



# Friends

of FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK  
and GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL  
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Issue No: 90      December 2013

Website: [www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk)

*Merry Christmas*



*and a Happy New Year*

***Dr Mary Gillham***

In our June letter, Chis James wrote an article about Dr Mary Gillham MBE who had passed away and he gave a brief history about her life and involvement with The Forest Farm Country Park and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve and the Friends of Forest Farm.

This has continued after her death as Mary has left money in her will to the "Friends of Forest Farm". The Committee are discussing how best this can be spent on the Reserve in remembrance of Mary.

***John Harding (Chairman)***

**Editorial**

*Hello Friends,... and a particular warm welcome to our new members. It seems as though the Open Day, summer occasional 'pop up cafe', providing refreshments from time to time at events and last but not least our website are helping boost our numbers (see p10). We do need you. One of our main aims in 1990 - to protect and develop the Reserve is probably more vital now than it was then.*

*I would like to take this opportunity to thank all contributors to and distributors of our newsletter. (most copies are still distributed by hand by committee members and other volunteers). Thanks to Paul Davies, Paul Pinnell at Forest Farm and all the Rangers who do a great job and also Chris Price (p3) Hugh Harrison (p5) Stella Wells (p6) and all those who give freely of their time to help us.*

*So if Christmas preparations all get a bit much ... take some time out to read this and, better still, get out to the Reserve, observe what it has to offer, tell us what you think but most of all - enjoy it.*

*Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.*

**Sheila Austin**

**WHERE HAVE THE HERONS GONE?**

One of the benefits of dog walking on the Reserve early in the morning is that you have a chance to see many of the different forms of wildlife that we are fortunate to have on the Reserve. Sometimes you realise you take things for granted.

This year I have noticed that the numbers of heron seems to have greatly reduced.



Why has this happened? In the spring they were at their rowdy best in the Heronry but I have not seen any young birds this year. Have the developments around the Heronry had an impact?

I used to see them in the conservation meadow between the feeder and the canal also in the top meadows.

Has anyone else noticed this or is it just me ?

**Martin Chamberlain**

**Deadline for articles for next newsletter - 8th February 2014**

**See back page for contact details**

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## **Reserve Report**

by **Paul Pinnell - Ranger**

### **Longwood Drive**

**Litter** - Chris Price has kept a record of the number of bags of litter which are being removed - and this amounts to (on average) a bag each day. An approximate calculation puts the annual figure at 350 - 400 bags of litter being collected over the entire length of Longwood Drive!

Volunteer of the Year - I would like to take this opportunity to **congratulate Chris on being awarded the Cardiff City Council Volunteer of the Year.**



It has been a very good year at the **Warden Centre Pond** for insects: especially dragonflies - the Broad-bodied Chaser, Common Hawker, Common Darter and the Blue-tailed Damselfly. Also, sightings of the beautiful Demoiselle were not uncommon. Many of these species were noted to be breeding well into October due to the mild Autumn weather.

Broad bodied chaser (left)  
Common darter (below)

There were also a great many smaller insects such as the Great Diving Beetle, Caddis fly and many more.



Great diving beetle (left)



While carrying out my routine daily duties, I regularly catch sight of a dipper at **Middle Lock** where the water is running at its fastest and the Common snipe are back in force and can be seen regularly in front of the **bird hides**.

The favourable weather conditions have resulted in an abundance of berries and fungi around the Reserve as well.

Paul Pinnell  
Ranger

*(I am sure all of us wish to join Paul in congratulating Chris Price for his well deserved award. He does a tremendous amount of good work around Forest Farm and we are indebted to him. Ed)*

## A MYSTERY SOLVED

A number a years ago, a member of the local metal detector club contacted us to say that he had found a narrow gauge railway alongside the Mellingriffiths feeder (see below) . We knew that there was a standard gauge railway which ran from the Mellingriffiths Works to the Iron Bridge and across the Taff and Taff Vale Railway which was built to replace the original tram road.

What was also confusing is that the narrow gauge railway line finished before the bridge over the feeder in the field in front of the Wardens Centre. Various theories were put forward; was it used when the Mellingriffiths Feeder was being cleaned to keep the water supply running?

The mystery was solved at the recent Open Day on October 12th. The rails do not date from the eighteenth century but from the lead up to the Normandy Landings in 1944.

A local resident at the time advised that the American Army were using some of the Mellingriffiths buildings for storage and, in the field in front of the Wardens Centre, for the assembly of military vehicles.

To transport the parts from the storage buildings to the assembly area, they used a trolley running on the rails. I understand that the American Army were based on Whitchurch Common - were they linked?

Moving forward, we are planning to survey the field in front of the Wardens Centre to see what else we can find. If anyone has any further information please contact me.



**Martin Chamberlain**

Mobile no: 07952 926145

*I hope these arrows are helpful in spotting the rails which were hidden in the undergrowth. You can see how narrow the rails are by the size of the foot between them! Ed.*

*If you are interested in learning how to prune fruit trees , see page 11*

**Cardiff and District RSPB Group  
Conservation Group . . .**

**. . . Doing something positive**

Our last two visits in September and October have very much been catch-up, partly due to the weather and low numbers.

Our main tasks have been keeping the Japanese Knotweed, Balsam and Rosebay Willowherb in check; during the summer months these romp away. All of these invasive weeds are labour intensive. Our September visit saw us operating two strimmers mainly tackling the Rosebay Willowherb ,, becoming a problem and smothering out other wild plants.

October, a wet and damp morning saw our numbers up to seven in total. The tasks seemed less daunting and we were able to work in groups, cleared weeds from the roadside grass verge, from the bottom of our hedge and also a slight prune to restrict the hedge from becoming too leggy. We also needed to prune out young growth around the tree stumps plus tackling our three main weeds. After a morning session, it all seemed worthwhile.

**Programme 2014**

Conservation work will be held on the coming **Saturday mornings 10.30 - 12.30 at Forest Farm Longwood Drive Whitchurch.**

<b>January 25th</b>	Clearing out dead wood; thinning out old trees Middle entrance
<b>February 22nd</b>	Scrub/coppicing clearing Top entrance
<b>March 29th</b>	Clearing undergrowth/checking for dumped rubbish Middle entrance

The group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous, similar to an active gardener (you just work to your own level).

If you would like to get involved ... just turn up or better still, give me a ring

**Hugh Harrison  
029 20704889**

**NOTICE - MELINGRIFFITH WATER PUMP**

Please note that repairs are needed to the Water Pump, so do look out for the notices there, in the Reserve or on the website to see when the monthly operating sessions resume. Apologies to anyone who turned up in November and were disappointed.

**Nature Walks August/September  
Forest Farm Nature Reserve**

**by Stella Wells**



Our August walk was dry but cloudy. The day was quiet, restful, with few birds willing to show themselves, though we enjoyed a 'fly past' of a heron when we were sat in the hide. A green woodpecker and a couple of bull finches teased us with their calls but didn't show their faces.



Green woodpecker

The oak trees were laden with acorns. I can't remember seeing so many before. I'm told it is a 'mast' year where the beech mast, acorns and hazel nuts will be in plentiful supply.

September was a damp and drizzly day. But on a positive note, these conditions accentuate the skills of many spiders, their webs festooning the bushes, especially the old man's beard and fading plants. I never tire of seeing this and can only wonder at how they evolved such intricate designs.

We actually saw a bullfinch this month as well as gold finches, chiff chaff and kingfisher and the usual selection of blue, great and longtailed tits. A buzzard soared above us for a while and a heron hunched miserably. They never look full of the joys of spring or any other time of year do they?



Long  
tailed  
tit -  
right

Chiff  
chaff -  
left



I was away at the time of the October walk, (thank you Pauline for taking over) which is a shame because I

always enjoy the beginning of autumn with its blazing colours. But I can't complain. I spent a great 2 weeks snorkelling with baracudas, kayaking with manatees and watching ospreys fishing in the local lake, not forgetting the alligators watching me as I walked past the lake.

I wonder if it will stop raining by the time we take a stroll around the Reserve in November.

## **The canal**

**Chris James**

Around the end of August, concern was raised about the amount of pondweed on the canal and whether action ought to be taken to control its spread. Chris James has written the following:-

I collected some of the **pond weeds** from the southern end of the canal and have identified them as far as I can.

The main one (see photo) is most likely *Potamogeton pectinatus* (fennel leaved pondweed) which was recorded in the mid 60s by Mary Gillham. It is possible that my identification is inaccurate because I have not seen it in flower.



Fennel leaved pondweed

Other pond weeds I found in the section were:

- 1) Canadian pondweed, *Elodea canadensis*, which was introduced into the UK on numerous occasions since 1836.
- 2) Ivy leaved duckweed, *Lemna trisulca*,
- 3) Water starwort, *Callitriche stagnalis*, and a rare species, *C. brutia*.
- 4) Fringed water lily, *Nymphoides trifoliata* and
- 5) Yellow water lily, *Nuphar lutea*.

I do not believe the Canadian pondweed is a problem in the canal since it fits well into the ecological web. It provides good habitat with other aquatic plants. These plants also create oxygen as a result of photo synthesis and this greatly improves the status of the water which is then able to support a wide range of wildlife from microbes, invertebrates and vertebrates (fish, amphibians, reptiles birds and mammals).



Spotted flycatcher

**To maintain and to improve the canal environment**, there are many tasks required. Management of the canal environment does have some problems, for example, in some areas yellow water lily is very extensive and prevents light penetrating below it.

The Ranger service recognises this problem and for many years has removed significant amounts of this plant. However, the larger problem is caused by the extensive tree growth alongside the banks which prevents significant sunlight reaching many areas. The Management Plan agreed with the Ranger Service, includes recognition of the need for action to open up the banks of the canal.

During the 80s and 90s, sections along the banks were opened up and allowed more sunlight to fall on the canal. This had many beneficial effects and surprisingly both pied and spotted flycatchers moved into the Reserve and the spotted flycatchers bred for several years and then left as the vegetation and trees refilled the cleared areas.

This winter, the railway cutting is due to be opened up and many trees removed and hopefully they will be able create a few scalloped clearings along the canal.

# Friends Open Day - 12th October 2013



Warden Paul Davies - pond dipping with some youngsters.



Below, Alastair Melkie, Wood Turner, at work in the stable and, left, an example of the his skill



We did manage to fill the 'pond' enough for people of all ages to have a go at paddling the coracle.

The apple press was hugely popular.

A lot of people brought a lot of apples - in fact there was a queue for the press for a while. John hardly had time for a cup of tea, but some lucky people had a taster of the results. Delicious apple juice!



**PLEASE DON'T FORGET**

**The Big Garden Birdwatch - January 25th and 26th 2014**

*Only one hour of your time!*

See [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch/) or in the press

*I thought I would take the opportunity to let you know some of what is reported on the RSPB website about the 2013 birdwatch. all the information in this article comes from that site. (I have made bold certain words and phrases). If you are interested and want to find out more, do visit the RSPB website where there is more information and all the results are listed. **Sheila Austin** (Editor)*

Almost 590,000 people across the UK took part

Sadly, 2013 results show that some of the UK's most threatened and best-loved bird species are continuing to decline.

**Starlings** hit an all-time low in the 2012 Birdwatch and **their numbers sunk by a further 16 per cent in gardens** this year. As a UK 'red-listed' species (meaning it is of the highest conservation concern) this is a worrying trend. Numbers of **house sparrows**, also on the red-list, **dropped by 17 per cent in gardens compared to 2012, whilst bullfinches and dunnocks**, both amber-listed, **fell by 20 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.**

Other species fared better with **garden sightings of siskins, fieldfares and jays up by as much as 85 per cent.**

**2013 RSPB RESULTS - local information extracted**

Of the total of 73 birds listed in the RSPB results, on the day of the count, Blaenau Gwent (BG) had 42, Cardiff (CF) 49 and Caerphilly (CY) 50 and the top 5 birds in those areas are BG:- house sparrow, blackbird, jackdaw, blue tit, starling; CF:- house sparrow, blackbird, blue tit, starling, magpie; CY:- house sparrow, blackbird, blue tit, starling, long-tailed tit.

I have picked out some birds further down the 'pecking order' (forgive the pun!)

Bird	Cardiff		Blaenau Gwent		Caerphilly	
	Position	Ave No per garden	Position	Ave No per garden	Position	Ave No per garden
<b>Bullfinch</b>	27	0.11	19	0.47	20	0.39
<b>Dunnock</b>	16	0.53	14	1.01	14	0.95
<b>Fieldfare</b>	33	0.06	-	-	42	0.02
<b>Goldfinch</b>	12	0.74	13	1.11	11	1.28
<b>Ring necked parakeet</b>	20	0.29	-	-	41	0.02
<b>Siskin</b>	30	0.09	17	0.57	22	0.35

### Gardens 'vital' for some of our most threatened birds

The cold, harsh conditions in the wider countryside back in January is likely to have driven more of these birds into gardens in their search for food.

Last year saw a particularly bad crop of acorns - a favourite among jays - meaning these birds are likely to have visited gardens more than normal during the winter to find alternative food sources.

Gardens make up around 4 per cent of land area in the UK and their role as habitats for our wildlife is clear, the birds come for food and shelter when conditions in the countryside are especially tough.

By making gardens as welcoming and supportive for wildlife as we can, we're creating vital space for several of our most familiar and best-loved species, many of which we've seen decline at an alarming rate over the 34 years we've been running the Birdwatch.

### Ad Hoc volunteering?

#### *Interested?*

You may be someone who cannot turn up on the *Friends* regular volunteering day (2nd Sunday of the month - usually) but would still like to help. *We have an idea.*

The need can and does arise for tasks to be performed on an ad hoc basis. Our idea is to ask if people interested in doing this would contact us (see below) with their details. This means that when such work needs to be done, we could get in touch with you to see if you are able to help.

We would need your name and telephone number and/or email address. (This would not be held on a database).

If you are interested in volunteering on an ad hoc basis, please contact:

John Harding 07977881757 or e-mail [john.harding4@sky.com](mailto:john.harding4@sky.com)

Sheila Austin 02920 614245 or email [editor@forestfarm.org.uk](mailto:editor@forestfarm.org.uk)

Via the website [www.forestfarm.org.uk](http://www.forestfarm.org.uk)

or contact any Committee member

### Membership

Membership is currently **310**, this includes 5 new members who joined at our Open Day in October.

Welcome to you all, and thank you again to all new and existing members for your continued support of the 'Friends'.

Pauline Fisher  
Membership Secretary  
8 Woodland Rd.,  
Whitchurch  
Cardiff CF14

*(I have checked and **this is a record!** Its the highest number of members we have had since the Friends was set up in 1990. The previous highest total was 299 in 2006-7. We are delighted and thank you so much for supporting us. Ed.)*



*Friends of Forest Farm*  
*Evening Talks - 7.30 p.m.*

**15th January "Wild Bees"**

**19th March "History of Flatholm Island"**

See Events (pp11/12) for details



Have you over indulged over the festive season?

**Join Martin for a post Christmas Walk going over the new bridge over the Taff and around the Reserve.**

Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch 10.00 - 13.00  
Toilets and refreshments

### The Orchard

We first planted 11 trees in November 2007 and then more on 20th December 2008, 18th November 2009, 8th February 2011 and 6th November 2011.

This means that a total of 63 assorted fruit trees have been planted; 38 eating apples:- 6 cooking apples, 5 cider apples, 6 pear, 3 cherry, 2 gage, 1 damson & 2 plum. Of these 28 have been **adopted/sponsored**.

In *February 2014*, the trees will need pruning so I shall try to arrange 1 or 2 classes where any one can come and learn how to prune fruit trees by pruning our trees in the Orchard.

***If anyone would be interested in helping and learning about pruning fruit trees, please could you contact me and hopefully I will be able to arrange suitable dates.***

Text or phone me on 07977881757 or e-mail [john.harding4@sky.com](mailto:john.harding4@sky.com) or contact any other committee member.

**John Harding**



We have new high visibility vests for our volunteers, so that people know that volunteering is part of the work of the Reserve and also to advertise the Friends of Forest Farm.

### Volunteering on the Reserve

Cardiff Conservation Group  
25th Jan, 22nd Feb

*Friends* - 8th Dec, 19th Jan,  
9th Feb, 9th March

or join our Ad Hoc group

## Events - December 2013 to mid March 2014

DATE	EVENT
Sunday 8th Dec 10.00 - 13.00	<b>Friends Volunteering Event. Hedge laying. Booking necessary.</b> Contact Martin on 07952 926145. Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 14th Dec 10.00 - 12.30	<b>Nature Ramble with the RSPB.</b> Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.
Saturday 14th Dec 10.00 - 12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club</b> for children aged 8-12 <b>Yuletide log and wreath making at the Victoria Park Bowls Club.</b> For more details email Gareth at <a href="mailto:gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk">gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk</a> or phone Community Rangers on 029 2044 5903

*Events - December 2013 to mid March 2014 cont'd*

DATE	EVENT
Sunday 12th Jan 10.00 - 13.00	<b>Post Christmas Walk</b> with the Friends of Forest Farm. Meet Martin at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road Whitchurch (NOT Melingriffith Water Pump). See p11 for details
<b>Wednesday</b> 15th Jan 19.30	<b>Friends Evening Talk on wild bees by Marc Carlton.</b> The Community Centre, Church Road, Whitchurch.. Refreshments available.
Sunday 19th Jan 10.00 - 13.00	<b>Volunteers Day with the Friends of Forest Farm.</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road Whitchurch. Hot home made soup provided.
Saturday 25th Jan 10.00 - 12.30	<b>Nature Ramble with the RSPB.</b> Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.
Saturday 25th Jan 10.30 - 12.30	<b>Volunteering with RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group.</b> Meet Hugh at the middle entrance, Longwood Drive. See p5 for details
Saturday 25th Jan 10.00 - 12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club</b> for children aged 8-12 <i>Activity to be announced.</i> For more details email Gareth at <a href="mailto:gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk">gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk</a> or phone Community Rangers on 029 2044 5903
Sat/Sun 25-26th Jan	<b>RSPB Great Garden Birdwatch.</b> Only one hour of your time at any time during this weekend. See p9 or the RSPB website or in the press that weekend.
Sunday 9th Feb 10.00 - 13.00	<b>Volunteering Day with the Friends of Forest Farm.</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 22nd Feb 10.00 - 12.30	<b>Nature Ramble with the RSPB.</b> Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch.
Saturday 22nd Feb 10.30 - 12.30	<b>Volunteering with the RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group.</b> Meet Hugh at the top entrance Longwood Drive Whitchurch. See p5 for details
Saturday 22nd Feb 10.30 - 12.00	<b>Wildlife Watch Club</b> for children aged 8-12 <i>Activity to be announced.</i> For more details email Gareth at <a href="mailto:gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk">gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk</a> or phone Community Rangers on 029 2044 5903
Sunday 9th March 10.00 - 13.00	<b>Volunteering Day with the Friends of Forest Farm.</b> Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Wednesday 19th March 19.30	<b>Friends Evening talk. The History of Flatholm Island with Peter Sampson.</b> The Community Centre, Church Road, Whitchurch.. Refreshments available.

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](mailto:editor@forestfarm.org.uk)  
The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.