

FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 70

DECEMBER 2008

EDITOR'S FORUM

by Sheila Austin

Another quarter has passed by with amazing rapidity (it must be my age!). Writing this editorial makes me more conscious of the passage of time perhaps because the newsletter covers a daunting 6 months, looking back at what has happened, ahead to future events and with some 'present' for good measure. Dr Gillham's welcome elucidation of the difference between horsetail and maretail refers back to a factual error in our previous edition. The lovely monthly walks with the RSPB continue, Paul Davies keeps us up to date with his Reserve Report, volunteers keep up the good work via Cardiff conservation group as well as our own members and helpers. The dramatic burst water main and allotment flooding feature as well. Don't forget our series of talks over the next few months at the Whitchurch Community Centre

It's good to hear again from Hugh Harrison and 'see' Mike Wiley back on the Reserve. My thanks to all our contributors. Articles, memories, letters, snippets – all are welcomed for future editions of the newsletter.

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, may I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

Deadline for articles for March newsletter - 5th February 2009. (Details on page 12).

BIRD FEED

Yes, it's that time of year again! The birds rely on us to feed them during the winter, and that starts now. Of course, they reward us with splendid views as we visit "their" reserve.

A supply of seed for this winter has been ordered and by the time you read this feeding will have started. Unfortunately, costs have soared, and the feed will cost around £200 more than last year for the same quantity, but the committee have approved the increase in expenditure for the birds' sake. If you can help the birds with a donation for feed, I'm sure they would appreciate it!

Phil Baker

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Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies

In mid September I was away attending the annual APS forestry show near Cannock Chase when I received a phone call from a concerned visitor to the park. He said a huge torrent of water was pouring down the bank next to the bridge near Longwood Drive over the old Coryton line. Apparently there had been a burst in a 25cm water main and after 3 or 4 hours the pipe was shut down and repaired. The damage to the bank and steps down to the track was considerable and an area of some 10 x 20m of topsoil had been washed down the line. Fortunately the water company brought in contractors and the damage was repaired and steps replaced at no cost to the Council. The pipe crosses inside the bridge and follows along the top of Long Wood across the hospital meadows and down the track adjoining the canal and feeder at the southern end. I was told that quite a few houses in Radyr were without water for some time.

The first pond dip platform has been completed and the second should be in place by next Spring.

We have also been coppicing the hazel near the hides to open up the area and hopefully make them less prone to vandalism.

Both Mike and I are glad to report that site

meetings have taken place recently between the Drainage Board, a specialist contractor and Cardiff Council Parks department to repair the penstock valve at the top of the Melingriffith feeder. This work is long overdue and will resolve the flooding problems we have been having.

Finally, once again, thanks to the Friends of Forest Farm for providing this year's bird seed. We will be starting to use it shortly.



THE BURST WATER MAIN

I work on the industrial estate at Forest Farm and often have a quick stroll around the Reserve at lunchtime.

Arriving at the top lock just before 1 p.m., I saw an amazing sight. A waterfall was cascading down the hillside in the manner of those seen in Snowdonia or the Lake District. The effect was rather spoilt by the overpowering smell of chlorine and the huge amount of sediment entering the canal either washed down or coming through the drain from the old railway line as a high pressure torrent.

Fortunately our works engineer was a few minutes ahead of me and already on his mobile phone to Welsh Water. An investigation of the source showed water pouring from a spot just beyond the bridge over the old Cardiff railway (behind MacDonalds). Water was still cascading down at a reduced rate when I left work at 5 p.m.

The canal just managed to contain the extra water but the level was lapping over the path for much of its length and the bypass at the middle lock was just beginning to overflow. The water was full of mud and I did wonder how the wildlife had been affected.

The following day, the repair had been made, but the steps up from the railway cutting had been washed away and a section of broken cast iron pipe was visible, showing the source of the burst.

The steps were soon under repair and within 10 days all was back to normal as though nothing had happened.

Albyn Austin

Pictures

By

Rob Stone



VOLUNTEERS DAY

28th September 2008

This was a very successful morning. Eight people turned up plus Warden Paul was with us and surprise, surprise even Mike stopped a while on his way back from checking the hides. He even picked up a shovel – I won't say for how long though, but I did manage to get a photo.

Together we managed to spread the stone over a 20 metre stretch of path. I would like to thank all those who turned up to help. Let's hope during 2009 we will have many more successful volunteer days.



2009

All being well, providing we can arrange a Warden to be with us, we will have a VOLUNTEERS DAY on Sunday 1st February 2009 at about 10.30 a.m. We aim to carry out Habitat Restoration Work. We will supply some warm soup and bread so come along just to meet up any way.

Details of this will be on the notice board on the Reserve and on the door of the Wardens Centre. Also you can e-mail me at taffkiwi@hotmail.com or phone me on 02920563874 nearer the date to check if it is still going ahead ...also it would be useful to have some idea of how many people would be coming.

John Harding - Chairman
(photo by John Harding)

MEMBERSHIP

Our current membership stands at 280 Families plus 2 Groups - just 5 short of last years figure.

Welcome to those new members who have joined us this past year, and many thanks for the continued support received from our long standing ones.

Noel Gale—Membership Secretary

FOREST FARM ALLOTMENTS

When walking around Forest Farm many people will pass the allotment site at the end of Forest Farm Road and wonder what goes on behind the fencing and barbed wire.

In October 2007 after waiting 18 months I finally took delivery of my allotment or plot 10 as it is now known.

I was assured by the secretary that underneath the two-foot high weeds and assorted rubbish that this would be an ideal opportunity.

Six months later after many trips to the Wedal Road Tip the "plot" resembled the traditional allotment site of two rods (whatever that means).

The next question was what to grow and how; what you are never short of is advice from the many older plot holders. Importantly, a shed arrived courtesy of my father in law. The floor was raised two feet off the ground, to avoid the regular flooding; but that's another story.

May arrived and the first new potatoes were ready and what a taste from plot to plate in ten minutes. Early summer continued to bring broad beans, green beans, lettuce, strawberries and as I left for holiday in early August everything looked fine. Unfortunately, for the next four weeks it did not stop raining and my tomatoes and main crop of potatoes all succumbed to blight.

All the benefits of growing your own food have been enjoyed as were the free gym sessions removing all the weeds and rubbish. The enjoyment of a summer evening spent gardening with the local wildlife birds, foxes and many rabbits is a relaxing end to the day.

The allotment holders are a community of people of all ages and backgrounds. Advice is always available and freely given, and excess produce is exchanged, as you always have too much of one thing and too little of some thing else.

After many years of falling numbers, the allotments are all taken with a waiting list now running into many years.

Martin Chamberlain

MONTHLY BIRDWALK: **20th SEPTEMBER 2008**

Sheila Austin

(I am indebted to **Chris Rhodes** for the comprehensive information he provided for this 'report').



For the first time in several months, this Saturday morning was bright, sunny and pleasantly warm. I was among the 11 adults and 4 enthusiastic children for the September walk led by Chris Rhodes - RSPB member.

We set off from the Wardens' Centre, seeing among other things **Jackdaw**, Blackbird and **Long-tailed Tit** before reaching the Taff. Then, along the riverbank and on the bridge, we saw **Cormorant**, **Jay**, **Grey Wagtail** and Mallard and, for the observant – myself not among them – a flash of a Kingfisher.

On the section between the river and hides, there were some lovely views of **Nuthatch** taking advantage of the birdseed, also Great Tit, Coal Tit, Robin, Dunnock, **Carrion Crow** and Wood Pigeon. It was a bit disappointing that our stay at the hide only produced sighting of Moorhen and a Squirrel, but **Blue Tit** and Chaffinch were seen several times along by the canal and a **Buzzard** was spotted circling high overhead.

Jackdaw



Jay



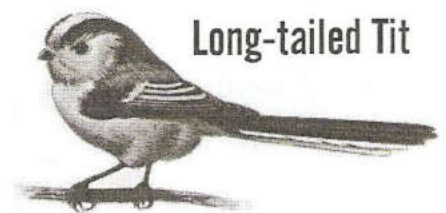
Cormorant



Grey Wagtail



Long-tailed Tit



We did have further sightings of the above-mentioned birds but as Chris pointed out, some species were notable on this occasion by their absence. These included Grey Heron, Treecreeper, Dipper, Swallows, Greenfinch, Martins and Starling.

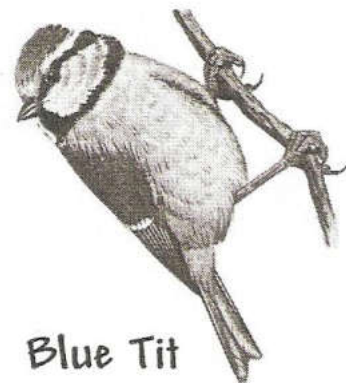
We all greatly enjoyed our walk and the weather was a bonus. Enthusiastic children and bird watching do not always go hand in hand but it was great to see them, they seemed happy and there was enough to keep them interested. They might be the RSPB/Forest Farm members of the future...

My grateful thanks go to Chris for leading it.

Don't forget this walk is held every 3rd Saturday, meeting at the Warden's Centre at 10.00 a.m. You are very welcome to come along.



Nuthatch



Blue Tit



Carrion
Crow



Buzzard

RSPB CARDIFF CONSERVATION GROUP

Doing Something Positive

I missed my slot for the last two Newsletters due to unforeseen circumstances, so this is a catch-up report.

Our Nest Box and Wildflower Survey in May went well—a good breeding season overall—most boxes occupied, even our open-fronted. Also, a first for Longwood Drive—a Nuthatch. Our wildflower count has been roughly 28 species; after this survey we recorded an extra 14 new species. We should really try to do at least two counts during the season; that would give us a better indicator of the common plants on our patch.

June was slightly disappointing in that the Japanese Knotweed had romped away. In some places it was over 6ft tall, and I had thought we were making progress in eradication of this weed. However, on the plus side, whilst strimming new growth of the invasive weed Balsam, I was delighted to come across small groups of the common Spotted Orchid, which were not out during our May visit.

After our Summer break, we're back clearing the dreaded Balsam—a really invasive plant. As soon as we have cleared an area of Brambles, etc., it quickly spreads, even filling gaps that were dominated by the Knotweed.

Programme 2009

| | | |
|----------------------|---|-----------------|
| January 24th | Clearing scrub/coppicing | Top entrance |
| February 28th | Meadow area/general clearing | Middle entrance |
| March 28th | BIG LITTER PICK | |
| | Come and help clean our patch before Easter | Middle entrance |

The group meets for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. Not particularly strenuous work, similar to an active gardener (you work to your own level). Extra pairs of hands are always welcome.

If you feel you would like to get involved ... *just turn up*

or better still, give me a ring ... **Hugh Harrison 029 20704889**

THE HORSETAIL—MARESTAIL TANGLE

(re 'A Lunchtime Walk' in the September 2008 issue)

Mary E. Gillham

Just to sort out the difference between Horsetail – “a very ancient plant” as your contributor remarks, from the totally different Maretail – a very modern plant and member of the Angiosperms or flowering plants – so far removed from its origins as to have much reduced flowers.

The one and a half metre high plants along the brook from Gelynys Fruit Farm to Pugh's nursery are giant horsetail (***Equisetum telmateia***), the most noble of the horsetails (relative of ancient Coal Measure ferns. A smaller related species is a much maligned garden weed).

Unfortunately the picture illustrating this contribution was the sub-aerial form of the maretail (***Hippurus vulgaris***), which is most likely to be found in ornamental ponds in parks and gardens, such as Heath Park.

Except at flowering time, maretail is an underwater plant, with flowing, flexible stems a foot or more long, beset with hundreds of even more pliable leaves – waving in the current, like the tail of a mare in full gallop.

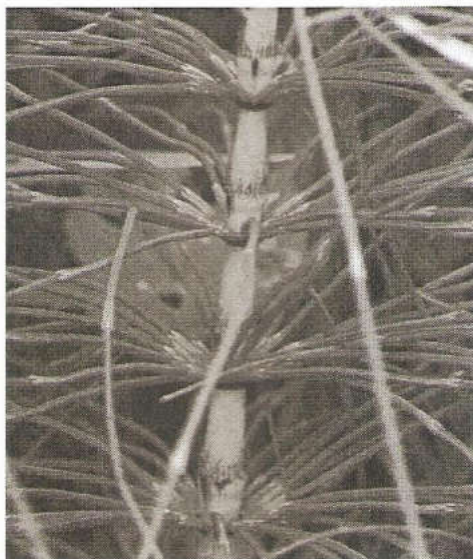
This phase is seldom illustrated in wild flower books, although much more characteristic than the shorter stems bearing tiny flowers which stick up into the air.

Horsetails, of course, have no flowers, only a single cone at the top of a naked stem in early spring – these quite different from the vegetative phase of summer, with its whorls of stiff branches.

(Our thanks to Dr Gillham for this clarification. We are fortunate to have an expert amongst our readers. Ed)

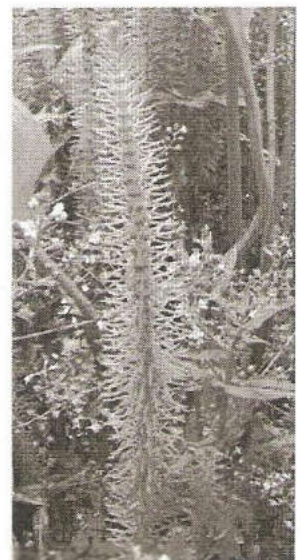
Horsetail

Equisetum
telmateia



Maretail

Hippurus
vulgaris



BOBATH CALENDAR of FOREST FARM

**Emma Bennetts
Volunteer Co-ordinator
Bobath**

A wildlife calendar has been created to raise money for Bobath Children's Therapy Centre. The 2009 calendar, which features photos taken by staff at GE Healthcare's Maynard Centre, includes images taken during the course of the summer to capture the essence of local wildlife, flora and fauna in and around the Forest Farm nature reserve in Cardiff.

The images are truly stunning and show, among other things, the diversity of wildlife that exists on the Forest Farm site, where Kingfishers, Herons and many other species thrive.

Jan Sperandio of GE Healthcare said: "The Bobath Centre is just 2 kilometres from our site and so it made sense to capture images of the wildlife that we all enjoy locally. Our staff are very proud of the volunteer work and fundraising initiatives that we have undertaken throughout the year, and we hope that the wildlife calendar will play an important part in helping to raise further funds for Bobath, our site charity of the year."

Gail Griffiths, the fundraising manager at the Bobath Centre said: "We are over the moon with the support that we have received from GE Healthcare. We hope that the wonderful images will grab the attention of local people and lead to bumper sales."

The 2009 calendar, which is on sale for just **£4.99**, can be purchased by calling the fundraising team on

029 20522600 or emailing fundraising@bobathwales.org.

Alternatively, the calendar can be bought directly from the

Bobath Centre, 19 Park Road, Whitchurch.

All proceeds will go to the Bobath Children's Therapy Centre Wales.



FOREST FARM EVENTS

30th NOVEMBER to 20th DECEMBER 2008

| | |
|--|---|
| Sunday 30th November 10:30 a.m. | Tree planting at Forest Farm in celebration of National Tree Planting Week . Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| Saturday 6th December 10:00-12:00 | Watch Club Age Group 8-12. £1 per child. (phone Park Ranger service for further details - 029 2044 5903). |
| Saturday 20th December 10:00-12:30 | Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road. |

See page 12 for Events in 2009

17th JANUARY to 28th MARCH 2009

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Saturday 17th January 10:00-12:30 | Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| Sunday 18th January 11:30-14:00 | <i>Walk off Christmas.</i> <i>Join us for a guided tour of Hailey Park and Forest Farm led by 'Friends'.</i> <i>We stop halfway for soup, roll, tea / coffee. £2.</i> |
| Wednesday 21st January 7:30 p.m. | <i>An illustrated talk by Sue Price on 'The Ruperra Nature Reserve.'</i> <i>Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Rd., Whitchurch</i> |
| Saturday 24th January 10:30-12:30 | Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group. Coppicing / scrub clearing. Meet at the top entrance. |
| Saturday 31st January 10:00-12:00 | Watch Club Age Group 8-12. £1 per child. (phone Park Ranger service for further details - 029 2044 5903). |
| Sunday 1st February 10:30 | Possible Volunteers Day. See page 4 for details. |
| Saturday 21st February 10:00-12:30 | Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| Saturday 28th February 10:00-12:00 | Watch Club Age Group 8-12. £1 per child. (phone Park Ranger service for further details - 029 2044 5903). |
| Saturday 28th February 10:30-12:30 | Cardiff and District RSPB Group Conservation Group. Meadow area / general clearing. Meet at the Middle Entrance. |
| Wednesday 18th March 7:30 p.m. | <i>A screened video presentation by Mike Wilcox on 'Railways in the UK -</i> <i>past and present.'</i> <i>At Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Rd., Whitchurch.</i> |
| Saturday 21st March 10:00-12:30 | Monthly Bird Walk on the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road. |
| Saturday 21st March 10:00-12:00 | Watch Club Age Group 8-12. £1 per child. (phone Park Ranger service for further details - 029 2044 5903). |
| Saturday 28th March 10:30-12:30 | Cardiff and District RSPB Group Conservation Group. BIG LITTER PICK. Meet at the Middle Entrance. |

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 and e-mail: albynautin@tiscali.co.uk

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