Friends

of Forest Farm Country Park and Glamorganshire Canal Nature Reserve

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Great News to start the year—the New Bird Hide has arrived!

Update on the New Bird Hide

Anthony Matthews

We are pleased to be able to report that the new bird hide has been delivered to site by the fabricators. As reported in the December newsletter, the commissioning of the project has been severely affected by the numerous lockdowns we have all witnessed, but there seems to be a growing momentum now that things are beginning to happen.



(Photo Andre Van De Sande)

Whilst located in its final resting place, further work is required before Cardiff County Council (CCC) are able to fully commission the hide which includes the erection of timber screens either side and completion of groundworks.

At the time of writing, t will be some months yet before the hide will be open to the public.

The bulk of the finance available for the project has been secured from CCC's insurers, although there will be a shortfall between receipts and expenditure to restore the hide. A contribution will therefore be made by Friends of Forest Farm and also the JustGiving funds which have been made available by the generous public donations. It is intended to utilise the Friends of Forest Farm and JustGiving for specific features within the project so that there will be a recognition of the generosity displayed as mentioned in our last newsletter.



Thumbs up from your Editor — The New Bird Hide has arrived.
Paul Pinnell (L) and Alec Stewart (R)

We continue to liaise closely with the Parks Conservation Officer in the commissioning of this project and allocation of funds - we all hope the new hide will be made available at the earliest opportunity.

I know our photography fraternity are champing at the bit….

See also the Ranger's Report on page 3

Important notice about the A.G.M.
see page 4.

Editorial,

Hello Friends.

Well, at last—signs of Spring and some hope that this easing of restrictions after a year of the Covid 19 pandemic, will mean we can get back to visiting and volunteering at the Reserve again.

I am sure you will be as delighted as we are to see the new hide in situ, and you can read more about it from ***Anthony Matthews*** *and* ***Alec Stewart.*** *Hopefully it will not be too long before the Covid restrictions are lifted and we are able to use it.*

The Rangers have been very busy as usual but I am sure are missing the input of volunteers.—the state of the paths being one most noticeable areas of the lack of manpower. This is being addressed.

Volunteering is alive and well in our area and evidence of the community spirit is one good outcome of Covid. So I am pleased to mention two local initiatives, Awen and the Friends of St Mary's Gardens. Perhaps you can help?

My thanks to ***Charis White*** *and* ***Chris Segar*** *for their contributions about things they have spotted on the Reserve. Also, to our Secretary* ***Martin*** *for his articles to bring us up-to date.*

The forthcoming Zoom AGM this year will continue that, but please note the changes coming re some committee members. Your support would be greatly appreciated.

Stay safe, and best wishes,

Sheila Austin

A Goosander not a Merganser ...

(In the last edition, a report included the sighting of Mergansers on the Taff. Two experienced photographers got in touch to say they would be a Goosander. Ed)

"Mergansers are sea ducks and would not be on an inland waterway, … Goosanders, are seen every winter on rivers and lakes in south Wales. " ***Colin Harvey***

Mergansers are sea ducks & very rarely stray far up river from the estuary mouth. The ladies would not be alone in mis-identifyng Goosanders." ***Cliff Woodhead***



Cliff Woodhead also supplied this photo of a pair of Goosanders taken from Radyr Bridge.

"I've started so I'll finish"

The famous phrase from Mastermind is appropriate for this edition as my computer had very serious problems, not least 'losing' ALL my photos.

So this edition has been done in Publisher—something I've not used for a number of years—and it's all changed since I last used it, of course!

So the presentation might look a little different and with a few anomalies/mistakes.

Happily, I have got my computer back and all fixed, but I thought it would be good practice to continue with Publisher and help to keep "the little grey cells" going a bit longer!

Sheila Austin

The deadline for the June edition of the newsletter is

11th May 2021

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Ranger's Report by Alec Stewart
December/February 2020/21

Work on the Reserve has still been problematic, with the current Covid situation making things difficult to organise and instigate. However, general maintenance has progressed with some tree work carried out and some hedges trimmed. The Warden Centre pond is looking good after the autumn clearance and has filled with water nicely. As Spring approaches, it should look really good.

The main point of interest is,… drum roll…..the new hide is finally with us. At last we were able to take delivery. It was an interesting experience getting the hide off Longwood Drive and actually onto site with the equipment available to us. My thanks go to the lorry driver who was extremely helpful and the team of rangers who worked to get the hide in place. We had a few hiccups along the way but all were overcome and it now stands proudly overlooking the pond. We have some screening to put up and reinstate some fencing to finish it all off. We will not open it to the public until Covid measures allow but hopefully that should be a matter of weeks only.



Photo from Alec Stewart showing the front of the new hide.

Another project that was completed was the installation of an artificial nesting bank for kingfishers.

The woodcrete nestboxes used in this were funded by the Friends of Forest Farm.









*Photos from **Alec Stewart** showing the construction of the nesting bank, the woodcrete nestboxes, the spacing and positioning of the artificial bank and the completed project.*

A kingfisher pair have been around the area and we are approaching the time that they will be looking for suitable nest sites . I will keep you informed if we have any success with them taking up residence.

Continued overleaf

Wildlife wise it has been fairly quiet with mostly the normal species of woodland and wetland birds spotted. There was a report of a Firecrest from the Scout field area and we had a flyover from a Goshawk. Some of the ponds have frogspawn in them and is a pointer that Spring is on the way.

Other signs included the abundant flowering snowdrops we have on site, which this year could actually be seen in the snow for one day only! Some of the wild daffodils we have planted are now making an appearance along with primrose and you can also see the slender leaves of bluebells poking through.

It's time to look forward to better times. Stay safe everyone.

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Some information about **Kingfishers** (taken from RSPB website. Ed)

Breeding

Both birds (would) excavate the nest burrow into the stone-free sandy soil of a low stream bank, choosing a vertical bank clear of vegetation, since this provides a reasonable degree of protection from predators. The nest tunnel is usually 60-90cm long, and the 6cm diameter is only a little wider than the bird. The nest chamber at the end has a slight depression to prevent eggs rolling out, but no material is brought to the nest. 2-3 broods are raised in quick succession, normally in the same nest.

The first clutch of 6-7 eggs is laid late in March or early in April. Both adults incubate the eggs, and the chicks hatch 19-21 days later. Each chick can eat 12-18 fish a day, and they are fed in rotation once a chick is fed, it moves to the back of the nest to digest its meal, causing the others to move forward. They are normally ready to leave the nest when they are 24-25 days old. Once out of the nest, the young are fed for only four days before the adults drive them out of the territory and start the next brood.

Feeding

Kingfishers inhabit slow-moving, shallow rivers or streams which are clean enough to support abundant small fish. They mainly eat fish, chiefly minnows and sticklebacks, but they also take aquatic insects, freshwater shrimps and tadpoles etc to top up their diet. Each bird must eat at least its own bodyweight of fish each day.

An ideal fishing spot is a firm perch overlooking a clear, shallow pool of water. Once the bird has located a suitable prey and assessed its depth, it dives. At the entry into water, its beak is opened and its eyes closed by the third eyelid. The bird is effectively blindfolded as it catches the fish.

A letter from our Chairman

"At the A G M April 2019 I did not put my name forward as Chairman but, as we did not have any nominees for this position, I said I would stand in for another year.

In April 2020 we were unable to have an A G M, so all the committee carried on with the hope of it only being postponed until the Autumn. Now , here we are fast approaching April 2021

I am willing to stay as Chairman until, but not past April 2022, when hopefully we will have an proper AGM ."

John Harding

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Annual General Meeting

Last year's Annual General Meeting was cancelled due to the start of the first lockdown. As this newsletter is being produced we can see no opportunity to have to have our traditional meeting. We have therefore decided to move to a Zoom meeting, details of which are on the attached / enclosed notice.

We appreciate that this is not appropriate for all members but as this would be the second year that we have not held an annual meeting, we feel this is the best available alternative.

Due to the limitations of the format, the meeting will have an amended agenda. Attendance is restricted to members only and is limited to 90 attendees. All officers have agreed to continue in their present roles for another year and there will be a presentation of the audited accounts.

M J Chamberlain. Secretary.

THEFT OF BIRD FEEDERS FROM WARDENS' CENTRE HIDE

On the night 23rd January (the night before it snowed) someone stole the bird feeders at the Wardens' Hide including an expensive Squirrel proof feeder purchased by the Friends. We have received a generous offer of some replacements and we will be looking to replace any short fall.

If anyone saw anything suspicious please contact the Rangers.

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary

This generated expected comments of incredulity and disgust, but also very kind offers to replace the feeders and a couple of comments about the pleasure the Reserve brings. Ed.

"...we are so lucky to have this oasis on our doorstep" and "Forest Farm has provided some of the happiest memories in the last 12 months'.

Charis White

...sent me an email about some fungi she had seen on the Reserve recently in which she said:

" I like them but they are not very exciting …
I didn't see much else on my walk - except mud and ducks!

The fungus was growing on that full fallen tree which spreads right across the canal below the lock. It was unusual for me as I have only seen that type grow along logs or along the chopped ends in rows. I have never seen one form a frill around the end of a small branch before.



The lichens were growing on trees along the path running from the Longwood Drive access towards the junction just before the 'new' bird hide site. Amazing to see just how many different plants are rammed onto a couple of branches.



Fabulous things.

(Photos by Charis)

Membership

… is now 407.
Since December we have received 10 new members who have joined via Paypal. Welcome to you all.

Once again, a big thank you to all our other members who have continued supporting us through these trying times, and even with lockdown Forest Farm has never been busier.

Pauline Fisher
Membership Secretary.

A letter FROM the Editor

Dear Friends,

*It will probably come as a surprise to you but I have already told the Committee that I will **not** be continuing as editor of this newsletter. I have given a 'notice' period of 12 months. This means my last newsletter will be March 2022.*

If anyone wants to step in in the meantime that is brilliant and, any time I can, I will offer all the help I can.

When I took over from Ken Patterson in 2006, I had absolutely no experience of doing something like this. If I can do it, anyone can - and a lot of you are much more computer savvy than me!

Please do get in touch if you are interested—even just to talk over what is involved.

Sheila Austin

FOOTPATHS AT FOREST FARM

We have received a number of comments concerning the conditions of the paths at Forest Farm.



We have suffered a triple whammy.

The winter of 2019 / 2020 was a very wet winter culminating in Storm Dennis which caused damage to the paths.

This was followed with the lockdown which greatly affected the resources of the Rangers and stopped, and continues to stop, any volunteering being undertaken on the reserve.

Finally, due to the lockdown more people discovered Forest Farm for their daily exercise and the increased footfall caused more damage.

Plans were in place to repair the towpath at the end of 2020 but this was paused by the present lockdown.

Report and Photo by ***Martin Chamberlain***

Velindre Planning

The planning process continues as in previous months. In January, permission was granted to extend the planning permission by another year to 2025. My understanding is that there is sufficient planning consent is in place for Velindre to start preparation works. However, any clearing of trees etc has be completed by the end of March 2021 due to the nesting season.

In March this year another planning application is being sought to extend the planning consent for housing on the Whitchurch Hospital Fields for another five years. If this is passed, it would extend planning consent to some 25 years after the Planning Enquiry and 10 years since I appeared unsuccessfully in front of the planning committee trying to get the planning consent overturned again.

M J Chamberlain

What is this?

It's an **American Signal Crayfish** and was photographed last October by Chris Segar. Along with his photograph he supplied the following information:-



Photo: Christopher Segar

"It had crawled out of the canal across the path and into the wetlands about 100m down from Forest Lock. It was the size of a small lobster! "

(I found some information on the web. This is not a new problem. Ed)

A voracious predator it will eat almost anything it finds including plants, invertebrates, snails, small fish and fish eggs. It is also a cannibal that makes a meal of its own young.

The Signal Crayfish digs burrows up to three feet long in river banks where each year it lays more than 250 eggs at a time. The spread of this species is threatening the future of our native White-clawed Crayfish.

Sheila Austin

DEVELOPMENTS AT FOREST FARM

In the last newsletter I wrote that we were in correspondence with Cardiff Council concerning a number of developments at Forest Farm, namely the Park and Ride at junction 32, the City Circle Line and plans for an area for growing food at Forest Farm.

We have received a reply from the Council. They have advised that no location for the Park and Ride has been selected. The City Circle Line is a long term proposal and there are no plans at present for this to be developed.

There are plans to use the area to the right of the field in front of the Wardens Centre -presently used for wildflower planting - to be developed as a tree nursery.

The Council have agreed that we are stakeholders for Forest farm and confirmed that they will keep us updated for these or any other proposals.

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary
Friends of Forest Farm



Flytipping!

Sadly, we have had it before of course, up by the allotments and down Longwood Drive, but this was near the entrance to the Reserve at Ty Mawr Road.

Laura Thomas, one of our members, noticed it on 21st February. She took the photos as well. She—and no doubt others—reported it and we are pleased to say it was removed when she visited the following day..

Even though they, have transport, it's obviously handier and less hassle to take it to the local Nature Reserve!

Sheila Austin

Can you help with this project? A map of Whitchurch during WW2

I saw this and it reminded me of going through the old newsletters and seeing some of the memories recorded there about the canal, Melingriffith and the Reserve.

*I am sure many of you who live in Whitchurch have heard of **A**rts **W**hitchurch **E**glwys **N**ewydd,- AWEN. This group formed when our library was threatened with closure. They were determined to retain it both as a library and information centre, and extend it as an arts hub for the community. It has been busy with a wide range of successful events since it started.*

The refurbishment of the library was completed last year (and it looks great). Unfortunately, Covid means that it has not yet developed in the way anticipated but AWEN is still very active. One of its current projects is to create a map of Whitchurch during the war years.

I can do no better than use their 'poster' from their February newsletter. ***Sheila Austin***

Illustrated Map of Whitchurch 1939 - 1945

We're very excited about our new project to create an illustrated map of Whitchurch at the end of the Second World War, but we need your help! Do you have any photographs, plans, maps or memories of Whitchurch at this date that you could share with us? We'd love to know the names of shops, local landmarks and any other information from 1945.
Please get in touch with us at **awen.cymru@gmail.com**

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St Mary's Gardens, Whitchurch

Saving Local History:.



Although on a different scale from Forest Farm, St Mary's Gardens in Old Church Road, Whitchurch (parking at The Fox and Hounds opposite) well rewards exploration. Clear evidence remains that it was for several centuries the local church and churchyard before being imaginatively transformed into a public park and arboretum by Cardiff Council in the 1970s. Since then financial cuts leading to decades of neglect have taken their toll, but the Gardens still exercise their magic on those who find them. If you want to start your exploration of this intriguing site from the comfort of home the Parks Department's excellent website will pique your interest:

www.cardiffparks.org.uk/otheropenspaces/stmarysgardens.

Now local people are working to restore the Gardens so that it will again be a worthy member of Cardiff's fine individualistic collection of parks and gardens. As soon as circumstances allow, a group of Volunteers are at the ready to renew the work they began in 2017 under the auspices of a Park Ranger. In the meantime the more recently formed **Friends of St Mary's Gardens** are continuing to apply for Grants to erect sympathetic interpretation and information boards for public benefit. The number of Friends we have influences the regard in which the Gardens are held by Cardiff Council and by award granting bodies.

If you would like to support our venture for the modest sum of £5 a year, please contact me for a Membership Form at ***saintmarysgardens@gmail.com*** or go to our Facebook page: ***Friends of St MarysGardens@oldchurchgardens*.**

In any case, treat yourself to an outing to the Gardens and decide for yourself whether this is a site worth cherishing.

Zoe Pearce (Chairman, Friends of St Mary's Gardens)

2021 FOREST FARM CALENDAR

It is great to report that sales were very successful. We printed 250 and by 3rd December had sold them all, even having to disappoint some potential purchasers! We made a profit of over £500 for our funds; so our grateful thanks to John Harding for organising it, posting the calendars and also for being a point of sale, along with Sheila Austin. Also thanks to Jon Wallis for his role in processing requests for the calendars by email. Last but not least —to you for buying.

Comments were almost unanimously favourable. E.g. the photographs were "as good as on the Countryfile calendar" and "better than the Countryfile calendar"! "You are underselling." and " Just a note to say that my husband and I purchased the calendar and are really impressed with it. The quality is very good. I hope the calendars will become an annual event!"

There were also a couple of suggestions; that the names of the birds and animals depicted should have been printed under the pictures. Also that there needed to be more room to write note against the dates These are things we will take on board if we decide to do another for 2022

One bonus was meeting people who collected the calendars, many of whom we had not met before.

Published on behalf of the Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorgan Canal Local Nature Reserve
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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors is their own, as is responsibility for them.