

FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE
WEBSITE REF: www.forestfarm.org.uk

ISSUE 60

JUNE 2006

EDITOR'S FORUM

by Ken Patterson

Friends ... Standing down is not an easy decision. However, because of other commitments I decided, after sixteen years as Editor since our launch, that the time had come. This is to take effect after this issue. I was delighted to meet Mrs Sheila Austin at the Friends AGM. She offered her services as the new Editor with effect from September. I am confident she will fit the role admirably, and the Committee wish her well.

Heartfelt thanks to Robin Sotheby for his layout skills and helpful suggestions in our Newsletter deliberations. This has set a very high standard in newsletter production which is continuing. I wish to express my gratitude to the excellent contributors who have always come up trumps despite the pressure put on them by my deadline. Equally the role of our distributors in fair weather and foul to get the Newsletter delivered.

We have a dynamic Committee, who are effectively taking forward the principles for which the Friends stand. I will follow with continued interest all the developments in our splendid Country Park.

PS: At the AGM a pleasant surprise for Pauline Linck (also stepping down) and myself was the presentation of two attractively framed certificates in recognition of our contribution since 1990. John Harding and Mike Wiley—your kind words are appreciated. Wishing you all an enjoyable summer, and thanks for continued support.

Reminder: Contributions for the September Newsletter need to be received by 12th August 2006 by

Mrs Sheila Austin

1 Heol Gwrgan

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Tel: 2061 4245

MEMBERSHIP

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 289 Families and 1 Group—another record year. Thank you all for your continued support.

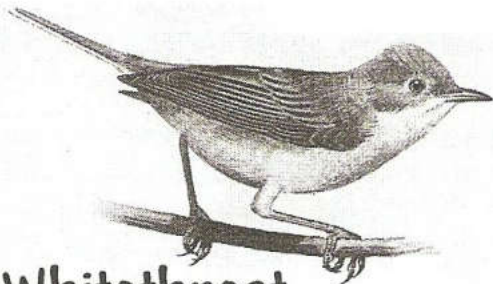
N.J.GALE Membership Secretary

RESERVE NEWS	2, 3	TALES FROM SUNNYBANKS	8, 9
CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP	4	AUDITOR	9
RSPB WALK	5	KEN PATTERSON & PAULINE LINCK	10
LITTER PICK	6	SLIMBRIDGE TRIP	11
WHITCHURCH FESTIVAL	7	FINANCIAL YEAR	12
WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL	7	EVENTS	12
FRIENDS WEBSITE	7	T-SHIRTS ETC.	12

Reserve News

by **Mike Wiley**
 Countryside Warden

It's Sunday, May 14th, and **Chris James** (voluntary warden) and I have just completed a guided walk of the Country Park and Nature Reserve, the theme being spring and summer migrants. It was a lovely sunny, warm spring morning, and 17 members of the public were waiting outside. As I locked the wardens' centre I



Whitethroat

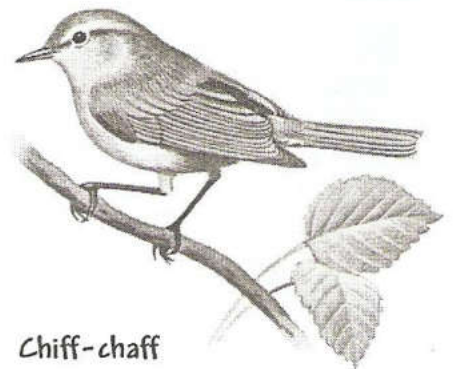
could see a **Wren** carrying food to its nest in a patch of bramble just outside the door. A **Buzzard** circled high above, being mobbed by a **Crow**. All the spring migrants are in now, with a lot of them already nesting. As our group rounded the corner we heard a **Whitethroat** calling; **Swallows** and **Swifts** were overhead. That morning we heard and saw a good variety of warblers including

whitethroat, **Chiffchaff**, **Willow Warbler**, **Black Cap**, **Garden Warbler** and **Reed Warbler**.



Blackcap

Everyone seemed to enjoy the walk; one lady told me that on such a lovely morning in such a beautiful place seeing any birds was a bonus.



Chiff-chaff

The reserve did look in good shape, but in such an urban reserve we still get our problems. The Hides continue to get trashed—obscene graffiti being the latest craze. No sooner than one group of kids starts to mature and go on to better things than the next lot come along ad infinitum. I'm afraid that as long as the hides are there, they will act as magnets for these kids. The local community constable, **PC Stacey Chaplin**, has been a great help; he caught three of them dancing on the hide roof, and threatened them with arrest.

Recently we've been suffering far more serious problems. It seems that the word has got around to the north of here that there is an abundance of wildlife down here, and some easy pickings are to be had. They are coming down by train with guns and dogs, and getting off at Radyr station. We've had lots of reports of people being seen with lurchers and terriers rabbiting on the nature reserve. Some we have caught ourselves, and have been threatened.

A member of the public came to the wardens' centre and told me of a female mallard on the canal with a crossbow bolt right through it. When I found the duck it was still very much alive, with the bolt sticking out from both sides of the extreme back end of the bird, possibly caught up in its tail feathers. I called the RSPCA; they responded immediately. Despite its injuries the duck could still fly; our attempts to catch it failed. This was back in April; and the bird is still on the canal now. The bolt appears to have broken, and one half of it has fallen out. Let's hope the other half will work its way out.

These problems culminated one Sunday afternoon when a young couple with a small child reported to me that there were four men on the Taff Trail cycleway/footpath firing guns. The lady was clearly distressed, and frightened for the safety of her child. I immediately rang 999 and informed the police, telling them of my intention of tackling these men; they warned me not to approach them, but to wait for their arrival. After waiting for one and a half hours, with no response from the police, I felt I had no option but to try and sort it out myself. I remonstrated with them; after some argument they agreed to leave the reserve. One had a high-powered air rifle with telescopic sights and silencer; as they walked back to Radyr Station I saw them retrieve more guns which they had hidden on my approach.

At home the wildlife has been good. We had a **Hawfinch** in the garden; it stayed with us for about a fortnight, using the bird table just outside the conservatory and giving fantastic views. It is a large finch with a huge bill (like a pair of flying nutcrackers). This is normally a bird of the tree tops, being shy and difficult to see. Another nice bird we had in the garden was a male **Redstart**. He would perch on the fence, flying down to the vegetable patch to collect a grub. The **Pied Flycatchers** are back; we have three nesting pairs and a singing male, and the **Cuckoos** are calling constantly.

I have just heard that the Newsletter Editor, **Ken Patterson**, has decided that it's time to hang up his red pen. Ken has been the editor since the inception of the Friends' Newsletter way back in the mists of time; he has done sterling work, and will be a hard act to follow. I understand that Ken has decided to put pen to paper and write his memoirs.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish him well. I will miss his regular phone calls telling me that I've missed the deadline, and that my article is well overdue. (I'm surprised he hasn't fined me). Anyway, all the best, Ken!

RSPB CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP

Doing Something Positive



The end of April saw us on our patch on the Longwood section of the Reserve, tackling that old chestnut, the **Knotweed**. It was our first cut of the season; we were surprised to find how well it was sprouting. Our aim has been to tackle it early in the growing season, then cutting twice again. We also made good strides in clearing logs and branches after the contractors had returned and cut another swathe through the trees.



Our next visit soon came around in May, checking our Nest Boxes, doing a wild flower survey and checking the level of growth of the **Balsam**, which has become a major problem. Sixteen boxes checked—eleven were occupied—8 **Blue Tits**, 3 **Great Tits**, one box lined with dried leaves ... Nuthatch or Wood Mouse. The remaining four boxes were empty.

The wild flower survey is a learning curve for us, but achieved identifying 30 plants—15 more than last year, as we've been clearing more of the scrub, flowers that have been lying dormant in the shade, now with the extra light the floor cover is slowly changing ... satisfying to see.

June 24th Balsam pull / second cut of Knotweed. Middle entrance.

June is our last visit for the season till September. The group works for a few hours during the morning—10.30 to 12.30 pm—at Longwood Drive, Whitchurch.

If you would like to join us ... give me a ring ...

Hugh Harrison 029 2070 4889 ... or just turn up.

MONTHLY FRIENDS / RSPB WALK

PHIL BAKER



The joint RSPB / Friends of Forest Farm Nature Reserve monthly walks have now been augmented by Glamorgan Bird Club, at their request. We are always ready to welcome bird watchers of all levels, so that we can share the experience and learn from each other.

Our February walk was a dry and bright, if cold, morning. A good number of walkers were rewarded with a 28 species total count. The feeding station provided good numbers of Finches, as usual, but less usual was the excellent view of two **Water Rail** feeding out in the open by the Sand Martin bank. A **Kingfisher** put in an appearance, a **Buzzard** was spotted and a **Green Woodpecker** was heard calling. The **Wood Duck** was not visible on the canal, although the warden reported that it was still about.



Water Rail

March provided a cold, dry day with a biting wind that kept all but the most hardy birdwatchers away! - but what about the birds? Well, hoping to



Great Spotted Woodpecker

see the first migrants around, we set off, but I fear the birds decided it was too cold to arrive just yet. Despite that disappointment, we managed a total count of 33 species, including a **Redwing**, **Treecreeper**, a good view of a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, and excellent views of 3 **Snipe**. a good view of 2 **Water Rail** at the feeding station, a **Kingfisher** on the canal, and once again a **Green Woodpecker** was heard calling.

Ted Edwards was 'guest' leader for the April outing, with 32 adults and 5 children joining him—again including some newcomers. The summer visitors were beginning to arrive, but it was good to see **Snipe** still around, and a good sighting of the **Dipper**. Altogether 33 species were spotted, the same as the previous month.

As we look forward to the Spring and Summer, with the summer visitors swelling the numbers and chorus, why not join us and enjoy your local Nature Reserve? We meet at 10 am on the third Saturday of every month, near the Wardens Hut—everyone is welcome.

ANNUAL SPRING LITTER PICK

Martin Chamberlain



Can I thank everyone who turned out for the annual Spring Litter Pick.

The volunteers, together with the RSPB volunteers the previous weekend, removed twenty five large bags of litter from the Reserve. As usual, it is depressing to have to do this but, taking into account the numbers who visit the Reserve, most people are acting responsibly.

The main area of concern remains Longwood Drive, with a large amount of fast food wrappings and some dumping of various industrial products.

Again, thank you for your help. We will again be undertaking a Spring Litter Pick next year on 1st April 2007—so, an early date for your 2007 diaries.

WHITCHURCH FESTIVAL 2006

Martin Chamberlain

The Friends will again have a stall at the Whitchurch Festival on **8th July** at **Whitchurch Common**.

Last year we met many Friends, and signed on some new members. It is still surprising how many people still do not know the Reserve exists, and what wildlife we have within the City boundaries.

Why not come along and meet the Committee. We are always appreciative of hearing what our members want from the Reserve and your Committee.

WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Martin Chamberlain

After getting involved in the bureaucracy of the planning process, we are now waiting for a detailed response to our objections. We have had to send a 50-name petition to the planning department before they would answer our concerns; many thanks to those who signed up.

I will provide an update in the next Newsletter; however, based on previous decisions, I have little confidence that we will be successful.

WEBSITE

This Newsletter will be the first that has been sent to Friends electronically. If you would like to receive your Newsletter by **email**, please contact me; I will add you to the mailing list.

David Bevan, our webmaster, has added this option via our website. Since it has started, our website has been developed with contributions from many local photographers. We now have an excellent number of photographs showing the varied landscapes and wildlife. We are one of few voluntary organisations that are linked to Cardiff County Council's own website, and we receive many requests for information on the Reserve. Have a look at the website and tell us what you would like to see using the contact-us facility.

Martin Chamberlain (email m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com)

TALES from SUNNYBANKS

Mystery No. 3

Eric Tucker

Unlike my previous two stories this story involved me personally.

The year was 1986. At the time, my work took me away to various parts of the country for anything from a day to a week, where I carried out surveys on refrigeration systems in supermarkets.

On this occasion it was the north east of England.

Completing my tasks on the Thursday evening I travelled back on the Friday, arriving home about 2.30 pm. At that time I lived in Alfreda Road, Whitchurch, and I thought I would unwind after the long drive home by taking a walk through Longwood.

It was early autumn at the time, and I decided to take a few white violet plants from my garden—where they were plentiful—and replant them in the wood where I knew they once grew.

I walked past the old Sunnybanks site, up the hill past Ty Clyd and along the top path. I continued on along the path, which at that point has a few twists and turns and a final dog leg which prevents you seeing ahead until you round it. I caught a whiff of what seemed to be cigarette smoke, but with an unusual aroma that seemed somehow familiar. I thought that there was someone ahead smoking.

Getting past the dogleg, I saw just up ahead where the paths divide—the right one going up into the field, the left down the slope into the wood—an elderly gentleman dressed in a long grey or dark blue overcoat, black trousers and dark blue or black trilby hat walking slowly along and about to take the left hand path down into the wood.

As it was my intention to plant the violets on the right hand bank by the large beech tree at the bottom of the slope (where I knew they used to grow), I decided to wait a few minutes to allow the old gentleman to get ahead.

After a short wait I walked on down the slope, planted the violets; this only took a few minutes (incidentally, I have never seen them flower), then I carried on along the path through the wood, expecting to catch up with the old gentleman a little further along. Walking quite briskly I arrived at the path down to the lock; no sign of anyone. Down to the lock, then down the canal towpath to the end of the canal, I did not see or hear a living soul.

Thinking about this later I suddenly remembered how I knew the unusual aroma of the cigarette smoke.

We go back now from that time about 55 years to the time as I stated in my earlier tales of when I lived at Sunnybanks. Our lower floor—that is the one onto the lower bailey—was living space, but our neighbours in No. 1, an elderly couple (I say elderly because I suppose when you are only 8 or 9 years old, anyone over 40 is elderly), used their lower room as a work shop; the man of the house could often be seen doing woodwork, or (it seemed to me at the time) sharpening saws. He also had a respiratory problem; he could often be seen using some kind of inhaler which he would cup in his hands, and which gave off a distinctive unforgettable aroma—the aroma I had encountered that day many years later in Longwood.

If you saw our neighbour out walking, he would invariably be wearing a long dark overcoat, black trousers and dark trilby hat and would at that time have been about 90 to 100 years old.

AUDITOR STANDING DOWN

Since the AGM, I have been informed that **Neil Salmon** is standing down as Independent Auditor of our accounts as from the last financial year.

Many thanks to Neil for undertaking this task for the past few years.

As a result, we would be very happy to hear from anybody willing to take over from Neil as independent auditor. The qualification for this is to be a non-Committee member, and with the ability to read and understand a balance sheet.

Please don't be shy in coming forward, by ringing me

John Harding on 2056 3874

or any other of our Committee members.

Whilst on the subject, we are also short of at least one member on our Committee; we would be very pleased to hear from anyone who would like to join us.

We meet once a month; no qualifications are needed—just an interest in promoting and continuing the on-going life of the Nature Reserve.

John Harding Chairman

KEN PATTERSON and PAULINE LINCK

Sadly, at our recent AGM, **Ken Patterson** and **Pauline Linck** gave up their positions as **Editor** and **Publicity Officer** respectively, on the Committee. Both have been involved from the beginning of **Friends of Forest Farm**, and have worked tirelessly to promote the Nature Reserve. I, and the Committee, cannot thank them enough for their commitment to Friends of Forest Farm.



As a small token of our thanks, it was a pleasure to present each of them with a certificate incorporating a photograph of the Canal after a snow fall, taken and framed by **Martin Chamberlain**.

John Harding

Chairman

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM **THIRD ANNUAL SUMMMER COACH TRIP**

To the Wildfowl and Wetlands Centre, SLIMBRIDGE **On Saturday 29th July 2006.**

9.00am. Coach arrives at Canolfan Beulah, Pantbach Road, Rhiwbina Village.
9.15am. Coach departs Canolfan Beulah.
9.25am. Coach picks up from opposite the public car park, Penlline Road, Whitchurch Village.
9.30am. Coach picks up from opposite The Hollybush Public House, North Whitchurch.
The coach now travels direct to Slimbridge via the M4, and M5.
10.55am. Coach arrives Slimbridge.
5.00pm. Coach departs Slimbridge and travels direct to Whitchurch.
6.15pm. Coach arrives Hollybush. 6.20pm. Arrives Penlline Road. 6.25pm. Arrives Rhiwbina.

PRICES: - Coach & entrance fees. Seniors (over 65) £15. Adults £17. Children under 14 £14.

Slimbridge is the headquarters of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

There is excellent access throughout the Centre and wheelchairs can be hired.

Some aspects of the Centre: -

Over 300 hectares of wetlands and is celebrated as a refuge for the White-fronted Geese and Bewick's Swans that travel thousands of miles to spend the winter here.

There is a collection of over 2000 birds here.

The observation tower can be accessed by lift or 71 steps.

The restaurant serves hot and cold snacks and drinks throughout the day. Hot meals are served between 12.30-3pm.

Safari tours with a Landrover and trailer takes place at 11a.m. and 2pm. However places are limited to 18 on each tour and places can only be booked on the day, on a first come, first served basis.

There is an art gallery with a monthly change over of artists.

There is an extensive gift and clothing shop.

The grounds have flat paths and plenty of benches, to relax and enjoy the scenery.

This year Slimbridge is celebrating 60 years of conservation. Sir Peter Scott's vision became a reality in 1946 when he realized how many thousands of geese depended on the shores of the Severn. This award-winning Centre overlooks the internationally protected wetlands.

If you and your friends and family would like to join us on this trip please state your coach and entrance requirements, and send your cheque made out to **FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM, to **Duncan Hockridge, 5, Clos Cromwell, Rhiwbina, Cardiff. CF14 6QN** together with a stamped addressed envelope as soon as possible.**

Should you have any queries please contact Duncan on

Cardiff 20626111 or send an e-mail to duncan3@hotmail.co.uk.

FINANCIAL YEAR CHANGE

The decision has been made, with the support of all at this year's AGM, that the financial year for us will be changed from April—March to January—December.

This has been brought about because of the difficulty of preparing the statement of accounts so close to the AGM. Therefore this year's statement of accounts will only have this year's remaining 9 months.

John Harding Chairman

EVENTS

June 17	10-12.30 pm	Monthly Bird Walk at Forest Farm (free).
June 24	10-12 pm	Wildlife Watch at Forest Farm (small charge).
July 15	10-12.30 pm	Monthly Bird Walk at Forest Farm (free).
July 23	10-12 pm	A Walk on the Wild Side (free).
July 29	10-12 pm	Wildlife Watch at Forest Farm (small charge).
August 19	10-12.30 pm	Monthly Bird Walk at Forest Farm (free).
September 16	10-12.30 pm	Monthly Bird Walk at Forest Farm (free).
September 30	10-12 pm	Wildlife Watch at Forest Farm (small charge)

Wildlife Watch is the junior wing of the National Wildlife Trusts.

This group is aimed at children between 5 and 12 years old.

There is a small charge for materials.

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

Layout by Robin Sotheby

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