

FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 85

SEPTEMBER 2012

Hello Friends

Sheila Austin

A specially warm welcome to our new members. I hope you enjoy this edition - and do feel free to contribute with any comments or suggestions about the newsletter itself or observations about the Reserve.

*We are extremely grateful to volunteers who help out on the Reserve and for donations. Paul Davies mentions several in his Reserve report, but we do not forget our 'regulars' - Hugh with Cardiff Conservation Group, Stella from the RSPB and our own Friends. All Reserve visitors are the beneficiaries of the physical work, guided walks and information disseminated, outings (see p9) and refreshments provided (bacon butties seem to be particularly appreciated—see pp5, 6-7!) **On 15th September it looks like you can get all these (except the outing!) in one day, so don't miss that - see below.** I really must convey special thanks to Duncan. He has been extremely busy organising both the trip and, on a trial basis, the very successful days in July and August with refreshments and information about the Friends and the Reserve - so much so that we had 14 new members in July.*

I am delighted that we have a special report for you this time - on the wetlands. Raj and Alec (among others) have been concentrating on that area and Raj's report explains what is happening and, probably more importantly, why.

The nights are drawing in already—which brings to mind our Winter talks and we have some really interesting ones lined up for you. We look forward to seeing you at the first one on 21st November or any time on the Reserve .

Deadline for articles for the next edition—8th November.
See back page for contact details

'Friends' Open Day

Saturday 15th September 10.00—16.00

Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road Whitchurch

Come and enjoy the Reserve, its wildlife, walks and wetlands then join us at the Wardens Centre for refreshments, lots of information, water divining and other attractions. See www.forestfarm.org.uk for details

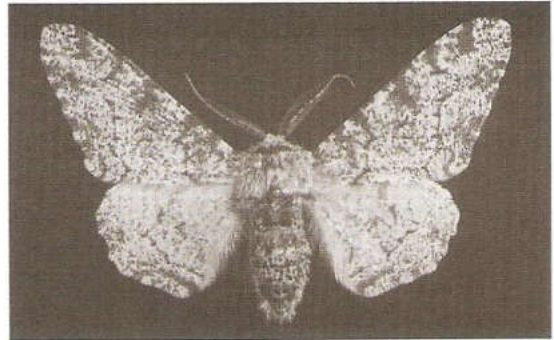
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Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies
Countryside Warden

The past few months may be the wettest start to the summer since records began. Conditions for all insects and butterflies have been difficult and have affected numbers throughout the country.

Paul Pinnell found a peppered moth on the parish road and, despite the poor weather conditions, various birds have succeeded in raising young. A group of kingfishers were seen along the canal which may well have nested locally.



Peppered moth. (In my book it says it has a plump body and forewing up to 2.8cm. Flight mid May to late July. Its food plants include birch, ash, oak, elm, blackthorn and hop. Ed)

We have recently had a work experience student from Radyr Comprehensive school and, as this was the same week as our annual bracken trampling and Himalayan Balsam pulling, he is now well trained in both techniques!. Many thanks to Jack and to all the teachers and students from Whitchurch High School who came to help us during the last week of term.

The bird hides have recently been repaired and re-painted thanks to help from the Friends and are shortly to be fitted with new benches.



Thanks also go to those who contributed to the Reserve Management Plan which is nearing completion.

And a final thank you to Mr John Minty from Whitchurch who donated a large quantity of stone which will be used for repair works along the towpath.

Himalayan balsam. (*Impatiens glandulifera*)

This is a relative of the Busy Lizzie, but reaches well over head height and is a major weed problem, especially on riverbanks and waste land. It can also invade gardens. A tall growing annual 2-3m (6-10ft), it has attractive pink/white helmet shaped flowers during June to Oct followed by seed pods that, when ripe, open explosively and seeds can be scattered up to 7m (22 ft) away. Each plant can produce up to 800 seeds.

The aggressive seed dispersal, coupled with high nectar production which attracts pollinators, often allows the Himalayan Balsam to out-compete native plants.

The main method of non chemical control, and usually the most appropriate, is pulling or cutting the plants before they flower and set seed. Great care needs to be taken if chemical controls are used and specialist advice obtained

(Source—mostly RHS website. Ed)

The Bird Hides

Many visitors to the Reserve enjoy using the hides to observe birds and other wildlife.

Over the last few months, volunteers have been working with the Wardens to improve the condition of the Hides. Both Hides have been boarded internally, made waterproof and painted both inside and outside. Wooden structures are always in need of maintenance and also unfortunately need repairs due to vandalism.

The Friends have funded the wood for the panelling and also the paint. We have now agreed a solution to the seating with the Council and this should be in place by the end of the year.

Martin Chamberlain

(Concern has been expressed for some time over the state of the hides, so this is good news—especially about the new benches. Ed)

MEMBERSHIP

Our current membership is 239 + 1 group. Included in this are **35 new members**, 14 of whom joined at the Warden's Centre on our Open Day on the 21st July – **a very warm welcome to you all.**

To date, three quarters of our regular members have renewed their membership. For those who would still like to renew, a slip will be included in this newsletter.

If you receive your newsletter via email, renewal can be done by sending the £5 annual subscription direct to my address (see below). Alternatively, you can use our new Pay Pal account which is becoming more popular; anyone can also renew or join in this way.

**All details are on our web site
www.forestfarm.org.uk**

Once again, thank you all for your continued valuable support.

Pauline Fisher (Membership Secretary)
8 Woodland Road,
Whitchurch
Cardiff
CF14 2BU.

Wildlife Habitat Management at Forest Farm

Sunday 7th October 10.30—13.00

A Walk with Chris James

The Reserve Management walk in June was a great success and most interesting for those who attended. So, we are delighted that another walk has been arranged with a similar focus, and again with the support of the Community Ranger Service.

The maturation of habitats, shortage of manpower and resources are limiting the management efficiency of the Reserve and leading to loss of animal and plant diversity. The walk will identify the problem areas where The Friends and volunteers can complete co-ordinated tasks which will assist the Ranger Service implement their Management Plan.

**Meet Chris and the Rangers at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Whitchurch**

Forest Farm/RSPB Walks

Stella Wells



"Summertime, and the living is easy." So said George Gershwin. Obviously he hadn't experienced one of our 'typical' summers! The June walk, or slosh, around the reserve was enjoyed by seven of us hardy types. Despite the inclement weather we were treated to aerial displays from swifts, swallows and martins. A heron was busily fishing in front of one of the hides, oblivious to the torrential rain as we sheltered inside. We were rewarded by the sight of a very handsome male reed bunting and a reed warbler. A chiff chaff was heard but to be honest, it wasn't the sort of day where you could linger to search out the songster.



Reed warbler 12.5cm
photo taken on Forest Farm

In July we fared better. The sun shone and it was warm. Summer flowers basked in the sunshine such as meadow cranes bill, meadow sweet, St Johns wort, lady's mantle and enchanters nightshade. (I'd love to know why this delicate plant was so called). Herb Bennett, bull rushes and woundwort added to the spectacle.

Emperor dragon flies quartered the pathways hunting their prey as did the broad bodied chaser and a beautiful male demoiselle shimmered in the sunshine.

Many species of birds were out and about such as tree creepers, reed warblers, a kingfisher, black cap with young, green finches and a greater spotted woodpecker to name but a few.

I felt that this lovely walk couldn't get any better, until we arrived back at the visitor centre. The aroma of bacon butties wafted on the breeze. What a wonderful end to the morning.



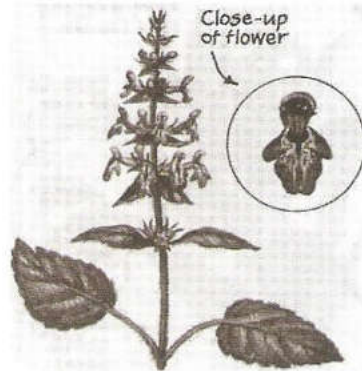
Reed bunting

In August twenty people turned up on the day and I can report that all age groups were represented from 5 weeks young to several decades older. The flowers were far more abundant than the bird life, which is why I think we should change the name to Nature Walk rather than Bird Walk. My knowledge of flowers and trees was severely tested and it was a good reminder that I still have a lot to learn.

Many of the plants on the Reserve have been used as medicinal remedies in the past and into the present. The perfoliate St Johns wort was used for getting rid of internal parasites and in preparations for healing wounds. Mugwort, which we spotted in the hedgerows, was used to expel worms and parasites from the intestines and as an anti-spasmodic. Lady's mantle was used as an anti-rheumatic, a

tonic and a tranquilliser. So I suppose this would be useful for people who bird watch in the pouring rain, in need of a bit of a lift after a disappointing walk and to keep us calm when we actually see something like a king fisher or a dipper!

Next month we will bask in an Indian Summer (ever the optimist!) as we discover the early autumnal delights on the Reserve. And this of course will be even better if followed by a bacon butty and a cup of tea.



From left to right:

Herb Bennett
(yellow flower)
(Wood Avens)

Wood Woundwort
(pink flower)

St John's Wort
(yellow flower)

Cardiff Conservation Group - Doing something positive

A few of our regulars were not able to make the **May** visit to the Reserve for **the nest box and wildflower survey** but there were enough of us to split into two groups.

The nest box results were not very promising. Out of 16 boxes, in 4 the young had fledged and 3 still had eggs to hatch. The remaining ones had suffered from either the damp Spring or squirrel attack leaving dead young plus there was the odd empty box. The wildflower team had a mixed result. 10 new plants were recorded for our list but around 26 plants not ticked off our current list possibly due to our change in weather, a damp Spring or plants coming out earlier.

Our last visit to Longwood Drive before the Summer break was at the end of **June** - to **tackle the balsam**. The task involves pulling up the weed which, being a succulent, is not too difficult. We also decided to leave it on site rather than bag and remove being a controlled weed.

The morning went well generally and there seemed to be less weed about. Perhaps at last our efforts are paying off. The strimmer was in action as well cutting the Rosebay willowherb. It was good to find the Common spotted orchid had spread a lot more.

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

September 29th

October 27th

November 24th

The group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous work, similar to an active gardener, (you work to your own level). If you feel you would like to get involved ... just turn up or better still, give me a ring.

Hugh Harrison (029 2070 4889)

A new venture for the 'Friends' - on a trial basis

Duncan Hockridge

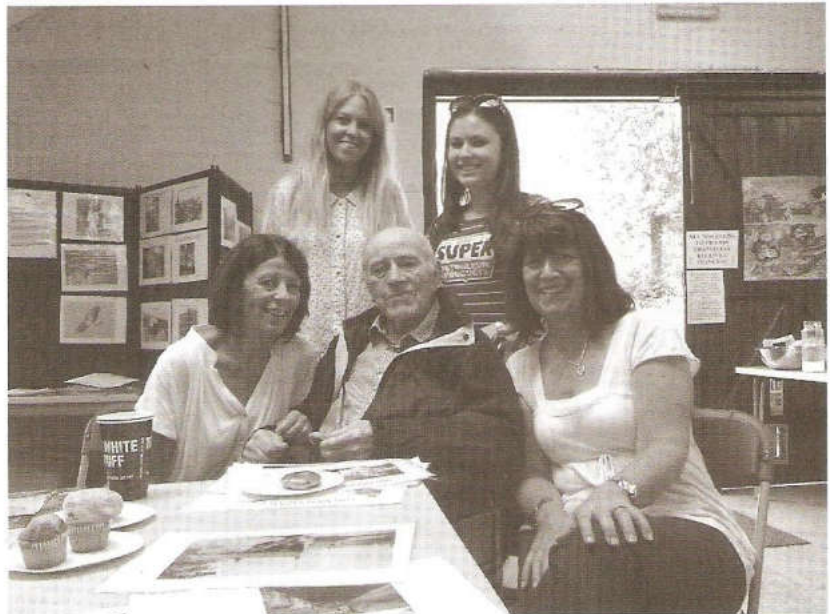
As many of you will know, the Warden's Centre is in a bit of a backwater on the Reserve. Many people using the routes along the feeder, canal, and the Taff Trail by-pass the end of Forest Farm Road and miss the Centre completely. For some time, the Committee has wanted to try and get many more people to visit that area so that they can see the new pond, orchard, bird sound device and, when the Centre is open, to use the facilities there. Last September, with the publicity given to the *'Friends'* Open Doors event at the Centre there was a very good response and the visitors really did appreciate what they were able to see and do there.

In order to try to do something about it, I suggested, and the Committee agreed, that on a trial basis - possibly monthly, we could advertise that the Centre was open from mid morning to mid afternoon. We would provide a limited refreshments service and have information available and be able to talk to people. This would be advertised around the Reserve the week before and on the opening day, together with posters in some of the Whitchurch and Rhiwbina village shops and libraries. It was also suggested that this could coincide with the RSPB guided walk which is held on the third Saturday each month as we would then have 'ready made' visitors in the area of the Centre.

So the first trial opening was held on 21st July and I am pleased to say that we must have had between 60-70 people coming to the Centre, and many enjoyed what food was on offer. The bacon butties proved to be very popular. It was very satisfactory to see everyone enjoying themselves and to see our new selection of books and old maps. Visitors also went outside to see all the other attractions. We had many cyclists who had been diverted from the Taff Trail.

Everyone there was surprised and delighted that one of the visitors was Ted Edwards whose daughters and families brought him to visit around the Reserve. It was obvious that Ted was very pleased to see some of his friends and to be back in his old hunting grounds.

Although it is not the intention to make money from this initiative, it was left to visitors to give donations towards the costs if desired. We did make a small profit which was donated to the *'Friends'* Funds.



We have to thank Joy and Pam who did most of the cooking etc. whilst Barry and I did the P.R. work about the Reserve and the *'Friends'* organisation. Martin's mum Bet

kindly provided a big tin of her home made Welsh cakes which were very well received; in fact next time we hope to be able to give out copies of Bet's old Valleys Welsh cake recipe.

The visitors were so supportive that we were able to sign up 14 new Members as a result. So I think everyone agreed that this first venture was a real success for so many reasons and, by the time you receive this newsletter, the second opening will have taken place on Saturday 18th August.

Look out for a further follow up report in the next newsletter.

(We are delighted at the success of the event and give special thanks to those concerned for organising it and for their hard work on the day Ed)

Hedge laying course

Sunday 18th November

10.30–14.30

Over recent years many of the hedges within the Reserve have become overgrown. This reduces the habitats for wildlife, increases shade and therefore affects plant life. Within the management plan for the Reserve, there is a requirement over a period of years to improve the hedges thus increasing the opportunities for nesting birds.

We have arranged with the Community Park Rangers for a Hedge Laying Course for members who are interested in undertaking voluntary work on the Reserve.

This will take place on Sunday November 18th from 10:30 am to 2:30 p.m., meeting at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road. Places are limited and have to be booked in advance either by calling me on

07952 926145
or via email

m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com

Martin Chamberlain

(This replaces the November Friends of Forest Farm volunteer day)

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Do you know of anyone who has town planning expertise and would be willing to give some of their time to help save Forest Farm Country Park and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve from possible future changes?

If so, please ask them to contact
Martin Chamberlain on

07952 926145 or
Email
m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com

???

Just a reminder - an evening talk on

Otters by Dr Elizabeth Chadwick

Wednesday 21st November 7.30 p.m.

Community Centre Tyn y Pwll Rd Whitechurch

Refreshments

(Plenty of parking in car park behind British Legion)

(A lot of our readers follow the progress of the Pontypridd Canal Conservation Group with interest, so I am very pleased to receive this report and photographs from Bill Hockey about the work being done by their volunteers —Ed)

Pontypridd Canal Conservation Group

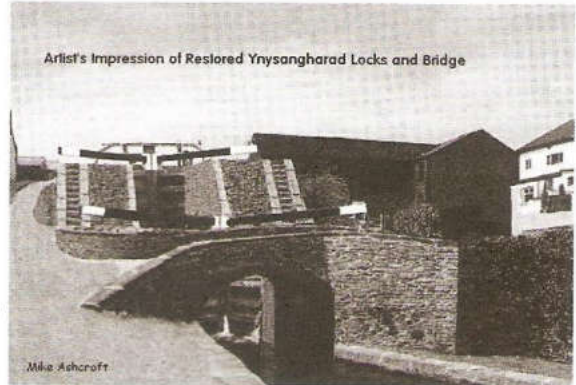
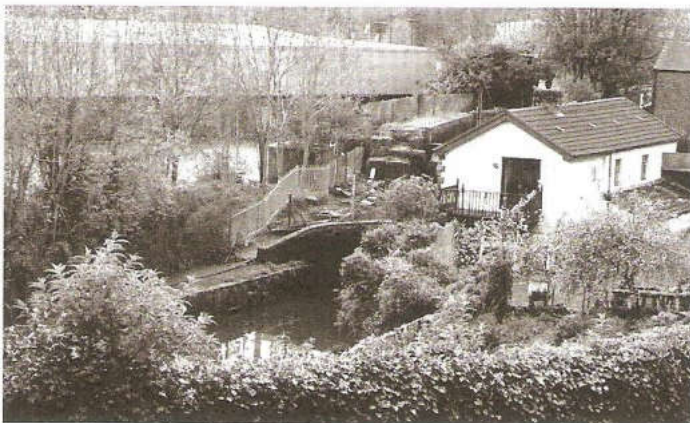
A progress report

Preparations for canal restoration at Pontypridd continue, planning approval and listed building consent for restoration of the Ynysangharad Locks being received in late May 2012. No objections were made and the approval conditions are not onerous.

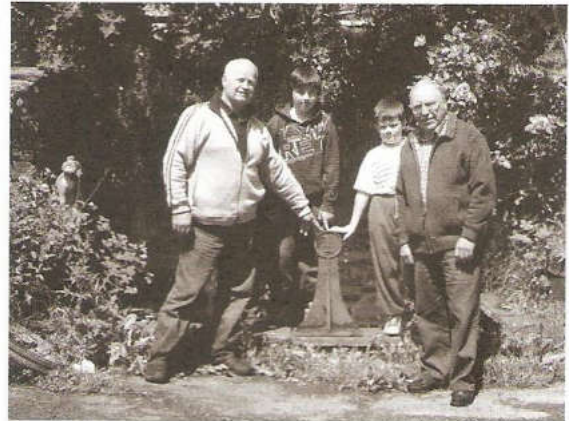
The Sainsbury's store opened on 4th July. An area of land which they released will benefit the future opening up of the filled-in canal but there is one stretch where the position of their boundary wall means that use will have to be made of the embankment to Pentrebach Road.

Most of the volunteer work this year has been carried out at the locks. Damaging tree growth was removed from the lock chamber walls – very challenging work which involved the lifting of massive coping stones. The demolition of the Lock 32 dam, which was started in June, should be completed by early September. At Nightingales Bush, Himalayan balsam plants were removed in July, growth being much less than in 2011. A group from Lloyds TSB Asset Management is to work at the canal for one day in mid-September as a part of their community support programme.

The basin is now much improved following clearance work by Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC. The recent high rainfall has resulted in flooding but sightings of Mallard ducks are now frequent and a heron visits occasionally. The Council continues to be supportive and has donated valuable stone removed from Pontypridd Town Centre as a part of the regeneration scheme. Public interest continues at a high level; one recent donation was an original GCC mile marker post.



Artist's impression
of the restored locks and bridge



Parts of the working areas are untidy but completion of the demolition work, the clearance of debris from the lock chambers and minor rebuilding work should radically improve the overall appearance of the locks over the next few months.

Bill Hockey

Annual *Friends* Coach trip—to Weston



On 16th June this year our annual coach trip went to Weston-Super-Mare. There were 31 Members and friends who all enjoyed this day out despite the wind and rain. At least the weather in Weston was better than that which prevailed in Cardiff on the day.

Unfortunately, just as we were about to leave the Holly Bush pick up, one of the ladies in our party was taken ill. An ambulance was sent for, but she was in the good hands of an ex nurse on the coach until it arrived. For those on the trip, I am pleased to report that after a check up at Llandough Hospital, she was allowed home later and her husband has told me that fortunately she has not had the same problem since.

Despite the 25 minute delay, we did actually get to Weston right on time as the traffic was relatively light due to the bad weather. On arrival, the group photograph was taken and copies made so that everyone was given their own memento of the visit on the return journey.

23 of us were taken to lunch at the Seward hotel, overlooking the beach and new pier, where we had an excellent fish and chip meal. Then I led a guided walk to see Jill Dando's Memorial Garden— located in the town's main Grove Park. The rest of the day was free for everyone to spend as they wished. Many of us went to see the improvements at the Pier, now reconstructed after the fire. Our coach left at 5.45pm and during the journey a box of Weston fudge was presented to the winner of the word game.

Mention must be made about Pencoed Coach Travel and Neil our driver. He used the coach like a taxi for us so with his help we were able to get around Weston without getting too wet.

Finally, I am pleased to say that, even though the numbers coming on the trip were down this year, we were still able to raise £56 for the *Friends*' funds.

I have already been asked where we shall be going next year and I am pleased to say the Committee has agreed that we shall be going back to **Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust**. Please look out in the 2013 Friends newsletters for further details.

Duncan Hockridge

What's been happening around the Wetlands?

***Raj Chettri
Community Ranger***

"You've cut down the oak tree, it used to be a favourite perch for the woodpecker" says Cliff bemoaning that now he can't get "The shot" of the Green woodpecker.

"Tough, this chainsaw will be coppicing photographers next" I reply and explain the reasons for all the "carnage" around the wetland. Cliff is pacified, especially now that Alec has promised to replace the oak tree with a better photogenic perch for his woodpecker.

The wetlands at Forest Farm were created in 1995, adjoining the "Sheep's Bane Wood" or the "Alder Carr". Two scrapes were installed and about 0.55ha of the scrapes were planted with phragmites and the margins were screen planted with alders and willows.

Over the years the screen planting has overgrown and is overshadowing the reeds. As a result, the reed-beds were deteriorating due to drying out and scrub encroachment. Succession to scrub and woodland is inevitable in the long term unless positive management is undertaken, as reed-beds/swamps represents the early stages of succession from open water to woodland. One of the 2 ponds was silted and the channels feeding the wetlands were clogged up with silt and vegetation and water was not free flowing into it at all.



In 2010, we successfully applied for a small grant of £700 from the Countryside Council for Wales to hire a JCB to re-profile the eastern pool and remove the silt. This work was undertaken in the autumn of the same year, followed on by 2 consecutive weekends' work by Cardiff Conservation Volunteers, coppicing the overgrown willows and removing the encroaching scrub vegetation. The staff from the Ranger Service continued to thin and remove the Alders from the reed-beds and lay the overgrown hedges in the autumn of 2011. A rotational cutting of small sections of reed-beds has been introduced from autumn 2010. This rotational cutting is done in a way that takes into account the various needs of different species requirements, from invertebrates, birds and small mammals.

At present, the reed-beds are showing signs of recovery and have started to spread back into the ar-



eas which were taken over by scrub. There is more ongoing work to be done every autumn, from reed-bed management to thinning of the overgrown screens of alder and willows, which are overshadowing the reed-beds.



Snipe.

Due to the shrinkage and degradation of the beds in Forest Farm, the snipe numbers are falling from flocks of 20 recorded in the past down to 6 at the present. The beds are also being overwintered by Bitterns and are a valuable nesting site for 2 types of warblers and harvest mice.

In the Reserve the dormouse boxes sited on the reed-beds are proving to show that it is a most favoured area for small mammals, reflected by the numbers using the boxes.



Bittern. Photo by Graham Clark

(I would like to express my sincere thanks to Raj and Alec Stewart for this report and all the Rangers and other volunteers who have helped with this, also Alec and Graham Clark for the photos—all except the bittern were taken by Alec. Ed)

Events - September to December 2012

Sunday 9th September 10.30—13.00	<i>Friends</i> Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Rod., Whitchurch
Saturday 15th September 10.00—16.00	<i>Friends OPEN DAY</i> —Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch Do come and enjoy all the Reserve has to offer, lots of wildlife - walks, bird hides, wetlands and at the Wardens Centre, lots of information, attractions and refreshments.
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
Wednesday 26th September 18.00	Foods of the Forest. A stroll around Forest Farm, then a tasting session of some delicious delicacies. £3 per person. ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT. Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 29th September 10.00—12.00	<i>Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12.</i> Bug Hotel Part 2 - We will be creating a bug hotel in the wildlife garden, an escape for those creepy crawlies. Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk

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
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Email: Sheila@forestfarm.org.uk

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