Friends

of FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
and GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Issue No: 118 December 2020

website:www.forestfarm.org.uk Postcode: CF14 7JJ

A Green Flag award for Forest Farm!!

*The **Green Flag Award** is all about connecting people with the very best parks and green spaces.*

Wherever you see a Green Flag, you know you're visiting an exceptional place with the highest standards.

Read Martin's report below:



At this time of uncertainty, good news is at a premium. Therefore, we are delighted to report that, at the first attempt, Forest Farm has achieved the Green Flag Award from Keep Wales Tidy.

The Green Flag Award is a benchmark for parks and green spaces in the UK and abroad.

The judging was in two parts:-

Part one

This was the production of documentary evidence provided by Nicola Hutchinson, Parks Conservation Officer, covering subjects as evidence of biodiversity, volunteering, accessibility and planning.

Part two

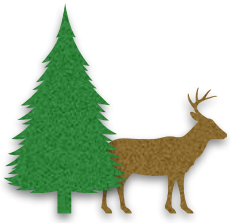
This involved a site visit by two Keep Wales Tidy judges. It was undertaken with Nicola and myself in a socially distanced manner and with a tour of the Reserve in mid September demonstrating what was detailed in the documentary evidence.

The judges understood that the coronavirus had a major impact on the work of the Park Rangers and the volunteers. They were impressed by the biodiversity, volunteering and history of the site.

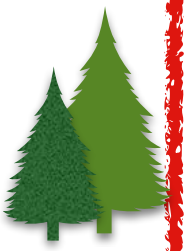
The combination of these two parts of the process resulted in the judges awarding a score of 80+ against their criteria.

This is a recognition of the commitment and knowledge of our Park Rangers and also the volunteers who support them.

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary
Friends of Forest Farm



With very best wishes for Christmas and 2021



Editorial

Welcome Friends. What a year it has been! We anticipated a celebratory year for our 30th anniversary; events got in the way … There were floods early in the year and then Covid19. The Nature Reserve has been a haven of peace and beauty; nature has provided some sanity in this crazy year. No wonder the Reserve has attracted new people; we welcome them and hope they enjoy and appreciate what it has to offer. Maybe join in some of our activities when we are able to return to them?

*As ever, the newsletter aims to show the diversity of the Nature Reserve. So we have reports about what was there to see this last 3 months (*pages 2-3. 6 and 9). On page 11 an article *giving a bit of background to the what, how, when and how of volunteering; finally some 'bits and bobs'. My sincere thanks to* ***Alec*** *for his regular and always interesting Ranger's report, to* ***Martin, Anthony, Elaine, Jan John*** *and* ***Jon*** *for their contributions to this edition.*

Many members will know the saga of development on the 'hospital meadows' - the battle over this land has run almost as long as the thirty years the Friends have existed. ***Martin*** *reports on the latest decision about Velindre and other potential developments which could affect the Reserve.*

One lovely and positive event was the award of a ***Green Flag*** *to Forest Farm - an acknowledgement of the high standard of the Reserve and a recognition of the hard work of the Rangers and volunteers.*

We have been delighted with the sales of our 2021 calendar and the response to it. Let's hope it marks the beginning of a much better year. To our members, volunteers, contributors and distributors, on behalf of the Committee, very best wishes for this Christmas.

Sheila Austin

DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING FOREST FARM

In the last few years there have been many proposed developments affecting the boundaries of Forest Farm. The ongoing plans for Whitchurch Hospital Fields, the new Velindre Hospital or the housing development on the same site have been mentioned in many newsletters over the years.

Velindre

On the 18th November Cardiff Council Planning Committee, following recommendation from the Planning Officer, unanimously approved the next stage of the planning process for Velindre New Hospital i.e. construction access via the Whitchurch Hospital entrance.

In the environmental planning document it had been proposed that there would be a need during construction for any excessive water to drain into the canal via a pipe on the Sunnybanks path.

We had raised our concerns with the Parks Department.

On reading the paperwork from the planning department, it would appear this has been declined as it does not meet Welsh Government rules from January 2019 that require all drainage to remain on the site.

It is expected the Welsh Government will make a final decision from a medical and planning point of view in early 2021.

cont'd on facing page

Deadline for articles for next newsletter - 8th February 2021

See back page for contact details

Contents	Page	Contents	Page
Developments affecting Forest Farm	2-3	Red in Beak and Claw'	8
Ranger's report	3-4	A walk in the Autumn sunshine	9
Forest Farm Rd	5	Update on the new Birdhide/ RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch Jan 2021	10
What is a Woofell?	5-6	Volunteering	11
A reminder of late summer	6	Something to … look forward to	12
Calendars 2021	7		

Developments affecting Forest Farm - continued

However, if permission is granted, there will be further planning applications when detailed plans are produced for the actual design of the buildings etc.

Other proposed developments

In addition there are also continuing proposals for the City Circle Line as part of the South Wales Metro using the railway cutting and a Park and Ride at M4 junction 32. Also, most recently, as part of the Green Plan produced by the council in their publicity hand -out , there was a mention of a public area for growing food at Forest Farm. Although, this was removed at a later stage.

The Committee are disappointed that no contact has been received from the Strategic Planning Department of the Council concerning these proposals.

We have, therefore, sent a formal request to the Council to advise us of how far the proposals have progressed. Also, more importantly, what impact they will have on the reserve.

With the present economic position facing the country, these plans may never be implemented but we need to be prepared and involved in these proposals.

Martin Chamberlain

Secretary, Friends of Forest Farm

Reserve Report September - November

- Ranger Alec Stewart

This season has seen a mixture of very dry weather followed by very wet weather and all temperatures as well. So nothing new for the Welsh weather then!

It helped being dry the early part of the season as we were able to get into the wetlands and carry out essential work to clear water channels and pools ready for the Autumn and Winter visitors. This was especially needed this year as we had spent a lot of grant money and time last year reshaping the wader scrapes and did not want to lose this valuable work. Since the deluge, these areas have filled nicely, now looking really good, and I have been happy with the way the water system is working.



Snipe in the Wetland. Photo Norman Smith

As if to enforce this, the wildlife has shown its appreciation with **Snipe** putting in an early appearance and with the **Kingfisher** and **Heron** being very evident. There was also some sightings of a **Grass Snake*** in the pond and canal areas.

We still have some work to do at the Whitchurch end of the canal and some more bank reinforcing along the length of the canal up to the Forest lock. We may have to close one section of the canal for some of this work to be carried out and information will follow when we have a date.**

Some other sightings of wildlife include a **Weasel** spotted by Paul darting out of the allotments and making its way to the old cottage ruins opposite. We occasionally see these marvellous little mammals and know they use the area frequently but it is rare to see them and it's never for long as they are so quick and agile and never spend more than a fraction of a second in one



Weasel photo by Steve Copner

Another notable sighting from Richard was a **Red Kite** down low over the field opposite the Warden Centre. Although we have had Red kite fly over before, this has usually been up high and never been right on the Reserve.

With the change of weather from dry to wet, the whole Reserve began to sprout fruiting bodies … yes the Fungi season was upon us. All over Forest Farm different species can be found and this season has been excellent.

Among others we have **Rosy bonnet, Birds nest fungus,**as well as **Matt bolete, White saddle, Earthstars** and loads of **Porcelain fungus**

Far right:
Birds nest fungus.

Right:
Earth stars fungus.

Photographs by:
Cliff Woodhead





The last couple of days have been beautiful autumn days starting cold and crisp, then warming slightly through the day. An early morning walk along the canal to check on the hides and pipes revealed a lovely scene as the **Mallards** swam around bathing and shafts of golden light cut through the trees. It reminded me that not all is doom and gloom and lifted my spirits.

This feeling was further enhanced as I reached the stone bridge over the feeder canal and was greeted with the beautiful and delicate warbling song of a **Dipper** announcing the start of the day. A sound that seems to be able to cut through the background noise of a rushing gurgling river. On this occasion though, it was beautifully enhanced as the song bounced and echoed from under the bridge and put me in a positive mood for the day.

In these times, simple joys are important. Go for a walk; take the time to stand and stare - nature will surely reward you.

*(*There is a photograph of a Grass snake swimming on the May month of our 2021 Calendar.*

*** Probably best to keep an eye on our website www.forestfarm.org.uk for information about temporary closures of a part of the canal path for maintenance Ed)*

Donations.

You have continued to be very generous.

A number of you who bought calendars also gave a donation to the Friends of Forest Farm. One of these was for £500 - the donor wishes to remain anonymous.

Our sincere thanks to you all.



FOREST FARM ROAD

Members may have noticed the 20mph speed limits being rolled out throughout the city in recent months.

This is part of the local Council's plans to provide improved safety for pedestrians, cyclists etc.

For many years the Committee have been concerned, and members have raised, the issue of the speed limit on Forest Farm Road.

It is surprising that this single track road with no pavements and used by many pedestrians, cyclists and runners (it is part of the Taff Trail), has anational speed limit of 60 mph.

The Committee has raised this with the Council highways department over many years without any success and the increased use of Forest Farm Road during the pandemic lockdown has only highlighted these concerns.

We have recently been contacted by the Council following another request and have been advised that the speed limit **will be reduced to 20 mph**. Whilst we appreciate that most car drivers do travel at a reasonable speed, this should improve the safety of all on this road.

The next question is - when? This has not been agreed at present, but it is planned for the next roll out of speed restrictions by the Council, so we will monitor the position going forward

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary
Friends of Forest Farm

What is a Woofell,

Any ideas?

Well, according to a Garden Bird Guide insert in a national newspaper which was given to me a while ago, this is an alternative name for one of our most common birds.

Maybe it's just my ignorance but some of these names were entire new to me (maybe good for Scrabble though!)

Some you would know or have a good guess at these	***But what about these 12? Have a guess!*** *Answers on Back page*	
Magpie - aka Chatterpie (and Meg and Pianet)	***Scrubber***	***Black Uzzle***
Great Spotted Woodpecker - Pied Woodpecker (and Witwall)	***Barley-bird***	***Pridden Pral***
SongThrush - Throstle (and Mavis)	***Stumpy***	***Sheep Stare***
Greenfinch - Green olf (and Greeney and Green Lennart)	***Nope***	***Hedge Mumruffin***
Nuthatch - Woodcracker	***Devil Scritch***	***Cushy Doo***
Coal tit - Coaly Hood (Coaly Hoodhen and Black Ox-eye)	***Pickcheese***	***Woodcock Pilot.***

What is a Woofell cont'd

This Garden Bird Guide gave some interesting facts as well (interesting to me anyway!)

Long Tailed Tits are known as' flying lollipops' due to their short body shape and long tail; a Blue Tit weighs the same as a pound coin; the Nuthatch is the only British bird that can walk down a tree trunk as well as up it; Great Spotted Woodpeckers have air pockets in their skulls to cushion the blows as the bird drums on a tree or post.

Maybe you can try this out on some friends …

Sheila Austin

p.s A Woofell is another name for a Blackbird; Spadger - another name for a House sparrow.

A reminder of late summer.

There have been quite a few sunny days over the summer months to enjoy Forest Farm. Lockdown provided an opportunity for many to explore around the Northern Meadow, and enjoy its beauty and diversity while it's still possible.

As always, the summer leaf cover makes catching sight of small birds that much more difficult but their calls and song remain audible. Many **Nuthatches** have been calling all around the Nature Reserve, and on one occasion, having put some bird seed out, a couple of young Nuthatches came quite close to feed, which was a delight. They were joined by the obligatory **Robin, Blue and Great tits**!

On the last Saturday of September a **Tree creeper** was sighted feeding atop a very tall tree on the path by the feeder. Nearby in the bright sunshine a pair of **Speckled wood butterflies** were performing a spiral dance together.

As has often been the case recently, many **Rabbits** were spotted in the meadow by the second bird hide where the grass was newly mown.



Little Grebe photographed on the canal in 2016 by Colin Harvey.

Walking past the Taff, first a Dab chick (**Liittle Grebe**) was seen, then two **Mergansers** were spotted diving for lunch, while a **Cormorant** sun bathed in close proximity. A pair of **Grey Wagtails** were in evidence at Radyr Weir.



You have to include a Robin in the December edition don't you? Thanks to Jan Rowsen for this, taken on their walk

At the dipping pond in the orchard we spotted a **Red Darter dragonfly** along with a beautiful **Emperor dragonfly.**

Looking forward to the next sunny opportunity to visit; let's hope we don't have to wait too long!

Elaine Olsen and Jan Rowsen

(Sincere thanks to Elaine and Jan - two of our regular Saturday walkers in normal times.)

Calendars 2021

Back in the distant past, the end of 2019, the Committee were looking back over the success of the June Summer Festival and the October Open Day and started to make plans for 2020. We were hoping to have extra special events to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Friends of Forest Farm.

One of the ideas was to have a photo competition with the 12 winning entries being put in a Calendar for 2021. The plan was to show the entries at the Summer Festival with the sale of the Calendars on our Open Day in the October.

As things turned out, with everything having to be cancelled, it was decided that we would still go ahead with the printing and sale of the Calendars. I was able to find a company to print 250 of them with 13 pages spiral bound, at a very competitive price. (This was partly because we had them printed early.) It meant we could sell them for £5 each, with over £2.50 from each sale going into The Friends of Forest Farm Funds. At the time of writing we have sold over 200.

It would be great if we could have some feedback about the Calendars so we can decide whether we should go ahead with a 2022 Calendar and if we did, how could it be improved. Do you think another one is a good idea?? Perhaps you have a suggestion for the content or the format/style for another calendar.

The comments have been overwhelmingly positive, but it was suggested that we should have named the wildlife and fungi. (see below)

Thanks to everyone who has purchased the Calendars and everyone who helped to make it possible with the entries and advertising.

John Harding (Chairman)

"A Year at Forest Farm" - Naming the pictures month by month

Month	Common Name	Latin name
January	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendocopos major
February	Robin	Erithacus rubella
March	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea
April	Rabbits	Oryctolagus
May	Grass snake	Natrix helvetica
June	Large Red Damselfly	Pyrrhosoma nymphula
July	Poppy	Papaver Rhoeas
August	Fox	Vulpes vulpes
September	Blue tit	Parus caeruleus
October	Sulphur tuft fungus	Hypholoma fasciculare
November	Canal scene	
December	Long tailed tit	Aegithalos caudates

An article appropriate for this time of year and written for FFNL No 58 (December 2005). By some technological magic (not mine!), this is as it was printed then. I hope you enjoy it. Ed.)

RED IN BEAK AND CLAW

The cheerful image of a **Robin** perched on a spade handle is one of the staple Christmas Card images. His beady expression and bright red chest standing out against the snow seem the perfect expression of warmth in the depths of Winter.

In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Far from embodying the season of peace and goodwill, this bird has the temperament of a lager lout. The Robin is constantly spoiling for a fight, often so keen to scrap that it will take on anything-even inanimate objects.

The aggression stems from its extremely territorial nature. Each bird claims a patch of hedge or cluster of shrubs, and proclaims its ownership loudly in song, driving off all rival Robins. This territorial instinct is so strong that, unlike most birds, both males and females sing all year. Fortunately for us, this warbling melody is beautiful; Robins are closely related to the Nightingales. It also has a warning call —*"Tic-tic-tic"* — often the indication of a prowling cat or Sparrowhawk..

The red plumage acts as a warning display. Threatened, the bird will push its chest out to make it appear as large as possible. If this display and its song is not enough, the bird will resort to violence. At first this is little more than trying to frighten the intruder—usually another Robin that has strayed into its territory. But, as fighting develops, it turns nasty as the birds tumble to the ground while aiming for the eyes. Blinding, and even death, are not uncommon.

Although most Robins stick rigidly to their home patch, some do migrate as far as southern Spain, but these are replaced by migrants fleeing even colder weather in Scandinavia and Russia which only leads to more territorial battles.

All this has little to do with the spirit of Christmas, but there is a link between Robins and the festive season. The breeding cycle begins around the Winter solstice by a female invading the territory of a male. If successful, the pair will build a nest of grass and moss in a sheltered site by March. The hen incubates the eggs, while the cock redoubles his song and becomes even more aggressive. After two weeks the eggs hatch and both parents work frantically to supply insects and worms that are vital for growth.

The young fledge after two weeks, and within three weeks will have dispersed. In a good year a pair can raise five broods, but life is hard for the youngsters.

It is significant that young Robins look much drabber than their parents. Toning down the natural warning signal on the chest reduces adult aggression, while the young learn to fend for themselves. It soon deepens, however, and as others see them as rivals they are initiated into the violent world of their parents.

Despite, or because of its aggression, the Robin is likely to remain one of our favourite birds. It feeds readily at bird tables and can become so tame that with patience it will feed from your hand.

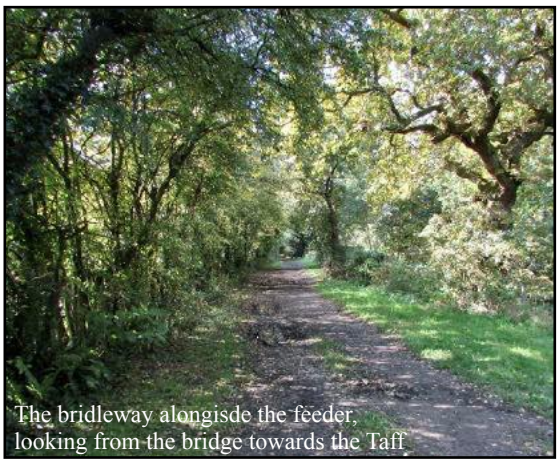
The association with Christmas is comparatively recent, but Robins feature strongly in folklore. According to one myth, the colour comes from a bird that pulled the thorns from the head of Christ on the cross, staining its chest with blood. Another is that it scorched itself when it flew too close to the fires of Hell. For all the mythology, the name is surprisingly modern. To the Saxons, the Robin was *"ruddoc"* as in ruddy, but by Chaucer's day it was *"redbreast"*.

Redbreast was only dropped early in the last century. The name ***Robin*** was recognised officially as late as 1952.

Edgar Sapili

A walk around Forest Farm in the Autumn sunshine.

Isn't Forest Farm noticeably more popular? The car park by the canal was full and cars lined the road by the Melingriffith estate. We got the last remaining space in the car park on Forest Farm Road and bikes were parked up as well. Would we have trouble social distancing on our walk? Well, no.



The bridleway alongisde the feeder, looking from the bridge towards the Taff

Now forget all that and come with me on this lovely autumn day. The air is fresh, slightly cold, the sun is shining. We walked past the Wardens' Centre and allotments and then turned left by the feeder along the bridleway. It was slightly muddy but very peaceful walking under the trees and seeing lot of leaves falling gently through the air. The birds were singing too.

When we reached the Taff trail, by Radyr weir, there were a number of people, cameras poised, waiting for the salmon to leap and although we waited about 10 minutes we didn't see them - but I bet they did as soon as we left! Not much further on, heading north, there was a solitary **Cormorant** on some tree debris in the Taff. When I have seen them before they have been quite still, but this one was moving all the time and occasionally spreading its wings to sun itself. It didn't seem at all bothered about the trains the other side of the river; we stood and watched it for more 10 minutes or more, its head constantly moving this way and that. Apart from some ducks flying overhead, no more bird life was seen on that stretch.



Moving up towards the motorway bridge, we turned right and then left to walk up the other part of the Reserve adjacent to Longwood Drive. Someone was picking **chestnuts** to eat but apart from that we didn't see anyone. There was still **Himalayan Balsam** in flower, so we pulled up some of that en route (every little helps as they say!), then crossed over the road to the entrance near to what was GE Healthcare - formerly Amersham. The sun was coming through the trees on this tranquil path up to the canal where, despite the silt, the water was clear. The **Mallards** were content. There were a few more people along this section but we managed the social distancing. At Forest Lock and near Ted's bench, we then headed back towards the Wardens' centre and the car park.



That's the back of me by the Taff; with your magnifying glasses -you might be able to see Castell Coch is in the distance!

We stopped near the Giant sculpture to marvel at how those **Blue Tits** had managed to nest in the hands earlier this year and are pretty sure we saw **bees** entering and leaving the same place. Two little girls were having a great time in the Willow tunnel, other children were playing on the other sculptures and two families were picnicking.

While we were out we met two families. One lived around Cardiff Bay. They told me that even though they have great views of the bay, they really enjoy the space here and their children love it. Then, outside the Wardens' centre were a Chinese family inspecting the map. They were new to Forest Farm, so I took them round to the pond, bog area and orchard and then pointed out the direction of the canal. I hope they made it. It's good that new people, especially families, find Forest Farm. Naturally I mentioned the Friends!

We were out nearly 2 hours - a leisurely and throughly enjoyable stroll. What a resource we have at Forest Farm!

Sheila Austin ***All Photos by Albyn Austin***

Update on the New Bird Hide

Unfortunately we still don't yet have a date for when it might be installed. Preparatory groundwork for the new hide was started earlier this year, before lockdown intervened to put this on hold.

The company which is fabricating the hide had been shut down during the lockdown period. They are now back up and running, but have warned that there is at least a 3 month delay on orders, as they understandably have a lot of work to catch up with, and exactly how long it will take is unknown at this stage. Notwithstanding this, we are assured that the delay has/will not increase the cost. Cardiff County Council have also confirmed the requisition order is in place.

At the time of printing, the Council were not able to confirm the layout of the new hide, but it is our understanding it is a converted shipping container-like structure which is of similar size to the destroyed hide.

Those who have contributed to the 'JustGiving' web page and all contributions made specifically for the bird hide can rest assured the money received has been ring fenced and will be expended as part of the larger project of hide replacement.

We are continuing to liaise with the Parks Conservation Officer and will provide another update when we have more information.

Anthony Matthews

rspb giving nature a home

The Big Garden Birdwatch
January 29th - 31st 2021

This is what they want us to do.

Watch the birds for one hour
Choose an hour between 29 - 31 January to watch the birds in your garden or local park.

Count the most birds that land at once
Only count the birds that land in your garden or park, not those flying over. The same birds may land more than once, so you can avoid double counting by recording the highest number of each bird species you see at any one time – not the total number you count over the hour.

Tell us what you saw
Every count is important, so don't worry if you don't see anything. Observing which birds aren't around is as important as seeing the ones that are.

You can submit your results ***online at*** rspb.org.uk/birdwatch***. between 29 - 19 February.***
OR
You can ***download a submission form from*** rspb.org.uk/birdwatch***. and post your findings back to us by 15 February.***

Hope

A Poem by Ken Patterson
(former editor of the newsletter)

Sunlight shafting the boughs of winter
Can convince us as not other thing
That nature with infinite wisdom,
Will lead us yet, to Spring.

Volunteering - ***by Jon Wallis***

This obviously won't be the usual round-up of our volunteering activities, as we haven't been able to do any since the first lockdown, back in March.

But we thought we could take the opportunity to give an overview of the activities we do (when pandemics permit!), what's been achieved through over the years, and the outlook for volunteering in the near future.



What we do depends on the season, the weather, and specific needs that arise in the nature reserve during the year. It includes things like planting trees and bulbs, sowing wildflower seeds, pruning the trees in the orchard, cutting back overgrowing vegetation, repairing the canal banks, hedge-laying, fencing, pulling-up Himalayan balsam, hay-raking, and path maintenance.

Activities are generally suitable for pretty much everyone. Age is definitely no barrier — we have had volunteers from just a few years old to several decades — and no experience is necessary. Regardless of what we do, and what the weather's like, people always seem to have a good time.

Some things may be more strenuous than others — there's no easy way to dig a hole for a new tree or a fence post! — but there's always a way for everyone to get involved.

It also provides a way to engage meaningfully with nature, something that many people have discovered is of enormous value in recent months. There's also a great sense of satisfaction in doing something tangible — something that may be a part of the reserve for many years to come, and which will be appreciated by hundreds or thousands of visitors.

And there's no doubt that our volunteering makes a real contribution to Forest Farm's continued success. The Park Rangers do a fantastic job, but it's no secret that there's more that needs doing than they have time for. Considered in crude financial terms, over the course of a year Friends' volunteering at Forest Farm contributes the equivalent of over two months of full-time work. And when the Rangers apply for grants or funding for projects, it really helps that they can show there's active community involvement at Forest Farm.



We were thrilled when Forest Farm won a Green Flag Award in October, and there's no doubt that Friends volunteering over the past many years helped the park to achieve that prestigious accolade.

We don't yet know when volunteering will be able to start again, but when it does it will inevitably have to be run a bit differently until Covid-19 no longer poses a serious risk. For example, it will almost certainly be necessary to book a place to come to a volunteering session, as there will be a limit on the number of people who can attend.

As soon as we have more information we'll post on our Facebook page and Twitter feed, so keep an eye out on those.

30th anniversary booklet

We are stlll working gn this and I am hoping it will be out early-ish next year. Contributions still welcome! (Ed)

Something to look back on - and to look forward to



A beautiful primrose. Photo: Alec Stewart



Dawn chorus walk May 2018
led by the Ranger.



One of our Open Days
held on the 1st Saturday in October



One of our many trips. We can do these again - if someone will will step up to be the organiser!
Photo by Duncan Hockridge

What is a Woofell? Answers

Scrubber: *Dunnock.* Barley-bird: *Siskin.* Stumpy: *Wren.* Nope: *Bullfinch.* Devil Scritch: *Jay.*
Pickcheese: *Blue Tit.* Black Uzzle: *Blackbrrd.* Pridden Pral: *Great Tit.* Sheep Stare: *Starling*
Hedge Mumruffin : *Long tailed Tit.* Cushy Doo: *Woodpigeon.* Woocock Pilot: *Goldcrest*

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Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1PP Tel: 02920 614245 email: editor@forestfarm.org.uk
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