FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Issue 54 *December 2004*

EDITOR'S FORUM — Ken Patterson

Robin Sotheby, who provides his expertise for the layout of our Newsletter has been seriously ill in Hospital. He is now showing improvement, I'm sure you will join me in wishing him a speedy recovery, Robin has long been one of our keenest supporters and a constant visitor to the Country Park. Honing his skills over many years, together with our contributors, has made the Newsletter one of the best.

Brian Bond, one of our committee members has stepped in at short notice with organising the layout, Brian is the editor of the Cardiff Naturalists' we are most grateful for his assistance at this time.

I apologise for a misprint in the September issue. The Reserve News referred to the head of conservation as Ted instead of Ted Jones.

I would like to thank Mr R.B.Fuse of Rhiwbina, a retired engineer, for his constructive suggestions regarding protective measures for the hides.

All contributions are appreciated including those of our members, Les Gibbon, Jean Taylor and Chris Jones.

Membership

by **Noal Gale -Membership Secretary**

Our current membership stands at 262 Families plus 2 groups. To date 12 new families have joined us, and 23 families have yet to renew their membership. Last year we had a record membership of 275 families and groups, I am confident that by the end of March we will have passed that figure,

Editor's Forum	1
Membership	1
Reserve News	2
Doing something positive	3
Whitchurch community gdn	3
Cardiff Heareld & Post	3
Velella Spirans	4
Treasures appeal	4
Tales of the riverbank	5
Friend's Web site	5
Friend's Monthly walk	6
Hide appeal	6
Letters from members	7
Forest Hall	8
T-shirts Etc.	8

Reserve news

By Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

Its great to be able to start an article with some good news. By the time you receive this newsletter the new bird hide will have been installed, (its due to be erected on November 2nd), and open to the general public. It will be nice to have both hides functioning again, with the new one once again giving views across to the winter feeding area. Many thanks to all who gave donations and made this possible.

I write this article at the end of October and we have just received the first half of the seed for the winter feeding program, (funded by the friends) I don't expect to start feeding for a while yet as there is plenty of natural food about. I have never witnessed such a good year for autumn fruits with everything coming together to give a massive bumper crop. Most shrubs and trees are laden. I have recently seen large flocks of goldfinches and mistle thrushes taking advantage of this bounty. One downside to this was that a very large mature beech came crashing down through Long Wood, ending up with most of its top branches in the canal. Growing on a steep scarp, (and constant rain doesn't help), but I'm sure that the weight of the large amount of beech mast and leaves was a contributory factor. According to the old wives' tales this sort of harvest is supposed to precede a very hard winter, let's hope the old wives have got it wrong, but I think that there is something in this country folklore , you never know!

Ken Patterson, (the newsletter editor), rang me the other day, not just to gently remind me that my article was due, but to say that a Mr. Chris Jones had written in asking if anyone knew the identity



of a lovely damselfly that he had seen on several occasions near the Forest lock. The description he gave of a large damselfly with blue/ brown wings and a weak flight matches the size. colour and characteristics - in other words jizz - of the Beautiful Demoiselle, (Calopteryx virgo). This stunning damselfly. first recorded on the reserve some fifteen years ago, has steadily increased in numbers. It is a truly magnificent damselfly with a dainty butterfly-like dancing flight. The male has the brownish/blue iridescent wings, with a metallic green body. While the female has a metallic bronze body. with the wings completely suffused with russet.

Its normal habitat requirements are for clean, fast flowing, pebble-bottomed streams, so the canal and feeder aren't by any means ideal for this species. This is why it tends to use the lock area of the canal where at least the water is flowing. It is one of the eighteen species of dragonfly / damselfly recorded on the reserve.

I was on the reserve talking to Howard Davies (one of our voluntary wardens) recently when we heard the distinctive mewing call of a buzzard. On looking up we counted two, then three, then five. then finally six spiraling overhead on the thermals, so it seems that they are doing well. The voluntary wardens will be continuing with the annual task of checking and cleaning the hundred or so bird boxes on the reserve shortly. Lets hope that the number of squirrel-damaged boxes will be down on last year.

Finally I'd like to end by wishing Robin Sotheby a speedy recovery after his recent serious illness. Robin has the unenviable task of turning all our bits of scribble into a very professionally produced newsletter. I'm sure that everyone who reads and enjoys Robin's newsletter will look forward to seeing him back at his computer!

Mike Wiley Countryside Warden

p.s I apologies for any mistakes in this article, but as I try to type it. our cat is stretched out across the mouse mat, and attacking the mouse whenever I try to move it.

Cardiff and District RSBP Local Conservation Group

Doing something positive

The Phoenix group unfortunately folded this June, nobody to follow on from those who have left. It is a shame as the group was very much a pilot for the RSPB Phoenix youth concept,

Over the many years the group had taken an active roll in the development of the Longwood drive section of the reserve. All is not lost as a small band of RSPB local members have over the last year been working away on the reserve.

September saw us clearing away some of the summer growth on the North bank. October found the group tackling the invasive Balsam in an area we had cleared during the early part of the year and were rewarded with drifts of the common orchid together with two types of fern and even a rabbit or two a first seen in that area.
It was with some alarm after talking to Mike Wiley to find that the Balsam had smothered out every thing else during the late summer and grown 4 to 5 feet high. Being a soft succulent annual you are able to literally pull it out by hand, flowers roots and all but it will be a task to keep it in check as the plant is cunning, has exploding seed capsules. December will have seen us tackling further scrub clearance.

January 8th Coppicing/scrub clearing (sort out those winter blues) middle entrance.

The group works for a few hours during the morning roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous work is similar to an active gardener (you work to your own level). If you feel you would like to get involved.....just turn up or better still give me a ring.
Hugh Harrison 029 20704889.

WHITCHURCH COMMUNITY GARDENS

Are you interested in Gardening and would like to help improve the environment in Whitchurch. A local initiative is being developed with Cardiff County Council and our Local Councillor to develop a community garden at Whitchurch Library. If you could volunteer a few hours a month to help with some general gardening maintenance please contact Martin Chamberlain on 029 20658488 or email m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com



CUTTING FROM CARDIFF HEARALD & POST 19-11-92

CARDIFF HERALD & POST

Nature reserve opens up to disabled

WHEELCHAIR USERS were given an official civic welcome to the Glamorganshire Canal nature reserve by Cardiff's Lord Mayor Derek Allinson.

The reserve has been asdapted to allow wheelchair access from the Melingriffith entrance at Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch after being funded by volunteers from the Friends of Forest Farm Additional funding came from Environment Wales, the Frazer Trust and the Lord Mayor's Civic Awards Scheme.

The Secret of a Time Capsule.

Most of us are more than ever conscious of our local history. Participation in helping to provide a record of the present for future generations Is an exciting prospect. I had this pleasure in the Autumn of 1988 at Forest Farm Conservation Centre.

The l7th century farmhouse conversion was well under way when a coin was found in the foundations Though not of any value, from this find grew the idea of putting a cotemporary record within the building. A container was required, so what better than a stout plastic box from the nearby superstore!

That was the easy bit. The vital question was, what items would interest future generations? This was anybody's guess; the new building could stand for a further 200 years! However, one thing seemed certain - there would be curiosity about the changing development of the farm, and the activities of the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. There would be interest in Information which reflected life in the 1980's. Bearing in mind that many Items of interest which seemed obvious would be well recorded in archives and museums up and down the country. It was decided to concentrate on Conservation and Local issues,

The Publicity Department had black and white and colour photographs and transparencies documenting the conversion of the farm from dilapidation to rebuilding over a period of five years - which I had helped to produce. Similarly covered were the activities of the various conservation groups based at the farm. Copies were made,. and these formed the basis of the "Time Capsule". Conservation magazines, reports and leaflets were added, including details of the Wildlife and Countrside *Act* 1991 and the New Community Programme.

Then followed practical items. The found coin, various badges representing conservation activities, and eight sealed packets of seeds, which included varieties of delphiniums, wallflowers, snapdragons, broom and pentstemon. A touch of humour would not go amiss in this record of the 1980's and so was added a staff payslip and. finally, a Tea Break Rota with attached to it - a tea bag I

A prominent person, with due ceremony, placed the 'Time Capsule* in a special cavity In the farm, and it was then sealed over. (Sorry, but my lips are also sealed!) We can only speculate as to what future generations will think of those folk who lived in the late 20th century.

Ken Patterson

Friends of Forest Farm Treasurer

I would like to thank every-one for their letters and the donations that were sent to me towards the New Hide. I believe Ted has an article about the New Hide in this newsletter, so I won't-say anymore on that subject.

Once again it comes to that time of year when we start feeding the birds for the winter. We expect to spend over £750 on bird feed. This could of course be more dependent on how long or hard the winter may be. Last year we spent £693 on bird feed and received £248 in donations. This was a great sum and I would like to thank you all very much. Any one wishing to make a donation for this winter feed can do so by sending a cheque made payable to "Friends of Forest Farm" and write on the back BIRD FEED to me at 63 Fairwater Grove West, Llandaff, Cardiff CF5 2JN.

As treasurer I would also like to thank members, new and old, for paying their membership fees and those who made open donations towards the funds, plus another thank-you for donations towards the hide and the bird feed last winter.

THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH John Harding..

TALES OF THE RIVERBANK

At the last AGM there was an interesting talk on the work of Sustrans to increase the use of cycling and walking to reduce car travel. For the last nine months I have taken their advice and commuted to work daily using the Taff Trail Cycle route.

This is the story of my journey to work.



Switch on the traffic report, 5- mile tailback on the M25, gridlock on the M4, accidents on the A470, I get on my trusted steed and prepare to cycle to work. As I cycle along I am able to see the improvements in the water quality of the River Taff as fish jump in the water. I approach Llandaff weir and watch the next Mathew Pincents training for the Olympics. Next on the route is the pot-holed path between Glantaf High School and Western Avenue which means I have to concentrate not to fall off.



Past Western Avenue the trail is smooth and safe I watch out for Squirrels (the record is fifteen in one morning) and I enter the Castle Grounds, I now cycle over to the other side of the Taff and look south to see the large colony of Mute Swans that appear to be breeding successfully. I stop to see a small bird diving and wait for it to reappear to my surprise it's a Little Grebe. Then as I cycle under Canton Bridge I am shocked to be greeted by a rather large Heron looking for his breakfast.

Now past the Millennium Stadium the final mile to work through the most urban part of the route I am greeted by the sight of a single scull rower (remember Banecek). As I approach Penarth Road Bridge something bright catches my eye as I approach its fly's off again no chance of misidentification - it's a Kingfisher in Cardiff City Centre.

Arrive at work, 5.75 miles in 23 minutes and the traffic report now announces the tailback on the M25 has grown to 10 miles long, I know how I prefer to commute to work.

Martin Chamberlain

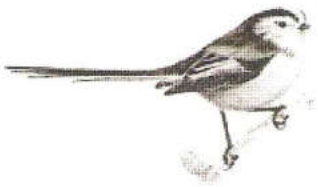
NEW FRIEND'S WEB SITE

One of the Friends has been working very hard to develop a Web Site for the Friends Of Forest Farm. The site will be developed as we move forward and can be viewed at www.forestfarm.org.uk

Monthly Friends/RSPB walk

We have now changed the walk to the third Saturday morning of the month and August provided a lovely sunny day, not many people, due to holidays, but we managed 23 species, including nice views of Buzzard, Green Woodpecker and Kingfisher. In fact, we've managed to see Kingfisher every month this quarter.





In September the weather was not so good, starting rainy, but soon drying up, and we saw 22 species (and quite a few grey squirrels!) - it was good to welcome some new members also. The October walk was characterised by the huge numbers of Long-tailed Tits and Blackbirds - they were everywhere! Another bonus was the Fox that sat in full view from the second hide. It seemed as if he was watching us, watching him! We counted 25 different bird species, in good weather.
The lack of the first hide may have affected the number of birds we see, and we look forward to the installation of the replacement one soon.

Just a reminder: We meet at 10 a.m. on the third Saturday of every month, come rain or shine, at the wardens hut, and everyone is welcome, young or old, beginner or expert.

Phil Baker.

THE HIDE APPEAL

In his article on the burning of the hide in the last Newsletter Mike was in the process of obtaining quotes for another hide and these indicated that the cost of replacement would be around £9000.00 The Insurance Assessor agreed that they will meet the cost of a new hide but as the old hide did not have fire retardant treatment the insurance would not meet the £2200 cost of this treatment.
Both the Wardens and the Friends are of the opinion that in the present climate of mindless vandalism this treatment is vital and the money from the appeal will be used for this purpose.
I am very pleased to be able to tell that at this moment (28.10.04) the Appeal stands at £1200.00 and all thanks to the Friends and well wishers who regularly visit the area for responding so magnificently. The other good news is that the new hide is promised for Tuesday 2nd November and should be well established by the time the winter feeding starts toward the end of November.
So the bills will start coming in very shortly and if there are any who have not as yet made a donation towards a new hide but wish to do so please do it soon. We need to gather in at least another £1000. Thank you all for your support.
E.O.Edwards

LETTERS FROM MEMBERS

From Chris Jones:-

Dear "Friends"

Please accept my apologies for late payment. I love walking around the canal and noting all the wildlife and I am gladden that so many other people appreciate all your efforts as to upkeep and conservation.

Like you, I was horrified to see the hide burnt down. I often wonder whether a viewing wall would be less targeted, but I understand that a building would be more appropriate for providing shelter. Unfortunately that is also what so-called 'board' young people want as well.

Than you for delivering the newsletter. I would like to pose one question *and wonder if a entomology expert could answer it for me. I have often wondered what the name of those beautiful, dark-turquoise / brown, weak flying largish damselflies are commonly known as. They occur mostly by the lock in May/June. I've never seen them anywhere else.

Thanks again

*Editors note.– See reply in Mike Wiley's article (our expert warden on all maters to do with the reserve)

From Joan Taylor:-

Once again we have enjoyed reading our "Friend's" newsletter, the good and the bad news. It's a nice comforting feeling to know there are so many like minded people in our midst.

Shall I tell you about the pleasure we have with our small garden in Llandaff. We feed all birds, all wild life that visit, garden plants, our mad cat Maddy, our three lovable little grand daughters, we have room for them all.

They give us great joy, fun and laughter. The good, bad and ugly we are all together in our garden. Our grand children learn so much from this:- Seagulls, jackdaws magpies, a pair of jolly grey squirrels all are welcome. Nature sorts itself out and as our Countryside Warden said:- The greatest threat to the environment! We only have to look in the mirror.

Our grand daughters Amelia 5 years, Ffion 3 years, Hana-Mae 2 years are learning now for the future.

Keep up the good work

Thank for your interesting comments .Editor

Forest Hall by Les Gibson

This was a delightful looking house set in it's own grounds where the picnic area is now situated. Going up the drive there were two red clay tennis courts which were always kept in good condition, my friend Mr. Doug Rees sprayed these courts on a regular basis. There were stables, a nice orchard a well and bees were kept at the back. When I was seventeen I worked at this house with Mr. Noah Rees-Dougs father we repointed the chimney stacks, as a lad I remember Mr. Shirley Gazard who was the manager of the tinplate works living there. On the weekend he rode a brown horse and wore proper ridging gear and would say hello to us boys. He then went to live at Swansea. When I was employed at the works the manager was Mr. Bert King who also lived at Forest Hall. He had three brothers who were tradesmen at the works. The last person to live at Forest Hall was Mervyn Thomas a farmer, his brother Arthur also lived in Forest Hall. They also had a farm at Ty Rhiw and worked both farms between them. When the lease was up and Mervyn moved out the boys got in and wrecked the place. I saw it like this, it was a crying shame. The house was then knocked down a sad fate for such a lovely house. Local people still talk about it, before closing I would like to mention a lady I know– Gladys Lloyd who was a maid at the house for 7 years.



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