



FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

WEBSITE REF: www.forestfarm.org.uk

ISSUE 84

JUNE 2012

Editorial

Sheila Austin

*Hello again Friends! Firstly, a warm welcome to new members—and thanks to our 'regulars' who continue to support us financially through subscriptions, donations, volunteering and in all other ways trying to preserve this very special place. Maintenance work is ongoing, but there is always the unexpected to deal with as well, - this time damage from strong winds and it seems extra vigilance is required from unwelcome visitors, as you will read in **Paul Davies'** report on the Reserve.*

*However there is also much to delight us, as reported by Paul and **Stella Wells** from her RSPB walks—from otter to orange tip butterfly, goosanders to wild garlic. Did you see recently that Plantlife Cymru says 1 in 10 woodland plants is under threat of extinction in Wales? Forest Farm is doing its bit by managing its woodland and opening up areas for woodland plants to flourish. The management plan for the Reserve is now being finalised and this and the volunteers work—for example as mentioned by **Hugh Harrison** on P3 — all help to increase the biodiversity.*

Perhaps because summer really does seem to be approaching now—you will find quite a lot of events mentioned in this edition. Thanks go to all who arrange them and I hope some of you will be able to attend some of the walks or participate in some of them.. All this and the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympics!

Deadline for articles for the next newsletter Wednesday 8h August
See back page for contact details

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

At the 'Friends' Annual General Meeting on 18th April, the Committee proposed that it would be a nice gesture to confer lifetime membership for certain members who have given exceptional service to the 'Friends'.

This was agreed at the A.G.M. by those members present.

The Committee will discuss the names put forward and an announcement will be made in the September edition of the Newsletter.

John Harding (Chairman)

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Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies
Countryside Warden

The recent stormy weather has taken its toll on many trees in Cardiff and to date over 300 have been lost of varying size and species. We were fortunate at Forest Farm to only lose about a dozen less than mature trees. On the Wenallt, Forest Ganol, Cwm Nofydd and Coed Pantawel, (all council owned woodlands) we have had to clear about a dozen trees, ones that have blocked paths/bridlepaths or left in a dangerous condition.

The Footpaths team and the Woodland Biodiversity team have also been working flat out, (not to mention the tree gang), and have been doing a good job sorting out trees all over the county.



Canal erosion

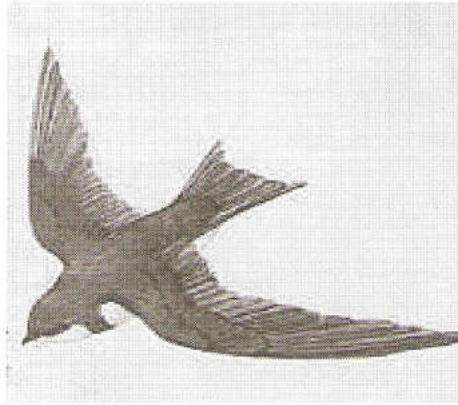
On the maintenance front, we are now prioritising further remedial works to combat the erosion on the footpath caused by dogs entering and exiting the canal. We also plan to remove a quantity of silt and trees from the canals over the summer months.

Recently, Warden Paul Pinnell had an encounter with some poachers who had two mallards and a rabbit, plus two modern looking air rifles. The men were well camouflaged and even had the stupidity to point one gun at Paul, before running off. The incident has been logged with the police and if anyone sees anything suspicious on the Reserve please contact us ASAP.

We have also recently, 10th May, had an encounter with an individual who maybe sleeping rough on the Reserve. He is about 6 ft tall, dark haired with a goatee beard and very unkempt. The police are aware of his presence there. Please be wary if you encounter him.



House Martin



Sand Martin—12 cm

On a more positive note, an otter was seen on the Taff at the end of April. Also, hundreds of returning swallows, sand and house martins, and swifts were seen over the Reserve

for a few days during the stormy weather, probably forced down due to the high winds, rain and sleet.

The heron chicks can be heard quite easily now in their large platform nests in the Scots Pines. Chris Price has witnessed several goldcrests, siskin, kingfishers and a couple of orange tip butterflies braving the bad weather.

Finally the Friends are kindly offering to fund the purchase and installation of a small camera to place at various points of interest around the Reserve including nest sites and tracks frequently used by fox, mink and weasel.



Siskin

THANKS

WHITCHURCH AND TONGWYNLAIS COUNCILLORS

The Friends of Forest Farm Committee would like to thank Linda, Brian, Tim and Michael for the support and advice they have given to us over many years.

With the increasing demands for Council funding, we would not have been able to achieve many of our projects, including the Wardens Centre development without their assistance and support.

We look forward to having the same relationship with the newly elected Councillors.

Martin Chamberlain

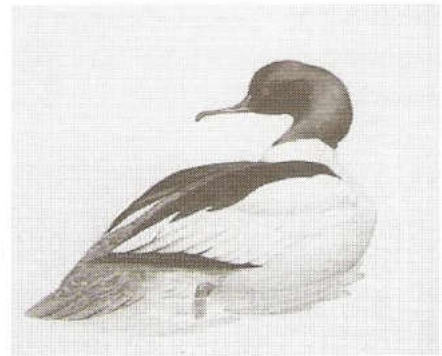
Forest Farm/RSPB Walks

Stella Wells



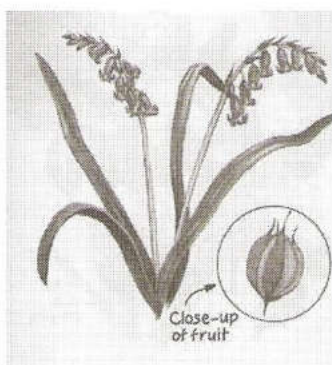
River Taff at Forest Farm

Back in February on a stormy day, we were cheered by the sight of goosanders on the Taff, three females and two males. The river was quite shallow and we could see them swimming under water, skilfully chasing their next meal, their saw bills helping to retain the fish they caught.



Goosander

Since then, we have seen the usual birds as well as dippers near the weir and a fleeting glimpse of a water rail on one of the ponds. We have also spotted a field mouse, oodles of squirrels and the occasional rabbit.



Native bluebell

But now that May is here, we are treated to a tapestry of flowers along the hedgerows, the river and canal banks and in the woods. Blues, yellows and various shades of pink predominate with a few white wild garlic plants on the point of fading away, leaving only the pungent aroma of garlic in their wake. The blue of the native bluebell is so intense and I am always disappointed to see the Spanish invaders growing in wild places. Yellow flag, buttercups and the last of the celandines all reflect the sunshine. Red campions and herb Robert add another colour to the palette of spring with their vibrant pinks.

Jack by the hedge also has a pretty white flower. Some of us were brave enough to try one of the leaves - a strong mustardy garlic taste that lingered in my mouth throughout the walk. This made me think about all the edible plants that abound at this time of year. When I was a kid we used to eat the early hawthorn leaves, 'bread and cheese' as it was known

in Yorkshire. I made nettle soup once but will never repeat the exercise as it tasted too much like spinach. Nettle wine is good though.

The trees are certainly green now and again, we have to use our song recognition skills to name that bird. The chiff chaff is easily recognised by its monotonous call, but what about the dunnock? Few of us realise how pretty their song can be. My favourite bird song at this time of year is that of the Black Cap, warm and melodious it always raises my spirits.



Dunnock

We noted that some of the bird boxes were in use and watched a pair of great tits delivering a variety of insects and caterpillars to their brood. I'm looking forward to June when we may see the newly fledged chicks foraging for themselves.

My thanks to Hugh Harrison who led the walk in April.

Cardiff Conservation Group - Doing something positive

The litter pick in March was rather like a damp squib but we had a good turn out of eager volunteers ready to tackle the usual pile of rubbish. There was hardly any rubbish around the Reserve due to the effort of Chris a Volunteer warden and his helper. We did manage to fill some bags though, but nothing like the volume we would have expected ... well done them!

On our visit in April for the first cut of Japanese knotweed, fortunately we had a dry morning after a week of horrendous rain. Also a good turn out - 14 in all. The growth of the knotweed was nowhere as advanced as in previous years; I am hoping this is due to our cut and spray new policy ... cut in spring and spray late Summer. It did mean we could tackle a few other jobs like cutting back young saplings, which also meant that the strimmer was in full use tackling Rosebay Willowherb first flush of growth, which has very invasive in our open area. Whilst walking around the Longwood section you are starting to see the fruits of our Winter labours with drifts of primroses and bluebells etc.

Conservation work is held on **Saturday mornings at Forest Farm, Longwood Drive Whitchurch - 10.30 - 12.30.**

The next one is:- **June 30th Clear balsam/knotweed cut. Middle entrance**

Then there is a break till September

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)

"Friends" Annual Trip
to WESTON-SUPER-MARE
Saturday 16th June 2012

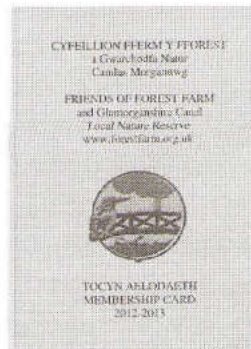
At the time of going to press, there were still some seats on the coach. Pick ups in Rhiwbina and Whitchurch.

If you would like to join us then for further details and bookings please contact Duncan on Cardiff 20626111 or email him at duncan3@hotmail.co.uk

Adults £14, Children under 12 £8.

Error!!

Please note that your green membership card contains an error.



The speaker for our talk at the AGM on Wednesday April 17th 2013 will be Alec Stewart, one of the Community Park Rangers.

The talk is entitled ***Photography and Wildlife***. Alec is an excellent photographer and has many wonderful photos of the wildlife Forest Farm

RANGERS WILDLIFE QUESTION TIME

Saturday 23rd June 14.00 – 16.00
Education Centre
Bute Park

FREE!

Led by the Community Park Rangers

See the Rangers wildlife display.

***Please bring along any items for identification
or
questions relating to native British wildlife.***

Fund Raising



It seemed a good idea at the time, but volunteering to walk the Three Welsh Peaks in one day now appears to be a major challenge. The wet weather has had a major effect on training but has tested my map reading on Pen Y Fan. Its on 23rd June. We start on Snowdon at 04:00a.m. followed by Cader Idris and then Pen Y Fan to finish by 8:00p.m.

I am raising funds for Ty Hafan the charity which provides comfort, care and support to life-limited children, young people and their families. If you would like to sponsor me you can, via my charity website :- <http://www.justgiving.com/Martin-Chamberlain>

I will keep you updated in the next newsletter.

Martin Chamberlain

Friends of Forest Farm Matters

Volunteering Events

The regular date has been changed

At a recent Committee meeting, it was agreed that we would change our regular volunteering event to the

SECOND SUNDAY IN THE MONTH

Often, the last Sunday in the month meant that the Friends and the Cardiff Conservation Group had their volunteering events on the same weekend ... so we decided to change.

The next *Friends* volunteering event will be on Sunday 10th June at 10.30 and then Sunday 8th July. We realise that because of the printing and distribution of the newsletter, some of you will not know about the June event in time, but those receiving the newsletter by email and looking at EVENTS on our website www.forestfarm.org.uk will have found it there.

We greatly appreciate your help and support and look forward to seeing you at these events as and when you are able to come along.

Membership

I would like to thank **Noel Gale**, who has for the last 16 years worked tirelessly as the Membership Secretary. Thankfully Noel has agreed to remain as an active committee member.

Our new membership year started in April, and thank you to all those who have already renewed, and to the many who gave extra monies for bird seed, or donations. All of these will help towards the multitude of tasks that have to be carried out each year on the Nature Reserve.

To anyone who would still like to send their subscription, a slip will be included in this Newsletter; or it can be done via Pay Pal (see article).

Thank you

Pauline Fisher
Membership Secretary

Paypal

As mentioned by Pauline, our new membership secretary, there is now the option of using the online payment system Paypal.

You can use it to become a new member, renew your subscription or make a donation.

Just visit our website
forestfarm.org.uk

Follow the links.
It could not be easier!

Since introducing this we have already had 7 new members using this system.

A warm welcome to them!

Sand martins in the wetland

The sand martin is the smallest European swallow with a brown back, white underparts and a brown breast band. It's flitting, erratic flight is often seen when feeding on flying insects with house martins over water. They migrate from Africa, south of the Sahel, arriving in the UK towards the end of March, then breed during May and June, returning to Africa in August after raising 2 broods if the weather has been favourable.

Hugh Harrison (Cardiff Conservation Group) recently sent me photos of the construction in 1997 of the cliff burrow for sand martins on Forest Farm Nature Reserve, so I decided to look through the newsletter 'archive' for some history. Here is the story.

A flash flood on the Taff May 24th 1996 swept away part of the Bank where sand-martins were established. There was frantic activity all along the bank the following morning as they strove to find the entrance to the various burrows, most of which had disappeared or were damaged **E. O. Edwards** (FFNL No 22)

Construction of the artificial cliff

In FFNL25, May 1997, **Mike Wiley's** article gave news of the construction of an artificial sand martin Cliff. The initial idea came from **Chris James** after it was found that one or two of these had been built elsewhere and been successfully colonised.

The site was near the (then) new pond (see right) and would give good views from the bird hide.

Oak posts were sunk and concreted in; a solid steel palisade fence attached to the posts with sheets of reinforcing mesh outside. Holes at regular intervals took 1m long clay pipes. The whole thing measured 9x2m approx. 100 tons of sandy gravel (previously excavated from the pond) was used to back-fill **by hand**, clay pipes inserted with one end showing and filled with sand to act as a nesting chamber. then sheets of corrugated steel placed over the sandbags.



After **3 days**, the bulk of the work was complete, then the vertical face was rendered with the final coat a rough cast finish.

The last job was to fill the pipes with sand and overhanging vegetation was planted to give a natural appearance.



Did the sand martins use their new home?

Mike Wiley and Chris James reported (May 1997) that the sand martins had arrived and shown interest in the cliff – though whether or not they would nest was yet to be seen. Their population had decreased during the 20th century, with a crash in the late 60's reducing the sand martin population by around a staggering 90%. This had been due to severe drought in the Sahel which affected the birds' winter feeding area.

Chris confirmed to me that in 2008, a few pairs did use the artificial cliff and several pairs did breed for a few following years but later stopped using it.



This, he thought, was due to:

- 1) Vandalism
- 2) Growth of vegetation on the pond and growth of trees around the hides. (The vegetation growth inhibits clear flight runs to the nest holes and they like to feed over open water.)
- 3) Mink are predators, and because they are present on the Reserve, they might have some impact; there is little or no information on this concerning Forest Farm.

Chris also reported the following: *"In the early 90s, Ronald Lockley, (the famous naturalist during the 1930s to 1960s from Cardiff who set up the first UK bird observatory on Skoholm), visited his old home in Heol Don and I met him there and on the Reserve. During his youth he had bird watched etc on the area where the Reserve is now and we talked about changes in bird populations on the site. He told me that sand martins used to nest in the drainage holes in the stone walls above the canal near the Melingriffith Tinplate Works."*

However, you will have read in Paul Davies' report on Page 2, that sand martins have been seen over the Reserve recently, so perhaps they will use the artificial cliff again.

Current situation

The population of sand martins has crashed twice in the last 50 years, not only the late 60s/early 70s but also during the 80s - both due to droughts in tAfrica. *They are now on the Amber list i.e. when the breeding population has declined by 25 to 50% in the last 25 years* (Red list for breeding population decline >50%).

The UK population is approx 160,000 pairs whereas in the earlier part of 20th century, it was approx 1 million.

Sheila Austin

Acknowledgements:

For the construction work, Mike Wiley thanked Martin Chamberlain, his son Christopher (Friends of Forest Farm), Chris James, Howard Davies, Dave Rogers (Voluntary wardens) John Dearing, Huw Evans, Edwin Watts (Watch parents) the Watch group and Phoenix (Junior group of the RSPB)

My thanks to Ted Edwards, Mike Wiley, Chris James for their previous articles, Hugh Harrison for the photos and Chris James for the additional information.



Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club

Do you want to be part of a club where you can enjoy fresh air while learning about nature? Come along and make friends with other nature detectives and have lots of fun taking part in lots of activities. This club is for children aged 8-12 and their families.

For a Forest Farm Wildlife Watch programme please email Gareth at gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk or phone the Community Rangers on 02920 445903

Parents – IMPORTANT please note the following:-

We hold our meetings from 10.00am – 12.00pm at The Warden's Centre, Forest Farm Country Park, Whitchurch, Cardiff (unless otherwise stated).

Under 8's must be accompanied by a parent or guardian to meetings.

Children must be suitably dressed for the outdoors and the activity on the day i.e. warm clothes, waterproofs and suitable footwear e.g. wellies/hiking boots or old trainers.

Children should bring a drink and snack in a rucksack if needed e.g. warm weather or doing physical work.

We do not charge at meetings unless for special events e.g. entrance fees, please consult the program. Please make a donation toward the Forest Farm Wildlife Watch Club to help covers costs for materials.

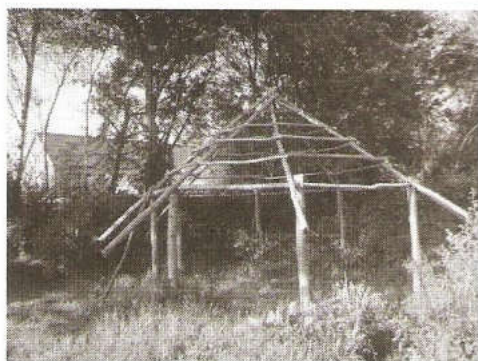
Friends are welcome, but their parents must come with them for the first time, as we MUST have a parent consent form for every child.

For Children attending Watch

We aim to provide a high standard of care at all Watch events.

If you would like to talk to someone about anything to do with this, please call the Watch U.K. Officer on 0845-070-0065.

This line is open between 9am – 5pm weekdays



This is the Roundhouse that the Watch group are working on. The next stage of the construction—scheduled to be carried out on 28th July—will be using withies to construct the walls and then thatching. If all goes according to plan, I should be able to show you their progress in the next edition.

Sheila Austin

Can you help please?

If anyone can spare some non invasive herbs for the Watch Club's herb garden, which is next to the Wardens' Centre, please will you contact the Community Rangers

Tel: 029 20445903 or email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk

Rhiwbina Festival
Saturday 30th June



Whitchurch Festival
Saturday 7th July



Information
from the Friends of Melingriffith Water Pump



Events schedule 2012

The pump will be operational at all events

- April** Sunday 22nd 2-3pm General opening
- May** Monday 7th 2-3pm Onsite talk. Speaker TBC
Sunday 20th 1-4pm Volunteer workday
- June** Sunday 24th 2-3pm General opening
- July** Sunday 22nd 10.30am-12.30pm
Onsite talk by author Steve Rowson followed by
a tour of Forest Farm looking at the industrial
heritage of the area. Finishing at the warden's
centre for refreshments (small charge)
- Aug** Sunday 12th 2-3pm General opening
Monday 27th 2-3pm
Onsite talk by Steve Rowson
- Sept** Sunday 9th 4-5pm
OPEN DOORS event. Full details will be
published nearer the time.
Sunday 23rd 2-3pm General opening

All Welcome
All events are free

Note: Operation of the pump is adversely effected by certain weather conditions
(eg high water levels) and as such events may be subject to change.

Alternative access/talks can be arranged for schools
and groups on request.

Please visit our website for more info.

www.friendsofmelingriffithwaterpump.org

Events - June to September 2012

Sunday 10th June 10.30-13.00	'Friends' Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 16 th June 10.00—12.30	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch
Saturday 16th June	'Friends' trip to Weston Super Mare. See Page 6 for details

Events - June to September 2012 cont'd

Sunday 17 th June 10.30 – 12.30	Forest Farm - how to manage a nature reserve. A walk led by Chris James and Park Ranger. A stroll around the Local Nature Reserve to see its variety and range of wildlife and to discover how the Reserve is managed to maintain its wide range of animals and plants. Meet at the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.
Saturday 30th June 10.30—12.30	Cardiff Conservation Group—Volunteering event. Clearing balsam/knotweed cut. Meet at the middle entrance, Longwood Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 30th June	RHIWBINA FESTIVAL The 'Friends' have a stand at there. Do come along and say hello.
Saturday 30th June 10.00-12.00	Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. The Stream Shuffle at Nant Fawr See what creatures live beneath the depths of the Nant Fawr stream. Please bring wellies. Meeting place at the Reservoir Car Park off Rhydpennau Road, Cyncoed Cardiff. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Saturday 7th July	WHITCHURCH FESTIVAL The 'Friends' have a stand on the Common. Do come along and say hello.
Sunday 8th July 10.30—13.00	'Friends' Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Rod., Whitchurch
Saturday 21st July 10.00—12.30	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Sunday 22nd July 10.30—12.30	See Melingriffith Water Pump working. On site talk followed by industrial history tour of Forest Farm area, the Wardens' Centre for refreshments (small charge)
Saturday 28th July 10.00—12.00	Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Roundhouse construction—Part 2. Help the rangers construct a Celtic roundhouse which we can use for future WATCH meetings Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Saturday 18th August 10.00—12.30	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Sunday 9th September 10.30—13.00	Friends' Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Rod., Whitchurch
Saturday 15th September 10.00-12.30	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch

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

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