

OF FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM



Country Park and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

Editor's Forum

March 1998

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The march on London of country folk and supporters, though representing diverse interests, has reawakened national interest in the environment.

I'm sure the Friends must hope that some of the messages from the green lobby will reach local levels of responsibility for implementation. Action, not fine words, is now needed to sustain areas like our Country Park. We shall see. Meanwhile, our Committee remains vigilant.

To quote the late Mother Teresa, "To keep a lamp burning we have to keep putting oil in it."

My thanks to all our excellent contributors and to Robin Sotheby, who is now fit and back in harness. I join our Chairman in wishing Mr Dennis Davies a return to good health soon.

Looking forward to seeing you all at the A.G.M.

Ken Patterson

MEMBERSHIP

We are now nearing the end of our 1997/98 season, and I am pleased to say that our family membership reached 223. This is very encouraging and actually equals our best year since the Group was formed in 1990. Thank you for your support.

You will find a **membership renewal form** at the bottom of our A.G.M. announcement (enclosed with our March Newsletter).

If you have any thoughts, suggestions, ideas or even 'grumbles' relating to the Country Park and Reserve, please let a committee member know. Better still, come to the A.G.M. and air them in person.

Noel Gale

8 Heath Park Drive
Heath, Cardiff, CF4 3QJ

Tel : 01222 - 756771

WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

An amended plan, put forward by the **Hospital Trust** in the summer of 1997, involved the building of 200 new houses, 180 flats, 36 sheltered units for the elderly, a 100-bed new psychiatric hospital, shops, a pub and restaurant and community health facilities.

Compared with the previous proposals, this scheme showed a reduction of 39 houses and an extra 1 1/2 acres of meadow land left undeveloped. Also included was the donation of the redundant stores building to the Council for use as a sports hall.

The new proposals were turned down by the Council's **Highways Committee** in September because of the inevitable increase in traffic that would be generated in an already very busy area. On 29th October the Council's **Planning Committee** also rejected the plans on the grounds of the loss of open space. Members of **Whitchurch Action Committee** spoke in opposition to the developments at both the Council's Highways and Planning Committee meetings. The decision to reject the application was ratified by the full council on 18th December 1997.

Since December 18th the Hospital Trust has been more willing to enter into dialogue with the Action Committee. Representatives of the Action Committee and **Julie Morgan M.P.** have now met with the **Cardiff Community Health Care Trust Managers** on two occasions. There will be further meetings over the coming weeks.

As soon as the latest ideas on how the Whitchurch Hospital site might be altered become more concrete a **public meeting** will be called by the Action Committee to keep residents informed and provide them with a chance to express their views.

Pauline Linck

RSPB PHOENIX

The second stage of our **COPPICING** programme was completed at the end of December. This work has been carried out on the slope down to the canal north of **LONGWOOD DRIVE**. There is still a small area to cut back, but this will now be done in the Autumn.

The afternoon of the same day had been set aside for nest box cleaning. This started well, but to our dismay we found seven of the boxes were missing, including the **WOODPECKER** box. Three further boxes had been left lying on the ground.

We were able to replace most of the boxes in February and hope there is no further vandalism.

A **KNOT WEED** cut is planned for May, and both our April and May monthly meetings will be held at the Reserve.

Pauline Linck (Leader)

Sweatshirts

Sweatshirts carrying the **Friends of Forest Farm** logo are for sale. They are good quality and have a raglan sleeve to give a comfortable fit.

A choice of sizes and colours is available.

Price **£16.50**.

Children's sizes at **£10.75**.

If interested, please contact :

Pauline Linck.

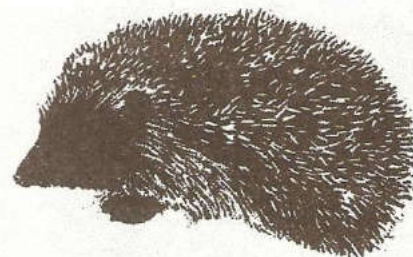
Tel : **01222 - 617012**

RESERVE NEWS

A small, but nonetheless very important part of our estate management work on the Nature Reserve is the creation of **Habitat Piles**, some of which can be seen from the towpath. These piles are not just thrown together haphazardly, but stacked in such a way as to be most beneficial to wildlife.

Recently the **Forest Farm Watch Group** helped with this work by making two huge piles with material left over from coppicing hazel. First, large logs were placed on the ground in a criss-cross manner, leaving spaces in between to form 'rooms'. These rooms were then filled with dry hay to give warmth. Next came the roof. Smaller branches were continually piled on top until the whole thing was completely covered, making a pile some two metres in length, two metres in breadth and two metres high.

The children really enjoyed this task. The benefit of such piles to wildlife is enormous. **Insects** feed on the decaying wood as it breaks



down. **Birds** use them as feeding and nesting sites. **Toads** and **Hedgehogs** use them as hibernation sites. **Fungi** and **Mosses** colonise them.

These important mini-habitats can be made anywhere. Why not build one in your garden? Any biodegradable material can be used - hedge trimmings, grass cuttings, the odd log and so on. The pile can be any size you like and ideally should be placed in a quiet shaded corner.

Meanwhile, the Watch Group have refilled last year's excavated holes in the **Sand Martin Cliff** with sand in preparation for the returning birds in March or April. With twenty pairs nesting successfully last year, we're hoping for another good season.

However, since Sand Martins are not known for their 'site fidelity', we'll have to wait and see!

Mike Wiley (Countryside Warden)



Forest Farm Watch Group

Publicity in the local press concerning the **Lacewing Project** has resulted in an increased Watch membership. Attendance at meetings has doubled from around a dozen regulars to more than twenty children. Interest in the Lacewing Project has stimulated Mike Wiley and myself to develop the insect theme further and to plan projects with **Bumblebees** and **Ladybirds** for the new year.



Organising work around these insects allows the children to learn through enjoyable and stimulating activities about concepts such as **biological control, sustainability, biodiversity and conservation**. The age group that attends may not fully grasp the principles involved, but they will gain a sound foundation of knowledge that can be built upon in the higher levels of secondary education. From our projects members of the Watch group will discover the beneficial nature of lacewings and ladybirds in controlling pests, and the role of

bumblebees as pollinators. They will examine ways in which the imbalance of nature against these insects by current agricultural and horticultural practices can be redressed.

The children will be equipped to identify the different stages of these insects, and will be involved in practical tasks to conserve them on the Reserve. They will be shown examples of new species of animals and plants that have moved into the Reserve as a result of careful and thoughtful management over recent years.

WATCH meets once a month on a **Saturday** at the **Warden Centre, Forest Farm**.

For further information contact :

Daytime : **Mike Wiley : 01222 - 612213**
 Evenings : **Chris James : 01222 - 611342**

Chris James

Village Hotel and Leisure Club

This is now being erected at **Coryton** in **Whitchurch** and is due to be opened for business in August this year. It will have 98 bedrooms and it is hoped that the Leisure Club will eventually have 5000 members.

The impact on the Reserve should be minimal, but some guests might want a stroll after dinner and end up on the Reserve. If they use the entrance by **McDonalds** they might find it a bit hazardous unless they are country-wise and well shod. There is bound to be a big increase in traffic around that area and through **Whitchurch**.

Cardiff Athletic Facility

Rumours are circulating that the proposed expansion of the **Cardiff Athletic Facility** on the **Diamond Ground, Forest Farm Road**, may not go ahead as planned. Things should become clearer during the next two months.

Dennis Davies

Our Secretary, **Mr Dennis Davies**, has recently undergone an operation to release pressure on his spinal chord. We wish him a full and speedy recovery and that we shall soon see him back, striding around the Reserve.

E.O. Edwards

Nestbox Survey for 1997

This year there were **10 missing** boxes, and **7 boxes** were **damaged**, mostly by squirrels. Some have already been replaced by new boxes. The others will be replaced as new boxes become available.

63 nests were occupied, giving an estimated **504 chicks**. This is slightly down on last year but is still a good result.

A large number of **Great Tits** and **Blue Tits** have been around all winter and there has been a definite increase on **Coal Tits**. **4 boxes** appear to have been used by **Nuthatch**.

Saturday Morning Walk

There has been a sharp decline in the volume of winter birds this year. Only one **Tufted Duck** on the river so far, but **2 Goosanders** and a pair of **Dippers** have made an appearance. A few **Redwing** and **Siskin**, but no **Fieldfare**.

Has the warm weather kept them away? Reports of **Swallows** in Pembrokeshire during February point to something odd going on.

Indoor Meeting and A.G.M.

WEDNESDAY 15th APRIL at 7.30 pm

TABERNACLE CHURCH HALL

Anne Dickson, a guide at Cardiff Castle, will speak about her experiences and the history of the Castle. There will be a short **A.G.M.** after a cup of tea.

Pentyrch Railway

The information plaque near **Radyr Weir** is now in position (Please see Newsletter No. 27)

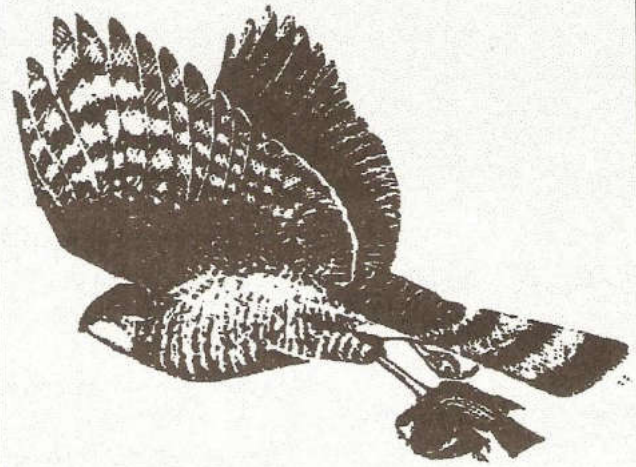
Garden Invasion

This year I was glad to note the absence of **Magpies** in the garden but, when all the other small birds disappeared as well, leaving only **House Sparrows** and **Starlings** behind, it was cause to worry.

Returning home about a month ago, there was a bird perched near the feeding tray on the back lawn. It had white splotches on its back. It took me a while to be certain that it was a male **Sparrow Hawk**. It stayed there an hour and then sloped off.

There were other sightings of **Sparrow Hawks** around the back gardens later on. Last Wednesday I looked out on the lawn. There was a female **Sparrow Hawk** eating one of the **Sparrows** on my lawn!!!

I must confess to mixed feelings. It was a thrill to see the hawk so close with its big staring yellow eyes glaring at me while it expertly plucked the feathers of the poor sparrow - the one I had fed all winter, the one whose chattering with its companions I had listened to as I worked in the garden.



What I fear is that the small birds driven out of the gardens will not survive the winter. **Sparrow Hawks** are on the increase and have found a new food source. Increasing the **garden shrubbery** will give the small birds extra cover. That will be this year's priority.

E.O. Edwards

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.

