

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM



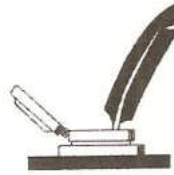
Country Park and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

Editor's Forum

May 1997

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I am pleased to report on behalf of 'The Friends' committee their pleasure at the excellent turnout for the AGM on April 16th. The responses of members to their reports were interesting and constructive.



Prior to the AGM, in the unavoidable absence of Mr Teg Jones, who was to give the talk, he was replaced by Priscilla Quinn. As an officer of the Environment Agency, she gave an authoritative and fascinating insight into the workings of this body. Booklets and leaflets were available, and we were informed as to how we could make use of their facilities to help protect the environment.

Wishing you all a happy, sunblest summer holiday.

Ken Patterson

SPRING CLEAN AT THE RESERVE

A successful litter-pick was carried out by volunteers split into 3 groups. One covered Longwood Drive and adjoining areas, which had a lot of litter. Some Phoenix members participated. Another took the towpath along the river upstream, the third covered the downstream area.

MEMBERSHIP

The final membership figure of

Friends of Forest Farm

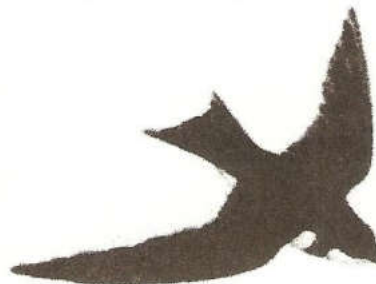
for the 1996/97 year stood at 218 families.

Another encouraging year - and might I take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued support.

Already we are receiving a steady flow of membership renewal forms, and we are looking forward to another successful session in 1997/98.

N.J.Gale Membership Secretary

On a later occasion the Watch Group cleared along the Canal and adjoining paths. The total number of bags collected was 132.



RSPB PHOENIX

The Group spent two sessions during the February half-term week helping to build the nest site for Sand Martins. They enjoyed being able to take part in the project despite the hard work and the wet weather.

We returned to the site on March 1st to finish levelling the bank, and then went on to complete the cleaning and re-positioning of the Nest Boxes on the middle section of the Reserve.

Some of the Group helped with the litter-pick on March 16th, and on April 9th we were back again to spring clean the middle section, continuing under the motorway and on towards Tongwynlais. The work was finished by mid-morning and, as the day was sunny and warm, we rewarded ourselves with a bird-watching session and picnic lunch taken in the new hide, from where we watched the Swallows and Sand Martins skimming over the lake.

Pauline Linck Leader

MEMBERSHIP enquiries please to

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CLIFF BURROWS FOR SAND MARTINS

It was going to be our biggest bird box so far, measuring some 30 feet in length and 6 feet in height. We were going to construct an artificial Sand Martin Cliff. As reported in last autumn's issue of your magazine, the Sand Martin colony nesting on the nearby River Taff was washed out last year by a sudden rise in water levels.

The initial idea came from Chris James who, I am glad to say, helped with the hard labour, for hard it was! After some initial research, particularly Chris Du Feu's 'BTO Guide to Nestboxes', it was found that one or two of these had been built elsewhere, and had been successfully colonised.



One cold, wet February morning we started. The site chosen was near the new pond; it would give good views from the bird hide. Oak posts were sunk into the ground and concreted in to form a sound support, to which was fixed a solid steel palisade fence, with sheets of one inch reinforcing mesh outside that. The fence and mesh had holes cut out at regular intervals in order to take one metre long clay pipes.

Then came the hard work of backfilling by hand approximately 100 tons of sandy gravel, excavated when the pond was dug out. As the backfilling commenced, the bottom layer of clay pipes was inserted, with just one end showing through the face. An open bag of sand was placed at the end of each pipe to act as a nesting chamber. When the first layer was complete, sheets of corrugated steel were placed over the sand bags, literally putting a roof over the birds' heads. And so we continued upwards.



Three days, and several hundred wheelbarrowfuls later, the bulk of the job was complete. Our next task was to render the vertical face. Chicken wire was fixed to the face in order to get a key for the sand/cement render. The final coat was a rough cast finish, using specially hired Tyrolean guns. The last job was to fill the clay pipes with sand. (Sand Martins like to excavate their own nest sites). The Forest Farm Watch group were on hand for this. Finally the top was planted with overhanging vegetation to give a natural appearance.

I am writing this article in the first week of April, and already the Sand Martins have arrived and have shown interest in the cliff. Whether or not they will nest is another story - if not this year, perhaps next. I will keep you posted.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers for the hard work they put into this project, including Martin Chamberlain and his son Christopher representing the Friends of Forest Farm, voluntary wardens Chris James, Howard Davies and Dave Rogers, Watch parents John Dearing, Huw Evans and Edwin Watts, the Watch group themselves, and finally Phoenix (the junior wing of the RSPB), all of whom put in a lot of time and effort.

Mike Wiley (Countryside Warden)

Sand Martins in the new Wetland

The building of an artificial cliff next to the Friends' hide in February this year has provided a nesting site for a small transcontinental migrant, the Sand Martin. At the time of writing (mid April) birds have arrived in South Wales, and several have started excavating nest burrows in the artificial cliff.

Most people are unfamiliar with this little brown European swallow, although they are able to separate the large, stiff winged swifts, screaming between our houses on summer evenings, from the three species of swallow that most people lump together. The birds comprising this group are the Barn Swallow, the House Martin and the rarer Sand Martin.

Close observation of these swallows will reveal differences. The Sand Martin is the smallest European swallow. It has a brown back, white under parts and a brown breast band. It has a flitting, erratic flight, unlike the slower and less swooping flight of the House Martin. It is often seen feeding on flying insects with house martins over water. The House Martin has darker upper parts and a characteristic white rump. The Swallow, which feeds on larger flying insects associated with grazing animals, has a graceful flight with regular beats, and glides and has the well known deeply forked tail.

The voices of House Martin and sand Martin have some similarities, but the flight call of the sand Martin is louder, drier and harsher than the weaker but clearer chirrup of the House Martin.

If the artificial cliff is suitable for sand martins (early indications suggest that it is) then visitors to the Friends' hide this summer will witness adults birds collecting insect food over the pond and returning to feed young in the burrows. In a good year two broods are raised, adults and young returning to overwinter south of the Sahara in Africa in September to October.

During this century the population of this bird has decreased gradually, with a crash in the late sixties that reduced the population by around 90%. This was due to a severe drought in the Sahel region (south of the Sahara). Many migrant bird populations were reduced by these droughts which affected their winter feeding areas in the Sahel.

Since the late sixties there has been a partial recovery, and in 1992 three hundred pairs were estimated to breed in Glamorgan. Some of this population has been breeding on the River Taff near the former Melingriffith Tinplate Works site for the last five years. This site is now under threat from erosion caused by upstream canalisation of the river. The provision of an alternative nesting site in the area will hopefully keep these interesting and attractive birds in the area if the Melingriffith site becomes unsuitable.

Chris James

VOLUNTARY WARDENS

The duties of the Voluntary Wardens are not laid down as hard and fast rules. It is expected that each one will walk around the Reserve every week if possible, and report back any damage, vandalism or anything of interest. On these walks a badge is worn with the City logo and the wearer's name on it. This is to show the public that the Reserve is patrolled, and it helps to deter wrongdoers as well as giving authority when corrective action is needed. It is also very noticeable that the public will approach a badge-wearer and ask for, or share information.

Each warden tends to specialise on something or other. I record all the birds throughout the year, and three of us have care of the 100-odd nest boxes. Another collects rubbish on his walk; unfortunately he has just announced that he is returning to live near his daughter in Yorkshire. Others do work on the Reserve, cutting Japanese Knotweed, killing Ragwort and helping out on construction work and maintenance. One spends his time digging the mud out of the canal, and is making slow but steady progress.

Mr Mike Wiley, the resident warden, calls a Wardens meeting about four times a year and outlines the work done and the future work planned. Suggestions and ideas are thrown about, and any special duties allocated. There are eight Voluntary Wardens at the moment, all officially appointed by the Sports and Leisure Department.

E.O. Edwards

**DISCOVER
THE
HIDDEN
HISTORY
AT
FOREST
FARM**

**WEDNESDAY
16 JULY
6.00 pm**

Join **PAUL KENT**

Countryside Ranger

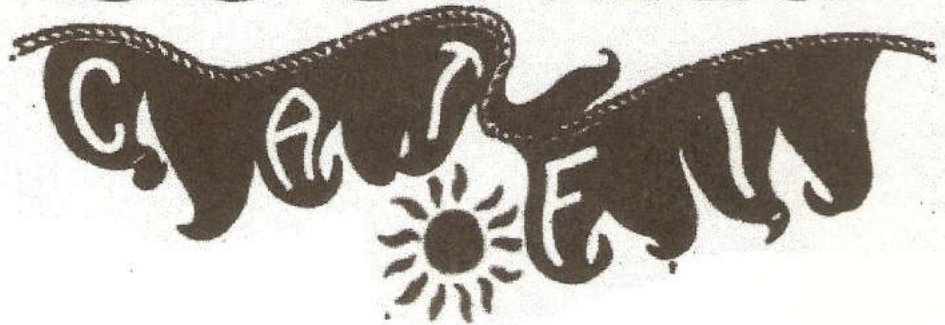
in unravelling the
fascinating
industrial heritage
in this area.

FOREST FARM

Cycle Hire Centre
Forest Farm Road

Distance: 2 miles

COUNTRY



SUNDAY 29 JUNE

10.00 am - 5.00 pm

Come on down to a Great Family Event

that has become a
traditional fixture in the calendar.

Craft stalls Displays Entertainment

Big Arena Demonstrations

It all add up to a fantastic day out!

Check posters for further details.

FOREST FARM WHITCHURCH

YOC

The YOC (7-12 yr olds)
are holding their
fortnightly meetings
at Forest Farm for the
summer months
commencing
April 16th.

Details from
Jac queline Linck
and Dave Dollah

Telephone (01222)
627159

Thanks to Robin Sotheby for the layout of this Newsletter.

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 allviews expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.

