Friends of Forest Farm

WINTER 2023/24 130

"To appreciate the beauty of a snowflake, it is necessary to stand out in the cold" Aristotle

So, it is already the end of 2023; where did it go? It has been quite a tough year on many levels and the hope has to be for things to change for the better in 2024.
The picture for our wildlife is also tough. The *'State of Nature 2023'* report (https://stateofnature.org.uk/) paints a disturbing picture and shows how Wales is one of the most nature depleted countries on earth. One in six species in Wales are threatened with extinction. It shows that climate change is one of the biggest drivers of the loss of nature across the UK.
This can all feel rather overwhelming. However we do know what is needed to fix it and that action for nature can make a real difference. Political change is undoubtedly necessary, but at an individual level we **can** make a positive difference - have a look at https://www.welshwildlife.org/things-you-can-do-about-climate-change

Fortunately we are blessed to have Forest Farm on our doorstep. Somewhere where we can find beauty in the ordinary and the small things.









On behalf of the Committee we hope you had a great Christmas and send our best wishes for 2024. Naomi and Paul

RANGERS' REPORT: AUTUMN 2023

The Autumn into the winter is always a very busy time around the reserve. All the meadows have been cut and lifted, to keep them in good order and allow the wildflowers to set seed and spread. This enables us to get a good mixture of different species of grass and flowers, which in turn provide food and nectar for a multitude of invertebrates. These, of course, then provide food for a lot of the bird and mammal species on the reserve.

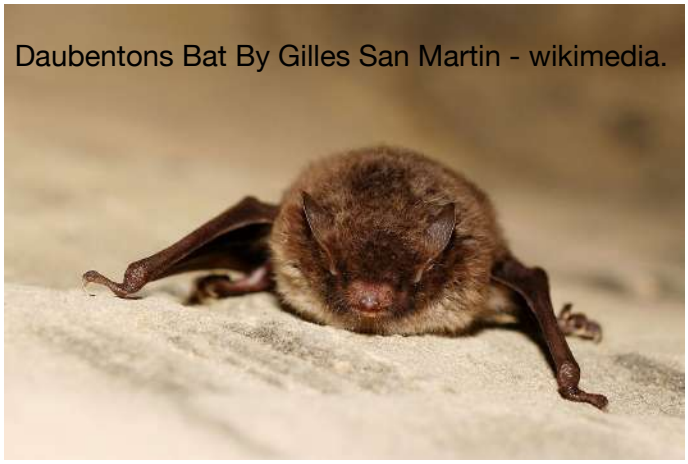
The field edges have been fenced off and allowed to grow, with occasional cutting to keep the scrub and bramble under control. These areas are especially important, acting as safe areas for small mammal populations and those invertebrates which need longer grass. These long narrow areas further add to the mosaic of habitats that can be found at Forest farm.


Oobi Benubi

The other main task at this time of year is getting the ponds and wetland into shape ready for the winter birds. The summer visitors have finished breeding and started to move on, and so it is the ideal time to clear excess reeds and vegetation. This makes the ponds and wetland accessible for viewing by the public, but importantly creates the right habitat for our winter visitors such as Snipe, Water rail, and Bittern (which have been seen again in December - see photo). Little egrets are now also becoming a more common visitor at this time of year.

As always lots of people helped with this task including the Friends group, Cardiff Rivers Group, Innovate, Ranger volunteers , Cardiff Conservation Volunteers, and other members of the public who all joined in and ensured this task was completed. Thank you everyone for all your hard work.

The Forest Farm Open Day was successful, with several hundred people spending time pond dipping, visiting the craft stalls and pop up café, tasting some of the freshly squeezed apple juice, and generally having a pleasant day at Forest Farm.


Daubentons Bat By Gilles San Martin – wikimedia.


Ash Harris

We also had our annual Bat Walk which never fails to deliver, but this year we had a bonus of 5 foxes in warden centre meadow. We picked up a thermal scope to show people and later at the weir we did the same to show the bats. These were mostly Common and Soprano pipistrelle bats, with Daubentons bats flying over the river.

It was also great to have our trainee Jess Hopewell move into a full time community ranger role, allowing the role of trainee to be filled by Andrew Bodgin.

Jess described being "so chuffed" when she found out she had secured a permanent role after an extensive apprenticeship, which saw her complete qualifications and gain hands-on conservation experience while also getting paid.



"It's different almost every single day. Sometimes it's very practical tasks, with the conservation work, so some of it's really practical, physical work and then there's also the educational side of things, and community groups as well." "We'll often go and check the bird hides first thing in the morning and in the winter, that'll be just as the sun's coming up, so doing a lap of the Forest Farm Reserve and there's birds flying around you, it's just beautiful, it's really quiet, really still, and it just feels like you've got to pinch yourself that this is your job."

Congratulations Jess and welcome Andrew!

A very busy but enjoyable period with lots going on here at Forest Farm and all over the city. I look forward to seeing what the winter brings.

Alec Stewart

JAY 'ANTING'

I was sitting alongside fellow photographer Colin Harvey in Hide 2, on 9th August this year, when I observed a Jay doing something I had not witnessed before. Colin said it was "Anting".



I took several images 5 of which were then uploaded on to the 2 Forest Farm sites, and one of these is shown here. Afterwards, I referred to Google which states "This species brings both wings forward to allow the ants to swarm up over its plumage. Although the Jay makes movements with its bill along the underside of its wings, it does not in fact hold an ant while doing so."

Editor's note: Many thanks to Cliff Woodhead for this interesting snippet and beautiful photo! We checked out Wikipedia for more information and learned that the bird is rubbing the ants on its skin. There are several theories why Jays and about 200 other species of bird world-wide do this. It is thought that the insects secrete liquids containing chemicals such as formic acid, which can act as an insecticide, miticide, fungicide or bactericide. Alternatively, anting could make the insects edible by removing the distasteful acid, or, possibly supplement the bird's own preen oil.

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM
AUTUMN OPEN DAY AT FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK

On 14 October, the Friends were relieved to see a bright, if chilly, autumn morning for the Open Day, and sure enough people started to arrive by 10am, particularly eager to sample the apple juices and to dip in the pond. Several hundred people came throughout the day and it appeared that a very good time was had by all. Thank you all for your support – we hope you enjoyed yourselves as much as we did.

As usual there was a 'pop up café' in the Warden's hut, where refreshments were available. We were very grateful yet again for the amazing and delicious cake, designed and provided especially for the occasion by Steve and Jenny Turner. One young man was so keen to try a piece that he waited almost an hour for the ceremonial cutting which he was more than happy to assist with!



Alongside the café was a beautiful display of photos by a range of the regular photographers on the reserve, set up by our Chair Anthony Matthews. Colourful and detailed pictures of insects, birds and plants illustrated the wonderful range of wildlife that can be seen and enjoyed in our own local nature reserve.



Outside the Warden's hut were the Cardiff Bee-keepers. It was a little cold to have any active bees on display this time, but a delicious variety of honey could be sampled and purchased along with various beeswax products.



Over in the old dairy, the woodturner could be found again, next to some amazing hand-made cards and knitwear on display for purchase.

The pond area was the main hub of activity, buzzing with excited children dipping into the pond and busy rangers helping them to identify their finds. In the next gazebo they also had the opportunity to twist willow stems into interesting snails, or stars for Christmas.



Finally, of course, was the chance to watch apple-pressing in progress and to sample juices from the different native trees that grow in the orchard. So interesting to find how different they taste, some sweet, some sour, some with an amazing 'zing'!

Thank you everyone who came and thanks also for your enthusiastic feedback. Plans are already in place to make it even better next year, and to develop some display banners to make sure every passer-by knows it's there. We don't want anyone to miss out on the fun!

PROVISIONAL DATE OF SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 2024

WINTER TALKS 2023

OCTOBER: **Mary Gillham by Andy Kendall**

Dr Mary Gillham MBE was heavily involved in getting Forest Farm approved as a nature reserve in 1967, and later in setting up the Friends group (1989-90). What an amazing woman she was, and as a personal friend, Andy was able to add a very special touch to his talk.

Mary was brought up in Ealing, west London. She was interested in nature from an early age, keeping a typed nature diary with coloured hand drawn illustrations. Her parents took the family on adventurous holidays to Scotland in the mid 1930s, and also by car to the continental Europe. They were in Switzerland in 1939 when war was declared and only just managed to get back to Britain!

For most of World War 2 she was in the Land Army, working in the countryside; taking a diploma in farming in her spare time. After the war, she earned a BSc and then PhD in Botany at Aberystwyth University, followed by an Assistant Lecturer post at Exeter University.

She spent 1956-59 in New Zealand and Australia, working for the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). This included living in a wooden shack on a small island near Tasmania, studying the decline in the population of mutton birds.



In 1959 she was one of the first four women to visit Antarctica working on Macquarie island with its cormorants, albatrosses, seals and penguins that were suffering from introduced (alien) species. Then in 1960 she did a research trip in Africa.

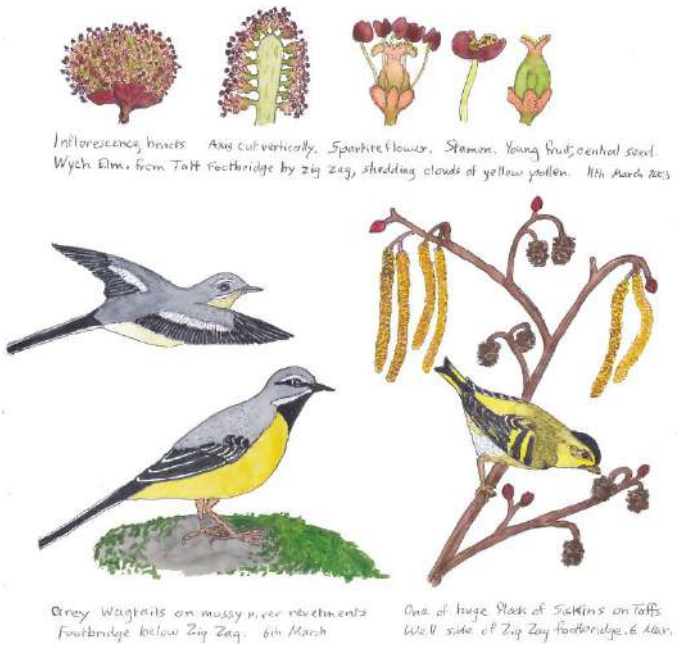
So, what brought this intrepid traveller and naturalist to Cardiff? On her return to UK, she had trouble in gaining suitable employment, (being turned down for a number of posts because she was a woman!), In 1962 she came to Cardiff University as an

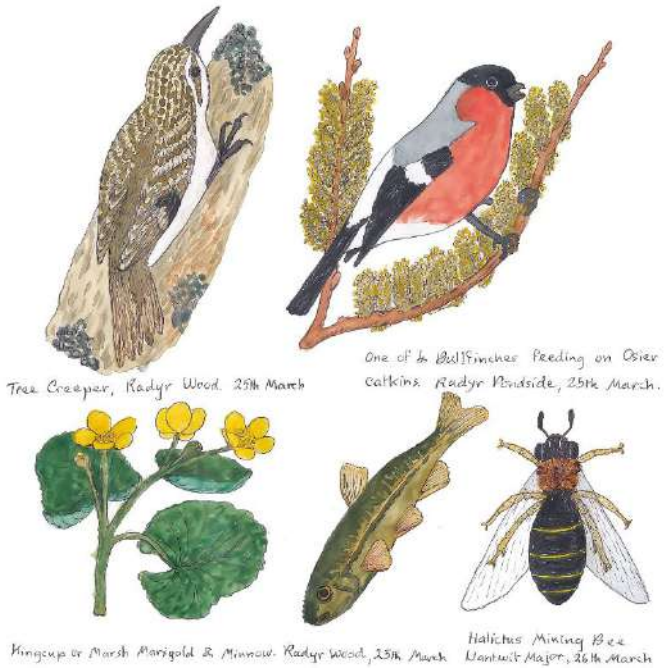
extra-mural lecturer in Botany and Ecology. For the next 25 years, she worked with students from all over the UK, and was writing extensively.

She was active in local nature conservancy being on the board of the Brecon Beacons National Park , she was President of Cardiff Naturalists, of the Glamorgan and the Merthyr Naturalists societies. She lived for 40 years in a cottage below the Garth, and did much to set up the Coed-y-Bedw nature reserve. This was all in addition to her extensive work at Forest Farm where she was deeply involved in the creation of the nature reserve and later in the creation of the Friends of Forest Farm.

During mid-2000s she catalogued plant species at various open spaces in Cardiff, identifying 280 different species at Coryton roundabout alone!

In 2012 Mary was honoured for her work on nature and was awarded an MBE.





Mary wrote extensively, about every phase and experience in her life, often with beautiful hand-drawn or photographic illustrations, plus many academic and scientific papers. She completed her last book in her late-80s. When she sold up her cottage to move into a nursing home, Andy collected four land rover loads of books and papers.



The books were sold to help fund a student prize that Cardiff Naturalists still present annually.

Her life and work have been beautifully show-cased in the Mary Gillham archive project, including 4,500 slides, 250 photos and 5000 documents just for the Welsh area; much of the remainder remains uncatalogued. You can see it all at Mary Gillham Archive Project

Albyn Austin

NOVEMBER: **Reversing the Decline of Wildlife in Cardiff by Alex Griffiths (Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales)**

Welsh wildlife is in peril. We are losing our precious species and habitats. 17% of all species in Wales are at risk of extinction. Over the past 50 years there has been a 13% decline in the abundance of species. The rate of decline is accelerating. But nature is integral to our lives. Everything we value comes from nature and everything we do impacts wildlife. This is why we must act now.
Trust goals: A vision where wildlife is abundant, resilient and secure; where opportunities for nature, both in our urban and rural environments, are optimal; where extensive, interconnected natural habitats are robust and sustainable, providing opportunities for the full range of native species. For more information go to https://www.welshwildlife.org/our-strategy

Alex works on 2 major projects:
MY WILD CARDIFF: This is all about looking after this wonderful wildlife by educating and inspiring members of the community to care for Cardiff's wildlife. They support community led action, aiming to educate and up-skill the lead players who then empower others.
Therefore they facilitate a programme of activities: In Roath Gardens they are promoting more wilding, affixing nest boxes and clearing invasive species. In Cathays Cemetery, volunteers have erected nest boxes, carried out bird and bat surveys and run a bat walk. They are aiming to increase and diversify their audience - e.g. at Nant Fawr, a well-publicised dawn chorus walk attracted a lot of new people.


Our Welsh wildlife walk at Forest Farm, hosted with Menter Iaith Caerdydd as part of the Tafwyl festival. Rachel Matthews/ Menter Caerdydd.

The project provides visits to schools, gives talks, organises meetings and runs activity events. It also helps build audiences and participants in events, improve networking between groups, and promote the Local Nature Partnerships with local authorities. To improve networking the Trust are running events at Forest Farm Rangers' Centre for Species Identification – trees, butterflies, bumble bees and pollinators.
Youth and education outreach means the Trust is lobbying the Senedd for curriculum changes to increase nature and conservation awareness in schools, and is providing forums and guidance for schools to achieve it. They provided a 'green wall' at Birchgrove Primary school. They also supplied schools with bug hotels and hedgehog houses.
STAND FOR NATURE WALES is the second project. The Stand for Nature project aims to empower and inspire young people to take action for nature and wildlife in their local area. A Wales youth manifesto for nature recovery was included in the UN's COP15 at Montreal. Developing 'Nature Wales 9-24', a youth led initiative to involve young people to arrest the decline in Welsh nature due to climate change and other causes. They have campaigned to reduce pesticide use by lobbying the Senedd. They assist in the monitoring of bird nesting sites at Forest Farm and plan to collect data on Dormice in Cardiff. The Trust have also promoted a 'Save our Taff' campaign to reduce river pollution; and to this end a 'Nature Summit' is being organised at the Senedd.

You can find out more about the Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales here: https://www.welshwildlife.org/
Contact Alex: a.griffiths@welshwildlife.org

Albyn Austin

THE FRIENDS HAVE MORE WINTER TALKS PLANNED FOR SPRING 2024.
WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOU JOINING US.

MISTLETOE: Why the Kissing Plant is a Parasite

Did you know that Mistletoe, like a number of our native plant species, is actually a parasite?

Thanks to its association with Christmas, and its appearance on cards and decorations, Mistletoe is probably one of our most recognised native species. This association also means that the 'kissing plant' is also harvested in huge volumes each year for seasonal decorations. That tradition probably derives from a long history of use in ritual, which may have started with Celtic druids. It's seen variously as a symbol of fertility, love, and peace across European cultures. However, the kissing tradition itself appears to have developed more recently, perhaps in the 18th century.



Although it has a widespread distribution in the UK, it is quite rare in many areas. Its greatest abundance is strongly clustered around the Welsh-English border areas. In fact, it's also the county flower of **Herefordshire.** Here, it is strongly associated with the area's **fruit orchards**, although it grows on a wide range of deciduous trees such as poplars and limes as well as orchard species.

Lifestyle:
Mistletoe is an 'obligate hemi-parasite' of the trees on which it grows. In simple terms, this means that it doesn't just grow on trees as a physical host, it actually **can't survive** without the biological symbiosis it has with the host tree. So how does that relationship work?

Mistletoe produces seeds in white berries – itself unusual, it is our **only native plant with truly white berries**. The seeds are spread through the landscape by birds, such as thrushes (via their droppings) and Blackcaps (which move seeds mechanically on their bodies).



The seeds stick to new tree hosts, where they germinate. The emerging seedlings are photosynthetic, and at this early stage they are not dependent on the tree.
As the seedlings grow, some shoots penetrate the bark of the tree and connect with the tissue beneath. In the plant's first year, the connections to the tree's tissues provide it with water and mineral nutrients.
Over the following few years the plant slowly begins to grow. Mistletoe is a long-lived perennial.

How parasitism works:
Parasitism is a form of relationship where **one partner benefits at the expense of the other**. Mistletoe thrives on account of the tree, but the reverse is not true. If a tree has a lot of Mistletoe, it can eventually affect the tree quite severely, impeding growth, and for example, making it more susceptible to drought as a result of water loss.

Other parasitic plants:
In the UK we have a wealth of other parasitic and hemi-parasitic plants that gain nutrients directly from other plants, as well as a whole bunch of plant species that rob their nutrients, fully or partially, from fungi. Examples are 21 different species of Eyebright, Broomrape,



Toothwort, Yellow Rattle, and Dodders. Also, many **Orchids** like Neottia nidus-avis, the Bird's-nest Orchid, and heather relatives such as Monotropa hypopitys, the Dutchmans Pipe (pictured), extract all their nutrients from fungi without providing anything back to their host.

Harvesting and buying mistletoe:
Mistletoe is a popular Christmas plant and decoration. Most mistletoe on sale comes either from the UK or elsewhere in Europe. Look for plants that are freshly gathered (if necessary, ask when it was harvested), with fresh green foliage and ripe white berries that are plump and not withered.
Mistletoe will keep for two to three weeks after gathering if it is kept in a cool place such as a shed or garage.
Do not attempt to gather mistletoe without permission from the landowner.

How to grow your own mistletoe:
Although mistletoe is spread naturally by birds, it is possible to grow it yourself;


Mistletoe in flower: RHS

1. Harvest berries from a tree in March or April. Make sure you choose a tree that is similar to the type of tree in your own garden that you wish to establish the mistletoe on.
2. Discard any crushed berries and do not use berries from sprigs used as Christmas decorations. These will not germinate as they are generally harvested when immature.
3. Choose a branch 10cm (4in) or more in girth on a tree that is 15-years-old or more. Ideally this should be fairly high up, so the developing plant receives plenty of light.
4. Find a natural crevice in the bark or make a shallow cut to create a small flap.
5. Remove the seeds from the fleshy berries and insert them into the crevice or under the flap.
6. Finish by covering with hessian to protect the seeds from birds.
7. To ensure greater success, sow quite a few seeds at each site as only one in ten seeds germinate, and both male and female plants are needed for berries to form.

The branch will swell as the mistletoe develops, but don't expect quick results; plants can take five years or more to reach berrying size.

Problems:
Mistletoe is generally free of pests and diseases.
If your propagated mistletoe produces flowers but no berries, it means it is most likely a male plant. Where this appears to be the case, try inserting some more seeds on the branches to see if you can even out the balance between male and female plants.

Adapted from Plantlife newsletter. https://www.plantlife.org.uk/mistletoe-why-the-kissing-plant-is-a-parasite/.
Plantlife work in Wales https://www.plantlife.org.uk/about-us/plantlife-cymru/.

Additional material from Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) https://www.rhs.org.uk/

MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPH



My Favourite Photo – Buzzard by Heather Fowle

I was asked to choose my favourite photo I have taken at Forest Farm. This was a difficult choice as I spend a lot of time here, and I take a lot of pictures of everything from insects to birds to the delightful shy bank voles, the fox and rabbits. I have had the opportunity to meet some lovely people over the past few years that share this love of nature and photography. We are so lucky to have this wonderful wildlife hotspot on our doorstep and we see and learn something new every visit.

After some thought I chose this picture of a Common buzzard. This was one of the youngsters that I had been watching since the parents had nested. I watched it hatch, grow and explore its nest with its sibling, learn to fly and successfully fledge. I love this picture as I am completely silent and I had followed its call through the reserve, managing to locate it with another individual calling overhead.

I really like how the branch acts as a frame leading you in to see the majestic beauty of this bird, the clarity of the eyes, a completely natural picture not altered in any way, just slightly cropped. This gorgeous buzzard knows I'm there. Perhaps it recognises me as I have watched it for a very long time, many, many weeks, but it is not concerned at all by my presence as I am not a threat in any way. I am known.

This was taken on 19th July 2023 on my Sony Alpha A77ii with sigma DG150 -500mm 1:5 -6.3 Apo HSM lens on manual, 1/1000 sec ISO 640 at 500m.

WINTER GARDENING:
Use fallen leaves to encourage biodiversity

If fallen leaves are a problem on lawns or paths, rake (or blow) them onto beds or collect them to make leaf mould. Leaves in beds will act as mulch, and they will be used by earthworms and other animals. Earthworms are a familiar sight to gardeners:

Earthworms
Britain has nearly 30 species of earthworm, about 16 of these are likely to be found in gardens. They vary in size and colour, all help create good soil structure and fertility.

Quick facts
- Earthworms eat decaying plant material, helping create healthy soils
- Britain has about 16 species of earthworms likely to be found in gardens
- Earthworms occur in most soils
- Some earthworms can be used in wormeries to make compost
- They produce Worm casts which can occur on lawns

What do earthworms do?
Earthworms are an important part of a healthy garden ecosystem where they help create and maintain healthy garden soils. Earthworms can be active throughout the year but are usually dormant during cold or hot and dry weather.



- Earthworms occur in most soils, but are scarce in soils that are extremely acidic or prone to water logging
- There is no need to introduce earthworms as they are usually present at natural densities and will colonise new gardens
- Earthworms eat decaying plant material and do not damage growing plants. They are important to soil structure and fertility
- Some earthworms emerge at night to feed on dead plant material on the surface, and will pull fallen leaves and other plant debris into their tunnels
- Some species such as *Allolobophora nocturnal*, *A. long* and *Lumbricus terrestris* live in permanent burrows and it is mainly these species that produce worm casts on the surface.



Specialist species and wormeries
Some earthworm species live in accumulations of organic matter, such as compost heaps. One such species is Eisenia fetida (brandling or tiger worm) recognisable by its stripy appearance, see photo; another is Dendrobaena veneta. These are the species most commonly used in wormeries, as their feeding activities speed up the composting process.

Composting
The process by which plant material is heaped together to rot (decompose) to produce compost. Garden or kitchen waste can be broken down over time in a compost bin or heap to produce crumbly organic matter that can be used as a mulch, soil conditioner and a constituent of potting compost.

Pot worms (Enchytraeidae)
Pot worms, also known as white worms, are closely related to earthworms, but are usually much smaller and most species are pale whitish in colour. They are often abundant in decaying organic matter, especially if it is damp. Like the larger earthworms, they feed on and help break down decaying organic matter and will not cause any damage to living plants. Some further information on these worms can be found at iNaturalistUK .



Worm casts
Worm casts consist of soil and undigested material excreted by the worms as they feed on organic matter. Click for more information on Worm casts on lawns and gravel paths.

Adapted from Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) https://www.rhs.org.uk/

Wild About Gardens website (download earthworm booklet)

Find out more about earthworms and participate in earthworm research at Earthworm Watch and the Earthworm Society of Britain.

MONTHLY NATURE WALK AT FOREST FARM

A lot of you will recall that we used to do one of these walks monthly, but they stopped during Covid and have never re-started properly.

I would like to get us going again by leading the first on **Saturday 20th January 2024**, and at other times during the year - *but can someone else also volunteer please?* It would share the commitment and provide flexibility if one of us be unable to attend. In particular I need help for the February walk (18th) which I cannot make.

A small group of us did the walk in December We saw the following; Mallards, Heron, Dunnock, Great Tit, Blue Tits, Robin, Male Chaffinch, Nuthatch, Moorhen, Blackbird, Sparrow - and the absolute star of the show a Kingfisher. We saw it as a flash of colour flying down from the bridge over the feeder; then when visiting the second hide had a wonderful time observing a kingfisher in the reeds and then making its way around the wetland alternately very still and then diving in for fish. We watched for a good 15 minutes, and then had to leave it. Brilliant to watch its beautiful colours as it moved around.

It can be amazing how many birds we hear and see, as well as the plants, animals and invertebrates around - depending on the time of year. You don't have to be an expert to lead the group; as I have found, those coming are often more expert than me!

Details:
Third Saturday monthly (every month), 10.00. Meet outside the Wardens' Centre, Forest Farm Rd, Whitchurch CF14 7JJ. The walk lasts about 2 hours.

It's free, you can just turn up, and all are welcome. Bring binoculars if you have them.
Please consider it and please get in touch if you can help.

Sheila Austin (07969 625248)

VOLUNTEER REPORT: AUTUMN 2023





September's volunteering session was spent in the wetland at hide 2, cutting and raking reeds and other vegetation.

Reed cutting and clearing is essential work that needs to be done every year. It stops the pond shrinking, due to reed encroachment around the edge, and it creates the 'scrapes' (shallow water-filled areas) that are important habitat for birds like snipe and water rail. It's also vital to make sure that the water channels that bring water into the wetlands are kept open.
If it's not done, the reeds would come to dominate the whole area, the water channels would get blocked, and the wetlands would stop being sufficiently wet — the pond, in particular, would dry up.Then, as most of the area became too dry, the majority of the reeds would die off, and the many species that like ponds and wetland habitat would disappear.

We were particularly lucky that young Elliott came along with his family, because he performed the essential job of "reed stomping"









with great enthusiasm.

Clearing away overgrowing trees and shrubs from the edges of paths was the task for **October's** volunteering, together with opening up areas for the spring wildflowers to come through.

It wasn't the most inviting of mornings for **November's** volunteering — cold, grey and damp — but there was terrific turnout of 18 volunteers, which enabled a great deal to be achieved in just two hours.



Some people planted lots of native daffodil bulbs alongside the path up to hide 1, so please keep an eye out for those popping up in the spring — they should provide a nice vibrant splash of colour.



The rest of the group went over to the back of the wetland at hide 1 where they gave the laid hedge a good trim, and cut down a lot of willow and buddleia, to stop it taking over. The aim is to maintain a clear flight route between the two wetland areas, to allow birds to move freely between them. Unfortunately, over the past three or so years (ie, since Covid-19), it's not been possible to do all of the work required to keep the hedge and surrounding trees as low as would be liked. But by cutting the hedge back down to its intended height, and removing some of the self-seeded trees, Friends' volunteers have made an excellent start in reinstating the "aerial corridor".

Dates for volunteering sessions in 2024: not yet decided. Please watch our calendar of upcoming events — our website at https://forestfarm.org.uk/ or on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/forestfarmuk/ - where we post a notification about a week ahead of each session.

Jon Wallis.

NUTHATCH

The Nuthatch (*Sitta Europaea*) : This is one of my favourite birds that can be seen all year around at Forest Farm. Judging by the number of lovely photos on the Forest Farm facebook pages, our regular photographers feel the same way. So, what do we all know about this attractive little bird?



The Nuthatch is a woodland bird, about the same size as a Great tit, but more like a Woodpecker in shape. It is very attractive, with blue-grey on top, whitish below, and chestnut on its sides and under its tail. It has a distinctive black stripe on its head, a long black pointed bill and short pink/brown legs. If you are out in the woods in Spring-time, you can't miss its piercing call, which is rather like a Guinea-pig's, but coming in bursts of two or three calls at a time.

The small Nuthatch family, Sittidae, are distinctive in their mode of movement – an

ability to walk along tree trunks, branches and rock-faces headfirst. They are the only species which can walk both up and down a tree. They use their strong claws to do this, and can even walk whilst hanging upside-down beneath branches in their search for food. This can make them very entertaining to watch and also easy to spot during winter, when the leaves are gone.

Although they look similar in shape to Woodpeckers, and share some behaviours, they are not related. They don't drill out holes in trees, but do nest in tree holes, and also feed primarily on insects, spiders and beetles gleaned from crevices in tree-bark or rocks. They also enjoy hazel nuts, acorns, beech and other nuts and seeds.

Residents of the British Isles, Nuthatches rarely travel from the wood in which they were hatched. They breed throughout England and Wales and have recently begun to breed in southern Scotland. They are mostly monogamous during their 2-3 year (average) lifespan, and each pair is extremely territorial throughout the year. They will use nest-boxes but prefer old holes in large, mature deciduous trees and will also re-use the nests of other birds. Each year they usually produce one or two clutches of 4-13 eggs. The eggs are smooth, glossy and white with reddish-brown spots and are incubated only by the female. They hatch after 14-18 days and it is a further 23-25 days before the young fledge the nest, cared for by both parents.



Finally, a couple more interesting facts about this smart little bird. Their common name is derived from the behaviour by which they break into a nut: they force a nut into a tree crevice to keep it still and then forcefully hammer it with their beak until it cracks open. They have also been seen using a piece of bark to open cracks in other pieces of bark, in order to find food, one of only a few birds known to use tools. Clever eh?

Sources: BTO.org ; RSPB.org.uk ; peckamix.co.uk

HOW TO CLEAN A NEST BOX

Once the nesting season is over and garden birds have left, it is a good idea to clean out your nest boxes. Now is a good time:

1. Open the box and remove all old nesting materials and debris.
2. Pour in boiling water to kill any parasites
3. Allow box to dry naturally and then replace lid
4. Put box back in its original position and leave it empty.

IMPORTANT. Do not use flea powder or insecticides for cleaning boxes due to the possible harm this can have on birds and other wildlife. However leaving a handful of clean hay or wood shavings may help if the box is used during the winter months for roosting purposes.

Adapted from RSPB magazine - Winter 2023.

How to build a bird box. RSPB Guide. https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities/build-a-birdbox

RSPB ultimate guide to nest boxes https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities/all-about-nest-boxes

COMING EVENTS AT FOREST FARM

Saturday Nature Walks and Sunday Volunteering meet at the Warden's Hut, Forest Farm Rd, CF14 7JH, from 10am to 12.00
Winter talk events take place at Ararat Community rooms, CF14 1PT, at 7.30pm

Friends of Forest Farm AGM
Wednesday 17 April 2024
at Ararat Community rooms, CF14 1PT, at 7pm

January	Volunteering (Dates TBC)	Jon Wallis
20 January	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
21 January	Wildlife Detectives (8-12 years)	
26-28 Jan	RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch	
17 February	Nature Walk	
18 February	Wildlife Detectives (8-12 years)	
21 February	Winter Talk	Speaker: See Forest Farm website
February	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
16 March	Nature Walk	
17 March	Wildlife Detectives (8-12 years)	
20 March	Winter Talk	Speaker: See Forest Farm website
March	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
17 April	AGM 7pm	Save the date
April	Volunteering	Jon Wallis

For current information about events check the website or Facebook pages.
Wildlife Detectives: https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/parks/cardiff-wildlife-detectives/

What is Big Garden Birdwatch? RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch (26-28 JANUARY) is the world's largest garden wildlife survey. Every year, hundreds of thousands of nature lovers like you take part, helping to build a picture of how garden birds are faring. For more details go to: https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch

Please send your contributions for the next edition to the editors by **10 MARCH 2024.**



For more information about Friends of Forest Farm or to join see our website: www.forestfarm.org.uk
Also on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/forestfarmuk/

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