



FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 73

SEPTEMBER 2009

Editorial

Sheila Austin

Hello again 'Friends'

The Reserve has marked the end of an era with the retirement of Mike Wiley, Countryside Warden. Despite our best efforts, he avoided a presentation, but we did mark our great appreciation by some gifts. He will be very much missed.

Through the good offices of Jessica Aldred, Forest Farm was in the national press (see P2—thanks go to Margaret and David Reeves for bringing it to our notice. You can read about the Summer coach trip, not only did Duncan organise the outing but also supplied an account of it and we have the added bonus of Dr Gillham's lovely wildlife report of the trip. Other contributions come from Stella Wells, Hugh Harrison and Edgar Sapili, as well as some of the Committee. I hope you will enjoy reading them and would be delighted to have any feedback from you.

Don't forget the forthcoming volunteering opportunities and that our evening meetings start in November. We look forward to seeing you if you can make it.

Deadline for contributions for the next newsletter—6th November 2009

Letter from Mike Wiley

Please pass on my thanks to all the Friends for the lovely gifts.

I hope to make full use of the stick whilst on my wildlife rambles. The picture will bring back happy memories of my time on the Reserve.

With best wishes, Mike

(The Committee gave Mike a framed picture of the canal and a walking stick beautifully carved by one of our members, David Smith. Editor)

STOP PRESS

Volunteering event
Sunday 27th September
10.30a.m.

Tree Planting
Sunday 29th ~~September~~ November
10.30a.m.

See EVENTS—
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Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies
Countryside Warden

Mike Wiley, the Warden based at Forest Farm for at least the last twenty five years, retired at the beginning of August. All of us at Forest Farm and the Rangers based at Wedal road wish him a happy retirement and good luck for the future.

A Programme of works including canal edge repairs and tree lifting will take place this winter. The woodland management team will be undertaking essential tree work over the coming winter months.

The installation of the new penstock sluice gates was completed on the 19th June. It is working well and the council rangers plus a number of voluntary rangers have been instructed how to operate it. This means that if heavy rain is forecast the flow down the feeder can be reduced, to prevent flooding of the adjacent areas.



July 2009—volunteers repairing the edge of the canal

We made the national press!

... thanks to Jessica Aldred, who submitted the article, and to Margaret and David Reeves who let me know about it. For those of you who did not see it, I am reproducing Jessica's article which was printed in the Travel section of the Guardian on Saturday 20/06/2009. (Editor)

Glamorgan canal nature reserve, Cardiff

This is a section of the old canal, once used to transport coal from the valleys out to Cardiff docks. You walk through a tunnel of trees, alive with wildlife. At the midpoint, you can turn off to Forest Farm, or on the other side, cross a lock, climb up a steep hill and look back down at the canal through a canopy of beech trees.

forestfarm.org.uk

Jessica Aldred

Cardiff Conservation Group— Doing something positive

Our turn out for May was good, ten of us in total. We split into 2 groups. One group of us plus a ladder made our way through the undergrowth. Out of 16 boxes, 4 were empty. 1 attacked by squirrels another had been occupied by a tree wasp ... In 5 boxes, young had already fledged, the rest had newly hatched young or ready to fledge. Our only open fronted box was used again by robins. The boxes are more or less evenly divided blue/great tit.

The other group, books in hand, set off to record the plants on our patch they identified three new plants for our list, at least another needing some more research. Overall, we have recorded 48 plants, I would I like to think it is due to our management.

June was our last visit to the Reserve to clear Knotweed and Balsam which has rapidly become enemy number one. It has quickly invaded new areas we have cleared. Unfortunately on the morning only 3 of us turned out and that included a new helper. We did make some progress especially with the brush cutter. We could have achieved a lot more with a few extra hands.

Conservation work is held on **Saturday mornings from 10.30a.m. to 12.30 p.m. at Forest Farm Longwood Drive ,** Whitchurch.

September 26th
October 31st
November 28th

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
Tel: 029 2070 4889

MEMBERSHIP

We are delighted to welcome the 4 new members who 'signed' up at the Rhiwbina and Whitchurch Festivals in July.

The latest count of the membership (early August) is 223 families plus 2 groups. This is a little disappointing as it is down on the same time last year.

Hopefully, those who have not renewed will do so shortly. To those who have ~~not~~ already renewed, many thanks for your support

Noel Gale
Membership Secretary

*(In appreciation of Mike Wiley's long association as with the Reserve, I thought it would be nice to reproduce his very first report in our Newsletter **Edition no. 2 June 1990.**—Editor)*

SPRING BIRDS - Mike Wiley

It has been a good season for birds on the nature reserve. I think that Spring is the best time to watch birds, just before the leaves fully open in the tress.

I've had sightings of Buzzard, peregrine, Cuckoo, plus all the warblers. Around the middle of March, a Kingfisher was found on the towpath with a broken wing. I was told that it subsequently died. I thought at the time that this might affect the population, as breeding was about to commence. A few weeks later, in about mid April, I discovered a pair nesting on the banks of the River Taff, near the Reserve.

It was obvious that they were feeding their young, as both parents were to be seen flying up and down the river carrying small fish. On leaving the nest, the parents will be seen to dip several times in the river, not fishing, but to wash themselves, as their nests are extremely dirty places. A few weeks later, both parents were seen, plus three young flying together.

The Kingfisher is double brooded (it rears young twice in the same year), and sometimes uses the same nest to rear the second brood, so we'll have to keep an eye on the nest site. Some people still attempt to collect birds' eggs, so it is fortunate the nest site is inaccessible

For me, one of the best things about birdwatching is that you never know what you might see. An example of this is the Greylag goose I recently saw on the river; whether or not this was truly a wild bird, or feral (semi-wild), I do not know.

There was also a female Mallard with 15 young swimming on the river. Although 15 seems to be a large number, because of predation by gulls, mink, rats and even pike (they get attacked from below as well as above), the parent will be lucky if it ends up with half of them.

Another day, I noticed that all the tits around the farm were calling, and seemed very agitated. On looking up I saw a Sparrowhawk circling overhead. A few of the braver tits were even going up and trying to mob him.

The Nature Reserve with its many and varied habitats is a particularly good place for birdwatching and over the years more than 90 different species have been recorded.

Our WATCH club (the local group of the Royal Society for Nature Conservation for children between 8 and 14) has helped the breeding population by providing 30 nest boxes. They constructed and erected these themselves - at the last count 21 were occupied.

Let's hope we have a nice summer...

Don't forget - Our Winter evening talks start on Wednesday 18th November, 2009 at 7.30 p.m. at the Community Centre, Tyn-y-Pwll Rd, Whitchurch

The 'New' Pond -

The pond is doing very well. There is so much wild life in it, There have been quite a few visits by groups for pond dipping as well. John Harding

Friends' Coach Trip to Abergavenny—July 18th 2009

The photograph shows the 36 members of Friends at the start of our annual day trip which this year was to Abergavenny and the Newport Wetlands. We were fortunate to have Dr. Mary Gillham with us and I am grateful to her for writing the wildlife report which concludes this report.

I had chosen for us to visit Abergavenny so that we could have a guided tour around St. Mary's Priory Church, which is considered by many to be one of the largest and finest in Wales. We were met, and given a very warm welcome, by Sir Trefor Morris who is the chairman of the St. Mary's Priory Development Trust. We could certainly not have had a better or more knowledgeable guide. He took us inside the church and whilst sitting in the pews we had a fascinating 45 min. talk about the history of England and Wales but in the context of the foundation of this church in the eleventh Century.



Built as a priory church in which 12 Benedictine Monks offered worship each day, it survived the excesses of the Reformation and the Civil War. This is indeed a special church in which we were able to see fascinating monuments, interesting curios, and feel that inimitable sense of holiness and peace which characterises a place where worship continues to be offered each and every day. Of all the items seen one of the greatest treasures is the 15th Century solid piece of massive teak carving representing King David's father Jesse. Whilst we were inside the church we were fortunate to be able to hear the ring of 10 bells being rung in preparation for a wedding which took place after our visit. Interestingly we were told that these bells were recast in 1948 in thanksgiving for the end of the Second World War. If anyone has not yet been to visit this church I cannot recommend more highly that you do so. I have to thank The Reverend Canon Jeremy H. Winston for making all the arrangements so that our group had such an interesting 75 min. visit to his church.

After the visit some of us went across the new church Piazza to have snacks in the adjoining Tithe barn. This 900 year old medieval monastic barn was once used to store tithe grain and goods and is believed to be the oldest of its kind in Wales. After various uses, even as a carpet discount store, in 1999 the premises were bought back by the Parishioners and £1.6M has been spent in transforming it into a Centre for exhibitions, education projects, and hospitality. It is also houses a vibrant Taste of Wales food hall and café. Again, from our experience of eating in both inside and the outside Courtyard, it can be highly recommended for both value and the quality of the food served.

In the afternoon we travelled from Abergavenny down to the Newport Wetlands which is located on the northern shore of the Severn Estuary and is home to all kinds of wildlife. At the Visitors Centre we were greeted by Adrienne Jones who is the RSPB Centre Coordinator and who had made the arrangements for our visit. We were then split into three groups each then being taken around the site with experienced RSPB volunteer group leaders. After using the Centre's café we left at 5pm having found that there was something for everyone at the site whether you are a keen bird-watcher or simply want somewhere scenic to go for a stroll.

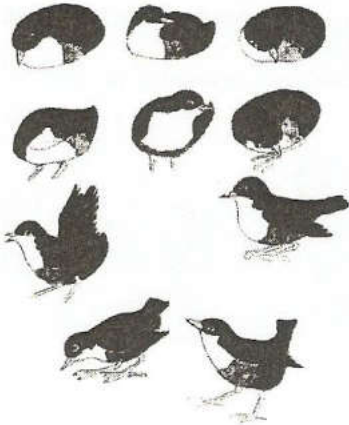
Please now read Mary's wildlife report.

Duncan Hockridge

Please note that our annual trip in July next year is anticipated to be to Flat Holm

ABERGAVENNY

While the party toured church, tithe barn and town, I explored a short stretch of the River Gavenny and was rewarded by one of those wildlife treats that happen all too infrequently in our depleted countryside.



Drawings by Dr Mary E Gillham

The black and white egg shape on a boulder protruding from the water, just a few feet below me, proved to be a dipper, once rare on our rivers, but increasing as water quality improves. It woke and set about a thorough preen and tidy up. During the next 10 minutes I sketched it in every possible position, observing the passage of the nictitating membranes or inner eyelids flicking across the dark eyes.

The bird is said to be 5 inches long but appeared almost round, until it finally stretched its stubby little wings and resumed the usual bobbing motion, which it shares with wagtails. I tired first and left it peering into the water for drifting titbits. It passed me later, flying low upstream, pausing briefly on a stone below the little weir before continuing about its business.

NEWPORT WETLANDS

A brief introduction to the new luxurious RSPB centre at Newport Wetlands and we divided into three groups to be shown round by experts. We were at the reedbed end of the site, near to the Usk-mouth Power Station. Sadly the end near Goldcliffe with the lagoons, mudflats, waders and other birds must wait for another day.

Following the causeways between the reedbeds, we lingered at the intersecting reens, where most of the water fowl seemed to have families, very likely second broods. They were fluffy cohorts of ducklings, the sooty black ones of the tufted ducks able to dive below the surface while still not much bigger than the eggs which they had so lately vacated. So, too, could the young of the great crested and little grebes. Mallards, coots and moorhens were also in the family way.

Most interesting of the plants bordering the tracks were the pink-flowered narrow-leaved everlasting peas and the fluffy white flower heads of the equally tall dittander, an unusual and essential coastal member of the cress family. Spectacular splashes of yellow were supplied by the pea family—tall melilot and greater bird's-foot trefoil. Flowering water plants were few, notably the greater water plantain and the blue water speedwell.

As we reached the low lighthouse on the sea wall a white egret flew overhead and we spotted one of the few passerines in a wind-trimmed bush, either a common or lesser whitethroat, both of which are present. A sizeable flock of the always spectacular shelducks shared the shoreline beyond the extensive saltmarsh with the gulls.

Mary E. Gillham

Forest Farm/RSPB Walk By Stella Wells



Apart from the time when my friend Joy Lyman led the walk, when I was basking in the Florida sunshine, the weather has been kind to us on our Saturday rambles. On the last walk 14 adults and youngsters joined me as we searched for the elusive King Fisher and dippers.

The leaf canopy made it nigh on impossible to spot our feathered friends but at some of the feeding stations some of the usual crew, robins, blue tits, coal tits and a nuthatch, came down to feast on seed provided by one of the group.



Early on in the walk I said that I had rarely seen a bird of prey around the site and as if pre-arranged, a sparrow hawk flew overhead.

Being an avid gardener and allotmenteer, I know something about successional sowing, to ensure a constant supply of food. Nature, of course has this off to a fine art, and as we head towards Autumn, the early summer flowers are past their best but are rapidly being replaced by other beauties. Fruits are beginning to ripen and I think we are going to be blessed with an abundant harvest of sloes, wild damsons and blackberries to name but a few.

There were a few species of flower that I have yet to identify, such as the purple and white vetches growing in a cluster by the river or the tall yellow flowers, similar to St John's Wort. The unwelcome incomers, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knot weed were in evidence. It's a pity that they are as destructively invasive as they are beautiful plants.

One of my favourite plants, meadow sweet, was in abundance filling the air around it with a sweet liquorice perfume and competing with the heady scent of honeysuckle.

All in all it was a pleasant walk and I look forward to the next one.



(Photographs taken on Forest Farm—see website forestfarm.org.uk)

NEWSLETTERS BY EMAIL

Whilst the majority of those members receiving their newsletter by hand/post have renewed their membership, it is the reverse for those members receiving their membership by e-mail. At the time of writing some 47 of those have not yet renewed and I feel sure most of these would like to remain members and continue receiving our quarterly newsletter.

If anyone is not sure whether or not they have renewed, please ring or email me.

The annual subscription remains at £5 for individuals or families, cheques made payable to 'Friends of Forest Farm'.

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(This interesting article, by one of our regular contributors, was received a while ago, but not used due to lack of space. I hope you enjoy reading it now Editor)

Coming soon – Flying Ant Day is looming— Edgar Sapili.

The pivotal summer movement is not Wimbledon, Glastonbury or even a Test Match at Lords, its Flying Ant Day.

This is the day in July when, in response to some subterranean signal, hordes of winged ants rise out of cracks in the earth. In 2007 the annual exodus reached plague proportions in some parts of Britain. No-one knows precisely when Flying Ant day takes place, though the chances are it will happen between July 21 and July 28 as it has done for the past 5 years.

There is obviously no pre-arranged date but there are specific meteorological conditions that spark it off. It always happens in humid, balmy weather when moisture in the air assists the flow of oxygen through the ants' breathing holes. The whole purpose of this mass break-out is reproduction. In scientific terms, the correct term for this phenomenon is Nuptial Flight, when all the male ants attempt to mate with the new queen ants. Once mating has taken place (in mid air), the queen descends to earth, sheds her wings and seeks a new place to nest. She never mates again, preserving the male sperm in her body for several years and, constantly producing eggs, chooses whether or not to fertilise them.

Those that are fertilised become females (who do all the work) and those that are not become males, who just sit around doing nothing but attempt to mate with the queen. They are forcibly restrained from doing so by the female workers until the conditions for the Nuptial Flight are right. Once mating takes place every single male dies.

Despite the huge death toll, it's not all bad news, especially if you are a trout, for the following Flying Ant day, rivers become clogged with the carcasses of millions of ants. For days afterwards, fish try to recapture the delights of the ant feast – snapping at flies wherever they see them. Unfortunately, they become vulnerable to the wiles of the fly fisherman who lure fish into taking their hooked man-made flies. Such of course, is the merciless cycle of Nature.

The most pressing question from the human point of view is "Do they bite?" The answer is "YES". As with most ant species, they can give you a tiny nip but the amount of formic acid they emit is so minimal there should be no lasting effects. Just arm yourself with an ant powder to tackle the likely arrival of a new nest in your garden, sit back, bide your time – and wait for the weather to get muggy.

THE ORCHARD—FOREST FARM.

On checking the orchard on Sunday 26th July, all but one of the trees seem to be doing fine. The Conference Pear seems to be having trouble; by the time you read this we will have put some chicken wire around it as it seems to be getting nibbled.

Quite a small pear tree BETH has a small pear on it although I don't think it will come to anything.

There is also an apple on the LORD LAMBOURNE tree in position B 6. It is still a very young orchard, but things are looking promising.

At the moment there is quite a lot of growth which is encroaching around the trees but I can assure you this will be cut back and cleared.

For those who have adopted a tree...

I am sorry it has taken so long but I am preparing Certificates for you which will have the name and some history of the tree, its position, root stock and when planted.

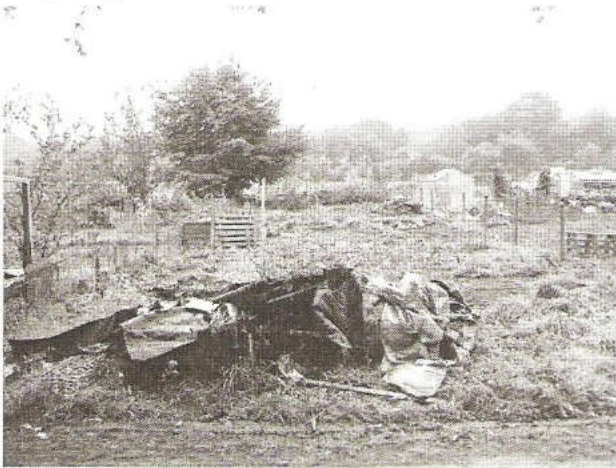
By the next newsletter I should have a list of the trees with their position and their history which will be printed for you all to read.

If any-one has any questions about the Orchard you can e-mail me at
john@forestfarm.org.uk JOHN HARDING Chairman

FOREST FARM ALLOTMENTS

Many visitors to Forest Farm will have passed the Allotment Site at the end of Forest Farm Road and wondered what happens behind the locked gates and metal fence.

In September 2007 I had a long awaited call from the site secretary. "Martin, a plot has come available and would you like to meet to discuss if you want to sign up".



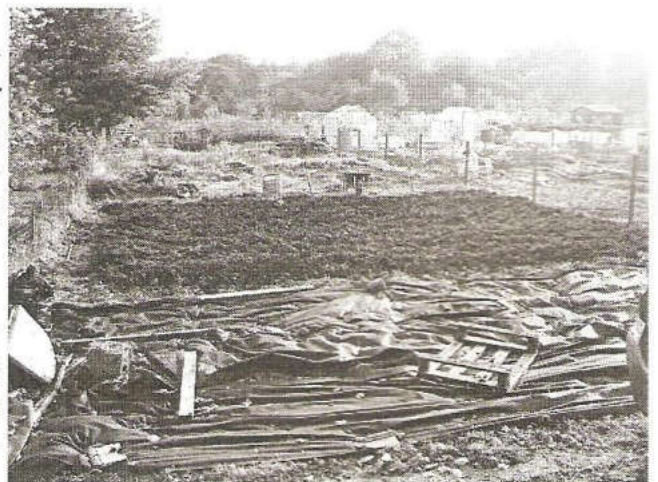
This is what I was presented with.

Always up for a challenge I said yes and, after many visits to Wedal Road and help from my family, we slowly started digging from one end of the plot. Wisely, I took advice from one of the seasoned 'allotmenters' and decided not to use a rotavator which chop the weed roots into tiny pieces and cleared the weeds by hand.

Six months later and I was able to start planning my first season and the delights of planting and eating my first produce.

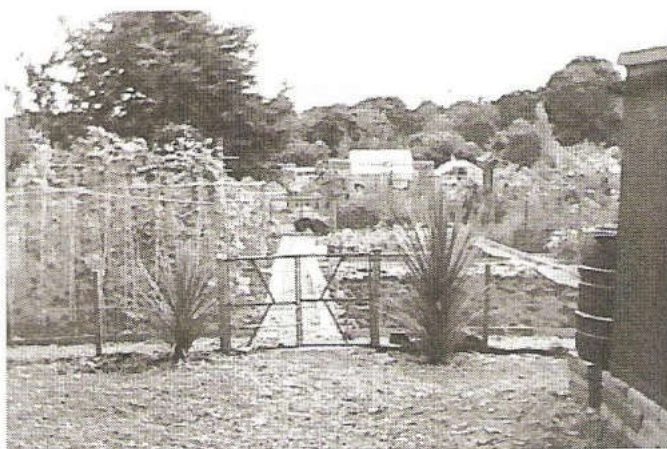
After working in an office all day, it is relaxing to spend sometime in the fresh air within the Reserve and observe the local wildlife, many species of birds. Many rabbits and foxes are often seen as was a five foot grass snake.

The allotment holders are a varied community. There are many young people and families as well as the older members with their much valued knowledge together with a hard working Committee.



Summer and Winter 2008 was met with problems of flooding which was caused

by the failure of the penstock valve at Radyr Weir. Fortunately, this has now been resolved and this Summer the plot has now been completed with the addition of a greenhouse and wildlife pond.



Having an allotment is the new "in thing" and like many other sites there is now a waiting list at Forest Farm. It has been hard work at times and many Sundays in mid winter it did appear to be a big effort for little gain; but again taking advice from others " it is a marathon and not a sprint", I got to the finishing line at the end.

Unfortunately this, as in the previous year, has seen an outbreak of blight which destroyed my potatoes and outside tomatoes caused by the wet weather in July. My peas have been eaten by mice and something has been eating my tomatoes inside the greenhouse.

These are minor issues compared with the delights of eating your own food hours after it was still growing and the 'food miles' are less than one. I must admit it has been one of my better decisions and the next projectchickens in the garden.

Martin Chamberlain

Forest Farm Wardens' Centre- Proposed Improvements

You may recall that in connection with the new pond, your Committee are keen to promote its educational potential and as part of this, had the idea of improving the facilities at the Wardens Centre – the "Toilets & Kitchen" area to make it more suitable for schoolchildren and groups to visit.

By paying for the plans, we will be in a position to approach funding bodies and organisations with formal plans and costing which are required before we move forward.

This will be a Friends project organised by your committee for the development of the wetlands area.

Whilst this may not be developing new environments for wildlife we think that it is important to educate the next generation to understand the importance of protecting the environment. This project will be a key part of our 20 year anniversary next year.

John Harding (Chairman)

Events Sept—December 2009

Saturday 19 th September 10.00-12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 26 th September 10.00-12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club. Age Group 8-12 £1 per child (phone Park Ranger service for further details 029 2044 5903)
Saturday 26 th September 10.30 – 12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Meet at the middle entrance, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Sunday 27 th September 10.30	Volunteers Day Repairs to the Canal Path Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 17 th October 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 17 th October 10.00-12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club Age Group 8-12 (phone Park Ranger service for further details 029 2044 5903)
Saturday 31 st October 10.00-12.00	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Meet at the middle entrance, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Wednesday 18 th November 7.30 p.m.	<i>An illustrated talk 'Falcons and Falconry' by Mrs Hawkins Community Centre, Tyn-y-pwll Road, Whitchurch</i>
Saturday 21 st November 10.00-12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 28 th November 10.00-12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club. Age Group 8-12 £1 per child Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 28 th November 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Meet at the middle entrance, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Sunday 29 th November 10.30	Tree Planting in the Orchard Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road.
Saturday 19 th December 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 19 th December 10.00-12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club. Age Group 8-12 £1 per child 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.