Friends of Forest Farm

WINTER 2025/2026 137

"He who marvels at the beauty of the world in summer will find equal cause for wonder and admiration in winter." John Burroughs



Welcome to 2026 at Forest Farm. The final months of 2025 have been very busy with some major engineering taking place. In particular, extensive work on the upper part of the canal and the adjacent areas. As well as making it more attractive it will give much better control and management of water within the reserve. A further phase of work on the canal is planned for the latter part of 2026. In addition, there is extensive reworking of the wetland scrapes in front of the bird hides, as we try to improve water retention and thus improve habitat for the wildlife. Please read the Rangers report for more details about this. The Volunteer Report describes some of the hard work undertaken by FoFF members with the rangers around Forest Farm.



Campaigning to remove the tree planting in "The Bowl' area continues. The initial work, due to start in October, has been postponed to January and then the trees will be physically removed in February. The restoration of the Dragonfly Pond is due to commence this year, with funding in place. We continue to hear positive noises about the rebuilding of the Barn, but sadly little is actually happening yet and no clear plans seem to be in place; perhaps our next target for campaigning. The Orchard has been rather neglected in recent years and action is now being taken to improve its management (see Volunteers Report and Events).

Our regular activities continue: the Winter Talks programme with interesting talks held last Autumn, about Red Kites in Wales and about Beautiful Bumblebees, and now with more planned for 2026 (see Events). Also the Saturday walks and the volunteer sessions. Some simple actions for members to do to make a difference: The RSPB Birdwatch in January (see article) and lobbying our local councillors to ensure funding for the canal repairs.

Our Best Wishes to you for 2026. Naomi and Paul

MY FAVOURITE PHOTOGRAPH - TAWNY OWLET



In April 2023 I came back late one afternoon from a day out at RSPB Gwenffrwd-Dinas when I heard that a nest of Tawny Owls had been spotted at the Glamorganshire Canal. I had seen very few Tawny Owls up to that point, let alone owlets; this is a strictly nocturnal species, unlike Barn Owls and Short-eared Owls which can sometimes be seen hunting before sunset. So I immediately left home again and went to Forest Farm.

Any worry whether I'd be able to find the owls was quickly dispelled when I saw several people with cameras and binoculars gazing at a spot across the canal. Despite being told where to look the owlets were actually pretty difficult to spot, in fact I only saw one, out of two or even three. I got a couple of 'record shots' and then went home again, to return the next morning. This time one of the owlets sat on a branch more or less in full view, with one of the parents perched in front of the nest entrance nearby. After a while the owlet lay down on the branch for a snooze, and that's when I got this photo. I selected it from the many I took because I really liked the owlet's pose and expression. The owlets (and their parents) could be seen for a few days, a memorable experience for many of the regular visitors to Forest Farm as well as quite a few who traveled from further afield.

I took the photo with my Nikon Z7ii (a mirrorless full-frame camera), a 100-400mm lens and a 1.4x extender. In order to be able to reduce the shutter speed to 1/200 (at f8) I used a monopod.

Frank Sengpiel

RANGERS' REPORT: AUTUMN 2025

After a hot and dry summer, when drought threatened the wetlands and the silted canal, the Autumn has been busy with the start of long-awaited work in these areas. It is pleasing to see the progress that has been made.

The work has mostly centred on the canal, at the top end from Middle lock and stretching towards Forest Lock *1. The canal had become severely silted, but it took a long time to secure the necessary funding and permissions to tackle it. Initially there was delay of several weeks whilst the presence of some pollutants in the silt was investigated and further permission granted by NRW to remove and place it in the woodland alongside the canal.



It is worth noting, that the purpose of this work is not just to enhance the canal appearance. A critical issue is improving the management and control of water levels within the canal itself and in the adjacent wetland (hides) areas, particularly important in periods of drought.

A huge volume of silt was eventually dug out; in places it was nearly a metre deep and the length cleared is hundreds of metres – that is a lot of silt! Currently it doesn't look particularly sightly, piled up in muddy banks in the woods, and it will take around two years for it to settle (NB: you are strongly advised not to walk on it - it is deep). One thing is certain, next Spring Himalayan balsam will begin to cover it because there are so many seeds that pop into the canal each year. The plan is to regularly cut it to ensure that it doesn't flower and seed, and this will be necessary for several years. Once the soil settles, we intend to replant the area, probably with more trees.

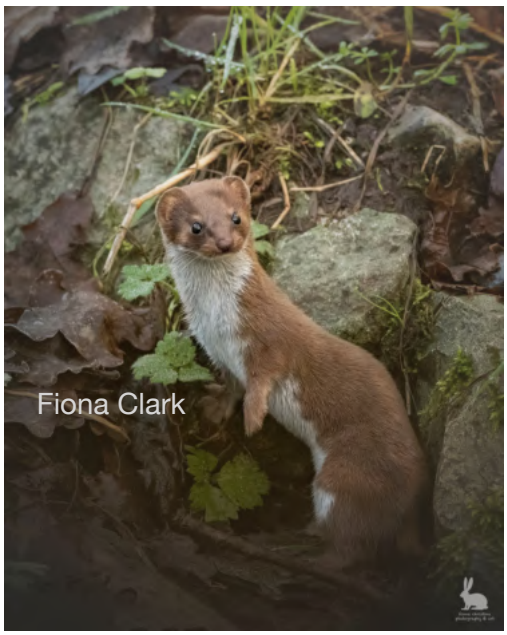
It has been great to receive positive feedback from so many people, despite the inconvenience of the mud and the temporary closure of the canal footpath. It is so good to see a canal full of water again, with restored footpaths. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time. Thanks also to Ranger Richard Connock and all the volunteer Rangers who have worked so hard to make it a success *2.



Not only does the area now look more like a canal, but a fast-flowing pebbly section has deliberately been created to make good habitat for Dippers and Golden-ringed Dragonflies. The canal is the feeder for the wetlands and so sluices and silt traps have been provided and feeder pipes unblocked. The banks have been reinforced and repaired, although there was insufficient funding to rebuild the canal walls completely as would be desirable. It is essential for the canal to stay full of water, so that the wetland ponds can have a constant supply even during drought. In recent years this has been a constant challenge and not always possible to achieve, as you probably know.



Water Parsnip can be seen even in Winter, and other water plants such as Sedges, Purple loosestrife, Yellow flag iris, Brooklime, Watermint, and Marsh marigold will soon thrive to oxygenate



the water and adorn the banks. In the Spring, the top end of the canal will be a wonderful green and watery place!

This work is the first phase of a bigger restoration project. However what is done in the following years to address the lower sections of the canal in the same way is totally dependent upon securing adequate funding. You can make a difference to the outcome *3.

Work has also begun to restore the ponds at Hide 1. Again, if these continue to leak the wetlands will drain dry. A feeder channel from the canal and new liners in the small ponds have been installed. Since the location of the main leak could not be found, a further liner is needed to ensure that the whole area remains as a Wetland. We know that currently the area is not as picturesque as you might like, but once the work is done and the Spring vegetation appears, the area will not only look better but will continue to provide a wetland habitat for many different species of birds, amphibians, invertebrates and plants. Thank you again for your patience whilst this essential work is done.



Wildlife sightings that have been regularly visible on the reserve during the Autumn and Winter include Weasels up near the BT buildings, and Redwings feasting on the fermenting apples that still lie on the ground beneath the orchard trees. Along the river and canal there are Dippers and Little egrets. Grey wagtails seem to enjoy the area between Hide 1 and the canal. Foxes are still very active and the occasional Badger has recently been sighted. Wagtails, Goldcrests and Goldfinches on the Burdock seed heads are numerous and there are many opportunities to see a Green Woodpecker.

Alec Stewart, Ranger

*1 Editor's note: For those who, like me, are sometimes confused by the lock names, Middle Lock is the one right at the top nearest to ASDA and Forest Lock is the one that is actually around the middle of the whole stretch of canal at Forest Farm. This is not entirely intuitive!

* 2 Editor's note on behalf of FoFF: We'd like to add our thanks here to Alec himself. He does not mention in his report the personal enthusiasm and sheer hard work and commitment that he has put in to these projects. Thank you Alec!

*3 Editor's note: If you would like to see de-silting and wall/bank improvements for the remainder of the canal also, **please write to Councillor Jennifer Burke**. Please thank her for enabling the work so far and the big improvement made, but also ask her to ensure funding is available to do the remaining sections. Remember there are important elections coming up soon and you can make a difference!

Jennifer.Burke@cardiff.gov.uk

A TALE OF A SILTED CANAL

I am Whitchurch born and bred (1952 vintage) and over the years I have been a constant visitor to the Forest Farm area. As a child I visited it with my parents, in later years I used it for fitness training in my sporting days, taking advantage of the solitude and circuitous routes, most enjoyable in the rain when you had the entire place to yourself and believe it or not, it's a place where my father took me for my first driving lesson (c.1970) along the quiet, farm, 'country' roads that once led, without obstruction, to the bottom end of Ironbridge Road in Tongwynlais, alongside the silted remains of the old Glamorganshire Canal. Over recent times I used it more and more for just pure relaxation and pleasure, until Covid came along, then every man and his dog turned up.

One brief but memorable story dates back to 1983. I had taken my 2 1/2 year old daughter to the southern end of the canal to view the wildlife, but mostly to see the new born 'chicks' that I thought would interest her. As we walked no more than a few metres from the point where the canal overflows into the feeder, a duck (Mallard hen) swam towards us, making a fuss, with just 2 ducklings in tow. We were just opposite where the stone wall is that once formed the walled embankment for Sunnybanks. It was an interesting display for us and as we stopped to pay more attention. I couldn't help but form the impression that the duck was agitated, swimming back and for, coming closely towards us, going around in circles, opening and closing her beak and she generally seemed unsettled. It was almost as if that bird was trying to communicate. It had been a hot summer and the canal waters were low. As I looked across to the opposite bank I noticed a duckling hanging precariously, upside down near to the top of the wall, in amongst the foliage growing there (Ivy, Brambles and other plants). The hen seemed to be swimming around, directing our attention towards it. I could not walk by and leave the stranded duckling there, but I had a problem: A young daughter by my side; an expanse of water of unknown depth, although it was shallower than normal; a canal basin floor comprising of mysterious sludge and mud: I had summer footwear.

Motivated by compassion and the chance to wear a super hero cape, in the eyes of my 'little one', I homed in on a few large stones on the opposite side that I could possibly use as stepping stones. There were a number of other large loose stones lying around, so I walked to the end of the canal to the water's edge, my daughter under strict instructions not to move. I removed my socks and shoes, rolled up my jeans and stepped gingerly across using the stones to step on while placing a few others in place for good measure. I faced the stone wall and placed my hands on it to steady my balance and I traversed along it until I got to the stranded duckling and then I noticed that there was another duckling also in a similar predicament. As I examined this one I noticed that it had become entangled in the network of bramble creepers, it was hanging by its foot and it had been hooked through the web of its (palmate) 'foot' by a bramble thorn. I held it gently and I unhooked it quite simply, the second duckling was trapped in exactly the same way and so I managed to release it from its fate and I lowered both ducklings into the water and they both made a quick welcome return to their mother. Before returning, I decided to take another look just to make sure that all the chicks were accounted for and unbelievably, close by, I found another and then another, all 4 chicks having been trapped by a thorn through the web of their feet. I unhooked these two in the same way and not being able to find anymore, I held them gently in hand and returned to my daughter with both 'balls of fluff' safely secured so that she could see them.

With the undivided attention of the mother duck I then showed my daughter just what a baby duckling looks like and then after a short time I lowered them into the water to the safety of their mother and family. As I stood with my daughter to watch the reunited family of ducks swimming happily together again, that mother duck swam toward us with her family in tow, she made all the movements and every effort to make a fuss and move her beak with excitement while staring at us, as if to say 'Thank You'!.... I kid you not.

I am convinced that bird was attempting to show some gratitude. It's something I will never forget. I can only assume that this was the first time that this duck family had been to the water and that they had come from a nest that had been built just on top of the walled area and in their first quest to take that leap of faith and follow mother duck into the water they became trapped in the way that I had found them.

Terry Chard, local historian

Editor: Terry also sent us 2 photographs of bridges related to Forest Farm. The attribution of them both is unknown. You may find it interesting to try and work out exactly where they were located.





TREES IN THE BOWL UPDATE: WINTER 2025

We had hoped to report to you that the tree saplings have at last been removed from the Bowl. However, just before Christmas we were informed that the tree works due to begin on 13 October were delayed and were now re-scheduled to start the week beginning 5 January 2026. These works, near Longwood Drive, include the removal of Cherry laurel, Japanese knotweed treatment, some thinning of selected trees (up to 10% of the canopy cover) and the planting of native understory shrubs. Since they provide additional Dormouse habitat they are a necessary pre-cursor to the removal of the Bowl plantings. Once completed, the planting in the Bowl can then be removed.

Also, separate to Longwood Drive, Velindre will begin a programme of small scale works along the railway cutting in order to achieve a change in the existing habitat over the 30 year period of their dormouse licence. This will include periodic felling of small areas of trees (10m x 10m), planting of species suitable for Dormice and targeted thinning of Sycamore.

I responded to this notification, saying that we were very disappointed to hear of the further delay, pointing out that in February the trees will have been in the Bowl for two years, and asking when we could now expect to see them removed.

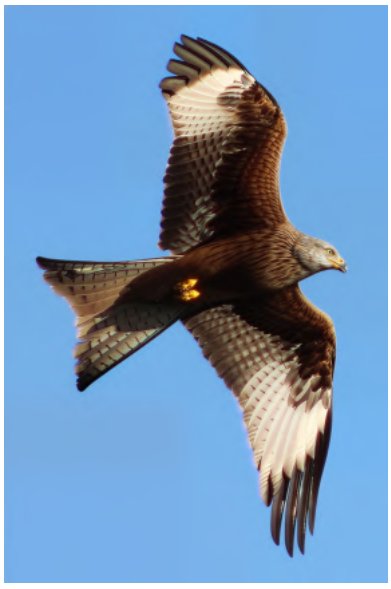
On 2 January, a further update was received, noting our disappointment and explaining that the delay had been caused by an issue in procuring a contractor. We were also informed that Velindre have advised that they will remove the planting from the Bowl in late February.

Further updates have been promised on completion of the tree works and removal of planting from the Bowl.

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM WINTER TALKS

THE WELSH RED KITE

The October talk was given by **Alan Oliver** about **'The Welsh Red Kite - How one small Welsh village and a few local farmers saved the Red Kite from extinction in the UK'**. Alan's talk was far more than a natural history presentation. He talked passionately about the village where he lived and the efforts made locally to save the Red Kite in Wales. He also spoke about the fascinating history of the Kite, and some of the reasons for its original decline, as well as telling us more about the bird and its' key features.



The Red Kite or Barcud Coch, has a body about two foot long (60cm), a wingspan of about five foot ten inches (1.8m) and a weight of about two and a half pounds (1kg). Its average life span is about ten years. Although basically a scavenger, it will also look for voles or earth worms. It usually mates for life, and usually lays one or two eggs each year in its nest which is lined with pieces of old rags or similar.

Once common across the UK, the Red Kite was first mentioned in English in 1392 by Chaucer in the Knight's tale - while two dogs fight over possession of a bone, a Red Kite swoops down and seizes it. Shakespeare also mentions it in two of his plays: In 'Coriolanus' he uses the term 'the city of kites and crows' to refer to London it is thought; and in 'The Winter's Tale' he mentions that they line their nests with rags. As well as the countryside, they were found in towns and cities where they cleared carrion from the streets.

It was Henry VIII who accelerated the persecution of the Red Kite with the Preservation of Grain Act of 1532, which listed 'vermin' blamed for destroying crops or killing domestic animals, including Red Kites. A bounty of one penny for the head of every Kite caught, (four pence was a week's wages). This law lasted for 200 years. As the birds became rarer the crazes for egg collecting and taxidermy also took a toll. The last recorded Kite was seen in London in 1859, in England in 1871 and Scotland in 1879.

However, a few survived in Wales. In 1903 there were ten pairs remaining, around the village and nearby farms of the little village of Rhandirmwyn near Llandovery in mid-Wales. The locals were proud of their Red Kites and tried to protect them with watches being kept on the nests. By then a Red Kite's egg fetched £50, almost a year's wages for a labourer!

In 1903 a lecturer at Aberystwyth University, J H Sulter, formed a committee to raise money to pay watchers to protect Kite's nests with the help of local farmers and the local minister, The Rev. David Edmondes Owens. By 1914, £80 was paid annually to watch the nests day and night. Owens died in 1922 but the work continued actively until the 1950's. In Llandovery Church are two stained glass memorial windows – one for him and one for the Kites.

By the early1950s the local headmaster was active in organising Kite protection with the RSPB providing funding. Captain and Mrs HRH Vaughan, were also active in promoting their protection and encouraging local people and children to watch them and observe their habits. The Captain was a local magistrate so anybody caught trying to steal eggs was shown little leniency. The Vaughans received RSPB silver and gold medals for their work. Only three gold medals have ever been presented by the RSPB.



By 1965 there were 15 pairs in the area. From 1965, trainee Gurkha soldiers helped watch the nests to ensure their protection. However, the building of the Llyn Brianne reservoir scheme in the area from 1962 caused major disruption and by 1972 there were only 14 pairs.

In 1986 work began on planning a reintroduction programme, as by then it was thought there was only one breeding female left in Wales. This programme needed permission from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and strict criteria had to be met.

The precarious state of the Welsh birds and their inbreeding meant the birds had to come from elsewhere – Spain and Sweden.

The first UK Red Kite reintroduction occurred on Paul Getty's estate in the Chilterns in 1989, at Christmas Common near Stokenchurch. Birds were gradually reintroduced from then until 2010, and today there are large numbers in the area.

In 1992-3 the first Welsh reintroduction began, with a feeding station set up at Gigrin Farm near Rhayader. It occurred by accident when the farmer saw kite's feeding on rabbit carcasses. In the 1990s there were about 150 birds attending the daily feeding. Now it's about 500! Feeding is really just a top-up to what the birds find naturally.

By 1994 there were about 100 pairs in Wales and the RSPB and the CCW pulled out of supporting the Kites, saying there were more threatened species requiring support. In response, in 1996, the Welsh Kite Trust was formed to continue providing support for the birds. In 1999 the Welsh Red Kite Centre was set up at Bwlch Nant yr Arian near Aberystwyth. In 2002 another centre was set up at Llanddeusant in the Brecon Beacons which also feeds Red Kites - about 150 to 200 Kites

can be seen feeding there daily at around 2-3pm. In 1999 the British Trust for Ornithology voted the Red Kite the bird of the century and in 2007 it became the national bird of Wales.



Today there are an estimated 6000 pairs in the UK, with 2000 in Wales. The bird has spread widely over much of the UK, but is still persecuted particularly in Scotland and Yorkshire (Grouse estates!). The birds are territorial and usually stay in their territory. Fledged youngsters have to leave and find their own territories. They have recently been observed over the Lisvane reservoirs and may even be colonising the Cardiff area.

Perhaps you will see one when doing your Big Garden Birdwatch.

(All photographs by Alan)

BRILLIANT BUMBLE BEES

This was the very apt title for the talk, given by **Claire Fidler.** Claire is a volunteer at RSPB Newport Wetlands and it was there that she 'fell in love with Bees' eight years ago!



She has become quite an expert and regularly leads Bee walks during the summer months, to introduce others to these intriguing, essential and endearing insects. She presented a wonderful talk full of information and brimming with her contagious enthusiasm.

In the UK there are 24 species of Bumble bees and an amazing 247 species of Solitary bees. In contrast, there is only one species of Honey bee which is not wild but farmed, with up to 50 thousand individuals in each hive.

Bumblebees live in much smaller colonies than honey bees, no more than 400 in a nest. However, they have a queen and female workers too. They form nests in a variety of places - in holes in the ground, old rodent holes, cracks in trees or walls or in bird boxes. Late in the year they also produce males, and daughter queens for the following year.

A black exoskeleton covers Bumble bee bodies and their colouration is due to the colour of the fur. It is thought that they are hairy because they originated in the Himalayan area. The fur fades in sunlight, so can make identifying some species difficult. Like all insects their bodies have three parts – head, thorax and abdomen and these are the main source of identification.

As well as their two complex eyes they have three light sensitive small eyes on top of their heads which just detect light and shade. They have longer tongues than honey bees enabling them to pollinate flowers that honey bees can't reach. When they gather nectar they also get pollen caught on their fur and legs. Back in the colony they mix with other bees and spread pollen between bees. They also 'buzz pollinate' by buzzing their wings to release trapped pollen.

Bumblebees are key pollinators of many crops and fruits. It is estimated they add £600 -£1000 million to the UK economy annually. They pollinate hundreds of billions of plants every year.

Without them the price of much fruit and other food plants would increase impacting on human health.

They are also important pollinators in gardens, enabling flowers to produce seeds. Some larger bees however eat holes in the base of flowers to enable them to drink the nectar without picking up the pollen!

In Winter the queens hibernate and in the Spring they come out to feed. She makes cocoons with wax from her body and food she has collected. When eight to ten workers emerge, the queen stays underground in the nest and the workers gather food. Early species emerge in February onwards with the latest ones emerging in May. Good weather is needed for the colony to survive its early days. Workers only live for about four weeks. In September the workers feed the eggs more, to produce queens and males. The males can't sting but they mate with the daughter queens and then these queens hibernate. Old queens don't usually survive the winter.



Bumblebee numbers are seriously declining which is providing a big challenge to the world. Decline is caused by many reasons – loss of habitat and fragmentation of habitat preventing males mating with queens from other nests. Also such causes as grass cutting, pesticides, competition with honeybees and imported bumblebees, and climate change. 97% of traditional hay meadows have been lost in this country. In 2024 the cold, wet Spring and dull Summer resulted in 75% reduction of the larger Bumblebees such as the Red and White tailed bumblebees, though the smaller types survived better.

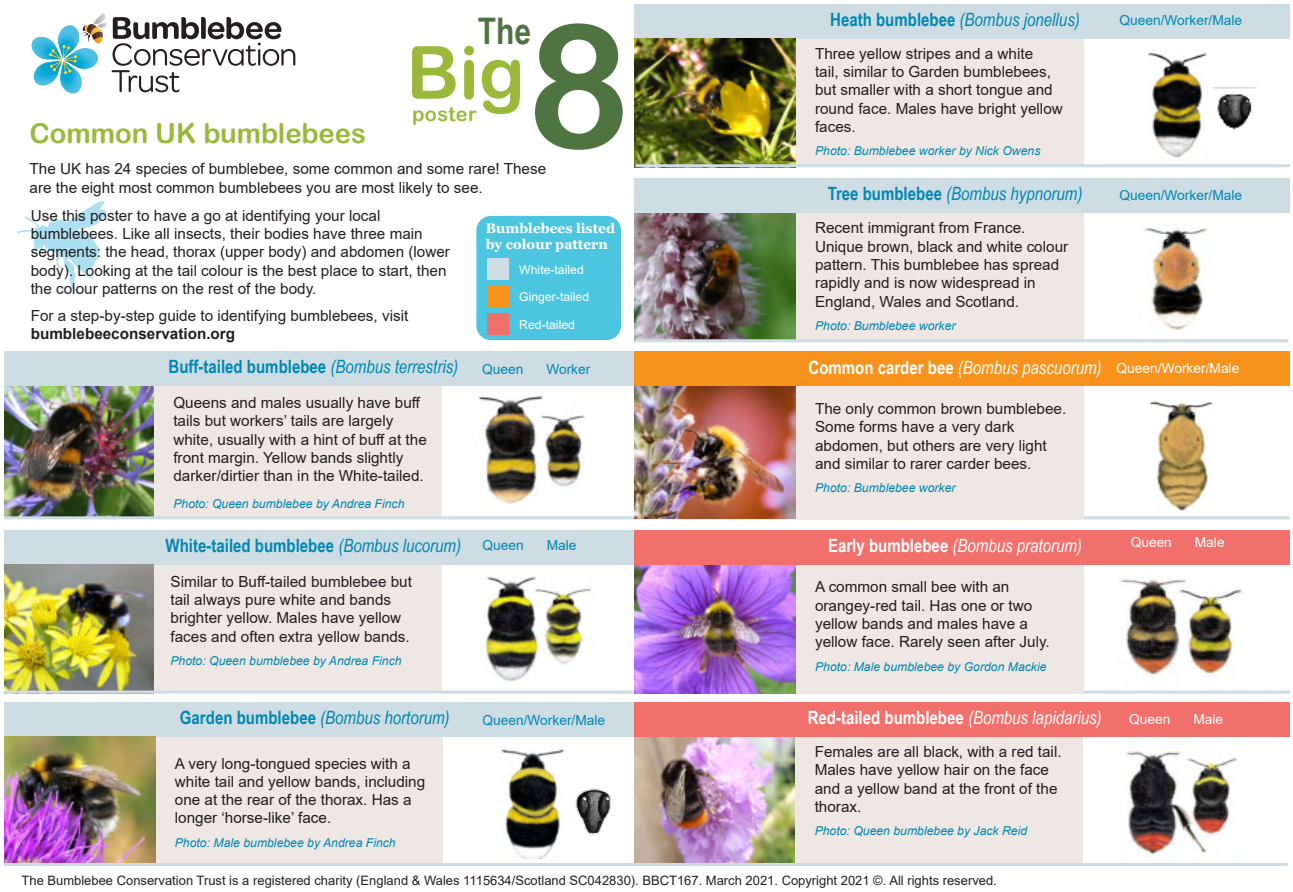
Of the 24 species of Bumblebee in the UK, 18 are social. There are eight common species, 'The Big Eight', which are:

- **Buff Tailed**. A large bee, the workers have off white tails and darkish yellow bands.
- **White Tailed**, which has much brighter colours than the Buffs
- **Red Tailed** is early and small, and all black except for red brown tail.
- **Early Bumblebee** is small and early. It has a red brown tail and two yellow stripes.
- **Common Garden** is slim and has a cream pointy tail and yellow brown bands with a long face as it has a long tongue. It is very fond of Foxgloves.
- **Tree Bumblebee** has a white tail with a brown and black body. It's an immigrant from France, but is now becoming widespread.
- **Heath Bumblebee** is similar but smaller and plumper than the Garden bumblebee.
- **Common Carder bee** is all brown, found in a range of browns from light to dark.

Newport Wetlands RSPB reserve is very good for Bumblebees. It has poor soil and deep margins with flowers, especially Wild sweet pea which flowers from late July. It has become home to two rare types of Bumblebee – the Banded Carder and the Shrill Carder.

Solitary Bees

Claire was also determined to give us some information about the 247 species of Solitary bees in the UK. They live alone in nests (not hives) in soil, wood, or walls, with females building and provisioning their own nest cells. Key types include **Leafcutter Bees** (using leaf pieces for nests in hollow stems or wall cavities), **Hairy-footed Flower Bees** (distinctive hairy feet, territorial, and love Pulmonaria). **Red Mason Bees** (using mud, often in mortar), **Ivy Bees** (nest in ground in



September) and **Mining Bees** (also ground nesters). They can also be easily confused with some species of flies which mimic solitary bees to avoid predators.

Solitary bees are vital, non-aggressive pollinators, with many species nesting in urban gardens, needing varied flowers and nesting sites like bee hotels or bare soil. They are 100 times more effective pollinators than Honey bees and 20 times better than Bumblebees, and some have very intriguing behaviours. For example, the Wool Carder bee collects fibres from the underside of hairy leaves to form a ball of fluff that it takes back to use in its nest.

A typical solitary bee nest can be 15cm deep in the soil with a series of cocoon cells to contain eggs and pollen, placed there carefully for food when the eggs hatch. Females are placed at the back and males at the front and then, the entrance is sealed in a variety of ingenious ways. The eggs develop into fully formed bees over Winter and emerge in Spring, the males first. The males then fly around waiting for the females to emerge. They mate and the males soon die, the females doing all the work to lay eggs, gather pollen and build the nests ready for next year's bees.

Claire wanted us to know how we can help, and so she talked about gardens and other urban green spaces which are now vital habitat for Bumblebees. She asked us to avoid use of pesticides, and to leave some long grass and untidy areas. We can provide bee hotels and small piles of vegetation. She asked us to grow plants with open flowers but especially wild flowers, particularly Comfrey, Liverwort, Crocuses, White flowering Dead nettles (feeds five species), Willows, Borage, Alliums, Salvias and Chives.

More information: Bumblebee Conservation Trust: https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/

Book: A Sting in the Tale: My Adventures with Bumblebees by Dave Goulson. A great read, both funny and informative.

VOLUNTEER REPORT: AUTUMN 2025

Sunday 26 **October** a beautiful day, when 10 volunteers, plus two willing children, reported for duty at the Wardens Centre. The task was to conduct coppicing and clearance around the Hide Two pond. A lot of Reeds had already been cleared and now it was necessary to re-coppice the small trees, mainly Hazels. This will allow in more light for Spring flowers and prevent the area around the pond from becoming too densely wooded.

When we arrived at the Hide, a Grey Heron was standing at the edge of the pond and seemed serenely unconcerned by our presence. We had hoped that we might also flush out a Snipe but sadly we didn't see one this time, although we did see some gloriously shiny brown fungi.







We set to work. As usual, large and straight stems were saved for use as stakes or hedge supports. The smaller branches, Brambles etc were piled up near to the remaining trees and will make excellent wildlife habitats for invertebrates and small mammals. We saw one, not so small mammal, running away from the area – an extremely well-fed Brown Rat who had obviously learned to benefit from the bird-seed around the hide!

It was an enjoyable morning and although there was still plenty left to do, we left feeling that we had made a difference at the same time as enjoying the fresh air and good company.

Novembers volunteering session was another bright and sunny day and about 20 people, again of all ages, came along to help.

We were working on the woody area between Hide 1 and the canal, a space that we have several times cleared from overgrown Brambles and from Himalayan balsam. The task was first to plant several hundred native Bluebell and Wild Daffodil bulbs, which will be a joy to see when the Spring comes. This was easily achieved with a little bit of cutting back to clear the ground, taking care to leave the beautiful Harts-tongue and other Ferns still in situ.

It was interesting to see the mossy piles of building stones amongst the trees, which are the remains of an old building, probably a house, that used to be alongside the canal in the days when



these woods were open fields. Martin showed an old black and white photograph of this, probably taken very early in the last century.

The next job was in a slightly lower area nearer to the pond. The intention is for this to eventually become another pond area and so it was necessary to start clearing the Buddleia that was growing there and also to coppice the



Hazels.

In this area was it was interesting to view the work taking place to restore the pond, ensuring a clear channel to keep the ponds refilled. New liners have been purchased and over the Winter the Rangers will continue this work. A very active Grey wagtail was already enjoying the increased water supply.

December: Yet another bright and sunny day for volunteering on the Saturday before Christmas, and a lovely job to do in the orchard. Alec described it as 'hacking rather than pruning'! Our task was to 'elevate' the trees by removing the lower downward hanging branches. This will enable better clearing and tidying beneath the trees in future. The removed branches were placed in piles around the edge, for later shredding.



The oldest trees are now nearly 20 years old and both the FoFF and the Rangers are aware that they have not been kept as tidy and well-pruned as they need. The work done will make them easier to access. I took a photo of Alec demonstrating the work required, and he can hardly be seen for all the untidy branches! Today was just a start, the plan is for the LNP and Wildlife Trust to run a pruning course in the orchard for volunteers and other interested people. The first will be in February/March and will be advertised on the LNP website. FoFF volunteers will have priority. NB COURSE IS NOW AVAILABLE: MONDAY 23 FEBRUARY, PLEASE SEE EVENTS PAGE TO BOOK A PLACE.



In future years, the orchard will be pruned twice, with Winter tidying, and more detailed pruning in

Spring/Summer. The trees are of all different varieties, with many specific to Wales. We agreed that it would be helpful to provide an interpretation panel in the orchard so that the trees and their fruits can be identified more easily.

Despite some neglect, the trees are very productive and there were still fermenting apples lying beneath some of them. The Redwings who have been enjoying them recently were hovering around waiting for us to leave so that they could eat some more!

What better place than a sunny orchard to enjoy Mince pies with Mulled apple juice just before Christmas? Which we did. 14 people made a significant difference and the work was done with great pleasure by us all. Thank you Alec for organising us and thank you everyone who came to any of the sessions.

Next session is also on a **Saturday** – **17 January** 10:00 am. Do come along!



HELP FOREST FARM

Do you love Forest Farm? Can you help us? Do you have a little time to spare and skills to share? Would you like to make a difference for your local community?

Friends of Forest Farm is here to support, safeguard and celebrate the wonders of Forest Farm reserve and canal and right now we need your help.

If you can help, or just want to learn more about what it involves, PLEASE get in touch now: editor@forestfarm.org.uk.

Friends of Forest Farm | Ffrindiau Fferm y Fforest

ENJOY PROTECT IMPROVE MWYNHAU GWARCHOD GWELLA

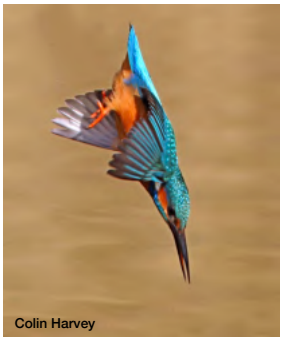
JOIN US HELP US YMUNWCH Â NI CYNORTHWYWCH NI

Diogelu, gwarchod a gwella Gwarchodfa Natur Fferm y Fforest fel lle o ryddid, hamdden a mwynhad, er budd y gymuned
Protect conserve and enhance Forest Farm Nature Reserve as a place of freedom, recreation and enjoyment for the benefit of the community



I Ymuno: To join:
https://forestfarm.org.uk/membership

Am fwy o wybodaeth:
For more information:
https://forestfarm.org.uk
facebook: @forestfarmuk



2026 BIG GARDEN BIRD WATCH: 23-25 JANUARY

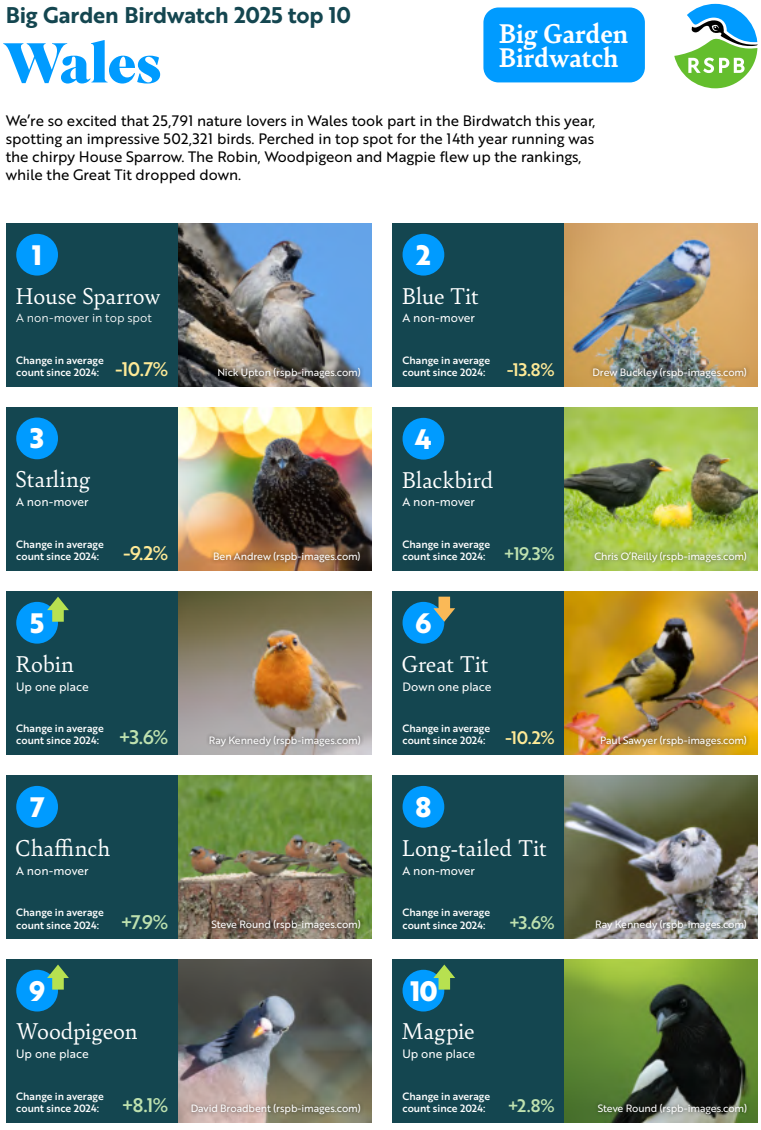
Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's largest garden wildlife survey and is organised by the RSPB. Every year, hundreds of thousands of nature lovers take part, helping to build a picture of how garden birds are faring.

Every Birdwatch counts: In 2025 across the UK, over 590,000 people took part in Big Garden Birdwatch 2025, counting a whopping 9.1 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 us a valuable insight into how garden birds are faring.

We thought some of you might like to take part and it's very easy to do so. Just sign up at https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch

You'll get an identification chart to help you. Then all you have to do is set aside just 1 hour to do your survey, in your garden, a local park or wherever you choose, and submit your results afterwards. It's as easy as that.

Here are the Top10 results for Wales in 2025.



EVENTS AT FOREST FARM

Nature Walks & Volunteering: meet at the Warden's Centre, Forest Farm CF14 7JH, from 10am to 12.00
Winter Talks: ARARAT Church Community rooms, Whitchurch Common CF14 1PT, 7.15pm
(NO BOOKING IS REQUIRED)

PLEASE NOTE AGM DATE: WEDNESDAY 16 APRIL

17 Jan	Nature Walk	Sheila Austin
17 Jan (SAT)	Volunteering	Alec
18 Jan	Cardiff Wildlife Detectives: Meeting at Roath Park Lake	
30 Jan (FRI) 10:30 Warden Centre	**Introduction to winter tree identification** https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/cardiff-local-nature-partnership-82029987383	WTSWW. Free, but registration essential
31 Jan (SAT) 10:00	**Signs of Spring**. More details at: https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/events/early-signs-of-spring/	Ranger Event £5 cost
8 Feb (SUN)	Volunteering	Alec
21 Feb	Nature Walk	Sheila
23 Feb (MON) 10:00 Warden Centre	**Orchard ecology and management: Training Session.** https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/cardiff-local-nature-partnership-82029987383	WTSWW. Free, but registration essential
25 Feb	Winter Talk: A Year photographing Butterflies	Frank Sengpiel
18 Mar	Winter Talk: Lisvane and LLanishen Reservoirs	Kathryn Buck, Ranger
21 Mar (SAT)	Volunteering	Alec
21 Mar	Nature Walk	Sheila
16 April 7:00 pm	Winter Talk and **AGM: ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**	Cardiff Bat Group
25 April (SAT)	Volunteering	Alec

For current information about events check our website or Facebook pages.
Wildlife Detectives: meet on the 3rd Sunday of every month. Please book on https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/ditectifs-bywyd-gwyllt-caerdydd-cardiff-wildlife-detectives-tickets-1977276798130?viewDetails=true
Ranger Event bookings required: https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/events/

For more information about Friends of Forest Farm: 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. CONTACT: **Email** editor@forestfarm.org.uk