

FRIENDS
OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER
34
DECEMBER 1999

Editor's Forum
by Ken Patterson

Important news on the Country Park redevelopment was received by our chairman just before the Newsletter deadline. I bring this to you, sharing his disappointment with the result.

The RSPB/Friends walks at the Country Park are popular and well attended. It was, however, with personal pleasure that I heard from Mr Ted Edwards of the response on the 2nd October. 25 persons of all ages enjoyed the occasion.

I would have liked to have participated in that walk but my duties on behalf of the UN Worldwide Walks took me to Chepstow with a group from various parts of South Wales. We set off across the Old Severn Bridge with our International Year banner, to be greeted by a contingent from Bristol halfway across. It was an unusual experience, which was enjoyed despite a stiff breeze, but helped by a glimpse of sunshine.

There is much discussion and speculation as to what individually and collectively we will be doing as the Millenium arrives. However it is celebrated, let us hope it will usher in a period of peace and wellbeing for everyone.



A Happy Christmas and New Year to you all from the Friends, Committee and Contributors

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From the Membership Secretary
NOEL GALE

MEMBERSHIP

I am pleased to report that our current Family Membership now stands at 237. This equals last year's final figure.

Thank you all for your continued support.

**8 Heath Park Drive
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FROGSPAWN

Where did it go? !!

Last Spring my small garden pond was overflowing with frogspawn, and I was contemplating passing some of it on.

Imagine my surprise one morning when I discovered that the pond was completely empty - not a shred of frogspawn anywhere, and nothing to indicate where it had gone.

Talking about it to other people turned up the surprising news that they had also suffered in the same way. Various theories have been advanced, but I am inclined to blame the Heron - the same one that stole my goldfish, though it is a bit difficult to envisage exactly how he does it.

This year I intend to put a mesh over the pond, with a small gap all the way round for the frogs to get in - that is if there are any frogs left! I say this because new neighbours have brought two young cats with them, and they are killing machines on four legs. Anything that moves is fair game. One jumped on to our three foot high bird bath, grabbed a starling and was gone before I could open my mouth to shout.

There are very few birds around now, and the poor frogs have been having a hard time as well. So keep an eye on your ponds this coming spring, and write in should you come up with any answers.

E.O.Edwards

Reserve News

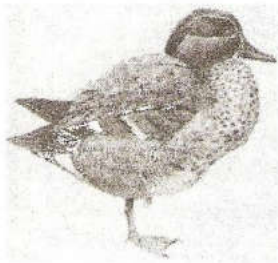
by
Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

In the last Friends' Newsletter I told you that we were getting a JCB in to re-work one of the scrapes. The work was carried out at the beginning of the Autumn. Already up to a dozen **Common Snipe** have been seen busily feeding on the improved habitat. The work had a two-fold aim ...

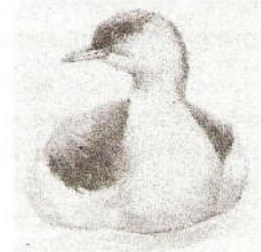
1. To improve the habitat for wading birds.
2. To afford better views from the hide.

I hope that we have achieved both aims.

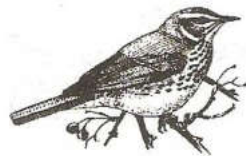
A member of the general public recently informed me that while sitting in the hide he had observed an Osprey flying down the valley and over the wetlands (probably migrating south from Scotland).



On a visit to one of the hides recently I was fortunate to find a pair of **Teal** on the pond. Nearby a **Little Grebe** was fishing and several **Snipe** were feeding on the scrape, along with a heron and a flock of Mallard. A **Kingfisher** alighted on one of the pond's perches and a **Water Rail** was showing on the island.



While a **Buzzard** was mewing overhead a **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker** was preening in a nearby tree.



A flock of **Siskin** was feeding on the alder cones with yet a further flock of **Redwing** beyond. It was like the curtain going up with everything happening at once; at another time you might see nothing at all.



We are fortunate to have a pair of professional BTO bird ringers, **Peter and Rosemary Morgan**, who are carrying out a bird ringing study on the Nature Reserve. This survey forms part of an international study helping to increase our knowledge and understanding of bird populations and movements. A copy of the results of this study will be forwarded to us.

This year's guided walks programme on the Reserve has been a success; most walks were well attended. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ted Edwards for volunteering to stand in at the last minute to lead the history walk, and Chris James for the many walks he has led.

Our **Watch** group at Forest Farm will be busy in November making Christmas **bird cake**. The children enjoy this activity as it entails mixing peanuts, seed and fat by hand in large bowls (always a messy business) and then stuffing it into small tubs, which they will take home and hang upside down in their gardens. As the winter draws in and the weather gets colder this energy-rich cake can become a life saver for many small birds. So please remember the birds this winter.

Appeal by Cardiff Community Healthcare NHS Trust for Mixed Used Development at Whitchurch Hospital

The First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales has delegated the function of determining the Appeal to the Environment and Local Government Secretary, Mr Peter Law.

He is broadly in agreement with the Inspector's conclusions, and is minded to allow the Appeal, but before consideration can be given to the granting of planning permission the submission of a completed formal agreement with the highway authority for highway improvement works will be required within the next three months.

The Inspector's final conclusion ...

"With regard to the development plan, particularly Local Plan Policies 7 and 23, I find that the proposals would not diminish recreational land or open space of significant amenity or conservation value in the Whitchurch locality. When compared to the existing situation, the development would bring about a net gain in public open space, playing fields and tree planting to the benefit of the local community. Furthermore, the proposals are in accordance with all other relevant policies in the Local Plan and the South Glamorgan (Cardiff Area) Replacement Structure Plan.

Subject to the construction of the proposed roundabout road access, improvements to the Park Road / Pantmawr Road junction, the section 106 Undertaking and other conditions, I find that development would provide the opportunity for much-needed improvement to the mental health service and the environment for patient care at Whitchurch. The listed historic hospital buildings would be given a more secure future as new uses, the playing fields and open spaces would be made available for public access, and looked at as a whole, the project represents a regenerative development of an existing urban site for a variety of suitable uses, which is of a sustainable nature.

Subject to the imposition of the amended conditions ... I recommend that this appeal be allowed."

Proposed development	Hectares	Notes
Grazing	2.51	This will become part of the Reserve
Landscape	4.51	This will form a buffer around the site
Residential	6.79	150 dwellings to be built
Recreational	5.45	Playing fields
Leisure	0.26	Existing chapel
Mixed use	8.00	Hospital buildings, 180 flats, offices, community, community health, retail, pub
New hospital	3.22	200 beds

This is a very disappointing result when one considers that the last plan turned down by the Planning Department saved 4.6 hectares of the meadows for the Reserve and was the culmination of nine years work by the Friends.

We feel we were badly served by our local councillors.

E.O.Edwards

WILDLIFE LIAISON OFFICERS

An article on the above appeared in the "Cardiff News", the newsletter produced by the Cardiff group of the RSPB, and they have very kindly given the Friends permission to use it in this Newsletter ...

RURAL VANDALISM

So you're out in the country, bird watching or walking, and you see something untoward - a group of cars in the middle of nowhere, someone carrying wild plants or someone climbing cliffs or trees after a bird's nest.

What do you do? You contact your WLO! "What is a WLO," you ask yourself.

These are a group of Police Officers who, as well as carrying out their normal policing roles, act as Wildlife Liaison Officers. In all there are at the moment 10 officers covering the area from Merthyr to Cockett - one in each of the Divisions in the South Wales Police area.

They have been trained by the Investigations Unit of the RSPB in Sandy; Sergeant Guildford in Pontypridd recently worked with Sandy and 15 forces across Britain, investigating the illegal taking of birds of prey by keepers in South Wales.

Their specialities range from birds to badgers via otters, and their work has resulted in successful prosecutions for disturbing nesting Peregrines and the illegal possession of Red Kites, Goshawk, Merlin and Peregrine. One intrepid officer abseiled down a cliff to put a peregrine chick into a nest already containing two chicks. The step parents accepted and fed the newcomer, which was successfully returned to the wild.

It seems there is still a lot of badger digging and possibly baiting going on in the area. But, being out in the country, it is difficult to detect. Which is where we come in. Make a note of where you are, what you see - e.g. car registration numbers - and a description of any people. Don't get involved, but inform the WLO for the area where you saw the activity. None of this should be too difficult for anyone who can tell a blackbird from a robin.

My thanks to PC 2621 Bob Minton for the original ideas for this and an appeal from him. In an attempt to combat rural crime, he is trying to set up a series of "Rural Watch" schemes. If anyone in the Pentyrch, Creigau, St Fagans, Tongwynlais or Radyr areas is interested, please contact him on 02920 890753.

Below is a summary of the WLOs for the South Wales Police area ...

Merthyr Tydfil	Alan JONES	01685 724246	Neath	Carl RYAN	01792 456999
Pontypridd	Ian GUILDFORD	01443 743756	Swansea	Roger HUGHES	01792 562740
Cardiff Central	Chris GREEN	02920 527337	Llanishen	Dave ROGERS	02920 222111
Pentyrch	Bob MINTON	02920 890753			
Cowbridge	Chris EDWARDS	02920 222111			
Maesteg	Bryan CAIN	01656 732122			

So don't just record the birds you see - report any illegal activity.

Forthcoming Meeting in Tabernacle Church Hall, Whitchurch

WEDNESDAY 9TH FEBRUARY 2000 AT 7.30 PM

"Caerphilly Mountain Countryside Service" by Dai Workman

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

Published on behalf of the **Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve** by

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