

FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 75

MARCH 2010

Hello again 'Friends'

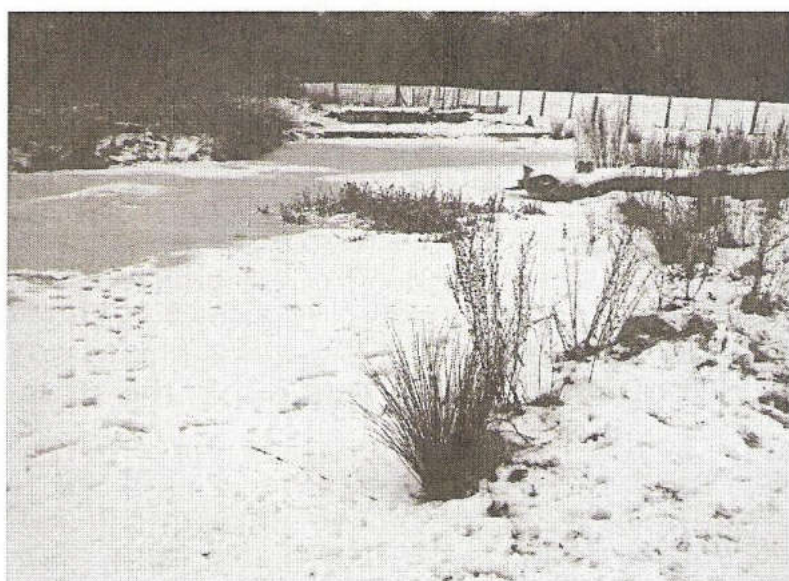
Whether you are a new or longstanding member, welcome to the start of a special year, marking the 20th anniversary of the 'Friends of Forest Farm' and our first newsletter. So, we have some reminders of that in this edition along with, this time, a sporting reminiscence from Les Gibbon. Do get in touch if you have other stories about Forest Farm or Melingriffith, I'd love to hear from you

I am sure the birds have appreciated the bird feed, indeed for some it will have meant their survival during the cold weather and there has been a bonus for us in that bittern, redwing and fieldfare have been seen on the Reserve. Read all about it in the reports from Paul Davies(p3), Stella Wells (p4) and Mary Gillham (p8). Winter has also meant the start of our evening talks. The two we have had so far on Falconry (p11) and Victorian Parks were excellent. The next one is on 'The Bee' on 17th March and then it's the AGM on 21st April—both at Ararat Church centre. We look forward to seeing you.

Finally, I must give thanks and best wishes to David Bevan who left the area recently. Apart from setting up and maintaining our website, he was very helpful with technical assistance for the newsletter.

Sheila Austin

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



A wintry scene at the 'new' pond at Forest Farm

Contents

Page

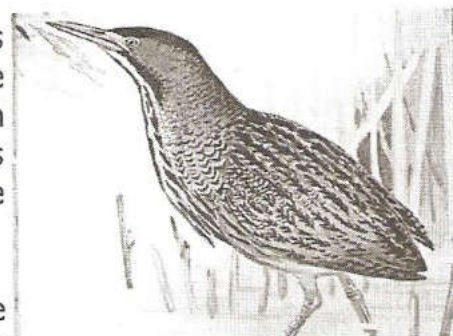
Warden's report	2/3
Wardens' Centre upgrading	3
RSPB walks report	4
Bird feed/membership website	5
1990 newsletter	6/7
Tree planting	7
'A winter stroll'	8/9
Cardiff Conservation group	9
A Team from the past	10
Falconry talk/Events	11
Events	12

Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies
Countryside Warden

As I write this, approaching mid February, the cold weather continues and so far shows no sign that it is coming to an end soon.

We have had a Bittern living on the Reserve this winter. I was fortunate the other day to see the Bittern fly in front of me and land in the reeds on Llyn Gamlas, (the pond by the second hide). This was pure luck as I had only just sat down in the hide!



Obviously all the birds find survival harder in the colder weather. Those that have migrated here from the north, eg. redwing and fieldfare, will move south and west until they find more favourable conditions. Birds that normally stay all winter will move too, but not to the same extent. The rest will just "tough it out", the longer the cold spell, the worse it becomes.



Most birds that stay find food in the leaf litter in woods and hedgerows. If this isn't too frozen, they can pick out both animal and vegetable matter to feed on. The birds that suffer the most are insect feeders. Some like the wren need a lot of spiders, and can find them difficult to find - which they must if they are to survive and not succumb to hypothermia. Treecreepers, nuthatches and woodpeckers also suffer in hard weather, as they are specialist feeders. The smaller birds are the most vulnerable; fortunately all of them have been helped by

the donations towards bird feed over the last twenty years from the Friends! Even if the hard weather decimates the small bird population, as it did in 1947 and 1963, I'm sure the numbers will eventually recover as the smaller birds tend to have larger broods. With less competition more will survive to maturity and, in time, bring their numbers back-up.

Other news; we have recently installed three bat boxes on a sycamore adjacent to the Melingriffith water wheel. The work on dismantling the wheel blades had to be halted as there was a colony of roosting Pipistrelle bats within the structure.

Recent work on the Reserve included the felling of seven trees on the southern end of the canal/feeder bank. This was to remove the risk of the canal bank breaching if one of these trees came down. We always try to minimize any felling on the Reserve and will replant with woodland edge species. Some of the stumps may also re-grow.

Finally, a big thanks to all the volunteers who arrived for our coppicing day and one end of January. A good turn out and thanks to John and his tasty soup and Rolls!

Paul Davies

WARDENS' CENTRE UPGRADING - Latest report

Our Consultant Mr. Peter Bricknell, completed preparing the engineering plans, specification and quotation in December. He then submitted the necessary information to the County Council for Building Regulation approval at the end of December 2009. This approval was received in January with a number of conditions attached. The matters raised will be able to be complied with both before and during the works. Whilst Environmental Wales (E.W.) had previously indicated that it would be able to make a £4700 contribution to the overall project costs (£16,500) further discussions between the County Council and E.W. resulted in us having to obtain two more quotations. These were received and forwarded to E.W. I am pleased to say that Messrs. Catesby was the lowest tenderer. We now await the formal confirmation regarding this contribution.

Over the Christmas period the full extent of the project was fine-tuned having regard to the future uses which will be made of the of the Warden's Centre. The main additional items were:-

The provision of replacement windows on the north side of the centre with double glazed units with toughened glass.

The provision of non-slip seamless vinyl flooring in both the new community kitchen, the existing small Wardens' kitchen, and the existing and new toilet.

As a result of these extra items there has had to be a small increase in the overall costs. In order that these costs could be met from the County Council resources a meeting was recently held with our three local County Councillors who were given a detailed explanation regarding what works are to be undertaken. I am pleased to say that with the usual co-operation we have with our Councillors, they were all enthusiastic about the project and then approved the financial requirements.

Once these works have been completed the County Council has arranged for the remaining area of concrete flooring within the Centre to be substantially upgraded by levelling and then painting it with a hard wearing, attractive, extra-strength polyurethane paint finish. The materials for this work are already on site.

At the time of preparing this report I am hoping that a start can be made on the building works in the middle of March 2010 (Watch this space!).

Duncan Hockridge

Forest Farm/RSPB Walks

Stella Wells

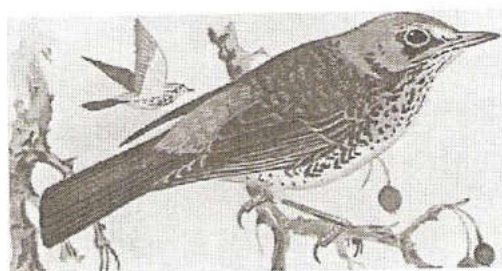
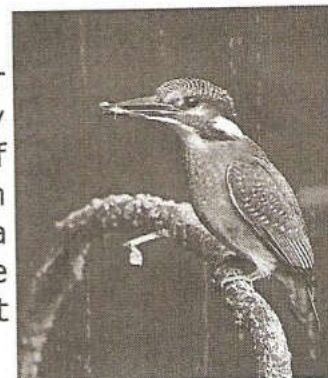


The last three months have seen a mixture of weather, from ice and snow to rain and sunshine. We have been reasonably lucky on our walks which have been cold but mainly dry. Winter is well and truly upon us but this hasn't prevented the more hardy souls from enjoying our walks.

As well as the birds we have seen, we have been treated to sightings of fox, rabbits, squirrels and a mink. Now I am not a fan of mink because of the detrimental effect they have on our wild life, but I still felt a thrill when I actually saw it swimming along the edge of the canal, seemingly without a care in the world. As usual, the camera was not to hand!

I think it was in December when I heard talk of a visiting bittern on one of the ponds and I couldn't wait to see it and hoped that members of the group who have never seen one before would get a good view. Well, as you may have guessed, it was absent on the day of the walk. It was nowhere to be seen (by us) in January either. But some of the group were treated to the rare sight of a water rail out on the ice.

I was worried that the kingfishers may have struggled or had even been decimated by the harsh weather and my worries increased when we didn't catch even a glimpse of one. But the following week when I visited the area with my dog, a man told me that he had just been watching a kingfisher, from the hide with the door, diving into the pond ten times before it caught a fish!! Maybe I'm just jinxed.



Fieldfare

On the January walk we were treated to good views of redwings, field fare, mistle thrush and song thrushes. The field fare is one of my favourite birds and I don't think the books do it justice with its slate grey head and rich chestnut back and heavily marked chest. The redwing is a close second, especially when viewed through binoculars or a telescope.

Bird song was quite pronounced on the last walk and we saw around thirty species of bird, which is quite good I think. Perhaps in February we will start to notice emerging springtime flowers to join the hazel catkins which are already ripening, and maybe even more avian activity as Spring slowly approaches.

(As mentioned by Paul Davies in his report on Page 2, the need for bird feed has been even greater this year. In 2009 we had a magnificent £291 donated, and £264.73 was spent. Ed.)

BIRD FEED

This winter 2009 /2010 we have been buying the bird feed locally in 20 kg bags as and when we need it, I would like to thank every one for their contributions to the bird feed

John Harding (Chairman)

MEMBERSHIP

Our latest count of Membership for the current year stands at 269 families and 2 Groups, a little down from last year's figure but nevertheless an encouraging number of Families still giving continued support.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Our New Year (2010/2011) will shortly be upon us. A MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM can be found on the AGM Notice with your Newsletter. We have kept the Annual Subscription at £5 for Groups, Families and Individual members.

Noel Gale (Membership Secretary)

WEB SITE

David Bevan who set up our Web Site for us has moved away. These days a website is an essential part of any organisation.

On behalf of the Committee and I am sure many 'Friends', I would like to thank him for all the hard work he has put into this for us both on the website and for his Committee work. He gave his time and effort freely and we have all appreciated the results.

Wishing best of luck and happiness to David and Catherine in your new home.

John Harding

Don't forget

Our next talk:

17th March—Bill Lee
'The Bee—its lifestyle and its health update'

21st April AGM and talk
History and Wildlife of Forest Farm. Martin Chamberlain

Volunteering Days
28th March
11th April
23rd May

20th Anniversary

To help commemorate the 20th year of the 'Friends of Forest Farm' I am delighted to reproduce the front page of the very first Friends of Forest Farm newsletter. The objectives and purpose still hold good. As a relative newcomer myself, I see some familiar names there in an official capacity—testament to a long and valued commitment to Forest Farm. Are there any of the original 39 families or members out there? Editor

Friends of Forest Farm Country Park

Newsletter No1

Glamorgan Canal L.N.R.

A warm welcome to all members of Friends of Forest Farm Country Park in this our first Newsletter.

We were delighted when our launch meeting at Bethel Chapel Vestry on the 14th March 1990 brought in 39 families as members.

A meeting at Forest Farm on 28th March generated much enthusiasm and a Steering Committee was established as follows.

OFFICERS APPOINTED.

Chairman - Mr. Steve Miles
Secretary - Mr. Dennis Davies
Treasurer - Mr. E.O. Edwards
Membership- Mrs. Stephanie
Secretary Crocker
Newsletter- Mr. Ken Patterson
Editor
Publicity - Dr. Dave Jennings
and Events
Assistance was kindly
offered by :-
Mrs. Sheila Kernick with typing.
Mr. Chris Segar with publicity.

TECHNICAL ADVISORS.

Dr. Mary Gillham - Natural
History
Mrs. Mairead Sutherland -
Ornithology
Mr. Chris Small - British
Trust for Conservation
Volunteers. (B.T.V.C.)

The main objective of the "The Friends" is to contribute in whatever way possible to protecting and developing, in a suburban setting, this area of countryside as a valued amenity and a nature reserve for the observation and study of flora and fauna in their natural habitat.

We trust our purpose will enhance the enjoyment and quality of life for an increasing number of members of the public.

"BEATING THE BOUNDS" SUNDAY 29TH APRIL 1990

Start at the Forest Farm Car Park at 2.00p.m. The route will follow the Taff south to the new housing area. Here we will omit the lower section of the river path to the water wheel. (This will be a visit for another day) Our path will take us to the southern end of Longwood and then to the Cardiff Railway cutting via the public footpath. In the cutting we will see the changes effected by years of coppicing. From the cutting we will cross Long Wood Drive into the middle section and see the piers of the Cardiff Railway bridge across the canal. On passing beneath the M4, we will explore the top section of the Reserve and then return to Forest Farm via the Three Castles Cycleway.

(Yes this really was 20 years ago— article taken from the very first copy of our newsletter. Did any of you go? Ed)

TREE PLANTING NOV. 2009

On 29th November 2009, a very wet Sunday morning, we planted 16 trees which included CHERRY, PLUM and GAGE plus more apples and pears.

Family members of the late Dr Joyce Lloyd came along to plant one row of 6 trees (Cherry, Brithmawr apple, Beauty of Bath apple, Victoria Plum, Conference Pear and Royal Jubilee cooking apple) and also 1000 bluebells in her memory. A Gage was also donated by the family of Joan Trainor and planted on the day.



A misty photo (complete with rainspot!) of the tree planting at the orchard near the 'new' pond.

I would like to thank all those who turned up to help with the planting.

We had ordered 18 trees all together but 2 were not ready; so they were planted on the 7th February 2010. One of these was a Damson. This gives us a total 49 trees in all.

In January, a tree pruning course was held at Forest Farm in conjunction with Orchard Cardiff. 8 people turned up including myself.

Hopefully there will be a summer pruning course followed up with another winter pruning course in January 2011.

John Harding (Chairman)

A Winter Stroll in Forest Farm Country Park

It was the Bank Holiday after Boxing Day. Most of the untrodden snow had melted and the air trapped in ice-sealed puddles gleamed white in the winter sunlight. A moorhen was ice-skating in the frozen half of Sheep's Bane Wood while a gaggle of ducks chased and splashed in the other half. The frosted field beyond was bobbing with foraging redwings, seeking respite from Scandinavian frosts.

I had followed the east bank of the Taff downstream to Velindre, where three newly opened and emptied hens' eggs by the road showed where some Corvids (or others?) had breakfasted. Beyond the cottage gate, hens and bantams clustered along shelves in the porch or pottered on the lawn. It was all the same to them who benefited from their offerings.

Plump ivy berries were still green. These would be feeding blackbirds and wood pigeons next April and May, long after the accompanying alder catkins had shed their pollen. Sunlight shimmering on the canal water set in motion by sparring water fowl was reflected in replicate waves on the pale trunks of newly felled forest giants alongside.

Clusters of orange velvet shank toadstools (*Flammulina velutipes*) at the tree bases gleamed against the snowy backdrop. These resemble the commoner sulphur tuft toadstools but emerge undamaged after being frozen and were as sprightly at the end of another three weeks of frost and snow as before.

Two dapper nuthatches were sharing grain with a couple of chaffinches, while a coal tit joined more colourful cousins at another feeding station, selecting tiny cubes of cheese from among the corn. A wren? No; much too small. An elegant goldcrest was pecking its way assiduously along far reaching bramble trails. These tiny birds are particularly vulnerable to cold and there were 3 more weeks of snow to come. A diligently probing grey wagtail soiled his yellow waistcoat as he worked his way systematically across the muddy shallows of the broad hollow where we sometimes see scurrying water rails.



And then the substantial shadow beyond took form, rufous and soft-treading over the silvered crust of melting snow. Reynard paused in his apparently aimless pottering and set off discretely towards a matter of greater interest. The targeted heron watched his stealthy approach with no visible tautening of muscles, then rose languidly, flapping disdainfully low over the potential adversary's head. Another of these statuesque fishers took wing soon after but the fox, once thwarted, lost interest and resumed his inconsequential loitering.

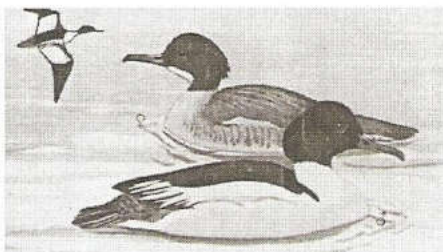
"There, going left behind that big tree, now to the right, splashing through that puddle." Me, doing a running commentary for the little group I had waylaid on the towpath by the lock, far above. Old habits die hard! They couldn't see the

goldcrest and didn't particularly want to see the jays, but a fox was different. I moved on, past the mossy ruin of the old canal house.

The best was yet to come. As I passed two anglers on the Radyr footbridge over the Taff, headed for home, I glimpsed a speeding kingfisher: an apt finale in this winter wonderland.

But there was more. On New Year's Eve four goosanders were being bowled down the Taff below Radyr weir, plunging at intervals beneath the surface. Relatively new winter visitors to our Welsh rivers from further North, these were the first I had seen this year.

Mary E Gillham



Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group ***Doing something positive***

The November 2009 visit was a general clear up operation, especially the brambles that steadily encroach into the open area, and also the woody growth that soon appears around the pollarded stumps.

The last Saturday of January started off well, a crisp bright morning with a slight covering of snow ... also a good turn out. So the task went smoothly clearing some old dead trees and thinning out the rather spindly specimens. We achieved a lot during the morning session. The area will benefit from the extra light ... possibly a spread of bluebells in the Spring.

Programme March - May 2010

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

March 27th **BIG LITTER PICK.**
Come and help clean our patch before Easter
Middle entrance

April 24th Knotweed first cut of the season
Middle entrance

May 29th Wildflower and Nest box survey
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)

A TEAM FROM THE PAST



Top

Gerry Lewis, Clive Warrington, Eddie Donovan, John Donovan, Les Brown, Tony Hockridge, Bob Warrington

Middle

Brian Warrington, Ross Llewellyn, Tom Davies, John Llewellyn, Dennis Pudge, Les Gibbon

Bottom

Blandford Glastonbury, Terry Pudge, Graham Beard

The photo shows the Melingriffith Rugby team in early 1952. I remember it being taken as I was 18 at the time, and joined the Royal Signals for two years National Service a few weeks later.

Our colours were yellow and green hoops and we played on the Dimond Field now owned by CHSOB. As you can see there were quite a few brothers in the team; the only ones not related were the Llewellyns.

We did quite well over the years, reaching the final of the Mallet Cup one season, but were beaten by the Butetown side, the CIAC's. Perhaps the sports-minded would like to know that the Melingriffith were the first team to bring the Mallet Cup out of Cardiff in earlier days. The first Mallet Cup final was held in 1894 at the Harlequins ground.

Some of our players went on to better things. Terry Pudge, who was always Captain of the team, played for Cardiff and District. Graham Pugh – not in the picture – played for Cardiff. He was also a first class runner. Blandford Glastonbury went on to play for Pontypridd and Cardiff.

When Melingriffith closed in 1957, a great sporting club closed with it.

Les Gibbon

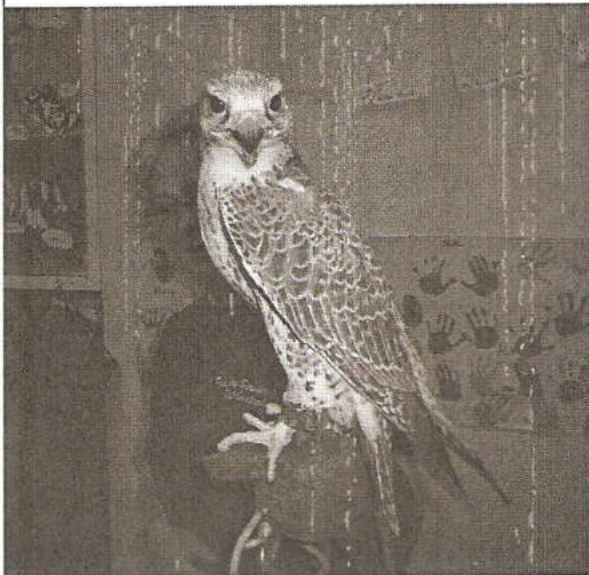
A Talk on Falconry

We opened our autumn /winter indoor programme in November with a talk by a falconer Phillipa Hawkins from Falconry Services in Newport

Unfortunately, we arrived to find a craft sale taking place in our usual room, we had been double booked. It was bit of a squeeze into one of the smaller rooms. I know all who were present were so impressed by this interesting, informative and enjoyable evening.

She brought with her Billy the barn owl, a Saker falcon (called Madam) from Siberia, and a 'Perlin' – a cross between a peregrine and a merlin) named Robinson.

Phillipa explained how she trains the birds, all bred in captivity, and that they had managed some cross breeding.



'Madam'
(With Philippa behind)



'Billy'

She was regularly employed by the Council to fly a falcon in the Millennium Stadium to drive the pigeons away. Where the seagulls cause problems on the waste tips at Lamby Way, she is also called in to drive them away.

Phillipa was a natural speaker, and showed her respect and affection for all her birds. She had loved wildlife and the outdoors from a young person and decided caring for birds would be her life.

Rosemary Waters

Events - March—June 2010

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 BIG LITTER PICK Meet at the middle entrance Longwood Drive, Whitchurch

March—June 2010 cont'd

Saturday 27th March 10.00—12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club Age Group 8-12 Easter Art activity. Donations welcome (phone Park Ranger service for further details 029 2044 5903)
Sunday 28th March 10.30—12.30 approx	Volunteers Day Footpath repairs/scrub clearance Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd
Sunday 11th April 10.30—12.30 approx	Volunteers Day LITTER PICK Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 17th April 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
<i>Wednesday</i> <i>21st April</i> <i>7.30 p.m.</i>	Friends of Forest Farm AGM and talk "The History and Wildlife of Forest Farm" — Martin Chamberlain Ararat Church Centre Whitchurch
Saturday 24th April 10.00—12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club Age Group 8-12 Taff Trail cycle ride. Donations welcome (phone Park Ranger service for further details 029 2044 5903)
Saturday 24th April 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Knotweed—first cut of season Meet at the middle entrance Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Sunday 2nd May 05.30 am — 07.30 am	'The Early Bird' at Forest Farm. £2.50 per person (breakfast roll and drinks) Book in advance, places limited, Tel. 029 2044 5900 Enjoy the dawn chorus with experts there to identify the birdsong.
Saturday 15th May 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 22nd May 10.00—12.00	Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club Age Group 8-12 Woodcraft skills. Donations welcome (phone Park Ranger service for further details 029 2044 5903)
Sunday 23rd May 10.30—12.30 approx	Volunteers Day Activity to be arranged—see website or notice on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd
<i>Wednesday</i> <i>26th May</i> <i>7.00 p.m.</i>	Foods of the Forest. £2.50 per person. Enjoy a pleasant stroll following by a tasting session of Nature's treats. ALL CHILDREN TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT
Saturday 29th May 10.30—12.30	Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group Wildflower and nest box survey Meet at the middle entrance Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Saturday 19th June 10.00—12.30	Monthly Bird walk on the Reserve Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road

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

Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1PP

Tel: 029 2061 4245

Email: Sheila@forestfarm.org.uk