



# FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 77

SEPTEMBER 2010

## Editorial

*Hello everyone— and an especially warm welcome to new members. In this edition we have given quite a bit of space to the Wardens Centre upgrade but I hope you agree, with some justification. It has been a major project with which the Friends have been involved to mark our 20th year and is in keeping with one of the objectives of our Constitution 'to promote the Nature Reserve for the observation and study of flora and fauna in their natural habitat'.*

*I read the article from Chris James on changes in the biodiversity and the future at Forest Farm with great interest; it gives us a lot to think about.. I am very grateful to him for that and to Dr Mary Gillham who has also contributed a short report on the 'Friend' summer trip to Flat Holm( short at my request—sorry to have deprived you!) Duncan Hockridge deserves a special mention too for his 'overview' of the Wardens Centre project.*

*Can I also draw your attention to John Harding's update on our 'harvest' from the orchard. If you come along on 19th September you can see that, the pond and the Wardens' Centre! As Autumn approaches, we start our evening talks and there are volunteering opportunities too. No time to be bored! Best wishes.*

*Sheila Austin*

Deadline for articles for next newsletter  
**8th November**

See back for contact details

CONTENTS	Page
Warden's Report	2
50 years of change at Forest Farm and its future	3-4
Membership	4
RSPB walk/Opening of Wardens centre	5-6
Friends Visit to Flat Holm	7
Wardens Centre Project	8-10
The orchard	10 -11
Events	11 -12

Invitation  
Sunday 19th September  
2-4p.m.

Come along and see the new facilities at the Wardens' Centre, the new 'listening post'.

Look around the orchard and read about the traditional varieties of fruit trees planted.

See how the pond has developed.

Hot and cold drinks and nibbles will be provided.



## Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies  
Countryside Warden

After a long dry spell, we have been fortunate to have some rainfall in the last few days which has helped green up the fields and vegetation. The orchard pond is still very low and will now need several more days rain to top it up.

The official opening of the upgraded Wardens' Centre went well despite the lack of headmasters attending! But thanks to all who came to the talk, walk and buffet. We have installed a 'listening post' (identification of birdsong—see below, left) at the rear of the building; the next phase will include laying a wheelchair/disabled access from the road to the dipping platform.

There have been several reports of mink on the Reserve and due to their impact on wildlife in the area, I will be liaising with the Environment Agency to look into ways of controlling them. They cause a lot of damage to local fish and bird populations.

In the early dry spell, the feeder water supply from the Taff reduced to a trickle and as a result, many fish were starting to struggle due to de-oxygenation. After contacting the Environment Agency, I was glad to see them arrive soon after to 'electro-fish' several pools and transfer almost 200 fish into the Taff. 'Electro-fishing' involves passing an electric current through the water to temporarily stun the fish long enough to transfer them into containers. It was reported in the Western Mail that almost 2,000 fish had been moved. A lot of these were very small. Species caught included brown trout, roach, minnow and grayling. A big thank you to the Environment Agency staff for reacting so promptly.

And finally just to let you know, the new face at the Wardens Centre is Paul Pinnell who started work on the Reserve about 7 weeks ago.



*(Headmasters of local schools were invited to the opening. One of the aims of the improvements to the Wardens' Centre is to have facilities available for visiting parties; some schoolchildren have already been pond dipping. Ed)*

You can *just* see Martin Chamberlain, centre, back of picture, bending to wind up the listening post.

Rhiwbina and Whitchurch Festivals—it was lovely to meet 'old' members here in July and a very warm welcome to those who joined us to become new 'Friends'



## *50 years of changes at Forest Farm - and its Future*

Fifty years ago Forest Farm was a working farm surrounded by other farms and brown-field sites (the former Melingriffith tinplate works site, GKN bumper bar factory and British Rail's Radyr sidings). These were sites rich in wildlife with a variety of habitats. Many changes have taken place to the surrounding area since the Reserve was set up in 1967: the construction of the M4 and the A470, Forest Farm Industrial Estate, housing at Radyr, Tongwynlais and Morganstown and the development of the Coryton interchange with hotels and Asda. In addition, there has been significant infill development in the already urbanised areas of pre 1950s housing, including house extensions paving and tarmacing of gardens and lanes with a consequent increase in road water run-off. Such changes have resulted in loss of wildlife, reducing the number of insects and other invertebrates which provide food for higher profile species such as birds and mammals.

The national decline in pollinating insects (such as bees) has had an effect on agriculture, since we have lost many natural predators of pests. It is, therefore, in our interest to preserve our wild spaces and improve the diversity by creating more habitats. This will enable wildlife communities to be established which will benefit both urban and rural environments. The loss of biodiversity comes at a great cost to agriculture through increased use of pesticides and herbicides, which often kill off beneficial species.

The encroachment of housing into rural areas obviously causes loss of habitat; also the use of garden herbicides and insecticides and an increased number of domestic cats have a detrimental affect. Road water run-off affects the quality of our streams and rivers. The water quality in the canal has deteriorated over the years and species such as the fresh water sponge is now locally extinct. There have been at least two incidents of pollution: one involving engine oil tipped down a drain in Coryton and another when diesel oil was spilled into the stream feeding the canal at Tongwynlais.

The changes we have seen in our Reserve mirror those seen nationally. For example, in the last couple of decades, we have witnessed drastic falls in the numbers of house sparrow, starling and song thrush. In spring, we no longer hear cuckoos at the top end of Hailey Park or on the Reserve; also they no longer breed in the area.

Despite these changes and the effects of climate change, all is not lost. Since its inception in 1967, projects at Forest Farm to improve diversity have been undertaken. Four wetland areas have been set up, woodland areas created, several kilometres of hedgerow planted, wildflower meadows created, an orchard and a wild bird seed area planted. All of these projects have resulted in an increase in animals and plants recorded at the site. The wetland areas in particular have provided habitat for over-wintering water birds such as water rail, snipe and last winter a very rare bird in Britain, the bittern. In summertime,



reed warblers and numerous dragonflies breed on site, many of which are new to the site. These species are high profile and act as indicators of the improving health of the area.

Sadly we have lost some species like the kestrel which bred locally until the development of the neighbouring BT site. However, otter sightings have been made on the Taff near Radyr. Both of these changes reflect national trends and I hopefully predict that we shall hear reports of red kite flying over the Reserve in the next few years.

During its first forty years as a Local Nature Reserve, Forest Farm has been a great success due to active support from both the Council and the public represented by organisations such as Cardiff Naturalists, Friends of Forest Farm, RSPB, WATCH and BTCV. However, this success is dependent upon the enthusiasm and commitment of the Reserve's supporters.

The existing habitats require regular management otherwise the ponds would overgrow, meadows would soon become bramble thickets and the woodlands would eventually be taken over by sycamore, an introduced species which does not support as much wildlife as native species. It is essential that regular planned management is continued and modified to increase diversity wherever possible. These tasks are labour intensive and it will be extremely important to continue to involve voluntary groups such as the Friends and the BTCV in this process

As the Council is under considerable pressure to reduce costs, we must commit to seeking effective ways of maintaining and improving the area for the benefit of the community. Forest Farm is a very valuable amenity for the City. We and other citizens have responsibility as caretakers of this precious site and must ensure its future for following generations.

**Chris James**  
**August 2010.**

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Our current Membership stands at 230 Families plus 1 Group. This is a little disappointing. Quite a number of our members have not yet renewed especially those receiving their Newsletters via e-mail. Hopefully the position will improve and we will soon reach our last years Membership of 279.

Thanks go to those who have renewed - for your continued support, and to those of you who have sent me extra over and above the £5 annual subscription which helps to boost our funds. Last, but by no means least, thanks to the volunteers who distribute the newsletters to you all.

Noel Gale (029 20915665)

## **Don't forget!!**

Our series of evening talks starts in November.

### **Venue:**

We are back at the new Community Centre, Ty'n y Pwll Road, Whitchurch.

### **Speaker:**

Mr Desmond Woods on the **National Botanic Garden of Wales.**

### **Date and Time:**

Wednesday 17th November at 7.30 p.m.



## Forest Farm/RSPB Walk May—July 2010



Early summer was a good time for spotting birds on the Reserve, presumably because the adults were busy looking for food for their ever hungry chicks. We were lucky enough to see at least two treecreepers - stunning little birds, secretive and silent as they climb up the tree trunk probing the bark for food. Great spotted woodpeckers seemed to be everywhere and I still live in hope of seeing a lesser spotted woodpecker (or, as I call it, the never spotted) which I am told, is present on the Reserve.



Overworked blue, great and long-tailed tits foraged for insects; chaffinch, black caps and dun-nock were also taking advantage of the abundance of food. Pied and grey wagtails were spotted on the river banks as were the herons. We also caught a glimpse of the elusive kingfisher. A beautiful, fluffy young jay sat high up on a branch, keeping a close eye on us as we walked past.



Of course, we were also blessed with the sight of the many flowers that bloom at this time of year. The colour of blue forget-me-nots, bluebells, speedwell and alkanet contrasted with the yellow of Welsh poppies, cowslips and lingering celandines, interspersed with the wonderful pink of campions. The pretty and pungent wild garlic was seen here and there but will soon be gone, releasing the appetising smell of garlic as it fades away.

As summer progresses there are more and more flowers to see, such as yellow loosestrife and meadow sweet. I love the scent of this flower. Where it grows in profusion the smell of aniseed and liquorice seems to float on the breeze. July brings a new perfume to the air as the wild clematis or old man's beard comes into flower. I'm sure that scent could be bottled!



Yellow loosestrife

The canal was a joy to walk along as we were entertained by mallard ducklings taking a breather on the fallen tree, or grappling with the art of swimming through vegetation walking on top of the lily pads. There were some fluffy black moorhen chicks, swimming around, never still. Thankfully there was no sight of the dreaded mink.

It's the beginning of August now and already nature is slowing down, losing



that manic quality when everything is racing against time to go forth and multiply. The atmosphere is more calm and, if we give ourselves the opportunity, we can absorb this feeling of serenity as we walk around the Reserve, recharging our batteries and soothing our souls.

Stella Wells



On the August RSPB walk with Stella.

Why not come and join us? Its held on the 3rd Saturday monthly. Meet at 10.00 at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch

## Opening of the Wardens Centre

The improvements to the Wardens Centre and the surrounding area have happened as a result of obtaining funding from various sources

Our local Councillors have been closely involved in supporting our plans and the development. It was therefore important to show them what has been achieved as a result of their support.

The official opening was held on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> July. We were delighted that Jonathan Morgan AM, and local councillors Linda Morgan and Mike Jones-Pritchard were able to accept our invitation to attend.

Duncan Hockridge gave a presentation on the project and showed everyone round and I conducted a tour of the pond area and the orchard. We discussed our future plans to develop the area for educational purposes.

Our Councillors, who are also Governors of local schools, agreed that developing the educational aspect of the Reserve was an excellent way to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Martin Chamberlain  
Secretary





## **'FRIENDS' VISIT TO FLAT HOLM ISLAND**

When the 'Lewis Alexander' drew into the quay at Penarth to await the opening of the great sea lock, we were entertained by a furry mink. It skipped from rock to rock onshore and swam around to return, dragging a dead fish longer than itself. When we re-boarded, it was being hunted by a tortoiseshell cat, which hadn't a hope on that labyrinth of narrow crevices. What a time her sleek black quarry might have had among the hundreds of undersized, day feeding rabbits infesting every part of the island!

Half of Flat Holm was allocated to the four thousand pairs of lesser black-backed gulls, which had had a successful season, resulting in some 16,000 birds contributing to the general gullabaloo. Streaky brown youngsters were full sized but not yet flying, so there was no dive bombing by protective parents. The mallard duck on the little pond had a one-day-old duckling in tow. "There were five this morning" said the Warden. The predatory gulls have taken them all for many years, but the salt sea all round has deterred the unsuccessful parents from seeking fresh water elsewhere.

The herring gull flocks loitered mainly around the shore: the pair of greater black backs lorded it over the central pinnacle of Castle Rock. The outermost pinnacle, away from the gnawing incisors of rabbits and sheep, was crowned with flowering tree mallow.

Most colour was provided by ragwort, weld and thistles, with scarlet spikes of wild arum berries under the elders. The hoped for 'limestone grassland', from which the trampling, defaecating gulls have been excluded, was a desiccated yellow waste of creepers and tiny rosettes, sprinkled with tufts of poisonous foetid Iris and areas of depauperate bracken. That tired, 'end of summer' look had been brought forward by a couple of months intense biotic pressure.

Dr Mary E Gillham

Group photo taken at  
Flat Holm July 2010

Duncan is happy to email you a copy of this photo. Email him at [duncan3@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:duncan3@hotmail.co.uk) Alternatively, if you want a print of the photo he will do one for you and post it. There will be a charge of £1. Telephone 02920 626111.





## Forest Farm Wardens' Centre - The Project

As far back as last September, in our newsletter issue 73, we were able to give you the first indications that it was the intention to proceed with the project management of the proposed improvements at the Centre. This was to be a key part of our 20th year anniversary celebrations. Since then in each subsequent newsletter you have had regular updates on the progress of this project. Then, I was able to tell you that it was hoped that the building works were to be started in the middle of March.



Work in progress started March 2010

Well here we are in September 2010 and I am pleased to tell you that **all** the works have been completed **on time** and **to budget**. We are to have an **OPEN DAY** at the Centre on 19th September (see further details about this elsewhere in this newsletter). This means that you will be able to come along and see what has been achieved. I hope that everyone will be as delighted as I am with the result.

So what has been achieved?

1. The existing single wardens' toilet has been extended to provide a fully fitted Gents toilet complete with new hand washing facilities.
2. A new toilet has been provided for disabled persons and Ladies.
3. A new kitchen has been provided complete with an electric oven and fridge with both a washing up sink and a separate hand washing sink.
4. Tiling has been provided along the full length of new worktop surfaces and sinks.
5. The existing wardens' office has had (a) new vertical window blinds provided for security and (b) the previous untidy electrical cabling and meter boxes have been enclosed in a new fitted timber unit.
6. All the floors in the above four rooms have been provided with new non-slip safety vinyl flooring.
7. All the windows on the right hand side of the Centre have now been replaced with white UPVC double glazed units.
8. A set of three large storage cupboards have been built across the full width of the Centre at the end furthest from the entrance doorway.
9. Along the top of the newly constructed works an attractive painted frieze has been provided.
10. The total area of flooring within the Centre, outside the new areas of construction, have been re-levelled and painted with a mid-gloss, hard wearing easy to clean grey industrial quality concrete floor paint.



11. The main outside double doors have been rubbed down and sealed with a waterproof stain.
12. All the other windows in the Centre have had both the inside and outside surfaces fully cleaned.
13. The front wall of the Centre has had all the dirt and lichen removed.
14. All newly constructed works have had both inside and outside walling painted in a hard wearing cream finish.



Once these works had been completed, we were delighted that our AM and local Councillors accepted our invitation to come along and see the result.

The photograph shows everyone enjoying the hospitality we were pleased to provide.

Afterwards we had many calls and letters of thanks and congratulations. It must be said that throughout the life of these works from both the pre-planning and construction stage, our Councillors have given us total support particularly regarding the funding, for which we must thank them.

Furthermore as this was a joint Council/ Friends project I have to also give my thanks to the Officers of both the Council, particularly Mr. Chris Powell, and Environment Wales for being so helpful and encouraging during the project.

Could I also pay tribute to the way in which all the Wardens at the Centre, particularly Paul Davies, have put up with all the mess and noise AND me within their work space for the eight weeks we were all on site. I even had a few cups of tea offered to me but no Earl Grey!

Finally, tribute must be paid to our contractor Mr Peter Bricknell and his team of dedicated tradesmen. They all gave a 100% commitment which one can appreciate from seeing the result. My regular early morning site meetings were a meeting of friends.



We all wanted one result; a Centre everyone would be proud of for people to see and visit and, may then become themselves Friends of Forest Farm. Let us not forget that this project only started when the Friends approved and decided to spend nearly £1000 of its own money to fund the original plan preparation and the submission for Planning Permission.

So we are now open for business. The facilities are here to be used. With all the publicity that is being arranged about the improved facilities we are hoping that many other groups and particularly school parties will visit the Reserve and see what we have to offer including our new pond and orchard. I am sure that over the coming years there will be other projects to be carried out around the Centre and Local Reserve, so let us look on this project as just the first of many things to come.

Let me say that whilst it was a fairly busy eight weeks for everyone, I have enjoyed it and I was able to speak to many people who were walking past outside the Centre. They all made positive comments when they came inside to see what was going on - and in particular thought that the new toilet facilities were going to be a real bonus!

**Duncan Hockridge**

## *The Orchard*

### *August 2010*

Things are looking good this year despite the very dry spell we have had. Last year we had only one apple on B6\* Lord Lambourne this year there were 6 apples. The rest of our apple crop was as follows:

<b>Fruit</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Fruit</b>	<b>No.</b>
Lord Lambourne apple - B1	4	Louise Bonne Pear - E6	13
Pitmaston Pineapple apple - B3	1	Pig yr Wydd cooking apples - F2	8
St Cecilia apple - B5	2	Beth Pear - F4	12
Bakers Delicious apple - D2	4	Sunset - F6	5
Rosemary Russet apple - D3	2	Merryweather damsons - I4	3
Bardsey apple - D4	5		

Hopefully we will purchase some stakes for the **28th November - our tree planting and volunteering day**, as only one tree has been staked so far, some of the others will need supporting.



On **Sunday 19th September, our 'Open Day'**, I shall bring as much information about the orchard and print some copies of the position and names of the trees.

To those who have adopted a tree, I will try and put together some photos and information and either send or e-mail it to you, I apologise for not having done this already. "Where does the time go?"

(\* The codes relate to where and when the trees were planted in the orchard.)

**John Harding (Chairman)**

### **Bird Feed**

*Please don't forget the bird feed this winter.  
Any donations will be gratefully received*

## **Events - Sept to Dec 2010**

Saturday 4 September 18.00 hrs	<b>Food of the Forest</b> Meet by the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch. 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> <b>ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.</b>
Sunday 12 September 10.00 -12.00	<b>Spiders, bugs and creepy crawlies</b> Meet at the Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch. 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>
Saturday 18th September 10.00 -12.30	<b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Sunday 19th September 14.00—16.00	<b>Open Afternoon - Wardens Centre</b> Come and see the new facilities at the centre, the pond and the orchard. Hot and cold drinks and nibbles available.
Saturday 25 September 10.00 -12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club – Autumn Photography Workshop.</b> <i>Learn how to get the best from your camera. Our very own experts will be at hand to give you all the guidance you need. Please bring your own camera.</i> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth 02920 445 903, email: <a href="mailto:communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk">communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk</a> .
Saturday 25th Sept 10.30—12.30	<b>Cardiff Conservation Group.</b> Join other volunteers for some conservation work Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive Whitchurch



## Events - Sept to Dec 2010 cont'd

<b>Sunday</b> 26th September 10.30—12.30	<b>'Friends' Volunteers Day</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road for some conservation work on the Reserve
<b>Saturday</b> 16th October 10.00 -12.30	<b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
<b>Saturday</b> 23 October 10.00 -12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club – Halloween Art.</b> <i>Create your own ghoulish art for the Halloween season.</i> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 02920 445 903; email: <a href="mailto:communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk">communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk</a> .
<b>Saturday</b> 30 October 10.30—12.30	<b>Cardiff Conservation Group</b> Join other volunteers for some conservation work Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive Whitchurch
<b>Sunday</b> 31st October 10.30—12.30	<b>'Friends' Volunteers Day</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road for some conservation work on the Reserve
<b>Wednesday</b> 17th November 19.30 hrs	<b>Evening Talk at Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Rd Whitchurch</b> Mr Desmond Woods The National Botanic Garden of Wales
<b>Saturday</b> 20th November 10.00 -12.30	<b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
<b>Saturday</b> 20th November 10.00 -12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club – Wildlife detective.</b> <i>Look at animal tracks and signs. Discover what an owl has eaten and recognise different animal droppings.</i> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 02920 445 903; email: <a href="mailto:communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk">communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk</a> .
<b>Saturday</b> 27th November 10.30—12.30	<b>Cardiff Conservation Group</b> Join other volunteers for some conservation work Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive Whitchurch
<b>Sunday</b> 28th November 10.30—12.30	<b>Tree planting</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
<b>Saturday</b> 18th December 10.00 -12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club – Xmas Party !!</b> <i>Celebrate the festive season. Make Christmas decorations There is music, games and a bite to eat .</i> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 02920 445 903; email: <a href="mailto:communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk">communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk</a> .
<b>Saturday</b> 18th December 10.00 -12.30	<b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch

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