

FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 72

JUNE 2009

Editorial

Hello again. Isn't the Spring lovely – even though its been a bit cold. Traditionally, to some people, Spring means spring cleaning and that is what has been happening through the good offices of members and supporters of the Friends and the Cardiff Conservation Group. Unfortunately its not hard to believe that over 40 bags of rubbish can be collected between them. As our Chairman says, where would we be without you? Spring also brings flowers, birds calling and nesting and the start of pond dipping in our new pond – all so well described in the RSPB walk report and the Reserve News by Stella Well and Mike Wiley.

This time, we have another article from the Watch group, the junior branch of the Wildlife Trust telling us of their activities. Thanks to Community Park Ranger Kevin for that – what interesting things they get up to. Also a couple of articles refer to the start of the Friends group – with good reason – as you will read. It makes you think how far the Friends have come and what has been accomplished since the start.. Our AGM marked the start of another year for us – and our new subscriptions (don't forget) – only £5, a real bargain!!

I hope you enjoy this June edition and perhaps will see you at some of the events over the next few (Summer?) months.

Sheila Austin

Deadline for next edition 6th August 2009
See back page for contact details

Bird Feed Donations.

Thanks to everyone who responded to the request in the last newsletter. A further supply of seed has been purchased and this should be sufficient for the rest of the season.

Of course, donations are still welcome – the Autumn will be upon us before we realise!

Phil Baker (Treasurer)

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Forest Farm/RSPB Walk

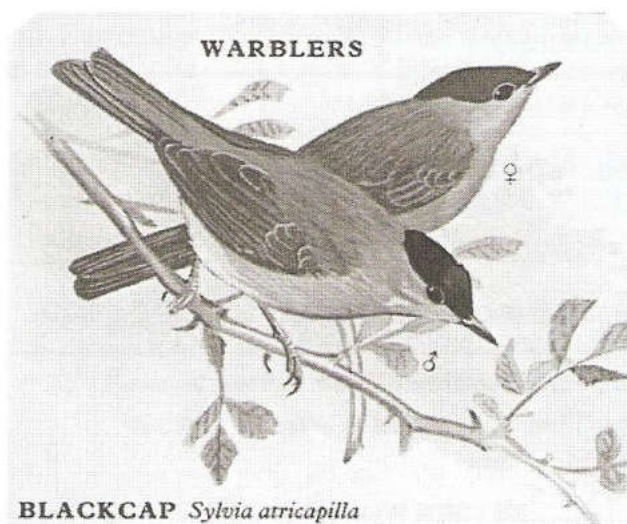
April 2009



It's always a surprise to me how quickly the leaf cover increases at this time of year. Spring has definitely sprung and the next few weeks will be an exhausting time for our feathered friends as they defend their territory, protect and feed their young and find food for themselves to keep their energy levels up.

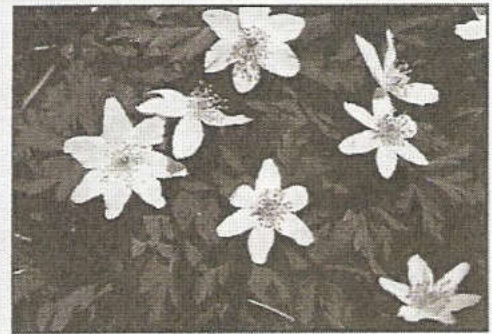
On our walk around the site we were still able to see many of the usual birds, but very often we could only hear them. It's at times like this when you really start to wish that you had listened to the birdsong CD. I have to admit that I have never found them all that useful as I would put on a CD as I lay in bed and would usually be asleep by the fourth bird!

No, to my mind, the only way to learn to distinguish the difference between a greenfinch and a siskin is to get out there, as often as possible, and familiarise yourself with the birds and their song. The chiff chaff is usually easy to recognise because of its monotonous 'chiff chaff, chiff chaff' call, though they also have a couple of other calls that I won't even attempt to describe. One of the group gave us a useful tip on how to tell a chiff chaff from a great tit call. The great tit sounds as if it is calling 'teacher, teacher', but again this handsome little bird has several calls, just to confuse.



One of my favourite bird calls is that of the bullfinch with its high pitched, very sad call. Sometimes it also sounds like a creaky gate! The elusive water rail is supposed to sound like a distressed piglet. The melodious blackcaps were in fine voice as we searched the tree canopy for a glimpse of this lovely bird. I'm looking forward to the arrival of the swifts with their screaming call as they zoom around the sky with such ease.

But at this time of year, we're not only there for the birds. Flowers are showing off and it is quite amazing how, as each species fades, there is another one waiting in the wings to take its place. Celandines, violets, wood anemones and primroses are followed by wild garlic, blue bells and campions. Jack by the hedge will soon be competing with fools parsley, Queen Anne's lace and hog weed. One day I'll get around to recognising which one is which with these white hedgerow plants.



Next month I will not be there as I will be visiting family in Florida, but Joy, a fellow volunteer from the Cardiff and District RSPB group will be there to answer any questions.

Stella Wells

**The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire
Canal Local Nature Reserve**

I hope to be represented by having a stand at both Rhiwbina and Whitchurch Festivals in July.

We look forward to seeing you there.

(See EVENTS—back page)

History and Nature Walk—Forest Farm

As part of Whitchurch Festival fortnight, meet Martin Chamberlain for a history and nature walk

Date 1st July

Time: 6.30 p.m.

Place: Melingriffith Water Pump, Ty Mawr Rd

LITTER PICK APRIL 2009

On April 5th at 10 o'clock we met at the Warden's Centre for the start of the litter pick. When I arrived I was surprised to see two Canada geese on the pond.

There were about ten of at the start with one or two turning up later. From what I could see, the centre of the Reserve was quite clear of litter but nearer the borders, along the edges of the feeder and in the car park, there was a lot of litter. About twenty bags were filled up. Some of them were brought back to the Wardens centre with the rest being left for Mike Wiley to drive around and pick them up in the land rover.

I would like to thank every-one who came to help. Where would we be without you?

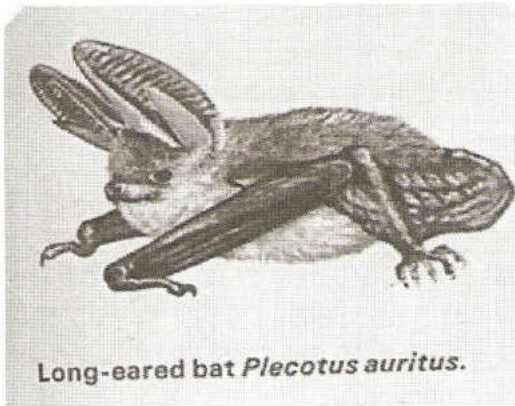
MANY THANKS TO YOU ALL.

John Harding (Chairman)

Forest Farm Reserve News

Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

Up till now, May 10th, this Spring is proving to be a cold one, with night temperatures plummeting. The Spring migrants have been late in arriving this year and at home I didn't hear my first cuckoo until 21st April, and their numbers seem to be down.



Long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*.

One evening at dusk recently, I was watching a long eared bat taking insects from above our garden pond. I was admiring its dexterity and manoeuvrability as it hunted, when all of a sudden there was a loud whoosh above my head and a large female sparrowhawk appeared from nowhere and dived at the bat. The hunter had become the hunted! At the last minute, the bat jinked and dropped, and the sparrowhawk flipped onto its back as it tried to catch the bat. It was like a dogfight from the Battle of Britain. They both went out of view behind a large holly and by the time it took me to go around

the bush, the hawk had gone and the bat was flying around as if nothing had happened.

Last night in the garden, I could hear the blackbirds making their usual predator alarm calls so I thought I would go and investigate. I know that a pair of tawny owls have taken over the barn owls box, (it makes a change from our cat), and the noise was coming from that general direction. Before I could reach there however, I heard a strange muffled thud. One of the owls had flown into the glass of a derelict greenhouse. It had possibly seen a mouse inside, and was going in for the kill, but happily it flew off seeming none the worse for its encounter. You may be wondering what a large derelict greenhouse is doing in a woodland. Or indeed a woodland in a garden! Well that's another story.

Meanwhile back at the Farm, the new pond at Forest Farm is proving a great success with the first school group pond dipping parties all catching a good variety of water bugs. (Pond dipping is always a popular activity with schoolchildren.) Earlier on in mid April, a pair of Canada geese were using it and they have now moved over to the nature reserve where they have built a nest on the little island on one of the Reserve ponds. Currently the female is sitting on eggs which should be hatching any day now. A Canada goose is not a native bird to Britain, but was introduced about 250 years ago. It is regarded by some with mixed feelings, and in large numbers can be a bit of a pest.



We also have a new beekeeper at the Farm. Mr Peter Roberts has recently set up a hive in the orchard field behind the Wardens' Centre. As bees are in short supply, like everything else these days, Peter's bees are a welcome addition. They will also benefit the allotment holders with the pollination of their plants.

The penstock, (the mechanism that controls the amount of water entering the Melin-griffiths feeder from the River Taff), is currently being refurbished by a local engineering company. This is a very old and interesting feature. It is a major engineering job to restore it. With this gate back in working order, we will once again be able to regulate the water levels in the feeder. I am sure this will be much appreciated both by the wildlife living there and the allotment holders whose plots were being flooded regularly when the River Taff was in full spate.

Let's hope the weather improves before long and we all have a good Summer.

Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

Repairs to the Canal Bank

For many years this, and previous Committee members have been concerned over the continued deterioration of the canal bank. At the 2009 AGM, following a vote from the membership, it was agreed that £1,000 from our funds be earmarked for proposed repair of the canal banks using untreated timber. We are presently in discussions with the Council and hopefully this work will be undertaken during the Summer of 2009.

This system will hopefully protect the footpath from future damage. We would ask all members, if they are dog walkers, to refrain from letting their dogs enter the canal as this not only causes erosion of the canal footpath and canal bank but also disturbs the wildlife.

Martin Chamberlain

MEMBERSHIP

Our final membership figure for last year was 293 Families/Groups. This was an increase of 6 over the previous year. Many thanks for your continued support.

Membership Renewal.

Membership renewals are flowing in. For those members who receive their newsletter delivery 'by hand' and may have mislaid the renewal form or it may have slipped their minds, I have arranged for a renewal slip to be included in this quarter's newsletter.

For those who receive their newsletter by e-mail, a reminder will also be included with their 'delivery'.

Noel Gale (Membership Secretary)

The 'Friends'—from the beginning...

Martin Chamberlain

In March 1990, a Group was formed to contribute in whatever way possible to the protection and development of the Glamorgan Canal Local Nature Reserve and Forest Farm, and to promote the study of flora and fauna in their natural habitat. The Nature Reserve, situated in Whitchurch Cardiff, was formed in 1967 and straddles the last remaining stretch of the former Cardiff Merthyr canal which still holds fresh water to a quality good enough to provide a good hunting ground for Kingfishers, Herons and many others species.

The majority of the woodland is Beech and Oak with several trees being over 200 years old, and the part called Long Wood is designated an S.S.S.I together with the Canal and Sheep's Bane Wood.

During the last few years the Friends, working with Cardiff County Council, have created a series of ponds, scrapes and wetlands to encourage water loving birds to feed and nest on them. These can be viewed from two bird hides, which have contributed greatly to the enjoyment of visitors as has the improved access and disabled facilities. A winter-feeding area for birds was established in 2001 and is very popular.

Forest Farm, including the Local Nature Reserve, was designated a Country Park in 1992 thereby increasing the area covered by the Friends to over 150 acres. The western boundary of the park is the River Taff and the Friends have agreed to look after and keep clean and tidy a 2.5 Kilometre stretch of the river bank.

All of this area is under constant threat from developments on its borders, developments that could harm the Country Park if not stopped, curtailed or modified to be environmentally friendly. This is an essential part of the Friends work and over the years we have been successful in either stopping or obtaining major concessions from developers. It is essential there is an organisation able to stand up to developers and present a case from a position of strength and commitment.

The membership of the friends is presently c290 families and organisations and there would be a warm welcome to any wishing to join and help keep this wonderful locality for the enjoyment of the public.

The Friends join with the RSPB for a walk around the Reserve from 10:00 am to 12:30 pm on the third Saturday of each month, to learn about the flora and fauna, and to recognise and record the birds that use the Reserve. Other walks are arranged during the summer. In the winter, talks and social events are held indoors at the Community Centre, Tynypwll Rd Whitchurch. A three monthly newsletter and a yearly programme are also available.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT, JOIN AND DO YOUR BIT FOR CONSERVATION WHILE PROTECTING AND IMPROVING AN AMENITY UNIQUE TO THE CITY OF CARDIFF

To join contact: Noel Gale (membership Secretary) 8 Heath Park Drive, Cardiff CF14 3QH or m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com

Melingriffith Water Pump

Just in case you have not heard already, Cardiff Council and CADW have set aside £100,000 for extensive restoration of the Melingriffith Water Pump on Ty Mawr Rd.

A Friends group has now formally been set up and they have a website which you may care to look at.

<http://friendsofmelingriffithwaterpump.weebly.com/>

RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group—Doing something positive

The litter pick in March went smoothly with a good turn out – eight of us. At first glance the area looked fairly clean but we soon realised that was not the case. The rubbish was concentrated in patches over a wide area... We finally filled well over 20 bags plus some items too large to bag; a wheelbarrow and also a smart pushchair among other things.

After the morning session, we took the opportunity to admire our previous work on the north bank – a carpet of wood anemones.

April saw us back on the Reserve for our first cut of the dread Japanese knotweed. There was surprisingly very little to cut, but I am reluctant to say we could be winning. The brushcutter was also in action cutting brambles before they start to encroach into the middle section. Again, a respectable turnout, eight in total.

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.

June 27th Balsam and second cut of knotweed
Meet at the Middle entrance

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 WATCH CLUB **(the junior branch of the Wildlife Trust)**

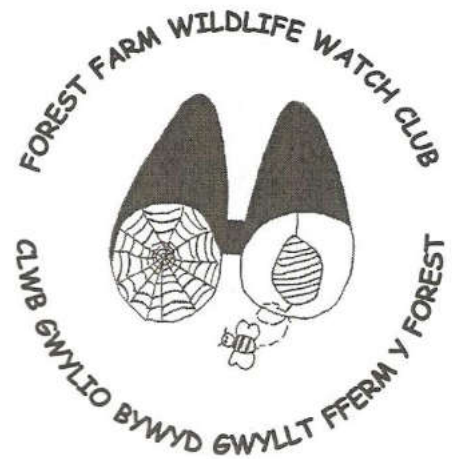
The WATCH leaders never cease to be amazed at the inventiveness and ingenuity of the children attending the activities on offer. The most recent activity saw children designing their own Spring Flower identification card, after which they were used to positively identify flowers on the Reserve. Although no rarities were found it was an enjoyable morning for all.

Previous activities for 2009 include a stag beetle project, scavenger hunt on the Reserve and a kite making workshop, with some wonderful designs taking to the skies on their inaugural flights.

The WATCH leaders will shortly be compiling the Summer/ Autumn programme of activities, which will offer opportunities to study the various habitats within Forest Farm and Cardiff in general. Hopefully we will be visiting the coast near Sully Island for some rock pool studies if tides allow.

If you have children between 8-12 yrs who are interested in wildlife, please feel free to come along to one of our meetings which are usually held on the last Saturday of the month at the Warden Centre Forest Farm. Dates and activities are posted on the door of the Warden Centre.

A programme listing the activities on offer is also available by contacting:
The Park Ranger Service on 029 20445 900 or
emailing communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk



COACH TRIP BOOKING FORM

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM COACH TRIP TO Abergavenny and the Newport Wetlands
18TH JULY 2009

NAME.....ADDRESS.....
.....POSTCODE.....

Tel.....Email (if available).....

I/we wish to bookNo. adult places(£9)= £..... andNo. child places(£7)on this trip =£.....

I/we am/are a member/s of the RSPB and wish to join the guided tour (FREE) No.....

I/we am/are not members of the RSPB and wish to join the guided tour (No..... at £2.50) = £.....

I enclose my cheque made payable to Friends of Forest Farm in the sum of TOTAL =£.....

I/we wish to join the optional guided tour around St.Mary's Priory Church (No.....)

I/we wish to be picked up at Canolfan Beulah*, The Three Elms, Whitchurch Common*, Whitchurch High School*, or The Holly Bush Inn*. (*Please circle your desired pick up location)

A confirmation letter will be sent back to you giving your seat numbers as soon as the coach has been booked. Once the coach has been booked no refunds can be made unless alternative persons have taken up your cancelled seats. You may at any time change the booked names.

**FRIENDS of FOREST FARM—Sixth Annual Coach Trip to
Abergavenny and the Newport Wetlands Nature Reserve.**

Saturday 18th July 2009

ITINERARY

8.50am. Our coach will arrive at the lay-by, outside Canolfan Beulah, Rhiwbina.

9.00am. The coach will depart from Canolfan Beulah and travel to the Three Elms, Whitchurch Common, arriving here at 9.10am. to pick up.

9.15am. The coach will depart from the Three Elms and travel to the northern side of the front entrance of Whitchurch High School, Penlline Road, arriving here at 9.20am to pick up.

9.25am. The coach will depart Whitchurch High School and travel to the bus shelter opposite The Holly Bush Inn, Coryton, arriving here at 9.30am. to pick up.

9.35am. The coach will depart from the Hollybush Inn and travel direct to the bus station at Abergavenny town arriving at 10.30am.

10.45-11.30am. An optional guided visit to St. Mary's Priory Church, which is a 3 min. walk along a footpath leading from the bus station. Although this tour is free, donations can be made towards the upkeep of the church on the day which does incidentally cost £400 a day. (£2 each, adults only, is suggested, for your guidance).

or

10.30am-1.45pm. An individual self guided visit around the town. A full list of the various tourist places of interest within the Town, including the indoor Saturday market, will be given on the coach.

1.45p.m. The coach will depart and travel direct to the Newport Wetlands arriving here at 2.30pm.

2.30-3.45pm. An optional guided tour around the reserve. The RSPB make a charge of £2.50 per person (adults and children) for this tour for non-members of the RSPB, but is free for members (please remember to bring your membership card).. There is a very nice coffee/snack shop and children's play area here.

4.45p.m. We travel back to our original morning pick up locations, arriving at The Hollybush at 5.20pm.

THE COST OF THIS TRIP IS £9 per adult or £7 per child (under 12).

St.Mary's Priory Church. The church serves as a parish church for the town and community of Abergavenny, and is one of then largest and finest parish churches in Wales. This Priory was a Monastery of Benedictine Monks, founded in the reign of Henry1(1100-1135).During our guided visit we shall be told about the fantastic history of the following years up to recent times. Last year HRH the Prince of Wales opened the adjoining 900-year-old Tithe Barn which had been the subject of an extensive restoration in order to bring in back into beneficial use by the community. The building now houses an exhibition (the Abergavenny Tapestry was created by 60 local volunteers to celebrate the new millennium), a Taste of Wales food hall/cafe, shop, education resource, and Courtyard and adjoins the new church Piazza. This is not to be missed.

Please return the booking form on Page 8 to Duncan Hockridge, at 5, Clos Cromwell, Rhiwbina, Cardiff. CF14 6QN, together with a stamped, addressed envelope and your cheque made payable to Friends of Forest Farm. If you have any queries please telephone Cardiff 20626111.

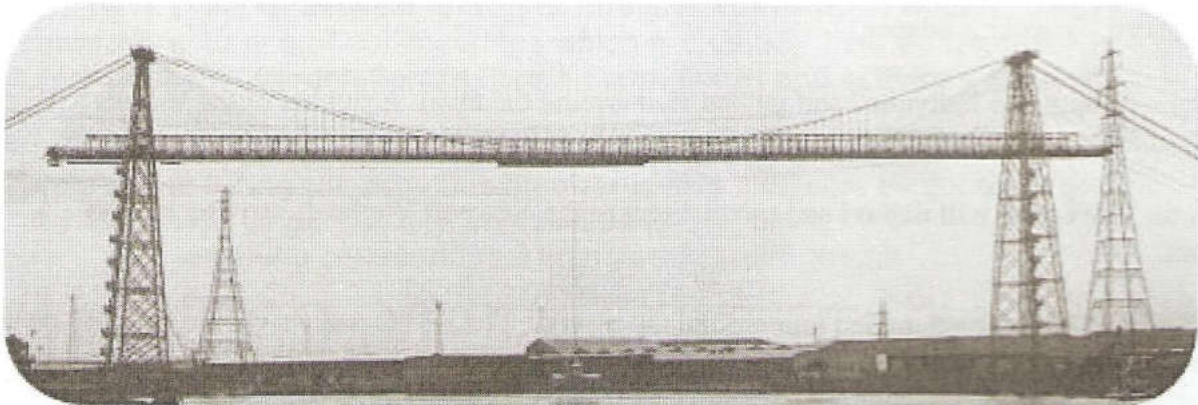
Newport Transporter Bridge – Resume of a talk by Dr Barrie Mawson

By Albyn Austin

This year, a most interesting talk was given after the AGM in April by Dr. Barrie Mawson, the former Newport bridge engineer who managed most of the refurbishment of the Newport Transporter Bridge. More details than I have room for can be found on the website: <http://www.transporter-bridge.co.uk/>

Dr. Mawson had gathered a huge number of photos and drawings of the Newport Bridge and others like it. He even included a film clip of the official opening ceremony in 1906.

Transporter bridges enjoyed a brief period of popularity from about 1890 to about 1925. This type of bridge was cheaper than a tunnel or a swing or lift bridge but still allowed sailing ships to pass underneath. The first opened in 1893 at Bilbao and was designed by a French engineer Ferdinand Arnodin. He also designed the Newport Bridge. The mouth of the River Usk at Newport was the entrance to the harbour and has a huge tidal range. This means that a ferry of any size is impractical. The proposal for a new Steelworks near the river mouth required a river crossing.



The Newport Transporter Bridge was one of only 4 in the UK. It was a suspension bridge mounted on tall towers of spidery steelwork. These towers were mounted on caissons buried deep into the river silt before they hit bedrock. Sinking them required some of the earliest working of men in compressed air, needed to keep the water out of the workings.

On the high suspension bridge was mounted a railway truck, wound backwards and forward by a cable from an electric winding drum. From the railway truck is suspended a platform or gondola, in effect an aerial ferry, to transfer people and vehicles across the river.

However the Newport Bridge requires about 12 staff to operate it, and lost money from the time it opened. Maintenance was reduced to save money, and by the 1970s the bridge required extensive and expensive remedial work, including replacement of the cables. It had to be shut for repairs. The money was eventually found, much of it from the European Union, and the bridge restored and reopened. However the new River Usk crossing has rendered it redundant and its long term future as a working bridge is again in doubt.

Listen to the Natural World on world wide web

If you have your own computer or can visit your local library, click on to these sites and you will hear something amazing.

www.forestry.gov.uk – click "England", then under the listed regions choose "South East England"- New Forest Rangers will guide you along the Tall Trees Trail featuring all the world's largest tree specimens.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk - click "Conservation, heritage and learning" and then choose "Countryside and environment", then select "nature". One topic is about the remarkable life cycle of the Large Blue butterfly which is Britain's rarest and most endangered butterflies.

www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide - all the bird voices can be heard in these audio clips in the RSPB's bird recognition guide.

www.shakespeare-country.co.uk – click "Downloads" then "Talking the walk". You will have a fantastic choice of audio guides to walks in that area including a stroll through Southam, which was once the bustling crossroads of drovers' routes to Wales.

www.bbc.co.uk/radio4 - If you fancy going on a family-friendly guide to pushchair walks in North Wales. Click "Factual" then under "listen to the latest programmes", look for "Ramblings".

I do hope that after using these websites, you will be encouraged to go on many more "days out" without even leaving the comfort of your own home.

Duncan Hockridge

(My thanks to Duncan for this interesting and useful information. Ed)

★ **20th anniversary of the Friends of Forest Farm** ★
★
★ Did you know next year marks the 20th anniversary of the Friends of Forest Farm?
★ Your Committee are thinking about how to mark this auspicious event.
★
★ Recently, I collected Robin Sotheby's printed set of all the newsletters, courtesy of his
★ wife, Inge. For a relative newcomer, it has been fascinating to look at them. I see
★ some familiar names right from the very start! Of course, I will be looking in more
★ detail at these previous copies and will be including extracts from them in future
★ editions.
★
★ However, it seems to me that a lot of our readers will have recollections of those early
★ years. I would like to include contributions from you in all 4 of next year's editions
★ Particularly it might be interesting to focus on the inception and development of
★ Forest Farm and perhaps your views on how it has evolved. You may also have some
★ photos or newspaper cuttings?
★
★ I know it's a bit early to be thinking about 2010, but is amazing how the time flies, so
★ I thought I would mention it now so as to give you plenty of time...
★
★ Sheila Austin
★

EVENTS JUNE to SEPT 2009

Saturday 20th June 10.00—12.30	Monthly bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road
Sunday 21st June 10.00—12.00	The Biodiversity of Forest Farm led by Mike Wiley and Chris James Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm
Saturday 27th June 10.00—12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club. Age Group 8-12 Discover Dragons at Forest Farm Learn about dragonflies and damselflies. Meet at the Wardens' Centre. ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.
Saturday 27th June 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Balsam and second cut of knotweed Meet at the middle entrance
Wednesday 1st July 6.30 pm	Nature Walk Forest Farm—in association with the Committee for Whitchurch Festival. Meet at Melingriffiths Water Pump, Ty Mawr Road
Saturday 4th July	Rhiwbina Festival The Friends of Forest Farm hope to have a stand here
Saturday 11th July	Whitchurch Festival The Friends of Forest Farm will have a stand here
Wednesday 15th July 2.00—4.00 pm	A Summer Wildlife Walk—led by Mike Wiley and Chris James Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd
Saturday 18th July 10.00 -12.30	Monthly bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road
Saturday 25th July 10.00—12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club. Age Group 8-12 Mapping Exercise. Meet at the Wardens' Centre.
Saturday 15th August 10.00—12.30	Monthly bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road
Saturday 5th September 6.00 pm	Foods of the Forest—£2.50 per person Take a stroll around Forest Farm followed by a tasting session of delicious delicacies. Meet at the Wardens' Centre. ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT
Saturday 19th September 10.00—12.30	Monthly bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road

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