FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

ISSUE 57 SEPTEMBER 2005

Editor's Forum

by Ken Patterson

Greetings to all.

Some of you may have read a short article in The Post recently entitled 'Children's view of farm on the Web.' For those who did not, I think it is worth repeating.

A nature reserve seen through the eyes of children is now available to view on the internet. During a series of visits to Forest Farm in Whitchurch, Cardiff, 60 pupils from ***Bryn Deri Primary School, Radyr****, and* ***Tongwynlais Primary School*** *took photos, drew pictures and recorded information about what they found there.*

Their work was then transferred from the classroom to the World-Wide-Web. The website, WWW.ffotogallery.org/ff-farm, allows whoever logs on to find out about wildlife, scenery and projects at the farm. Devised by ffotogallery, and funded by Arts in Business Cymru and GE Healthcare, the website was launched at the Turner House Gallery in Penarth.

It is interesting to have a website specially for children, but I hope they will find our own facility in due course, namely, the Friends website—www.forestfarm.org.uk. It's all helpful publicity.

With thanks to our contributors, here's hoping you all enjoy a splendid Summer and Autumn wherever you are.

NB. Contributions for the December Newsletter

I would appreciate them received by ***12th November.***

MEMBERSHIP

At the time of going to press, our present membership stands at **242 families** and **1 group**. This figure is somewhat short of last year's record figure.

There are still a number of members (some long term) yet to renew. Hopefully, when I receive their subscription, we will not be short of, or in fact will better last year's total.

Many thanks again for your continued support.

Noel Gale - Membership Secretary
029-2091 5665

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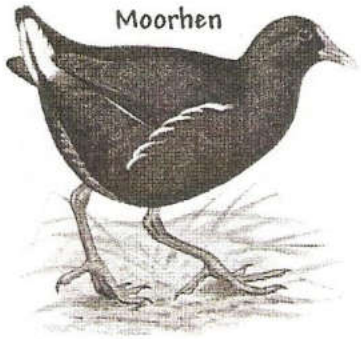
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Reserve News

by Mike Wiley
Countryside Warden

In my last article I told you that, if I had any further news on the three dead birds found in the Forest Farm allotments, I would get back to you. Well, as expected, I haven't got to the bottom of it—and I doubt if I ever will. Let's hope that it was a 'one-off'.

I seem to be reporting nothing but bad news, but I'm sure that you'd rather be kept informed of the bad news as well as the good. One Sunday morning at the beginning of August while doing some management work, i.e. brush cutting in front of the Hides, I was totally unaware of two teenagers on the Reserve with airguns. Luckily Howard Davies, one of our voluntary wardens, was on patrol; he spotted the two youths, and told them in no uncertain terms to leave the Reserve, or the police would be called. They duly left.


Moorhen

The next day whilst walking on the Reserve I came across a young **Moorhen** calling for its mother, which was nowhere to be seen. The young bird came right up to me, calling pitifully. I came to the sad conclusion that the mother had been shot the previous day. This conclusion seemed to be borne out when a local dog walker told me of a dead Mallard he had just seen in the canal. Whether or not this young Moorhen will survive I don't know, but judging by the size of the bird I think there is a good chance. I did report the incident to the police, but of course the culprits were long gone. I tried for years to stop the general public feeding the Mallards and Moorhens, as it is my belief that the wildlife on a nature reserve should be kept wild and not be made vulnerable by being tamed, but with the ever increasing numbers visiting the Reserve and the obvious enjoyment they get from this activity I ultimately had to admit defeat.


Tawny Owl

This incident took place very close to a **Tawny Owl** roost (a place where Tawny Owls rest up and can be found in the same place every day). Unfortunately, just over a year ago I made a very big mistake in showing this roost to a couple of genuine bird watchers who come regularly to the Reserve. Through them watching the roost other people got to know about the site; ultimately practically everyone knew of it, and I then had people coming to me saying they couldn't actually see the bird and asking me to point it out. Obviously I refused. This culminated one day with a family of six opposite the site; the parents were loudly clapping their hands in order to frighten the bird into flight—'so that the kids could see it'. I wasn't best pleased.

I will always show people birds, but I really regret giving away the location of an owl roost, and therefore making the bird vulnerable; you learn the hard way. Had these two idiots with the guns known about this bird and could locate it, I'm sure that it wouldn't be alive today. These people wouldn't think twice about killing an owl, and might see it as some sort of trophy.

(*Continued on next page*)

As long as these guns can be bought over the counter without any safeguards—i.e. licences, or proof of belonging to a bona fide gun club—you simply hand over your money and walk out of the shop with a very powerful rifle with telescopic sights, silencer if required and as much ammunition as you can carry. This sort of thing will happen.

Whilst on the subject of tawny owls, I must relate to you something that happened at home. We have tawny owls nesting in the garden in an owl box that I put up in a large oak tree. Around mid-May I thought that I would take a look at the box. Knowing that it can be dangerous to get too close to the young, if there were any, I approached very gingerly. Stopping some thirty yards from the tree, I could see two fluffy young heads poking out of the front of the box. What I hadn't realised was that our cat had followed me and was standing some twenty feet behind me. Something made me turn to the side where, alarmingly I saw a large female owl (their flight is perfectly silent) coming straight at me—or so I thought. I ducked, and the owl flew over me, heading for the cat, which also saw it coming and high-tailed it as fast as he could—with me not far behind him!

Some years ago a famous wildlife photographer, Eric Hosking, was filming young tawny owls at the nest, when a parent bird attacked him. He lost an eye during the encounter, and later on went on to write his autobiography, which he called 'An Eye for a Bird'; at least he had a sense of humour. Tawny owls can be very defensive of their young, as he found out to his cost.

This summer I was very fortunate to watch a juvenile Cuckoo being fed by its foster mother, a Meadow Pipit. I have seen pictures and film of this many times, but to actually witness it was marvellous. The young cuckoo called persistently—a loud trill—as its diminutive mother worked hard to try and satisfy it. The difference in size has to be seen to be believed. It is amazing to think that this young bird will find its way to its wintering grounds in tropical Africa without parents or a flock to follow.

Back in July, Fountain Forestry (contractors who work on behalf of Swalec) came to me saying that they wanted to do some tree felling under the power lines on the Reserve, I wasn't very happy with this, as it was still the height of the bird nesting season and to my mind, this kind of work should be undertaken during the autumn or winter period, and I told them so. After walking the line with the supervisor, I saw the problems for myself—i.e. some of the trees were getting close to the lines and, according to the supervisor, during really hot weather the lines may sag by anything up to four metres. So I reluctantly agreed to the work being done, subject to the minimum disturbance possible, and signed it off.

However, before the work could be completed, a strange sequence of events occurred. One of the trees in question—an Ash, which just happened to be growing next to the main underground sewer, somehow came into contact with the 275kV power line. The line didn't actually touch the tree but the power arced across, went down the tree and caused a huge explosion of methane gas when it hit the nearby underground sewer, blowing the massive concrete manholes out of the ground. The nearby Amersham (now GE Healthcare), which makes radioactive isotopes for the medical industry, and which is connected to the sewer, was cordoned off by the police; the road leading down to the site was temporarily closed off while a police investigation was carried out. It all ended well, with no-one injured. Let's hope nobody in the complex was sitting on the loo at the time!

Friends' Coach Trip to Brecon Town and the Red Kite Feeding Station, Gigrin Farm, Rhayader 30th July 2005

Last year, you may remember that we ran a coach trip to the National Wetlands Centre at Llanelli. There was such a good feedback from those who came that the Committee decided to repeat a trip this year.

This year we had double the number attending, and a full bus. We left Whitchurch and Rhiwbina early so that we could have three hours to look around Brecon. Although we left in the drizzle, we did not have any rain throughout the visit. At Rhayader it was very warm, and when we arrived back in the evening we could see we had left the bad weather behind all day. Due to the variety of members' wishes, we made three different stop-offs around Brecon. At stop 1 members spent their time looking around the shops and visiting the monthly Casglwr Antique and Collectors Fair. Many purchases were made. One member picked up a very nice old brass kettle with a wooden handle, which she got knocked down from £8 to £5; this was a real bargain. Stop 2 was at the canal marina and the modern Brycheinog Arts Theatre. Some members spent their time walking along the canal tow-path viewing the bird life. Varieties spotted included Mallard, Ducklings, House Martin, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Black-headed Gull, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Sparrow and Dunnock. Stop 3 was to the Cathedral and the fabulous Pilgrims Tea Room. If you have never been to Pilgrims, this is highly recommended. Most of the food is home made. The scones are huge, and you will never taste better. In the cathedral we were fortunate, as there was to be an organ recital in the evening, and we were able to hear the organist practicing for his performance, The 'greeters' inside the cathedral were very informative, and it was very interesting to hear that this cathedral has been a site of worship for more than one thousand years.



On returning to the bus, everyone was given a coloured photograph of the group; this had been taken on our arrival at Brecon. All thanks to the wonders of digital photography. We then made the hour's journey to Rhayader. Some interesting places were pointed out along the way, including the site of the drovers' fording point at Erwood—the house which has recently been discovered to be the oldest house in Wales, the country property which had been owned by James Watt, Bernard and Laura Ashley's 5-star hotel, Llangoed Hall, the Wyeside Arts Centre, the site of Builth Castle, the toll house being the scene of the Rebecca Riots in Rhayader, and the quarry on the outskirts of Builth which did have the rare Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary up to two years ago.



We made our way to the five hides on Gigrin Farm. Feeding takes place at 3pm in summer and at 2 pm in winter. The Crows usually come first, waiting in the surrounding trees for the meat to be spread around the feeding area. By now many Kites and Buzzards were also circling overhead. On this day the birds must have been hungry because, as soon as the food arrived, the Kites did not wait for the Crows; they performed quite a flying display, swooping down for the meat. At one point I counted over 150 Kites. Three Buzzards just sat on the ground, having a picnic! The Crows were left out of it for some time. As the hides are so close to the feeding area, some excellent photographs were taken. After about 30 minutes a large number of Kites moved away; however, in another 30 minutes, a new set of Kites arrived, but in smaller numbers than at first. Afterwards, we visited the Farm's interpretive centre, snack bar and picnic area.

We left the Farm at 4.45, but had to change buses at Builth as our coach had developed a broken water pipe on the way to Rhayader. However, due to the efficiency of Jeff the driver of Messrs Edwards Coaches, he had made the necessary transfer arrangements whilst we were at the Farm. As a result we arrived back home on time at 6.45pm. On the way home a raffle was held.

These coach trips, as well as being a very social day out for members, are also held to try and raise funds for Forest Farm. Having now done the accounts, I am pleased to report that the day raised £215. I should like to thank everyone who attended for making the day such a success. And next year ..... !

DUNCAN HOCKRIDGE

FRIENDS WEBSITE

Martin Chamberlain www.forestfarm.org.uk

Our resident Webmaster **David Bevan** has been developing the Website to show the varied wildlife, plants and views on the Reserve.

Friends have sent us some excellent pictures; they are now displayed on the website. My favourite is this year's juvenile Kingfishers with their parent. The website is an excellent way of sharing information of the Reserve and asking questions. We have recently had emails from Poland and from people visiting Cardiff from other parts of the UK.

Have a look, and tell what you think and what you want to see in the future.

THE CANAL



MEMORIES FROM LES GIBBON

As a lad, I can only remember two barges, as the Canal finished working in May 1942 when I was eight and a half years old. One of them was by Sunny Bank Bridge.

A crowd of us were going over the bridge, when the bargee stopped his boat and called out, "Jump on, boys! I'll give you a ride up to the lock."

None of us moved. He sensed the situation, laughed and said, "Been warned about strange men, have you? That's good boys for listening to your parents." He called to his horse, and off he went.

When I got home I told my Dad, and explained what the bargee looked like. My Dad said, "That's my friend Bill Blayden. If you see him again, you can have a ride." But I never saw another barge.

A short while after this, my friends and I thought it was about time we learned to swim. So, down to the Canal by the Works entrance we went. The Canal was called 'The Basin' by here, as it was wide. The boats could be turned if they were just bringing goods to the Works. There was also a horse slip where you could walk into the Canal.

When we tried to go in, the silt was coming up to our knees, so we went to the lock by Oak Cottage, where the water-wheel is, and in we went with our rubber rings and arm inflaters.

But most of us learned to swim in the river right opposite Forest Farm. I developed tinnitus in my left ear through swimming in the river—which I still have to this day.

WHITCHURCH FESTIVAL

MARTIN CHAMBERLAIN

It is always a surprise that so many people do not know that there is a nature reserve close to where they live. This year's Whitchurch Festival gave the Friends the opportunity to meet many existing, and some prospective, members at our stall.

There were many discussions over what you can see on the Reserve, what impact will the Whitchurch Hospital development have and, from older residents, tales of the Canal when it was in use.

The most popular question was, "Did the Canal run down Churchill Way?" Answers on a postcard, please!

Next year we plan to be at the Whitchurch and Rhiwbina Festivals. They were both on the same day this year!



Watch



Forest Farm Watch Club Events

Meetings are on **Saturdays** from **10 a.m.—12 noon** at the **Wardens Centre**, **Forest Farm**.

Watch is designed for children aged 8 to 10.

Younger children will be accepted if accompanied by an adult or older sibling.

For **Further Details** and **Booking**, please contact **Kevin** on …

02920 445903 or **07976 011 765**

September 24	**Nest box building & Pond Dip**	Nest boxes for the Reserve or your garden. If time allows, we will go for a pond dip.
October 29	**Autumn Leaf Mobile Making**	Autumn leaves are a great colour, and will look good for months as a mobile.

Monthly Friends / RSPB Walk — Phil Baker

Our monthly walks continue to attract new faces, some of which have joined our membership as a result.

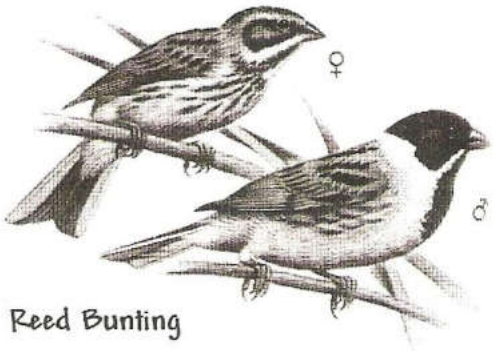
A fine day for our May walk resulted in a total of 35 species, with good views of **Reed Bunting**, **Reed Warbler** and **Little Grebe** from the hides. The re-appearance of the **Dipper** on the river was a welcome sight.

June's walk was included in Wales Biodiversity Week and saw a crowd of 32 people enjoy the diversity of Forest Farm. A similar bird count to May, with good views again from the hides.

Not so many people assembled for the July walk, but it was good to welcome back Ted Edwards as 'guest' leader. Even at this 'quiet' time of year, bird-wise, we totalled 32 species, including a brief glimpse of a **Kingfisher**. Several species of butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies were also seen.

If you haven't tried it yet, why not join us and enjoy your local Nature Reserve? We meet at 10am on the third Saturday of every month at the Warden's Hut. Everyone is welcome, young or old, beginner or expert.

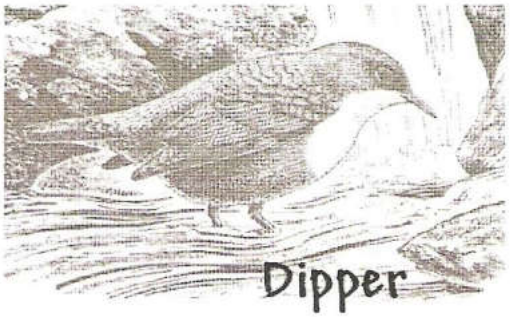
(illustrations on page 8)



Reed Bunting


Reed Warbler


Little Grebe


Dipper


Kingfisher

Layout by **Robin Sotheby**

Published on behalf of

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