

FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 66

DECEMBER 2007

EDITOR'S FORUM

by Sheila Austin

One or two people have mentioned to me recently that they do not get down to the Reserve as much as they used to. So the regular Newsletter reports keep us all in touch. This time we have some photos of the new pond so you can all see what we have been talking about. We've also got one of the volunteers putting spades and wheelbarrows to good use. Memories of Melingriffith continue to stimulate interest and I am very grateful to Lyn Bodman and Rod Mackay for their interesting articles.

One of the events listed on the back page is Tree Planting on December 1st. We will be able to get our new orchard off to an excellent start thanks to the donations from 2 individuals and a magnificent sum of £189 from Betty's Birders (see page 11).

I hope you enjoy this Winter edition of your Newsletter. On behalf of the Committee, may I take this opportunity to thank all our contributors and Robin for the layout, not forgetting the distributors and wish them and all our readers best wishes for Christmas and a very Happy New Year.

(Contributions for the next Newsletter by 6th February 2008 –

see back page for contact details)

MEMBERSHIP

Our current Membership stands at **278 Families plus 1 Group**—a little down on last year's figure.

Welcome to our new members, and many thanks for the continued support received from our long-standing ones.

Noel Gale (Membership Secretary)

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Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies

The new **Pond** behind the Wardens' Centre has been completed; now various projects need to be continued to turn the area into a good facility for local schools and visitors. With help from the 'Woodlands and Wildlife Team', some hefty large tree trunks were 'planted' into a 4x3m pit about 1.5m deep with the aim of encouraging the generally sparse stag beetle population.

Recent work on the Reserve has included cutting areas around both the old 'hide' ponds to make any birdlife a bit more visible from the 2 hides. The Kingfisher has been seen on almost a daily basis, and we have also cut a channel through the Phragmites (reed) to spot any wandering **Water Rails**.

The bird seed crop has done well, but as yet there are not many birds feeding on the heads. This may well be due to the mild weather, and that there is still plenty of natural food around.

In the Wardens' office the other day I looked across, and a female Sparrowhawk landed on the bird table—a great view, but it was gone again almost immediately. Great to see this bird up close, but I suspect the local smaller species may well not agree!



FRIENDS NOTICE BOARD

Martin Chamberlain

(m.chamberlain@ntlworld.com)

After many months of searching we have been able to trace a suitable notice board for the Reserve. The first notice board will be situated where the Canal and Feeder merge. Whilst the Newsletter will remain our primary source of communication, the notice board will be used to keep everyone up to date of any events and news on the Reserve.

If the notice board is a success, we will install others when funding is available.

BIRD FEED

John Harding (Chairman)

I would like to thank everyone who has given donations, whether it be for BIRD FEED or into our FUNDS; they are gratefully received.

This year we will still continue to feed the birds, and would still be glad of any donations you would like to make. I would like to thank the couple in Rhiwbina who gave us a bag of bird feed and some bird feeders. Many thanks to you all again.

MONTHLY FRIENDS / RSPB WALK

Phil Baker

The joint Friends of Forest Farm Nature Reserve/RSPB/Glamorgan Bird Club monthly walks continue, come wind or weather (literally!), with friends new and old walking around the Reserve, observing the birds and other wildlife. It has been good to see a number of children and families joining us—it's never too early to start getting children interested in wildlife.



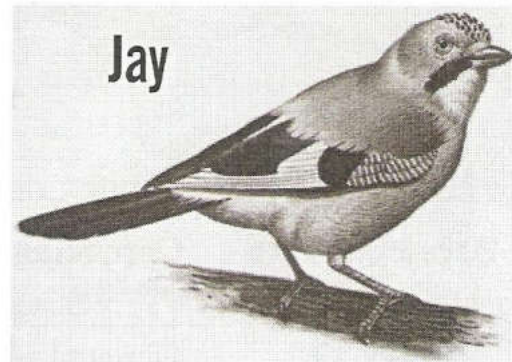
Our August walk was the wettest and windiest we have ever had! Six brave walkers turned out to experience firsthand that birds (including ducks) don't like the rain any more than we do! As might be expected, we saw less than we might have done if the weather had been better. We recorded a total of 11 species, including a young Heron at the first hide, well camouflaged amongst the reeds.

By way of contrast, September's walk could not have been more different! Fine weather of course made a difference, and 26 people, including several children in family groups, enjoyed the experience of the summer/autumn transitional stage. As well as 22 species of bird, there were several butterfly and dragonfly species to be



Goldcrest

seen. After the 'quiet' summer, it was nice to hear birds singing more, especially Robins and Chiff-chaffs. We were also rewarded with the sight of the Kingfisher flying down the river, **Goldcrest**, Grey Wagtail and **Jay**, as well



Jay

as the more 'common' species we usually expect to see.

For October, we were blessed with a fine sunny day, although now noticeably colder. A good day, enjoyed by 17 people, we totalled 27 species, including the Kingfisher, a group of Goldcrests, and Jay again, as per the previous month. However, we did not see a Grey Wagtail, although there were Pied Wagtails on the roof of the Forest Farm buildings as we set off. Lots of **Long-tailed Tits** were about, as is common at this time of year.



Long-tailed Tit

As we look forward to what the autumn and winter may bring, why not join us and enjoy the varied bird life at Forest Farm? We meet at 10 a.m. on the third Saturday of every month, near the Wardens' hut; all are welcome.

RSPB CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP

Doing something positive

In May, our last session for the Summer, it was planned to check our nest boxes and complete a wild flower survey. As it happened, there were only two of us and, as neither of us were all that sure of our wild flower skills, we tackled the boxes.

Out of sixteen boxes, eight were occupied; some had already fledged, others still with young, one contained seven dead Great Tits almost ready to fledge. It's always a mystery as to what has happened. Other boxes were either empty, lost lids or gone missing.

Already this Autumn we have put in two sessions at Forest Farm. In September we were clearing undergrowth from around our newly planted hedge. The growth varies somewhat due to it being a mixed hedge of Hazel, Field Maple, etc., though I am pleased to say it is growing.

On a bright sunny morning in October we tackled the north bank. A group of five of us soon made inroads into the Bramble and scrub on a slightly awkward site because of the slope. The reward is masses of Wood Anemones in the Spring.

Programme December 2007-March 2008

Conservation work will be held on the coming **Saturday mornings 10:30 to 12:30 p.m.** at Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch.

December 15th	Coppicing/clearing wood (winter logs) Middle entrance
January 19th	General sort out Middle entrance
February 23rd	General clearing—meadow area Middle entrance
March 29th	BIG LITTER PICK

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



VOLUNTEERS ON THE RESERVE

30th September 2007

Our project for the day was to move 12 tons of stone dust by wheel-barrow. It had to be shovelled into the barrows and wheeled down the path and tipped out. Then it had to be spread out and levelled with shovels and rakes.

This seemed quite an impossible task to do in a matter of hours, but it just goes to show how much can be done with willing volunteers.

Altogether there were 16 of us consisting of 8 adults, 1 boy, 2 girls, 4 Committee members and 1 ranger. We all worked as a team, taking turns to do different jobs. By 1.30 we were just finishing off—just as well, as we had used up all the stone—so we had some sandwiches and a drink, cleared up and walked back to the Wardens' Centre and departed for home.

As Chairman I can't thank you enough for the work and effort you all put in; I enjoyed working with you all. It was a great pleasure, and I hope you had a good time.

We will be organising other volunteer days; hope to see you then. Once again with thanks.

John Harding

NEW POND DEVELOPMENTS

Following support from our local councillors, the new Pond at the rear of the Wardens' Centre has started to be developed. The excavation started in late September, and was completed using a protective material that will self-heal if damaged. Mid-October saw the Fire Service, based at Whitchurch, pumping water from the Taff into the Pond.

Whilst the Pond is not fed by any watercourse, rainfall from the roof of the Warden's Centre is piped into it, and should maintain a good level even during the Summer (especially if we have summers similar to this year).

The Pond is in an area to the rear of the Wardens' Centre and is part of a long-term project to develop an educational centre for school children. As funding becomes available, the area will be developed and improved.

As the Newsletter goes to press, a tree-planting day will have been undertaken as part of the traditional orchard project in this area. We have been able to plant a number of trees, thanks to a kind donation from Betty's Birders group and personal donations from a number of members.

We will be using the orchard to increase the biodiversity of the Reserve as well as for educating children about where different types of food come from.

Martin Chamberlain

(m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com)





MELINGRIFFITH WATER ENGINE

I recently attended a meeting with Cardiff County Council and a member of the Archaeological Organisation that restored the Water Engine in the 1980's. Whilst I was aware that the Water Engine is of particular local historical interest, I was not aware that it is a scheduled monument, and is the only one of its type in existence.

The Council are not in a position to fund a major project to maintain and improve the condition of the engine, and it would be too large a project for the Friends to take on and manage.

A public meeting will take place on Wednesday 23rd January at the Community Centre, Whitchurch (Ty'n Y Pwll Road) starting at 7:30 when Robin Williams will present a talk on the history of the Water Engine and its restoration.

Following the talk, the objective is to form a separate voluntary organisation that will be able to obtain funding to restore the Water Engine for future generations.

If you or anyone you know would be interested in attending, please join us.

Martin Chamberlain (m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com)

MEMORIES of the RAILWAY around MELINGRIFFITH

I remember the old pump and the Melingriffith Works well; it was always rather smelly and threatening down there in my childhood days; the canal (what was left of it) and the feeder channel both being heavily silted and weedy and the works having assorted steaming pipes and strange chemical wafts; and there were all sorts of half-overgrown sluices and sumps visible, so that straying from the paths looked very ill-advised. Living at Whitchurch, I went that way to reach the cinder path to Radyr Junction, but rarely lingered. If there was anywhere in Cardiff which looked, on a hot summer's day, to be capable of supporting crocodiles

We moved from Radyr to Whitchurch in 1963 when I was about nine; I would ride through the area en route to return to my train-spotting haunts at Radyr Junction. This was a pretty occasional trip as the footbridge built onto the side of the Taff Vale's Taff viaduct had steep and awkwardly angled steps at each end, and lugging one's bike up them was a trial. Train-spotting at Radyr could also be a bit of a trial, as engines would keep shunting busily towards you as you stood on the platform end, then clank to a stop and propel annoyingly back into the yard sidings without getting near enough to read the number! The cinder path from the Whitchurch side ran down quite close to the remains of the pumps and water wheel as previously described, but the undergrowth was thick and overhanging, so the feeling of being temporarily lost in a tropical jungle was quite convincing. The Llandaff North to Forest Farm road was then still narrow and winding, and one would also have occasional nervous meetings with heavy trucks.

Once across the river, the path ran at the foot of the railway embankment to the bridge below Radyr station, passing behind the signal box where the bell codes could be heard ringing out at frequent intervals.

As far as I recall, the tinplate mill was by then in use as a trading estate, but the feeder channel still flowed through, while the remains of the Glamorgan Canal—although reedy and with the locks weired—were still recognisable as such, and the towpath quite well used by anglers but rough for cyclists. My mother and I would ride sometimes up the lane through Forest Farm to Tongwynlais, although passing through the farmyard was rather alarming as there were a couple of resident collies which would charge out and run along beside the bikes, snapping at the wheels—not the place for a puncture! Although surrounded by busy areas, the farm was a haven of peace at the time, prior to the building of the A470 Tongwynlais bypass, the M4 and the adjacent industrial estate.

The sleepers of the light railway were still in place along most of the track bed near the riverbank; I used to wonder what trains had worked along it. Using this route on the bike, bumping along as best you could, you passed Radyr, with trains always to be heard shunting tantalizingly across the river but screened by the trees along both banks, then passed the roaring Radyr weir, where heavy sluices directed water off under a low bridge into the feeder channel. Keeping on along here, one reached the old Black Bridge which carried a large pipeline and a narrow walkway with railings across the Taff. The former railway track and any other decking had been removed, so one could look down into the river. The water then was thick and greenish-looking and smelled rather evil, the smooth swirling of it round tree roots and so on giving the impression of being very deep. So it was a real surprise when it finally ran clear during the coal strike in the 80s to see how shallow it was. Later on, a footbridge was erected over the Taff at the rear of Radyr station and footpaths were much improved, but the area lost much of its mystery and remoteness.

The railway had always held a special fascination for me as, growing up in Radyr, unless you liked golf, it was the only diverting interest in the village and also my nightly lullaby, the musical clank of shunting and the whistling of engines going on throughout the day and night. It seems strange now to see this apparently huge complex reduced to a housing estate.

Rod Mackay

MELINGRIFFITH TINPLATE WORKS

It was nice to see a picture of Mr Albert King (or *Bert* as he was called), the Manager of the above Works in the June edition of the Newsletter.

I was there from 1951 to 1957, and it closed that year.

Mr King had three brothers, who also worked with him at Melingriffith.

John was the Chief Electrician.

Ron was a Fitter and electrician; he was married to Joy Powell, the daughter of T.J.Powell, the well-known conductor of the famous Mellingriffith Brass Band. Ron lived in one of the 3/4 terraced houses between the Water Wheel House and Tymawr House; they have all been pulled down now.

Howard King was the Works Welder.

The Kings were second cousins of mine.

I married on 1st June 1957 and Howard gave me the Bodman's old Family Bible.

There were a lot of family—fathers and their families who worked in Melingriffith, for instance Rupert, Val and Vera Evans; T.J.Powell, who had two sons and a daughter; Alec and Derek Donne ... I could go on, but that's another story of the good people who worked in the Melingriffith Works.

Lyn Bodman

VACANCIES

WEBSITE

I'm afraid I don't know anything about running a website, or what it entails, but we need someone who has the know-how and would be willing to take on the task of looking after THE FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM website.

If you can help in this matter, could you please contact a Committee member or myself.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

After 12 years in this position Noel Gale has decided it's time to take a well-deserved break. This will mean that at the A.G.M. on **Wednesday 16th April 2008** we will be looking for a replacement.

If anyone would be willing to fill this position, or knows of someone else that might be interested, could you please contact any member of the Committee or myself.

JOHN HARDING (Chairman)

Telephone 029 2056 3874

Donation from BETTY'S BIRDERS

Friends of Forest Farm are very fortunate to receive a number of donations, mostly from individuals and for bird feed. Recently, however, the Committee was delighted to receive a cheque for £189 from Betty's Birders.

This group was formed about 19 years ago; the name suggested by one of the members as its leader was Betty Williams. At its peak, there were over 20 members, but this fell to 9 and it was decided to disband. They went on walks, day trips, had weekends away and went on holidays.

The money donated accumulated from monthly coffee mornings and saving coins, e.g. 5p pieces. It's amazing how it built up.

Betty's Birders left it to the Committee to decide what the money should be spent on. After discussion it was decided to use it to 'kick start' the planting of our new orchard near to the new Pond.

Sheila Austin

It was one of those times when ...

.... I wish I'd had my camera with me. It was Boxing Day afternoon 2005. My son was with us and we decided to show him Forest Farm—his first visit there. We had told him about the Kingfishers and looked out for them along the Canal. Not today—but we were enjoying the walk.

We went to the Hide. There was a pale sun, the water looked grey but the reeds were straw-coloured in that light—and there, perched on top of one of the reeds was a Kingfisher with its magnificent plumage. What a magical picture. We stayed those few minutes until it flew away.

I still take pleasure in the memory of that scene, but I wish I'd had my camera with me.

Sheila Austin

We have received this information from the Community Park Rangers which was taken from the following website ... woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/customs/questions/specialdays

NATIONAL EVENT DATES for the DIARY 2008

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Big Schools Garden Watch | 21st January—1st February |
| • RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch | 26th—27th January |
| • World Wetlands Day | 2nd February |
| • National Nest Box Week | 14th-21st February |

Events December 2007 to March 2008

Saturday 1st December 10:30	Tree Planting at Forest Farm. Celebrate National Tree Week. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road.
Sunday 9th December 10:00-12:30	Winter Birds at Forest Farm. Discover winter visitors arriving at the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road.
Saturday 15th December 10:00-12:30	Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road.
Saturday 15th December 10:00-12:00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watchgroup. Yuletide Logs & Wreath-making Art 8-12 years old. Contact 029 20 445 903 for more details.
Saturday 15th December 10:30-12:30	RSPB Cardiff Conservation—conservation work. Middle Section. See Page 4 for details.
Wednesday 16th January 7:30 p.m.	An illustrated talk on Green Medicine by Prof. T.D.Turner at Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn Y Pwll Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff.
Saturday 19th January 10:00-12:30	Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road.
Saturday 19th January 10:30-12:30 p.m.	RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group—conservation work. Middle section. See Page 4 for details.
Wednesday 23rd January 7:30 p.m.	A talk at Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn Y Pwll Road on the restoration of the Mellingriffiths Water Engine, looking at setting up a new organisation to restore the Water Engine for future generations.
Saturday 26th January 11:30-2:00 p.m.	Walk off the Christmas excess with a combined walk with the Friends of Forest Farm and Hailey Park. Meet at the Mellingriffiths Water Engine, Ty Mawr Road, finishing at Hailey Park for soup & tea/coffee. £2.00 charge.
Saturday 16th February 10:00-12:30	Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road.
Saturday 23rd February 10:30-12:30	RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group—conservation work. Middle section. See Page 4 for details.
Saturday 15th March 10:00-12:30	Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road.
Wednesday 19th March 7:30 p.m.	An illustrated talk on the Newport Wetlands by Kevin Dupe at Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn Y Pwll Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff
Saturday 29th March 10:30-12:30 p.m.	RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group. BIG LITTER PICK. See Page 4 for details.

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.