



# FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 76

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## 20th Anniversary edition

Editorial

Sheila Austin

Welcome to a special 'one off' colour edition of your Newsletter—in colour to mark this 20th anniversary year! So we have some looking back—and I am really most grateful to Chris Powell, Hugh Harrison, Joan Trainer and Noel Gale for their articles. Paul, Stella, Hugh, Kevin (must not leave out the WATCH group!) and the Committee have all contributed to what I hope will prove to have something of interest to you all

I have obviously missed out a lot you may be interested in but I will be including other articles from and about the past in our other editions this year. Just let me know of events, memories or if you have any old photos perhaps we can publish.

A colour edition is more expensive, but the Committee have decided members will have one 'free'. Other copies will be available for sale.

With sincere thanks to all Friends old and new and those who have contributed in so many ways which means that we can celebrate 20 years.

Deadline for next edition  
7th August 2010

For contact details, see back page



| CONTENTS                            | Page |                                |    |
|-------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------|----|
| 20 years– Chris Powell              | 2/3  | Dawn Chorus/Conservation Group | 7  |
| Cardiff Conservation Group—20 years | 3    | Membership/Welcome             | 8  |
| Memorise/Membership/Milestones      | 4    | Summer trip—Flat Holm          | 9  |
| Forest Farm/RSPB walks              | 5    | WATCH club/Rubbish             | 10 |
| Reserve News                        | 6    | Wardens' Centre/Events         | 11 |
|                                     |      | Events                         | 12 |



## Section 1: The Past

### *20 years ago – The Birth of ‘The Friends’*

During a recent office move I had occasion to move some original Friends of Forest Farm files that had survived a fire at Heath Park and other major upheavals.

The temptation to start reading through old records is overwhelming and I was immediately drawn back like a Dr Who Time Lord, to those heady days when we launched the Friends group in 1990.

We were quite cautious at the outset and called it a steering group as there was quite a bit of scepticism on whether it would get off the ground or be successful or just simply become another pressure group.

Despite this opposition we decided to press on with support from Phil Jayne from the Caerphilly Mountain Countryside Service and Ann Bryan from the newly formed Cwm Talwg group in Barry



1992 The Reserve (Longwood Rd) How open it looks! note the M4 sign. (Photo Ken Patterson)

I remember the launch meeting which took place in a local church followed by the inaugural meeting in which we selected the first steering committee. Steve Miles put himself forward as Chairman and Dennis Davies secretary. Dennis was experienced as he had recently retired as head of Social Services in Mid Glamorgan and running a Friends group was very small beer in comparison and Steve had lots of get up and go.

Later Ted Edwards replaced Steve as Chairman and he was a wonderful supporter of the group who seemed to possess all the essential qualities as a community leader. Ted was bilingual, had an excellent knowledge of local history and wildlife, particularly of the Glamorganshire Canal. He was often seen around the Reserve fixing things, leading walks and bird spotting. Between them, Ted and Dennis allowed the group flourish to become the largest in Cardiff and possibly in Wales. We also had a lot of support from Chris James who is a very talented and experienced naturalist and offered excellent technical support.

There were some lively campaigns in the early stages and Dennis and his wife played host while we plotted and planned against the Whitchurch Hospital expansion on the meadows or sought to raise funds for the bird hide and the wetlands which gave a much improved interpretative and environmental facility offering much more to the visitor.



Dennis wrote hundreds of letters and was tireless in his pursuit of funds for the Reserve. We improved access for the disabled, created horse routes and worked on the canal. We were led in many of these tasks by Mike Wiley, who was an excellent craftsman / supervisor who took pride in everything he tackled. There were some lively exchanges between Mike and Dennis but this spirit of camaraderie ensured things were completed in a competent lasting manner. The wetlands were particularly difficult as they were constructed over sand and gravel beds and only survived by dint of Mike's careful supervision of machines spreading and puddling the imported clay.



Result! View from the hide

The fact that the Friends group has been so successful is a great testament to those early founders and also an excellent example for those who continue to lead the group today in such a positive and constructive way.

Chris Powell  
Parks Conservation Officer

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

With the Friends of Forest Farm celebrating 20 years, I have been reflecting on the RSPB involvement over the last 15 years. Under Pauline Linck's leadership, the YOC (Phoenix) group approached Cardiff City Council requesting a piece of the Reserve to manage. It was decided that the middle section, Longwood Drive, would be suitable.

One of our major successes was the construction of the sand martin bank on the main Reserve which allowed visitors to view the birds at close quarters over many years. We also during that time received an award from environment Wales which allowed us to carry out another major project, the replacement of steps up a steep embankment at the top end of Longwood Drive. The completion of these steps improved public access to this section of the Reserve, also linking in to the network of paths over the whole Reserve.

The Phoenix group folded a few years ago. Fortunately we had enough interest not only within the RSPB local members group but with others keen to be active in conservation work. Recently, we have created a short section of a new bridleway which we hope to extend in the future.

### **Hugh Harrison**

*(Over many years, Hugh and his fellow workers have carried out and continue to carry out much valued work on the Reserve. The Committee would like to take this opportunity to formally offer their sincere thanks. Editor)*



## Memories – Melingriffith Tin Works

*During WWII the Admiralty took over the Tin works. All ships were stripped to accommodate troops and all items from the ships ended up at the Tin works. Some of the items were new eg. Briefcases, sheets, pillowcases, sheepskin rugs but, as times were hard, many people took the items home.*

*On sunny days, we would build rafts to sail on the canal and I was dared to jump on, which I did and then floated towards the lock, jumping off just in time.*

*Later, my father and husband rented the ground next to Melingriffith Tin Works by the feeder where we raised pigs and chickens. On the rest of the ground, we grew vegetables and had a market garden. We sold the produce to Llandaff North and Whitchurch from a horse and cart.*

*One day Polly the horse ran from the field and fell in the canal. It took us a long time to get her out with a hoist. She was none the worse for her adventure. Mr Perry, who lived at Forest Farm, would sell us mushrooms and rhubarb to sell in our shop at 67 Ty Mawr Road and from the horse and cart. Whilst getting purchases from Forest Farm, our other pony, Snowy, was being driven by my husband Rockie when the train whistle blew, the horse was spooked and bolted, sending Rockie bouncing on the cart floor hanging on desperately to regain control. I was also hanging on being thrown into the brambles on the side of the path. We were exhausted when we finally brought Snowy to a halt.*

Joan Mary Trainer – nee Woodley

### Membership – the last 20 years

There was a modest beginning at the launch in **March 1990—39** members, Spring 1993 saw an increase to **175**, then there was a gradual rise and after 10 years, we had reached **245** members. **Our 'high point' was 2006/7 with 299!** We have managed to maintain the support of members more or less at that level—though we'd like some more!

From Chris Powell's article (on the opposite page) you hear about the tremendous achievements of the Friends, particularly impressive in those early days with the membership comparatively small. They promoted 'The Friends', fought those hard won battles against developments likely to encroach on the Reserve and succeeded in magnificent fund raising for the wetlands—not to mention physical effort with repairs and projects on the Reserve.

It is a testament to what can be achieved with determination and hard work.

**Numbers 1993-4 onwards from Noel Gale Membership Secretary.**



*Some Milestones since March 1990—a credit to the Friends, volunteers and past Committees*

|  |                |
|--|----------------|
| 1st mention of proposal Country Park status                  | Christmas 1991 |
| Disabled access ramp opened                                  | November 1992  |
| Confirmation of Country Park status                          | December 1992  |
| New pond (in front of Conservation centre)                   | March 1993     |
| Fish pass Radyr Weir   | June 1994      |
| Start of fundraising (£35,000!) for construction of wetlands | June 1995      |
| <b>£35,000 raised</b>  | March 1996     |
| Cliff burrows made for sandmartins                           | May 1997       |
| Replacement of burned birdhide                               | November 2004  |
| Website being developed                                      | December 2004  |
| New pond constructed near Wardens Centre                     | Autumn 2007    |
| Orchard started near Wardens Centre                          | December 2007  |



## Section 2: The Present and the Future



### Forest Farm/RSPB Walks Stella Wells

Our winter visitors such as the redwing, fieldfare and bittern have left us only to be replaced by the songsters from lands far away. Chiff chaff and blackcap are filling the air with their song in the hope of finding a mate. The song thrush sits atop a tree pouring out its medley of tunes.



Black cap.

Photo—Helen Davies \*

Despite the mixed weather, our group of intrepid walkers has enjoyed sightings of many different birds, a large rabbit and a fox. Plant life is coming into its own now, the bright colours cheering up a damp day as does the occasional sighting of a butterfly such as the peacock, comma or orange tip.



I love this manic time of year. As we move from February through to April, the crescendo of birdsong increases, plants burst into flower and as they die away, they are replaced by other species. Celandines, primroses and violets are now becoming a distant memory and the blue bells, wild garlic and campions vie for our attention.

Wild garlic by the canal

In March, we were sitting, standing or kneeling in one of the hides, we looked at the pond and the surface was alive with frogs. We must have been there during their annual courting ritual.

As the trees come into leaf it is becoming more difficult to see the birds but I think we are improving our song recognition skills as the months go by. Now I thought that I was pretty good at recognising birds but it just goes to show that even those of us who have been 'birding' for many a year, we sometimes make mistakes. High up in a tree we saw a somewhat bedraggled bird and I was convinced that it was a great spotted woodpecker. Suddenly it moved and turned into a magpie. How did it do that!!?



Greater spotted woodpecker—  
Photo Raymond King\*

On our last walk we enjoyed beautiful sunshine. I hope that will be the case next month. The only thing missing at the end of the walk was a lovely hot bacon and egg roll, just like the one I enjoyed so much after the dawn chorus walk.



## Forest Farm Reserve News

Work continues apace at the Wardens Centre and the new kitchen and toilets are nearing completion. The next phase will be provision of a tool cupboard and storage areas plus new windows on the western side, also a new floor covering.

Our first event at the Centre was to hear the dawn chorus. It was well attended with about 20 people turning up at 5.30 a.m. for a slightly damp guided walk. A good variety of birdsong was heard including nut-hatch, greater spotted woodpecker, song thrush, reed warbler and black cap.



Reed warbler



Nuthatch Photo taken by Steven Burnett \*

The hedgerows and trees are coming into full leaf and the ponds are alive with young tadpoles, larvae and newts.

Seeing and hearing the birds reminded me of an incident that happened to me around this time of year when I was in my early teens. Whilst walking through woodland in the Llanthony Valley, I noticed a young owl chick on the ground (recently fledged I think). My first instinct was to approach it and put it higher up out of harm's way. As I did so, a rush of

wings above my head scared the living daylights out of me and I ran. The parent tawny owl had narrowly missed me and I think I ran a good 50 yards before realising that the tawny owl had taken an obvious dislike to my actions! The parent bird had obviously succeeded in protecting the chick and, with hindsight, I believe I was lucky not to have been seriously hurt.

*Paul Davies*  
Countryside Warden

Please note:

Photos with an asterisk \* after the name come from the Friends of Forest Farm website picture gallery.

Regular visitors to the Reserve will have noticed that Ted Edwards has not been around for a while. Close friends will already know this is because he has been in hospital for quite a while, though now discharged. We send our very best wishes to Ted and his family.



## The Dawn Chorus

Although being able to identify the most popular birds, I have never been able to identify birds by their song apart from the blackbird, chiff chaff and robin.

Taking advantage of the Bank Holiday weekend, I decided to attend the Dawn Chorus event organised by the Councils Park Ranger Service (Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May). Arriving at the Wardens Centre at 5:25 I met twenty other like minded people ready for an early morning tour of the Reserve.

The four experts from the Parks Rangers were Gareth, Alec, Raj and Nicola, Gareth assisted by Alec took us on a tour of the Reserve. Within the first one hundred yards we were shown the difference between five different species. Always taking advantage of expert knowledge, we were advised by Gareth that if you cannot identify the bird song, it's probably a great tit. We did not cover a great distance but experienced the song of many different species with excellent views of a nuthatch and green woodpecker.

Returning to the Wardens Centre, we were greeted with the smell of freshly cooked bacon, eggs and coffee which Nicola and Raj had been preparing. This was the first event where the new facilities at the wardens centre were used. Everyone agreed that project managed by Duncan Hockridge and others would be a major asset to visitors to the Reserve.

The Park Rangers have already been able to book groups to visit the Reserve and use the new facilities and it is excellent way to celebrate the Friends of Forest Farm 20th anniversary.

Martin Chamberlain

### Cardiff and District RSPB group Conservation Group

Unfortunately, the litter pick at Longwood Drive had to be cancelled. I was unable to organise the litter pick and the Warden was on leave. So, during our April visit, the main task was Japanese Knotweed cut plus a litter pick. The group split in two; not a great deal of growth on the knotweed though that is not to say we won't have a flush of growth later on. The morning litter pick filled roughly 6 large bags of rubbish. This time of year the north bank looks splendid with a splash of wood anemones ... reward for our work.

We also welcomed a new member to the group, we always need extra helpers.

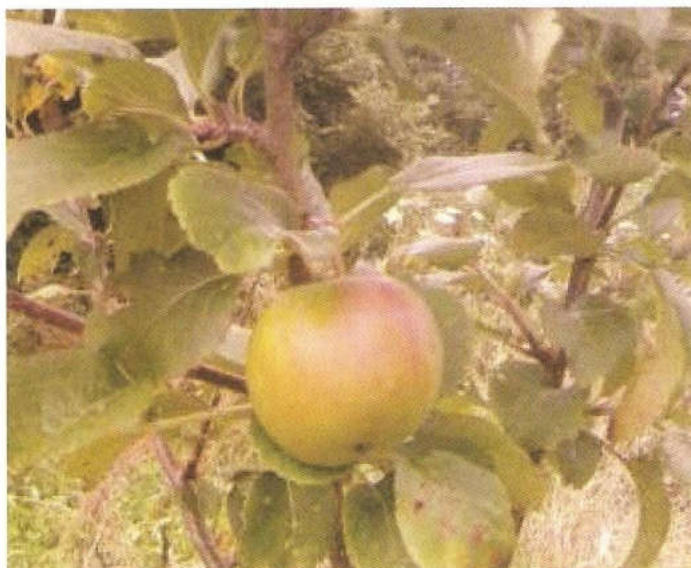
-----  
**Conservation work**—meet at Forest Farm Longwood Drive Whitchurch

**Saturday June 26th**  
**10.00—12.30**

Balsam and second cut of Knotweed  
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**



First apple in the new orchard 2009

### **Membership**

*The final membership figure for the past year was 280 families and 2 groups, a little down on the previous year but nevertheless very encouraging. Thank you for all your continued support.*

*During the year we welcomed 24 new families, however this was offset by 34 not renewing. Currently 153 families and 1 group have renewed their membership for 2010/2011.*

*For those whose mind it has slipped, or who have mislaid their renewal form, I have arranged for another renewal slip to be included with this quarter's newsletter. Those receiving the newsletter by email can send their subscription direct to me.*

*We have kept the annual subscription at **£5** for individuals, families and groups.*

*Noel Gale  
8 Heath Park Drive  
Cardiff  
CF14 3QH*

### **Welcome...**

to the Committee!

Following the AGM, we are delighted to have 2 new and 1 potential new member volunteer to join us on your Committee.

Firstly Chris James, a very well known and expert member who has been involved with 'The Friends' since the beginning.

Secondly Matthew Locke who has taken over responsibility for our website.

Last but not least, Pauline Fisher has offered to come along to our meetings to see what goes on...

We are delighted to welcome them and look forward to working together .

John Harding  
Chairman



Blossom, May 2010, on one of the 52 trees now in the orchard



## **Summer Outing**

### **Guided Visit - Flat Holm Island**

**Date:** Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> July 2010.  
**Meet At:** 14.15 at the Channel View Leisure Centre, Jim Driscoll Way, Grangetown, Cardiff, CF11 7HB.  
**Times:** The Lewis Alexander boat departs 14.45 (Usually 3 hours on the island) The boat arrives back at 20.15.  
**Cost:** £16.50 for adults, £8 for children (4-17 years); a family ticket (2 adults, 2 children) is £41.50.

At the start of the visit we shall be sailing down a short length of the River Taff into the main water area of Cardiff Bay then across the bay into the lock of the barrage. This is interesting if you have never used the lock before; from that level you can see how the mechanics of the lock work so as to take the boat to the sea level beyond. There will then be a 40 min. trip across to the island where the boat will land on the beach alongside the pier.

We shall then have a 10 minute walk across to the former Victorian barracks, now the Visitor Centre. Here we will be given a short introductory talk by our guide. After a short snack and comfort break we will be split up into smaller groups and commence our guided walk around the island which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. There will be many things to see and in particular the numerous adult and young Lesser Black Backed Gulls and Herring Gulls. **Please remember to bring your hats!** The two halves of the island are managed separately: one half is preserved for the ground nesting birds whose activities enrich the soil and encourage plant growth: the other is kept relatively bird free to preserve the maritime grass species.

We shall also be shown the Victorian canons and the remains of the defences built between 1865-1869 and also the re-fortification works carried out after 1940 when 350 soldiers were stationed on the island.

If you would like to read more about Flat Holm before the visit I can recommend the book published by Wincanton Press which is available from your library. Also, I have leaflets giving full details about the island if you wish to have a copy.

**To book please telephone me as soon as possible so that I can reserve your place.** The boat is limited to 45 passengers so bookings will be on a first come, first served basis.

Although Fairtrade snacks and drinks can be purchased on the island you are recommended to bring your own food for tea.

If anyone requires a car lift or can give a lift please let me know when you speak to me. Should you have a mobility problem please be aware that there are 20 steps to get from the island's pier, up to the general level of the island, otherwise walking around the island is generally on a flat grade.

For any enquiries about the island, phone the project office on Cardiff 20353917.  
**Duncan Hockridge. Cardiff 20626111 or email [duncan3@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:duncan3@hotmail.co.uk)**





## Forest Farm Wildlife WATCH club

The Forest Farm Wildlife WATCH club has been running for a number of years now, giving children the opportunity to study nature in a safe and friendly environment.

WATCH club members are very lucky to be based at Forest Farm where a wealth of wildlife is at hand to study and appreciate compared too many inner city areas, and the beauty of the site is that it can be easily accessed from the railway station at Raddyr. Past activities have included making Autumn leaf mobiles through to surveying small mammal populations, with occasional visits to coastal areas for rock pooling and sand art. There has even been a visit to the life boat station at Penarth for a talk and demonstration from the RNLI!



If you have children who are interested in wildlife and would like to attend, all activities and dates are posted on the notice board attached to the Warden Centre at Forest Farm and are advertised in the Park Events and Guided Walks leaflet. This leaflet can also be downloaded at [WWW. Cardiff.gov.uk](http://WWW.Cardiff.gov.uk) following the links to guided walks and events programme. Alternatively you can contact the Ranger Service on 02920 445 903 for a WATCH programme.



Look out for our 'new' website - [www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk)

## WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH!



Just a few of the **50+ rubbish bags** collected on the Litter Pick. April 2010 Longwood Drive

I am not sure it is because I spend more time walking the streets (I now have a dog) or because of the hard winter that killed the vegetation but there seems to be more litter around than in previous years.

Longwood Drive has always been a problem area with litter due to its close proximity to a supermarket and fast food restaurant.

Over two week ends volunteers including three helpers from the local Mac Donalds restaurant removed over fifty large bags of litter and other assorted rubbish.

We have contacted our local councillors who have asked for the council to regularly clean this area. Hopefully, this may help reduce the volume of litter which whilst unsightly is also a danger to wildlife but I am at a loss for what else we can do with the people concerned who have no respect for our Reserve.

Martin Chamberlain



## Our latest project—the Wardens' Centre

'Friends' will be aware of our involvement in the upgrading of the Wardens Centre on Forest Farm Road. Apart from what has been its primary function as a base for the Countryside Wardens, it is frequently a meeting point for our activities— walks, volunteering etc. Foods of the Forest events use it and it is the base for the WATCH club. Since the new pond was constructed, it has also been the focus for visiting parties, such as schoolchildren for pond dipping. Duncan Hockridge has project managed this upgrading and it has gone fantastically well, due to organisation, communication many hours given to the project. It is almost finished. There will be an official opening but we plan to an open day in September so that you can all visit!! We will be giving a full report in the next edition

I am very happy to publish this email (see below) from Chris Powell to show the measure of appreciation to the Friends and Duncan in particular. Editor

I would like the Friends to be aware of what has been achieved and how pleased we are with the result. This is wonderful example of a Council / Friends partnership that is working for the benefit of the whole community and provides a lasting legacy to those who will use the centre in the years to come.

I really feel that at last we are making real progress in providing appropriate visitor facilities and are providing a building that we can take some pride in. A lot of this is due to the Friends and in particular down to Duncan for his vision and involvement.

Chris Powell  
Parks Conservation Officer

## EVENTS JUNE – SEPTEMBER 2010

|                     |               |   |
|---------------------|---------------|---|
| Saturday<br>19 June | 10-12.30      | <b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch  |
| Sunday<br>20 June   | 10.30 - 12.30 | <b>Volunteers Day</b><br>'Alien species'<br>Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch  |
| Saturday<br>26 June | 10.30-12.30   | <b>Cardiff Conservation Group</b><br>Meet Longwood Drive Whitchurch Middle section<br>Balsam and knotweed second cut  |
| Saturday<br>26 June | 10.00-12.00   | <b>Wildlife Watch Club for children 8-12 years. Big Bug Hunt</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Phone the Park Ranger Service on 029 2044 5903 for further details. <b>DONATIONS WELCOME</b> |
| Sunday<br>27 June   | 10.00-12.00   | <b>History of Forest Farm Country Park</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.<br>Led by the Countryside Wardens of Forest Farm. <b>FREE</b>  |



## EVENTS June - September 2010 cont'd

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Wednesday</b><br>30 June 14.00-16.00       | <b>Alien animals and plants of Forest Farm Country Park</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch<br>Join the wardens for an easy walk around the reserve looking for alien species that have been introduced to the British isles from all parts of the world. <b>FREE</b>  |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>3 July                     | <b>Rhiwbina Festival</b><br>Friends of Forest Farm hope to have a stand there. Come and support us.   |
| <b>Sunday</b><br>4 July 10.00-12.00           | <b>Discover dragons at Forest Farm</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch<br>Join the Park Ranger Service to discover and learn about the incredible lifecycles of dragonflies and damselflies. Then have a go a pond dipping in the new Forest Farm pond. Finally, back to the Warden's Centre for some art activities. <b>FREE. ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.</b> |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>10 July                    | <b>Whitchurch Festival</b><br>Friends of Forest Farm hope to have a stand there. Come and support us.   |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>17 July 10.00-12.30        | <b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch  |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>24 July 14.15-20.15        | <b>Summer outing to Flat Holm</b><br>Meet at the Channel View Leisure Centre, Jim Driscoll Way, Grangetown, Cardiff, CF11 7HB at 14.15. (See p for details)   |
| <i>Saturday</i><br><i>24 July 10.00-12.00</i> | <i><b>Wildlife Watch Club for children 8-12 years. Activity To Be Confirmed</b></i><br><i>Led by the Park Ranger Service at Forest Farm. Please phone the Park Ranger Service on 029 2044 5903 for further details.</i>   |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>14 Aug 10.00-12.30         | <b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road Whitchurch   |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>4 Sept 18.00 hrs           | <b>Food of the Forest</b><br>Meet by the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.<br>The Park Ranger Service will take you on a pleasant stroll around Forest Farm Country Park. Discover the tasty treats Mother Nature has in store at this time of year, then taste some delicious delicacies. <b>£2.50 per person</b><br><b>ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.</b>                      |
| <b>Sunday</b><br>12 Sept 10.00-12.00          | <b>Spiders, bugs and creepy crawlies</b><br>Meet at the Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.<br>Join the wardens in their search for a variety of insects that can be found throughout the Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve and the surrounding fields, woodland and scrub. <b>FREE</b>   |
| <b>Saturday</b><br>18 Sept 10.00-12.30        | <b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b><br>Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch  |
| <i>Saturday</i><br><i>25 Sept 10.00-12.00</i> | <i><b>Wildlife Watch Club for children 8-12 years. Activity To Be Confirmed</b></i><br><i>Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch.</i><br><i>Please phone the Park Ranger Service on 029 2044 5903 for further details.</i>  |

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