

# FORENDS O F FOREST ARM



## Country Park and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

Editor's Forum

August 1997

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*It's always a pleasure to convey good news. The Country Craft Fayre held at Forest Farm provided this opportunity.*

*The Friends of Forest Farm stall took the top place for Best Dressed Stall. Pauline Linck, Dennis Davies and myself received the certificate from Dr Victor Chambers of Amersham International.*

*However, the responsibility for the setting up of the stall is entirely due to Pauline and her two helpers, Jacque Linck and Dave Dollah.*

*I'm sure you will find the contributions made in this issue of particular interest, and the contributors' efforts appreciated.*

*Let us hope that the remaining summer weather will be kind, whether we are on holiday or not, and the Country Park is there for you to visit and enjoy at all times.*

Ken Patterson

## RSPB PHOENIX and YOC

The Phoenix Group made the first knotweed cut of the season on the middle section of the Reserve during May Bank Holiday week. The programme of two cuts a year in May and August are weakening the knotweed, and the work was completed in good time, allowing the Group to spend the rest of the morning bird watching on the Reserve.

It was a sunny day and the birds were busy calling and carrying nesting material. The variety seen included Long-tailed tits, Coal Tits, Nuthatch, Buzzard, Jay, Moorhen and Coot - and, of course, Sand Martins at their new nest site. A pleasant and rewarding morning!

The YOC Group have just completed their summer programme. Since Easter they have met every fortnight at Forest Farm. This has been a great success, as it has provided the opportunity for the members to pursue outdoor activities. These have included canal dipping (no-one fell in!), hedgerow-dating and recording, playing outdoor games and visiting hides to observe the Sand Martins and other birds. Time has also been spent indoors, talking and learning about Bats, Butterflies, Owls and other wildlife.

### MEMBERSHIP

Most of last year's Friends have now renewed their membership for the current session (1997/98). For those whose minds it might have slipped, or who have mislaid their renewal forms, I have arranged for a replacement to be delivered with this Newsletter. Thank you once again for your support.

All membership enquiries please to :

Mr Noel Gale  
8 Heath Park Drive  
Heath, Cardiff, CF4 3QJ

Tel : 01222-756771

Pauline Linck  
(RSPB Phoenix Leader)  
Jacque Linck  
and  
Dave Dollah  
(YOC Leaders)





## RESERVE NEWS



In my last article I promised to keep you informed on the success or otherwise of our new Sand Martin Cliff. Completed in late February, by mid-March the first Sand Martins were seen recceing around the area, a few flying over the new pond and a pair actually landing on the face of the cliff. This was a promising start, and I was very hopeful.

By mid-April several pairs were seen actually excavating nesting burrows through the sand-filled clay pipes. By regular monitoring I discovered at first that eight pairs were actively excavating. This number soon increased to thirteen, then to nineteen, and finally to twenty pairs. The fact that we had twenty pairs nesting in the cliff in the first year exceeded all our expectations.

It was noticeable that the top twelve holes were the first to be used and, when these were all occupied, the next layer down was started, the lower layer (a good two feet six from the ground) ignored. This was probably due to two reasons :

- (1) The fear of predation by animals such as Mink, Weasels, etc.
- (2) The fear of being washed out by rising water levels (which couldn't in fact happen).

Looking out from the hide, which gives excellent views across the cliff, sometimes the sky seemed full of hirundines - Sand Martins, House Martins and Swallows. Then it would suddenly empty, as a Sparrowhawk would come hurtling over the hedge in a surprise attack, only to be thwarted by these agile flyers.

As the season wore on the activity increased, both parents obviously feeding young inside the cliff. It was then that it happened.

During one of my regular morning checks, I noticed that something was wrong. A couple of pairs of Sand Martins were hovering agitatedly outside the holes. With the aid of binoculars I could see that several of the holes had been deliberately blocked with pebbles, and the birds couldn't enter to feed their trapped young. As I watched I saw one bird manage to squeeze around the blockage in a desperate attempt to enter. In a couple of minutes I had the holes cleared. I watched from the hide, hoping that all would be well and was relieved to see the parent birds entering the holes with food, and behaving normally.

How anyone could do such a thing is beyond me. Had these people been caught, they could have faced a fine of up to £1000 per blocked hole.

Later in the season I received a request from the British Trust for Ornithology to ring the birds. This is a very valuable exercise, enabling a wealth of knowledge to be assembled. (Whilst on holiday recently in the North West of Scotland, I found a dead gull washed up on the lochside with a ring on its leg. I retrieved the ring and forwarded it to the British Museum in London, who will be able to identify it by its individual number).

One evening in late June, Dave Bull and Peter Morgan, two very experienced B.T.O. ringers, caught and ringed twenty two birds (eight males and fourteen females with obvious brood patches). None of these birds had previously been ringed. This surprised us somewhat as Dave and Peter had in previous years ringed the nearby Sand Martin colony on the River Taff, and it had been assumed - perhaps wrongly - that our new colony had come from the river.

As I write this article at the end of July, the young are flying and the adults are busy preparing for a second brood. Timing is crucial here, for they leave for South Africa at the end of September.

I would like to thank again all the people involved in helping to create this very successful new habitat. They should be happy in the knowledge that their efforts have helped to increase the population of this very beautiful little bird.

Mike Wiley (Countryside Warden)



## LOTTERY WIN

Forest Farm Watch Group and a Cardiff based scientist are beneficiaries of a Lottery Award.

Entomologist **DR PETER MCEWEN** has won an award from the National Lottery through the Millenium Commission. The award of £2985 is to fund a project, in partnership with the Forest Farm **WATCH GROUP** at the Glamorgan Canal Local Nature Reserve. The project is aimed at raising the profile of the **GREEN LACEWING**, a naturally occurring predator on garden pests. The award from the **Royal Society** and **British Association Millenium Awards**, a new scheme run on behalf of the Millenium Commission, aims at building community partnerships through science and technology.

Dr McEwen, an expert on Green Lacewings, has designed a box in which lacewings can spend the winter, reducing dramatically their high overwintering mortality. The project, which will involve the Watch group putting up lacewing boxes around the Reserve during late Summer, and counting lacewings in the boxes during Winter, is aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the boxes. It will give the young conservationists a chance to take part in a real and significant experiment. It will also involve other interested community groups, thus spreading the word about the lacewing's usefulness in pest control.

Green Lacewings are commonly occurring important predators of insect pests such as greenfly and whitefly. The adults are bright green, about 1 cm long with golden eyes and lace-like wings. They are often seen on windows during Spring and Autumn. The adults are not predaceous, feeding rather on pollen and nectar, the material needed to produce eggs.

The eggs are laid on vegetation and hatch into larvae. It is the larva that is predaceous, stabbing its prey with curved jaws and sucking out its victim's body contents, discarding the shell and moving on to its next victim. Many hundreds of prey are consumed during this larval stage. Finally the larvae pupates (forms a cocoon) and then emerges as an adult, ready to start the cycle once more.

By helping the lacewings to overwinter in boxes, they will emerge in Spring in large enough numbers to control pests. This method of **biological control** lends itself to gardeners and commercial growers who do not wish to use chemical methods of insect control.



Chris James and Peter McEwen will be available by arrangement to talk about the project to groups and to show the experiment in progress at the Reserve.

Chris James

## CARDIFF AND THE COUNTRYSIDE

Cardiff County Council is preparing a strategy document to explore and set out in writing how the countryside, within the City boundary and on its edge, can be made more fully appreciated, enjoyed and enhanced.

It is being prepared with the active involvement of a wide range of local countryside-related groups - including 'Friends of Forest Farm'.

The first draft of the document has been available for public consultation, and by the end of the year an **Integrated Action Programme for 1998-2001** will be established. All aspects are being looked at - encouraging public participation in countryside-related issues; raising awareness and understanding of our natural environment in Cardiff; considering access, but protection where necessary.

Full use is being made of the many local groups, such as 'The Friends', to develop a network of like-minded bodies to assist in and monitor the Programme. In this way it is hoped that Forest Farm Country Park and other natural areas like it will be safeguarded.

Eric James



## WOODLAND SKILLS DAY AT FOREST FARM

**Saturday 22 November  
10.00 am**

**FREE**

**Led by the  
Countryside and Community Rangers**

As part of National Tree Week, the rangers will be showing you many different traditional woodland skills, with a chance of taking part in some practical woodland management.

Meet at the Car Park, Forest Farm

**Please bring old clothes !**

## WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL LAND

A new development plan has been submitted by the Hospital trust to the Council's Planning Department. The main changes from the earlier plan are :-

- 1) The new hospital to be reduced from 200 beds to 100 beds.
- 2) The chapel to be a restaurant and bar.
- 3) The central stores building to be purchased by the Hospital trust to gift to the Council for use as a sports centre.
- 4) Extra 1.8 acres of meadows to be retained as grazing land.
- 5) Density of housing to be increased.
- 6) Two access points on to the Local Nature Reserve are shown in the new plan.
- 7) Access on to Velindre Road from the development site.

The 'Friends' continue to oppose any development on the hospital site. Your Committee has written to the Planning Officer to express these views and to take up certain aspects of the new plan which will directly affect the LNR. These include density of housing, height of barrier fence, second proposed access on to the Reserve and the positioning of the buffer zone.

Julie Morgan M.P. strongly supports the residents of Whitchurch in their opposition to any development on the hospital site. She has met the Hospital Managers to question them about the proposed plans. If you oppose these plans, write to the Planning Officer and tell him your views.

Public opinion can influence decisions.

**WATCH...** is a club for young people who care about wildlife and the environment.

The group based at Forest Farm meets one Saturday every month from 10 am till 12 noon. New members are always welcome.

The next meetings this year are on **SATURDAYS** :

**20th September, 18th October, 22nd November and 20th December.**

For further details, please ring Mike Wiley on 612213 / 796152 or Chris James on 611342 (evening and weekends).

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

