

# FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 71

MARCH 2009

## Editors Forum

*This edition of the newsletter is rather special for me. The main reason is that, very sadly, Robin Sotheby who did our layout, died just after Christmas. He had a long association with Forest Farm and for over 16 years had given his time and expertise to the newsletter (see page 8). I have used his 'template' and feel he is watching and encouraging the production of this edition.*

*My sincere thanks go to a new contributor, Stella Wells for her article on the RSPB walk, to Mrs Henderson and Mr and Mrs Lockwood for their letters and last but not least to Mike Wiley who has contributed the Reserve Report this time. I am sure you will enjoy reading them and all the other contributions. Articles from you the readers are always particularly welcome although some are not always used immediately for the next edition, they will be!*

*We appreciate your continued support through help on volunteer days, donations for bird feed and attendance at the meetings. The numbers at the latter have been depleted probably due to the bad weather but I would encourage you to come; tea and biscuits available! Please do not forget about the AGM 7.30p.m. on 22nd April followed by a talk on Newport Suspension Bridge.*

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*Deadline for articles for June newsletter - 5th May 2009 (contact details See P 12)*

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## MEMBERSHIP

Our latest count of membership for the current year stands at 285 families and 2 groups. This equals last year's final figure.

Our new year (2009/2010) will shortly be upon us. A MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM can be found on the AGM notice enclosed with this newsletter. We have kept the annual subscription at £5 for both families and individual members. Thank you all for your continued support.

Noel Gale (Membership Secretary)

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## Forest Farm Reserve News

Mike Wiley  
Countryside Warden

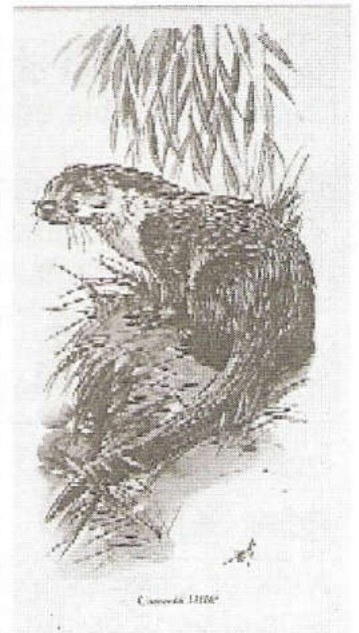
I'm writing this article at home sitting in the conservatory. It's February 5<sup>th</sup> and I'm looking out at six inches of snow. There are birds everywhere. On the feeders, great spotted woodpeckers, and a male brambling on the bird table. I walked our fields earlier and put up a snipe and woodcock. While following some fox tracks I came across an imprint in the snow of a large bird of prey which had dropped down on something. The imprint was very distinct with the open wings and tail showing clearly - it was probably a large tawny owl.

This cold winter the birds on the nature reserve have really benefited from the seed provided by the Friends. Feeding every day, we were starting to run low but the Committee has ordered more to see us through this cold spell and hopefully to the end of winter.

It was with both shock and sadness that I heard of the death of the Friends' layout editor, Mr Robin Sotheby. I didn't know Robin well, only meeting him once, but Robin was one of those dedicated men who just got on with the job of producing a great newsletter without any fuss. He will be greatly missed.

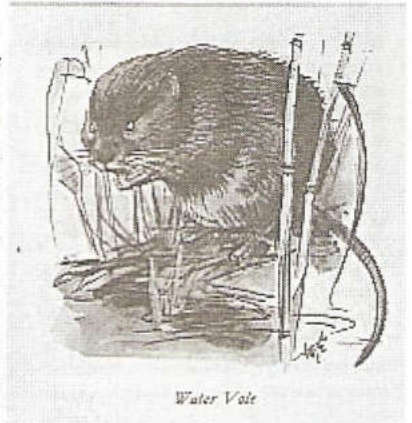
Sheila Austin, newsletter editor, has agreed to take over the layout role. She has asked me to reply to a letter from Annette and Dave Lockwood, (see opposite page), as to whether or not their son saw an otter or a mink in the canal on Christmas Day.

About a month ago, at the beginning of January, a Friend told me of a sighting he had had of an otter in the canal on Christmas Day. At the time I took it with a pinch of salt, keeping an open mind, but after seeing the photograph sent in by Annette and David, I could clearly see that this animal wasn't an otter, but the large pointed ears threw me, as it didn't look particularly like a mink either. But after conferring with a colleague, Mr Chris James and the Mammal Society, we have all concluded that the animal in question was a mink. But otters are known to be back on the river Taff, and the reserve and canal are linked to the Taff by the Melingriffith feeder which acts as a highway between the two. (A dead otter was found on Longwood Drive - the road which bisects the reserve - a few years ago, probably a road kill). Its marvellous to see them making a comeback after being persecuted relentlessly and being virtually wiped out. The Mammal Society say that the reappearance of the otter is pushing the American mink out. Although occasionally I still see mink on the reserve, I don't think that I am seeing as many as I used to.





This brings me to another photograph, kindly sent in by a member of the public, of a water vole seen on one of the Reserve's ponds. This photograph is very clear and there is no doubt that this is a water vole. Sometimes the water vole can be confused and mistakenly identified as a rat, as in Ratty in *Wind in the Willows*, but its blunt rounded nose and face and shorter tail can't really be mistaken. These charming little creatures, once common in Wales, have become very scarce mostly due to predation by mink. So its great to think that they may be making a comeback here. Sadly, the common theme linking these three animal populations – or the lack of them – is us!



This is an illustration and not the photo referred to in the article– Ed

Unfortunately we're still being besieged by people with ferrets, lurchers, guns and now snares, sixteen of which were found set in one of the Reserve fields. The bird hides also continue to take a battering. Sometimes it feels like the Alamo. Perhaps I should wear a Davy Crockett hat!

### ***Mink or Otter?*** (Letter from Annette and David Lockwood.)

*'My husband and I have been unable to walk the Reserve for some time as I cannot walk far.*

*We love hearing about what is going on and what has been seen and we are sending a small donation towards feed.*

*The photo was taken by our younger son, Martin, who is a keen photographer. He and his wife were here for Christmas and with our elder son went for a walk Christmas morning. About 200 yards from Melingriffiths entrance, they saw this animal on a branch by the water. By the time he had taken out his camera it had dived into the water. It was about 2ft long and he thought it was an otter but we are sure it's a mink. Maybe others have seen it but they were fascinated with it. We would love to know if we were right.*



*Hope the mink doesn't bode ill for the young birds and animals.*

*(Sincere thanks to Annette and David Lockwood for this contribution . I have tried to sharpen a black and white version of the photograph for the newsletter. Editor)*



## **Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group**

### **Doing something positive**

The turnout for our last visit for 2008 in November was very much the usual team. We might be a small group, but soon put the effort into the task in hand, clearing unwanted growth that was smothering our new hedging and looping over the hanging branches for extra light. Parts of the hedging are doing well. It is mainly the hazel that has benefited from being more in the open. Paul Davies, the Reserve Warden was on hand with a chainsaw which made the task slightly easier especially when coppicing in the middle section. A rewarding morning's work; we also produced some stout fencing posts for use on the main reserve.

January 2009 started off well; a dry fine morning. It was also the best turnout for a while. We were a group of ten with a new helper and his young son. So the task went smoothly. We soon made inroads into clearing the brambles and coppicing. After the morning session, we had achieved a lot; working on the north bank is not easy due to the steep slope. The rewards should be a sea of wood anemones.

Hugh Harrison

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### **Programme 2009**

Conservation work will be held on the coming Saturday mornings from 10.30a.m. to 12.30 p.m. at Forest Farm Longwood Drive , Whitchurch.

March 28 <sup>th</sup>	BIG litter pick – come and help clean our patch before Easter— <b>Middle entrance</b>
April 25 <sup>th</sup>	Knotweed : first cut of the season <b>Middle entrance</b>
May 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Nest box and wild flower survey <b>Middle entrance</b>
June 27 <sup>th</sup>	Balsam and second cut of knotweed <b>Middle entrance</b>

The group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous work – similar to that of 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)



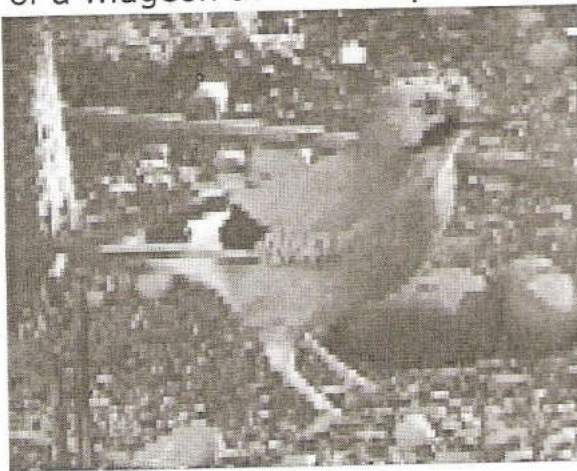


## Forest Farm/RSPB Walk Saturday 18th January 2009

For once it wasn't raining and the sun was splitting the trees. I arrived early to put out some seed in an attempt to persuade the birds to pose for the group as we moved from one observing point to another. Cheating I know, but sometimes a leader's got to do what a leader's got to do!

As I walked along the canal bank, I had wonderful glimpses of a kingfisher on a fallen tree, stunning in the bright sunshine. I put in a request for him to stick around for a couple more hours.

By 10 o'clock a fine group had gathered and 14 of us headed towards the bridge in the vain hope of spotting a dipper or kingfisher. As we suspected, the river was running high and fast - so no dippers. Some of us had a quick glimpse of a widgeon as it flew up river.



Jay

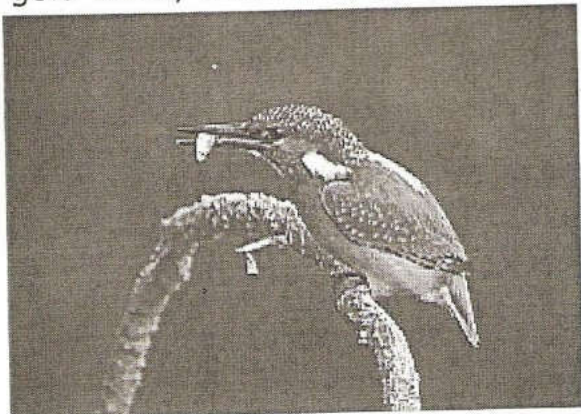
We were fortunate enough to see a number of bird species, but few at the 'feeding stations'. They must have breakfasted earlier and were now replete. After many years of 'birding' the thrill of seeing a robin only feet away from me is still as strong as when I was a child. There seem to be far more robins around this year, or is this just my imagination?



Grey Wagtail

The birds seen were: mistle thrush, song thrush, redwing, blackbird, magpie, crows, jay, wren, gold crest, chaffinch, greenfinch, bullfinch, siskin,

robin, sparrow, dunnock, blue tit, great tit, coal tit, long tailed tit, mallard, moorhen, heron, grey wagtail.



Kingfisher

But we did see the kingfisher in the same place where I had seen it earlier. Maybe he/she will have a nest somewhere nearby. Sadly, no dippers, waxwings or snipe, but we can't be greedy.





Heron



Wren

I enjoyed the morning and I hope that the group did too.

Stella Wells

### POST CHRISTMAS WALK

On a warm mid January Sunday morning, the second joint Friends Of Forest Farm and the Friends Of Hailey Park post Christmas Walk took place. After many weeks of cold weather the sun came out and Spring appeared to be on its way.

Recent weeks however have proved that was not the case and we have experienced the first real Winter for many years.

A slow walk around the Reserve was followed by a visit to the allotment site to find out what went on behind the metal fence. We also had the chance to visit the new pond and show where the new apple trees had been planted the previous November.

Some of the group were also able to share reminiscences of the area over the years.

We then returned to the Mellingriffiths water engine where the friends of Hailey Park were able to take over and show us what they have been achieving and areas of interest in their area.

Next year's walk is already planned and details will appear nearer the time.

Martin Chamberlain



## **Memories**

Nora Henderson

*When my three children were young, we lived in Llandaff North. Sometimes we would walk as a family up to the Long Woods. We first went along the canal bank, which had water in it all those years ago, across the first loch, with the big wheel on the one side. Then we would pass the Melingriffith Tin Works and shortly after that arrive at the bridge. One path led down to the river, one along the canal bank with the feeder one side and the canal on the other. The third path went to the right of Sunnybank cottages up the hill leading to the lovely woodland with its beech trees and bluebells, to name just a few of the delights we could see there.*

*On the right was the farmland belonging to Whitchurch Hospital and we often saw the cattle grazing in the fields at the top. Sometimes we would go through the woods and cross the canal by the second loch and then back along the canal bank.*

*Pleasant memories of years ago and I feel sure these walks introduced my family to the joys that nature can bring all through life. My son Robert became the first Warden on the Nature Reserve quite a few years ago.*

*What a different area it is today before we reach the Reserve; houses and still more houses. I'm not sure whether it is progress or not. What do you think?*

*(My thanks to Mrs Nora Henderson for this letter describing a lovely memory—Editor)*

## **BIRD FEED WINTER 2008 to 2009**

Bird feed this winter had gone tremendously fast as this has been and will continue to be a hard winter for the birds. We were running out of food fast. I am writing this early February whilst the snow is on the ground. By the time you are reading this we will have purchased more food from our funds. This will be £200 worth and should last till the end of March.

I would like to thank all those who have already donated money for bird feed and if any-one would like to donate, you could send a cheque to the Treasurer (Phil Baker) or myself. Please make it out Friends or Forest Farm and write BIRD FEED on the back.

Thanks to all.  
John Harding  
(Chairman)

Robin Sotheby

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death of Robin Sotheby, aged 78, on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

Although not known personally to many of you, Robin was in fact a key person in the production of this newsletter. For over 16 years, he had arranged the layout of the articles for this Newsletter, usually also finding appropriate pictures to enhance the written contributions. Once all the articles and information had been edited, a visit would be made to pass them on and discuss problems. Then a further visit was arranged to discuss the final draft layout. Robin often had helpful suggestions to make. He was meticulous and had a keen eye for spelling and grammar! The kindness extended to me on those visits by both Robin and Inge his wife was greatly appreciated.

Robin had not been in good health for a while but wanted to carry on with the Newsletter while he could. He was unfailingly patient and courteous and voluntarily gave his time and materials as his "contribution to Forest Farm and the Friends". I hope he knew how much his skill and effort was appreciated; he will be sorely missed. Our sincere condolences to his family.

Sheila Austin

Please can you help?

After 13 years as **Membership Secretary**, Noel Gale has decided it's time to take a well deserved break. This will mean that at the A.G.M. on Wednesday 22nd April 2008 we will be looking for a replacement.

We are also looking for a new **Speakers Secretary** as Rosemary Waters has also decided to resign this time. She has admirably fulfilled this task for the few years and is in the process of sorting out speakers for the forthcoming year. We have speakers at our 3 evening meetings from November to March and then a shorter talk on the evening of our AGM.

Would you or someone you know be willing to help out with either of these tasks? If you would like to find out more on an informal basis or be willing to try for an trial period perhaps, please contact any member of the committee or myself.

John Harding (Chairman)      Tel. 029 20563874

*Note from the Editor*

*Thanks to David Bevan webmaster for Friends of Forest Farm (FFF), for his technical assistance with the layout for this newsletter and the Committee for their support and encouragement and my husband for his patience! Some photographs have come from the FFF website, so thank you also for them—with my limited experience I hope the contributors will forgive any flaws in reproduction. You can always look at the excellent originals on our website — [www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk)*



## Volunteers Day February 1st 2009

On Sunday 1st February was our first Volunteering day for 2009. We were 7 in all and worked from 10.30a.m to 1.00p.m with a 15mins break at 12 o'clock for coffee, home made vegetable soup and bread.

I was very pleased with the amount of coppicing we managed to complete. It would have been lovely to have had more helpers but I would like to thank those who came to help. It was a matter of never mind the quantity but look at quality!

I took some pictures to show what we achieved and also a close up of a small fungus we found. This was white and bright red in colour (it was very small—about the size of a 10p)

John Harding  
(Chairman)



### SPRING CLEAN AT FOREST FARM

On Sunday the 5th<sup>st</sup> April, the Friends will undertake their annual spring clean of the nature reserve.

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, suitable for all ages, 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)



## **TREE PLANTING 30th November 2008.**

On 30<sup>th</sup> November we met at our new orchard for our second tree planting event. We planted 20 trees all together 12 assorted eating apples, 3 assorted cooking apples and 5 assorted pear. This added to the 11 assorted eating apple trees planted in December 2007, making a total of 31 trees in the orchard.

It was a nice dry, cold morning and quite a lot of people turned up to take part. As they arrived and left at different times I'm sorry that I haven't got a head count.

After the fruit trees were planted, a group took part in planting a couple of hedge rows either side of the new gate to the orchard at the rear of the new pond. Whilst they were doing this, I was taking down the names and positions of the trees planted to make a plan.



I would like to thank every-one who turned up to make it a very successful day.

Towards the end of this year on the last Sunday in November or the first Sunday in December we shall plant a few more apple trees plus some more hedging.

John Harding (Chairman )

## **RUPERRA NATURE RESERVE—Winter Evening Talk**

On 21st January , a cold and wet night, we enjoyed an excellent talk by Sue Price on developments at the Ruperra Nature Reserve (near Machen). There have been many changes since we last had a talk about this project about 5 years ago. The group that are interested in preserving the castle are now a separate wing from the Conservation Trust that runs and develops the reserve.

The site was 85% clear-felled conifer woodland, with the remainder still a conifer plantation. Large areas have now been replanted with native deciduous tree species, though some open heathland habitat is to remain. Surviving clumps of wild daffodils, wild snowdrops and bluebells have been encouraged to expand.

A new pond has been a great success, attracting numerous insect and amphibian species. So many toads now use the pond for breeding that a toad patrol



has been established to help them cross the road safely. Hopefully our pond will mature as quickly and be as successful!

Better access paths and limited parking space have been completed. The 18th century viewpoint on the summit has been rebuilt. Several guided tours every year are now carried out, together with regular working parties. Before and after photos showed what dramatic changes have occurred in the last few years, and the photos showed the wide variety of wildlife that now live in the reserve. A great success story that is still continuing to develop. We hope to visit the site later this year. Thank you Sue for a great lecture.

Albyn Austin (Editor's Serf)

### **'Friends' Sixth Annual Coach Trip**

This year, our trip for members, family and friends of all ages will take place on **Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July.**

We depart from the usual pick ups in Rhiwbina, and Whitchurch and go direct to Abergavenny Town, arriving there at about 10.30am. Then at 11am there will be an optional visit to visit St. Mary's Priory Church in Monk Street, which is a side road just off the main road. Founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, many historically important monuments can be seen there.

For lunch you will be able to make your own arrangements as there are a large number of cafes, restaurants and some hotels within the town.

Our coach leaves Abergavenny at 1.45pm to take us directly to the Newport Wetlands Nature Reserve, arriving there at 2.30pm. Members of the RSPB will provide a guided tour or you may go and look around yourself along the numerous nature trails. There is new visitor centre there as well. We shall depart the reserve at 4.45pm arriving back in Whitchurch at 5.20pm.

The cost will be £9 per adult, £7 per child.

Full details together with a booking form will appear in our next edition. In the meantime if you have any queries on the proposed visit please contact Duncan on 02920626111 or email [duncan3@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:duncan3@hotmail.co.uk).

**Duncan Hockridge**

### **Events—March to June 2009**

<b>Tuesday</b> 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 14.00—15.30 approx	'Walking for Health'. Meet at the BCTV offices and Farmhouse Forest Farm Road for this walk followed by a cup of tea at the BCTV offices
<b>Wednesday</b> 18 <sup>th</sup> March 7.30 p.m.	A screened video presentation by Mike Wilcox on 'Railways in the UK – past and present.' At Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Rd Whitchurch



## MARCH to JUNE 2009 cont'd

Saturday 21 <sup>st</sup> March 10.00-12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 21 <sup>st</sup> March 10.00-12.00	<b>Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club. Age Group 8-12</b> Photography workshop. £1 per child (phone Park Ranger service for further details 029 2044 5903)
Saturday 28 <sup>th</sup> March 10.30 – 12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group BIG LITTER PICK Meet at the middle entrance
Sunday 5 <sup>th</sup> April 10.00—12.30	Spring Clean—litter pick (Friends of Forest Farm) Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 18 <sup>th</sup> April 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> April 10.00—12.00	Forest Farm History Walk—led by Mike Wiley and Chris James Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> April 7.30p.m.	<i>Friends of Forest Farm AGM followed by an illustrated talk 'The Newport Suspension Bridge' by Dr Barrie Mawson</i> <i>At Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Rd Whitchurch</i>
Saturday 25 <sup>th</sup> April 10.00-12.00	<b>Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club Age Group 8-12</b> Visit to Penarth Lifeboat station. £2 per child to RNLI (phone Park Ranger service for further details 029 2044 5903)
Saturday 25 <sup>th</sup> April 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Knotweed: first cut of the season Meet at the middle entrance
Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> May 10.00-12.00	Spring Wildlife at Forest Farm led by Mike Wiley and Chris James Meet at the Warden's Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 16 <sup>th</sup> May 10.30—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 23 <sup>rd</sup> May 10.00-12.00	<b>Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club. Age Group 8-12</b> Moth Trapping. £1 per child Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 23 <sup>rd</sup> May 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Nest box and wild flower survey Meet at the middle entrance
Wednesday 27 <sup>th</sup> May 7.00 pm	<b>Foods of the Forest</b> £2.50 per head Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 20 <sup>th</sup> June 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> June 10.00—12.00	The Biodiversity of Forest Farm led by Mike Wiley and Chris James Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm

Published on behalf of **The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve** by

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**Tel: 029—20 61 4245**

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