FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM

and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

EDITOR'S FORUM

Welcome to the March edition of the Friends Newsletter! I am sure you will enjoy the various articles from contributors, but I am always happy to accept your interesting observations as well, which can be shared - or even your queries.

Please check that you have a copy of our A.G.M. notice for Wednesday 20th April.

Thanks again to all contributors, and to Robin Sotheby for his layout skills. Ken Patterson

The River Taff Basin - Litter Abatement Project

Over the last few months, Friends and Residents will have witnessed contractors, engaged by the **Keep Wales Tidy Campaign** (KWTC), undertaking selective brashing and litter removal from the river banks from Tongwynlais to the City Centre. Similar works have been undertaken up-stream from Merthyr Tydfil, Hirwaun, Maerdy and Treorchy to Abercynon. The stretch from Cilfynydd to Taffs Well was not treated.

The finance for the Cardiff stretch (**£50,000**) was met by the City Council, the Welsh Office Urban Programme and other organisations. By mid-January, a total of **264 tonnes** of material had been taken from the Cardiff river corridor at public expense. It is now up to each one of us to ensure that the banks remain free from litter. Is it possible that a **Volunteer Group**, with support from the Keep Wales Tidy Campaign, would be prepared to "adopt, manage, monitor and police" the eastern river bank from the M4 to the Melingriffith?

Comments on this proposal are invited and should be sent to:

Mr John Elias
Keep Wales Tidy Campaign
1B Stangate House
Stanwell Road
PENARTH
South Glamorgan
CF64 2AA

(Tel : 0222 712111)

Civic Award

Last year the Friends were awarded first prize in the Practical Projects section of the Lord Mayor's Civic Awards for the Access Ramp at the Reserve.

As well as receiving the £200 prize, we held the Practical Projects Shield for one year. This has now been returned, and at a Cardiff Castle ceremony recently we received from the Lord Mayor, Councillor Victor Riley, an attractive replica of the Shield - to keep permanently.

Eric James

MEMBERSHIP enquiries to Mr Tom Colston
15 Coed Arian. Whitchurch. CARDIFF CF4 2ND
Tel: (0222) 624606

Bird News

The birdtable disappeared last April; this February the last squirrel-proof feeder was stolen. There is left a mesh feeder and Tit feeder nailed to the Elder tree outside the Warden's hut. The **House Sparrows** have learnt the knack of extracting nuts from the mesh feeder and frighten off the smaller birds, but the Tit feeder is sparrow-proof!.

Easily made from a clear P.V.C. or Perspex tube approximately 1¼" internal diameter and 12" long; wire mesh for the bottom; bung in the top; loop of wire to hang it up by - and you have a Tit feeder!

80 bird boxes have been cleaned out ready for the nesting season; two were damaged by squirrels, one disappeared. **513 Blue and Great Tit chicks** hatched last year, but still no Pied Flycatcher; 10 boxes will be kept blocked until the end of April, when the Pied Flycatchers return.

The **Song Thrush** has returned in strength this year after ten lean years; **Goldcrest** numbers are up as well. **Kestrel** sightings have declined, but the **Sparrowhawk** numbers have increased. The **Sandmartin** colony on the Taff is thriving; the number of **Dabchicks** on the river is up.

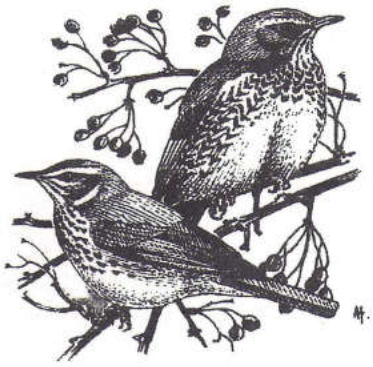
E.O.Edwards

Garden Birdwatch



Those birdwatchers who keep records of the birds they have seen have a busy time. As we are keeping a record only of birds in our gardens, we have only one figure to arrive at. If we have kept daily, weekly and/or monthly records, these should be up to date for November; this should mean only amending the records with December sightings.

Having decided to feed birds continually in the garden throughout the year, the number of visiting birds are up. The **total species of 36 for the year**, however, is only equal to our third highest total in previous years.



The cold spell in November, with some snow, saw an increase in daily totals, and for our garden included two new species. A **Grey Wagtail** was first noted on **24th November**, and has returned on a number of occasions since. A female/juvenile **Stonechat** paid a brief visit to the garden on **5th December**, and has been seen nearby most days since, mainly in the morning. These have brought our total of species seen in our garden to **57** since commencing records in 1987.

As a matter of interest, we also have a total of 73 species seen in and <u>from</u> the garden. It is interesting to note:

(1) <u>Which species are present each month</u>:

Collared Dove, Robin, Blackbird, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Magpie, Jackdaw, Starling, House Sparrow, Greenfinch (Chaffinch missed one month, which coincided with our holiday);

(2) <u>Which species go missing at breeding time</u>: Wren (April - July most years);

(3) <u>Migrant summer visitors</u>:

Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, House Martin (counted in the garden, flying through below roof level, as they feed in flight);

(4) <u>Migrant winter visitors</u>:

Sisken (has shown increases in visits from 3 months in 1989 - 91 to 5 months in 1992 and 7 months in 1993), Blackcap, Meadow Pipit, Bullfinch (all visited in November to January in recent years), Redwing, Fieldfare (vary, depending on the weather).

And so in January we started yet again on a new count ...

R.J.Williams



Don't forget the A.G.M.
Wednesday 20th April 7.30pm
Talk by Dr Mary Gillham

Autumn Fruits Foray with Mary Gilham

When Mary kindly agreed to lead a guided walk for the Friends on September 8th 1993, I was hoping for a fine September evening. It was not to be! Three weeks of sunny weather ended on the 6th September, and the rain continued into the morning and afternoon of the 8th, the day of The Walk. Fortunately the rain stopped for three hours between 6 and 9 pm, allowing enough time for the dozen members to enjoy a splended evening's walk in Mary's company.

From our starting point near Radyr Weir we walked the river bank to the M4 crossing of the Taff, through the Middle Section of the Nature Reserve, to return to our starting point. We were introduced to a bewildering array of seed types and fruits, and to the fascinating methods of seed dispersal by plants to propagate their seeds.

At our meeting place opposite the AB Electronics factory a large patch of the plant introduced from India, the Himalayan Balsam, **Impatiens glandulifera**, provided lighthearted entertainment as its seed dispersal method was discovered. The turgid seed capsules exploded at the most gentle of touches, suddenly to release and scatter seeds several yards from the plant. The energy for this explosive release is provided by a build-up of hydrostatic pressure within the capsule. On release of this pressure, the capsule splits open, the seeds leaving from tightly coiled 'springs'. This plant is a member of the aptly named ***Touch-me-not*** family.

Another introduced species, the Japanese Knotweed, **Reynoutria japonica**, a prolific plant found along the river bank, its sterile heart-shaped, three-sided fruits hanging in long thin bundles from the taller parts of 2 metre-high stems. As with many introduced species, it has few, if any, natural enemies, and has become a major pest, blocking streams and rivers, and overgrowing native species. How does it spread if its fruits are sterile? Propagation continues vegetatively by growth of rhizomes, which are underground stems. Spreading from one part of the country to another occurs when soil containing rhizomes is moved. Since its introduction over 200 years ago the plant is now widespread.

The preceding three days of rain had dampened the windborne fruits of Hemp Agrimony, **Eupatorium cannabinum**, Dandelion, **Taraxacium officinale** and Old Man's Beard, **Clematis vitalba**. These are examples of single-seeded windborne fruits, whereas those of the Rosebay Willowherb, **Epilobium augustifolium** and other willowherbs are examples of fluffy seeds released from non-flying fruits.

A wide range of trees were in fruit, the Hornbeam, **Carpinus betulis**, carrying large numbers of trident-shaped winged fruits. This tree, a member of the *Hazel* family, superficially resembles the beech with its smooth grey bark and oval leaves. Other winged fruits were seen; Field Maple, Sycamore, and the '*keys*' of the ash. Many windborne fruits were long gone; those of the Pussy Willow and Poplar, and the winged fruits ('*samaras*') of the Elm. The tiny samaras of the Birch catkin were present in infinite numbers and helped to explain the thick driftlines they had formed around puddles.



Seeds with a coating of sticky hooks presented examples of methods of dispersal achieved by hitching a lift on a passing animal - human, domestic or wild. Burdock, **Arctium minus**, Bedstraw, **Galium aparine**, Enchanter's Nightshade, **Circaea lutetiaria**, were all found. These reminded members of childhood games using the sticky seeds which have local names such as *Sticky Jack, Goose Grass*, etc.

A final group of fruits with fleshy parts so attractive to berry eaters concluded this highly structured and informative guided walk. Guelder Rose bushes were laden with crimson berries contrasting with the oval fruits of the Wayfaring Trees, varying from red to black. Bryony, Arum, red Dog Rose hips, black Burnett Rose hips, Blackberry, Elderberry and Dogwood fruit gradually faded into the gloom as our excursion drew to an end. Outside the electronics factory the white fruits of the Siberian Dogwood, **Cornus alba**, were beautifully displayed under the artifical lighting.

Those attending the walk came away with a greater understanding of the way in which the environment works. Complex fruits and seeds, the result of millions of years of evolution, filling niches, propagating their own species, providing food for animals and providing us with indicators of the health of the environment.

Chris James

Leisure and Amenities Guided Walks

A *questionnaire* was circulated at a number of walks during August and September last year. The majority of people attending were from Cyncoed, Rhibina and Whitchurch - a reflection on the concentration of walks in those areas. Most arrived by car; there was a clear concensus of opinion that the walks are mainly educational in character, **Natural History** the most commonly mentioned interest.

A complaint was made that walk leaders are inaudible at times; this problem will be addressed on future walks. The number attending the 'Friends' walks tends to be smaller, so this complaint does not arise, and walkers can be given more individual attention.

E.O.Edwards



[A full analysis of the Questionnaire will be given by Chris Powell in a future issue. Ed]

Please Do Not Feed The Ducks!

Last year, for the first time in my sixteen years of being the Reserve Warden, I witnessed ducks actually following people along the towpath, all but begging to be fed. While understanding the obvious pleasure families derive from feeding the ducks, and as much as I hate being a killjoy, I am asking visitors for their help in not feeding. This is clearly an emotive subject, but the negative results of feeding by far outweigh the positive. The **consequences of feeding** are:

1. **Pollution.** The uneaten bread breaks down in the water, promoting eutrophic conditions, contributing to the formation of an algal bloom.

2. **Bread.** Hardly the best food.

3. **Vermin.** Uneaten bread left on the canal bank encourages rats.

4. **Litter.** Discarded bread wrappers not only look unsightly, small mammals such as voles get enmeshed and suffocate.

5. **Taming of wild birds.** The Glamorgan Canal is a very special place, holding both Local Nature Reserve and SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) status.

We have fought over many years to try and maintain the semi-wildness of the area by careful and sympathetic management. This wildness, being the "very essence" of the area, will be lost if we continue to "parkify" it.

The new Country Park status can be a double-edged sword for the nature reserve. Along with the increase in numbers of visitors follows the inevitable corresponding increase in pressure.

Another drawback in taming wildfowl is to make them "Sitting Ducks" to predators, such as mink and man. On at least three occasions in February, two men have been seen in full camouflage gear carrying high-powered air rifles. On one occasion they were observed to shoot and kill a redwing. The police have been very helpful, sending three officers to assist our three countryside staff, myself included, in combing the area to try and catch the culprits. This time we drew a blank, but we did succeed in catching a couple of poachers with terriers and a lurcher; they were subsequently cautioned, and snare-wire found hidden in the undergrowth was confiscated.

Prior to this, a small vixen was found dead on the Reserve, a garrotte mark around its neck; it had obviously been snared.

Visitors need not worry that the wildfowl will suffer from lack of food, for during severely cold spells special wildfowl seed is laid down for them.

Mike Wiley

RADYR FISH PASS

The National Rivers Authority are in process of reconstructing their Fish Trap and Fish Pass at Radyr Weir.

The original scheme, completed in 1990, has been only partially effective; the revised scheme seeks to increase underflows through a straightened fish pass. The old structure contained some abrupt changes in direction which reduced water flow at certain times of the year. Salmonids such as Salmon are fussy creatures which rely on precise currents and *pherenomes* to entice them up stream if obstructions such as the Radyr Weir are encountered.

If successful, the scheme will allow passage to their breeding grounds in and around the reservoirs in the Brecon Beacons. Two more passes have yet to be constructed in the higher reaches of the Taff for the scheme to be truly effective.

It is being funded jointly by the National Rivers Authority and Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, and is expected to be completed by April 1994.

Chris Powell



Published on behalf of Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Local Nature Reserve

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The Editor wishes to state that all views expressed by contributors are their own, as is the responsibility for them.