Friends of Forest Farm

WINTER 2024/25 134

“O, Wind, If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”
— Percy Bysshe Shelley, Ode to the West Wind

As we write this newsletter, it is cold outside. Winter, however, has it’s own allure and radiance. Winter also gives us time for reflection on the past, together with an opportunity to look forward and to plan for the future. We hope the newsletter helps you do both.

Thank you for visiting Forest Farm last year and for all the ways in which you have helped and supported us. We trust that Forest Farm will be part of and enhance your life in 2025.

Whilst a time for rest and regeneration, Winter is also a time of great beauty. We just want to leave you with some of the glorious images at Forest Farm captured by the local photographers this winter.On behalf of the Committee we send you our best wishes for 2025. Naomi and Paul


Oobi Benumb


Gildas Griffiths


Frank Sengpiel


Steve FfPhotos


Steve FfPhotos

RANGERS' REPORT: DECEMBER 2024

Another year has drawn to a close and it is time to think about what has been achieved and what are the tasks and projects to plan for the year to come. The Friends of Forest Farm regular monthly workdays have been well attended this year and we have managed to carry out a lot of tasks around the reserve.



These have included path maintenance, woodland management, such as coppicing and opening up woodland glades, and keeping paths clear for people to access. We have also underplanted with native bulbs including Daffodil, Snowdrops and Bluebells. The idea is to keep a rich and varied mosaic of habitats which will encourage the wildlife to live and flourish.

This is especially important on a small urban site such as Forest Farm, which acts as a natural reservoir for plants, insects, birds, and mammals in a busy expanding city. This human presence can put pressure on our wildlife, so please keep to paths and do not stray into areas of the reserve that are fenced off or marked as conservation areas and also please keep dogs on a lead in the marked area past the hides and around the canal towpath. As a nature reserve this greatly helps to keep quiet little corners reserved for the wildlife only. In turn it means there is always a chance of having an encounter with something special.

There are plans in place to try and desilt an area of the canal and repair a section of towpath, and also to scrape and clear the pond at Hide 1 to see if we can find the areas where the water is leaking out. We can then repair these and hopefully get the water levels back to where they should be, which will greatly benefit our wetland plants and wildlife.



We will also be constructing 2 Kingfisher banks with nest boxes to try and encourage them to stay and breed in the Spring and Summer. This work will be carried out by the rangers and the ranger volunteers during January so that everything is in place for the breeding season.

Readers may also be interested in our Camera Trap project which has been based at Forest Farm and will be rolled out all over Cardiff. This has involved installing some fixed cameras and trail cameras placed at different locations in Forest Farm to record anything of interest.

The results from these are viewable at our new YouTube cannel called Ranger Watch. https://www.youtube.com/@rangerwatch_



A big thank you to all who have been involved in any of the work at Forest Farm and I look forward to finding more work for you into the New Year!

Happy New Year

Alec Stewart

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM AUTUMN OPEN DAY

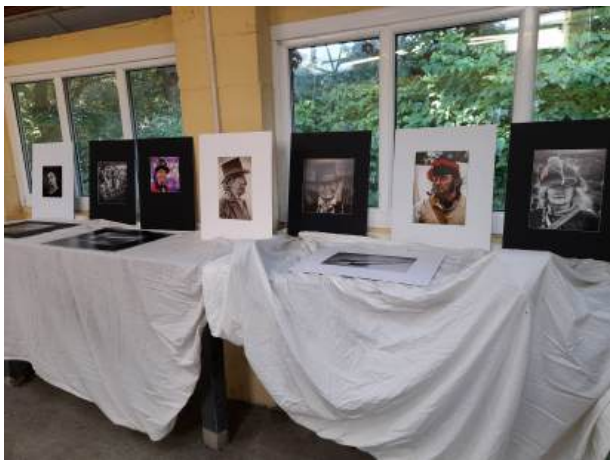
Another great Open Day at Forest Farm with lots of visitors, especially young families, coming to join in the fun.



The pond-dipping, was a huge success and a team of rangers were hard at it all day, helping children to dip their nets into the orchard pond and view the magical mix they had uncovered. From Diving beetles, Water boatmen, Mayfly, Damselfly and Dragonfly nymphs, snails, to strange larvae and various pond plants. A very satisfying experience for children and parents alike.



We had a major photography display in the warden's hut. Some truly beautiful and stunning photographs of the highest quality, in memory of, Andre Van de Sande, and arranged by Anthony Matthews. Andre was



a versatile and very talented photographer who spent much time at Forest Farm and is greatly missed. The exhibition was admired and enjoyed by all who saw it. Look at the last Autumn edition of the newsletter to see again some of Andre's beautiful photographs.

Also in the warden's hut, the pop-up café was busy with refreshments. Once again, a beautiful Open Day cake was donated by Jenny and Steve Turner. Thank you Jenny and Steve.



Outside the warden's hut were the Bee-keepers. As popular as ever, they reported that this year they actually sold out of honey by the end of the day!

It's always interesting to sample the various different flavours of apple-juice that the trees in the orchard produce and this year was no exception. The trees are all native to Wales and the different varieties, some of them ancient, are to be seen on a plan available on our website. The apple-press was put into good use and Open day visitors had fun using it and sampling the results.





Next to the Dairy was an opportunity to willow-weave stars, hearts and other designs. In the dairy itself beautiful knitwear and wildlife artwork could be purchased in readiness for Christmas.

All-in-all, another great Open Day! Our thanks go to all who who worked hard to make it a success and most of all, thanks to everyone who came along. See you again next year!

WINTER TALKS 2024

Cate Barrow, returned following up on her March talk with a more detailed explanation about hedgehog rescue. She is active in hedgehog rescue in South Wales and has been personally involved in some 150 rescues in the past year.



The hedgehog is probably Britain's favourite animal, but is one of the most rapidly declining species. It has suffered severe decline since the 1950's (perhaps 30 million population) and the latest UK survey put the population at only 900,000. They are difficult to study, but they now appear to be faring better in urban rather than rural settings.

The major factors for their decline are:
- Road Kill - mortality from vehicles is estimated about 29000 p.a.
- Habitat loss
- Garden chemicals (eg rat poison). Strimmers and remote control lawnmowers are also a big issue.

Other factors include domestic dogs, whose bites often cause infection and death if untreated, badger predation, and entrapment in garden netting.

Interestingly, although they have general protection under UK Wildlife legislation (e.g. you cannot take them into your house without authorisation) their habitat can still be legally destroyed.

The impact of climate change means that it is now common for hedgehogs to have 2 litters a year, but the second litter have a low chance of survival because they cannot gain sufficient weight to survive Winter. This requires rescue and supplementary feeding. Also now they do not always hibernate over winter and so may require winter feeding.





What you can do to **help**:
- Provide warm/dry nest boxes
- Keep your garden scruffy for wildlife
- Make gaps in your fences for hedgehog highways and routes between gardens.
- Provide feeding stations. **NB Do Not feed with milk (a killer) and no mealworms.** Use wet dog/cat food or kitten kibble and water.

Nest Box. Very specific requirements but it can be made DIY or purchased. See British Hedgehog Preservation Society website for details. The box location and contents are important. Do not feed in the box.

Hedgehog care: Do not attempt DIY care. It is illegal Their needs are complex and when found out in the day are usually ill and need a vet

and specialist care. They are easily stressed so please get them to a legitimate rescue provider as soon as possible. Hedgehogs are solitary, nocturnal and travel around two miles a night over substantial areas of ground. About 20,000 have been rescued in UK this year and returned to the wild. They are only seen in daylight when they're in trouble, except occasionally in mid-summer when pregnant females sometimes still feed just after dawn or in the evening twilight. If you see one in trouble contact a member of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society or the Hedgehog Helpline for advice.

The British Hedgehog Preservation Society https://www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk/
Hedgehog Helpline https://www.hedgehoghelpline.co.uk/

Albyn Austin/ Paul Brightmore

THE FRIENDS HAVE MORE WINTER TALKS PLANNED FOR SPRING 2025. PLEASE JOIN US

HAVE WE LOST THE LAST MEADOW?: LATEST UPDATE



Since the beginning of 2024, the FoFF committee have campaigned to have the tree-saplings planted in 'the Bowl' area in top meadow removed. You will probably recall that they were planted without agreement of Cardiff Parks department (our Rangers) or the FoFF committee, as part of the Velindre project team's obligation to protect Dormice within their European Protected Species Licence (EPSL).

Since the trees are part of the EPSL agreement with Natural Resources Wales (NRW), they cannot be removed until an alternative site, of the equivalent size, has been identified. Currently they are still there, but our continued correspondence with Jon Maidment, head of Parks Department and the responsible Councillor Jennifer Burke indicates that there is general agreement that they must be relocated from 'the Bowl', enabling this precious meadow-land to be restored.

The Rangers have suggested an alternative location to NRW, but this was rejected. Our latest update, in mid-December, indicates that another site has now been suggested. We have been told that: '*The Council has identified potential alternative planting mitigation within Forest Farm which involves the removal of a 316m long line of non-native cherry laurel shrub, not suitable as dormouse habitat, and replacement with native planting that would be suitable.*' This proposal has been put to the Velindre team so that they can propose an amendment to NRW for the EPSL agreement. We await the outcome.

Furthermore, we have been assured that '*While we stated 'this year', the planting season extends until March so we will continue to work on a solution and if approved by NRW remove the planting in the bowl and carry out replacement planting works during this time. If we do not have an approved scheme in place ready to be carried out before the end of the season, we will still request that the bowl planting can be removed and mitigation works take place in the next season.*'

It is reassuring to see that there is general agreement between ourselves and the Parks Department that those trees need to go, but we will continue in our role as a pressure group to make this happen. Naomi Brightmore

CHRIS JAMES AND THE FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM – A TRIBUTE

It was with sadness that we learned of the death of Chris James on 1 July last year, and we offer sincere condolences to his family and friends.



I was a newcomer to the Friends of Forest Farm in 2005 when I first heard the name of Chris James. It was evident that Chris was well respected and had a wealth of knowledge about wildlife. He was the person who suggested that there be a Friends group way back in 1989, (it was in 1976 that the Council designated the area around the canal as a Nature Reserve). His suggestion arose from concern about development when BT transport transferred there, using fields that were part of Forest Farm. The actual formation of the Friends group was due to the time and effort of Chris Powell (then Parks Conservation Officer for the Council) Wardens, Voluntary Wardens, workers from the farm, volunteers and supporters.

I found this on the web and include it as an 'unbiased' view! It is from a book "Capital Cardiff. 1975 – 2020. Regeneration, Competitiveness and the Urban Environment", edited by Alan Hooper and John Punter. Published 2006 by University of Wales Press.

' … in the rural fringe, however, council activity is often dependent on being able to channel assistance to local 'friends' groups attached to particular sites. … These supportive non-workers are well-developed in some parts of the city such as at Glamorganshire Canal local nature reserve and adjacent Forest Farm Country Park, where habitats and facilities have been enhanced. Elsewhere, governing green spaces at a distance, without supportive social networks, is more difficult.'

Chris was instrumental in achieving this recognition.

Already a Voluntary Warden, almost immediately after the Friends group was established, in July 1990 he led a walk around the Reserve, 'to see birds …a variety of seasonal hay meadow and waterside flowers and a range of insects, including dragonflies and damselflies, which depend on them for food'.

He continued to lead walks from time to time, wrote informed articles for the newsletters e.g. about dragonflies and Ash dieback, reports on walks conducted by others including esteemed members such as Dr Mary Gillham, and liaised with the Countryside Rangers on a Management Plan for the Reserve. Chris supported the Watch group too; although its name changed several times over the decades, this was to support and encourage children interested in nature. Articles were also written about the history of the Friends, the biodiversity and need to maintain it through management of the Reserve. Latterly, he joined the Committee.

As I said at the beginning, I only knew Chris when much of the above had already happened. I can only say that I found him to be a quiet, kind and helpful man with an abundance of knowledge and willingness to share it. He told me about the Parish Road, the old route to Tongwynlais before the A470 and the M4 were built, and he showed me the remains of the old Toll House almost entirely covered in vegetation, near the Iron bridge which I had passed many



times and not noticed. (The shell has been restored by volunteers from Tongwynlais Historical Society – see article in our latest Autumn newsletter).

How often have we, the Committee and ordinary members, said "Chris would have known about that".

Chris is survived by his children Bronwen and David and grandchildren. His daughter adds:

"Dad loved Forest Farm and really enjoyed his times there - spending many evenings preparing for his guided walks. As a child I can remember him practicing with the bat detector in the garden. He gained so much joy and peace from walking there and even latterly, before illness limited his outings he was able to walk familiar routes with David, his son.

He is deeply missed but we will continue to enjoy the reserve and remember him for his quiet and humble contribution to its development in our hearts."

All in all, Chris James supported Forest Farm Nature Reserve for well over 30 years. With his love of nature and concern to maintain biodiversity, what changes he will have been part of; what changes he must have seen! We are in his debt, but gratefully acknowledge his massive contribution to the Friends of Forest Farm.

Sheila Austin

You can read more of Chris's active participation outlined above by looking at the old newsletters on our website.

VOLUNTEER REPORT: AUTUMN 2024



On a bright and sunny Sunday morning, in October, 14 volunteers gathered at the Warden's hut. Not far to walk: across the road to the Dragon-fly pond (sadly still empty due to a leak). Armed with loppers and shears, we set about removing end-of-season vegetation. We cut back overhanging Dogwood, Hawthorn, Ash and Hazel to enable fresh growth during the Spring, whilst leaving an attractive border for the Winter enjoyment. At the entrance, we cut back along the ivy-covered wall but not too far since this is a site where Ivy Broomrape flourishes. Ivy is the host plant of this rare parasitic plant.

Fourteen pairs of hands make light work and soon we moved on to the next job, the planting of Welsh daffodils, with six- eight small bulbs placed into each freshly dug hole. On the opposite side, native Bluebells were planted in the same way. The hope is that these two lovely heralds of Spring will naturalise and flourish.

On 24 November, we were not so lucky with the weather. Storm Bert had raged all night, the River Taf had burst its' banks and the air was damp and grey. Amazingly eight brave souls still showed up for a productive and enjoyable morning. The task was simple, to plant more native Daffodil bulbs. These are tiny little bulbs, not like the large Daffodils you might plant in your garden; so the best approach was to plant them in small groups after first clearing a hole from roots and ivy. The area chosen was alongside the road, opposite the farm house, which we had cleared the previous session. Planting is always such an enjoyable and hopeful activity, so a lovely thing to do on such a gloomy day. I can't wait to see those little yellow flowers emerging in the Spring, and hope that they will naturalise and spread.



By 11.30, the job was done. The rain was continuing and so we called it a day and went home early after handing in our muddy tools. The river had by now overflowed onto Forest Farm Lane and so the return journey was a little challenging for those in cars!. On foot, we diverted back along the canal rather than risking very wet feet on the road. An uplifting morning despite the weather.



For the final 2024 session volunteers attended Forest Farm on 15 December, a damp morning but fortunately free of rain. The 15 volunteers undertook coppicing around the entrance to the car park to increase sunlight into an area where Spring bulbs had previously been planted. The coppiced wood did not go to waste as it was mostly Hazel, which is ideal for fencing posts when laying hedges.



Due to Storm Darragh one of the paths at the bottom of the canal was blocked and this was also cleared.

All in all, a very satisfying volunteering season. Thank you everyone for your efforts during 2024, and thanks to Alec for his vision and clear instructions. We look forward to seeing you again in 2025, when the first session will be on 26 January.

Naomi Brightmore and Martin Chamberlain

HAS THE MYSTERY OF THE STONES BEEN SOLVED ?

At the bottom of the canal there are two large circular stones that came from the nearby Melingriffith Tin Plate Works. What were they used for?

The obvious answer would be for making flour. However, whilst there was a flour mill at Melingriffith from at least 1215, these stones do not have the grooves that millstones normally have; although the base stones would have been smooth. Also, the type of stone (Limestone) would appear not to be correct for this purpose. Flour milling also ceased at Melingriffith around 1775.

Another suggestion is that the stones were for sharpening tools in the Tinplate works, but they would appear to be very large for that purpose.



Recently, there was an online discussion of the history of Melingriffith. One of the contributors advised that their ancestors were wheelwrights at Melingriffith. Could it be that the stones were used to form the iron tyres on wooden wheels? They do appear to be the correct size. Could this be the answer to the mystery? Does anyone else have any information or ideas to contribute?

Martin Chamberlain

MELINGRIFFITH MILL AND THE PENTYRCH IRONWORKS

Melingriffith or Melingryffydd was a medieval corn mill which was reputedly named after the son of Ifor Bach, Lord of Senghenydd (Welsh ruler). The problem with this theory is that Ifor Bach wasn't born until c 1105 and Gryffydd not until c 1135, by which time the land on which the cornmill at Melingriffith stood had been conquered by the Normans in the 1090's.

Melingriffith mill stands south of a series of Motte and Bailey castles built by the Normans, which extend from Morganstown - behind Pugh's Garden Village - to Ruperra in the east, to form the first border between the Normans and the Welsh. The Normans had brought the concept of Motte and Bailey castles with them from Normandy and one is shown in kit form on the Bayeux tapestry.

Another tradition has it that the monks from the pre-Norman monastery at Llandaf had operated the mill. In 1126 some lands taken from the church at Llandaf were restored, including the

chapel of Isuntaf (Ystum-Taf). It seems clear from the Llandaf records that Whitchurch had been a chapel of Llandaf prior to the conquest and that there could have been monastic buildings on the site of Melingriffith.

The mill was regularly damaged or destroyed when there was an insurrection against the English crown. Notably in 1295 "*there is a mill which was wont to render 14s 4d and it renders nothing because it was burnt.*" Llewellyn Bren the leader of an insurrection in 1316 once held the mill and the confiscation of the mill could have been one of the reasons behind his revolt. Throughout the medieval and early modern period Melingriffith had been the corn mill of the Manor of Whitchurch and it is likely that local farmers were obliged to mill their corn in the Lord's mill. This situation survived the building of the first ironworks in Pentyrch parish in the 1560's and its closure in the early years of the 17th century.

The works that stood on the Melingriffith site until the middle of the 20th century was between the Taff and the canal. It was a tin plate works although it also made wire and paint from the red ochre still to be found in the iron workings in the Lesser Garth. It was started c 1740 and by the end of the 18th century was the largest tin plate works in the world. As late as 1903 it employed approximately 530 workers and had an annual output of 17,500 tons of tinplate.

Melingriffith quickly became associated with the Pentyrch iron works. When the Pentyrch furnace was reopened is unclear; a Glamorgan record of 1745 talks of "*a road leading from Taffe River Ford near the New Furnace in the Parish of Pentyrch*." It was quickly linked to Melingriffith, first by carrying the iron bars on horseback to a quay at Gelynis. Here, it was loaded onto "tubs" and floated down to Melingriffith. Later a tramway was constructed all the way from Pentyrch to Melingriffith and a bridge built across the Taff at Gelynis. The tramway must have predated the building of the Taff Vale Railway(TVR) in the 1840's, because where the TVR crosses the tramway at Gelynis, wagons on the tramway, horse drawn in the early days, had priority over steam trains on the TVR.

The Pentyrch iron works stood on the west bank of the Taff, opposite Portobello, now known as Taffs Well. The remains of the Pentyrch Iron works were excavated and briefly exposed in 1989 before the building of a housing estate in Gwaelod y Garth known as Riverglade. Until 1792 the iron at Pentyrch was smelted by charcoal. There are numerous references to corders and "colliers" i.e. charcoal burners. The charcoal was made at Tir Mynydd Radyr, Cefn Colson, Cilynis and as far away as Llantrisant, Wenvoe, Llanharan and Barry. In December 1792 the new "puddling process" was introduced which used coal to smelt the iron. This was only a few years after Cyfarthfa and Penydarren had changed to the process. It enabled 15 tons of iron to be smelted using coal, where a charcoal forge only produced one ton.

Water was of great importance in the process both at Pentyrch and at Melingriffith. A holding pond was constructed at the entrance to Gwaelod y Garth to hold back the waters of the brook flowing through Cwm Llwydrew, between the two Garths. This quickly silted up and sometime prior to 1790 a better supply was obtained by diverting water from the Taff by means of a weir and a short canal. Melingriffith also had problems getting water and there was constant friction between the Melingriffith and the canal companies, often leading to legal action, because the Melingriffith company took water from the canal.

The Melingriffith Tin plate works finally closed in October 1957. Nothing remains of the Melingriffith works except for the huge pump. There are several brass bands which carry on the name of Melingriffith. The first was founded in 1798 as a Drum and Fife band which makes it the oldest Brass Band in Wales.

For more information: Edgar L. Chappell **Historic Melingriffith**, 1940, republished by Morton Priory Press 1995. Philip Riden, **Early Ironworks in the Lower Taff Valley, Morgannwg 36,** 1992**.**

Allan Cook, Radyr and Morganstown Historical Society

Follow the link to "History of theTaff Trail" for historic photographs: https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/wp-content/uploads/History-of-Taff-Trail-Tongwynlais-to-Llandaff.pdf

JOIN THE WORLD'S LARGEST GARDEN WILDLIFE SURVEY.

BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH IS BACK **24-26 JANUARY 2025**

Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's largest garden wildlife survey, organised by RSPB. Every year, hundreds of thousands of nature lovers like you take part, helping to build a picture of how garden birds are faring.

Last year's Birdwatch:
Across the UK, over 600,000 people took part in Big Garden Birdwatch 2024, counting a whopping 9.7 million birds! House Sparrows took the top spot, but counts of these chirpy birds are down by 60% compared to the first Birdwatch in 1979. In fact, we've lost 38 million birds from UK skies in the last 60 years. With birds facing so many challenges, it's more important than ever to get involved in the Birdwatch. Every bird you do – or don't – count will give a valuable insight into how garden birds are faring.
Taking part is easy., Relax and watch the birds in your garden, from your balcony or in your local park for an hour and then send in your results.

Register now to take part: https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch

LOOK OUT THERE ARE RATS ABOUT!

Recently several people have mentioned the number of Brown rats seen on the reserve, especially around the hides. Members of the November Nature walk also commented that they had certainly seen many more than usual, including baby rats. Squirrels have always been around where food is left for the birds, but their numbers too are increasing. On a recent visit to the hides I counted at least 12 around a single hide. We have been asked if this a problem for the Reserve.



Brown rats and Squirrels are genetically closely related. They are much larger than the other small Rodents on the Reserve, such a Field mice, Dormice, and also voles, and can cause significant damage if their numbers get out of control. They are not only scavengers, but predators, eating many invertebrates, smaller mammals, stealing bird's eggs, eating chicks and even the brooding parents. Rats are also a vector for disease.

Controlling their numbers is not easy to do, especially on a Nature reserve. A solution is needed, and soon, but what should that solution be?

They are a natural part of our local wildlife, but they are prolific breeders and populations can quickly get out of control. It is easy to help their numbers to increase by leaving food where they can readily find it. In particular, it is not desirable to encourage rats to the bird hides, where in close human contact they pose a health hazard.

We also need to remember that the reserve is popular for dog-walking; leaving of food such as raisins, grapes and fat balls on the ground where they may be harmful to dogs is also an issue.

Feeding birds, however, gives joy to many. At Christmastime, our grandchildren loved feeding the birds on the path towards hide 2, waiting patiently and with great excitement for the birds to land and feed from their hands!

Do we need to control wildlife feeding so that only the intended recipients eat it? How could this be done? Let us know what you think. We would love to hear your ideas please!

Naomi Brightmore

WATER VOLES

Unlike Brown rats, Water voles would be very welcome on the Forest Farm reserve and there have been several attempts to encourage them to move in along the canal bank over recent years. They require a reasonably long stretch of unbroken bank, which is why it is important to try and maintain the vegetation along the length of our canal. This has been done successfully at Cosmeston Lakes, Newport Wetlands and at most Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) sites. At a glance, these two very different animals may be confused, so read on to find out how they differ!

Notoriously shy, Water vole (Arvicola amphibius) could once be seen peeping out of riverbank nooks and crannies throughout the British countryside. Then, their numbers started dropping in the UK due to habitat loss. Even worse, the introduction of the invasive American mink decimated their population, which fell by up to 90% from 1989 to 1998.

Unfortunately, countrywide there is still a continuing declining trend in the population. If you're lucky enough, you might see (or hear) one. But how do you know if you've seen a Water vole - or just the common Brown rat?

Water vole vs Brown rat

Water vole	**Brown rat**
• Rounded, blunt face	• Pointy face
• Brown furry tail, half length of body	• Long pink tail, full length of body
• Small hidden ears	• Visible pink ears
• Furry paws	• Pink paws
• Deep brown colour (except in Scotland - they can be black)	• Light to middling brown in colour, with lighter underparts
• Will dive if alarmed - make a distinctive 'plop'	• Good swimmers but will not dive if alarmed
• Surrounding vegetation cut off at a 45 degree angle	• Feeding on things other than vegetation - rats are generalist in diet
• Leaves piles of droppings near water's edge	• Groups of oval droppings

If in doubt, and you don't get a chance to note the blunt face, seemingly spherical body and fuzzy tail, the unmistakable 'plop' will likely mean - it's a water vole!

Unlike water voles, brown rats are incredibly adaptable, larger and more aggressive - which can actually pose a threat to water voles and other species. To avoid attracting rats, it's best to use bird feeders that control the amount of food that falls on the ground.

Water vole spotting tips

Easier to spot during Spring, but can be seen all year round as they don't hibernate. Early Spring is the sign to get a head start on producing their young, called pups. The pursuit of finding a mate brings them out of hiding, and they're extremely territorial, despite looking so adorable! Because of this, they tend to be aggressive to their neighbours and therefore easier to notice.

The female Water vole will also deviate from her usual vegetarian diet to eat caddisflies and snails during pregnancy, so will be more active to find this food.

Water voles can be seen at a number of WWT centres including London, Slimbridge, Llanelli and Arundel. The Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) have a special project to encourage Water voles:



Why are Water voles important?

Once widespread across South Wales, Water voles are now effectively extinct in all but a few locations in the Glamorgan uplands. A native species, Water voles help control the growth of aquatic plants, which is turn cultivates biodiversity. Sadly, by the early 2000s their populations had decreased significantly, largely fuelled by 3 primary factors: predation by American Mink, loss of suitable habitat, and changes in land management. The recovery of Water voles relies not only on securing remaining strongholds, but also re-introducing Water voles from captive bred populations as well. Previous successful reintroductions in Wales demonstrate the importance of addressing all 3 factors which influenced their decline. Monitoring shows that these reintroductions have been successful. To secure the long-term resilience of this species, there is a need to build on the work and establish a robust landscape network to allow for further expansion.

Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust https://www.wwt.org.uk/news-and-stories/blog/how-to-tell-the-difference-between-water-voles-and-rats/

Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales Water vole Project https://www.welshwildlife.org/about-us/what-we-do/wildlife-conservation/our-projects/water-vole-project

HELP

Friends of Forest Farm is a voluntary organisation and we are only as strong as our membership. For us to remain active and valuable we need the assistance of our members.

We recognise that many of you already assist at volunteer sessions or Open Days for example. However, right now we need your input to ensure that we remain vital and thriving.

We need additional people on the Committee to provide ideas, strategy and skills.

Or could you assist with ongoing tasks - nature walks, help with the winter talks programme, articles for our newsletter and of course the Open Days. Perhaps you could assist in the development of new activities.

Do you have a professional skill, for example financial audit, or social media and IT skills (helping with website, Facebook, email communications). Do you have journalist or public relations skills? Other talents?

Please give this some thought and get in touch at : editor@forestfarm.org.uk

MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPH



“Phototherapy” by Ade Ward

For me Forest Farm has always been a place I can simply slow down and be able to relax amongst nature.

I’ve also had the pleasure to meet many fellow photographers and build friendships with some incredible talented people.

I was firstly drawn towards landscape photography for many years. However, after seeing the amount of wildlife that can be photographed at the farm, especially the Kingfisher, I decided to purchase a 150-600 lens to really capture this small incredible bird.

My favourite time of year would be early spring and autumn.

The early January mist and fog is incredible on the canal. You just need a crisp sunny morning as the sun warms the air. When the temperature is a few degrees above freezing the magic starts to happen.

The swirling mist from the canal and the moisture in the trees as the suns’ rays shine through the trees really are the amazing photographic ingredients I use.

Likewise, autumn is so photogenic, the light and colours are just fabulous.

It’s just a really beautiful place to photograph all year.

Personally forest farm is a magical place to enjoy a walk, but never forget to take a camera.

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 7.15pm

Friends of Forest Farm AGM THURSDAY 10 April 2025 at Ararat Community rooms, CF14 1PT, at 8pm		
18 January	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
26 January	Volunteering	Alec
24-26 Jan	RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch	
9 February	Volunteering - Hazel fencing	Jess
15 February	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
19 February	Winter Talk: RSPB Newport Wetlands	RSPB
9 March	Volunteering	Alec
15 March	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
19 March	Winter Talk: Welsh Beaver Project	Alicia Leow-Dyke
THURSDAY 10 April 7.15 PM	Winter Talk: Llanishen & Lisvane Reservoirs	Save the Reservoir Group
THURSDAY 10 April	**AGM 8pm**	Save the date
SATURDAY 19 April	Volunteering	Alec
19 April	Nature Walk	Sheila
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 MARCH 2025**



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/

The editors advise that all views expressed by contributors are their own. Published on behalf of The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Nature Reserve by Paul and Naomi Brightmore.
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