



FRIENDS

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

ISSUE 86

DECEMBER 2012

An early Christmas present?

A grant from Environment Wales

Earlier this summer, we applied for a grant from Environment Wales and were successful. We received a payment of £1,035!

The reason we applied is that when we are undertaking volunteering work on the Reserve, we are reliant on the Park Rangers to supply the required tools and equipment. On occasions, there are changes in our plans due to weather or other demands and then sometimes we are struggling to have enough equipment for our volunteers.

We will now start purchasing a number of tools which can be used by our volunteers and also for other organisations which undertake work on the Reserve. The tools will be used for path repairs, woodland management, including hedge laying, and general maintenance on the Reserve.

Martin Chamberlain



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Walk off Christmas and the New Year Sunday 13th January 2013

Meet Martin at Melingriffith Water Pump
Ty Mawr Rd for a post Christmas walk around
Hailey Park and Forest Farm Nature Reserve
10.30—1p.m. approx
ending at Forest Farm Wardens' Centre.

Light refreshments will be available. Toilet facilities
including disabled at the Wardens Centre.

An early date for your diary!

Wednesday 20th March 7.30p.m.

**"My role in the Reserve's Management
and its Future" by Nicola Hutchinson**
Conservation Officer, Cardiff Parks Dept

Whitchurch Community Centre
Ty'n y Pwll Rd., Whitchurch

Editorial

By the time you read this I expect you will be well on with planning for the festive season. So this is a good place to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and New year. Thank you for all your support. over the past year.

This edition starts appropriately by mentioning Christmas but then is a mixture of past and present seasons—from Martin's 'summer' three peaks walk., to articles relating to the Autumn from the two Paul's (Reserve Wardens) and Stella on the RSPB nature walk. Then to our volunteers— Hugh tells us of the post summer work of the Cardiff Conservation group and Chris describes the Friends work on the top meadow and John our recent hedge-laying—all essential and much valued maintenance for the Reserve.. Finally let's not forget our successful September Open Day and do take a look at the Events which take us into 2013 - we hope you can join in some of those!

We could do with your help on dating an old photo of Forest Farm (P4). Last but definitely not least is ash dieback disease. Sadly, the view is, it's a question of when not if it will arrive here. Chris James' other article on this topic incorporates what we can do to help.

Best wishes

Sheila Austin

MEMBERSHIP

Current Membership is 293 plus one group. This year we have had 58 New Members, (of these 26 joined via Pay Pal). A warm welcome to those who have joined recently.

We now send the Newsletter via E Mail to 73 of our members, who are all able to see the colour version on line. If any of you would now like to receive it this way, instead of by post, please let me know.

Once again thank you all for your continued support.

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

Deadline for articles for the next edition,
8th February 2013

For contact details, please see back page

Hedge Laying Course



Before

On Sunday 18th November, we had a hedge laying course at Forest Farm. 10 of us turned up to learn these new skills. from 3 of the Rangers. We were in the new allotment field. The Rangers split us into pairs to work, each pair being well spaced! Quite a lot of time was spent preparing the area before we could actually get to the hedge-laying. I think we all appreciate better now the skills of experienced hedge layers.



After—allowing more light
to the allotments

The weather was fine and it was great to be learning something which can be of use at Forest Farm, as we have plenty of hedges to lay.

It was a very successful day and we hope to repeat this on 20th January 2013 when we will be having hot vegetable soup and bread during the break!

John Harding

Forest Farm Reserve News

The kingfisher has successfully reared a family this year at the Reserve. It has been sighted on numerous occasions in and around the Reserve's water courses and many people have remarked on its continued presence.

The areas in which kingfishers hunt and feed have been greatly improved by selective habitat management by the Community Ranger Service in and around the hides. (Particular thanks to Alec and Raj for this.) For example, corridors of reedbeds have been cut to improve re-growth and to blend older growth in with the newer growth. This achieves the best possible outcome for our wildlife with regard to habitat improvement/restoration. The future is looking good for them.



Rangers continuing to work in the Llyn y Gamlas wetland



Egret in the snow on Forest Farm.
Photo Alec Stewart

The areas opened up have also improved routes for migrating birds such as Jack Snipe, Little Egret and Bittern and other forms of wildlife.

Concerning the hides, we have recently installed new seating in both hides and are in the process of raising the seating height by some 4 - 6 ins (10 - 15cms). The logs are designed to be vandal proof and definitely cannot be used to damage the hides, as was the previous furniture!

The TCV (The Conservation Volunteers) based in the main farmhouse are setting up a conservation task team to carry out a variety of work throughout the Reserve here and at

other sites within Cardiff. We look forward to working closely with them in future years.

Finally, the recent outbreaks of ash dieback are attributed to the *Chalara fraxinea* fungus. Older trees can survive initial attacks but younger ash are more vulnerable, killing the trees within one growing season of the symptoms becoming visible. More information can be seen, plus the initial signs of dieback, on the forestry commission website www.forestry.gov.uk/planthealth.

Paul Davies and Paul Pinnell

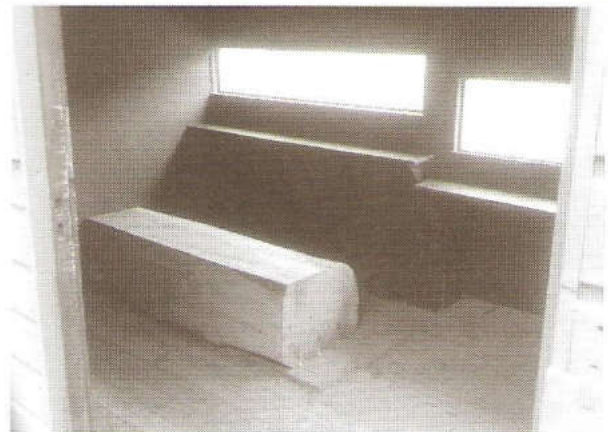
At the time of going to press, we have heard that the nearest cases to Cardiff have been confirmed in a tree nursery near Carmarthen.

Bird Hides - Martin Chamberlain

Much of the improvement to the Bird Hides, outside and in, has now been completed with new benches fitted. This should remove the problems caused by the previous seating!

There are some minor changes needed to the height of the benches so everyone can use them and this will be undertaken in the next few weeks.

The funds for the improvements and repairs have come from the Friends resources and we will continue to maintain the hides for the benefit of the many users.



Not the prettiest of pictures, but this shows those of you not able to visit what the new 'benches' in the hides look like. From Paul's report (P3) you will know why this was chosen and note that there is still some finishing off to be done. (Ed)



Does anyone know when this was taken?

This copy of an old photograph was found amongst BCTV documents. The writing on it looks like Forest Farm 19??

If anyone knows or has an idea when this was taken, do get in touch. We will publish your responses next time.

Get in touch via 'Contact us' on our website forest-farm.org.uk or contact me (see back page).

Sheila Austin (Editor)

Halcyon Days



Early November by the canal
but still some lovely colour to be seen.

A buzzard, sporting a very pale chest, sat up on a nearby telegraph pole so that we could all enjoy a close up view of this wonderful bird of prey. Was he sunbathing or just waiting for his next meal to come along?

Several of our favourite birds were around, such as a greater spotted woodpecker, song thrush, nuthatches, gold finches and the attractive grey wagtails. Lots of tits of various sorts were busily feeding in the trees and flew eagerly to the posts where seed had been placed to tempt them to come closer.

The dying remains of last seasons flowers bravely provided some colour in the hedgerows and on the canal banks. Purple loosestrife, Himalayan balsam and an occasional buttercup glowed in the sunshine.

At the end of the stroll some of us carried on to the weir where we saw a few fish jumping. They were different sizes and so I was unsure as to which fish they were – salmon, sewin or trout. I had to feel sorry for them as they attempted to jump the weir. How many attempts do they make before they are successful?

Our next walk is in November, Mis Ddu. Let's hope the rain will stay away.

A bright and sunny day welcomed a group of 18 people and we enjoyed a pleasant walk around the site. Autumn is well and truly here with trees losing some of their leaves with every breath of wind. Golds, reds and greens provided a colourful spectacle which was only rivalled by the kingfishers, (glas y dorfan), which we saw on several occasions.



Salmon on the River Taff

WEBSITE WOES!

We've had some problems with our website in the past few weeks as I know some of you have noticed. Unfortunately our internet domain name -

forestfarm.org.uk had expired and we'd not received any renewal information from the web host company. This did lead to our website being offline for about a week, but I'm pleased to say nothing was lost or damaged, and the site is now online again. We had received a couple of phone calls about the site from our members so I'm pleased to see our website is missed when it's not there.

To give you an update on our social media status, our **Twitter** account currently has 151 followers which is always on the increase and has regular interactions with RSPB groups and conservation organisations. If you are on Twitter you can follow us @forestfarmuk. The most recent tweet to us was a picture of a salmon jumping on the weir. **Facebook** is a little quieter but still doing well with 108 followers.

If there ever is anything you'd like to see on any of these services from us then please do drop me a line. I can be contacted by email webmaster@forestfarm.org.uk

I'd also just like to thank everyone that has renewed their membership or indeed joined as a new member using our online **paypal** service. It has proved very popular and will hopefully make it easier for us to reach new members.

Thanks,

Matthew Lock

Plastic bags and Whitchurch health foods shop

You might wonder about the title, but there is a link! As you know, in October 2011 legislation in Wales introduced a charge for single use carrier bags. This was to encourage people to use their own bags so as to conserve limited resources, promote sustainability, and cut down on waste and litter. The money raised is collected by the retailer - and the Welsh government wanted this to be passed on to good causes, preferably environmental good causes, here in Wales.

We have been delighted that **Whitchurch health foods** decided they wanted to use the money from the sale of plastic bags in their shop, near the Post Office, to support something **environmental and local** - namely **Forest Farm Local Nature Reserve**. I spoke to the owner manager Larissa Sheppard who said it was her father, Steve Sheppard's, idea (He's a Director of the business).

This means a lot to us and, via the Newsletter, we would like to thank them for this thoughtful initiative.

Sheila Austin

ASH DIEBACK DISEASE

(*Chalara fraxinea* or *Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus*)

There has been a great deal of publicity about the disease affecting ash trees. This is an extremely serious situation nationally. For our members and readers, Chris James has contributed this article. As many of you know, Chris is a voluntary ranger with a huge knowledge, understanding and involvement with Forest Farm over many years. Recently, he has been working with Cardiff Parks Department on a management plan for the Reserve. Apart from general information, this article focuses on Forest Farm and what we can do to help. At the time of going to print, there has been one case of ash dieback disease in Wales. This has been confirmed by Defra and was found in a newly planted tree on private woodland in Carmarthenshire. Ed)

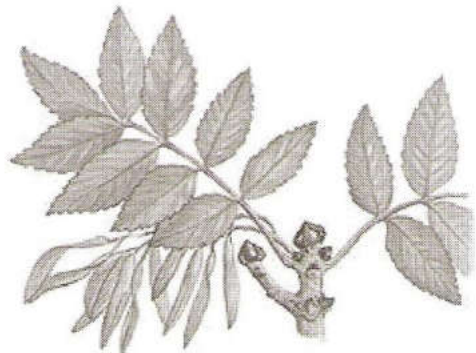


The ash dieback disease, caused by the pathogenic fungus, *Chalara fraxinea*, is now established in the UK and it is unlikely to be eradicated. It is most likely that we will see the disease turning up on Forest Farm Nature Reserve in the future.

The fungus causing the problem originated in Japan but did not cause problems to the Asian Ash trees. It was imported to Poland in 1992 and the disease spread to other European countries devastating the ash saplings. When it infects adult trees, the infection weakens the trees and they become susceptible to a common virulent parasitic fungus, *Armillaria melea* or honey fungus, which is common in the UK.

Because British ash trees are genetically diverse, it is possible that during the spread of the disease, some individual ash trees will be resistant to the *Chalara fraxinea* and these will be unaffected, and will propagate some resistant seedlings which, hopefully and eventually, will fill the gaps created by the dying trees.

The effect of the disease across the UK will be profound and we will see the ash disappearing from our island as the elm was eradicated in the 1970s.



So what can we do at Forest Farm?

1. We must be observant and report any possible infections.
2. We must support the Ranger Service to assist in the management of the Reserve.
3. Keep up to date on the development of this disease and other tree pathogens.
4. Continue to remove the ash saplings etc from the Top Meadow
5. Make every attempt possible to improve the condition of the wooded areas.
6. Consider planting trees resistant to the disease.

It will be important to improve the status of our woodlands by ensuring that they are not too crowded with trees and thickets. This is because microbiological pathogens are more likely to become established as they have done in oak woodlands with rhododendron thickets.

Chris James

Pictures taken from the Forestry Commission website. Further information can be obtained online from them or Wikipedia.

September Open Day

This photo was taken on the *Friends* Open Day on 18th September.

It was taken in the stable area next to the Wardens Centre where beekeeper Peter had brought some of the equipment he uses and willingly answered any questions from visitors.



Peter, third from the left with some of the interested visitors



Although not part of the *Friends* Open Day, Michelle Fitzsimmons of Edible Landscaping was there taking a group around Forest Farm—one of the courses she runs. Michelle (far right of the picture) has given one of our evening talks

Visitors were able to stroll around the orchard, pond, see the herb garden (as well as the rest of the Reserve of course). Also maps and books about the Reserve were available for reference purposes.

Last but not least were a varied and delicious selection of refreshments courtesy of Duncan, Joy, Pam and Barry which was the last of the trial period 'café' days initiated by Duncan.

Cardiff Conservation Group – Doing something positive

September saw our return after the summer – always slightly apprehensive as to what has grown during the short break. The thing that struck you was the Rosebay Willow Herb 5 feet tall; it had taken off and covered a large section of the open ground. There were also patches of Himalayan Balsam and Japanese knotweed. Our numbers were low, unfortunately, four of us. The strimmer was put to good use cutting the Willow Herb and the rest of us tackled the Balsam – surprisingly, the balsam seed had not ripened that much. After the morning session was completed, we could see we had made good inroads and thankfully it had been dry and sunny.

Back on the Reserve in October and a sunny morning, which made a change from the prolonged period of wet weather. Jobs to tackle this time were the Japanese knotweed which we had been unable to cut during the September visit (must make sure spraying is being kept up). Other tasks were, cutting the fresh growth sprouting from old tree stumps, clearing undergrowth from around our hedge and also a slight prune. Group numbers up – seven in total – which meant the morning task was not so daunting.

Programme January – March 2013

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

January 26th	Thinning out old trees and clearing dead wood Middle entrance
February 23rd	Scrub/coppicing clearing Top entrance
March 30th	Clearing undergrowth/checking for dumped rubbish 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 20704889

Did you know that if you choose to have your Friends newsletter via email, it will be in colour? Recent past editions of the newsletter on the website (forestfarm.org.uk) have also been in colour. It is a pity that the cost prevents us from printing colour hard copies. (Editor)

FRIENDS VOLUNTARY EVENT 14TH OCTOBER 2012

Work commenced on the Top Meadow in an attempt to restore the area to an open meadow. Currently, the meadow is surrounded by bramble thicket, penetrating the field by approximately 10 metres and in addition there are several hundred ash tree saplings along the western edge. The bramble thicket and the ash saplings are significantly reducing the area of grassland in the field and are not significantly increasing the diversity of plant and animal species in the area. To improve the status of the area, it will be necessary to reduce the bramble thicket fringe to approx two metres depth and to remove the saplings growing in the open meadow.

On Sunday, eight volunteers cleared a significant number of saplings and cleared a small fraction of the bramble. It was not very easy work removing the saplings because they range up to 5 to 6 years old. They cannot be pulled from the ground and have to be dug out using spades. If this work can be completed before next spring, the meadow will provide an improved habitat for meadow flowers and insects. Reduced bramble thicket will provide suitable habitat for birds and small mammals.

Interfaces between different habitats area are additionally very rich habitats for many species of animals. The interfaces will be between the woods and brambles and between the brambles and the meadow. These areas will provide improved habitats for several species of butterflies eg speckled wood and some species of fritillary and improved feeding areas for birds. The grassland area will take a little longer to restore but eventually plant species such as hay rattle will return and we will see increasing numbers of meadow brown butterflies, small coppers etc.

There are many man hours of work still required to complete the restoration of the meadow and I suggest that the Friends Volunteers continue with this work during the autumn and winter this year, hopefully completing it before Spring 2013.

Chris James

(Reminder = Friends Volunteering dates: Normally the second Sunday in the month at 10.00. Next dates:- Dec 9th, Jan 20th, Feb 10th and March 10th)

(A reminder of warmer times and thanks from Martin to those who supported him. Ed)

THE WELSH THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE

Its 4:30 AM on June 23rd and dawn is breaking over Snowdonia National Park. We are waiting to be called forward as Team 70 on the GE Ty Hafan Three Peaks Challenge starting from Pen Y Pass car park to follow the Pyg path to Snowdon.

The weather is dry with little wind and mild, something that we would not experience for the rest of the day. For the next two hours we follow the Pyg Path until we reach a T junction to the summit. We then are hit by strong winds, thick mist and rain with visibility down to 25 metres. Ten minutes later we reach the summit, climb to the trig point where I hold to the top to stop being blown off the top. A quick check on the team and a 90 minute decent following the Snowdon railway to Llanberis and onto

Cadair Idris for the next challenge.

At the safety briefing, we are advised that the final stage has been cancelled due to the weather but from our position the sun is out with high clouds. A hard climb to Llyn Cau then a scramble up Craig Cau until we are hit again by wind, rain and mist.

For the next hour we walk through these conditions until it clears and we are left with fantastic views of the mountains. We arrive at the final check point, regroup our teams and return to our minibuses—two down and one to go. We calculate that we need to be at Pen Y Fan by 7:00 PM to achieve the challenge.



We approached the Brecon Beacons from the north and Pen Y Fan appears out of the clouds. A telephone call from Cardiff advises that it is raining heavily. We arrive at the car park at 06:45 PM check in at the safety control and start the last walk as heavy rain starts. One hour later we are on top of Pen Y Fan and we have achieved the challenge, wet but happy. After arriving back home I feel that I have spent most of the day in a car wash - but having experienced the mountains, I am planning to return again, hopefully in better weather. It is however a reminder of how quickly the weather can change even in the summer, and the importance of carrying the correct safety equipment.

As I write this article I would like to thank everyone who has sponsored me for over £300 which will be used by Ty Hafan for their special charity. Also, I would like to thank the staff of GE Nantgarw who provided the organisation and marshals for the event without whose dedication the event would not have been possible.

Martin Chamberlain

Events - December 2012—March 2013

Sunday 9th December 10.00—12.30approx	Friends Volunteering Event. Woodland management. Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitechurch
Saturday 15th December 10.00-12.30	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitechurch
Saturday 15 th December 10.00—12.00	Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Join the Rangers on their annual Yuletide and wreath making at the Bowls Pavilion, Victoria Park. Normal charges apply for logs and wreaths. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk

Events December 2012 — March 2013 cont'd

Sunday 13 th January 10.30 – 13.00	Join Martin for a post Christmas walk. Meet at Melingriffith Water Pump Ty Mawr Rd Whitchurch for a walk ending at Forest Farm Wardens Centre where refreshments will be available. Toilet facilities at Wardens Centre.
Saturday 19 th January 10.00 – 12.30	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Sunday 20 th January 10.00 – 12.30 approx	Friends Volunteering Event. Hedgelaying (weather permitting) Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch
Saturday 26 th January 10.30—12.30	Volunteering event. Thinning out old trees and clearing dead wood Cardiff Conservation Group. Meet at the middle entrance, Longwood Drive Whitchurch. See P9 for details
Saturday 26 th January 10.00 – 12.00	Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Sunday 10 th February 10.00—12.30 approx	Friends' Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Road., Whitchurch
Saturday 16 th February 10.30—13.00	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Saturday 23 rd February 10.00—12.00	Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Saturday 23 rd February 10.30—12.30	Volunteering event. Scrub/coppicing clearing Cardiff Conservation Group. Meet at the top entrance, Longwood Drive Whitchurch. See P9 for details
Sunday 10 th March 10.00 – 12.30 approx	Friends Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch
Saturday 16 th March 10.00—12.30	Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Wednesday 20th March 19.30	Evening talk "My role in the Reserve's Management and its Future" Nicola Hutchinson – Parks Conservation Officer Cardiff Parks Dept. Whitchurch Community Centre, Tyn y Pwll Rd. Refreshments. ALL WELCOME

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.