

FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

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SEPTEMBER 2004

Editor's Forum

Ken Patterson

*I'm sure all our members will be shocked, as is the Friends Committee, to read the report by Warden **Mike Wiley** of the vandalism perpetrated on the **Hide**.*

As it occurs in the evening, we have no means at our disposal of preventing it. However, Mike will research alternative ways of constructing the hide to limit any future damage.

A letter or comment from any of our members would be appreciated in support of our efforts to find ways of reducing destruction by vandals in the Country Park. We need your backing to gain support from the authorities too. A donation, as suggested by our Chairman, would be very welcome.

Thanks to all our contributors for their efforts, which make this Newsletter one to be proud of.



View through Hide window—2003

MEMBERSHIP

by **Noel Gale—Membership Secretary**

At the time of writing, our membership numbers stand at **238** families plus **2** groups. This compares with last year's final figure of **275**. We have lost some long-standing family members who have moved away from Cardiff, but hopefully we can still get close to last year's figure when those who have not yet renewed send in their renewal slips.

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Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**
Countryside Warden

Well, it's finally happened ! — the day we'd been expecting, but dreading. I'm sure that most of you are aware by now that one of our two **Bird Hides** has been burnt to the ground. This was the newer of our hides, erected by ourselves some eight years ago. It happened on Thursday evening, the 22nd of July around 6.15 pm. The fire brigade were called out but, by the time they got there, it was too late and the hide was gone.

I'm no Sherlock Homes, but these things do not spontaneously combust. It was obviously planned and, in my opinion, some sort of accelerant—petrol or the like—must have been used. It was a very sad day, especially for all those who spent many a happy hour enjoying the peaceful tranquillity while observing the wildlife.

I could go on for ages talking about the moronic behaviour of these louts, - e.g. the way the Tongwynlais section of the Reserve has been trashed, with trees cut down and the picnic area dug up, and all the problems we have been experiencing at the Forest Farm car park. But I'm afraid it is symptomatic of the society we live in today.

On a happier note, people have been marvellous. Members of the public have been coming to me, asking if they can help in any way. Someone from British Telecom (one of our neighbours bordering the Reserve) also rang inquiring in a similar vein; and Ted Jones, Head of Conservation at the Environment Agency, also phoned to say they'd like to help.

We have been doing a lot of deliberating and weighing up the options, one of which would just be a concrete wall with viewing slots, but bearing in mind the enjoyment the hide gave to so many, we have decided to try to go for another bird hide. I have just received quotes from the company who supplied the other hides; it is going to cost somewhere in the region of £8,000, of which £2,000 would be for special fire retardant treatment. By the time we build new wings, etc., the total is going to be around £9,000.

We are currently looking into the matter of insurance but, even if we are covered, we won't get anything like this amount. I have spoken to Ted Edwards, your Chairman, and he is going to set up a special fund for anyone wishing to contribute. I expect he will have something about this in this Newsletter.



View from next door hide

The company making hides told me that there is a big demand at the moment (obviously, other reserves are faring the same as us); even if we put in an order straight away, we won't receive the new hide until November, so we are doing all we can to try to respond quickly.

Marbled White



That's enough doom and gloom. I was up in our top meadow (the one above Long Wood) the other day, on a beautiful summer's morning. The **Yellow Rattle** was rattling underfoot, and **Meadow Brown** and **Gatekeeper** butterflies were everywhere, when a **Large White** butterfly caught my eye. This was a *White* with a difference. There was something about its deliberate slow flapping flight. As I got closer, I could clearly see dark marbling on the wings—distinctive of a **Marbled White** (a first on the Reserve). The Marbled White is a species normally associated with southern England, with a few colonies in Carmarthenshire. This is a butterfly of unimproved grasslands and, with our warmer summers and climatic change, it is increasing its range.



That same morning and in the same meadow I also came across a large **Grass Snake** some three feet long, with a large bulge in its middle. Obviously it had just devoured some unfortunate mammal—vole or mouse probably—and was slowly digesting it.



A few days later I was up in the same meadow pulling **Ragwort** (an annual chore), when a Cricket caught my eye. Upon capturing it, I identified it as a **Long Winged Cone Head**—quite a rare species. (One had recently been discovered on Coryton roundabout). Looking around me, I could see quite a number of these Crickets—we have a good-size colony there.

It's good to report that the **Little Grebe** I mentioned in the last article has successfully raised five young. What makes this so remarkable is

that she raised them on her own. What happened to her mate I do not know, but the parenting duties are normally shared.



I had better close this article now, or the Editor will be getting his red pen out ! Finally, someone in the last Newsletter asked if I had any views on the feeding habits of Magpies. They do take nestlings, and I know that I couldn't stand by and watch this happening without interfering, but to find the greatest threat to the environment, we only have to look in the mirror. **(No offence !)**

MONTHLY BIRD-WATCH WALKS

Please note: The Monthly walks will now be held on the **Third Saturday of each month**, not the first Saturday as previously. This change is effective from **21st August 2004**.

We start from the **Warden's Centre** at **10 a.m.** The walk last approximately 2 hours. All are welcome – Beginner, Expert or In-between !

Phil Baker—Leader & Voluntary Warden

COACH TRIP TO THE NATIONAL WETLANDS CENTRE, LLANELLI

Following on from the very interesting talk given to the Friends by **Mr Nigel Williams**, the Manager of the Wetlands Centre, I organised a coach trip in June.

Twenty-three of our Members came along on what turned out to be a very mild, sunny day. We left Whitchurch at 10 a.m. and arrived at the Centre by 11.30. We then had time to have a drink in the very welcoming lounge area before our tour around the **Duckery and Hatchery** commenced at noon. The café here can be recommended, and serves a good range of snacks and main meals. Many cakes and desserts were home made. The toilet facilities were first class and very well maintained. There was a sales area within the Centre selling a good range of items. There is an information board within the reception area, which lists recent sightings. Throughout the visit there was a general feeling of peace and tranquillity, both within the main buildings and the outside areas.

Our arranged ninety-minute tour was informative, and our guides were very knowledgeable; they had no difficulty in answering the many questions put to them. We were able to have explained to us the many features of the operation of the hatchery and duckery. The timing of this trip had been specially chosen so that we could see the various stages of duck development. Newly hatched ducklings could be hand held, and we could see their progress via cages set out within the building which held ducklings, born days and weeks before.

After the tour, Members were left to make their own way around the many parts of the Centre complex to see whatever was their own interest. There are seven hides within the forty acres of grounds; one of these, known as the **British Steel Hide**, overlooks the marshland and Gower estuary. The Millenium Wetlands area, covering 200 acres, has a range of habitats to attract winter migrants and summer feeding birds, with screened viewing areas and a hide.

We left the Centre at 4 p.m. and arrived back in Whitchurch at 5.15 p.m.



Lots of Happy Members on the Day

(continued on next page)

Phil Baker and his family were with us on the trip.

The following are his specialist notes on the day ...

The variety of birds at the Centre is superb. Obviously there are Ducks, Geese and Swans from around the world, which can be readily seen as soon as you enter the building—panoramic windows in the restaurant area affording some excellent views of **Eider**, **Bufflehead** and **Ringed Teal**, just for starters.

As we went around on our guided tour, we passed many open pens with a whole variety of species. Later, we were able to browse around the grounds. Another good vantage point for the Centre's birds was the lake with its magnificent windowed hide, where feeding takes place from time to time; it gives excellent close-up views. That is only half the story, though, as the "**Millenium Park**" side of the Centre is where the wild estuary birds can be seen.

Barely had we left the building before we saw **Whitethroat** singing, and the first hide afforded wonderful views of the lagoons, the highlight for me being **Black-tailed Godwit**, which really glowed in the sunshine. We wandered through the reedbed, listening to the **Reed Warblers**, and came back via a tree-lined path where **Willow Warbler**, **Chiffchaff** and **Blackcap** were singing. We also saw **Kestrel** and **Buzzard** overhead. Altogether I counted 38 British species. I didn't count the number of non-British waterfowl!!

Although the birds were undoubtedly the main attraction, it was nice to see a **Brimstone** butterfly and **Speckled Woods** in abundance.

So I can report that a visit to the Centre can be highly recommended. There is also a lot here to keep children amused, such as the Swan Maze and a Water Mole City. Within the main building there is also an imaginative interactive interpretation area within a Discovery Centre. Here there are information videos playing, with discovery boxes and a giant microscope, together with many other interesting items to help children and adults learn about water and wetlands.

For next year's trip I hope to organise a visit to Brecon in the morning, and Rhayader to see the Red Kites being fed in the afternoon. Watch this space

Duncan Hockridge

LETTER FROM ANNETTE & DAVE LOCKWOOD

We love the Newsletter, and so enjoy reading it; we cannot keep up with what is about, as I am still unable to walk around the Reserve, which we used to do.

I wish I had thought to write at the time, but last year while driving around St Brides (looking for strawberry plants) in one of the Reens along the road, I saw a little Egret; and in the water up the side of the field, I saw another.

We often see Swans, Ducks and Moorhens, but that's the only time for Egrets. Our son lives in St Mellons, and runs around the area and sees Herons and Buzzards.

Thanks to everyone for all the hard work put into the Newsletter.

Letter from Mr Edgar Sapili. *Thanks for producing my article on the 3-spiked Stickleback.
It's the first thing I have ever had published.*

I am soon to return to the USA, and I thought you might wish to consider the enclosed article for publication—a mischievous parting shot, you might say.

In the meantime, I will keep in touch with the Whitchurch Village website.

Best wishes to the Friends of Forest Farm.

THE GREY SQUIRREL (*SCIURUS CAROLINENSIS*) by Edgar Sapili

Following the interesting article on the Magpie in the June 2004 issue, may I—as a visitor to your country—raise the problem of what to do about your “tree rats” - the **Grey Squirrel**.

They are the cause of the destruction of many young saplings, and also new growth on established trees, by attacking the new growth and seeking out the sweet, sappy layers immediately beneath the bark. Sometimes the tree is completely ringed and dies. They also raid the nests of songbirds, eating both eggs and chicks. Their determination to get at the birds can be witnessed at the Warden's

Centre, where a collection of damaged bird boxes can be examined.



In the USA, 40 million Grey Squirrels are shot and eaten each year. Here, they are almost as unpopular. In fact DEFRA, which classifies the animal as vermin, advises trapping or poisoning; a recent poll by more than 100 woodland owners found that 62% of people thought that Britain has a legal duty to kill them. In the USA they get it right; the best way to keep their numbers down is with a gun. But, due to the much stricter law in Britain regarding firearms—and quite rightly so—this option is not available to you, unless of course you are a member of a gun club and the culling takes place on private land.

The Grey Squirrel, introduced to Britain from the USA in about 1870, could only be observed at that time in zoos around the country. Towards the end of the 19th century they either escaped or were deliberately released by the forerunners of today's Animal Rights Campaigners. You only have to witness the damage caused by released farmed Mink to wonder, “Why don't they ever learn?”

They can be found over much of England and Wales, but are less common in Scotland and in areas of extensive conifer plantations. There were none in Ireland until 1911, when the then Duke of Buckingham gave his daughter a birthday present of a wicker hamper containing about a dozen Grey Squirrels. When the hamper was opened on the lawn, the creatures quickly leapt out and scampered off into the woods, where they went forth and multiplied.

For those who cringe at the concept of culling by whatever means, the activity is purely the good management of an alien species with few predators. Not to manage their numbers is to allow them to destroy the environment they themselves inhabit.

Editor's note:

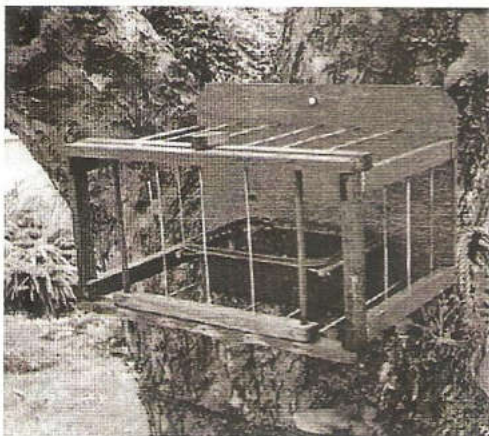
*Mr Sapili will always be welcome if he should visit this country,
as will his observations on nature. We wish him well.*

PIGEON PROOFING

by Pauline & Harry Linck

In Spring 2003, to our delight three **Bullfinches**, two males and a female, arrived in our garden and fed regularly on black Sunflower seeds that we had placed in an open container suspended from an old apple tree just 15ft from the living room window! They were very tolerant of our movements in the room and, as the seed container faces the window, we had great bird watching opportunities to see these normally very shy birds.

During the Autumn and Winter we did not see them, and so imagine our delight when this Spring again two males and a female arrived. The female and one male are obviously a pair, as they visit the seed dish together, and last year brought two young in July to the seeds. We have not seen any youngsters this year. The second male sometimes comes alone, but is often with them, and is tolerated by the pair. Is this a ménage à trois, or is the second male one of last year's brood? Can someone enlighten us, please.



Feral Pigeons began to be a nuisance during last winter, as many as 15 gathering by the Spring. They frighten the small birds and Hoover up the Sunflower seeds at great speed. Anxious that the Bullfinches could be scared away, we came up with a solution which is working well—a cage constructed with a light wooden frame and wires, forming bars, spaced two inches apart, for sides, roof and floor. A solid wooden back keeps the whole structure rigid, and the seed dish sits on the wire floor secured by a holder to prevent it being moved to within reach of the marauding pigeons whose effort to get at the food, when the cage was first introduced was quite entertaining. It only lasted for a couple of days, after which they gave up and their numbers have fallen to about six that manage to find bits under the hanging feeders. We have also enclosed the bird table with pigeon-proof bars.

Smaller birds, after a couple of days of cautious inspection, were not deterred by the cage or bars. The new RSPB sales brochure offers caged feeders and tables if you are unable to make your own.

A Heap of Ash !!

By E.O.Edwards

That was all that was left of the Hide erected by the Wardens, Voluntary Wardens and Friends in April 1996. The destruction was complete, not a single piece of wood left—only the metal roof cast aside. One could easily despair at such wanton destruction for no obvious reason and give up, but as one considers the benefit derived from the use of the Hide—No! we will not give up.

Having been in the Hide many a time with people who have never had the opportunity of seeing birds and small animals at close quarters and observing how they go about their daily lives undisturbed, the brilliant colours of the plumage bringing gasps of wonder, and all in the peaceful tranquillity of a Nature Reserve, the Hide is a valuable asset which must be kept at all cost. The Feeding Station, which was started 3 years ago, is just outside this hide, and in front of the Sandmartin artificial cliff. Feeding starts in November, so we are in a hurry to get a new hide installed.

Many have indicated they would like to help.

With this in mind, we have set up a fund to which you can send donations.

Cheques should be made out to **Friends of Forest Farm (Hide)**, and sent to our Treasurer ...

Thank you all for your support.

Mr John Harding
63 Fairwater Grove West
Llandaf
Cardiff
CF5 2JN

A TALE OF FOREST FARM

by Les Gibbon

Holding the Bull is my friend Alan Boyer, who was born at 10, New Houses, Melingriffith in December 1926. This photo was taken outside the cow shed at Forest Farm when Alan was fourteen years old.

The Bull was a 'Derry Shorthorn'; his name was 'Statesman', and he was of a gentle nature. Alan exercised him most days by walking him to the well and back at 10 a.m. He sometimes took him to Cox's Cabin to weigh him.



Alan started part-time work on the weekends at nine years of age, receiving 10/- (ten shillings) a week. He mainly looked after the poultry. The hours were 6 a.m. to 5 p.m., with two hours for dinner.

His father took him to the farm on the front of a carrier bike. Starting full-time work at fourteen years of age, the working hours were the same, but he had a half day on Sunday. His pay was 25/- a week.

The farmer at this time was Alan Spence Thomas, who lived in Forest Hall. In the farm lived Phillip Young, who was a cow man.

Alan still remembers the cow's names, and has photos of them. The farm was 150 acres, and the working names of the fields were ...

The Lock Field	The Pound Field	The House Field	The Barn Field	The Paddock
The Two fourteen Acres				Cheerio for now, Les.

Editor's footnote

The cow/milking shed shown in the photo was converted in 1984 during the reconstruction of the farm. It is now used as an administrative centre by the BTCV. The Friends Committee have the use of a room for their meetings on alternative months.

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Contact:

PAULINE LINCK

029-2061 7012

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Mr Ken Patterson Flat 10 Heathwood Court Heathwood Road Heath Cardiff CF14 4BT

Tel: 029—2019 8658

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