

FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 61

SEPTEMBER 2006

EDITOR'S FORUM

by Sheila Austin

Hello from your new editor. Not only am I new to 'editing', but also fairly new to Cardiff (we've lived here now for almost two years); so please bear with me

Thank you, **Ken**, for your help in the handover, your good wishes and confidence in me! You are a hard act to follow, I think. It would be remiss of me also not to thank the Committee for their welcome and 'holding my hand' in these early days, and **Robin** for his excellent contribution with the layout, which adds so much to the Newsletter.

Now to this edition. Our regular contributors, **Mike Wiley**, **Phil Baker** and **Hugh Harrison**, have once again come up trumps with ever-interesting reports, which demonstrate the large number and range of birds and other species here on our doorstep. As relative newcomers, we were so pleased at this wonderful bonus of the Reserve so near to where we live.

This edition also includes a bit of a mystery written by **Les Gibbon** and a report from **Rosemary Waters** on the summer trip to Slimbridge—what a trip that was! There are also some messages from our Chairman about various activities we can get involved in, and we get up to date news about the membership and what has been happening with the Friends of Forest Farm over the summer—quite a lot.

So here goes. I hope you enjoy this edition. We do welcome contributions from you for future Newsletters—perhaps a letter or a short article about something which you have seen whilst in Forest Farm—or something you are concerned about or about which you would like to know more. Perhaps you have some information to share after reading this Newsletter. Have a go; it would be great to hear from you.

Contributions for the next letter to reach the Editor by 6th November 2006.

Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch, Cardiff, CF14 1PP

or email to: albinaustin@ndsl.org.uk

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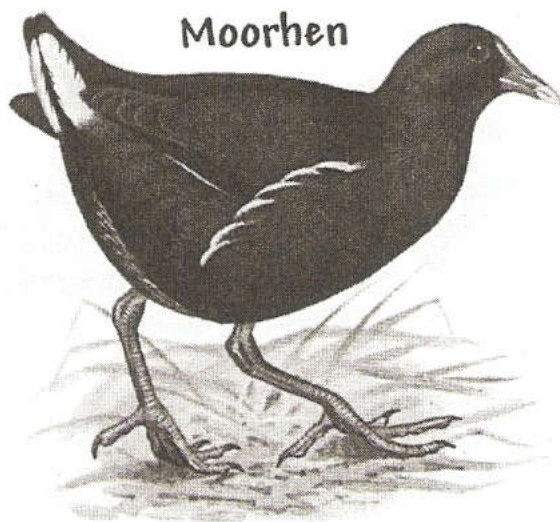
Reserve News

Mike Wiley

Countryside Warden

I must begin this article by welcoming the new Newsletter Editor, **Mrs Sheila Austin**. (Always a good thing to do—it pays to stay in with the editor).

It wasn't until I handed in my last article that I was told that **Pauline Linck**, the Publicity and Sales Officer, had retired from the Committee. Pauline, as well as being a good friend to the Reserve, had also helped to run the junior wing of the local RSPB for many years. A very busy lady. Good luck in your retirement, Pauline—we'll miss you.



Moorhen

Considering the recent heat wave we've been enjoying (or not, as the case may be)—the hottest July since records began—water levels have held up pretty well on the Canal, ponds and wetlands.

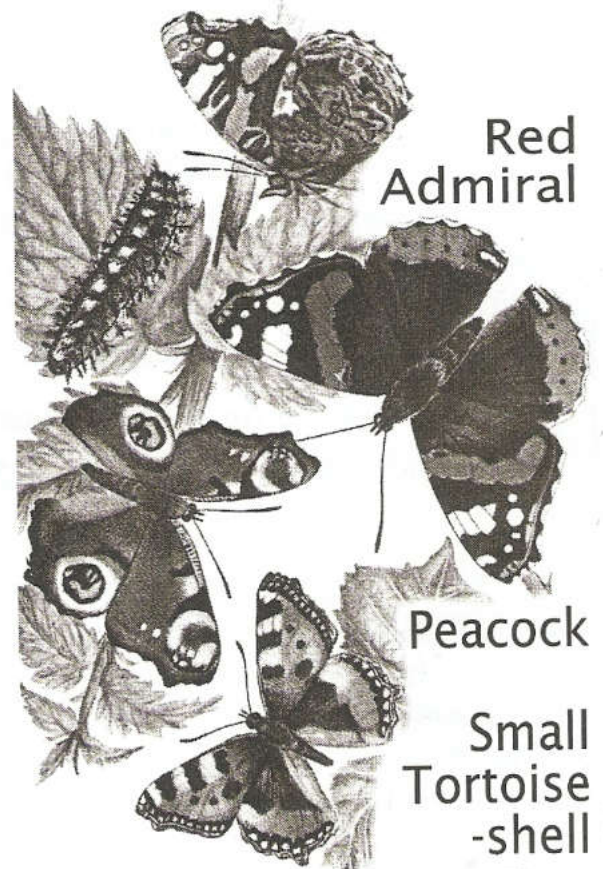
The riparian birds all seemed to have bred successfully, with the **Moorhens** doing particularly well with second generation young seen on all the wetlands.

(One young bird didn't make it, as a Fox was seen carrying off a juvenile moorhen to feed its young).

The butterflies also seemed to have had a good season. **Chris James** and I recently led a walk around the Country Park and Nature Reserve, where we counted eleven species in two hours.

They were **Meadow Brown**, **Gatekeeper**, **Speckled Wood**, **Large White**, **Green Veined White**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Red Admiral**, **Comma**, **Peacock**, **Painted Lady** and **Common Blue**.

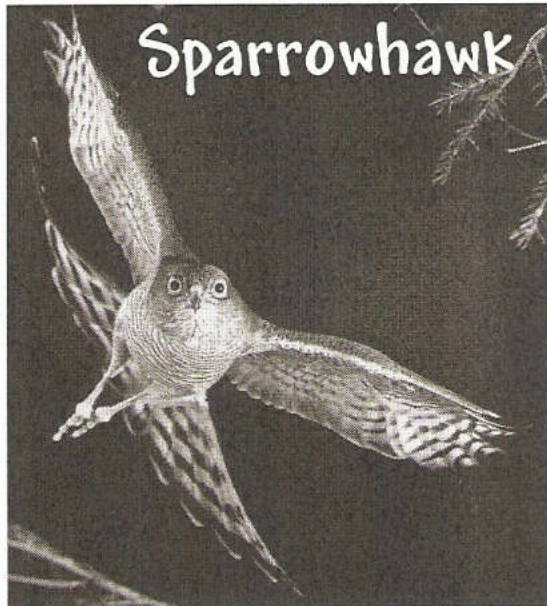
All are common species, but what's common these days? It's a good indication of the general health of the Reserve, and validates our policy of not using pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers.



Red Admiral

Peacock

Small Tortoise-shell



Whilst walking the Reserve recently I saw a **Sparrowhawk** giving chase to a **Great Spotted Woodpecker**. They both disappeared into the wood, so I don't know how it ended.



I witnessed something similar while walking in the Brecon Beacons not long ago. I watched a large female Sparrowhawk stooping peregrine-like at a Red Kite. The Kite easily outmanoeuvred the Hawk by jinking from side to side with a flick of its spectacularly forked tail. The Sparrowhawk

probably had young somewhere around and was just trying to get rid of the predator.

Back on the reserve, we are currently in the process of updating our access points around the Nature Reserve and Country Park. These entrances were created many years ago to allow wheelchair access whilst keeping out motorcycles. Back in those days the wheelchairs used were of the old-fashioned type and pretty much standard. Today's models come in all shapes and sizes from small scooters to large all-terrain vehicles, which are a boon to their users but difficult to negotiate our barriers.

Unfortunately no sooner had we removed the restrictive steel hoops—i.e. the motorcycle barriers—than we had problems with off-road motorcyclists speeding through. Most of these bikes don't have number plates so, even if we see them there is little we can do to stop them. Our department does have an off-road motorcycle team run by **Peter Owens**, the Parks Community Liaison Officer. This team work very closely with the police and run joint operations all over Cardiff. They have been very successful in catching and apprehending these nuisance riders, sometimes with a caution, but motorcycles have been confiscated and destroyed. The team has also been successful in winning a Welsh Assembly Government grant for an Anti-Social Behaviour Case Worker to work alongside the team; a community grant has been awarded to open an official off-road track in Cardiff.

At home, we have just cut two of our fields for hay. A local farmer cuts them for us and grazes the fields with a small herd of Welsh Blacks in the autumn/winter. No sooner had he started cutting, when a Buzzard came over and perched in a nearby oak tree in readiness to swoop down on any unsuspecting vole or mouse that ran out from cover. It hung around for most of the day. Speaking to the farmer afterwards, he told me that this buzzard is a regular follower of his as he moves from field to field. With the hay safely gathered in, it's a sign that all too soon the end of summer is approaching.

Back on the Reserve, with nesting over, we'll shortly be working in the wetlands with the volunteers thinning out reeds from the ponds.

RSPB CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP

Doing Something Positive



June saw us making our last visit to the Longwood Drive section of the Reserve before the summer break. Our objective was to tackle the Balsam during the first flush of growth; it is remarkable how invasive it has become in this area. If we were growing the weed for a cash crop we would be making a handsome profit.

After our morning effort we had made some in-roads by pulling and cutting the weed need some extra help, like a hard winter; it's going to take a while to eradicate.

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| September 9th | Balsam pull / cut. | Middle entrance. |
| October 14th | Clearing bramble / scrub. | Middle entrance. |
| November 11th | Scrub clearing. | Top entrance. |
| December 9th | General clearing / dead wood. | Middle entrance. |

The group meets on a **Saturday** morning from **10.30 to 12.30** at **Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch**. 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

MEMBERSHIP

N.J. Gale Membership Secretary

At the time of going to press, our present Membership stands at **257 Families** and **1 Group**. This figure is somewhat short of last year's record figure.

There are still a number of members (some long term) yet to renew. Hopefully, when I receive their subscriptions, we will not be far short of, or in fact will better last year's total.

Many thanks for the continued support for those who have renewed, and a welcome to those new members who have recently joined us. A very special welcome to **Mr Wallace Moody** from Tumwater in the U.S.A. In this past month he has become a member. Apparently a distant relative of Mr Moody resided at Forest Farm back in the nineteenth century, and he is interested in anything he can learn about Forest Farm during that time.

Finally, many thanks to those who sent in a little extra with their subscription. To date, these donations have boosted our funds to the tune of **£360**.

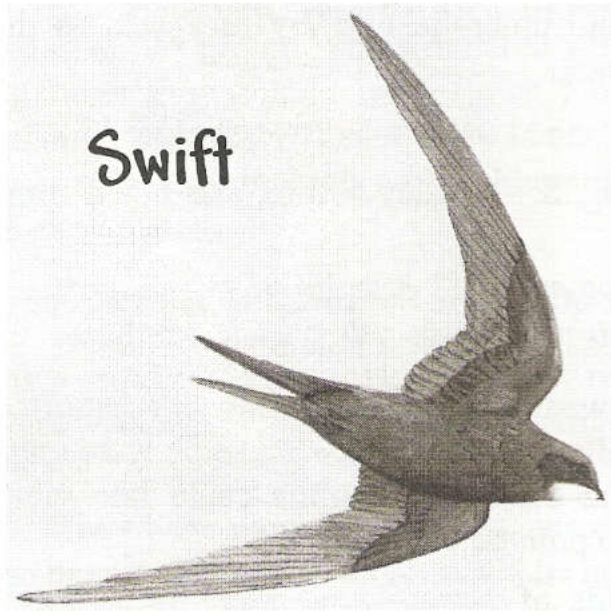
MONTHLY FRIENDS / RSPB WALK

Phil Baker



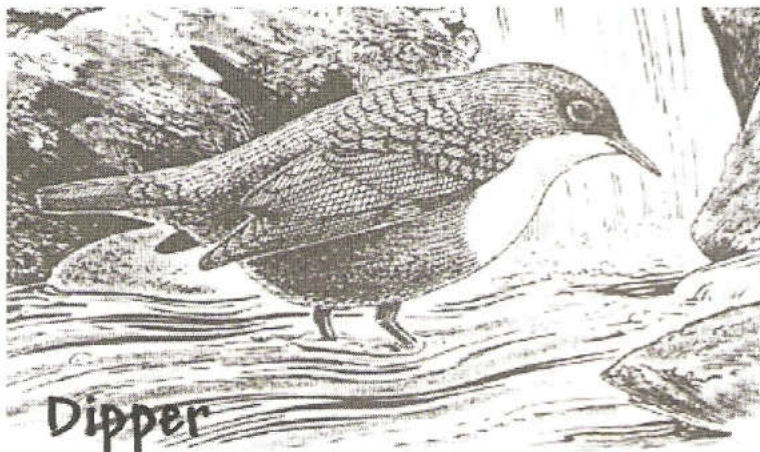
Our joint RSPB / Friends of Forest Farm Nature Reserve monthly walks continue unabated; new people join most months.

A pleasant day in May saw nineteen people, including six children, turn out in anticipation of seeing a good complement of summer migrants. We managed to list thirty one species—slightly down on last year, but a good variety nonetheless. There were lots of **Swifts** about. The river was very high after the recent rain.



June's walk was again included in Biodiversity week; it saw a crowd of twenty six people enjoying the diversity of Forest Farm on a pleasant sunny day. A slightly higher bird count to May; thirty three species were noted. We had excellent views of **Reed Warbler** from the hides, along with a **Fox** who was after the rabbits.

Fewer people assembled for the July walk led by a new 'guest' leader, **Joy Lyman**. Even at this 'quiet' time of year bird-wise, a total of thirty six species was listed. Joy



says: "The highlights were a family of **Dipper** seen from the bridge—at least four birds flying around, so good views for everyone. We also saw a female **Sparrowhawk** fly over the first hide and then sit up clearly in a tree for all to see, and two young **Heron**s fishing in the Canal; they didn't move when we walked past. There were plenty of **Damselflies** around—wish I knew what they were!"

As we continue through the summer and on into the autumn, who knows what may turn up? So why not join us and enjoy your local Nature Reserve?

We meet at **10 a.m.** on the **third Saturday** of every month, near the Warden's Hut. Everyone is welcome.

COACH TRIP to SLIMBRIDGE JULY 29th 2006

Rosemary Waters

With many thanks to **Duncan Hockridge** for the arrangements, forty six of us set off on a coach for a day trip to the **Wildfowl and Wetland Trust** site in Gloucestershire. It is well known to many of you, I'm sure.

In preparation, I packed both sunscreen and umbrella into my rucksack, as the weather was due to change, following our heat wave.

We set off at 9.15 a.m., picking up at pre-arranged sites, and arrived before 11 a.m.

I had looked at the web site—www.wwt.org.uk—the day before, and noted some visiting species to be seen.

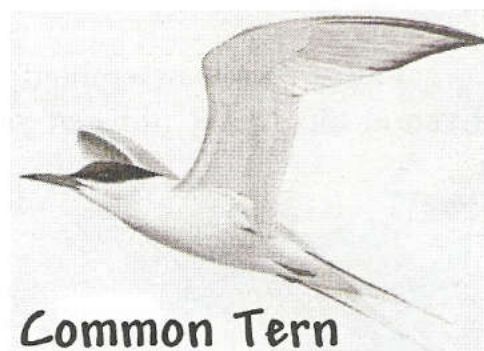
On our arrival **Marie Makepeace** and I set off for the **South Lake Hide** to see if we could find the birds I had made a note of.



**Spotted
Redshank**

Among many wading birds, we saw the **Spotted Redshanks**, several **Black-tailed Godwits**; some were quite close to the hide, and then two **Dunlins** came into view. Some **Ruffs** were also pointed out to us.

Through the other side of the hide's viewing windows on a specially constructed raft, was an adult **Common Tern** and one fledgling. Later the family, parents and two young, were to be seen flying over the lake, and one very near us fishing. It landed on the bank and preened itself, so we had an excellent view.



Common Tern

Marie is a very good bird-watcher and recorded all the species we saw as we went along. The whole list is recorded at the end of this report.

During a lunch break in the café—highly recommended—we noticed there was a shower of rain, which was over before we went outside. The remainder of our visit was warm and pleasant.

We looked at the pens of ducks and geese from around the world, and marvelled at the infinite variety of feather patterns, beak colours and shapes. Nature is certainly wonderful and full of surprises.

It was feeding time as we approached the house of the **Lesser Flamingos**. For the first time this year one egg had been laid. The staff were concerned at first, and took the egg to be incubated by another variety of successfully breeding Flamingos, as they were not sure how good the Lesser Flamingo parents would be at rearing their offspring. They need not have worried; they were now feeding and being very attentive to this growing grey fluffy bird. It had recently had its first venture into the water.

The bird has been named **Hope**.

We noticed there were two **Bewick's Swans** resting on the ground, and wondered why they were still here; they should have flown North to their breeding grounds by now. The same keeper who gave us the information on the Flamingos gave us the explanation:

Both had been injured. They are now pinioned and cared for during the remainder of their life, which can be many years. The Trust receive other swans damaged during their long flight North. Some fly into power cables or are damaged in other ways.

They have more Bewick's Swans on the reserve who have bred, and their offspring also have to remain, as there would be no parent to guide them away.

There were a large number of **Mallards** with chicks of varying ages, and more **Moorhens** plus offspring than I have ever seen in one place. The proximity to each other gave rise to several beak-to-beak 'spats'.

As well as the birds and wild fowl, there are many interesting trees and plants. This helps to attract other wildlife.

Two trees, the **Red Indian Bean** in flower and a variety of **Firebush** were impressive.

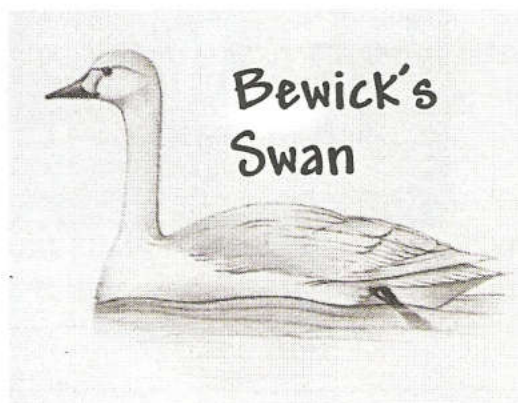
With a stop at two more hides, the tropical house and a tea hut, our time was running out.

For children there are many attractions indoors to help them learn while they have fun. Also an outdoor play / activity area for them to 'let off steam'.

We were on the coach for our return at 5.00 p.m.

Duncan drew out the lucky raffle prize winners; any profit made will help with funds for Friends of Forest Farm.

With all the arrangements he had made, he still found time to organise two other quizzes—one word-making, the other musical. I realised then I had forgotten to pack my brain.





The Coach Party

Birds seen at Slimbridge

All the wild birds seen have been listed, but not all of the collection birds.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Little Grebe | Dunlin |
| Cormorant | Redshank |
| Grey Heron | Spotted Redshank |
| Coscoroba Swan | Black-tailed Godwit |
| Mute Swan & Cygnet | Ruff |
| Trumpeter Swan | Black-headed Gull |
| Bewick's Swan | Common Tern & Juveniles |
| Canada Goose | Sand Martin |
| Greylag Goose | Jackdaw |
| Barnacle Goose | Blackbird |
| Brent Goose | Hawaiian Goose (NeNe) |
| Bar-headed Goose | South Georgian Teal (Pintail) |
| White-fronted Goose | Swan Goose |
| Shelduck | Buffleheads (Females only) |
| Ruddy Shelduck | Canvas Back |
| American Wigeon | Gadwall |
| Mallard & Chicks | Garganey |
| Tufted Duck | Ring-necked Duck |
| Ruddy Duck | Bronze-winged Duck |
| American Black Duck | South American Comb Duck |
| Eider Duck | Puna Teal |
| Red Breasted Merganser (Female only) | Rosybill |
| Moorhen Chicks & Juveniles | Coot & Chicks |
| Lapwing | |
| Flamingos: | Andean, James, Chilean, Greater, Lesser |

RHIWBINA and WHITCHURCH FESTIVALS

Martin Chamberlain

Members of the Committee had two enjoyable afternoons at the Rhiwbina and Whitchurch Festivals. We were able to show visitors pictures and articles on the Reserve and the surrounding areas. As usual, many people do not know the Reserve exists and are surprised at the variety of wildlife that we are fortunate to have.

Many Friends also visited us, and we were able to show them our new display stand that we will use at various events. We were also able to sign up new members; we welcome them to the Friends.

The next event will be the **Out of the Woods Festival** held in Coppers Field in the Cardiff Castle grounds on **Sunday 24th September** from **10.30 to 4.30**. This is an event organised by Cardiff County Council and has many interesting displays for those who are interested in our local environment.

NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY

I had an interesting telephone call one summer evening from the local **Metal Detector Club** saying that they had found remains of a railway alongside the Melingriffiths feeder.

We knew that there was a rail in this area as it was visible on the footpath. However, when we undertook a site visit with other members of the Committee, we were surprised that it was a narrow gauge railway of two-foot gauge.

A visit to Cardiff Central Library identified that there was no railway line on the 1880 or 1910 Ordnance Survey maps.

Does anyone know what the role of this railway was? It is not the same standard gauge as the Melingriffiths railway, and we do not have a date for it at the moment.



Most of the industrial heritage of the area has been destroyed, and it was a surprise to find this artefact in place.

OWNERS of FOREST FARM

I received an interesting email recently from a **Gary Moody** from Washington State in the USA, asking if we knew anything about the owners of Forest Farm in the mid-1800s.

I was able to find out that on the 1841 census* **John Brown** was the owner of the farm, originally from Scotland. By 1851 his father, James Brown, had died and his widow Mary Brown owned the Farm.

If you are related to the Brown family, please contact me via the website; I will forward your details on to Gary.

Another email—this time from Australia—was also able to trace later owners of the Farm and Forest Farm Hall. Looking at the places of birth, it is apparent that there were many people moving into the area of South Wales during the period.

The Website has been a great asset to the Friends; our Webmaster **David Bevan** has been really able to provide the benefits of the World Wide Web to ourselves.

Martin Chamberlain (m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com)

* the photo of the census unfortunately is not clear enough to be reproduced

SUNNYBANKS continued

Les Gibbon

Further to **Mr Eric Tucker's** story in the previous issue of '**Friends**', I was standing on the Canal bank on Friday the 23rd June looking for fish at about 10.15 a.m. I heard children's voices and looked up to Ty Clyd Hill. There were no children, but there was an old man with slightly hunched shoulders dressed in a black coat, black trousers and black trilby hat. I said to myself, "He's old to be going up there". He walked behind a large tree, and never came out the other side. I waited for a few minutes, but there was no other sighting of him or the chatter of children.

EVENTS at FOREST FARM

Monthly **Bird Walks** at Forest Farm. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm.**

Led by Phil Baker, Friends of Forest Farm and RSPB Cardiff

The following **Saturdays** at 10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

September 16th

October 21st

November 18th

December 16th

Wildlife Watch at Forest Farm. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm.**

For children of ages 5 to 12.

Led by the Park Ranger Service. There is a small charge for materials.

The following **Saturdays** at **10.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m.**

September 30th October 28th November 25th December 16th

FOODS of the FOREST. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm.**

Led by the Park Ranger Service. Cost: **£1.50 per person.**

Saturday, October 7th at 6.00 p.m. NOT TO BE MISSED!

WINTER BIRDS on the RESERVE. Meet at the **Warden's Centre, Forest Farm.**

Led by Mike Wiley and Chris James. Free.

Sunday, December 10th at 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m.

MEETINGS

These are held in **Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Road, Whitchurch.**

Wednesday, 8th November at 7.30 p.m.

An illustrated talk by local pharmacist **Mr Peter Rees** entitled

'Underwater Photography around the coral reefs of the world'.

Wednesday, 10th January 2007 at 7.30 p.m.

'Keeping Bees'. An illustrated talk about this fascinating subject by **Mr John Verran**, Regional Bee Inspector for Wales.

From the CHAIRMAN

Volunteers It would be nice to arrange some work on Forest Farm to be done by volunteers, such as moving stone dust in wheel barrows, raking and levelling paths, cutting back the overgrowth, hay making and possibly cleaning out bird boxes. These jobs would be arranged throughout the year by the Wardens, and the volunteers would assist them.

If anyone is interested in being a volunteer ... would you please contact me? I will draw up a list. Then I could contact you with the dates to see if you are able or available to help.

John Harding (Chairman)

Tel: 029 2056 3874.

Projects for 2007 +

In the spring of 2007 we hope to get started on some projects at Forest Farm ...

- No. 1 To lay a stone path between Central Lock and Long Wood. "I think".
- No. 2 To resurface the path at the Middle Section. Early summer 2007.
- No. 3 To do some repairs to the Canal banks and footpath.

When and if

- No. 4 A new Dipping Pond.

The existing pond does not look its best, but as it contains so much wildlife it wouldn't seem possible to repair or work on it to improve it.

So we would like to build a new Dipping Pond, perhaps nearer the Warden's Hut. This could be suitable for school and other groups to visit. Water to keep it topped up could come from the roof of the Warden's Hut. The work could be done over a period of time—perhaps with our volunteers (if any) helping out.

PLEASE NOTE—THIS IS JUST AN IDEA.

IT WOULD BE SUBJECT TO A SITE AND FUNDS TO BUILD IT.

We would try for grants and sponsorship if we get the go-ahead.

September is here already. Soon winter will be here, and we will have to start thinking about the birds over the winter period.

FOOD, FOOD and more FOOD.

Anyone wishing to make a donation for Bird Feed could send a cheque, payable to

Friends of Forest Farm. (Write on the BACK - 'Bird Feed').

Send it to the Treasurer ...

Mr Phil Baker 153 Whitchurch Road, Gabalfa, Cardiff CF14 3JQ
or to myself ...

Mr John Harding 63 Fairwater Grove West, Llandaff, Cardiff CF5 2JN.

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.