

# FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK  
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL  
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE  
WEBSITE REF: [www.forestfarm.co.uk](http://www.forestfarm.co.uk)

ISSUE 59

MARCH 2006

## EDITOR'S FORUM

by Ken Patterson

Welcome to your Newsletter. I stress 'your' because the **Friends Committee** and I want you to feel involved in all we do to protect and improve our local Nature Reserve.

I am pleased to welcome the contributions of one of our members, **Mr Eric Tucker**, who has answered a question but set a couple of mysteries for us. We are delighted at the generous contributions made to our **Bird Seed Fund**, which will be appreciated by the many winged visitors to our site. Many thanks to all our contributors and **Robin Sotheby** for layout. Details of our annual summer coach trip, **Duncan Hockridge** informs me, will appear in our next Newsletter. Members' comments are always welcome.

We look forward to seeing you at a talk prior to the **AGM** at 7.30 pm on **Wednesday 12th April**.

**P.S.** If anyone has a large screen and stand, no longer required, please let us know—for our permanent use. This would be so much better than having to borrow one as we do at present.

**Reminder:** Contributions for the **June Newsletter** need to be received by **15th May 2006**

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## Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**  
 Countryside Warden

It's nearly the end of February, and up until now—although we've had the odd very cold spell—we haven't had the severe biting winter that was forecast. Thank goodness!

On one of the coldest days—with a bitter north-east wind blowing—I was driving into work early one morning in mid-January. As usual birds were flying up in front of me as I drove towards the **Wardens' Centre** (this being one of our daily feeding sites). I noticed that one bird had remained motionless in front of my Land Rover. I pulled up and jumped out; still the little bird refused to move; obviously something was wrong. I was looking down at a female **Sparrow**. Its eyes were half closed, but I couldn't see any obvious injury. As I bent down to pick it up, it fluttered its wings slightly, but was too weak to fly; clearly it was literally freezing to death. As I had

**House Sparrow**

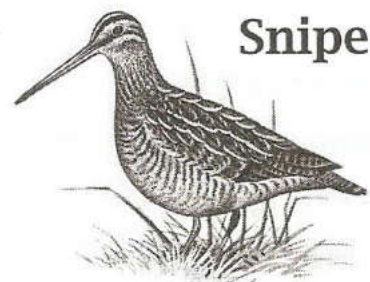


nothing else to put it in, I popped it into the inside pocket of my fleece and went on to the Centre. Once inside, I held the small bird with cupped hands in front of the fan heater for a few minutes. As I did so, I could feel the bird gathering strength. This form of treatment is a bit drastic and stressful—a dark warm box in the quiet is usually the best method of reviving a bird—but in an emergency, needs must! After a short time I took the bird to the open doors and uncapped my hands. I'm glad to say that the little bird flew off. In all the years I've worked here, this is only the second time that I've come across this sort of thing.

Back in December an American male **Wood Duck** turned up on the Canal, and is still there as I write this. It seems to have made itself at home, and is freely mingling and feeding with the Mallards. This is a very elegant bird and, as its name suggests, lives in wet woodland in the USA. Although the bird doesn't seem to be ringed, and can fly—i.e. it isn't pinioned—it probably came from a waterfowl collection, such as the ones they have at Slimbridge or Penclacwydd. (But if it quacks with an American accent—well, you never know!)

Surprisingly the white **Chaffinch** that I told you about in a previous article is still around—this being its third winter. I say 'surprisingly' because usually a bird like this is mobbed by other birds, and is a very easy target for a Sparrowhawk.

As the Reserve's popularity increases, so unfortunately do the problems. We have recently been suffering a spate of problems, such as a person—not so much walking her dog here daily, but actively encouraging it to go crashing through the wetlands, scattering the wildlife in every direction. As a consequence of this, the **Snipe** that normally over-winter here have disappeared. There is only so much disturbance that wildlife can tolerate. When I approached her, the only reply I received was, 'I pay my rates'.





Another serious problem is one of people coming here with guns, some poaching and others just shooting at anything for the fun of it. I know that I have mentioned this in a previous article, but recently it has become much more prevalent, and I am sorry to say that we have had to close the main car park again at the farm due to constant trouble.

A big concern at the moment is the spread of Avian influenza ('bird flu') - first found in South East Asia—across Europe with a duck carrying the strain H5N1 recently found dead in France. This is the strain that can possibly transfer from birds to humans. I suppose the worrying time will be around March to April, when the Spring migration starts, although the wildfowl which at the moment seem to be the birds most prone to the disease will be going in the opposite direction and leaving our shores.

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## **RSPB CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP**

### **Doing Something Positive**

Our last work party for 2005 was in the beginning of December, clearing brambles and doing some coppicing work in the middle section; this area we are gradually expanding and opening up. The new year saw us again working in the same area and, with two new helpers we made excellent strides; those extra hands meant we could direct our efforts to specific tasks.

A freak event occurred in the early part of the summer. Somehow the overhead electricity cable that runs down the middle of our section of the Reserve short-circuited with some trees, causing a large explosion. That necessitated contractors to come in and cut out a swath of trees. We now have a large open area and a lot of timber lying around—ideal for anybody with a log-burning stove or open fire.

### **Programme 2006.**

Conservation work will be held on the coming **Saturday** mornings from **10.30 am—12.30 pm** at **Forest Farm, Whitchurch, at Longwood Drive, Middle entrance.**

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>March 25th</b> | BIG Litter Pick. Come and help clean our patch before Easter. |
| <b>April 29th</b> | Knotweed first cut of the season. Light scrub clearing.       |
| <b>May 13th</b>   | Check for Balsam. Also nest box and wild flower survey.       |
| <b>June 24th</b>  | Balsam pull. Second cut of Knotweed.                          |

The group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous work—similar to an active gardener (you work to your own level).

If you feel you would like to get involved, just turn up or, better still, give me a ring.

**Hugh Harrison    029 2070 4889**





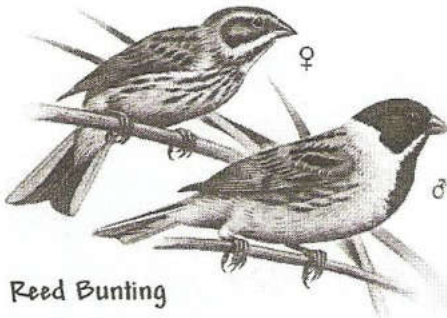
## **MONTHLY FRIENDS / RSPB WALK**

**PHIL BAKER**

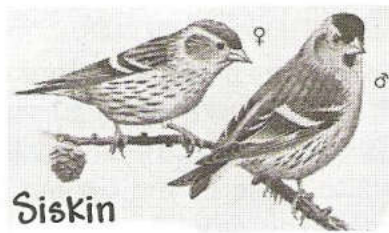


The monthly walks have provided some pleasant, dry and bright if cold mornings over the last three months.

November saw the re-appearance of the “white bird” - the leucistic Finch that has now been around for at least three years. It disappears over the summer months, but turns up again each winter. We had a good total count of thirty-two species for the day, highlights being the amusing sight of **Water Rail** and **Moorhen** slipping and sliding over the ice at the first hide! **Little Grebe** and **Reed Bunting** also showed, and it was good to see **Snipe** from the second hide.



Reed Bunting

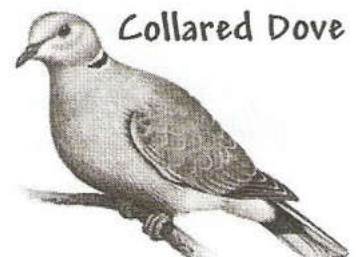


Siskin

December's walk was just a week before Christmas, and I wondered if anyone would turn up; I needn't have worried—we had quite a crowd, including many first-timers! We started off as usual towards the river, but it wasn't looking good as the “specialities” we had enjoyed the previous month (Dipper, Grey Wagtail, Kingfisher) just weren't there—just the ever-present **Cormorants**. Just then, a **Goldcrest**, Britain's smallest native bird, was spotted, and things started looking up. There were good numbers of **Finches** feeding along the paths where seed had been put down—including the white one. **Siskin** were seen as we approached the first hide. However, no **Water Rail** or **Little Grebe** were to be seen. On to the second hide, and the **Snipe** were hiding! We had a good look, but just couldn't see one. (I did see about six when I visited at the end of the year, however.) When we got to the Canal, we were surprised to see a **Wood Duck**—a very beautiful duck, but not a native species. It is a North American species, and presumably has escaped from an ornamental collection. Finally, to top it all, a **Kingfisher** appeared, stayed a while, and fished in the canal while we watched. A good end to the year, then, with a count of thirty-one species for the day.

A brilliant start to the year, the January walk saw a good turnout, rewarding us with no fewer than thirty-nine species, even though, for the first time ever, no **Cormorants** were to be seen. In fact the river was as quiet as it was in December, although a **Goosander** made a brief appearance up-river from the bridge. A fine view of a male **Great Spotted Woodpecker** near the river and several **Mistle Thrushes** near the river bank made up for the lack of **Cormorants**.

**Collared Doves** are beginning to be a regular sight now.





There was a good variety at the feeding station, **Reed Buntings** and a **Jay** supplementing the finches. The white bird put in its customary appearance, but the thing I noticed particularly was the large number of **Moorhens** feeding on the seed when we arrived. Again no Snipe were to be seen, but when we got to the canal the Wood Duck was still there. More importantly a single **Redpoll** was seen feeding in a tree on the bank. A Kingfisher put in a fleeting appearance, and a **Water Rail** was spotted, eventually showing itself for all those patient enough to wait for it.



Redpoll

If you haven't tried it yet, why not join us and enjoy your local Nature Reserve? We meet at **10am on the third Saturday of every month at the Wardens' Hut**; everyone is welcome, young or old, beginner or expert.

## **SPRING CLEAN at FOREST FARM**

On **Sunday April 2nd** 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. This is not hard manual work; it is similar to gentle gardening, and you can work at your own pace.

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

For more information, please ring **Martin Chamberlain** on **029 2065 8488**

**m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com**

or visit our website **www.forestfarm.org.uk**

## **FRIENDS WEBSITE**

## **Martin Chamberlain**

Our resident webmaster **David Bevan** has been working to keep our website up to date and adding new sections, including photographs from the Reserve. When looking at the photographs it is difficult to believe that they were taken from within the city boundaries, and not some remote nature reserve.

The Newsletter is delivered to members by hand. This can involve journeys via car, which adds to the "Greenhouse Gases" so popular in the news at the moment. As an environmental organisation we are aware that we should try to limit our impact on the environment; therefore we are offering, to any member who has access to email, the Newsletter sent directly to their PC.

If any member would like to use this service, please send your email address to

**m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com**



## **HERITAGE PROJECT**

## **Martin Chamberlain**

The Friends have been working with the County Council to develop a heritage trail within the Reserve and the surrounding area. In late December we received the news that we were one of only ten organisations in South Wales who had been successful in being accepted for the Heritage Project.

We are now working with a consultant to "tell the story" of the industrial history of Forest Farm and the surrounding area. If any Friends have any old photographs of the industrial heritage of this area, can you please contact me on either

029 2065 8488

or

[m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com](mailto:m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com)

## **THE GLAMORGAN CANAL in CENTRAL CARDIFF**

### **Eric Tucker**

The answer to the question, "Did the Glamorgan Canal run under Churchill Way?" is "No, the feeder ran under there, and in fact still does; the canal ran under the existing subway on Kingsway and a continuing tunnel under Queen Street which was 115 yards long. The Canal Boats were hauled through the tunnel by means of chains fixed to the tunnel walls.

In the Central Library I had access to a 1920 ordnance survey map of central Cardiff. This map was 3 feet square, and I was able to use a copier to produce a 2 feet square map showing the routes of both the Glamorganshire and the Docks feeder.

A copy of this map is shown below ...





## **Forest Farm has won many prestige awards**

**Ken Patterson**

[Reprinted from the Community Magazine  
"Connect" Summer 1988, of which I was Editor]

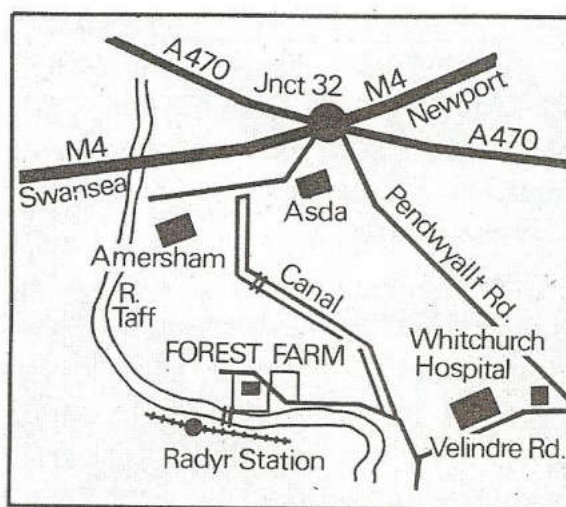
Whitchurch truly has a stake in practical conservation. With the development of the Conservation Centre at Forest Farm, at a cost of £250,000, it will become the Welsh National headquarters. But a question often raised is "Where is it? We hope the map reproduced here will help you find it.

Visitors are always welcome at these listed, early 17th century buildings which are now well in the course of renovation, and to walk the Nature Trail which has been designed to take in the various features and habitats around the farm. The buildings will provide an education and training centre for all age groups to acquire conservation skills and knowledge of the environment. The main farmhouse will cater for residential accommodation for long term volunteers and visiting groups. Other buildings will be allocated for offices and exhibition areas.

You will see examples in the main courtyard of dry-stone wall and slate fencing. Volunteers have prepared paths, planted shrubs and flower beds and made shelter screens for the Tree Seedling Nursery. A semi-formal wildlife garden is being developed to show visitors how they can make their own gardens more attractive to birds, butterflies and wild flowers. A charming feature is the Pond, which supports a large variety of pond life including a rare species of Bullrush.

However, work extends beyond the centre, but is only possible through the skill and dedication of staff and volunteers themselves. They are part of the **British Trust for Conservation Volunteers**, which works in partnership with other bodies such as central and local government, the commercial world, charitable trusts and other voluntary organisations.

The Conservation Centre at Forest Farm has won many prestigious awards for practical conservation work, including several from the Prince of Wales Committee. Mr Harley Thomas, the Wales Regional Officer, commented on his pride in the achievements of the volunteers, and he hopes that many more awards will be won.



### **Membership**

### **N.J. Gale (Membership Secretary)**

Our latest count is **284** families and **1** group. This is the highest figure reached since our Group was formed in 1990. Many thanks for your continued support, and a special welcome to new members.

### **Renewal**

A Membership Renewal Form can be found on the AGM notice enclosed with your Newsletter. We have kept the Annual Subscription at £5 for both families and individual members.



**TALES from SUNNYBANKS****Eric Tucker****Mystery No. 1**

Sunnybanks, late Autumn 1926 (?) at about 10.30 pm. The lower bailey on the canal side was very dark, as Sunnybanks usually was—the only illumination, if you could call it that, being a soft yellow glow provided by oil lamps in the several houses lit up at that time. The nearest gas street lamp being something like half-a-mile away at the top end of Velindre Road.

A resident in No. 2, recently home from his 2 pm till 10 pm shift at the local Melingriffith Tin Works, was sitting in the room leading on to the lower bailey. There was a loud knock on the door, and a voice cried, “Follow meeeeee” He rushed to the door, but could see nothing but three or four other people standing in their doorways, looking towards him and listening to this eerie voice saying, “Follow meeeeee follow meeeeee”, as it faded away down the lane faster than anyone could run. Whatever it was had apparently knocked on all the doors, where people were out looking, at exactly the same time.

I could name all the people mentioned in this story, but have elected not to do so, except to say that the resident in No. 2 was my uncle. I did, in fact, go to live in No. 2 in 1927 at the age of two years, and stayed until the cottages were condemned in 1935, and demolished two years later.

**Mystery No. 2**

I am not certain of the time this mystery took place, but it must have been late 1920s or early 1930s. A number of people experienced this.

Walking down the lane from Sunnybanks towards Llandaff, there is a stone wall varying in height from about 8 ft (2.4 m) to about 6 ft (2 m). Above the wall is a steep wooded bank rising to about 50 ft (15 m). At the top of the bank was a steel spike-topped fence, which ran around the perimeter of what was then Whitchurch Mental Hospital.

On a number of occasions, over a period of time, people walking down the lane on a dark night—usually around 9 pm—would see what appeared to be a nurse dressed in white, wearing a dark cloak and white hat, drop down from the wall into the lane and hurry away down the lane towards New Houses, which were just across the canal and feeder, or Llandaff or Whitchurch. Despite enquiries, no-one ever found out who that person was, or how—more importantly—she took that route.

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.