FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 55 MARCH 2005

Editor's Forum

Ken Patterson

I am pleased to announce that my friend Robin Sotheby's health is steadily improving. He is now keen to give his services again with the layout of the Newsletter, which is much appreciated.

The time has come to give our thanks for the work done by those members of the Friends Committee who are now stepping down.

When I joined the founding group in 1990 I never envisaged the great strides that would be made in the development of the Country Park. Without the dedication of the committee, then and now, it is difficult to gauge what state it would have been in. Certainly, the thriving membership would not have existed.

Our retiring Chairman, who has carried out his duties in a very modest way, should be highlighted. He has written a glowing tribute to our retiring Secretary's work—but what of his record?

Ted joined the founding group as Treasurer, but soon became Chairman. His steadfast resolution to lead the Friends with a determination to improve the Country Park, despite difficulties and setbacks, should be recognised and applauded.

Thank you, all contributors to the Newsletter. I look forward to seeing you at our AGM. We need a good turnout.

As a prelude to Mike Wiley's article on page 2, may I mention that many people, including Mr Derek Hector, have expressed their concern on the recent increase in rabbitting and fishing in the Park. Mike has included this in his comments on the many undesirable incidents which have occurred.

Editor

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Reserve News

by Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

This winter has seen a huge explosion of **Waxwings** to this country. This lovely little bird (about the size of a small starling with a prominent crest, a back throat, white and yellow wing markings, and a yellow tip to the tail) visits Britain every year. It is generally in small numbers, and is more likely to be found on the eastern side of the country. To have over a thousand birds in the South Glamorgan area is a rarity indeed. Reports of flocks have been coming in thick and fast. The first one I heard was that they were in Brecon, then Aberdare and Merthyr, moving down until soon they were being seen all over Cardiff. I was fortunate to witness a small flock of seven or eight flying through the Reserve. Their main source of food is berries, and they are not fussy where they take them. Supermarket car parks are a good source, where ornamental species of **Rowan**, bearing yellow berries, are planted for their aesthetic qualities. Once found, these trees are soon stripped bare before the birds move on. Here, on the Reserve, most of the berry-bearing trees have already been denuded by our thrushes. By the time I write this article (February 13th), most of these birds will have carried on southwards down to Devon and Cornwall, but they will soon have to make the return journey to northern Europe/Siberia before the spring. Still, it was nice while it lasted.



Waxwing

Mr Ken Patterson, the Newsletter editor, again rang to remind me gently that my article was due, and to say that one of the Friends had written in, commenting on the increase in adults rabbitting and fishing on the Reserve in the past months. I can sympathise with this person, and add problems with adults shooting birds in Long Wood. There was also a gang of youths stacking timber against a tree and setting fire to it, trying to burn down a two-hundred-year-old Beech, and throwing branches at me as I tried to dowse the fire. I'm glad to say that, after dialling 999, the police were very quick in responding; a police helicopter was sent up, and it soon spotted these boys near the River Taff. They were apprehended, handcuffed and locked in the back of the police van. It turned out that, prior to them coming on to the Reserve, a caravan was set alight at the nearby High School Old Boys Rugby Club, but as there were no witnesses who saw them actually starting the fires, they were to be released. I naively thought that their arrest and incarceration would have put the fear of God into them, but they were just laughing in the back of the police van—a sign of the times, I suppose.

Autumn/Winter is an extremely busy period for us, when we carry out woodland management, coppicing, thinning, etc. It must be pointed out that, although we are based at Forest Farm, and spend a good deal of time on the Reserve, it isn't the only area we cover. We also manage far larger areas to the north-east of Castell Coch, including the Wenallt, Forest Ganol, Cwm Nofydd and Tranch yr Hebog. You know the old adage about trying to be in two places at once. Well, on a few occasions recently, I've been trying to be in at least six places at once. I can assure you it's not only very frustrating, but can be very stressful. … but that's enough of me moaning. I'm looking forward to the Spring when, hopefully, things will be a bit quieter, but I won't be holding my breath.

Our woodland management on the Nature Reserve this Autumn/Winter forms part of a woodland grant scheme. It takes in three areas …

Area 1—the small plantation running parallel to the Melingriffith Feeder between the two Bird Hides, which we thinned out.

Area 2—the woodland abutting British Telecom. In this area some of the trees were thinned. The shrubs (mostly hazel) were coppiced.

Area 3—the southern end of Long Wood. This area was thinned. Ninety percent of the trees taken out were Sycamore.

Without going into too much detail (if I'm not careful, the Editor will be cutting this article), the main aim of this form of woodland management is to create biodiversity. Very basically, this means creating variability within these habitats.

MEMBERSHIP

Our latest count of Membership is **275 families** and **2 Groups**. This is the highest figure reached since our Group was formed in 1990.

Many thanks for your continued support, and a special welcome to members who have joined us during the past year.

N.J.Gale - Membership secretary

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Our new year (2005-2006) will shortly be on us. A Membership Renewal Form can be found on the A.G.M. notice enclosed with your Newsletter.

We have kept the Annual Subscription at £5 for both families and individual members.

SECRETARY PLANNING TO RESIGN

EDWARD OWEN EDWARDS

Dennis Davies, who has been Secretary of the Friends since it was formed on March 28th 1990, and has given excellent service and advice over the years, has indicated that he will be stepping down at the coming A.G.M.

Dennis, with his vast experience of the workings and machinations of the various local committees, helped enormously—especially during the nine long years of fighting the proposals for the development of the Hospital Meadows. He fought long and hard to obtain money for the various projects on the Reserve, and made sure I was not over generous in spending it.

His biggest project was the formation of the Wetlands/Access and Hide which needed £35,000. He wrote and sent out 150 appeal letters to various bodies, and 15 came up with the money.

I could mention many, many more projects that he has been concerned with, as well as doing the normal secretarial duties, but this Newsletter is not big enough. Suffice to say that he has done a good job quietly and efficiently, and it has been a joy to work alongside him during these past 15 years.

The Chairman, Secretary, and the Treasurer are all stepping down at the A.G.M. on Wednesday, 13th April; so do come along to help in constructing a Committee to take the Friends on into the future.

Edward Owen Edwards

HIDE APPEAL

Thanks to your generous response to the Appeal, a new Hide is in place, and is fully functional. The only bit of work outstanding is the fitting of viewing panels in the fencing on either side of the hide. **Mike** and **Paul** have already started on that work.

The Appeal raised £1735; a grant from the **Environment Agency** of £750 brought the total to £2485. This is adequate to cover the additional cost of fire retardant treatment; any surplus will be put into the general fund for Hide maintenance.

Thank you all for your support and generosity. Do come along to enjoy the sight of a mass of assorted birds gorging themselves at the feeding station, all in full breeding plumage and wildly excited at the prospect of another successful breeding season.

E.O.E.

MONTHLY FRIENDS/RSPB WALK

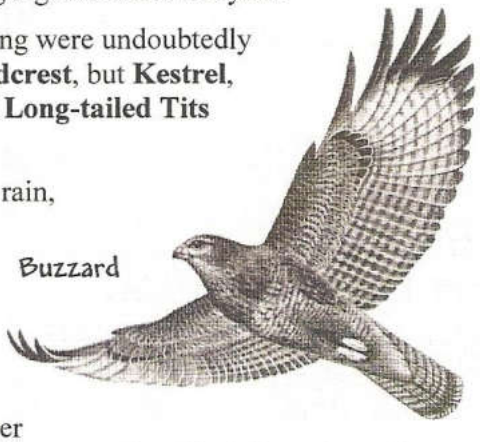
PHIL BAKER

It was a joy to be able to use the new Hide on our walks—especially in November, when we sheltered from the rain and cold! Despite the weather, our 25 species included **Bullfinch** and **Little Grebe**, visible from the new hide. **Snipe** and **Water Rail** were visible from the other hide, and we saw the white bird re-appear after its summer break! (I don't know where it was during the summer, but we haven't seen it on the monthly walks all summer).



A fine December day gave us a total of 34 species. A **Buzzard** at the last minute giving a great end to the year.

Highlights of the morning were undoubtedly **Tree Creeper** and **Goldcrest**, but **Kestrel**, **Water Rail**, **Snipe** and **Long-tailed Tits** were also enjoyable.



January saw a damp start to the new year; it turned into serious rain, causing us to abandon our full route, heading for home after sheltering a while in the second hide.

Even so, we recorded 31 species, with a **Raven** flying over being the *bird of the day*. It was again good to watch the variety of birds at the feeding station from the new hide.

As you can see, come rain or shine, there are a surprising number of birds to be seen and enjoyed. Why not join us? We meet at **10 a.m.** on the **third Saturday** of every month, at the **Wardens Hut**. Everyone is welcome, young or old, beginner or expert.

Website Developments

In previous Newsletters there have been updates concerning the developments of our website. One of the Friends (**David Bevan**) has been working away on new and better options, the latest being the ability to post items on the notice board concerning news from the Reserve. The website is an excellent way of getting information quickly to our members. Visit … www.forestfarm.org.uk … and tell us what you think of the work so far, and what you would like to see.

Martin Chamberlain email **m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com** or phone **029 2065 8488**

MELINGRIFFITH TINPLATE WORKERS

Les Gibbon



Some of the workforce at M.G. Tinplate Works about 1944.

A little of family history … the man with the tie on is my father, Tom, who was foreman of the works. Fourth man from the right is Doug Rees, whose son Paul married my daughter Cherie. The man behind the lady with the light dress on is Charlie Bodman. On the far left is Louise Yorath; her brother John was a doubler in the mills. Both still live in Whitchurch.

Behind the group runs the Pound or Feeder. There were always a few swans at this point. They did quite well, as people would throw them titbits from the bridge. On a Saturday morning the Feeder was emptied for cleaning purposes. Mr Bill Donne, who drove a coal-fired steam crane, took the crane up to the weir and cleared silt or debris that had built up over the week. The Feeder had to be kept clear, as it drove the big wheel inside the works. At that time it was believed to be the second largest wheel in the world; it was 36 feet in diameter, weighed 120 tons, and revolved at 60 m.p.h.

'WHITCHURCH IN LIVING MEMORY'

I would like to tell you about a new Video/DVD called 'Whitchurch in Living Memory'. I recently launched this project in my role as a volunteer Support Officer for the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme in Wales—part of Community Service Volunteers, a national charity.

Though written histories of Whitchurch exist, this was the first attempt to record personal memories of people who lived and worked in the area in the early part of the 20th century. It covers **Forest Farm**, **Melingriffith Works**, **Whitchurch Hospital**, **Shopping Centre**, **Churches**, **Schools** and **Leisure**. With these memories on tape, accompanied by slides of old postcards, it required a bulky slide/sound projector, which needed setting and operating; eventually it ceased to be used.

Not wishing this historical record to be lost, I approached **Harley Jones**, a local expert on films and video, for its reconstruction. Not without problems, I followed it every step of the way for over four months until completed in the form of Video and DVD. I was delighted with the support I received from my organisation which enabled this project to be achieved. As originally envisaged, I wanted to introduce the Video/DVD to the general public, and for its use in schools as an example of our heritage.

Videos are £10 each. DVDs are £12. To order, please phone me on **029 2019 8658**.

This will enable me to recoup the cost for my organisation.

Ken Patterson

WATCH

FOREST FARM WATCH CLUB EVENTS 2005

All meetings to be held on **Saturday** mornings from **10 am - 12 noon** at the **Wardens Centre, Forest Farm**, unless otherwise stated. 'Watch' is designed for children between 8 and 12 years; however, younger children will be accepted if accompanied by an older sibling or adult. Please bring waterproof clothing and wellies on all occasions.

April 30 **Spring Flower Card Making** We will be hunting for Spring flowers to help make our cards and making leaf viewers for close-up detail—these can be taken home.

May 28 **Scavenger Hunt and Bird Hide Watch** A chance to have a real exploration of the trees and hedgerows before some bird-watching at the Bird Hide.

June 25 **Big Bug Hunt at Llanishen Park** We will be joining in the hunt for the Big Bugs within the woodlands and the pond. Don't worry, they're not that big! Please meet at the changing rooms, Llanishen Park.

Other events this year are on ... **July 30** **August 27** **September 24** **October 29** **December 3.**

For further details and booking, please contact **Kevin** on **029 2044 5903** or **07976 011 765**

'Watch' is the junior wing of the **National Wildlife Trusts**, operating throughout the UK. Members receive a newsletter and lots of information about wildlife campaigns and events.

Forest Farm Watch group has been revived, following a short break, after operating for many years in the Warden Centre at Forest Farm. The group, led by the **Councils Park Ranger Service**, will be involved in lots of activities, including **Otter Holts**, making **Nest Boxes** and **Bird Feeders**, as well as exploring and discovering nature at first hand.

If you would like to come to one of the meetings, or require further information, please contact

Paul Davies on **029 2061 2213** or **Kevin Date** on **029 2044 5903**

SPRING CLEAN AT FOREST FARM

On **Sunday April 3rd** the Friends will undertake their annual spring clean of the Nature Reserve. Why not come along and discover parts of the Reserve you never knew existed, and at the same time remove litter that is dangerous to wildlife. This is not hard manual work, but similar to gentle gardening; and you can work at your own pace.

Meet at the **Wardens Centre** at **10 am**. All equipment will be supplied. We should be finished by midday.

For more information, please contact ... **Martin Chamberlain**

Telephone on **029 2065 8488** or email at **m.chamberlain1@ntlworld.com**

or visit our website **www.forestfarm.org.uk**

*Here are some advance details of the **indoor meetings**, and **the outing**, that have been arranged for the remainder of our programme up to April 2006.*

A.G.M. - 7.30 pm Wednesday 13th April 2005

The Birds and the Bees **Dr Tim Taylor**, Senior Lecturer in Music at Cardiff University, will explore how composers have depicted birds and insects in their music, with a range of fascinating recorded musical illustrations. A musical evening with a difference.

7.30 pm Wednesday 9th November 2005

Cosmeston Country Park **Mr Jeff Curtis** will be giving a very interesting, illustrated talk on this much-visited local facility.

7.30 pm Wednesday 11th January 2006

Wildlife within the Cardiff Area An illustrated talk given by **Mrs Linda Nottage**, the former president of **Cardiff Naturalists' Society**.

7.30 pm Wednesday 8th March 2006

The Conservation Aspects of Llandegfedd Reservoir An illustrated talk given by **Miss Rebecca Ward**, an Educational Officer for **United Utilities.**

7.30 pm Wednesday 12th April 2006

A talk (to be announced) given prior to the A.G.M.

2ND ANNUAL COACH TRIP

Saturday 30th July 2005

A visit to Brecon in the morning, with 3 hours free time for you to have a chance to see the weekly **Farmers Market** and the monthly **Antique and Collectors Fair**, or to go for a walk along the canal.

In the afternoon we shall be going to **Gigrin Farm, Rhayader** to the **Red Kite Feeding Station.**

Leaving **Whitchurch** at **9 am** **Rhiwbina** at **9.10** Arriving home at **6.30 pm**.

Full details, and the booking form, will appear in the next Newsletter. The trip will be suitable for children, having been arranged for a Saturday.

Cost per seat on the coach, including entry to the Farm, will be …

£14 for adults £11 for children under 11.

Advance reservations, without payment, may be made in the meantime by phoning

Duncan Hockridge 029 2062 6111

RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group

Doing Something Positive

January saw the group working on a neglected open grass area of scrub and bramble. With the creation of this open space, Spring should reward us with the regeneration of a few more native wild flowers; it will also help with the general improvement of the wildlife habitat.

A somewhat depleted group turned out for the February work party (weather, etc.) on the North Bank. Though after a morning session of clearing bramble and previous coppicing work, the transformation of the bank is taking shape—creating another open area for wild plants.

Programme 2005 Conservation work will be held on the coming Saturday mornings from **10.30** to **12.30** at Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch.

March 5th	Big Litter Pick. Come and help clean our patch. Meet middle entrance.
April 16th	Knotweed first cut of season light scrub clearing. Meet middle entrance.
May 14th	Knotweed second cut. Check for Balsam. Meet middle entrance.
June 4th	Balsam cut/pull. Check Nest Boxes. Meet middle entrance.

The group works for a few hours during the morning, roughly once a month. It is not particularly strenuous work—similar to an active gardener.

If you feel you would like to get involved … just turn up or, better still, give me a ring.

Hugh Harrison 029 2070 4889

T-SHIRTS	SWEATSHIRTS	POLOSHIRTS
	(Range of colours for sweats and polos).	
Adults: **£10.00**	Adults: **£16.50**	Adults: **£14.50**
Children's: **£8.50**	Children's: **£13.00**	Children's: **£11.50**

Good quality. All with **Friends of Forest Farm** logo. All profits go to Reserve projects.

Contact: **PAULINE LINCK** ***029-2061 7012***

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