

FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

NEWSLETTER
37
SEPTEMBER 2000

Editor's Forum
By Ken Patterson

A warm welcome to all new and old Friends! With a holiday atmosphere still in the air, whether spending time at home or abroad, I trust you will have gathered pleasant memories to take you through the months ahead.

Though we may grumble at our perverse weather pattern, at least it presents a good conversation opener, even with strangers. Who said a negative can't be turned into a positive?

To our contributors for sparing their precious time - many thanks - Robin too for his creative layout.

From the Mem. Sec. Noel Gale

Over 200 families have renewed their membership for the current year. These, plus a few new members, are putting us close to another record year for members. A few more renewals will enable us to pass last year's figure of 245. Thank you all for your support.

**Mr N. J. Gale 8 Heath Park Drive
Heath Cardiff CF14 3QH
Tel: 029 - 20756771**

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**RSPB PHOENIX
GROUP REPORT**



How the time drifts by!
We'll soon be starting our Autumn Programme.

In the past months the Group has been active on the Reserve with partly manual and survey work.

Our **Nest Box** check in May seemed to record a better result than the previous year. Also a first for us - both our open-fronted boxes had a **Robin's nest** in them. Over the past years our results have been nil with this type of box, though there does seem to be a larger Robin population on the Reserve, which might account for the success.



The results from our **Coppicing** programme are easily seen. The spring and summer showing of native wild plant species on the top bank near the Canal on the Longwood Drive section is most encouraging, and our attack on that invasive **Japanese Knotweed** is starting to show dividends.

Hugh Harrison

The Disappearing Frog Spawn

The Editor passed on a tip that he had received from Mrs Joyce Davies' daughter - for which I am very grateful.

"Fill a large bucket with the *Frog Spawn* and water from the pond. Let the tadpoles gain some strength, then put them back in the pond. Some will be strong enough to escape the greedy blighters who want to make a meal of them, grow legs and clamber out to hide in the dense undergrowth of my garden away from the **black cat** next door."

E.O.Edwards

Reserve News

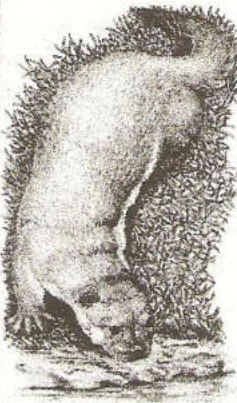
By
Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

It's mid-August as I write this article (not that you'd know it by the weather outside). The Swifts are leaving, and the second brood of Sand Martins are beginning to show themselves at the entrance holes of the artificial cliff. All in all, it hasn't been a bad season for birds on the Reserve (which is managed for the benefit of wildlife without the use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers). This is more than can be said for the bird life throughout the country as a whole. As has been well reported by the RSPB and the news media, bird populations in general are at a very low ebb, and some farmland species have seen their numbers crash; these include:

Song Thrush	down 70%	Blackbird	down 32%	Linnet	down 40%
Bullfinch	down 62%	House Sparrow	down 64%		

These are just a few examples; the list goes on and on. For some birds, their plight is so great that the garden has become their last refuge. For this reason, as I have said in the past, it's very important that we help them all we can by feeding throughout the year, but especially through the winter months when food is scarce.

On a brighter note, certain species are doing well – for example, the Common Buzzard. With less persecution their numbers have increased dramatically, and it's not unusual to see one or two circling on the thermals over the Reserve. The other day I saw one high up with something long dangling from its talons. With the aid of binoculars I could see that it was a Grass Snake, a good two feet in length. Whether or not the bird had come across it as carrion or had killed it using its powerful talons and beak I don't know - I suspect the latter.



In September the Forest Farm Watch Group will be busy constructing an artificial Otter Holt on the Reserve. Otters have been making a comeback recently; these manmade holts help them by providing suitable shelters in which they can lie up during the day. Otters have been known to give birth in these special holts. So if you are between five and fifteen, why not come and help?

Watch is a club for young people who care about the wildlife and the environment. We're always looking for new members, so why not come along! We meet at the Warden's Centre at Forest Farm from 10.00 am till 12.00 noon. The next meetings are:

16th September	Creating an Otter Holt
21st October	Working on the Wildlife Garden

See you there!

SWEATSHIRTS AND POLO SHIRTS

Sweatshirts with the *Friends of Forest Farm* logo for sale – good quality with raglan sleeves.

Choice of sizes and colours. £16.50 (children's sizes-£10.75)
Navy blue polo shirts £14.50 (other colours can be ordered)

Also T-shirts

Please order from: Pauline Linck (029) 20617012

ST MARY'S GARDEN – WHITCHURCH – CARDIFF	BY DAVID CLARK	PART II
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Closure of Church

The old church was already becoming dilapidated following its replacement by the present church, which was opened in 1885. In 1902 there was hardly a pane of glass unbroken, and the slates were falling from the roof. Eventually, on December 2nd, 1903 a faculty was obtained for the demolition of the building.

The wall tablets inside the old church were placed on the west wall of the churchyard; many of these, however, later fell to the ground, probably the result of the explosion of a **German land-mine** nearby in 1941.

Following the demolition, the old churchyard remained as a closed burial ground. Among the occasional burials which took place were the widow of Col. Lewis in 1912 and two other burials in 1914. The last burial appears to have been made in 1924.

Until 1967 it was the practice of the then Cardiff Rural District Council to provide men once a year to clear the old churchyard of brambles and undergrowth, and to burn the cuttings on the site. When the local government responsibility for the civil parish of Whitchurch was transferred from the Glamorgan County Council to the County Borough Council of Cardiff, the tending of the churchyard was discontinued.

The consequent neglect of the churchyard resulted in complaints from local residents, and in 1972 discussions took place regarding the transfer of responsibility for maintenance of the site to the City of Cardiff. In 1973 a faculty was granted for the site to be administered by the local authority under the **Open Spaces Acts 1906**. An improvement could then be carried out, qualifying for a Government amenity grant.

After careful consideration by the **Parks Department** of the City, and the preparation of a plan of the graves with a list of gravestone inscriptions, the site around the church foundations was levelled. With certain exceptions, the gravestones were placed against the perimeter wall, and a few were finally placed as a floor on the foundations of the old church.

An archaeological investigation was made of the church foundations. Some fragments of **Roman pottery** were found, but unstratified, as well as some **13th century pottery** and glazed ridge tiles. It also appeared that parts of the church had been constructed in probably three phases over the years.

On the **7th April 1974** the new park was officially opened by the Chairman of the Parks Committee. This was followed by a non-denominational service for the Blessing of Palms conducted by the Vicar of Whitchurch, Canon W.A. Winton MBE, TD, MA. The ceremony was attended by Council representatives, youth organisations, some relatives of those buried in the former churchyard, and a number of local residents. A procession was then made to the Chapel of Whitchurch Hospital, where a large congregation attended Holy Communion. Among the clergy officiating was an assistant curate of Whitchurch, the Revd. John Lewis, now Dean of Llandaff.

(to be continued)

SERENITY

Go again to a gentle haunt
Where freedom is found
With time for rare moments
When nature's secret store
Can be unlocked.
Share with kindred spirits
An aura of joy
Which restores serenity to all
Who visit the Country Park
And local Nature Reserve.

Ken Patterson

Ramblings

by Ted Edwards

Recent figures show that the population of the **Song Thrush** has declined by nearly half over the past twenty five years. For every two birds you might have seen in the 1970's, today you'd see just one. The decline of farmland bird species is on the increase. That is why it is so important to keep places such as our Reserve free from development that could harm this unique habitat. In the 70's and 80's we went ten years without recording a Song Thrush during our monthly Saturday morning walk, even though they had been there in large numbers in the previous years.

I can remember clearly the relief and excitement on looking over the fence into the meadow by Sheepbane Wood one morning and seeing two Song Thrushes scrabbling in the grass. Since then they have increased and are nesting on the Reserve once again. Long may they stay!

How many of you saw the **Pheasant** by the farm this year? On our last morning walk, when we were in the Friends Hide looking to see if the **Little Grebe** chicks were still there, our attention was drawn to a **Maggie** gorging itself on the far side – its menu a **Moorhen** chick a few days old. The one remaining chick from a brood of four was feeding on the pond quite undisturbed. I do not like Magpies !!

The resurfacing of part of the towpath has been completed, thanks to Mike and Paul. I must confess that I was quite distressed when, on a 'supervisory' visit, I found only a couple of the promised volunteers had turned up, leaving Mike and Paul to do most of the work. Of course I immediately offered my services, but was refused. Why, I wondered? Then I realised Mike knows the story of Samson and what happened when Delilah cut off his hair. I must remember to keep my cap on at all times; then Mike will not turn me away. Took me at least two hours to get over the hurt!

The latest rumour circulating is that a consultant has been given six months to draw up plans for the relocation of City Farm to Forest Farm, and that the railway line may be extended from Coryton to Radyr with a station at Forest Farm, where ice cream could be purchased; no doubt there will be a ride around the Reserve on a horse drawn wagon with rubber tyres.

Incidentally, there was nothing sinister about that second access to the car park. Apparently the Water Board, or whatever they call themselves these days, had run out of money when they were bringing that pipe under the river and failed to complete the job. Now they have the money and are making a massive hole bang in the middle of Forest Farm Road to connect the new pipe to the sewerage system to prevent flooding in Tongwynlais (or is it Taffs Well?) Anyway, traffic to Forest Farm will be diverted through the car park – all clever stuff.

BTCV are on the ball too. To make sure that they have work for their volunteers they have stuck bits of Willow all over the place; these are now throwing out masses of greenery which will require cutting. Clever? I'll be glad when August is over and all these silly ramblings cease.

R.S.P.B. WILDLIFE EXPLORERS **CARDIFF & DISTRICT GROUP FOR 7-12 YEAR OLDS** (formerly YOC)

We have had another excellent and enjoyable year with very good attendance. Our Winter and Spring sessions were held in a hall in Whitchurch, and for the Summer we have been at Forest Farm.

Our activities over the last year have included:

*Various guest speakers - Craft work - Organic food
A drama evening - A quiz - Winter Collage
A guided walk around Roath Park - Recycling*

If any children are interested in putting their name on the waiting list, or would like more information about the group, please contact:

Sue Walters (registered Leader) on 2075 1760

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

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MR KEN PATTERSON 12 MANOR COURT WHITCHURCH CARDIFF CF14 1BJ Tel: 029 - 20627077