

FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 74

DECEMBER 2009

Hello 'Friends'

I hope you all enjoyed the lovely Autumn. The Reserve report, RSPB walk and a visitor's article give a flavour of how much it was appreciated.. I have often thought Spring was my favourite time of year but the lovely days we had spread over several weeks have made me think again.

Unfortunately happy thoughts have been marred by the news that airguns have been in evidence on the Reserve and we are being asked to be on the alert and report any incidents

There continues to be a lot going on . When you look back over several years, it surprising how much the volunteering work achieves. Also, efforts behind the scenes have resulted in significant progress on plans for the improvements to the Wardens' Centre and Melingriffith Water engine although the latter is not part of the 'Friends' remit'. We also have some interesting talks to look forward to over the winter months.

Next year sees a temporary change of venue for our meetings and the beginning of what we hope will be a special year to celebrate the 20th year of the Newsletter. I would love to include some contributions from our readers to mark this milestone.

In the meantime, on behalf of the Committee, may I wish you a very happy Christmas and all the best for the New Year.

Sheila Austin (Editor)



Deadline for articles for the next newsletter is 6th February 2010
See back page for contact details

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NEW VENUE 2010 MEETINGS

Ararat Church, Plas Treoda, Whitchurch is the temporary venue for our evening illustrated talks on the following dates:

January 20th
March 17th
April 21st

All talks start at 7.30 p.m.

See Page 4 for details

Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies
Countryside Warden

As I write this, we are now at the end of the first week in November. In the Reserve it has been feeling more like Autumn but there are still plenty more leaves to fall yet.

Our last volunteering event on 25th October went well and despite the poor weather, we managed to clear some laurel trees near the old parish road at the northern end of the canal. However, in the branches after felling, we noticed two old nests. As they were practically built on one another, it looked as though a sparrowhawk or tawny owl had used the roost to nest or eat prey as there was a pellet and some brown and white feathers. The nest underneath looked like a wood pigeon's – a small basic platform of intertwined twigs and sticks, not much more than 25cms (10 inches) wide. I have seen these in the past with two eggs (usually 2 per clutch and bright white) and wonder how they never roll off such a flat nest!



Last weekend, we saw our first record of a sparrowhawk being ringed so they must be faring well in the area.

The reason we are felling laurel is that they are not a native species, and, they are cutting out a lot of light (all year round). We will be replanting with various species this winter including a bluebell planting session with the Friends.

The recent wildlife on the Taff guided walk was well attended and for the most part, dry. Species seen included grey heron, cormorant, mute swan, grey wag-tail, goosander, kingfisher and little grebe!



ILLEGAL USE OF FIRE ARMS OF THE RESERVE

We have received a number of reports of people using air rifles and other fire arms on the Reserve.

One of the benefit of the Friends' membership is that you are our eyes and ears on the Reserve.

The following is the legal position and what members can do if they see anything

The following response has been received concerning the law.

This section came into force on the 20th January 2004. It adds to the list of firearms covered by the Offence in Section 19 of the Firearms Act 1968 of carrying a firearm in a public place without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. That offence currently applies to loaded shotguns, loaded air weapons or any firearm (whether loaded or not) together with its ammunition.

Subsection 1 of section 37 adds to this unloaded air weapons and imitation firearms. Subsection 3 adds the offence to the list of arrestable offences in England and Wales set out in Schedule 1A to the police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

It is also an offence to carry any firearm in a public place unless it is in a secure container

Therefore, we know what they are doing is illegal so what can our members do?

We do NOT want you to approach any of these people.

When it is safe to do so contact the 101 service on either 101 or via your mobile on 01656 655 555. The operator will decide what action to take.

You may also ring the Wardens, 07976 011768 or 07817986316. There is a radio system operating during normal office hours (including weekends) so we can call up additional staff if necessary. The difficulty arises in early morning and late at night when often this activity takes place.

Finally, could people make sure that calls and incidents are retrospectively logged through Paul Davies at Forest Farm as we are keeping a record of all such incidents.

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary

Temporary new venue for meetings

Due to the forthcoming rebuild of Whitchurch Community Centre, we have had to find another room for our meetings in the early part of 2010.

The meetings on the dates listed below will be at **Ararat Church**. Please use the side entrance. The room is upstairs but there is a lift and we can still have our teas and coffees after the meetings!

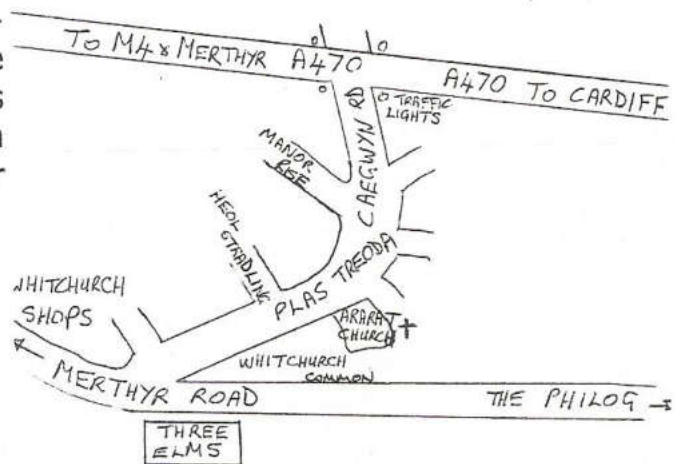
This venue will be used for the following meetings:

Wednesday January 20th

Wednesday March 17th

Wednesday April 21st

(If you are not sure, just ring me).



Sheila Austin

One of our members Dr. Mary Gillham M.B.E. moved from her previous home in Gwaelod Y Garth to a new flat in Radyr, which overlooks the Reserve.

Mary has recently written and had published a book dealing with her walks around local natural history sites during her first year in residence. Over half of her browsings were in and around Forest Farm, the Taff, and the Glamorgan Canal. This book will obviously be very relevant and interesting to members.

The title is **"Wildlife Watching in the Slow Lane"** **"The nature diary of an octogenarian"** and costs £12.99.

Readers will find that it updates a lot of things from Mary's earlier books. Copies will be available to purchase at our next evening meetings.

Duncan Hockridge

MEMBERSHIP

Our current membership stands at 259 Families plus 2 Groups. During the year to date, 16 new families have joined us. However, this has been offset by 44 families who have not renewed their membership.

Many thanks to our current members for their continued support.

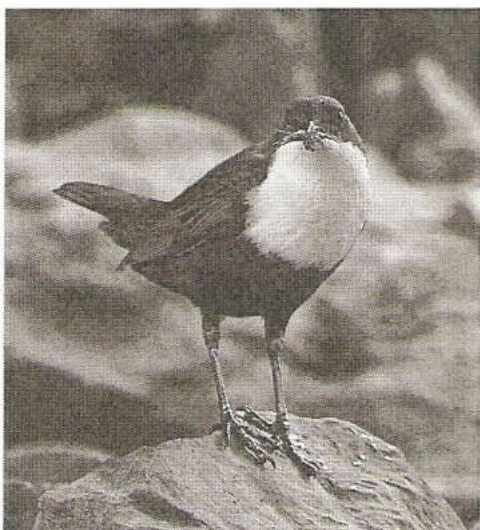
Noel Gale (Membership Secretary)

Forest Farm/RSPB Walks

Autumn 2009



Some people start to feel depressed at the outset of Autumn. I for one look upon this time of year as a preparation for a well deserved rest for much of the natural world. The plants, animals and birds have propagated their species, awarding us a blaze of life and colour throughout the Spring and Summer, ensuring that they will survive to stimulate our senses in the following year. September started with a very subtle change of colour on the trees. There were still too many leaves on the trees to enable good views of the many birds heard singing but this will soon change.



In October, we enjoyed our Indian Summer and basked in the warm sunshine as we walked around the site. On the bridge over the Taff, we were disappointed to see several fishermen standing in the water. We thought that this would prevent us from seeing Dippers or Kingfishers, but we were pleasantly surprised to have prolonged views of two Dippers and a fleeting glimpse of a Kingfisher.

The rest of the walk rewarded us with our usual feathered friends. The cheeky Robins - were these migrating foreigners or the resident birds? The blue tits, great tits, coal tits and nuthatches eventually took advantage of the seed offered to them. I don't think I will ever tire of watching them.

The trees are now a wonderful canopy of richly coloured leaves and fruits and aglow in the sunshine. There's a slight cool edge to the warmth, a reminder of the cold days to come.

I'm so pleased that the last two walks were well attended. Unfortunately I missed the September walk because I thought it was the following week! I apologise to all of you who turned up and I will try not to do this again - naughty Stella! I look forward to the next walks where we may see some Winter visitors.



Now for a short reminder that not all of nature is at rest. As most of you will know, our birds will fight for survival throughout the winter. Please put food out for them on a regular basis so that they don't have to waste precious energy searching for food.

If I don't see you on the walks, may I take this opportunity to give you my best wishes for the forthcoming seasonal festivities.

Stella Wells

**Cardiff and District RSPB Group
Conservation Group**

Doing something positive

September found us back on the Reserve. Our first task was clearing the Balsam and Knotweed which we were unable to complete during June. We were confronted with a lot more growth than we would normally expect for September ...we will need to change our strategy with the Balsam, cut and remove the plant before it has chance to set seed.

The summer saw contractors on the Reserve felling trees that pose a problem with overhead power cables. So our task for October was to clear the cut timber. Some pieces needed to be reduced in size for easy handling. We had a good turn out so we managed to remove a large amount of branches and logs to create a wildlife strip.

Programme January – March 2010

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

January 30th	Meadow area/general clearing Middle entrance
February 27th	Scrub/coppicing clearing Top entrance
March 27th	BIG LITTER PICK. Come and help clean our patch before Easter Middle entrance

The group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous work, similar to an active gardener (you work to your own level).

If you feel you would like to get involved ... just turn up or better still, give me a ring.

Hugh Harrison 029 2070 4889

Wardens Centre – update

We are pleased to let you know that good progress is now being made with the plans for upgrading the Wardens' Centre. The Committee of Friends is taking the lead on this project and Duncan has agreed to undertake the future supervision of the works. Meetings have taken place with all the interested parties and subsequently draft plans were drawn up for

1. Upgrading the existing wardens' toilet to be used as a gent's toilet.
2. The provision of a new toilet for disabled persons and ladies.
3. The provision of a new kitchen area.

A Consultant has been engaged by and at the cost of Friends to prepare the detail plans and estimates for submitting the proposals to Cardiff Council for Building Regulation approval. The Consultant expects this application to be submitted to the Council by the end of November. To get to this stage we have been fortunate in having such a good working relationship with the Council's Park Services. Mr. Chris Powell of that Department has worked hard and been successful in obtaining approval for all the remaining costs of the works from various sources. Our local Whitchurch Councillors have also been very cooperative in agreeing that some of the funds under their control could also be made available.

So we are pleased to say that the scheme is on target to be started early next year.

This improved Wardens' Centre will then be available for use by the Friends and encourage other groups and particularly school parties to visit the Reserve. It has been the lack of these facilities that has not allowed the Reserve to reach what we see is its full potential, particularly being at the head of the Taff valley tourist area.

Duncan Hockridge

Please don't skip this bit!

We are still in need of some new Committee members and a Webmaster.

David Bevan who does such an excellent job with our website is planning on leaving us! So if someone out there has the skills or interest in this field, we'd love to hear from you.

The Committee meets mostly once a month and is a friendly and informal meeting – but gets the job done (we think so anyway!!) Actually you don't have to be a formal Committee member to come along to our meetings and if you think you might be interested, you could join us for a few and see what you think.

If we want to continue to look after the interests of the Reserve, it is important to maintain our profile both via the Committee and, these days particularly, the web.

Robins and Christmas

With the advent of forthcoming festive season, recently someone queried why the robin is the bird generally seen on our Christmas cards. I thought I would look it up.



The most common explanation was that in Victorian times, the bird represented the postman. When early cards were produced, part of the postman's standard uniform was a bright red coat. Thus Victorian postmen were nicknamed 'robin red-breasts'. Many of the earliest Christmas cards show the robin at the door, some are carrying envelopes in their beaks with seasonal messages. This theory is enhanced by early Valentine Cards with robins carrying an 'I love you' message in their beaks.

Nowadays, we do not have this association at all. Perhaps the above seems a bit fanciful? Maybe it is just because robins are at their most visible at this time of year when the surroundings are so drab and that they seem happy to take the food put out by us when their natural food source is scarce ...

Whatever the reason, their inclusion on a card always seems to bring cheer.

Happy Christmas!

Sheila Austin

BIRD FEED

Winter 2009/2010 once again it's that time of year for feeding the birds.

If anyone would like to make a donation of money or feed itself it would most appreciated.

I would like to thank very much those who have already given us a donation,

John Harding
(Chairman)

Don't forget

2010 marks the 20th anniversary of the Friends newsletter.

We would love to include articles from you. Perhaps you have memories of the Reserve over that time, or your past activities with the Friends. Photos, written items, short or longer, are most welcome. In the past I have noticed crosswords and some have been moved to poetry!

We have 4 editions—so plenty of room for your contributions.

Volunteer Days

On 27th September we spent a few hours repairing a section of the Canal "replacing the edge in stone".

Also on 25th October a few hours were spent cutting the hedge to improve the light in this area. *(I'm sorry to say I missed this day)* but I would like to thank every-one for all their hard work on both days.

Dates for the 2010 volunteering events until April are:

Sunday 31st January	More coppicing. Middle section
Sunday 28th February	Footpath repairs
Sunday 28th March	Preparing the sandmartin cliff
Sunday 11th April	Litter pick

We meet at 10.30a.m. at the Wardens Centre and work for a couple of hours.

If any-one would like know in advance of any of our volunteer days, you can always check on our website www.forestfarm.org.uk or if you let me have your e-mail address or telephone number, I can make a list and let you know in case you are free to help.

John Harding
Tel: 029 20563874
E-mail address john@forestfarm.org.uk

Melingriffith Water Engine

Although there has been little visible progress on restoration of the engine, behind the scenes much has been happening. Cardiff council who own the engine have agreed terms with a contractor to restore it off site. This will involve removing it to the contractor's workshop to replace rotten timber and treat the iron work to prevent further rusting. In a few months time the repaired engine will be rebuilt.

This would have happened earlier but pipistrelle bats were found roosting in the structure. These will be transferred by a registered bat handler to special bat boxes set up in the surrounding area before the engine is dismantled.

The dismantling work will involve the use of a mobile crane and several lorries. This will require closure of the road for periods, so the intention is not to do this work during rush hour periods!

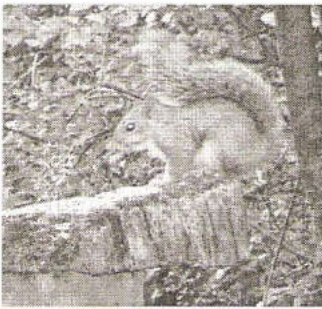
Albyn Austin

An autumn visit to the canal – and memories

I had been reading about the 'tow rope friendly' cast iron bridge on the remains of the Glamorgan Canal at Forest Farm in Mary Gillham's marvellously written book 'A Natural History of Cardiff'. Unexpectedly, a few days later, I saw it for real – as they say.

Pat and I had walked down the slope from the parking area at the Melingriffith Feeder (also known as the Sunny Bank Weir) end of the Glamorgan Canal, when there it was. I delighted in the skill and ingenuity of the Ironmasters.

Standing on the bridge and looking along this charming relic of a past age, there came to mind a memory from my past – another canal bridge – Brunel's masterpiece 'The Three Bridges' between Hanwell and the Thames. It was 1930 and my Dad and I were on our usual Saturday walk along the tow path when it was blocked by a crowd of angry young bargees. I can still see their flushed faces and thought it would erupt into a big punch-up and felt the dread thrill of the school yard. Dad knew better and steered me past them on towards a football match.



But no violence on the Glamorgan canal in October 2009 although a cheeky grey squirrel was provocatively eating the bird seed on the post whilst great tits waited half hidden in the trees. Ducks swam across hoping to be fed – and turned away when they were not. A wagtail 'wagged' from the waterline across the canal and crows flew overhead.

What a joy this area is and how much we, occasional visitors from North Wales, enjoy it. We do thank all the hardworking Rangers and the Friends of Forest Farm and wish you well.

John Rayfield

Wentwood Ancient Woodland

(Wentwood forms part of the largest block of ancient woodland within Wales and is a remnant of the vast woodland that once stretched from the Usk to the Wye Valley. Recorded history of Wentwood extends to over 1,000 years.

Ancient woodland is defined as land that has been wooded for over 400 years. It is the richest wildlife habitat in the UK. Wentwood is a haven for wildlife; dormice still live there, together with adders, lizards, deer and many woodland birds.)

Recently, we attended a short lecture on the history of Wentwood. Though now mainly conifers, there is relic ancient deciduous woodland at Wentwood. The

majority of it is owned by the Woodland Trust who plan to restore it. The lecture was about the history of the forest, the results of the investigations and around the issues of restoration - but restore to what?

Pollen found in a peat core in a marshy area revealed the following story. The oak and hazel growing there was probably regenerated after early Bronze Age farming but this was cleared in the late Iron Age and early Roman period. Forest regenerated in the late Roman period but there was a lot more Lime and Ash present and these and other trees were gradually replaced by the arrival of Beech – presumably introduced by man. Massive felling seems to occur about 1500 or so, eroding the topsoil. From then it seems mostly to have been coppice woods for charcoal production, until conifers begin to be planted in the late 19th century. There was always a patchwork effect with areas of grassland and crops.

If you leave the woodland to regenerate naturally it will probably become mostly oak, silver birch, hawthorn and sycamore. If you want to restore an earlier woodland, which one would you choose? Will the loss of topsoil allow you a choice in any case? Should 'restoration' include thinking about which trees will survive in the future (climate change) and how the wood would need to be managed?

In the Wye Valley where beech woods were traditionally considered to be natural woodland, a wood has been left unmanaged for 100 years and the beech trees are not regenerating. Is this due to grey squirrels, fallow deer, rabbits – all introduced species preventing regeneration and increasing damage to existing trees. Or was beech introduced by man and cultivated for its timber?

All in all, this was a lecture that gave us quite a lot to think about.

Albyn Austin

Apologies for a couple of errors in the September edition of the newsletter which was due to trying to have my 'editorial' and 'layout' hats on at the same time...Sheila Austin

Events—December 2009

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

*Dates for Watch club for 2010 not available at time of going to press,
please see website www.forestfarm.org.uk*

January - March 2010

Saturday 16th January 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Sunday 17th January 11.30—14.00	Walk off Christmas at Hailey park and Forest Farm Led by the Friends. Meet at the Melingriffith Water Engine, Ty Mawr Rd
Wednesday 20th January 7.30 p.m.	An illustrated talk by Mrs Rosie James 'Victorian Parks in Cardiff' Ararat Church, Whitchurch
Saturday 30th January 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group General clearing of the meadow area Meet at the middle entrance Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Sunday 31st January 10.30—12.30 approx	Volunteers Day Join the Friends to help with some coppicing on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd
Saturday 20th February 10.00-12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 27th February 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Scrub/coppicing clearance Meet at the top entrance Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Sunday 28th February 10.30—12.30 approx	Volunteers Day Join the Friends for some footpath repairs on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd
Wednesday 17th March 7.30 p.m.	A talk by Bill Lee 'The Bee—its lifestyle and its health update' Ararat Church, Whitchurch
Saturday 20th March 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 27th March 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Litter pick Meet at the top entrance Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Sunday 28th March 10.30—12.30 approx	Volunteers Day Litter Pick Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd

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

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