



Friends

of FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
and GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Issue No: 91

March 2014

Website: www.forestfarm.org.uk

Photo of the flooded Melingriffith Water Pump taken on 1st January 2014.

(Photo taken by Duncan Hockridge)



Hydro Scheme at Radyr Weir

If you have been walking along the Taff recently by Radyr Weir you will have noticed that some trees are being felled. The new hydro scheme is the reason. Cardiff Council are working with all relevant and interested parties and the 'Friends' have been involved since the start and continue to be consulted on this project. The Council have contacted us with this update.

"Cardiff Council are embarking on an exciting hydro power project at Radyr Weir. The scheme is predicted to generate enough electricity to power the equivalent of 550 homes and is expected to be operational by mid 2015.

The first stages of development involve, where necessary, pruning and felling of specific trees in order to provide access to the site. Felling work will be carried out by the Council's Parks Department in order to ensure this work is carried out as sympathetically as possible. It is anticipated that all felling will be undertaken prior to March 2014 in order to avoid the nesting season."

Sheila Austin

Editorial

Sheila Austin

Foremost in our minds at the time I write is the dreadful weather we have been experiencing; so much rain and high wind and for so long. Let's hope by the time you receive this, this battering will be in the past - except for those poor people who have experienced flooding. Yet our 'regulars', Stella for the RSPB walks, Hugh from Cardiff Conservation volunteers and the Friends and CCVT continue to support us in all weathers! (and we really do need you) Our grateful thanks them - and not forgetting the Rangers who do such good work.

All this talk about water brings me to the Hydro scheme - a 'green energy' project due to start later this year. We will keep you updated here and on our website www.forestfarm.org.uk.

*More about water - the canal. Its state is a source of major concern to us but it needs **major** money to fix it. A proper feasibility study is essential in order to access the finance, so we hope our contribution will help towards the study taking place soon. My thanks to Chris James for his article putting this in some context.*

I hope you enjoy this edition, the reports on the Reserve, the update on ash dieback and those on the evening talks for the members who could not get there. My thanks to all our contributors.

A letter to the Editor

Where have all the herons gone?



“Adding to Martin Chamberlain’s letter in the December 2013 newsletter, I too have noticed a reduction of Grey Herons in the Conservation meadow.

Could it be that their food resource is now in short supply and therefore they have moved on to new stock?”

Nigel Proffitt (address supplied)

Dates for your diary!

Evening talks 7.30p.m. - All welcome

19th March

“The History of Flatholm Island” Peter Sampson

16th April

“Invasive species” - Denis Murphy, and AGM

Community Centre, Old Church Rd. Whitchurch

Deadline for articles for next newsletter - 8th May 2014

See back page for contact details

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Forest Farm Reserve Report

We would like to thank the Friends of Forest Farm for their continued donation of generous amounts of bird seed. This replenishes the nut dispenser, helping ground feeding birds - hedge accentors (dunnocks), bullfinch, reed bunting, chaffinch, greenfinch, blackbird, song thrush, robin, house sparrow, great tit, blue tit and coal tit but also greater spotted woodpecker, jackdaw, jay, goldfinch, long-tailed tit on the dispenser itself and potentially the occasional siskin and starling



Male bullfinch

Recently people have been concerned at the lack of herons in and around the nature Reserve. However, they have been seen regularly at the Wardens Centre pond and orchard and the field adjacent to it, also at the weir on the River Taff. Herons do cover a vast area in order to take on new feeding grounds. It is probably the case that the birds seen on the Reserve have been affected by human disturbance. Meanwhile, Chris P and I will keep an eye on the heronry, watch the numbers and report back to the Friends of Forest Farm.



Snipe

There has been unseen work around the hides (i.e. creating flood channels and tree felling to create habitat species for e.g. bittern and common snipe). It is working well so far; for example, 25 snipe were seen feeding in these areas. I would like to thank Alec and Raj for their input and guidance in this type of management and also to them and Richie for their help with the habitat creation in the two-pond field. We have opened up these areas for ground flora enhancing diversity.

Weekly, we will be welcoming an inner city school to this area for an Eco Day; many of the children have never visited the countryside before. If there are any Friends of Forest Farm members who know of any schools and after school clubs who would like to benefit from an Eco Day, please could you get in touch with **Paul Pinnell, Ranger** on 07976 011768 as we would like to encourage this kind of activity.

(**Paul Davies** has added this information about an **otter**.) Towards the end of January, we received a phone message from local residents at a house above Rhiwbina Hill Farm. I called them back and they requested I come over to collect a dead otter and, when I met them, they said that over the previous week their dogs had been barking/agitated at night more than usual.

The otter was a fully grown adult female and had been knocked over by a car. A 30 mph speed limit on country roads might help. With the help of the Rangers, we arranged for it to be dropped at the University laboratories for dissection and analysis. The otter may well have been swimming up the Nant Cwmnofydd due to the high river levels.

Finally, news that there is frog spawn in the 2 ponds!

ASH DIEBACK - Chris James

Since the confirmation of Ash Dieback in the United Kingdom in February 2012, the disease is well established in the south east of England and is spreading at around 10 miles a year from infected areas. Of the approximately 20 infected sites in Wales, all except one are from imported trees. The exception is one area in natural woodland in Carmarthenshire. Of the latest information in January this year, the forestry Commission have confirmed that trees in the wider environment have been confirmed in Derbyshire.

As the disease has had profound impact on ash populations in mainland Europe (for example about 75% of Danish ash trees have been lost) it is likely that we will lose significant numbers of British ash during the next few decades.

In the Reserve, fortunately there have been no signs of infected trees. However, many hundreds of ash saplings have been removed from the Top Meadow. The reason for the removal is to restore the openness of Meadow which will increase the numbers of wild flowers which will create more habitats for invertebrates, birds and small mammals. Besides increasing the numbers of animal and plant species in the area, the removal of the saplings will reduce the risk of Dieback as saplings are more vulnerable to the disease than mature trees.



Photo: Forestry Commission

Volunteers work to reduce the ash saplings



Some of the ash saplings in the top meadow removed by the 'Friends' in November .
(Photos Chris James)

Members of the Committee and Friends were active in November working in the Top Meadow to cut down the many ash saplings which were growing there.

This was one of the 'ad hoc' volunteering events suggested in the last newsletter.



Cardiff Conservation Volunteers (CCVT) clearing the saplings December 2013

Photo and on p5, John Harding.

In December there was "additional ad hoc" performance by Cardiff Conservation Volunteers. This is great and has resulted in the removal of a huge number of the meadow invading trees.

The photos give an indication of the extent of their work, including the creation of several large habitat piles. This was arranged and overseen by Ranger Paul Pinnell . The focus is on completing this work ASAP so that maintenance of the meadow in future will be minimal .

In Mary Gilham's "Natural History of Cardiff", she writes of the orchids and yellow rattle that grew extensively in the meadow and not that long ago, management had increased the numbers of plants growing there. These plants have all but disappeared but will soon come back to spectacular levels when the field has been mown late in summer in the following years.



The work by CCVT has moved the programme far forward, allowing the treatment of the tree stumps with glyphosate to prevent their regrowth. There are also extensive areas of bramble (up to 30 metres into the meadow) to be reduced this winter.



8 - 12 years old?

Interested in the
environment?

Then come along to the

Wildlife Watch Club

with the Rangers
at the Wardens' Centre
Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch

For more details see Events on
pp11 - 12 of this newsletter,

or on www.forestfarm.org.uk

or email Gareth at
gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk

or phone Community Rangers on
029 2044 5903

Friends of Forest Farm Evening Talks - *report by Albyn Austin*

"Through the Eyes of a Stone Mason"

Simon Morgan of Mossfords gave us a most interesting and entertaining talk in *November*. Mossfords began in 1821 in Cheshire. The founder had several sons who went into the trade. He related how it came about that there were two competing separate Mossford businesses at Cathays and Ely by the 1900s. This was the heyday of the monumental masonry business with about 25 firms operating in Cardiff; there had been none 60 years before.

He showed us some beautiful memorials in Cathays cemetery from this period, contemporary photographs and ones showing their current condition: generally not bad after over a century of exposure to the weather and vandals. Again, using contemporary photographs, he described how the business was run in the 1920s and the way the men worked. A full time blacksmith was needed to re-sharpen the steel chisels which lasted about 15 minutes on marble but only about 5 minutes on granite. Today, power tools and the use of diamond or tungsten tips greatly reduce the manual work involved and extend the life of the tools. Granite or slate are now more popular than marble.

Municipal cemeteries limited the size of plots and stopped the more flamboyant and spectacular monuments. Cremations increased in popularity, especially after World War 2, thus the number of these memorials declined. Today there are only 3 surviving monumental masonry firms in Cardiff.

During questions Mr Morgan discussed cleaning. Clean water and elbow grease a few times a year are as good as anything to enable the stone to last longer, not chemical treatments or bleach!

Nature Walks November - January Forest Farm Nature Reserve

by Stella Wells



Well, I am a nice shade of rust and I think I am developing webbed feet! But I have to say that someone 'up there' has smiled on us for the last few walks. It has been dull, cold and damp, but the heavy rain has stayed away for much of the time.

Sometimes it pays to arrive at the visitor centre before anyone else as I often have a good view of the sparrow hawk as she explores the area around the giant seed feeder. Many of the finches take advantage of seed placed on the stone wall, such as bullfinch, goldfinch and chaffinches and a great spotted woodpecker on the feeder is always a joy, but it usually disappears before the walkers join me for our ramble.

In my notes for the November walk I have written that I was joined by 15½ people. Now was that a top half of a person or the bottom half. Maybe it was a child, but anyway it was a good day with about 23 species on our list. This included grey wagtails, redwings, song thrush, gold crest, king fisher and snipe as well as 'the usual crew'.

There were 2 walks in December as there was some mix up over the dates. The first walk was a good day, with jays, 3 herons, treecreepers and siskins all on show. On the second walk, 2 people joined me and we were treated to very good views of the water rail at both hides.



Goldcrest
the smallest British bird



Water Rail

In January the Taff was flowing fast and furious and so we omitted this part of the walk. The highlights were nuthatches and the bittern. This secretive bird walked out of the reeds for a short time so that we could have a good view and then it skulked back into the cover of the reeds and was soon out of sight. Such a wonderfully camouflaged bird.

Who knows what the weather is going to throw at us over the next few months – so thermals and waterproofs at the ready and we will look out for early signs of Spring.

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

. . . Doing something positive

Our last work party for November 2013 was to tackle fallen timber, the combination of strong winds and sodden ground resulting in up-rooted trees. We also needed to thin out some of the dead and spindly trees. Another task for the morning was to check and clean out our nest boxes.

The morning session went smoothly, the cleared timber being used to create a boundary alongside the foot path thus creating a wild life habitat. Only 8 of our 14 nest boxes had been occupied, 7 had young and fledged, the eighth had 6 dead (Great tit) found during our May survey. Tree wasps had taken up residence in 2 of the boxes, 3 had nests started and we lost one box to squirrel attack.

January 2014 has been a month of wind and rain. Fortunately for our visit this month there was a window in the weather which enabled us to tackle the invading scrub. The area was cleared of mixed scrub a few years ago, but this is now creeping back. The objective is to encourage this open area for grassland, keeping a boundary of scrub for wildlife. the task looked daunting - perhaps the length of a football pitch - nevertheless with only a small group, we cleared the area ... job done.

Programme 2014

Conservation work will be held on the following Saturday mornings 10.30 - 12.30p.m. at Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch.

March 29th	Clearing undergrowth/checking for dumped rubbish Middle entrance
April 26th	Cutting first flush of knotweed Middle entrance
May 31st	Nest box and wildflower survey 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 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



Advance Notice :

FRIDAY 27TH JUNE Friends of Forest Farm

Guided walk. *Dragonflies and Damselflies on the Reserve.*

Meet Chris James at 10.30 at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch

Melingriffith Sports Club Gate

I wonder how many of you noticed this gate amongst the hedging at the edge of the car park of the Diamond Ground of Harlequins RFC in Forest Farm Rd? Did you notice it has gone?

For some time, the Friends of Farm Committee have been concerned about its deteriorating state, and because it is part of the local heritage. (The letters MGSC of course stand for Melingriffith Sports Club, the sports club of the Melingriffith tin works which covered a large part of this area).



Due to the active intervention of one of our committee members, Duncan Hockridge, negotiations were conducted with the RFC through Phil Judd, their Chairman the result being that the gate is now in the custody of the Friends of Forest Farm. It has been removed to a safe location and a quote is being obtained as to the cost of renovation. It is hope that it can be repaired and repainted but in any case it will in future be available to be seen by visitors to the Reserve.

We could do with your help though. We believe there is a photograph or picture of it in a past publication in colour. As part of the design is a sunburst, this might have been yellow? If anyone knows what the colours were please get in touch as we would like to have it repainted in its original colours.

We would like to use this opportunity to thank Harlequins RFC for donating the gate to the Friends.

(If you have any information about the colours of the gate, contact any member of the Committee; my contact details are on the back page).

Sheila Austin

Mystery picture

What was this building?
(Tongwynlais side of the
M4 near the bridge
across the Taff)

If you know, and
contact me, I'll publish
your names next time.
Sorry - no prizes!

*(I do know and will
include a picture of it in
a much more complete
state in the June
newsletter).*

*See back page for
contact details*

Special Events at Forest Farm

Bat walk
23rd April 8p.m.

Foods of the Forest
14th May 6 p.m.

**Rangers Spring
Watch Weekend**
7th - 8th June
from 10 a.m.





Membership

Since our December Newsletter, we have received 11 new members, and a warm welcome is extended to you all from the 'Friends'. 5 of these members joined via Pay Pal; for any current members who would like to use this method for renewing, all the information can be found on our website (www.forestfarm.org.uk)

Current Membership is now: **316**.

Once again I would like to thank ALL our members for your continued support which is greatly valued; and I hope to see many of you at our AGM on 16th April.

Pauline Fisher
Membership Secretary.



A sign of spring to cheer you up!
Catkins - just outside the Wardens' Centre

Friends of Forest Farm Evening Talks - *report by Albyn Austin*

January talk "Wild Bees" by Marc Carlton

Marc started by explaining this was **not** a talk on honey bees, but wild bees of which there were several hundred species in the UK - ranging from large bumble bees to tiny solitary bees barely 2mm in size. Loss of habitat, large scale monoculture and other changes in agriculture mean that many of these species were now threatened and all are in decline. They and honey bees are vital for pollination of many agricultural plants such as fruit trees. Marc explained how wild bees feed on both pollen and nectar, and how flowers are shaped to encourage particular types of bees to pollinate them.

Many wild bees are solitary but some bumble bees in particular live in small colonies a fraction of the size of honey bee hives. These colonies are small and last for just one season; and only young queens survive the winter in hibernation before establishing new colonies elsewhere. Bumble bees are placid and rarely sting except as a last resort. All wild bees are much more placid than honey bees or wasps; many species have no stings at all.

Marc went on to explain how to identify wild bees from honey bees, wasps and hoverflies. There are eight common species of bumble bee for instance that are different in size, in markings and which are common at different times of the year. Wild bees, especially the large, furry, buzzing bumble bees were placid, colourful additions to any garden. They nest in a wide variety of holes and cracks in trees, buildings and even in burrows in the soil. Some species often fly distances of a mile or more to obtain food. He gave details of how to build a bee hotel to provide nesting sites, (*see the links below*).

He stressed how important gardens were becoming in providing habitat for bees and gave a list of plants and special habitats for them, (*see the links below*). However he said any open flowers provided food for bees. Hybrid double flowers such as some marigolds where the petals filled the flower could not be used by bees and should be avoided if you wanted to encourage bees in your garden.

It was a fascinating talk. Much more information on what to do if you find colonies or bedraggled bumble bees or for information on plants or wild bees see **Marc's own website** <http://www.foxleas.com/>, or <http://bumblebeeconservation.org/> and <http://www.bwars.com/>

Apology...I had one senior moment too many and got the dates of the Jan and Feb RSPB walks wrong. To those who did not get the revised information, my sincere apologies. **Sheila Austin**

Brief History and Future of The Canal - *Chris James*

The Canal is more than 200 years old and the Forest Farm section is the largest remaining section of the original 23 mile Glamorganshire Canal built and opened in the 1790s by Merthyr Tydfil ironmasters. It was a very important transport route moving materials between Cardiff and the Valleys. Iron and coal were flowing from the Valleys to Cardiff, boosting the economy and the expansion of Cardiff population which increased from 2000 in 1800 to around 200,000 by 1900. During this economic growth in South Wales, railways became established from 1840. The Taff Vale Railway provided greater capacity for moving coal and iron than the Canal. The result of this expansion led to the development of the docks and caused a gradual decline in the use of the Canal. The Canal was finally closed in 1947 by Cardiff Council who had become owners in 1942. Then in the late 1960s, the Glamorganshire Canal Nature Reserve was established, including Forest Farm.

During the 1970s, the A470 was re-routed, Longwood Drive was created and the M4 was constructed. Also a large section of Forest Farm land was developed and companies were established near the M4; the first company being Amersham International. These civil engineering developments resulted in sections of the Canal being covered and the blocking of the Parish Road which connected Llandaff North to Tongwynlais.

The formation of The Reserve led to considerable work on the site which created many natural habitats which established a wide range of all year around and migrant wildlife. Many hedge rows and wooded areas were initially created and this was followed by the creation of wetland areas and The Orchard. The result of these projects has created more site routine maintenance work and the Council's Ranger Service is working to cover the necessary jobs.

One of the major maintenance problems currently facing the Reserve is deterioration of the Canal and the towpath. The Canal has accumulated a great deal of silt, particularly towards the northern end. Also, the western bank alongside the towpath has deteriorated and repair and restoration of both the stone wall bank plus the towpath is needed as soon as possible.

These tasks are complex and will be very expensive to complete. Because the Council is not in a position to fund this kind of work, the Ranger Service is funding a specialist company to provide an appraisal* of the work required including the cost. Once this is completed, applications will be made for grants to cover the cost of the work. Hopefully this project will be successful and result in help to improve the nature of the Reserve and establish a sound future for the Canal which is an important historic monument of the Industrial Revolution.

The Friends of Forest Farm Committee are wholly supportive of this project as I expect the vast majority of members will be.

*(* As this report is fundamental to the future of the canal, the Friends of Forest Farm have agreed to make a contribution towards the cost of this feasibility study. Ed)*



This is an example of the deterioration of the edge of the canal and towpath

Can you spare three hours a month to improve the Reserve?



Photo: Martin Chamberlain

Over the Winter a hardy group of volunteers have been working on coppicing on the reserve.

The number of volunteers have reduced over the winter and we need more volunteers as we move into the summer months. **When we are applying for grants from various sources, we can use volunteer hours to match the financial funding.**

Due to the severe wet weather, much damage has been done throughout the Reserve and the number of tasks requiring volunteers is large.

The work is suitable for all ages and abilities and we have our own tools to use for the various tasks. We usually meet the second Sunday morning of

the month. Many of our volunteers find a few hours in the fresh air a good means of getting some exercise!

If you have any question please contact me on my mobile 07952 926145.

Martin Chamberlain

Events at Forest March to June 2014

DATE	EVENT
Sunday 9th March 10.00 - 13.00	Friends of Forest Farm Volunteering Event . Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch
Saturday 15th March 10.00 - 12.30	RSPB Nature Walk . Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Wednesday 19th Mar 19.30	EveningTalk “the History of Flatholm Island” Peter Sampson . Community Centre Whitchurch. All welcome.
Saturday 29th March 10.30 - 12.30	Volunteering Event with Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group. Clearing undergrowth/checking for dumped rubbish. Meet Hugh at the Middle Entrance Longwood Drive Whitchurch
Saturday 29th March 10.00 - 12.00	Wildlife Watch Club for children aged 8-12 Photography workshop Bring your own camera. (For more details email Gareth at gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk or phone Community Rangers on 029 2044 5903
Sunday 13th April 10.00 - 13.00	Friends of Forest Farm Volunteering Event . Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch
Wednesday 16th April 19.30	Evening Talk and AGM. “Invasive Species” - a talk by Denis Murphy . Whitchurch Community Centre. All welcome.

Events at Forest Farm March to June cont'd

DATE	EVENT
Saturday 19th April 10.00 - 12.30	RSPB Nature Walk. Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Wednesday 23rd April 20.00	Friends of Forest Farm Evening Bat Walk with Chris James. See some of the bats inhabiting the Reserve. Meet at the Wardens' Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch
Saturday 26th April 10.30 - 12.30	Volunteering Event with Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group. Cutting first flush of knotweed. Meet Hugh at the Middle Entrance Longwood Drive Whitchurch
Saturday 26th April 10.00 - 12.00	Wildlife Watch Club for children aged 8-12 Looking for signs of Spring on the Reserve. For more details email Gareth at gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk or phone Community Rangers on 029 2044 5903
Sunday 11th May 10.00 - 12.30	Friends of Forest Farm Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch
Wednesday 14th May 18.00	Foods of the Forest. £3.00 per person. Suitable for the disabled. 'Take a pleasant stroll around Forest Farm Country Park and discover the tasty treats Mother Nature has in store this time of year. This is followed by a tasting session of some delicious delicacies'.
Saturday 17th May 10.00 - 12.30	RSPB Nature Walk. Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 31st May 10.30 - 12.30	Volunteering Event with Cardiff and District RSPB Conservation Group. Nest box and wildflower survey. Meet Hugh at the Middle Entrance Longwood Drive Whitchurch
Saturday 31st May 10.00 - 12.00	Wildlife Watch Club for children aged 8-12 Pond dip and Art activity. For more details email Gareth at gstamp@cardiff.gov.uk or phone Community Rangers on 029 2044 5903
Saturday and Sunday 7th & 8th June 10.00 onwards	Rangers Spring Watch Weekend. at Forest Farm based around the Wardens Centre. FREE Suitable for the disabled. "Come and join the Rangers and our other partners in this 2 day festival of Spring." See great wildlife right on your doorstep. Various activities: walks, talks, workshops and displays.
Sunday 8th June 10.00 - 13.00	Friends of Forest Farm Volunteering Event. Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch
Saturday 21st June 10.00 - 12.30	RSPB Nature Walk. Meet Stella at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch

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 Tel: 02920 614245 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.