



Friends

of FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
and GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Issue No: 88 June 2013

Website: www.forestfarm.org.uk

Dr Mary Eleanor Gillham MBE (1921-2013)

On the 24th March this year, Dr Mary Gillham passed away at the age of 91. Mary, a member of the Friends, was a great contributor to conservation education and in particular to educating amateur naturalists in South Wales.

She was born in Ealing, West London, at a time when Ealing was surrounded by countryside. This allowed her to develop her interest in botany and natural history which was to be her life's passion and work. She spent time camping and touring with her family and began life-time recording of her nature observations. Aged 16, she worked in an office in Westminster until the beginning of the Second World War when she joined the Womens Land Army and worked on a farm in Hertfordshire until 1945. She then studied at Aberystwyth University, an enthusiastic student and in 1948 she obtained a first class honours degree. Further study at Bangor University resulted in a PhD on Island Wildlife and she was then appointed as botany lecturer at Exeter University. Later Mary worked across the world, including Australia, New Zealand and Nigeria and in the early 1950s was one of the first women to work in Antarctica.



In 1961, she returned to Wales as a lecturer at Cardiff University in the Extra Mural Studies Department. living at Gwaelod y Garth and then Radyr a few years ago. During her time in Wales, she contributed a huge amount of work on the environment of South Wales, including the writing of more than twenty books.

cont'd overleaf

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Editorial

Hello Friends. Quite a lot to read about in this newsletter. Mary Gillham was a key person to Forest Farm and will be greatly missed. Chris James has written about her and also given us a timely reminder about ash dieback disease. But the rich abundance of the Reserve is well described by Paul Davies (P3) and Stella Wells (Pp5-6)- evidence that Spring must be here!

Articles from Hugh Harrison, Martin Chamberlain and Albyn Austin describe the variety, challenge and enjoyment to be had from volunteering. This is much appreciated; indeed the Reserve could not do without them.

It is important to the Friends, and indeed the Council, that we let people know of the delights of the Reserve and its educational opportunities as well its ongoing need for management. Hence the Public Relations day (see Duncan's report P10), the special events such as Apple Day, Melingriffith water pump, the 'strawberry treat', the Rhiwbina and Whitchurch festivals and the Wildlife explorer trail leaflet for children (P11) - see the various 'ads'. Enjoy the summer!

Sheila Austin

Advance Notice

Friends OPEN DAY
and **APPLE DAY**

Saturday 12th October 2013



Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road,
Whitchurch.

See September newsletter for more details or check on our website nearer the time

www.forestfarm.org.uk

Deadline for articles for next edition -8th August. Contact details on the back page

Dr Mary Gillham cont'd

In the 1960s, as an active member of The Cardiff Naturalists Society (where she became President) and Glamorgan Naturalists, she helped create Cosmeston and Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserves and was instrumental with her work on the Nature Conservancy Council management team in organising the set up of the Reserves.

In particular, the Glamorgan Canal Nature Reserve established in 1967 included a Site of Special Scientific Interest namely Long Wood, the Canal and Sheeps Bane Wood. Mary's role along with her great friend, Mairead Sutherland, established the initial management plan for Forest Farm Reserve which was invaluable. Theirs was a remarkable contribution over the twenty years before the establishment of the Friends of Forest Farm in 1990. Mary's book on the natural history of Cardiff (A Natural History of Cardiff- exploring along the River Taff, 2002) includes a hundred page section on Forest Farm including an article on the wildlife of the area at the inception of the Reserve in 1967 that was published in the Centenary Year Volume of the Transactions of the Cardiff Naturalists' Society in 1969.

After her retirement in 1988, Mary spent her time working in the field and continued writing. She was well known for presenting talks and leading botanical walks to natural history groups, including many at Forest Farm. Wonderfully, in 2008, she was awarded an MBE for her prolific services to society concerning natural history.

We have lost a great naturalist who contributed so much to our society during her lifetime. Despite this very sad loss, her contribution to natural history is accessible to us. Forest Farm is an example of her supportive effort to create nature reserves and we also can read her books. Many include natural history records of conservation areas in South Wales. These wonderful heirlooms for our society will always remind us of her love of wildlife and her contribution to society.

Chris James

Reserve Report

by **Paul Davies - Countryside Warden**

Due to the recent poor weather, the arrival of Spring has been seriously delayed but in the last few weeks the ambient temperatures have been slowly rising. Various birds have been seen nesting and chicks have been heard calling from the local heronry. The bird seed crop has been sown thanks to the volunteer group from the Friends, and a variety of plants should be germinating soon, including millet and sunflower, which the birds can feed on in the winter months.



Orange tip butterfly



Wheatear

Recent sightings include several butterflies in the middle section of the Reserve; a small copper, orange tip (male), small white and green veined white; a male wheatear near the allotments field and a grey wagtail nesting in the rafters of the barn.

It is not surprising to hear that all the insect populations have been falling and this is affecting the birds which rely on them for food in the summer months, particularly when raising young. This is partly due to the increased use of pesticides and insecticides (including the recently banned neonicotinoids) plus general atmospheric pollution from vehicles and machinery. We can all do our bit to help reduce the detrimental effects we have on the natural world; if we don't then things will surely worsen in the future.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL 2013/2014

Once again a new membership year started in April, and thank you to all those who have already renewed. Current membership is 250. All those who have joined via pay pal will get a reminder shortly before the date they joined.

For anyone who would still like to send their subscription, a renewal slip with the details will be enclosed in this Newsletter. Thank you for all your support.

Pauline Fisher
Secretary

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Since the last newsletter, we have completed removing the ash saplings from two large areas (see P10). This has stopped the encroachment into the important top meadow and will help increase the biodiversity on the Reserve.

In May the volunteers were raking in the seeds for the sacrificial crops in the field in front of the Wardens Centre and installing steps and woodchip to improve the access to the top meadow. This work was to stop the erosion of the footpaths caused by the wet weather in the last year.



Volunteers raking the sacrificial crop
in front of the Wardens Centre

In the next three months, we will be improving the footpaths, undertaking maintenance of the bird hides and removing invasive non-native plants from parts of the Reserve. This work is important for maintaining the biodiversity as well as ensuring that access is available to all.

Although much has been achieved and we have now purchased our own tools, there is so much more to be done BUT we need more volunteers! The volunteering is suitable for all ages and abilities.

Friends volunteering events are usually the second Sunday of each month 10:00 to 13:00 - meeting at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Rd

If you can help please come along or if you want to discuss in more detail please call me on 07952 926145 or via email m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com

Martin Chamberlain

Poaching

We do have occasional problems with poaching on the Reserve; it can be a problem at this time of year as it is the breeding season. Paul Pinnell sent in the following:

I would like to thank PC's Stuart Cozens and Paul Tebbutt (Neighbourhood Officers for Whitchurch and Tongwynlais) for their assistance on the morning of 10th May.

At 5 a.m., in torrential rain, myself and the two PC's patrolled the Reserve checking for potential poachers. This patrol will be repeated again in the future.

Incidentally, Paul Tebbutt is the Divisional Wildlife Crime Officer.

Paul Pinnell
(Community Ranger)

Contact mobile numbers : PC Tebbutt 07805 301221; PC Cozens 07967 234798

Nature Walks on Forest Farm



March

There were early signs of nest building as we watched some crows gathering nesting material. We heard and saw a drumming greater spotted woodpecker and one of our group, an experienced birdwatcher, thought he had heard a lesser spotted woodpecker. Now its a good thing that I didn't hear it as I would have enlisted everyone on a tree by tree search for this elusive bird and we would never have completed the walk.

Some people may think that grey wagtails are two a penny, but I am fascinated by them. No two birds looks the same as far as I can see. And why do they bob about all the time? I remembered a short rhyme that my mum used to quote whenever we saw one when I was a child. It may amuse some of the 'young at heart' readers:

Wee water wagtail
I wish that you could talk.
I want to ask you why you have
That funny little walk.
Your tail goes wiggle-waggle
While you waddle in the rain.
I wonder, will you wag it off
And will it grow again?

Sorry about that! To get back to business, some of the other highlights were gold crests, bullfinches, goldfinches, a cute little dab chick (little grebe) on the canal and a tree creeper. Two other possible sightings were a bittern flying over towards the sports field and a red poll.

April

Twelve of us set off around the Reserve, basking in the belated warm spring sunshine. The air was full of bird song and buzzing bumble bees. Some of the birds, namely the crows, jays and magpies, were more raucous than others. We found out why when we stood on the bridge over the Taff. We had been hoping for a glimpse of something other than mallards when we noticed some crows mobbing a tawny owl, presumably ousted from its roosting place. It was being chased through the undergrowth and amongst the trees on the river bank. We could only hope that the poor owl managed to escape from its relentless pursuers.

Fresh greens and bright yellows made a colourful scene as we walked on. Celandines, a few dandelions, lady's smock, (also known as milk maids and cuckoo flower) and golden saxifrage offered up their faces for passing bees and butterflies. Small tortoiseshells spiralled into the air



Lady's smock

in their courtship dances or basked on the flowers and tree stumps. Peacock butterflies flapped lazily in the sunshine as a brimstone fluttered through a small clearing.

At the second hide, very well camouflaged, were two snipe, one of them possibly sitting on a nest. We heard and then caught sight of a couple of buzzards flapping above the trees, eventually finding a thermal which took them higher and higher. Wouldn't you just love to do that?

As we approached a small wood pile, we watched two wrens, one of them displaying to its partner. We were only a few feet away and, for a short time, they didn't seem to mind an audience.

A tree creeper, nuthatch and mistle thrush were also noted along with the usual crew. All in all, a very pleasant stroll.

May

What's going on? More warm sunshine! The walk started well with an early sighting of a dipper on a fallen tree on the canal feeder. Someone saw it fly out from under the stone bridge – perhaps it's nesting under there?

At the hides we were blessed with fleeting views of two reed warblers as they flew back and forth over the pond, their scratchy 'song' unmistakable as they settled down into the reeds. A green woodpecker was heard



Green woodpecker

calling loudly and very near to us, but remained invisible throughout the walk. I think it was following us and delighting in tormenting us. But not to be out done, we did see a greater spotted woodpecker fly out from its nest hole in a tree beside the canal. We often heard black caps singing – one of my favourite bird songs and we spotted a male as he sang his beautiful song. We were also treated to the sight and sound of a song thrush just above our heads.

But May isn't just about birds is it? Spring has most definitely sprung and the trees were in their greenest finery. Oak, ash, holly and chestnut trees were all in flower and below them, a carpet of spring flowers. Wild garlic, bluebells, red campions and stitchwort were in full bloom. A mixture of bright colours and subtle perfumes.

This is a visual and voluble time of year and a herald, hopefully, of the onset of summer, the kind we used to enjoy. Try to get out there and indulge your senses with the sights, sounds and aromas of Spring.

Stella Wells

Website news - FAQ's! - or a 'Frequently Asked Questions' page. This is new to our website, now online but will be added to as time goes on. It is a page that answers the questions I quite often receive through the website.

If you have any ideas or suggestions for this page please feel free to get in touch

webmaster@forestfarm.org.uk

Matt Lock

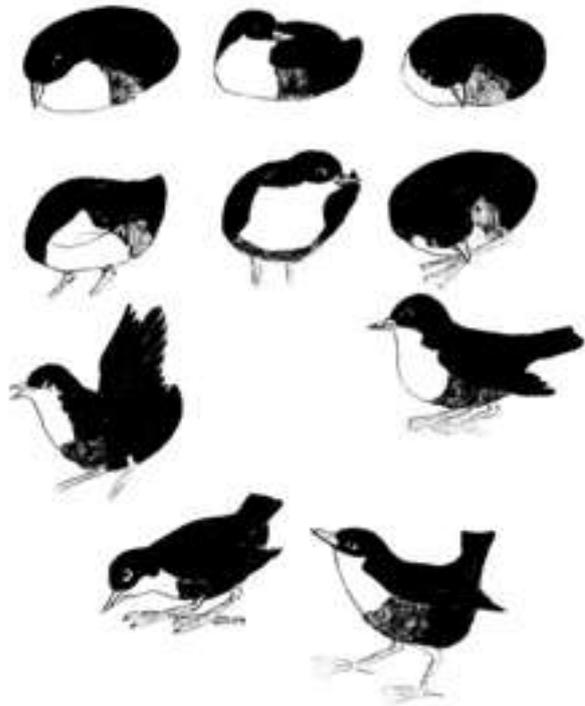
Abergavenney - The 'Friends' Trip 2009
by
Dr Mary Gillham

While the party toured church, tithe barn and town, I explored a short stretch of the River Gavenny and was rewarded by one of those wildlife treats that happen all too infrequently in our depleted countryside.

The black and white egg shape on a boulder protruding from the water, just a few feet below me, proved to be a dipper, once rare on our rivers, but increasing as water quality improves. It woke and set about a thorough preen and tidy up.

During the next 10 minutes I sketched it in every possible position, observing the passage of the nictitating membranes or inner eyelids flicking across the dark eyes.

The bird is said to be 5 inches long but appeared almost round, until it finally stretched its stubby little wings and resumed the usual bobbing motion, which it shares with wagtails. I tired first and left it peering into the water for drifting titbits. It passed me later, flying low upstream, pausing briefly on a stone below the little weir before continuing about its business.



In memory of Mary Gillham, I thought you might like to read one of the articles she wrote for the September 2009 newsletter. It was short - at my request on that occasion - which I found out later she was not particularly happy about! Ed



*Members renewing their membership will get the usual green card with details of your Committee, talks for the coming year and the 2014 summer trip. Also, this year you will be getting this **free car sticker!***

Chalara Ash Dieback Update

Since the extensive media coverage of Ash Dieback Disease last year, very little has been reported since. It is easy to forget that the disease might have the same effect as Dutch Elm Disease since the 1970s, which resulted in the decimation of our mature elm population in the UK. Since early last year, five hundred sites of infected ash trees have been detected in the UK mainly concentrated in East Anglia and Kent. Of these 60% are in nurseries and newly planted sites, and 40% in woodlands.

Early in May, the Welsh data has shown the first maturing woodland infected in Ferryside, Carmarthenshire. These trees are located in a site adjacent to an area recently planted with young ash trees (planted between Dec 2006 and Feb 2007). This is significant because it is the first finding of the disease outside of either a nursery or a planted area. The previous 19 reported infections were in recently planted areas.

Currently, the Forestry Commission is collecting data and advising people with infected trees that the spread can be slowed if affected trees are removed, burned or buried. Infected saplings will have dead leaves, brown patches under the bark. Infected branches often die and have classic diamond shaped patches on the bark. Ash is a tree which opens leaves in late Spring and the disease might not be obvious until well into Summer.

To find out more about Dieback, the Forestry Commission website: www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara#reporting%20suspected%20cases contains useful information. Also if you find an infected tree, you can report to Forestry Commission or to the Council's Ranger Service.

Chris James

A Rhiwbina Festival Event

Tuesday 25th June 0930 - 14.00

"History on our doorstep"

Melngriffith Water pump in operation. a short talk, then a level, guided walk in Forest Farm Nature Reserve followed by a strawberry treat at the Wardens Centre.

ALL IN AID OF BREAST CANCER CARE

Coach pick up Rhiwbina, Whitchurch and other locations en route.

Tickets - £5

Available from Serenade, The Deri Stores, Honey Pot - all in Rhwibina

Enquiries Tel: 20626111 or email cffourteen@hotmail.co.uk



A reminder !

Friends of Forest Farm
will be at

Rhiwbina Festival
on
June 29th

and

Whitchurch Festival
on
6th July



Cardiff Conservation Group

- doing something positive

Easter Saturday morning saw a small group of us at Forest Farm, the Longwood Drive section of the Nature Reserve. Normally, it would have been our Big Litter Pick session but for the sterling work of Chris the volunteer keeping the area clear of rubbish. so instead we concentrated on clearing fallen and dead trees. This was greatly helped by Paul (Warden) who operated the chainsaw. The morning went well and we could see the immediate effect the extra light will have on the understorey.

After a very indifferent April, cold and wet, we were not sure what would greet us. Our task for the morning was KNOTWEED. Fortunately, the morning was dry and sunny and we were most surprised to find very little growth showing. Normally, we would have expected it to be 2 - 3 ft tall; at most the Japanese Knotweed was 2ft high though the bulk was just showing above the ground. It would be good to think that after all these years of tackling this invasive weed, we might be winning ... or is it just down to our awful weather? No doubt time will tell. During the morning we took some time out to admire the carpet of wood anemones on the North Bank.

Conservation work will be held on the coming Saturday mornings 10:30 to 12:30p.m. at Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch.

June 29th Balsam clearing and cutting Rosebay Willowherb
Middle entrance

The group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous work, similar to an active gardener (you work to your own level. If you feel you would like to get involved --- just turn up or better still, give me a ring.

Hugh Harrison 029 20704889

Paypal

Just over a year ago we introduced the Paypal option on our website. This was an experiment and we were not too sure how popular it would be, but it was something that may make life easier for some members to renew and indeed for new members to join.

It immediately became apparent that it was more popular than we envisaged. In fact, in the past year we've had 36 new members via Paypal and 24 existing members have moved over to it. This means nearly 20% of our membership is using the service and we've recently started to see the renewal process work. So far, we're very pleased with the Paypal option on the website and we hope it continues to bring in new interest.

For many people, the Paypal system makes things a lot simpler and easier to use with less paperwork and no need to send off a membership form. We've also seen a few donations via the website, for which we are very grateful, and new members from all parts of the country, which we are delighted about.

Matt Lock

Friends of Forest Farm Public Relations Day at Radyr Weir 11th May 2013



(L to R) Matt, Noel and Duncan

In order to increase the awareness and knowledge about our existence and work, our Committee organised this new initiative. We also provided hot drinks, spring water, muffins and Welshcakes.

We set up our display information stand at the picnic and viewing area alongside Radyr Weir. The display showed a range of photographs taken around the Reserve by Members and visitors. We also had a number of photographs and plans showing some of the old buildings, locks, houses, sluices and landing areas. Included were some plans showing the location and extent of the proposed hydraulic electric generating station, which has just received planning permission to be built on the eastern side of the weir.

Despite poor weather on the day, 4 Members of the Committee (Noel, Matt, Duncan and Pauline) must have spoken to about 40 people who took a break from their activities on the Taff trail. We talked to our visitors about the Friends and showed them some of the older stone structures still existing nearby. To many, the proposed generating station project was a surprise although there had been an item about it in the South Wales Echo that week.

Visitors who were not a member of the Friends went away with a copy of our latest Newsletter together with a Membership application form. Based on the promises made we feel sure that there will be at least another 4 new Members and in view of the success of the event, I feel sure that the Committee will wish to carry out a similar event later in the year. Hopefully the weather will be better then with a consequential increase in the number of visitors. This event could not have been run without the ready assistance of Ranger Paul who was able to drive all our equipment to the weir and our thanks go to him.

Duncan Hockridge

“Armed with loppers ...” - A volunteer’s day

10th March 10th 2013, cold but dry – ideal for working on the Reserve. The last two volunteer days had been ruined by the weather – snow or torrential rain, so it was good to have a pleasant day. Now too late in the year for hedge laying, but there was still time to clear scrub before it really started to grow. Paul, the warden, drove the tools in the Landrover, while Martin, our secretary, led us 8 to meet him in the top field between MacDonald’s and Hospital Meadows. On the way we found some bright red elf cup fungi. Our task was to clear scrub ash which would soon takeover the grass if not controlled. Up to 5 years ago the area was grazed periodically but has not been since - hence the invasion! After a safety talk, a word that the less fit should rest when tired, and go home when they felt they’d had enough; we set to work in two groups.

My group had a patch with a large clump of brambles in the middle, some good sized saplings as well as many smaller shoots. Armed with loppers or saws we gradually worked our way through the patch. Cut wood was left in piles, some for later collection if suitable for fencing etc, some left as shelter for small mammals, insects and fungi.

About an acre had been cleared - a noticeable difference - although there was plenty left in the vicinity, and I at least had thoroughly enjoyed the morning.

Albyn Austin



Children and Visits to Forest Farm

I suppose the first thing that comes to mind in relation to Forest Farm and children's activities is the Wildlife Watch Group for youngsters aged 8 - 12 run by the Council's Community Park Rangers. (see Events on P.12 for details)

However, recently Paul Davies, our Reserve Warden gave me sight of some Primary schoolchildren's 'thank you' letters to the Warden following an organised school visit to Forest Farm. These are from a few years ago but I thought you would like to read some extracts.

"I learnt a lot, like how to measure a tree. I enjoyed the pond dipping best. I saw some insects I'd never seen before." "The most amazing bit was the pond dipping and fortunately I did not get told off!" "I found a fox lying on the floor sleeping" "trees and wildlife was really interesting and I loved it" "I spotted a bird box" "the pond dipping was excellent and so was everything else". Such visits seem to be less frequent now, perhaps because of financial constraints?

There is now a new initiative by the Council's Parks Department. They have produced a number of excellent leaflets for children for various sites in Cardiff called

Wildlife Explorer Trail

There is one for Forest Farm (available at the Wardens Centre, but all of them can also be found on the Cardiff Council website to download). The leaflet contains a map to find and collect rubbings from each of the 15 marker posts, there are drawings to colour in, and activities and games to complete.

Sheila Austin

(see below for something else that would interest children - and adults too!)

Melingriffith Water Pump

Ty Mawr Road, Whitchurch

See the water pump working!

Followed by a short talk

11 a.m.

Sunday 7th July

Saturday 3rd August

Sunday 1st September

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM

Annual Accounts

If any member wishes to see a copy of the **accounts presented at the AGM**, the Treasurer will be happy to send them to you on receipt of an s.a.e. His contact details are on the green membership card enclosed with this newsletter.

Alternatively you can get in touch via the website.

Events at Forest Farm June to September

Sunday 9th June 10.00 - 13.00	<i>Friends</i> Volunteering event. Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road. Contact Martin on 07952 926145 if further details required.
Saturday 15th June 10.00 - 12.30	Nature walk led by RSPB. Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 22nd June 10.00 - 12.00	Wildlife Watch Club for children aged 8-12. Rock pooling at Sully. Meet at 'the Captains Wife' car park. Charges may apply. For details email Gareth at gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk or phone Community park Rangers 029 2044 5903
Tuesday 25th June from 09.30	"History on our doorstep" Melingriffith Water pump, then a guided walk in Forest Farm, ending with a strawberry treat. £5. IN AID OF BREAST CANCER RESEARCH. See P8 for details
Saturday 29th June 10.30 - 12.30	Cardiff Conservation volunteers. Balsam clearing and cutting Rosebay Willowherb. Meet middle entrance Longwood Drive. See P9 for details
Saturday 29th June	Rhiwbina Festival. Come and support the <i>Friends</i> stand
Saturday 6th July	Whitchurch Festival. Come and support the <i>Friends</i> stand
Sunday 7th July 11.00	Melingriffith Water Pump. See the pump in operation and hear all about it. See P 11 for more details
Sunday 14th July 10.00 - 13.00	<i>Friends</i> volunteering event. Meet at Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road. Contact Martin on 07952 926145 if further details required.
Saturday 20th July 10.00 - 12.30	Nature walk led by RSPB. Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Saturday 20th July 10.00 - 12.00	Wildlife Watch Club for children aged 8-12. Bugs at Grangemoor Park. Meet at the entrance opposite MacDonalds. For details email Gareth at gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk or phone Community park Rangers 029 2044 5903
Saturday 3rd August 11.00	Melingriffith Water Pump. See the pump in operation and hear all about it. See P 11 for more details
Sunday 11th August 10.00 - 13.00	<i>Friends</i> volunteering event. Meet at Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road. Contact Martin on 07952 926145 if further details required.
Saturday 17th August 10.00 - 12.30	Nature walk led by RSPB. Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road
Sunday 1st September 11.00	Melingriffith Water Pump. See the pump in operation and hear all about it. See P 11 for more details
Wednesday 18th September 18.00	Foods of the Forest led by Nicola Hutchinson and the Community Park Rangers. Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd for a pleasant stroll around the Reserve and discover what Mother Nature has in store. Followed by delicious delicacies to taste. £3 per person. CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT.

Published on behalf of The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve by Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1PP email: editor@forestfarm.org.uk
The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.