thank them. I also thank the RSPB Committee for their support and the good wishes passed on by Margaret.

I sincerely hope that somebody will step forward as leader. It's not a hard job, but very rewarding and quite stimulating; if you don't know the answer, keep quiet—somebody is sure to pipe up and help you out!! So, be there on Saturday 3rd January at 10.00 am outside the Warden Centre; I wish you all the best.

Ted Edwards

Philip Baker, a member of the Friends and of RSPB, will now be a group leader on the walks, is the good news, but I'm sure Ted's enthusiasm and dedication will be missed.

Members of the Executive Committee have placed on record their thanks to him for the terrific effort he puts into the development of the Reserve.

Editor

FOREST FARM—TWENTY YEARS LATER

Hello. My name is **Paul Davies**. Some of you may have spotted me on the Reserve during the last twelve months. I began work at Forest Farm in March last year, and I hope to become closely involved in the development of the Country park over the next few years.

In 1983 I left agricultural college with an HND in Natural Resources and Rural Economy and, after working on a local farm in Devon for the summer, made my way back to Abergavenny where I had lived nearby for most of my life.

In the Autumn of that year I began doing voluntary work for the BTCV, and moved into the old Forest Farm house as a long-term volunteer. The house was then in a fairly poor state with plenty of damp and bits falling off.

It was about that time (Spring 1984) that Jerry Langford (now working for the Woodland Trust) set up a BTCV scheme known as the South Glamorgan Woodlands Project. This MSC-funded project used local labour to manage and restore some of the native woodlands within the county. I learned a great deal of practical and management skills, but in 1985 I had to leave the team due to a temporary contract.

From there I had a brief spell as reserves manager with the Gwent Wildtrust Trust before accepting a job as Assistant Warden with the National Trust in the Brecon Beacons—which was quite an achievement, and I knew the area well as I had been raised in Capel-y-Ffin in the Black Mountains.

After a couple of years, however, I moved on to try and become self-employed in the agricultural contracting business. Unfortunately this was not a success, so my next conservation post involved a move up to Derbyshire working for the Peak District National Park. Here I worked for the Pennine Way Team, which was a project set up to control the erosion on many sections of path within the Park boundary. I lived in a small caravan and walked across the fields to Edale every morning to start work. The work was quite demanding, involving the use of large flagstones (recycled from local mills) to prevent further erosion. These flags, or 'causey-paving' as it was known, were flown in by helicopter; we even had a mention on the News at ten for this pioneering work!

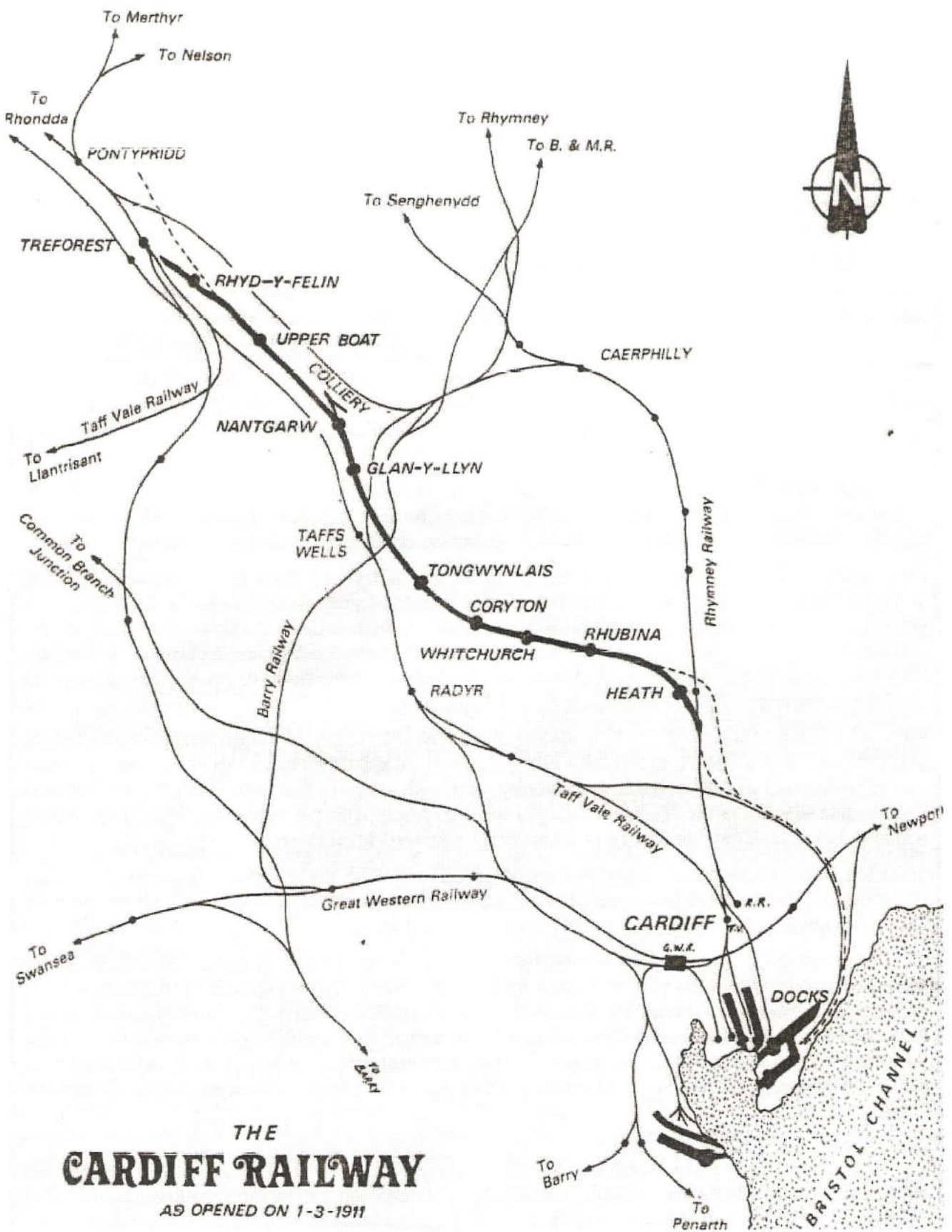
From there, in 1992 I took a temporary post with Oldham Borough Council working as a Countryside Warden in the Medlock Valley. I worked closely with the local community, took guided walks and developed my knowledge of urban-fringe countryside management.

My next job was with Ogwr Borough Council in 1994 as Assistant Warden at Bryngarw Country Park, just north of Bridgend. This is a small park of about 120 acres situated at the bottom of the Garw valley.

Then, in 2002, I applied for the post of Ranger with the Parks Department at Cardiff. I was called for interview, but the post was taken by someone else. To my surprise, however, some weeks later I was called in and offered the post of Park Ranger at Forest Farm. So it looks like I've arrived back where I started! The Reserve and other areas we manage are interesting places to work in. Mike has plenty of experience of the site, which has been very useful in all aspects. I hope I can help in the development and continuation of the Friends group, and wish you every success during the coming years.

Paul Davies

P.S. The Forest Farm Watch group, run for many years by Mike Wiley and Chris James, has temporarily ceased. Mike has handed over the group to me and the Community Rangers based at Wedal road. We are still awaiting results from vetting procedures requested by the Wildlife Trust. Once this lengthy process is completed, I hope to be re-launching the group as soon as possible.



THE CARDIFF RAILWAY

by

MARTIN CHAMBERLAIN

Recent articles in the local press have proposed to reinstate the link between Coryton Station and Radyr for a circle line around the city. Although the disused Coryton branch which forms the eastern edge of the Country Park would appear to travel in this direction, the lines never met in the Radyr area, but near Pontypridd.

The story of the Cardiff Railway is one of a powerful land owner (the Marquis of Bute), who owned Cardiff Docks along with the coal mines in the Rhondda, and the equally powerful Taff Vale Railway, which had a near monopoly on coal transportation.

The story starts in 1885 when the Marquis purchased the Glamorganshire and Aberdare Canal, with the objective of closing both and converting them to railways. In 1897 an Act was passed which formed the Cardiff Railway Company; it was given powers to construct a railway using the Rhymney Railway to Heath Junction, and then joining the Taff Vale south of Pontypridd.

In 1898 the construction of the Railway started with the first three and a half miles from Heath to Tongwynlais. However, in the same time the Taff Vale also purchased a strip of land running along the east side of their railway south of Pontypridd. The purchase by the Taff Vale was said to be for the provision of sidings, but this land was to prove vital in the legal dispute between the two companies.

Although the Cardiff Railway was built towards Pontypridd, years of legal disputes continued with the Taff Vale refusing the Cardiff Railway access to their recently purchased land. Finally, on the 15th May 1909 the first and only train to connect the two lines was operated near Rhydfelin.

In 1921 the Cardiff Railway became part of the mighty Great Western Railway, and between the wars the carriage of coal reduced, with passenger traffic only between Whitchurch and Cardiff.

However, shortly after the Second World War the line was again in use as the new colliery at Nantgarw was opened, but in 1953 the line north of Coryton was finally removed.

Much of the Cardiff Railway was destroyed with the building of the A470 in the early 1970's and the later M4. A link between Coryton and Radyr would have a dramatic effect on the Reserve and, although the circle line is part of the local transportation plan, Cardiff County Council have no immediate plans for its introduction.

FOREST FARM OUTDOOR EVENT**Winter Birds of Forest Farm****Sunday 14th December 2003 10am - 12 noon**

Mike Wiley and Chris James will help identify Winter Visitors, as well as local birds.

Bring binoculars, if you have them.

Suitable for families with budding naturalists.

Distance 4km.

Meet at the **Warden's Centre Forest Farm Whitchurch**

BIRD FEED AT FOREST FARM
by John Harding Treasurer

Last winter we spent **£676** on bird feed. The donations totalling £239 received towards this helped make it possible. I would like to thank all those who donated, BUT there's always a BUT.

Once again I am asking if you would like to make a donation for this winter. You can send a cheque made payable to

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM

Please write on the back

BIRD FEED

Send it to me at

63 FAIRWATER GROVE WEST

LLANDAFF CARDIFF CF5 2JN

As treasurer I would also like to thank members new and old for paying their fees, and those who made donations towards the funds. Also a big thank you for the bag of feed that was donated last month.

THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH !

A Letter from Madeleine Webb

It is with sadness that I report the death on 2nd October 2003 of my father, Alick Smith.

Alick was a **Volunteer Warden** at the Nature Reserve for many years. He also helped the Forest Farm **WATCH** group with tasks such as tree-planting, making bird boxes, and litter picks. He understood the importance of the Reserve and was always concerned about any development plans which might threaten it.

He enjoyed the Reserve in all seasons, but probably his favourite time was Spring. After a harsh winter, he would eagerly look out for early flowers and bird activity confirming that spring was, indeed, on its way.

Mrs Madeleine Webb and family of Pentyrch are members of the Friends. I would like to thank Mrs Webb for her sad but inspiring item on the contribution made by her late father to the Nature Reserve.

Editor

Layout by Robin Sotheby

Published on behalf of ... **The Friends of Forest Farm and
Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve** by

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