



FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 52

JUNE 2004

Editor's Forum

Ken Patterson

Warmest greetings to all our readers, and thanks to our contributors who help sustain the interest in our Newsletter.

In the spring I decided a large bird feeder would be a useful feature to have. With it standing in a border about twelve feet from my kitchen window, I have enjoyed the activities of many birds such as the Robin, Finches, Sparrows, Tits, Warblers and a variety of Thrushes.



However, two unwelcome visitors arrived in the shape of plump Woodpigeons. They scared the smaller birds, and polished off a great quantity of bird feed. Only by tying back a sturdy branch prevented them from reaching the feed, which dropped onto a narrow tray on which they could not stand. Only one of them now struts around the wall keeping a wary eye for my appearance. It then takes off with a clumsy flapping of wings.

To identify the birds I use a pocket sized book - "Birds" Gem by Collins is, as it claims, a "mine of information" at the modest price of £4.99.

If readers have interesting garden visitors (other than the human variety) please send me your observations so we can all share.

Marian Allsobrook of Birchwood Gardens has written to say how much she enjoys reading our Newsletters.

*Please note: The **September issue deadline** for contributions is the **12th of August**.*

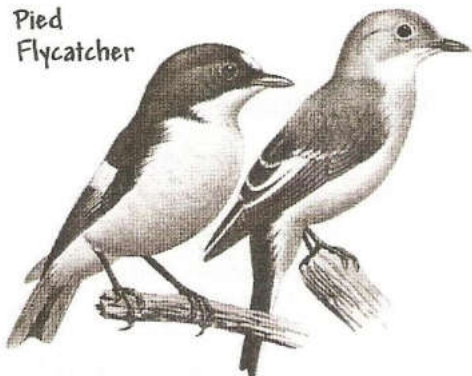
RESERVE NEWS	2	MEMBERSHIP	5
CHAIRMAN	3	CARDIFF PARKS	5
RSPB GROUP PHOENIX	3	PICA PICA	6
DOVES, THRUSHES, SPARROWS	4	WHAT'S ON	7, 8
WEB FRIENDS	5	NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION	8
LITTER PICKS	5	PRESIDENT	8

Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**
Countryside Warden

It's been a glorious hot and sunny spring day (Saturday May 29th) and I'm writing this article at home sitting in the garden at 8 o'clock in the evening. The sun is still fairly high in the sky and I can hear the call of the **Cuckoo** in the distance, while a male **Pied Flycatcher**

Pied
Flycatcher



Cuckoo



sings, perched on a tree outside a bird box (and woe betide any other bird who dares to go near it!) This particular bird has been calling for a mate for the past four weeks, but as the other flycatchers are now busily feeding young, I think the time is running out for this lonely male.

All is well on the Nature Reserve. The canal revetments using the pre-planted coir roll technique that I mentioned in the last article have gone in. We managed to do approximately 45 metres of the worst eroded areas, finally erecting a low fence to give them a chance to establish.

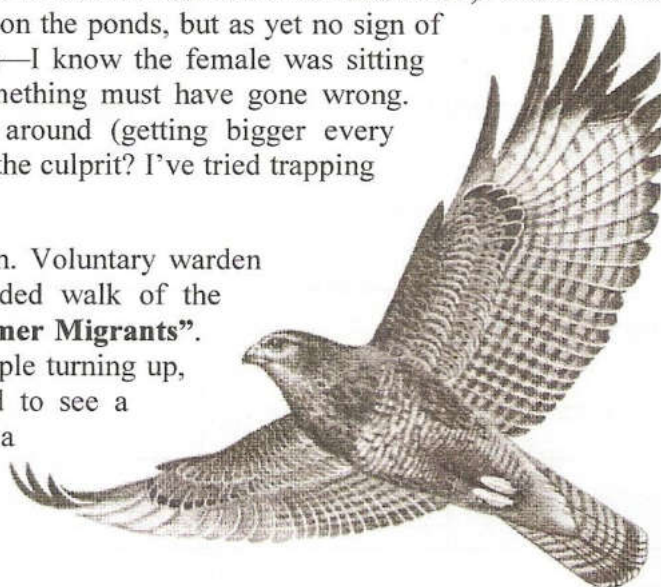
The works in the Car Park are complete, though the signage has yet to be erected. Gangs of youths are gathering here in the evenings, and the mess left behind is beyond belief.

Little
Grebe



The **Sand Martins** have not nested in the artificial cliff again this year (obviously they have found better accommodation elsewhere). Good numbers of young **Moorhen** are on the ponds, but as yet no sign of any little **Grebe** chicks—I know the female was sitting on eggs, but I fear something must have gone wrong. The **Terrapin** is still around (getting bigger every year). I wonder if he is the culprit? I've tried trapping it, but it isn't that easy.

I'm finishing this article on Sunday afternoon. Voluntary warden Chris James and I have just completed a guided walk of the Reserve, the theme of which was "**Spring / Summer Migrants**". The walk was well attended, with some fifty people turning up, and everyone seemed to enjoy it. We managed to see a reasonable number of birds, but the highlight was a spectacular view of an obliging **Buzzard** as it soared, spiralling effortlessly overhead on a thermal.



PS. Along with the usual litter this morning, the Car Park at Forest Farm contained a burnt out car and a dumped washing machine. Next time we have a litter pick, forget the black bags—bring along a lorry instead!

CHAIRMAN PLANNING TO RESIGN

Ted Edwards told the AGM that he proposes to give up the chair at the next AGM. He wanted to resign this year but has been persuaded to stay another year to allow time to find a new chairman. Ted feels it is time to give someone younger a chance.

Ted has been the backbone of The Friends for the past twelve years. We all know about his skill as a chairman and as a leader, but not all of us are aware of the 'hands on' contribution he has made to the Reserve. He has been deeply involved in every project—the creation of the new Hide and Pond, maintenance of paths and the Canal Wall, erection of Signs, etc. For years he has led the monthly guided walks, organised the winter programme, and been a Voluntary Warden for the Reserve. He has taken a leading part in the programming and financing of the bird feeding project and, for longer still, has been involved in the erection and maintenance of the bird nests.

He is going to be a hard act to follow, and we are not likely to find 'another Ted', but we all have different qualities and contributions to make. A new Chairman will get maximum support from the membership and from the officers. If you are thinking about it, why not have an informal chat with one of the officers.

Dennis Davies, Secretary

RSPB GROUP (PHOENIX)

HUGH HARRISON

Our last two work parties at the **Longwood Drive** section of the Reserve have mainly been getting to grips with the **Japanese Knotweed**. Our first cut in April was aimed to nip the first flush of spring growth. On our return visit in May, fresh growth had sprung up but only in small patches.

We've also been concentrating on clearing **Brambles** and **Scrub** that has invaded an open grass area. The improvement is now very evident, with **Fern**, **Bluebells** and **Grass** returning, but there is a need to keep the **Balsam** in check before it also smothers the other plants.

Our aim is to create a more suitable habitat with glades and open spaces, and to regenerate the growth of the wild flowers. We have also started on a wild flower survey of the section.



T-SHIRTS

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

SWEATSHIRTS

(Range of colours for sweats and polos).

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

POLOSHIRTS

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

INVASION OF THE DOVES AS SONG THRUSHES ARE SILENCED

From an article by Steve Dubé

The **Collared Dove** and **Woodpigeon** are now five times more common in British gardens than in 1979, according to the results of the RSPB's 25th Garden Birdwatch survey.

Collared Doves, seen in 62% of gardens, have increased by 525%. **Woodpigeon**, up to 594%, were recorded in 54% of gardens. The birds, which did not feature in 1979's top 10 birds, now hold the 7th and 9th place respectively.

The RSPB said a record breaking 409,000 people monitored their gardens and local parks during the RSPB's **Big Garden Birdwatch** on January 24-25, and 8.6 million birds were recorded and 247,000 gardens surveyed. The Birdwatch survey aims to find the most commonly seen garden birds.



Wild birds are an excellent indicator of the health of the countryside, and the survey requires only one hour to take part, producing a snapshot of winter garden bird populations.

The four biggest losers since the first Big Garden Birdwatch in 1979 have been the **Starling**, **House Sparrow**, **Song Thrush** and **Blackbird**.

The **Starling**—beaten to the top spot this year by the **House Sparrow**, has seen its numbers plummet from 15 per garden to an average of 4.3—a decline of 71%. The **House Sparrow**, with an average of 4.8 per garden, has declined by 52% since 1979, when an average of 10 birds were seen. **Song Thrushes** are down by 34% since the beginning of the Birdwatch, and dropped out of the top 10 in 1987. They are now struggling to stay within the top 20 species. Although **Blackbirds** are still common, and were recorded in 94% of all gardens this year, numbers are down by 31%.

There has been an increase in the number of common **Tits** visiting gardens, with **Blue**, **Great**, **Coal** and **Long-tailed** tits all up in numbers. **Long-tailed Tits** were an infrequent sight in gardens in 1979, but have increased every year since 2001, and are now up by 51.7% since then.

Richard Bashford, Big Garden Birdwatch co-ordinator, said, "It's an incredible achievement for a survey to reach its 25th anniversary. We're amazed at how the popularity of Big Garden Birdwatch has grown over the years. Over time we have been able to measure population changes among our familiar birds—some quite surprising."

Sparrow Flies to Top of the Tree

The **House Sparrow** has been named as the champion garden bird of Wales after taking top spot in the RSPB's 25th Big Garden Birdwatch survey. The **Starling** took second place, and the **Blue Tit** fluttered in at number three. A total of 409,000 people across the UK took part in this year's event, including 20,000 from Wales. Ruth Billingham of **RSPB Cymru** said the charity was delighted with the level of participation. "This demonstrates the interest and concern that people have for the birds around them. It is essential that surveys like this continue to gather important scientific information if we are to reverse the decline of our best loved garden birds," she said.

House Sparrow



The top 10 most common garden birds in Wales in this year's Birdwatch were, in descending order: **House Sparrow**, **Starling**, **Blue Tit**, **Chaffinch**, **Blackbird**, **Great Tit**, **Greenfinch**, **Robin**, **Collared Dove** and **Jackdaw**. The **Magpie** has dropped out of the Welsh top 10 completely.

FRIENDS ON THE WEB

The **Friends** have been exploring new ways to promote the Reserve and also increase our membership. Working with the **Whitchurch Information Group** we now have a presence on their Website:

www.whitchurchcardiff.co.uk

At present the Website holds details of forthcoming events on the Reserve and an application form for new members. Further development will include a picture section as well as a tour of the Reserve showing areas of interest.

We are also looking at more environmental ways of providing you with our newsletters and using Email to keep in touch with our members.

If you have any questions please *Email* me on:

m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com

LITTER PICK SUCCESS

Sunday 4th April saw the 7th Annual **Friends Litter Pick** on the Reserve. Over twenty people turned up for this event.

Each year we have found the amount of litter collected reducing; in the early years we filled large builders skips - this year we filled the back of a Land Rover.

This success is down to continued work by many people throughout the year keeping the Reserve tidy, as well as visitors taking their litter home.

Early date for next year's diary:

Litter Pick 2005
Sunday 3rd April 10.00

Martin Chamberlain

MEMBERSHIP

Membership renewals for the current year are now being received, and to date the majority of members have responded. 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.

The final membership figure for last year was **273 Families** and **2 Groups**—another record year. Thank you all for your continued support.

Noel Gale—Membership Secretary

CARDIFF PARKS

Some of our readers may not be aware that each year Cardiff Council Parks Services bring out a booklet on '**Park Events and Information**'.

This is an extremely useful and informative publication listing not only the events taking place at Forest Farm during the year, but also Park Events and Guided Walks taking place at other parks in the Cardiff area.

I am given to understand that at the time of writing, this year's edition is about to go into print, and should now be available. Copies can be obtained from libraries throughout Cardiff or from the **Park Services Offices** in **Wedal Road**. I believe also you can get onto their 'data base' by ringing:

029-2068 4000.

I am also sure that our Editor will keep you up to date on events at Forest Farm in our own Newsletter.

Noel Gale

PICA PICA (THE MAGPIE)

Browsing through some back copies of the Newsletter I came across an article written in the September 2002 issue headed '**Moggies—Pets or Pests**'. In it the writer discussed the disruption the domestic cat causes to the wildlife around us.

Well, I would like to suggest a second candidate to be put into the 'nuisance' category (or should I say 'Pest', as in fact in the 1981 Wildlife Act the **Magpie** was classified as a pest).

In 1960 it was estimated there were 100,000 Magpies in our isles; last year the estimate was some 650,000 - and I believe I have more than my fair share in and out of my garden daily.

The Magpie is now the most visible bird in the country; whilst other species are declining the Magpie population seems to be growing at an alarming rate.

Some folk say the Magpie is partly to blame for the reducing number of other birds. The Magpie will settle for leatherjackets, beetles and other insects, but much prefers the smaller birds, young rabbits, field voles, etc. for its lunch. I also read recently that Magpies destroy the amazing figure of some 20 million songbird eggs a year.

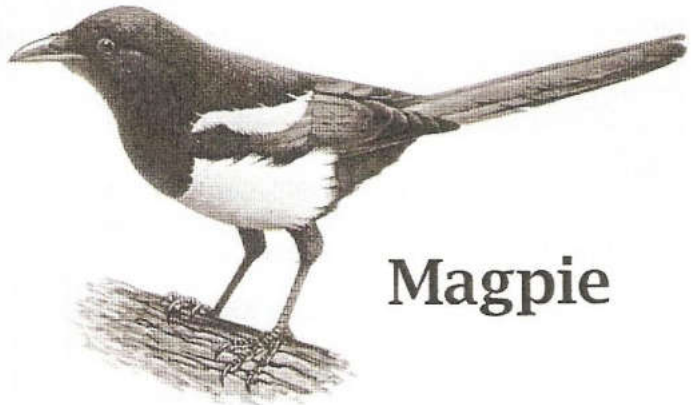
What is to be done? The Magpie, known also as the Pica Pica (named probably with reference to its omnivorous feeding - dictionary definition) can apparently be legally culled. A Game Conservancy spokesperson is quoted as saying, "You cannot just kill them for aesthetic reasons, but killing them to protect other wildlife is permitted." In fact, last year it was reported that a lady in Glasgow and her neighbours regularly set what is known as Larsen Traps to catch the birds.

I believe culling of the Magpie is going to the extreme, and certainly I would not advocate it. I

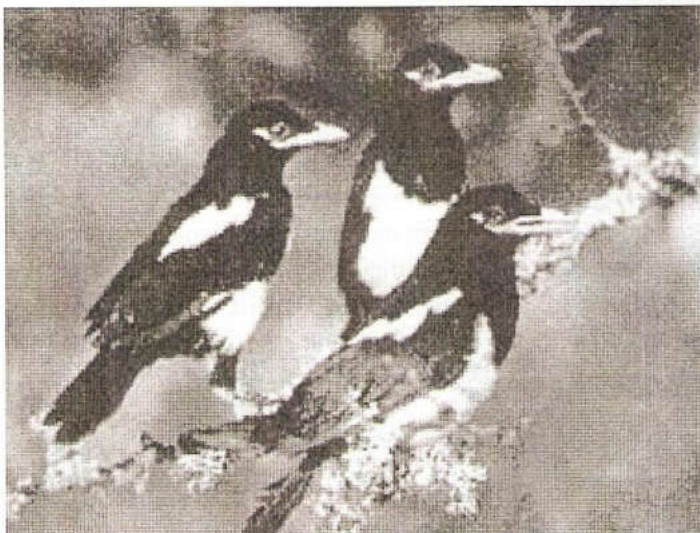
suppose I will just have to grow more prickly bushes and thicker hedges in my garden to give more safety for the few songbirds that visit from time to time.

I would be interested to hear the views of other readers on the Magpie. What is the opinion and thoughts of our own Reserve Warden, Mike Riley?

Anon (Name and address supplied)



Magpie



WHAT'S ON IN FOREST FARM ?

BIODIVERSITY WEEK - PLANTS & ANIMALS OF FOREST FARM

SUNDAY JUNE 27TH 10.00 AM - 12 NOON FREE 4 KM

LED BY MIKE WILEY, COUNTRYSIDE WARDEN AND CHRIS JAMES, VOLUNTARY WARDEN

A walk celebrating Biodiversity Week, searching out the nature reserve's rich flora and fauna. Suitable for all the family. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.**

A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE AT FOREST FARM

SUNDAY JULY 25TH 10.00 AM - 2 NOON FREE 4 KM

LED BY MIKE WILEY, COUNTRYSIDE WARDEN AND CHRIS JAMES, VOLUNTARY WARDEN

Join Mike and Chris on this nature ramble around the Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve. We'll be looking at all kinds of wildlife, from wild flowers to insects and birds. We will also try and answer any wild life queries you may have. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.**

BIRDS, BATS, MOTHS & BBQ IN FOREST FARM

SUNDAY AUGUST 8TH 7.00 PM £4 PER PERSON 3 KM

LED BY THE PARK RANGER SERVICE

Join the Park Rangers at **Forest Farm** for an evening of birds and moths. Local bat and moth experts will be on hand. Places limited and must be booked in advance. Phone the **Park Ranger Service** on **029—2044 5900** to reserve a place. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.**

FOODS OF THE FOREST WALK IN FOREST FARM

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 11TH 6.00 PM £1 PER PERSON

LED BY THE PARK RANGER SERVICE

Take a pleasant stroll around **Forest Farm** and taste the tasty treats Mother Nature has in store at this time of year. Followed by a tasting session of some delicious delicacies. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.**

BIRD DAY AT FOREST FARM

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 21ST 2.00 - 4.00 PM

LED BY THE PARK RANGER SERVICE

Your chance to help the local bird population. Build your own bird box for the nesting season, or help the birds by converting empty pop bottles into waterproof bird feeders for the garden. Please bring along your empty pop bottles if you have any. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.**

Nest Boxes £3 Bird Feeders 50p

(continued on next page)

WINTER BIRDS OF FOREST FARM**SUNDAY DECEMBER 5TH 10.00 - 12 NOON FREE 4 KM****LED BY MIKE WILEY, COUNTRYSIDE WARDEN AND CHRIS JAMES, VOLUNTARY WARDEN**

Mike and Chris will help identify winter visitors as well as local birds.
Bring binoculars if you have them. Suitable for families with budding naturalists.
Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.**

NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTION**Noel Gale - Membership Secretary**

In last quarter's Newsletter I asked for a volunteer to distribute Newsletters in the locality of the Reserve. To those who responded with offers to help - many thanks.

Names of those not required on this occasion will be kept on file for the future.

Many thanks also to all the distributors who give their time each quarter. The saving of over £250 annually on postage and stationery is of great help to our funds.

DO WE NEED A PRESIDENT ??

The Committee reported to the AGM that some members had been thinking about restructuring the Friends to include a President on the basis that we have now reached a level of maturity to justify the post.

Maturity? Well, we have been in existence for twelve years, with a gradual membership growth over the years. We maintain a viable bank balance, and this is the first year we have had to increase the annual subscription. Through grants, gifts, etc., we have been able to spend a great deal of money maintaining and improving the Reserve. This year we will be contributing £3,000 towards the cost of improving the Car Park and signage, as well as making a small grant towards the Canal Wall repairs and, of course, funding the Bird Feeding programme. We have responded to Planning Applications (often unsuccessfully) and tried to maintain some meaningful contact with the Council and its officers (again with limited success). We have a regular Newsletter, Guided Walks and Winter Meetings.

Does this justify a 'PRESIDENT' ? What do you think ?

The final decision will be made at the next AGM. The Editor of the Newsletter will be happy to publish your letters on the subject.

Denis Davies, Secretary

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