

FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 51

MARCH 2004

Editor's Forum

Ken Patterson

*Our latest Newsletter has much good news to report. However, there is a mixture of sadness with the report by Dr Mary Gillham on the death of **Mairead Sutherland**, the ornithologist and lecturer. And also that of **David Dye**, one of our keen members, written by our chairman.*

Vandalism is still with us. In the first Hide, one seat was smashed and another wood seat found in the pond. We remain helpless, but a possible solution may lie in a construction with tubular steel.

*My thanks to all contributors, including **Mr Edgar Sapili's** informative article on the Stickleback.*

Membership

Our latest count of Membership for the current year stands at **270 Families** and **2 Groups**.

This is the highest number since our Group was formed in 1990.

Our new year (2004/2005) will shortly be on us. A **Membership Renewal Form** can be found on the A.G.M. notice enclosed with your Newsletter.

Many thanks for your continued support, and a special welcome to those members who have joined us during this past year.

Noel Gale—Membership Secretary

Spring Clean at Forest Farm

On **Sunday 4th April** the Friends will undertake their annual spring clean of the Nature Reserve. Why not come along and discover parts of the Reserve you never knew existed, at the same time removing litter that is dangerous to wildlife.

Meet at the Wardens Centre at **10 a.m.** All equipment will be supplied, and we should be finished by midday.

For more information, please ring **Martin Chamberlain** on **029 20658488** or email m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com

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Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**
Countryside Warden

It was with both shock and sadness that I read about the death of Alec Smith in the last issue of the Friends magazine. Alec had been a voluntary warden with us for many, many years, and had contributed greatly to the overall well-being of the Nature Reserve. He had retired from being a warden only last year. Alec was of the old school of nature conservationists, and shared my feelings of keeping the Reserve in as natural a state as possible. I am sure that all of us would like to extend our deepest sympathy to Alec's family.



**Great
Spotted
Woodpecker**

I am writing this article at home on Friday February 13th, and already all the signs of Spring are here. A **Great Tit** is pecking away at the entrance hole to one of my bird boxes, and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** is drumming away in the woodland nearby. The **Primroses** and **Daffodils** are in flower, and the pond is alive with mating **Frogs** that dive beneath the floating rafts of spawn whenever you approach (a natural defence system helping to protect them against **Heron**s and other similar predators). I was working with the voluntary wardens checking and cleaning the bird boxes on the Reserve last week. I was up the ladder inspecting one box when a **Blue Tit** landed just above me. Its behaviour was something to behold. It went through the

whole gambit of tail fanning, wing flapping and scolding, letting me know in no uncertain terms that he had already laid claim to this particular box; my interference was unwelcome! We just about managed to get away unscathed.

For several months now we have had a bit of a strange visitor to the Reserve—an almost pure white **Finch**. When I first saw it, back in November, I wondered if I was seeing an escaped Canary, but after having watched it through binoculars I'm fairly sure it's a Finch. Its general shape, size and mannerisms (jizz) point to a Chaffinch, but seeing it in flight I thought I saw a slight tinge of green on its back, so maybe it's a Greenfinch. A local birdwatcher took some photographs of it through a telescope and had them blown up; he reckons it's a **Greenfinch**—so you pay your money, and you take your chance! It's surprising how difficult it is to identify a common bird when you don't

have any colouring to go on. It isn't a pure albino because it has black eyes as opposed to the pink eyes of an albino. I think the proper term is leucistic. If anyone else has any other ideas as to its identity, I'd be glad to hear from them. Any advances on a Greenfinch??? It can sometimes be seen from the first hide at the bird feeding station, along with some eighty odd **Wood Pigeons**—perhaps we should get a bird scarer! (That was a joke). Another anomaly on the Reserve is a Great Tit with a two-inch (five centimetres) bill. I haven't yet seen this bird myself, but I'm told it can be generally found along the towpath where the Feeder meets the Canal. How it manages to feed is a mystery.



Bluetit



Greenfinch

In May we'll be back in the Canal doing some more revetment work on the bank. The work we did last year using plant filled coir rolls was a success; it seems to be holding up, so we intend to do a larger section this year using the same technique, with the Friends providing 50% of the funding.

Let's hope this mild Spring weather continues, and that it's not a false dawn.

(more on page 3)

STOP PRESS

After completing the article on page 2, our resident bird-ringers, **Peter & Rosemary Morgan**, told me of a sighting they had had of a **Little Egret** near one of our ponds.

This was on January 3rd.

This is a first for the Reserve!

Mike Wiley



Little Egret

CONTRIBUTIONS IN MEMORY OF DAVID DYE

David and Carole came to live in Cardiff about two years ago, and walked along the canal towpath every day with their three dogs; they thought it a very special place.

Sadly, on 18th November 2003 David died. On behalf of the Friends, I extended condolences and sympathy to Carole and her family.

Carole had asked friends and family to send donations to Friends of Forest Farm in his memory. £315 has come to hand.

This money will go towards repairing a section of the Canal wall south of the gate leading from the towpath to the path alongside the Feeder, and will be a reminder to us all of David and his generous family. It is hoped to start the work in July.

E.O.Edwards

MAIREAD SUTHERLAND

It was with great sadness that we said goodbye to Mairead Sutherland just after Christmas 2003. Then in her eighty first year, she had been closely associated with the Whitchurch section of the Glamorgan Canal from the 1960's. She would often be bird watching along the towpath, sometimes with the late Colonel Morrey Salmon, ornithologist, and Glyn Hopkins, City Clerk, two of those largely instrumental in getting the Reserve on to a sound footing.

Mairead's irrepressible sense of humour was known to all who met her, and many have enjoyed her lectures—to the **Friends of Forest Farm**—and many other organisations. A keen ornithologist, photographer and traveller to the world's wild places, she was always welcome—both as educator and entertainer.

She will be greatly missed by her friends and acquaintances.

Our sympathies go to her daughters and grandchildren.

Dr M.E.Gillham

The Cottage Gwaelod-y-Garth Cardiff CF15 9HS

T-SHIRTS

Adults: **£10.00**
Children's: **£8.50**

SWEATSHIRTS

Adults: **£16.50**
Children's: **£13.00**

POLOSHIRTS

(Range of colours for sweats and polos).

Adults: **£14.50**
Children's: **£11.50**

Good quality. All with **FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM** logo. All profits go to Reserve projects.

Contact:

PAULINE LINCK

029-2061 7012

THE THREE-SPINED STICKLEBACK

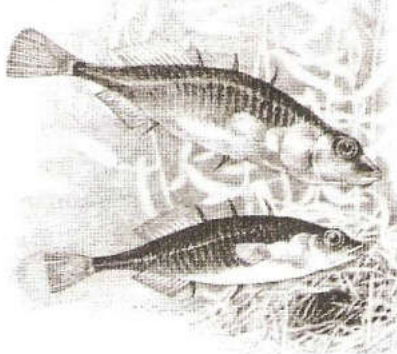
(*Gasterosteus Aculeatus*)

This little fish is the “tiddler” of our childhood fishing expeditions. All that was needed to catch a stickleback was a stick, a worm and a length of string.

But the Stickleback has become an important species in the study of animal behaviour and evolution. It is now one of the few species to have had its chromosomes mapped, but it first made its name in the scientific world because of its breeding habits.

Anyone can watch Sticklebacks courting and nesting in a clear, shallow pond, stream—or the Glamorganshire Canal—without difficulty. The breeding season is between March and July and, as

Three-spined Stickleback



with a number of other fish species, parental duties fall to the male. He stakes out a territory on the bottom, and digs a shallow pit in which he constructs a nest from strands of weed pasted together with a glue produced by his kidneys. At this time, he develops a breeding dress of cherry red on his underside; this contrasts with a bluish-white back and shining blue eyes. This is a signal that a male Stickleback is in breeding condition; any other male will regard it as a rival, and chase it from its territory.

Female sticklebacks register a male with a red underside as a prospective mate; they will swim around in shoals, while the males court them with a zig-zagging dance. Males recognize a gravid female by her swollen belly, and she will allow herself to be led to his nest, where he butts her to stimulate egg laying; then he

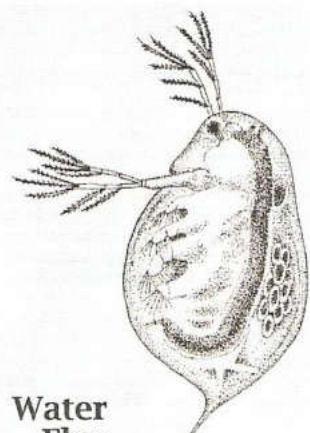
fertilises the one hundred to four hundred eggs.

After spawning, the female is chased away, and the male takes sole charge. He guards the nest against predators and aerates the eggs by fanning them with his pectoral fins. After seven to eight days the eggs hatch, and the fry emerge from the nest; they keep together in a swarm. After a few weeks the little Sticklebacks become more independent, and the male loses interest. The breeding season over, his brilliant colours fade.

Sticklebacks are voracious predators of Water Fleas, tiny crustaceans, aquatic worms and small snails as well as the eggs and fry of other fish. In turn, Sticklebacks are food for a variety of animals from pike to perch, otters, voles, grebes, kingfishers and herons, as well as dragon fly nymphs.

Their defence lies in their inconspicuous colouration, outside the breeding season, and their spines. There are three spines on the back, which are raised and locked in place to make a formidable palisade when it is attacked.

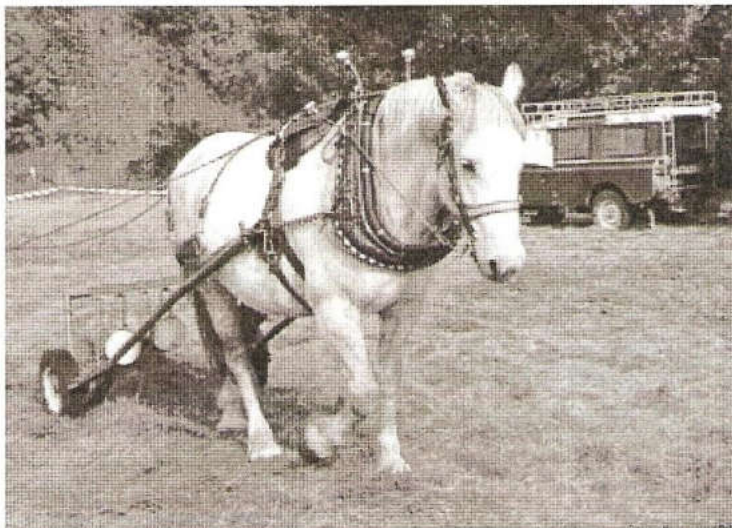
So, on your next visit to the Glamorganshire Canal, keep a look out for the Stickleback; and ensure that your dog doesn't invade their territory.



Water Flea



Seen at the 'Out of the Woods' Festival



*October 12th
2003*



RSPB Conservation Group / Phoenix

Hugh Harrison



Our last meeting for 2003 in December saw us making a start to clear the north bank of brambles. How quickly they have encroached and shaded out the woodland plants! January 2004 saw us truly rained off, but for those who turned out, a bonus in that we spent a while in the main hide and saw the **albino finch** (chaffinch), The **Snipe** offers a challenge. A bird that has the art of concealment. You spot one ... then another, and soon have a count of ten plus.

Early February we needed to put up replacement nest boxes lost due to vandals. Also clearing scrub that has invaded what was a reasonable grass area for wild flowers. After a morning session you feel slightly tired, but as you assess your efforts a good deal of satisfaction is felt.

Not only does the group activity involve Forest Farm. By the time this Newsletter is in print the **National Beached Bird Survey** will have taken place, checking for any oiled or dead birds. We cover from Peterstone Gwent levels to Rhose Point. Last year we took a major part in 'Aren't Welsh Birds Brilliant' - a project which involved the Peregrine Watch at Dare Valley Country Park.

Cardiff and District RSPB Group—Conservation Group

Programme 2004.	Conservation work will be held on the coming Saturday mornings 10.30 a.m. - 12.30 p.m. at Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch.
March 13th	BIG Litter Pick. Come and clean our patch / middle entrance.
April 17th	Knotweed first cut of season and light scrub clearing / middle entrance.
May 8th	Second cut Knotweed cut/scrub clearing / middle entrance.
June 12th	Check our nest boxes at Forest Farm.

The work is not particularly strenuous—similar to an active gardener. The Group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. If you feel you would like to get involved, just turn up or (better still) give me a ring ... **Hugh Harrison 02920 704889**

Saturday Morning Friends / RSPB walk

Phil Baker

As you will have read in the last Newsletter, I have taken over as leader since the beginning of the year. Ted did a magnificent job month by month, and is missed by the regulars. However, we had a good start to the year, with quite a few newcomers at our January walk. This month (February) the weather was not so kind, but a good number of hardy individuals turned up, and we saw thirty one species. We managed thirty different species in January, including a pair of Goosander, which I had not seen before on the walk.

We meet at 10 a.m. on the first Saturday of every month, come rain or shine (it's usually quite good weather!). Everyone is welcome, young or old, beginner or expert, or even just interested to see round the Reserve!

PROPOSED COACH TRIP

DUNCAN HOCKRIDGE

After the very interesting talk given by **Mr Nigel Williams**, the manager of the **National Wetlands Centre, Llanelli** at our November meeting, it was suggested that I organise a mini-bus trip to the Centre.

Nigel tells me that it would be preferable to come next Whitsun Week (half-term), as at that time we could also tour the *duckery* and see the *hatchery* in operation.

Here are the proposed details of the trip ...

DATE :	<u>WEDNESDAY 2ND JUNE 2004</u>	
TIMES :	DEPART RHIWBINA	10.00 A.M.
	DEPART WHITCHURCH	10.15 A.M.
	ARRIVE CENTRE	11.30 A.M.
	COFFEE	11.30—12.00 P.M.
	TOUR	12.00—1.30 P.M.
	FREE TIME	1.30—4.00 P.M.
	DEPART	4.00 P.M.
	ARRIVE WHITCHURCH	5.15 P.M.
	ARRIVE RHIWBINA	5.30 P.M.
COST :	£10 FOR SEAT ON COACH	
	+ £4.50 ENTRY FOR ADULT TO CENTRE	
	OR £4.00 ENTRY FOR SENIOR CITIZEN TO CENTRE	
	OR £2.75 ENTRY FOR CHILD TO CENTRE	
	OR FREE ENTRY FOR WWT MEMBER TO CENTRE	

There is a café at the Centre for snacks and light meals.

At this time I only need to know the number of members who would like to come on the trip. Therefore, please ring me on Cardiff **2062 6111** or email me on **duncan@closcromwell.freemove.co.uk** to reserve seats. Nearer the date I shall contact you again to confirm that you still wish to travel.

(continued on next page)

For those who missed the talk by Mr Nigel Williams, here are a few details about the Centre ...

The **National Wetlands Centre** is one of the nine centres in Britain and Ireland run by the **Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT)**, a registered nature conservation charity.

The 500-acre Reserve is situated at the edge of the Burry Inlet, which is acknowledged in Wales as the premier estuary for Wildfowl and Waders. It is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area (SPA), and a Ramsar site.

Of particular interest is the **Little Egret** population, which has dramatically increased in number from 2 in 1995 up to **217** this year, making a new Welsh record.

At the Centre there are ...

Observatory Hides ... Hundreds of Ducks, Geese, Swans, Flamingos

A Millenium Discovery Centre crammed with activities and investigations

A Water Vole City ... A Maze.

A LETTER FROM CATHERINE DART

Dear Editor,

Just a few lines to tell you how much I enjoyed the last issue (No. 50) of "Friends".

*I found the articles written by **Mike Wiley**, **Paul Davies** and **Martin Chamberlain** of particular interest.*

I have been meaning to write to you for ages, but somehow never quite found the time. However, I can now tick you off my list of things to do!

From Ken Patterson ... I am always pleased to receive some words of praise for the "Friends" contributors. They make it all worthwhile. So thank you, Catherine Dart of Rhiwbina, for your letter.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday 14th April 2004 at 7.30 p.m.

There will be an illustrated talk at **Whitchurch Community Centre, Old Church Road** 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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Published on behalf of ... **The Friends of Forest Farm and
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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.