

# FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 78

DECEMBER 2010

## WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT

As long standing members are aware, the development of the Hospital Meadows has been hanging over the Reserve since the mid 1990's. We received a letter from Cardiff and Vale University Health Board within the last three years advising that they had no plans for housing and the land would be kept for health purposes. Whilst this was not ideal, it would have not caused the level of environmental damage if a housing development was implemented.

Members may have noticed in the local press that the Board have changed their plans for the site. At the time of writing this article, the future of Mental Health Services is open for public consultation. Following this announcement, we requested a meeting with representatives of the senior management to discuss their plans and our continued concern as this has implications for the future of the site.

Whilst the final details will not be finalised until the end of the public consultation period\*\*, it would appear from our meeting that our worst fears will be realised. As things stand, a significant housing development will be built next to the Reserve. We have been told that this part of the Board's land has been identified as surplus to their requirements. (The fields we are most concerned about are in the Hollybush area across the road from Coryton station, towards ASDA.) They have existing planning consent and will be requesting that this timescale is extended into the future. The environmental damage that this will cause to this Reserve is obvious to anyone.

The timescales for starting these developments are unlikely to be imminent with the present economic conditions however the future plans for the Reserve and wide biodiversity in the longer term are now in doubt.

The Committee will be contacting our local representatives; AM, MP, Councillors and the Cardiff County Council Planning Department **to inform them of our opposition to the planned housing development which will cause damage to the Reserve and the loss of an important protective zone which is also a valuable countryside amenity within the City.**

*We would urge you to also contact your local representatives as soon as possible to express your concerns on an individual basis.*

Martin Chamberlain  
Secretary - Friends of Forest Farm

**\*\*Public consultation started on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2010 and lasts for 6 weeks until 17<sup>th</sup> December. The Board is expected to make a decision in January 2011.**



### Editorial

You will have noticed that I have changed the front page this time to highlight the Committee's concern about the Whitchurch Hospital development, which I am sure many of you will share. So much has been achieved by past and current members of the 'Friends' in the last 20 years. We must do what we can to protect and preserve this habitat both for that past commitment and perhaps more importantly for the future. The continuing and increasing interest and value of the Reserve is surely shown by the number and range of ages on the monthly bird walks has grown. Please make your voices heard. Remember, by the time you read this, the timescale for the consultation is very short.

Thinking of the commitment of previous members, I have included a short tribute to Ken Patterson, your former Editor, who died in October 2010. (See page 6)

This edition has contributions from Ron Davies, about the state of the bird hides, Norman Thomas with a lovely descriptive piece about an autumnal visit to the Reserve and a plea from Denise for any information about her Forest Farm ancestors. I look forward to any feedback! We also have a most interesting article from Richard Cornock about the woodland. I thank all the contributors, especially Paul Davies and Stella Wells for their regular articles giving us some lovely Autumn pictures to help us survive the Winter. Our evening winter talks on the Glamorgan canal and Biodiversity are coming up too—don't miss those!

Well, Friends, its getting pretty near to 2011 so on behalf of the Committee, we hope you all have a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for a healthy and peaceful New Year.

Sheila Austin

Deadline for contributions to the next newsletter

**8th February 2011**

See back page for contact details

### Evening Talks

Our next two evening talks are on subjects close to our hearts—so try not to miss them if you can help it!

Wednesday 19th January  
2011

on

#### **Biodiversity**

and the speaker is

**Laura Palmer**

Ecologist— Cardiff Council

Wednesday 16th March  
2011

#### **"The Glamorgan Canal from Start to Finish"**

and the speaker is

**Mrs Christine Soughton**

**Time:**  
**7.30p.m.**

**Place:**  
**Whitchurch Community  
Centre,  
Tyn y Pwll Rd  
Whitchurch.**

This is the lovely, new Community Centre (in the same location as the old one)

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## Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies  
Countryside Warden

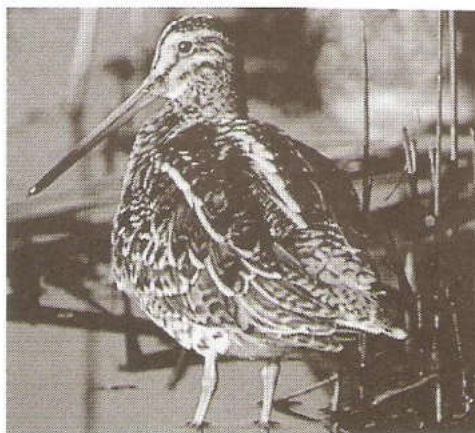
As I write this (the second week of November), it's feeling like Autumn now with the high winds and plenty of leaves falling. Today we have logged up 3 large ash trees which had fallen on to the old Coryton line near the Hollybush estate. One of our main duties this time of year is clearing and making safe fallen trees.



A total of 21 dormouse boxes have now been installed around the Reserve. This is mainly to find out if we have a resident dormouse population. So far nothing definite has been confirmed but there are encouraging signs of activity.

Also, the bittern has made a welcome return last Saturday, and since we have opened up the scrapes near the second hide, the numbers of snipe are increasing.

We are also planning to install a barrier on the sand martin cliff, to prevent predators, such as mink and grey squirrel, entering the nesting holes.



Snipe



Salmon on the Taff at Radyr weir

Salmon numbers have been encouraging so far this Autumn with the Environment Agency saying that there have been more coming up the Taff to spawn than last year.

Today, a red admiral was spotted on the Reserve which is quite late in the year!

## Woodland Management in Forest Farm this Winter

**Richard Cornock—Woodland Biodiversity Ranger**

A programme of winter woodland management works will take place at Forest Farm this coming winter. This year's work will include work on the woodland behind GE healthcare (Amersham) and will involve thinning out some of the trees that were planted by the founding members of Forest Farm. The small area of beech will be thinned to allow the trees canopies to spread whilst the stands of ash will be coppiced to allow greater light penetration and break up the even



age structure of the trees.

By having a mixture of ages and sizes the woodland's life is prolonged and as the taller trees topple the younger trees take their place. During the great storm of 1988 whole woodlands were lost due to their even age structure, and it took decades for the woods to recover. Last year we felled several large trees along the feeder and canal to protect the integrity of the bank, some further works will be included in the work plan for this year. Whilst the work can appear to be destructive if carried out correctly, its not long before the area recovers. The Alder has already grown back several feet in places. The hedge which was coppiced (cut down to ground) last year in front of the warden centre has recovered and is growing well and provides a very important habitat for low nesting birds. Where it is safe to do so, some trees will be pollarded (cut above eight feet) and treated to provide dead timber for insects and nesting trunks for woodpeckers.

A short programme of works to remove and thin trees from around the entrances to the canal will also take place, making them safer and more inviting for visitors. The area behind MacDonalds will be thinned and trees that are impeding on the bridge will be felled or lifted (lower branches removed). The work will be carried out by the Parks Departments woodland management team with the help of the Wardens and Community Rangers who have already carried out some important habitat improvement work around the hides. If time permits and the weather allows we will also continue to thin out the tall leggy trees along the path leading to the hides. No firm dates have been set yet but all the work will be carried out before the nesting season starts. Fingers crossed for a cold dry winter.

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

### ***Doing something positive***

#### **January - March 2011**

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

\*\*\*\*\*

January 29th	Plant hedging Middle entrance
February 26th	Scrub coppice clearing Top entrance
March 26th	LITTER PICK 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

*(My apologies to Hugh. I inadvertently omitted his article in the last edition, but did remember to include the activities in the back page Events. A senior moment perhaps? Ed)*



## Forest Farm/RSPB Walk

*Stella Wells*



After the calm of August we have now moved into Autumn and the woods are ablaze with colour. It always amazes me that all these stunning colours are made by toxins in the leaves; waste products that will eventually fall to the ground to nourish the earth. Every windy day the leaf canopy loses more of its density and this will enable us to have better views of the bird life around the site over the months to come.

We continue to have large numbers of people joining us for the monthly walks, ranging from 12 to 32! The age range spans several generations. I think the youngest participant was about three and I won't attempt to give the age of the elders of the group. We all share a common interest: not just birds, but the diversity of nature as a whole. There are several levels of expertise in the groups and I hope that we are all learning something on each walk. I know I am!

Last month, we had to split the group into two as we approached the hides. I went with the group of youngsters and their parents. And weren't we the lucky ones! On the skinny little tree in the pond at the first hide we were treated to prolonged views of a kingfisher. I am sure it was posing for the camera. (Sadly mine was at home on the hall table). There was a photographer in the hide and I was very proud of the young 'uns who were quiet and well behaved. One of the lads had a video camera with him and he was so pleased to be able to film this halcyon bird, which he had never seen before in the wild.



Great spotted woodpeckers are becoming a regular sighting and we often hear the green woodpecker. The herons (reyaf glas) are always a stunning sight as are the bullfinches, goldfinches and grey wagtails, but where's the dipper? The odd butterfly is still to be seen and we were fortunate enough to see a kestrel, which I would consider to be a rare sighting nowadays.



I'm looking forward to renewing my acquaintance with the winter visitors such as the fieldfare and redwings and having closer views of our own woodland birds as they come to feed on the seed provided for them. Will we see waxwings? I live in hope!

The weather has been kind to us this quarter with bright sunshine or light cloud cover, and I hope it will be kind to us over the next few months.

### Ken Patterson

I am sad to report the recent death of Ken Patterson. As many of you know, Ken had a long association with Forest Farm and in particular is remembered and greatly appreciated by the 'Friends' for his Editorship of your newsletter from 1990-2006.

Ken had a varied career but, like many, seemed to have been even busier in retirement. He was closely involved not only in the Friends of Forest Farm but among others, BCTV and RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteers Programme) of which he was a founder member.

Donations in his memory have been made to the Friends of Forest Farm for which we are most grateful.

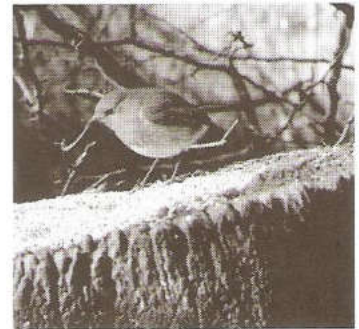
His sons Leigh and Craig have also given me permission to use any of Ken's poems from 'Memories and Impressions', a collection of his work published in 2007. One of these is printed below, which is seasonal and I hope when you read it, you will enjoy and remember Ken.

Sheila Austin

### New Year Greeting

The holly and the ivy  
This season will abound  
While hopes for joy and laughter  
In every heart is found.  
Comfort those who need it most,  
And there are quite a few;  
Plant the seeds of loving care  
To greet the Year anew.

Ken Patterson



### MEMBERSHIP

Since the last Newsletter, our Membership has been creeping up to be close to our last year's total of 281.

At present our membership stands at **265 families plus 2 groups.**

A welcome to our newest families and many thanks to you all for your continued support.

Noel Gale.

## OUR ANNIVERSARY EVENT—OPEN DAY

September 19th 2010

It was a lovely, fine Sunday afternoon and well attended with about 50 people—all ages turning up; these included members and non-members, Tea, coffee, squash and cakes were laid on for all.



Duncan and a successful water diviner!

Duncan had put a large 1865 O.S. map of the canal up on the wall of the Wardens' Centre and also arranged lessons in water divining. I had a go myself and to my surprise was able to do it. At times there was quite a queue waiting for a go – it was a great success!

At the rear of the Warden's Centre, on the way to the pond, there is a machine on a post. When you turn the handle it tells you the name of a bird and then you hear its song.

We put labels on the trees in the Orchard with their names and some information about them. Some of these had been donated and that information was included too. This also generated a lot of interest.

I think every-one who had not seen the improvements to the Wardens Centre before - the toilets, kitchen, cupboards and paint work, were very surprised at the changes.

I hope every-one had a good time and I would like to thank you all for coming. Also, a big thank-you to all those who helped out to make it such a great day.

John Harding  
(Chairman)

P.S We shall have to do it again next year



Some of our visitors looking at the displays inside the Wardens' Centre

### Website update!

We have been experiencing some technical difficulties with our [forest-farm.org.uk](http://forest-farm.org.uk) website for which we apologise. We are working on it but you can still access the site if you use your normal search engine, entering Friends of Forest Farm or Forest Farm Cardiff.

Matt Locke

Don't forget—  
The Big Garden Birdwatch  
29th or 30th January 2011

Spend **one hour** recording the highest number  
of each bird species seen in your garden.  
See their website for details



*Letter to the Editor*

**Subject: Hides at Forest Farm**

*I am a bird watcher and have been a member of the Friends of Forest Farm for about 20 years, I remember the days before the ponds and hides existed.*

*I wish to protest about the condition of the Bird Hides and the lack of effort to rectify the problem.*

*I have spoken to 2 "officials" of the Friends who shall be nameless, one last year and one last week. The impression I get is that because of vandalism it is a waste of time and money and effort to do anything about it.*

*There are options open to the Management Committee to address the problems:*

*Have the hides repaired and put combination locks on the doors. Only members would be told the numbers to open the doors. This method is used by Moor Green Nature Reserve in Berkshire, where I am also a member of the "Friends"*

*Demolish the hides and replace them with Observation sites open to the elements. This method is used at Goldcliff on the Gwent levels. (I would recommend a visit there by representatives of the Management Committee. It is open to the public.)*

*Do nothing! Which I consider is not an option*

*I note from page 4 of the Newsletter that membership is down by 49 families which means over 50 people. I am not surprised as a number of them will be disillusioned birdwatchers like me.*

*Yours faithfully*

*Ron G Davies  
(address supplied)*

**Committee response**

The Committee has discussed the state of the bird hides at some length over recent months. We had considered the options mentioned on Mr Davies letter.

The option of locking the hides has benefits but would pose some practical difficulties and limit availability to the genuine visitors who are not members. Also, evidence from the nearby allotment site still led to severe damage, although wooden sheds were locked, and provided little security against those who are intent on gaining entry. Opening up the hides to the elements would require structural work, and therefore funding – not readily available these days, but we would consider getting an estimate. Perhaps a first step would be to remove the doors?

Our initial actions are; to look at installing benches inside similar to those along the canal and concreting them in and improving the vegetation around the hides. We involve the community police, ensure the hides are cleaned regularly and will monitor the situation closely with a view to further action.

*What do members think?* Let us know – along with any other ideas you may have. We will be more than pleased to investigate them.



## Melingriffith Water Pump reinstalled/latest news

Following a partial restoration by volunteers from the Oxford House Archaeological Society (Risca) in the 1970's and 80's the pump was handed to the Council. Interest in the pump was revived through the enthusiasm of Robin Williams one of the original volunteers and a review of the Melingriffith Conservation area which took place in 2007. This led to public meetings and the Council and CADW providing the necessary funding to complete the current restoration.

After some delays due to bats roosting in the tiny wooden cracks of the rocker beams, the pump was removed in March 2010 and spent the spring and summer in Penybryn Engineering workshops, Hengoed, where the timber components were replaced and the metal work refurbished. Work on the Melingriffith site itself included repairing stonework to the leat wall and replacing the sluice gates.

Reinstallation of the pump started on 14th October when the main parts of the structure were crane-lifted back onto site. There was quite a buzz on site with a mixture of Friends of Melingriffith Water Pump committee, press, politicians, local residents past and present, and volunteers who had restored the pump in the 1970s and 1980s.

The project was funded by Cardiff Council and CADW, project managed by Opus International Consultants with the restoration work carried out by Penybryn Engineering. Several people tell me that the work is of an excellent standard. The pump looks fantastic, and I am assured that with the right maintenance 'she' will last in excess of 100 years.

The reinstallation work will be completed over the next few months and once again the wheel will turn, though for the time being powered by electricity rather than water (possibly a future project?).

Friends of Melingriffith Water Pump will now turn its attention to working with Cardiff Council in maintaining the pump and we intend holding an open day to celebrate the restoration, though this may be delayed until Spring 2011 while the electricity company put in a meter and H+S and insurance issues are sorted.

The wheel will be turned electronically every 1-4 weeks for maintenance, and we may do this in conjunction with opening the site to the public (possibly on a similar basis to the Heath park railway, where volunteers run the open days). Other plans include publicising the pump for educational purposes, holding regular open days, using the site as part of local walks, organising volunteer work and documenting the public's memories and experiences of the pump and surrounding area.

Being neighbours, FoMWP and FoFF have several issues in common and can work together eg we share Paul our Park Ranger. Recently FoFF held a volunteer workday clearing the old Melingriffith well which we are helping to look after and promote. The old pump timbers have been recycled and taken to Forest Farm where they will contribute to its bio-diverse habitat, and an iron bridge from the junction of Forest Farm Rd and Ty Mawr Rd is stored in the enclosure next to the pump for safe keeping.

I'm really hopeful for the pump's future, and the Friends group will be fundamental to making it a success this time.

Anyone who would like to find out more, support our work or share their stories and memories can contact us via our website [www.Friendsofmelingriffithwaterpump.weebly.com](http://www.Friendsofmelingriffithwaterpump.weebly.com) or come along to our next meeting 7.00pm on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2011 at Whitchurch Rugby Sports and Social club, Samuel's Crescent, Whitchurch.

Stephanie Wilkins  
Chair, Friends of Melingriffith Water Pump  
November 2010



## An Indian Summer on the Reserve

Norman Thomas



At the end of the Glamorgan canal  
November 2010

My friend John had never visited Forest Farm nor walked along the bank of the Glamorgan-shire canal. So it was with some excited anticipation that I brought him to enjoy the delights of the area. It was a warm, sleepy autumn afternoon and I hoped that Nature would allow us to enjoy a generous portion of treats.

My recent interest in wild flowers has enriched my countryside walks, and having a companion with such enthusiasm for anything we saw from the vivid kingfisher to the most ordinary-looking brown moth, I could not but be enthralled as we sampled the afternoon's offerings.

Gypsywort was common along the banks of the canal replacing the rapidly fading great willow-herb, loosestrife and marsh woundwort. The 'brandy bottle' yellow water lily had now given way to large patches of quickly spreading duckweed.

A squirrel showed great agility in reaching for food on a branch which was almost touching the surface of the water. Mallards appeared to be soundly asleep on a log in mid stream, whilst a sympathetic moorhen quietly tiptoed across the flat water lily leaves.

At least half a dozen different types of dragonflies darted and hovered over the still water. Narrow rust coloured ones, larger blue as well as yellow ones chased each other in the unexpected warmth of this Indian Summer.

As we ducked beneath the long hanging strands of "Traveller's Joy" we caught a brief breathtaking sight of two kingfishers darting along the length of the canal about 20 yards ahead. I would normally have been satisfied having seen those glorious hues, but this afternoon was deigned to be rather special. Two beautiful green woodpeckers seemed to laugh at us as they shot out from a nearby clump of trees.

After such excitement, we returned to a quieter period – identifying wormwood, hart's tongue and Spanish sweet chestnut. John then pointed at two



Gypsywort



nest boxes fixed to the trunk of a tree. On closer inspection, we realised they had been constructed for bats.

Some noisy magpies, a flock of about fourteen wild ducks passing overhead, and a family of long-tailed tits constantly calling and answering each other amongst the foliage added to our enjoyment. As we set out to include the pond at Forest Farm in our afternoon's exploration, we came across a large buddleia covered with beautiful butterflies. Most were sampling nectar, but I'm convinced that many were simply sunbathing! Lesser tortoiseshells, many red admirals and a lone peacock butterfly added to the extravagance of this glorious afternoon.

A kestrel – (or was it a sparrowhawk?) flew across the field ahead, constantly calling as though it was looking for someone. This strange sight almost caused us to miss another surprise at our feet. Trundling across the stony path, searching for cover was a 3inch long caterpillar of an elephant hawk moth.

After such an enjoyable few hours, we eventually parted promising to meet again in the hope of finding Mother Nature again in as generous a mood and as rewarding in her willingness to reveal her secrets.

### THE BROWN FAMILY

Between 1830 and 1880 the Brown family lived and farmed at Forest Farm.

The 1841 census consisted of John and Mary Brown, and their children Francis, Charlotte, George, William, James, Henry and Hannah. There were also 3 grandchildren – Richard, Elizabeth and John Brown. Richard is my great- great grandfather (unsure of mother's name).

I would be grateful if anyone has any information on this family during this time, which would assist me in researching my ancestors further.

Thank you  
Denise

Tel : 02920 419119  
Email: wtjoan9@aol.com

### EVENTS December



Happy Christmas

Saturday 18 <sup>th</sup> December 10.00-12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club</b> For children aged 8-12.– <b>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: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk .
Saturday 18 <sup>th</sup> December 10.00 – 12.30	<b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch



## EVENTS CONT'D

### January — March 2011

Saturday 15 <sup>th</sup> January 10.00 – 12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club</b> - for children aged 8-12. <i>Activity to be arranged</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>
Saturday 15 <sup>th</sup> January 10.00 – 12.30	<b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch
Sunday 16 <sup>th</sup> January 11.30 – 14.00	<b>Walk off Christmas at Hailey Park and Forest Farm</b> Meet at Melingriffith Water pump, Ty Mawr Rd, Whitchurch All ages welcome; children must be accompanied by an adult.
Wednesday 19 <sup>th</sup> January 7.30 p.m.	<b>EVENING TALK</b> <b>Biodiversity - Laura Palmer</b> Whitchurch Community Centre Tyn-y-Pwll Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 29 <sup>th</sup> January 10.30 – 12.30	<b>Cardiff Conservation Group</b> Join other volunteers to plant hedging. Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive Whitchurch
Sunday 30 January 10.30 – 12.30ish	<b>'Friends' Volunteering Day – coppicing.</b> <i>Home made soup available!</i> Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.
Saturday 19 <sup>th</sup> February 10.00 – 12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club</b> - for children aged 8-12. <i>Activity to be arranged</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>
Saturday 19 <sup>th</sup> February 10.00 – 12.30	<b>Monthly bird walk with RSPB</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch
Saturday 26 <sup>th</sup> February 10.30 – 12.30	<b>Cardiff Conservation Group</b> Join other volunteers scrub and coppicing clearing Meet at the top entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive Whitchurch
Sunday 27 <sup>th</sup> February 10.30 – 12.30ish	<b>'Friends' Volunteering Day – refurbishing the bird hides</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch
Wednesday 16 <sup>th</sup> March 7.30 p.m.	<b>EVENING TALK</b> <b>"The Glamorgan Canal from Start to Finish" by Mrs Christine Soughton.</b> Whitchurch Community Centre Tyn-y-Pwll Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 19 <sup>th</sup> March 10.00 – 12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club</b> - for children aged 8-12. <i>Activity to be arranged</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>
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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.