

Friends of Forest Farm



Country Park
and
Glamorganshire Canal
Local Nature Reserve

Editor's Forum

June 1998

* NEWSLETTER No: 29 *



Despite the ongoing saga of start-stop in the planning development of the Whitchurch Hospital land, the Friends will read in our update that there is further development.

This is an important time for the community here and elsewhere, who are interested in protecting green belt areas. We hope our cause will be strengthened by existing Friends renewing membership, and new ones joining.

It is difficult to believe we are three months into official Summer Time, and the Summer Solstice on June 21st upon us. We have to be optimistic that the seasonal weather pattern will be kind.

Whatever you have planned, we wish young and old a happy time. We hope to see you at the Forest Farm Festival on June 28th.

Ken Patterson

MEMBERSHIP

Membership renewals for the current year are flowing in.

For those members whose minds it may have slipped or who have mislaid their renewal forms I have arranged a further slip to be delivered with this quarter's Newsletter. Thank you all for your continued support.

Noel Gale
(Membership Secretary)

8 Heath Park Drive
Heath, Cardiff, CF4 3QI Tel : 01222 - 756771

WHITCHURCH HOSPITAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

By the time you read this Newsletter you will probably be aware that the **Cardiff Community Health Care Trust** has submitted a new plan to the City's Planning Department. The Plan was on display to the public between the 1st and 8th of June, giving people the opportunity to decide whether they wished to continue to oppose the development or whether sufficient changes had been made in the new plan to make it acceptable.

The plans are now going through committee stages with the **County Council**. A final decision will be made by **July 31st**. If the plans are not passed by this date, the **Hospital Trust** will ask the **Welsh Office** to consider the appeal that was submitted to them in 1996.

Friends of Forest Farm have always been opposed to the 1996 plan, but are willing to accept the 1998 plan because it will give 60% of the meadow lands to the Nature Reserve. This is 5.5 acres more than was proposed in the earlier plan, and there will be an adequate buffer zone between the development and the Reserve.

While the development as a whole raises concerns for local residents, the role of Friends of Forest Farm is to protect the **Reserve** as much as possible. This is what they have tried to do since plans for development of the hospital site were first proposed.

Pauline Linck

SUNDAY 28TH JUNE < FOREST FARM SUMMER FESTIVAL > 10AM TO 5PM

RESERVE NEWS

Over the past few years I have become increasingly concerned about the ever growing numbers of fish in the Canal. From the towpath, large shoals of **Roach** and **Rudd** can be seen, along with **Chubb** and **Carp**. These fish, although looking quite attractive, can cause a lot of damage to a delicately balanced environment. (As I write this article in mid-May it is **National Environment Week**).



Food chains are very fragile and can be easily destroyed. In the hot summer of 1976, when the Canal dried up, many fish were taken out and transferred to other waters - including a couple of Pike. The **Pike** is a predatory fish and is at the top of the food chain. Without these the balance is lost, and we are now seeing the consequences.



The **Nature Reserve** has a rich and varied **Dragonfly / Damselfly** population. Eighteen species have been recorded, including the rare **Hairy Dragonfly (Brachyton pratensa)**. The larvae of these species can spend up to three years in their aquatic phase before finally emerging as adults. It is during their aquatic phase that they are at their most vulnerable to predation by fish. It is quite natural for some of them to be taken, but I fear that they are being *hoovered up* by these large shoals.

I recently had a site meeting with the **Environment Agency (Fisheries)**, where it was suggested that they *electro fish* the canal and remove some of the fish. This is usually done by placing a net across the water, and men with chest waders walk towards it, dipping an electrode into the water. The charge harmlessly stuns the fish. They rise to the surface, where they are netted and transferred to other waters. Smaller invertebrates are not affected because they do not have a sufficiently large surface area.

A problem we will encounter is one of vegetation - e.g. **Yellow Water Lily** - which makes it difficult to wade through the water. It also hides the fish as they rise to the surface. This may make the practicalities of this type of exercise impossible. If this operation fails we may have to look into re-introducing a couple of small male jack pike.

Since the Canal is a **SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest)** any management proposals must have the consent of the **CCW (Countryside Commission for Wales)**. This is a valuable safeguard for these important sites.

Postscript ... The **Sand Martins** are back!

They first returned to our artificial **Cliff** at the end of March. By mid-May the cliff seemed to be alive with them. Some of the birds noticeably had rings around their legs (probably the young we ringed last year).

It is amazing to think of these young birds flying halfway round the world to winter in Africa, then returning to the same site - possibly even the same hole from which they had been reared the previous year.



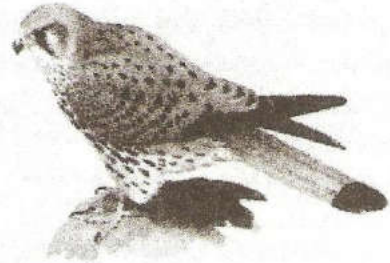
Mike Wiley (Countryside Warden)

A VISITING KESTREL

One of our friends, Mr R. H. Howell of Radyr, has sent us an interesting snippet accompanied by snaps giving positive identification of Kestrel visitors ...

"We had a female Kestrel on our patio bird table during the Autumn. It perched on the bird box, and then on a six foot ranch fence. Prior to that I saw a male Kestrel on our front lawn which had a live Greenfinch in its claws. After a few minutes it flew off with the Finch.

Result - no birds near the bungalow for weeks!"



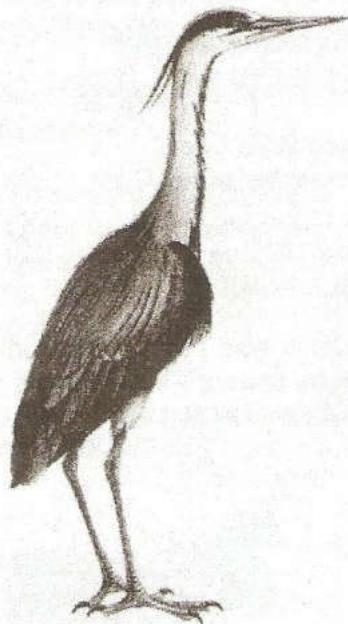
RSPB PHOENIX

Our April and May meetings were held at the Reserve - mainly spent Bird Watching.

It was good to see the Sandmartins in residence again and to watch them catching insects over the water.

A Kingfisher flashed past and the Dipper posed for us near the weir.

There were two immature Herons and a number of smaller birds to help make the walks enjoyable.



A Knotweed Cut was made in late May on the section north of Longwood Drive, and the nest boxes were checked to see if they were occupied. There are fifteen boxes; of these, seven had not been used. Five were occupied and had a total of thirty eggs or young in various stages of growth. There was one family of Great Tits; the rest were Blue Tits.

Two boxes had been used and the chicks flown. The box of particular interest had a nest with six eggs, over which another nest had been built. It is possible that the first occupant - a Blue Tit - had been ousted by a Pied Flycatcher. But, as the second nest was empty we have no definite answer to the mystery.

Pauline Linck (Leader)

RAGWORT

On patrol around the Reserve on Thursday 21st May I was asked a few times, "What are those six people doing, walking in line across the hay meadow with two of them jabbing at the ground with long poles when something is pointed out to them?"

Having taken part in this exercise myself last year I was able to explain that it was the annual **Ragwort Clearance**. The long poles were really hollow tubes containing environmentally safe poison, which was being deposited on the Ragwort to kill it. The following article, which appeared in the Farming Supplement of the Western Mail explains ...

E. O. Edwards

A vicious killer lurks among the pastures ...

To those unaware of the potential deadly effects of ragwort, the plant may look harmless. Yet this simple wild flower has the potential to cause a slow and painful death. Horses and livestock which have the misfortune to eat the plant are subject to poisoning over a long period. The toxins build up with each mouthful until irreparable damage is done.

Ragwort is so dangerous that it is listed by an Act of Parliament, and the Ministry of Agriculture and local authorities have the power to enforce clearance wherever the plant is found. Even a dead plant can spell disaster. Care must be taken to make sure that it has not made its way into hay bales, lying dormant until accidentally eaten.

In the coming August there will be a **Ragwort Awareness Week**, which is intended to highlight the problem and if possible to ensure that no more animals suffer the lingering and deadly effects the plant brings. Only by educating people can the threat be diminished, since the animals are at the mercy of what they find in the field or hay rack.

Sweatshirts and Polo shirts

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**.

Polo Shirts also carry the logo and are navy blue but can be ordered in other colours. Various sizes at **£14.50**. **T-shirts** will be on sale at the **Forest Farm Festival**.

If interested, please contact : **Pauline Linck** (01222 - 617012) or choose one at the **Friends of Forest Farm** stall on **June 28th**.

Forthcoming Events at Forest Farm

Barbecue for Watch Group
Thursday 23rd July 7 pm

Reserve Work for 'Watch' & Friends
Saturday 24th October 10 am to 12 pm

Woodland Skills Day
Saturday 5th December from 10 am

Wednesday Indoor Meetings Tabernacle Church Hall 7.30 pm

11th November - 'Cardiff at War' - Dennis Morgan
10th February - 'Flat Holm Project' - Kevin Hogan
14th April - 'Glamorgan Canal & Nature Reserve'
- Ted 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

MR KEN PATTERSON 12 MANOR COURT WHITCHURCH CARDIFF CF4 1BJ TEL: 01222 627077

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

