Friends of Forest Farm

SPRING 2024 131

"You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep Spring from coming."
Pablo Neruda

2024 has already brought unexpected challenges for Forest Farm.

The blanket tree planting on the Top Meadow, which is now part of the Velindre redevelopment, came as a real surprise for us. Is this development or desecration? We are currently in discussion with various authorities to get explanations and to see what can be done to mitigate it. Please read the article **Have we lost the last meadow?** on Page 7 for more details.

The other big shock has been the Cardiff Council budget cuts and their possible impact on Forest Farm. The original proposal for 4 park ranger posts to be cut has now reduced to 2. In addition the maintenance budget will also have significant cuts. This will inevitably have negative impacts on Forest Farm, although precise details are not available to us yet. It also raises questions about how Friends of Forest Farm, with its own funds, could and should assist in this crisis of funding, or not.


Mike Hopkins


Melanie Randal

Fortunately the natural world continues with its steady rhythms and Spring emerges with the eternal ability to captivate and charm us. We know that whilst the picture for our wildlife is also tough (see the *'State of Nature 2023'* report), it is uplifting and inspiring to focus on the resilience and life force of the natural world as it re-emerges from winter.

Naomi and Paul

MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPH



My Favourite Photograph – Bittern by Cliff Woodhead

Having been asked for my favourite photo taken at Forest Farm I realise there are so many from which to choose over the last 20 years of engaging in digital photography, from flora to fungi, our feathered or furry friends or simply a view? I decided in the end to choose one from the most challenging I have experienced.

In my early days of visiting hide1, news broke of a Bittern having been seen there and very soon the hide became very busy - from mainly "birdwatchers" in those days. The bird was first seen on January 2nd 2010 and could typically be very elusive until last sighted on 13th March. Towards the end of January things had quietened down somewhat and I was sitting in the hide with another photographer on the afternoon of 29th when the bird appeared in the reeds to the right. Its progress around the pond was extremely slow, disappearing for long periods until it finally arrived closer to left of the hide as dusk approached. We suddenly became aware the bird was about to take off.

I was using a Canon7D with 300mm lens +1.4 converter, and with no time to remove the converter I tried to track the Bittern as it flew in close proximity to the hide and away to the right. From memory I think the photo would have been taken at 1/400sec on 6400 ISO, aperture f4 rendered at 6.3 with the converter attached. From 10 images obtained, this is the only one

giving sharpness to the body. I have since changed to a 7D ll with 100-400 ll zoom lens which I find gives more versatility, particularly at the hides.

This bird was the first known record of a Bittern at Forest Farm, although subsequently single birds have appeared in winter annually until Dec 2016, with a unique record of 3 on 10th March 2012 at hide 2. Since then, only one has been seen and photographed, in December 2023.

Forest Farm Reserve will always have a special place in my heart. Upon arriving in Cardiff in 1970 I quickly discovered the local wildlife places from membership with the Cardiff Naturalists Society. I also assisted in formation of the local RSPB Group in 1975, along with Ted Edwards and others, becoming Chairman for a short while during which time I also enjoyed leading dawn walks along the canal and Longwood as well as journeys to other destinations.

Upon later discovering the Coed-y-Bedw Wildlife Trust Reserve on my doorstep, I enjoyed almost 30 years as a volunteer warden there, monitoring nest boxes which included Pied Flycatcher and Redstart whilst maintaining my interest in Forest Farm at which I recently had the honour of having hide 2 named after me.

Cliff Woodhead

THE PRIMROSE

The simple wild Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) is one of my favourite flowers at this time of year. There are plenty to see at Forest Farm, and in sheltered places they will show themselves as early as December, and continue until well into May. Such a joy to see when the weather can still be so cold and bleak!
Officially categorised as a wild flower, the Primrose grows in clumps of flowers up to 20cm in height. It is a hardy little plant, favouring woodland clearings, hedgerows, farmland and grassland habitats, and sometimes even gardens. It is low-growing, with rough, tongue-like, deeply-veined bright green leaves that grow in a rosette. The flowers are large (2.5 to 3.5 cm across) and creamy-yellow, with deep yellow centres. They often appear clustered together, but can also grow singly.
The primrose's common name comes from the Latin 'prima rosa', meaning 'first rose' and describing its early spring flowering. Although classified as a wild flower, the RHS advocates the planting of Primroses in your garden, not only because it is pretty and hardy, but also because it will provide nectar and pollen for bees and the many other types of pollinating insects. It is included in an evolving list of plants carefully researched and chosen by RHS experts.
As many of you will know, there are many varieties and colours of Primula available from garden centres for garden-planting.



Primulas are mainly grown as herbaceous perennials, and produce clusters of flowers on individual stems from the basal rosettes, although a few may also have umbel-like flowers. Cultivated varieties are either spring-flowering, if grown without protection, or winter- to spring-flowering, if grown as biennial container plants in greenhouses. In your garden, they can be grown as biennials for bedding, in containers, in a woodland or rock garden, or naturalised in grass, and are excellent for garden edging. They favour a sheltered position in sun or partial shade. They don’t need any pruning, although flowering will continue for far longer if you pick off the dead-head when each flower finishes.

Since Victorian times, April 19th has been known as 'Primrose Day' in honour of the late 19th century Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli; primroses, his favourite flowers, are placed at his statue in Westminster Abbey and his grave at Hughenden in Buckinghamshire.
Primroses are the foodplant of the caterpillars of the rare Duke of Burgundy butterfly, which is a Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. We are not aware that anyone has seen one at Forest Farm, but if you know differently, please do let us know!
Naomi Brightmore. *Photo by Cliff Woodhead*
Source: The Wildlife Trusts https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/wildflowers/primrose RHS (Royal Horticultural Society) https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/13901/primula-vulgaris-(pr-prim)/details

IN MEMORY OF HOWARD DAVIES



The Friends of Forest Farm Committee members were saddened to hear of the passing of Howard Davies on Christmas Eve last year. He was one of the founder members of the Friends Forest Farm and had volunteered for over 30 years.

When Howard retired, he took up practical volunteering on the reserve and could be seen keeping the footpaths clear and the bramble under control. He also delivered our newsletter in the Llandaf North area for many years, and was still doing so up until last summer. His daughters, Eiry and Rhiannon, have said that this was something he enjoyed doing and felt that he was still a part of the continuing success of the canal and wildlife.

As recently as last October, Howard came to our open day and had a good chat with the Secretary, Martin Chamberlain, about what he had done on the reserve over the years and how much it had changed.

The photo of Howard as a younger man was taken by his daughter Eiry in the 1980's. She remembers it well, as a time when they were looking for tadpoles and he was also teaching her how to use a camera. Forest Farm was his happy place for many decades, and he instilled his love for nature to his children from their very early ages.



Howard's family kindly requested donations to Forest Farm in lieu of flowers at his funeral, and have forwarded these funds to us. We will discuss with them the best way for him to be remembered.

The wild flower display from his coffin was laid back to the earth surrounding the bird hide that he helped to build back in the early 90's, and his ashes will be scattered along the canal.

Rest in peace and goodbye Howard, a true Friend of Forest Farm.

Martin Chamberlain, with thanks to Eiry and Rhiannon

THE GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL.

One bright sunny January morning earlier this year, some friends and I went birdwatching along the Glamorganshire Canal. We saw the usual array of tits, finches, and tree creepers, not to mention a goldcrest. The highlight was seeing fifteen herons sunbathing in a dead tree, and being able to watch a male kingfisher for about eight or nine minutes as opposed to the usual flash of blue. It's hard to believe that this area, so beloved by nature, was once a busy industrial hub.

I wrote about the tramway which linked the Pentyrch Ironworks to the Melingriffith works through Forest Farm in an earlier edition. The Glamorganshire canal was built in the 1790's by the Merthyr iron masters to bring iron from Merthyr to Cardiff. Prior to this iron had been carried to the port of Cardiff on horseback or wagons. The carrying of coal didn't become of major importance until the 1800's.

The section running through Forest Farm is the only sizeable section of the canal still in water. From the point where the present canal ends in Forest Farm, it ran south under Ty Mawr Road through Llandaff North and joined North Road where a canal weighbridge stood close to the Blackweir Tavern. In fact, a canal hitching post stood on the side of Ty Mawr Road, opposite the Melingriffith Wheel, until relatively recently.

North of the section through Forest Farm, the canal ran under the present A470 around Tongwynlais. This was an important point on the canal, since it was the last point heading south, and the first point heading north, where you could get fresh horses, and stables were constructed at Tongwynlais for this purpose.

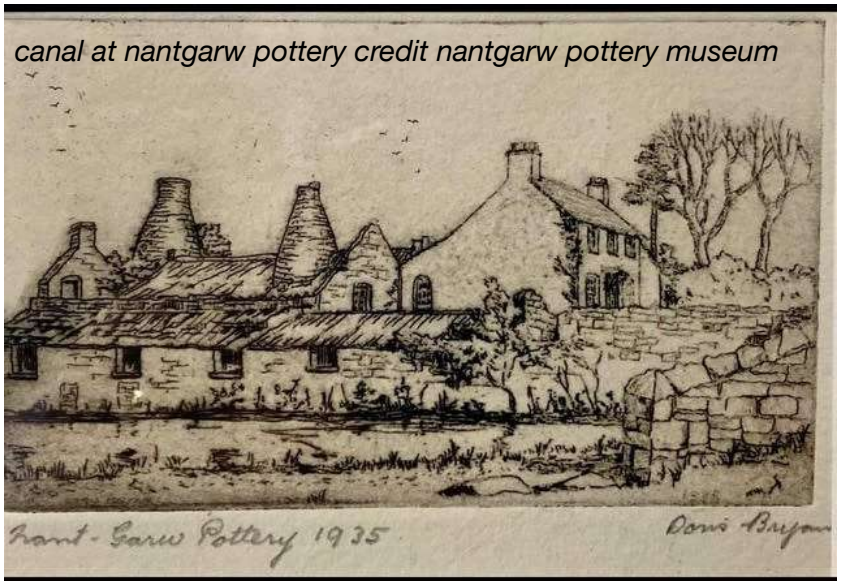
It is always important to differentiate between the canal and the feeder. The feeder, which brought water, and at one time loaded tubs of iron to the Melingriffith works, starts just above the Radyr weir and has no direct contact with the canal. At the Melingriffith Wheel, the feeder is considerably below the level of the canal and so the wheel was used to lift water from the Taff to the canal. Shortage of water was always a problem with canals; every time you open a down-stream lock gate you stand to lose thousands of gallons of water. Some canals had reservoirs at regular intervals, but the Glamorgan doesn't seem to have had any, or very few. In fact, no love was lost between the Canal company and the Melingriffith Ironworks and several court cases were fought in the 19th century over rights to water.

The terrain of Wales was not particularly suited to the building of canals, and so they tend to be quite short here. The Glamorganshire Canal only extended to about 25 miles and had 51 locks in that distance, most of them north of Abercynon. Abercynon was the point where the Aberdare branch of the canal joined the Merthyr branch, and was previously known as Navigation. The Navigation Inn, one of only four pubs left in Abercynon, used to be the Headquarters of the Canal Company. Several spurs of the canal linked Abercynon to ironworks, and several longer tramways linked ironworks to the Abercynon basin.



Abercynon's claim to fame is that it was the canal basin at the end of Richard Trevithick's 10 mile section of tramway. In February 1804, he ran a steam engine along it carrying coal and passengers from the Pendarren Ironworks in Merthyr. This was a good quarter of a

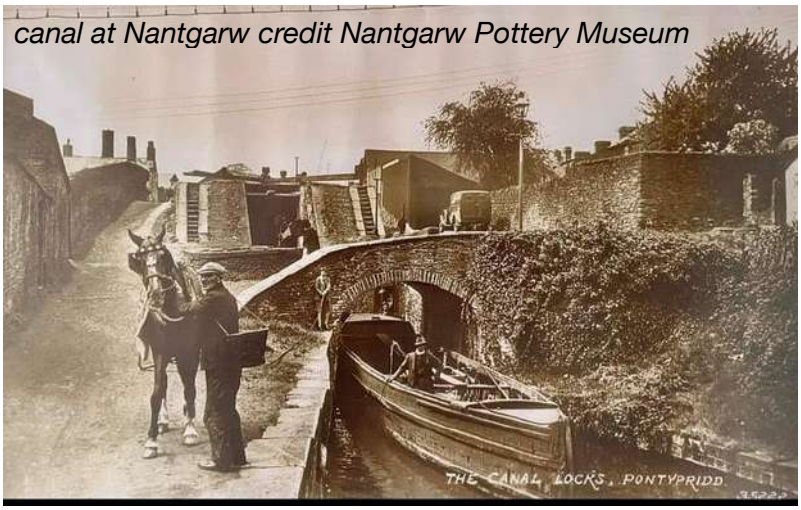
century before Stephenson's Rocket, and there is a memorial to the achievement in Abercynon. A replica of Trevithick's engine (see photo) can be seen at the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea. It is steamed up at certain times, the next time being May 11th. (For more information refer to the National Waterfront Museum website.)



canal at nantgarw pottery credit nantgarw pottery museum

Sections of the canal can still be seen in places. The Nantgarw China works was built on the canal in the second decade of the 19th century, and the dried-up section of the canal can still be seen below the present museum. From Nantgarw, the canal went to Pontypridd going around the Brown Lennox chain works - now Sainsbury's - keeping to the east bank of the Taff, and only crossing the river once on a Viaduct, again near Abercynon.

The Act of Parliament passed in 1790, which permitted the acquisition of land for the canal, its spurs and its tramroads, allowed for a maximum return of 8% per annum. This was easily achieved in the early years, between 1804 and 1828. It paid the 8% with enough spare to allow for periods of no charge or reduced charges for the users. However, the building of the Taff Vale Railway in the 1840's started to affect the profitability of the canal. In 1876 it failed to pay the 8% dividend for the first time and went downhill quickly, until it was bought by the Marquis of Bute in 1885. His intervention was too late, since by then subsidence had started due to the coal mining in certain areas. The section north of Cilfynydd was closed in 1915, and a further breach at Nantgarw closed another section in 1942. The canal finally closed to barge traffic in 1944.



canal at Nantgarw credit Nantgarw Pottery Museum

As John Bird the Cardiff diarist wrote in 1796, "The canal is brought through the mountainous scenery with wonderful ingenuity."

How lucky we are to have the last remaining section at Forest Farm, but how sad too that this is all that remains!

Allan Cook Radyr and Morganstown historical society

HAVE WE LOST THE LAST MEADOW?



In early February, members of the committee were concerned to see that trees had been planted in an area of the Top Meadow, known by some as 'the bowl' or 'basin'. Several emails to the committee were received on this subject, asking who was responsible and why it had been permitted in this location, long enjoyed by adults and children, dogs, and wildlife as meadowland. The Friends of Forest Farm had not been consulted and were certainly not responsible for this planting. No-one representing the Velindre rebuild had discussed it with us, and the park rangers (responsible for protection and management of Forest Farm Reserve) also had not been informed or consulted.

Action was taken quickly by our Secretary Martin Chamberlain to try and find out how, when and by whom permission had been given for this planting of trees, and what could be done about it. Valuable meadowland has already been lost to the project, and the committee is very concerned at the loss of yet more open space and grassland. Enquiries were made to the Velindre Project contractors (Walters), Cardiff Council and councillors, and our local Assembly member Julie Morgan.



For the past 20 years volunteers on the Reserve have worked hard to cultivate and enhance this lovely piece of meadow. One long-standing volunteer said 'so many of us spent hours keeping the land in good order for the public to use for walking and blackberry picking etc.'

However, as important as the recreational use might be, the greatest concern of the committee is from an ecological, biodiversity and conservation angle. Re-building Velindre has already meant the loss of a huge area of meadow, so planting trees on the last remaining area would seem to make no sense at all.

Our understanding is that the tree planting has been done to supposedly mitigate loss of Dormouse habitat. This was confirmed to Julie Morgan, Assembly Member for Cardiff North, when she made enquiries on our behalf. Her Velindre development contacts assured her that tree planting in 'the basin' was done in order to comply with an NRW (Natural Resources Wales) licence regarding Dormice habitat creation, and that regretfully there was a mix up in communication and the Friends of Forest Farm were not notified.

The Friends feel that the woodland won't be of much use to Dormice for a few decades, and that tree-planting is at the expense of every species that lives in unimproved grassland and meadow,

which is already increasingly under threat. If the tree-planting remains the chosen option, we also question the species chosen - non-local (such as Yew), as opposed to the predominant neighbouring ancient Beech woodland. In addition, we are unhappy about the unnaturally regimented layout the trees are being planted in.

Martin also put in a Freedom of Information Request to Cardiff Council, and was informed that:

> We have considered your request and enclose the following information:
>
> Response/Exemptions
> 1. Velindre NHS have permission/Licence to access the land for the purposes of undertaking duties in connection with the European Protected Species Licence issued by Natural Resources Wales.
>
> 2. The Licence document was arranged by officers in the estates and legal teams.

In the middle of March, I walked up there to take some photos to accompany this article. I was appalled to see that the tree-planting now stretches in both directions from 'the bowl', and reaches as far as the eye can see towards ASDA carpark. Whilst I was there, I spoke to two men, one of whom turned out to be the contractor who had actually done the planting. I carefully asked him a number of questions and in response was told that he was appointed by Walters to do the work. His understanding was that this was on the authority of Cardiff Council – he had done the planning with a 'young man' who was employed in 'their department responsible for landscaping'. He also told me that he believed the trees were being planted in order to meet NRW quotas to cover a certain amount of land with trees in order to rejuvenate the Dormouse population. To this end, he was also responsible for the extensive planting of trees on the old playing fields at Whitchurch Hospital and at the cricket ground. I did not press further, but thanked him for his time – he was paid to do a job, not to make the original decision, and had been very helpful.

You may recall that in a recent newsletter, we reported on plans for re-introduction of Dormice led by the Wildlife Trust, so please don't think that we regard this as an unimportant aim. We are just questioning whether tree-planting in our last remaining meadow was the only and best way to achieve it.

Our councillor, Kate Carr, is still awaiting a response about who exactly within Cardiff Council is responsible for this decision. However, it appears that the council's Estates department have allowed Velindre free rein to do what they want without involving the Parks department.

A site meeting has also been requested with the Velindre developers. They are taking their time with a date and this may be because we have started from the position that we want the trees removed. There are alternatives available and we should not be losing this important habitat because of this development.

The Friends Committee would like to thank all those who have contacted them on this subject and remain deeply concerned. Just before Easter, having discussed the whole issue together at a recent meeting, we wrote a long letter to the Velindre Trust, copied to all local political representatives, requesting that the trees be removed. We await a reply.

We hope to give a further update on our website and also in the next newsletter. We also encourage our members to contact their own representatives, and will welcome any further information any of you can provide. Thank you for your time.

Naomi Brightmore, compiled from relevant correspondence

HOW TO BUILD A BUG HOTEL

We all know how important insects and other minibeasts are to nature and in our gardens. Vital to the ecosystem, insects not only pollinate flowers, but are an important part of the food chain, representing a significant portion of many birds' diets. Many insects also provide an important waste processing service, digesting and breaking down plant matter, from fallen leaves to rotting wood.

They all need safe spaces to shelter, hide from predators and raise their young. You can help them, by building a bug hotel in your garden or outside area. We have found lots of easy ideas from the Woodland Trust, from large bug hotels that will house lots of creatures to small, cosy shelters that don't take up much room.

You can build your bug hotel at any time of year. The Autumn is an especially good time to find materials, but you will still find plenty around right now, in time for the Spring and Summer. This is a brilliant activity the whole family can take part in while helping the wildlife on your doorstep

Bug Hotel (See Photograph)
If you have some bricks, wooden boxes or pallets to hand, why not build a multi-storey minibeast mansion and treat your guests to some 5-star accommodation?



Divide it into sections and stuff each part with different natural materials. Dry leaves, twigs, hollow stems, dead grass, pine cones and bits of bark are ideal. They'll help to create warm, dry spaces that will attract different creepy crawlies.
Good for: lots of different types of minibeast such as ladybirds, bees, woodlice and spiders. You might even get frogs or hedgehogs coming to stay.
Please don't be daunted if you don't have all these materials to hand, have very little space or time, or want to do a simple activity with children. Very effective bug-hotels can also be built a great deal more simply. Here are a few more ideas, also from the Woodland Trust.

Log-pile Lodge
Decaying wood is really important for wildlife. To make a log pile, simply collect small logs, large sticks and pieces of rotting wood. Pile them up in a damp, shady area of your garden, then stuff some dead leaves in the nooks and crannies to make it cosy.
Good for: centipedes, woodlice and beetles who like to burrow into decaying wood. Log piles may also attract birds, frogs and hedgehogs looking for a tasty snack!

Pine Cone Palace for Ladybirds
Gather some pine cones and bundle them together closely, so the scales interlock a bit. Stuff some dried leaves in the gaps. Place the pine cones in a quiet corner of your garden shed or garage.
Good for: ladybirds and lacewings who will love to crawl into the crevices and hide among the leaves.

Twig Tower Block

Gather some sticks and find an undisturbed, sheltered spot outdoors. Pile them up and stuff the gaps with smaller twigs and dry leaves.
Good for: ladybirds and lacewings who will love to crawl into the crevices and hide among the leaves.

Pot Pad
Collect dried out, hollow stems and pack them into an old terracotta plant pot. You'll need to cut or break the stems to the right length and pack them tightly so they don't fall out, but not so tightly that they get squashed.
Find a dry spot that catches the winter sun and make a little 'nest' for your pot using a pile of stones. Place it so the open end is pointing downwards slightly to stop it filling with rain-water.
Good for: solitary bees who lay their eggs in hollow stems then seal the ends with mud.

Source: Danielle Wesley, The Woodland Trust
https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/09/how-to-build-a-bug-hotel/

FANCY A WALK WITH NATURE?

We are really pleased that the monthly nature walks have restarted. It's a gentle stroll really, giving time to listen and watch for birds, and at this time of year, enjoy the blossom and flowers. By the time you see this, the next walk will be on 20th April. You can just turn up, no booking required. Bring binoculars if you have them.

Although the weather has not been kind so far this year, our walks in January and February amongst the bare trees were a great time to see birds. At the start of the January walk a Heron flew down the Taff and over our heads as we were on the Radyr bridge. The absolute 'star of the show' though was a Kingfisher which we watched for quite a long time from the hide - and left reluctantly as we were less than half way around.


Cliff Woodhead

In February, we were lucky enough to see a White Egret in the hide pond. It almost looked as if it were on stage, sometimes very still and then gracefully moving back and forth to give us time to admire it!

On both occasions though we also saw most of the usual suspects including Blue, Coal and lots of Great Tits, Sparrows, Dunnock, Blackbirds, Chaffinch, Bullfinch, Heron, Moorhen and Mallards. There were Primroses, Celandine, some Daffodils and the Water lily in the canal was beginning to grow.

Another month has gone by and many trees have some lovely fresh green leaves and there may even be some blossom out too on our next nature walk. All are welcome.

3rd Saturday monthly, **10am** at the **Wardens Centre**, Forest Farm Road, CF14 7JH: See *Events at* www.forestfarm.org.uk

The walk lasts about 2 hours. It's free, you can just turn up, and all are welcome. Bring binoculars if you have them.

Sheila Austin (07969 625248)

VOLUNTEER REPORT: WINTER 2023/24



December's volunteering session, held just a week before Christmas, saw ten people working around the Warden Centre.

A couple of people got really dug in, planting bulbs around the Warden Centre — native daffodils alongside the path down the side of the centre, snowdrops around the wooden caterpillar & butterfly by the pond, and fritillaries in small boggy/wetland area next to where the old stable block used to be (and where something will be again before too much longer, we hope).

The rest of the team cut back two hedges — the one immediately behind the Warden Centre, and the one between the pond and the small field. A lot of long straight hazel branches that were removed were put aside, as they can be used to make hurdle fences or other woven "wattle" structures. See before and after photographs.



It was an excellent morning's work, some of it immediately visible and some of it rather longer-term — keep your eyes open for the bulbs flowering in the spring. The session ended with some seasonal sustenance — mince pies and spekulatius (a spiced shortcrust biscuit) all round, as a thank-you for all the hard work.



The first session of 2024 took place in the Scout Field, which is the one over the wooden bridge at Forest Lock and then on the right.

Fifteen volunteers from the Friends group spent the morning removing brambles, which will give the red campion that grows in the field a fighting chance, come the spring.

They also planted a lot of native bluebells around the edges of the path at the entrance to the field, so keep an eye out for those making an appearance.



February's session took place on a dull and chilly Sunday morning, but the lucky thirteen volunteers who came along still got stuck in with a will.

Their task was to remove scrubby vegetation from an area of Forest Farm nestled in the 'corner' where the Melingriffith feeder 'meets' the canal. It's intended to be rough grassland, but has become very overgrown with bramble and willow.

They also cut back some more established trees, to allow more light into the area, which will benefit the wildflowers that grow there. The brash generated was used to fill in the hedgeline along the edges of the paths that adjoin the area.

Sadly, the dry weather didn't quite hold until the end, with the rain getting increasingly heavy for the last half-hour. Still, they do say that it rains on the just as well as the unjust.



Dates for volunteering sessions in 2024. 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.

A STING IN THE TALE BY DAVE GOULSON: A BOOK REVIEW

The subtitle "My Adventures with Bumblebees" gives the game away. Dave Goulson is passionate about bumblebees and wildlife in general. One of the UK's most respected conservationists and the founder of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, he combines tales of a child's growing passion for nature with a deep insight into the crucial importance of the bumblebee.

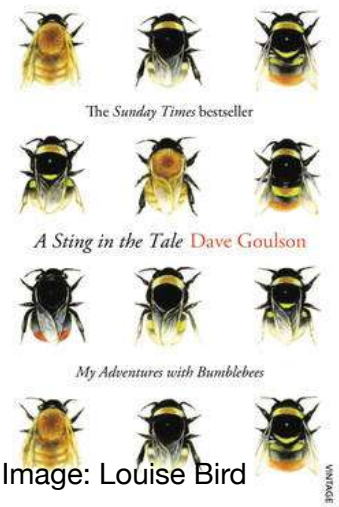


Image: Louise Bird

Currently Professor of Biology at Stirling University Dave Goulson is able to deliver his expert scientific knowledge in a wonderfully readable and captivating story that we can all enjoy. He has written a delightful piece of literature with amazing stories that will frequently make you chuckle.

The chapters are nicely arranged to cover different aspects of bumblebees and each is an engaging read in it own right. You will find out a lot of about biological processes and systems in a very palatable manner. He details the minutiae of life in their nests, sharing fascinating research into the effects intensive farming has had on our bee populations and on the potential dangers if we are to continue down this path.

The book provides a perfect combination of fascinating information about bumblebees, vital messages on conservation issues, and his personal experiences of the process of scientific research in a readable and entertaining manner.


Peter Richards

"I began studying bumblebees not because they are important pollinators but because they are fascinating, because they behave in interesting and mysterious ways, and because they are rather lovable. But as I became more familiar with what was

known about them, it was made clear that they were in urgent need of help." Page 208

Whilst entertaining to read, this book is still a scientific read. However the excellent explanations of the science mean that it can be enjoyed by all readers. For example he explains bee metabolism and evolution, and even provides an explanation of the quirks of bumblebee genetics and does a remarkable job of simplifying the topic so that everyone can understand.He devotes an entire chapter to bumblebee assassins and describes the darker side of bumblebees; think murder, infanticide and cannibalism.



Goulson is good on the remarkable features of bumblebees, not least their body temperature. Flying bumblebees maintain a temperature of 35C, almost as warm as a human body. Flapping their wings 200 times per second generates heat but requires a colossal amount of energy: a running man consumes the calories in a Mars bar in one hour; a man-sized bumblebee would burn the same calories in less than 30 seconds. A bumblebee with a full stomach is only 40 minutes from starvation, so they have to eat almost constantly to keep warm. Pollen provides the protein-rich food they require and, unusually in the insect world, bees feed on pollen and nectar throughout their lives.

It is a treasure-trove of fascinating and bizarre facts from where to find a beer-drinking pig, to how to measure a bees tongue. You will also learn that borage is good for bees, aesthetically pleasing salads and easing pre-menstrual tension, plus how to say 'how are the goats' in French.

Although, you don't need any previous knowledge on bees or science in general to enjoy this book, you will come away from it a wiser person.

Thoroughly recommended. If you read no other book this year, read *A Sting in the Tale*. You will not be disappointed.

For more information on wild bees please visit:

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust. https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/

Wild About Gardens: wild bee action pack - get your garden buzzing for bees.
Follow the link from https://www.wildaboutgardens.org.uk/

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 and final Winter talk 7pm Wednesday 17 April 2024 at Ararat Community rooms, CF14 1PT		
17 April 7pm	Talk: Recreating The Pilgrimage Route Llandaf To Penrhys AGM to follow	Allan Cook
20 April	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
21 April	Wildlife Detectives (8-12 years)	
April	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
18 May	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
19 May	Wildlife Detectives (8-12 years)	
May	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
15 June	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
16 June	Wildlife Detectives (8-12 years)	
June	Volunteering	Jon Wallis
June	Rangers Open Day	Park Rangers
For current information about events check the website or Facebook pages. Wildlife Detectives: https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/parks/cardiff-wildlife-detectives/		

Please send your contributions for the next edition to the editors by **28 JUNE 2024.**

For more information about Friends of Forest Farm or to join see our website: www.forestfarm.org.uk
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ARARAT TALKS 2024

FEBRUARY: Nature's Calendar by Alec Stewart

Forest Farm Lead Countryside Ranger Alec Stewart is also a keen and accomplished amateur wildlife photographer. For our February talk he treated us to some of his superb photographs. The talk was loosely set in the four seasons and was mostly of local wildlife. He provided a wealth of information covering a wide range of wildlife from animals and birds to insects, fungi and flowers.



He began with **winter** and snow scenes in the Brecon Beacons followed by a view of snow-bound Bright Red Elf Cup fungi found at Forest Farm. In winter small birds struggle for food and many migrate either to warmer southern climes, or flee from the colder northern winters to our shores. Waxwings visit us from Scandinavia to eat berries. They are mainly found in the east and north of the country but occasionally they reach our area in search of food. Alec had a superb photo of some feeding on berries in local woodland a few years back. Wetlands also shelter birds and Forest Farm has over wintering Snipe, almost invisible on the ground amongst dead grass. In some years we have been privileged to have Bittern – a very shy and rare member of the heron family that hides amongst the reeds; briefly emerging for Alec to catch a photo after a long wait! We also have Water Rail – another shy visitor that hides in the reeds. Newport Wetlands RSPB reserve has these plus the equally shy Bearded Tit that again lives amongst the reeds. On the coastal mud banks are various waders such as Turnstones and Knot.





As **spring** approaches male Greater Spotted Woodpeckers start to drum on trees with their beaks to attract a mate, a sound that can be heard around Forest Farm; and if you are lucky you'll catch a glimpse of the bird. Frogs are spawning and can be seen in the Forest Farm wetlands with the male perched on top of the female to fertilise the spawn as its laid. Dippers can be seen along the canal at Forest Farm and otters on the Taff river. At Tredelerch Lake at Lamby Way Great Crested Grebes can be seen courting by giving each other sprigs of pond weed.

Spring brings Blackthorn into flower first and Long-tailed Tits are pairing, whilst in Cardiff Bay the Coots are even more bad tempered than usual. Wild Garlic, Lesser Celandines (an indicator for ancient woodland apparently) and Wood Anemones flower in Forest Farm plus the rarer Moschatel. This has pale green or yellow flowers in sets of five. Four face outward like clock faces and a fifth sits on top of them.

Later, Bluebells come into flower. The UK and Ireland have about 90% of the world's Bluebells and Cardiff woodlands have very good displays; botanists from around the world come to see our local bluebell woods. The plants are poisonous but were used for gum and starch. The poisonous gum was used to bind Bibles as it discouraged weevils and the starch was used for ruffs in Tudor times.



When Lady's Smock flowers, Green Veined White and Orange Tip butterflies also appear as their caterpillars feed on the plants. Brimstone butterflies appear but several broods occur annually so they are seen at various times through the summer to autumn. The tiny Green Hairstreak butterfly can also be seen sunning itself on the edge of woods or in rough moorland. It is no bigger than your thumbnail.



If you are lucky you may spot snakes - Adders - as they emerge from hibernation. Bees also start to emerge - mining bees and leaf cutter bees can be seen at Forest Farm amongst others. As spring turns to summer the Swallows and Swifts return from over wintering in Africa. Common Orchids appear at Cardiff's Howardian Nature reserve and Bee Orchids at Grangemoor Park. Goldeneye ducks appear on Roath Park Lake and Marbled White and Gatekeeper butterflies can be found. Meatball fungi can be found in woodlands.



Over the **summer and autumn,** a succession of damselflies and dragonflies can be found at Forest Farm of various types. Damsel flies are often blue in colour with several species that appear in succession. Similarly, various species of Hawker, such as Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Emperor Dragonfly and Migrant Hawker, Broad-bodied Chaser and Common Darter dragonflies, appear in succession at Forest Farm. Butterflies include Common Blue, Gatekeeper, Marble White, Small Heath, Comma, Peacock, amongst many.



Kingfishers will be busy catching small fish in the canal for their young. Their plumage is actually grey in colour – it is only the reflected sunlight that makes them appear blue. Other birds that can be seen at Forest farm include Nuthatch and Reed Buntings. On the canal amongst the Mallards and Moorhens are Little Egret, Little Grebes and Herons. Red Campions flower in the Scout Field.

Albyn Austin