

# FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 63

MARCH 2007

## EDITOR'S FORUM

by Sheila Austin

Christmas and New Year already seem a distant memory. The weather since, with a warm January and then the recent snow must be very confusing for the birds and plants. However since the start of a new year, we look forward and activity is in the air... well, actually, more than that as anyone visiting the Forest Farm and Glamorgan Canal Local Nature Reserve would see.

I must say that from my comparatively recent association, I have been impressed with the amount of practical help that can be and has been given on the Reserve. This is both by the **Friends of Forest Farm** and the **RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group**. Apart from the purchase of bird feed, it includes cutting back Balsam, clearing dead wood, bramble etc, litter picking, hedge planting and footpath and canal side repairs. Some of it may not be too exciting but it is necessary work to conserve and protect the Reserve. The FFF committee are working to gain additional funding, linking in with potential sources, to bring to fruition some of our objectives and you will be aware of the various projects 'on the cards'.

In this edition, I am particularly pleased to include an item on **local schoolchildren's involvement in a web project on Forest Farm** (which has won an award). There are further thoughts on the **tram road** at Melingriffith. Also, there is updated information on **forthcoming projects, our events and meetings** and the much appreciated **regular articles on the walks and news from the Reserve Warden**.

This brings me to news that Mike Wiley is currently off sick. We wish him a full and speedy recovery. My thanks to Paul Davies for stepping in with his report.

*Contributions for the next letter to reach the Editor by 6th May 2007*

*Editor: Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch Cardiff CF14 1PP*

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## Reserve News

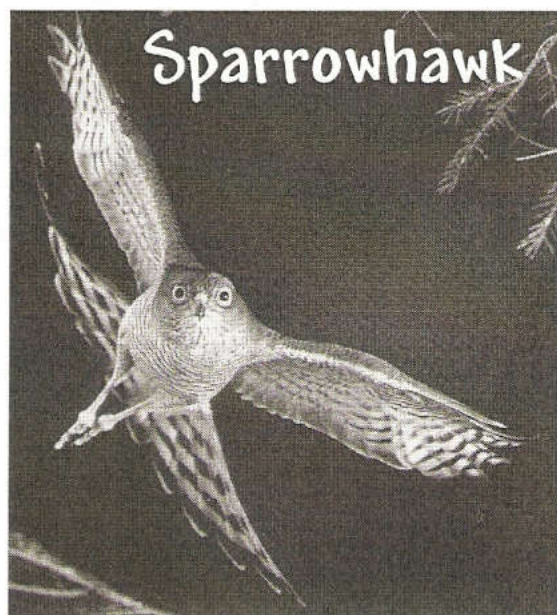
Paul Davies

I have recently been carrying out some hedge-laying along the **Canal**. In the coming week we will be pruning back the trees/bushes along the towpath edge to make the path wider and allow some more light through to the ground flora.

The erosion of the canal banks continues and, as mentioned previously, repair work must be a priority for the future. There are 2 main options here:

- a) to restore the original stone edging or
- b) to install coir rolls.

The former is more labour intensive but longer lasting. The latter is a technique used by the British Waterways Board who look after the majority of canals in Wales and England. However it is more vulnerable than option a), particularly to dogs who seem intent on having a quick dip in the canal. We will probably have a mix of these 2 options and monitor accordingly, possibly leaving the coir rolls fenced off for protection.

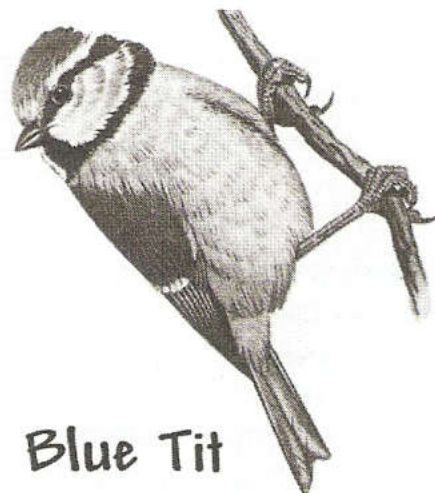


Sparrowhawk

Whilst walking along the canal edge yesterday, a **Sparrow Hawk** sped overhead about 10 feet above me carrying a screeching bird which I think was a thrush. It disappeared into the wetland thicket and all was quiet.

Also, I recently found an unconscious **Blue Tit** on the floor of the Warden Centre. It must have flown into the window after coming through the open door. After holding it for a few minutes, it came round

but would not fly, barely able to stand. I placed it on the wall nearby and in a few minutes it had flown off. What struck me was how small these birds are and how delicate and vulnerable too, particularly in the winter months.

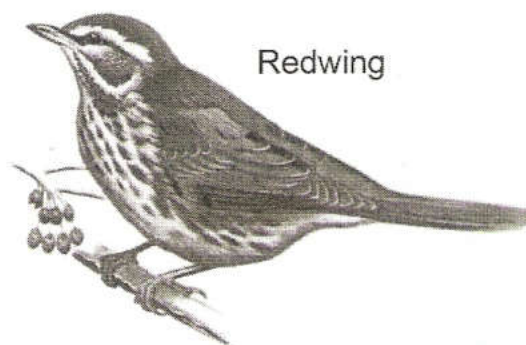


Blue Tit

I also spotted several **Redwing** in the last few days.

Mike is on sick leave at the moment and I am sure you all join me in wishing him well and a speedy recovery.

**Paul Davies**



Redwing

## **SPRING CLEAN AT FOREST FARM**

**Martin Chamberlain**

On **Sunday the 1<sup>st</sup> April** the Friends will undertake their annual spring-clean of the Nature Reserve. Last year nine members joined Mike Wiley and myself on our annual event now in its twelfth year.

We need as many volunteers as possible to help us get the Reserve ready for the spring and summer. Whilst litter may not look nice, more importantly it can also be a major danger to wildlife.

This is not hard manual work, but is suitable for all ages; it is similar to gentle gardening and you can work at your own pace.

**Meet at the wardens centre at 10:00.** All equipment will be supplied and we should be finished by midday.

For more information please ring **Martin Chamberlain** on **029 20658488** or email **[m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com](mailto:m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com)** or visit our website **[www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk)**

### **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: **JOHN HARDING** (CHAIRMAN) **029 2056 3874**

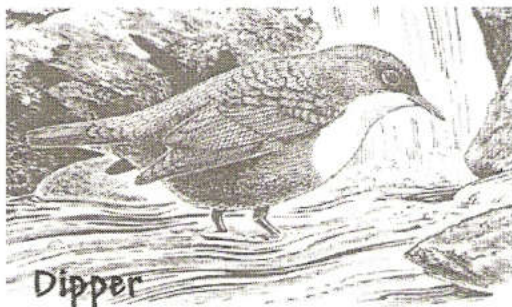


## **MONTHLY FRIENDS / RSPB WALK**

**Phil Baker**



Our joint Friends of Forest Farm Nature Reserve / RSPB / Glamorgan Bird Club monthly walks continue to attract new people (and sometimes new birds!) for our gentle stroll around the Reserve, observing the varied birds and other wildlife.



Dipper

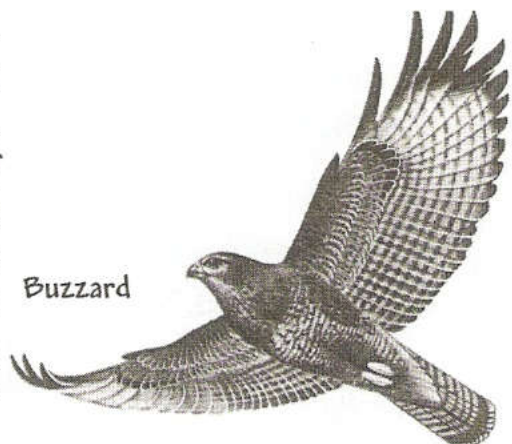
The latter part of autumn, going on into winter can be an interesting time for observing wildlife, so our November outing saw about a dozen people brave the showery weather, and were not disappointed. One of the highlights was watching a **Dipper** feeding from an overhanging branch by the swollen river. After all the rain we'd had, it was an unexpected treat – the bird had found its own solution to the high water problem! They normally work from a rock in the river, and go “walkabout” under the water to feed, but as all the rocks were submerged under the torrent, a branch provided a convenient solution.

Another highlight was seeing a Magpie take exception to the **Water Rail** feeding on the seed at the feeding station. There were several magpies about, but this one seemed most put out that the Rail was eating “its” seed! We totalled at least 26 species, despite the weather – I say “at least” because a large bird swooped through while we were walking along the path, possibly a Sparrowhawk, but it was just too quick for us.



Water Rail

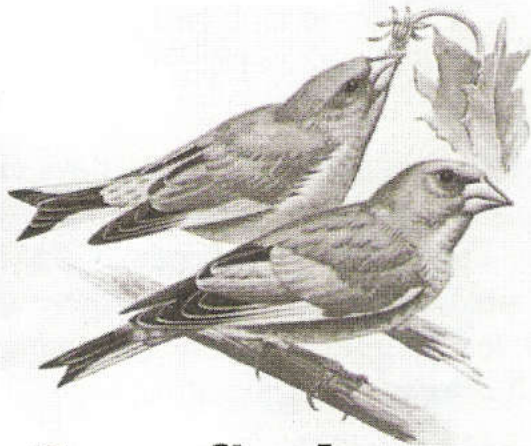
December's third Saturday was fine, weather-wise, if a little cold. After a little seasonal refreshment, we set off towards the river, as usual, where we were rewarded with a Goosander. A total of 32 species were seen, one up on last year's excellent total, with Little Grebe and Water Rail showing at the first hide, along with the usual finch and thrush species at the feeding station. A **Buzzard** glided over, and both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were heard.



Buzzard



A beautiful sunny day to start the year for January's walk, even if the river was running very high and fast. A lone **Cormorant** sat on the wires near the pylon, but the river revealed nothing. We did see a few Redwings, high in the trees along the riverbank, though. It was good to hear lots of singing from many species, making it seem more like spring than winter!



## Greenfinch

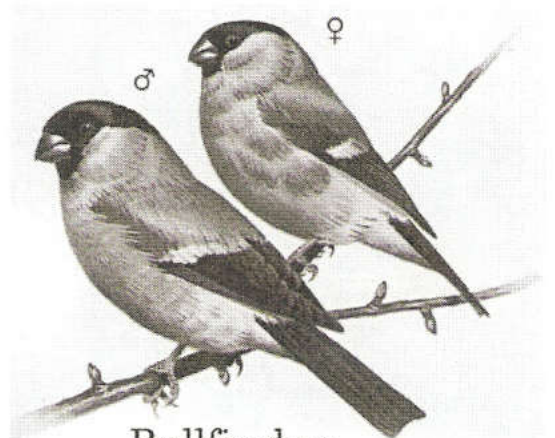
At the first hide we enjoyed watching the variety of birds feeding, including a male Blackbird with a distinctly red beak, and it was very satisfying to see **Greenfinch** back. This species had been hit by a parasitic infection back in the autumn, which had affected them across the whole country, and we hadn't seen them on the walk for several months.

A male Reed Bunting and some **Bullfinches** in their striking breeding plumage demonstrated that spring is not far away, or is it that they are fooled by the mild weather?



Great  
Spotted  
Woodpecker

Still no Snipe to be seen – perhaps the ground is just too wet, but a Grey Wagtail by forest lock and a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** at the edge of the reserve, just as we were leaving, brought the total species count for the day up to 30.



Bullfinches

The white bird that has been around the last 3 years has so far failed to turn up this winter, so maybe it has come to the end of its innings.

With the days now lengthening and spring approaching, 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, and everyone is welcome.**



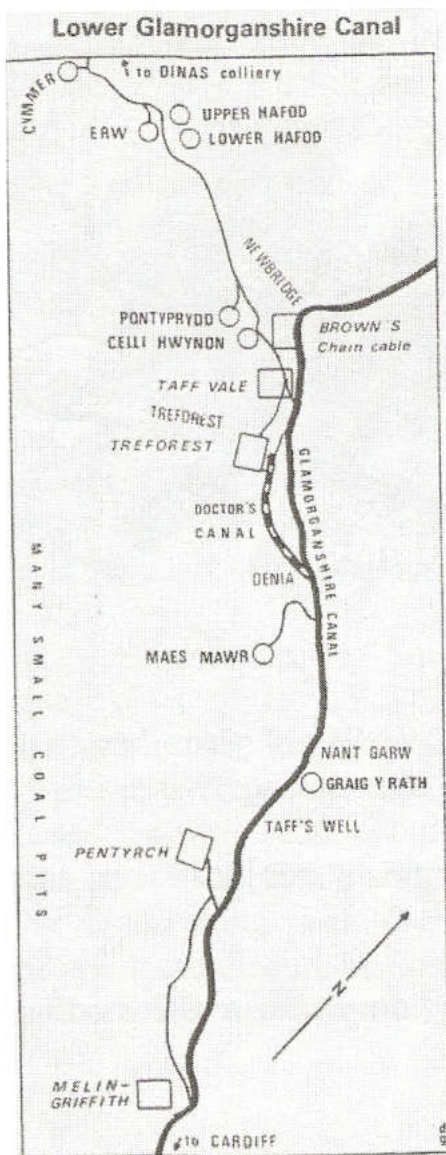
## **NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY (Tram Road)**

**Eric Tucker**

Further to my article in the December issue of 'Friends', I decided to delve a little deeper into the subject; I offer the following as an alternative, and possibly more likely, explanation for the existence of the discovered Tram Road.

The Mellingriffith Works came into existence in 1750; a second mill was added in 1774-5. The Radyr Weir was built in 1769 along with the Works Feeder. The Glamorganshire Canal was completed in 1794 as far as Abercynon and, two years later, to Merthyr. This means, of course, that the Feeder was there some time before the Canal was available to transport goods from the works.

In a book I have in my possession entitled "The Canals of the Welsh Valleys and their Tramroads" I found a simplified map showing a Tramroad from Mellingriffith Works to Pentyrch, and a reference further on in the book to this Tramroad bring 2½ miles long c. 1815-1875. This would suggest that the Tramroad was there before the Taffvale Railway, which came into existence in 1840 and, therefore, before the standard gauge railway from Mellingriffith Works to Pentyrch Furnaces sometime after.



It does however seem odd to build the Tramroad after the Canal was built; it would have been more practical to have used the Canal as far as, at least, Tonwynlais—and then build a Tramroad, as they seem to have done on the map, via the Iron Bridge across the river at Tongwynlais, and from there to Pentyrch Furnaces.

The reference to Pentyrch is misleading, and is not the village of Pentyrch at the top of Garth Hill but to Pentyrch Furnaces or Foundry at the bottom of the hill; it is shown on an 1882 revised O.S. map and spelt Pentirch.

I forgot to mention in my last contribution that, as children, we knew of the Tramroad alongside the Feeder, which was at that time exposed but overgrown. On reflection, it is possible that my first article could still be feasible; a branch line off the Tramroad could have been built to take it to the Line Wood, but it would have to have been beyond the existing Rugby Club. This is because the land between the Feeder above the three remaining cottages and the playing field was at that time a marsh, with a brook running between the field and the marsh down to the gate adjacent to the three remaining cottages then under the road to the river.

The marshland was filled with ash waste in the late 30's and early 40's to a depth of approximately two feet, right up to the brook.



## **RSPB CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP**

### **Doing Something Positive**



The weather has been so mild during these last few months, so we decided to bring our hedge planting programme forward.

During the December visit we planted roughly forty metres of saplings in a double, staggered row.

We cleared another stretch of bramble and scrub in January in preparation of planting on our next visit, though we did manage to plant about fifty saplings. Our first lot of hedging is already showing fresh growth, but there has been some nibbling by rabbits—mainly on the hazel!

We will need some protection—that will be a job for February—and finish off the planting.

#### **Programme for 2007**

<b>March 10th</b>	<b>BIG LITTER PICK</b>	<b>Middle entrance</b>
	Clean our patch	
<b>April 28th</b>	<b>Knotweed first cut of season</b>	<b>Middle entrance</b>
	Scrub clearing	
<b>May 19th</b>	<b>Wild flower survey</b>	<b>Middle entrance</b>
	Check Nest Boxes also for Balsam	

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**

**FOURTH ANNUAL SUMMMER COACH TRIP**  
**To CARMARTHEN MARKET & The National Trust Property,**  
**Newton House/Dinefwr Park, Llandeilo**  
**On Saturday 28th July 2007**

- 8.30am. Coach arrives at Canolfan Beulah, Pantbach Road, Rhiwbina Village.  
8.45am. Coach departs Canolfan Beulah.  
9.00am. Coach picks up from opposite the public car park, Penlline Road, Whitchurch Village.  
9.10am. Coach picks up from opposite The Hollybush Public House, North Whitchurch.  
The coach now travels direct to Carmarthen.  
10.25am. Coach arrives Carmarthen.  
1.30pm. Coach departs Carmarthen and travels direct to Dinefwr/Newton House, Llandeilo.  
2.10pm. Coach arrives at Dinefwr/Newton House.  
2.20pm.-3.30pm Possible guided tour of house/ deer park( subject to demand on the day).  
2.20pm.-5.00pm. Self guided visit around the house and grounds.  
5.00pm. Bus departs direct to Whitchurch/Rhiwbina via the M4.  
6.30pm. Coach arrives Hollybush at about 6.40pm. then it goes on to Penlline Road, then at about 6.45pm. the coach will arrive at Rhiwbina.

PRICES: - Coach seats and entrance fees (we have a special group rate so there are no further concessions for seniors or children), £16 for non National Trust Members or £12 for National Trust Members ( Please remember to bring your membership card).

CARMARTHEN INDOOR AND OUTSIDE MARKET. Dates back to Roman Times. Superb collection of arts, crafts, hobbies, books, antiques and fashions/accessories. You will be able to see some craftsmen and women at work. There is an extensive range of home cooked meats, home grown veg., plants and flowers, fresh baked bread and even local produced wine, fresh fish/seafoods, nuts, sweets etc. Not forgetting the friendly cafes.

NEWTON HOUSE/DINEFWR PARK AND CASTLE. Now reopened. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century 800-acre landscape park, encloses a medieval deer park that is home to more than 100 fallow deer and a small herd of White Park Cattle. At present work is ongoing to restore the Park's stone-walls. There are a number of scenic way-marked walks through the park that allow access to Dinefwr Castle (now owned by the Wildlife Trust South and West Wales), plus a wooden boardwalk and ice- house. There are extensive, fine views across the Towy Valley. The 17<sup>th</sup> century (1660) house, now has a Victorian Gothic façade, and a fountain garden, also a tea room (not N.T.) now in the old Billiard Room. The basement and ground floor is furnished c.1912. Here one can see, touch and hear about life above and below stairs in the Edwardian period. This is all part of an ongoing £5 million, 3 year restoration project, that commenced in 2005. The local Cardiff Association Of National Trust Members has financed a number of initiatives carried out at the house and gardens.

If you and your friends and family would like to join us on this trip please **fill in the form on page 9** and **send it with your cheque** made out to **FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM**, and send it to **Duncan Hockridge, 5, Clos Cromwell, Rhiwbina, Cardiff, CF14 6QN** together with a **stamped self-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](mailto:duncan3@hotmail.co.uk)



## WEB PROJECT ON FOREST FARM—FFOTOGALLERY

Thanks go to Ken Patterson our former Editor for drawing attention to this information. Although it was publicised last summer, 'Friends' may not know about this excellent children's project. (Ffotogallery is the national development agency for photography in Wales)

'Forest Farm Virtual Nature Reserve' is a Ffotogallery web project which involved children from Bryn Deri and Tongwynlais schools, creating a virtual nature reserve on line.

Ffotogallery were awarded the prestigious Chrisi Bailey award – the national media arts award that recognises children's exploration of photography, digital art, animation and video as creative media.

(Source: Ffotocopy newsletter No 19 2006)

*Editor: this can still be accessed on [www.ffotogallery.org/ff-farm](http://www.ffotogallery.org/ff-farm)*

PLEASE FILL IN AND CUT OFF

### **Friends Of Forest Farm. Coach Trip To WEST WALES Saturday 28th July 2007**

Name.....Address.....

.....Post Code.....

Tele. No.....

Please book me the following places on this trip: -

.....No. National Trust Members @ £12.00.....= £

.....No. non National Trust Members @ £16.....=£

**TOTAL £**

I/we wished to be picked up at Canolfan Beulah\* or Penlline Road\* or The Hollybush\*

\*Please circle where you wish to be picked up.

**YOU WILL RECEIVE A CONFIRMATION GIVING YOU YOUR COACH SEAT NUMBERS.**



**MEMBERSHIP      NOEL GALE      (MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY)**

Our latest count of Membership for the current year stands at **295 Families** and **1 Group**. This is the highest number since our Group was formed in 1990.

Hopefully, by the time of the A.G.M., we will have reached the 300 mark. Many thanks for your continued support.

Our new year (2007 / 2008) will shortly be on us. A **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM** can be found on the A.G.M. notice enclosed with your Newsletter.

We have kept the Annual Subscription at £5 for both families and individual members.

**NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

At our **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** on **APRIL 11th 2007** we will be looking for at least one new Committee Member.

Anyone who would like to put their name forward ...

... could they please let me, or any other member of the Committee, know.

**John Harding      (Chairman)**



## **EVENTS at FOREST FARM**

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

Led by Phil Baker, Friends of Forest Farm and RSPB Cardiff. Distance 4 km.

The **third Saturday** of the month at **10.00 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.** **Free.**

A guided walk to identify local birds. Bring binoculars if you have them.

The next walk is on **March 17th.**

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

For children of ages 5 to 12. There is a small charge for materials.

Led by the Park Ranger Service. Monthly on **Saturdays** at **10.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m.**

A range of activities—bird watching, tracking mammals, identifying trees & flowers.

The next meeting is on **March 31st.**

For details or future programme of events, ring the Park Rangers on **029 2044 5900.**

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## **MEETINGS**

These are held in ...

**Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Road, Whitchurch**  
on **Wednesdays** at **7.30 p.m.**

**14th March 2007** Dr Edith Evans of  
Glamorgan—Gwent Archaeological Trust, Swansea  
will give an illustrated talk on

**"Some historic churches in Cardiff and the surrounding area".**

**11th April 2007** Mr Alan Jennings will give an illustrated talk entitled  
**"Saved for the Nation"**, featuring National Trust properties.

This will be followed by the **Annual General Meeting.**





## **PROJECTS**

**John Harding (Chairman)**

### **Early Summer Projects - 2007**

As previously mentioned, we hope to organise the laying of stonedust on the paths on a couple of **Sundays** in **May and June**.

We need some **volunteers**.

It will involve some raking and wheel-barrowing. If there is any possibility that you may be able to help, could you please let us know .....

telephone	<b>John Harding</b>	<b>2056 3874</b>	<b>Evening</b>
		<b>20382272</b>	<b>Daytime</b>

or e-mail **Martin Chamberlain** at [m.chamberlain@ntlworld.com](mailto:m.chamberlain@ntlworld.com)

Dates will be confirmed on our WEB site ([www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk))  
or I will contact you by phone to see if you are available.

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### **Other 2007 projects**

- ▶ Revetment repairs to the Canal Banks and infill to the Pathway
- ▶ There is now a rough outline plan for a new Dipping Pond near the Warden's Centre, about 25m x 15m, with platforms on the sides with easy access for pond dipping. It will be double-fenced and hedged.

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

Published on behalf of **The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve** by  
**Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1PP**

**Tel: 029—2061 4245**

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