Friends

of FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
and GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

***Issue No: 116 June 2020***

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*Editorial*

*This unusual - and shortened - edition of your newsletter comes during these strange and difficult times brought about by Covid-19 and the consequent - and current - lockdown.*

*We do hope you have all kept well. Like us, I expect you miss being able to go out and visit your favourite places, especially Forest Farm!*

*All our events have been cancelled of course. It is particularly disappointing now, in the 30th year of "The Friends". However, nature is not self isolating! Ranger Alec Stewart's lovely report tells us of the diversity of nature in Forest Farm. I am sure you will enjoy it. I have included a few photos to remind you of the lovely Spring; also a brief outline of what is or has been happening.*

*We look forward to being back enjoying the Reserve and getting stuck into our various activities there. There will be plenty to do!*

*Keep well, stay safe.*

***Sheila***

*p.s. For the September newsletter, hopefully, we will be 'back to normal'.*

**Birds, insects - and plastics.**

Those of us of more senior years remember having to clean the windscreen of insects after (and maybe during) a journey. Not so now, but as well as this decline, research had already shown that about half of insects in UK rivers contain plastic.

Now, scientists at Cardiff and Exeter Universities and Greenpeace have found that Dippers not only eat the insects but also feed them to their chicks.

Prof. Steve Ormerod of Cardiff University's Water Research Unit said "In almost 40 years of researching rivers and dippers, I never imagined one day our work would reveal these spectacular birds to be at risk from the ingestion of plastics".

(Thanks to Rosemary Waters for bringing this to my attention. Ed)

**Photography Competition**

The Friends of Forest Farm are celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, and as part of that, we're holding a Photography Competition!



Winning entrants will get to see their work in a Friends of Forest Farm Calendar for 2021.

The idea is to celebrate the wide variety of the nature reserve, its ambience, beauty, wildlife and biodiversity — birds, insects, animals, plants, fungi and landscapes. Anything that makes Forest Farm the special place that it is.

*Photos can have been taken at any time since the Friends group was founded in 1990, so there's no need to go out during the current lockdown to take any new ones.*

The competition opened on 31 March, and we've had a great response so far. The deadline for entries is 31 May, so there's still time to send us your best shots.

Full details of the competition, and how to enter, can be found on our website, at **https://forestfarm.org.uk/photocomp/**

**Velindre Cancer Hospital**

**Planning**

In the last newsletter, we advised that Velindre were entering the next stage of the planning process.

However, due to the ongoing crisis, the planning process has been suspended and there is no date for it to restart.

As soon as there is any information available, we will update you at the next newsletter.

***Martin Chamberlain (Secretary)***

## *Reserve Report*

***Alec Stewart - Ranger***

**March/May 2020 (The covid months)**

Very strange and disturbing times at the moment with normal Forest Farm life put on hold. However the seasons and nature stop for no one and things have been progressing really well on the reserve. Early March saw birds such as the **Dipper** building their nests. As I type this, I have just watched the adults coming to the nest with food for their hungry chicks.



**Tony Fisher's photo of a Dipper** in the Taff - when there was a lot more water about than there is now.



Left: **Cetti's Warbler - Photo by Colin Harvey** taken at Rhymney in Feb 2016.

Below: **Photo of a Kingfisher at Forest Farm taken by Katie Horrocks in 2015.**



The H**ouse Sparrows** have taken up residence in the new sparrow boxes. The **Cettis Warbler** which has been present throughout the winter was calling loudly from various spots in the wetland. After the storms, the **Mistle Thrush** or **Stormcock** lived up to its name by proclaiming its territory from up high for everybody to hear.

As March moved on, I heard a **Tawny Owl** calling in Longwood along with a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** drumming and then my first **Chiffchaff** of the season along the canal. The **Kingfishers** were busy pairing off and chasing each other along the canal and, a hangover from winter, were some **Redwing** feeding off ivy berries. This shows the importance of ivy as a food source for berries and later on, pollen for the insects.

It was not only the birds that were evident. The **Bees** that live in the barn wall were out on sunny days and the wildflowers such as **Wood Anemone, Primrose and Daffodils** were all out. The **Lily Pads** and fresh sprouts of **Reed and Rush** hinted at the rush to spring.



Into April. the **Cuckoo Flower** was up everywhere with the **Ramsons and Bluebells and Red Campion.** I was particularly pleased to see a lot of the **Bluebells** we had planted in the autumn and winter now flourishing. I saw my first **Orange Tip Butterfly** on the 10th on a warm sunny day which was topped off by my first **Male Blackcap** singing away proclaiming I have arrived.

The wetlands are now green with fresh growth. **Mallards** have chicks and most birds are busy feeding their young. The flowers and plants are growing and blooming and the insects are taking advantage of this bounty.

Despite everything that is going on in our world at the moment Nature is at its best and reminds us of what is truly important in life.



Please stay safe everyone and keep positive.

Would you like to contribute to **the Friends 30th Anniversary booklet?**

The Committee, are making good progress with this project, but this is probably our *last* opportunity to invite you to send something in?

We are hoping to publish in the Autumn. It seems a long time off, but it's already mid May - there is still a lot to do.

If you are short of ideas, here are some suggestions: something from the early days,



maybe a photograph like this one from **Sarah Jones** taken in May 2005. It is upstream of Forest Lock. (Note the narrow path and grass - and the canal edge,).

Do you have a special memory of something you saw on the Reserve or when volunteering or on one of Duncan's trips.

At the moment it is best to email me or post it to me as you are unlikely to see any Committee members. My contact details are at the bottom of P4.

**Sheila Austin**

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***How has the lockdown affected the work of the Rangers at Forest Farm?***

**Update**

We are currently in very strange times! If you had asked me six months ago if five of the team would be off shielding from a virus, events and volunteer activity would be suspended and social distancing becoming part of normal life, I would not have believed you! But that is exactly where we are at the moment.

This of course does mean that projects and planned works are inevitably delayed. We are currently only operating with a skeleton staffing level in work on a daily basis. We are contributing to the Covid-19 response city wide by checking parks and open spaces, encouraging social distancing and responding to emergencies. When we can, we are fitting in essential management works to sites which does include some limited management work at Forest Farm.

The replacement of the bird hide has unfortunately been delayed through this period although we have still managed to do some of the ground works in preparation, between other things. Hopefully we will be able to get things back on track shortly.

We are all looking forward to getting things back to normal, whenever that will be! In the mean time, enjoy Forest Farm for your daily exercise but please remember to Stay Safe and social distance from others while you are doing so.

**Nicola Hutchinson**
**Park Conservation Officer**

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**What a great choice of nesting site!**

Did you know that some blue tits had nested in the hands of the 'giant' at Forest Farm? There is a very short video on our Facebook page taken by Chris Dawson-Morris. What a delight!



Ranger Alec Stewart commented that the sculptor, Chris Wood, "had left a hole to create a nest box for exactly that purpose. Excellent news".

**Membership**

*As you might have noticed, we haven't reported our membership numbers for some time. We have always kept a manual record, but transferring to a database (in line with GDPR) meant a good check on the data as well as taking account of recent changes in membership. Also, we didn't have the AGM this year for obvious reasons. (Ed.)*

***Membership report from Pauline Fisher***

Since January we have had 26 new members, even so our membership numbers are still only 341, slightly down on the number you had for last year's A.G.M. Maybe when the lockdown is over they may go up again.

Many who have renewed have kindly also included extra towards postage and bird seed, or just state 'donation'. Thank you.

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## Messages from our Chairman

**AGM**

The Committee will arrange the A.G.M. as soon at it safe and possible to do so.

**Friends of Forest Farm OPEN DAY**

I would like to think that by October things will be back to "normal". **If so**, our Open Day, currently scheduled for October 3rd, would be a great opportunity to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Friends of Forest Farm and for us all to meet up again.

Our September newsletter will be more up to date on whats going on.

All keep safe.

***John Harding***

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**More Donations**

You have always been generous and it's really good to hear that despite our current worries, donations have continued to be sent in. Often, these are with the annual subscriptions as mentioned by Pauline. Recently, we have also had 2 other donations.

We are extremely grateful to two groups for remembering us and for their generosity. It is greatly appreciated.

Many of you will remember Betty's Birders - some members of the Friends who continue to meet up and raise funds from their coffee mornings. They have made several contributions over the years and this time the amount is £32. Many thanks to them.

The Rhiwbina Walking Group has donated the balance of their funds (£199.07) to the Friends. The group has recently folded but as they used to walk at Forest Farm, they felt this was an appropriate way to use the money. On behalf of the Committee and the Friends I have passed on our grateful thanks but wanted also to recognise this more widely to you, our members.

Once again, many thanks to all our donors.

***Sheila Austin***

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**Respecting the wildlife**

On the Reserve, and on our Facebook page a little earlier this year, you may have seen some new signs from Cardiff Council. As the number of visitors to Forest Farm has increased, a politely worded poster reminds people that the canal and towpath has some of the best wildlife on the Reserve. It asks us all to respect the wildlife and not to let dogs in the canal..

**Ladybirds:** How often do we mention ladybirds? A great BBC poster on our Facebook site has pictures and brief details of the 25 most conspicuous species!

Look out for ladybirds on your walks, and why not take part in the UK ladybird Survey. (Thanks to Penny Bowers for telling us about this)

https://www.coleoptera.org.uk/coccinellidae/home - or search UK Ladybird Survey.

**Deadline for articles for next newsletter**
**10th August 2020**

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*The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.*