FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK
AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL
LOCAL NATURE RESERVE
WEBSITE REF: www.forestfarm.org.uk

ISSUE 81 SEPTEMBER 2011

Hello 'Friends'

An especially warm welcome to any new members who have joined us over the 'Summer'. Do make yourself known if you are a new member.

Like many other groups, there are not many organised activities on during August, though June and July were busy enough. However, as you will see from the "Events" (pp11/12) there is going to be plenty going on - so we hope to see you either on the walks, at a volunteering event or at the delicious 'Foods of the Forest'. Can I also put in a plug for our November talk 'Seaside Safari' by Judith Oakley which promises to be a really interesting talk from a recognised expert.

After quite a few 12 page editions , this is a shorter one—but I hope you won't feel 'short-changed'! We have ***Hugh Harrison's*** *article on the Conservation Group's activities,* ***Paul Davies'*** *Reserve News,* ***Stella Wells*** *report on the monthly RSPB walks and* ***Rosemary Waters*** *description of the Friends coach trip all for your edification and delight ... If* ***you*** *have any memories about Forest Farm, photos or just views you want to express, do send them in.*

May I reinforce Noel's plea (see below) to email recipients of the newsletter who may have not got around to sending in their subscription? After all, £5 for a year—must be value for money!

Sheila Austin

Articles for the next edition—deadline **November 7th**

Contact details see back page

CONTENTS	PAGE
Reserve Warden's Report	2
Hospital meadows/Cardiff Conservation Group	3
RSPB Bird Walk around Forest Farm	4
'Friends' summer coach trip	5/6
'Seaside Safari'	6
Open Afternoon/ Chairman's Update/ Mistake?/ Events	7
Events continued	8

MEMBERSHIP

The current membership stands at 228 families and 1 group.

The majority of the previous year's members have rejoined, but there seems to be a hiccup regarding ***those who receive their newsletter by email.*** Of the 54 in this category, only 14 have rejoined. If any of the remaining 40 families wish to rejoin, they can send the £5 annual subscription direct to me (cheques made payable to Friends of Forest Farm).

If there is any doubt as to whether or not you have paid for this year's membership, you can give me a call.

Noel Gale (Membership Secretary)
8 Heath Park Drive
Cardiff
CF14 3QH

Tel 029 20915665

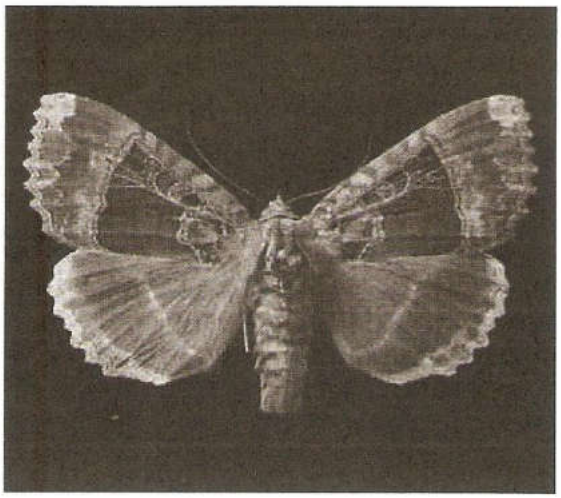
Forest Farm Reserve News

Paul Davies
Countryside Warden

The Wardens' Centre doors have now been replaced and an alarm system installed to deter any further vandalism or theft. There are several keyholders including Volunteer groups, Friends of Forest Farm and local Police. If anyone does require access, please contact the Forest Farm Warden or the Wedal Road Office (02920 445903)

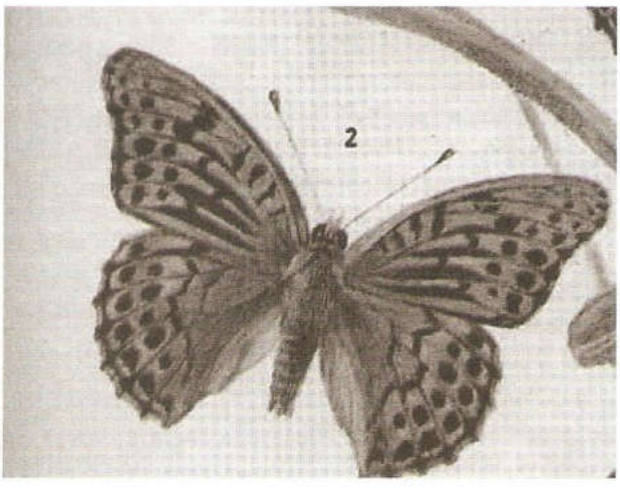
Chris Powell (Conservation Officer) had a leaving barbeque at Forest Farm and this was well attended - including many representatives from the Friends Groups. There was torrential rain that evening but despite this, we did all hear his final speech. Many thanks to all who came, but special thanks to Gareth, Kevin and Nicola who provided and cooked the superb barbeque, various salads and deserts!

In April, a regular visitor had seen an eagle owl on a beech tree in Long Wood. It had been in some distress and she had rung the RSPB who had said they would come down and attempt to catch it, but has heard nothing more since. This must have been an escaped bird as last known sightings of them in the UK were over 150 years ago!



Old Lady moth

Another unusual sighting was reported by Paul Pinnell (Warden) and Chris Price (volunteer). They found an Old Lady moth last week struggling in the water at middle lock.



Male Silver-washed Fritillary

Also, in May, I was fortunate to see a Silver-washed Fritillary feeding on brambles in the top meadow.

Finally, many thanks to the teachers and students from Whitchurch High School who spent four days here in July clearing Himalayan balsam, trampling bracken and collecting litter – all towards the biology section of their Welsh Baccalaureate qualification.

Hospital meadows



We would like to think this little haven, between the Glamorgan canal and the old railway cutting, would remain like this for all of us to enjoy. It is included in the Whitchurch Hospital development , currently with planning permission for housing.

Photo of Hospital Meadows as taken by Martin Chamberlain July 2011.

Cardiff and District RSPB—Conservation Group

Doing something positive

We have had rather inclement weather for the last two working parties on the Reserve. Fortunately the rain had stopped before we made a start. The nest box and wild flower survey in May went smoothly even though it was very damp. Ten out of our sixteen boxes were occupied. Those all had been fairly successful; most had fledged leaving the odd dead bird. Out of the others, bees had taken up residence in one—a hasty retreat, the others lost or empty. Flower surveys are very much governed by the weather – harsh Winter or early Spring. The overall number of plants has increased since we've opened up various areas. The group have identified well in excess of sixty plant species and those are only during the Spring count.

On the July visit, we thought we would have to abandon the morning session because of such heavy rain. Luckily the weather improved enabling us to make a start. Our task was to pull and bag the balsam and also cut the Japanese knotweed. It has been decided to spray the knotweed. The Wardens will undertake this later in the season. We used all our bags – more than 13 – then started to make piles of the balsam which is such an invasive plant.

Conservation work will be held on the following ***Saturday mornings 10.30 to 12.30 p.m.*** **at** ***Forest Farm Longwood Drive Whitchurch.***

Sept 24th	Clearing bramble/scrub	Middle entrance
Oct 29th	Scrub/coppicing clearing	Middle entrance
Nov 26th	Putting up boxes/cleaning, general clearing	Middle entrance

The group works for a few hours, roughly once a month, and it is not particularly strenuous (you work to your own level). If you would like to get involved ... just turn up - or better still give me a ring.

Hugh Harrison Tel: 029 20704889

Walks around Forest Farm

with *Stella Wells*

Having seen the appalling weather forecast for the July Walk I donned the wet gear and thought that I would be on my own that morning. But no, the regulars are made of sterner stuff and eight people turned up for the walk. I was impressed and our efforts were rewarded with a break from the downpour.







Songthrush, reed warbler on our Reserve and a Green Woodpecker

Despite the weather, the birds were still vocal and active, if hidden to some extent by the green and dripping foliage. We had great views of a kingfisher, both from the river bank and the hide. Reed warblers flitted about hardly pausing long enough for us to get a good view. The garrulous green wood pecker and elusive song thrush were heard but not seen.

The many flowers such as yellow and purple loosestrife, meadow sweet, St Johns Wort, knapweed and yellow water lilies, refreshed by the rain, brightened up an otherwise dull day. Brambles, sloes, cherry plums and hazel trees bore their ripening fruits with a promise of delicious feasts to come, not only for us of course, but for the many birds and mammals which depend on the Autumn harvest.

August is usually a quiet month when the birds rest after their spring and summer labours. The foliage begins to look a little tired but still useful as flowers fade and seed heads ripen for the birds which depend on them. But as you know, you can never tell what will appear from month to month and so I look forward to the next walk.

(The third Saturday in the month—meet at the Wardens Centre. Ed)

'Friends' Summer coach trip to Brecon and Gigrin Farm, Rhayader



Just off the coach at Brecon and not an umbrella in sight—well—not an open one!

Who would have thought there would be such a change in the weather on Saturday July 14th when 37 of us set out for our annual coach trip in pouring rain? As we approached Brecon, our 1st stop, there were plenty of blue sky patches and the rain clouds were dispersing. We have become accustomed to Duncan arranging the trip with an eye to detail; but had he arranged the weather I asked?

We had the choice of 3 drop off points, the Marina/Canal Basin, the town centre or thirdly the Cathedral, which Margaret and I chose. As we walked into this ancient edifice behind the choir & the priest dressed in his beautifully embroidered Cope, we soon realised the couple also in procession were to be married. We sat at the back of the church and enjoyed the organ playing, the choir singing and witnessed the second marriage of this mature couple; it was quite emotional.

After an enjoyable lunch at the Pilgrim Restaurant we walked down to the coach, where Jeff our very able driver, took us to Gigrin Farm to experience the feeding of the Welsh Red Kites. As we approached the farm we could see these graceful, agile birds wheeling above us, they knew it was nearly feeding time.

We had a hide set aside for our sole use; the view gave us ample photographic opportunities. Once the tractor had entered the field and distributed the 'best beef' pieces across the grass, many more of these beautiful birds of prey were ready for their feed.

The Crows & Rooks also know the time and kept a respectful distance in the trees and on the fence posts, then making a furtive dash for a piece of meat, knowing they would very likely be mobbed for their booty. One Buzzard, who landed in the field in front of us, sat his ground while tearing the meat to eat, ducking each time a kite swooped down at him. Among the kites was a White Red Kite, Leucistic - not an albino - who hatched locally, fed unhindered by the others.

It really is an amazing sight to see how these birds with a wing span of 1.8 metres dive to the ground, try to snatch a piece of meat and then take it up in the air to eat from their talons. If unsuccessful they wheel around and try again.

It was difficult to put a number on the birds feeding; it varies with the season and the weather, but we saw perhaps three hundred in total.



Just to give an idea to those who haven't seen them, this is a small number of the red kites seen feeding that day. Such a magnificent and memorable sight. Sorry its just an amateur shot of mine Ed

There were opportunities to buy refreshments or memorabilia and a small exhibition in a barn, and Gigrin Farm also have an excellent web site with much more information www.gigrin.co.uk

As we walked back to the farm buildings we feasted our eyes on the panoramic views around us in the sunshine.

During our homeward journey Duncan called out the answers to the word quiz we had worked on previously, The quality of the results showed what a 'brainy lot' members of the Friends of Forest Farm are.

Thank you Duncan for a very enjoyable day out.

Rosemary Waters

Wednesday 16th November - 7.30p.m. Whitchurch Community Centre

"Seaside Safari" a talk by **Judith Oakley**

Don't miss it – tell your friends!

Judith is an experienced and enthusiastic marine ecologist with a varied background and a wealth of knowledge in natural history.

(I noticed there was a short piece on Judith's book Seashore Safaris in the 6th August Daily Telegraph magazine. I quote, "a densely packed, full colour guidebook to everything that lurks in rock pools, scuttles in the sand and burrows beneath rocks" . We are really very fortunate to be able to have Judith for our November talk. Ed)

'Friends'

OPEN AFTERNOON

Sunday
18th September
2 - 4 p.m.

Come and see the **Owls** from Ebbw Vale Owl Sanctuary, our **pond** and **orchard** or visit **Hospital Meadows.**

Refreshments available

Update on the Orchard and Bird Feed

Orchard

The fruit trees seem to be doing well. Up to half of them have fruit on them, especially those planted in 2007 & 2008.

Bird Feed

Although we have run out of food, we have decided to purchase more so that we can at least keep food in the feeder at the Wardens Centre as it attracts so many varieties of birds there.

John Harding
(Chairman)

Were you being kind or did you not notice?

My numbering has gone awry! This IS issue number 81. I numbered March 2011 as 78 – when it should have been 79, and therefore the June 2011 should have been number 80. My apologies, there was no intention to confuse...

This happened once before, but the other way round. October 1991 was edition number 6 and Christmas 1991 was number 8, so I suppose in a way it has sort of rectified itself, so I think I will keep with September 2011 being our 81st newsletter.

Sheila Austin (Editor)

Events — September to December 2011

For Friends of Forest Farm volunteering days—see our website forestfarm.org.uk or the noticeboards on the Reserve

SEPTEMBER	
Sunday 11th Sept 14.00 – 16.00	**Spiders and Other Creepy Crawlies** led by the Countryside Wardens. Their role in nature will lead to an understanding of their importance in our world. Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch
Wed 14th Sept 18.00	**Foods of the Forest.** A stroll around Forest Farm, then a tasting session of some delicious delicacies. **£3 per person.** ALL CHILDREN MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT. Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 17th Sept 10.00-12.30	**Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB** Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Sunday 18th Sept 14.00—16.00	**'FRIENDS' OPEN AFTERNOON.** Come along to the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road. See the Birds of Prey. See what we've been up to, give us your views.
Saturday 24th Sept 10.00-12.00	***Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Rock pooling & sand art.*** A visit to Sully to look at the coastal life within the rock pools. **Please meet at the Captain's Wife car park, off Beach Road, Sully at 10am.** Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk

September to December 2011 continued

Saturday 24th Sept 10.30-12.30	**Cardiff Conservation Group volunteering event. Clearing bramble/scrub** Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
OCTOBER	
Saturday 15th Oct 10.00-12.00	***Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Snail Search*** Get out in your Park to help scientists find 'alien' snails! Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Saturday 15th Oct 10.00-12.30	**Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB** Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Saturday 29th Oct 10.30-12.30	**Cardiff Conservation Group volunteering event. Scrub/coppicing clearing**. Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Saturday 29th Oct 09.30-15.30	**One day Autumn workshop Photography. £35.00** at Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road, Whitchurch. For those 17+ years. Designed to cover photography basics and more advanced techniques. Indoors and outdoors. Bring your camera. PLACES LIMITED. BOOK IN ADVANCE. Call Park Rangers 029 2044 5900/03
NOVEMBER	
Wednesday 16th Nov 19.30 hours	**Friends of Forest Farm Evening Talk "Seaside Safari" by Judith Oakley.** Starts 7.30p.m. at the Community Centre Tyn y Pwll Road, Whitchurch
Saturday 19th Nov 10.00-12.00	**Monthly bird walk with RSPB** Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Saturday 19th Nov 10.00-12.00	***Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12.*** **Celtic Hut Building** See how a traditional Celtic round house is made! Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Road Whitchurch. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Saturday 26th Nov 10.30-12.30	**Cardiff Conservation Group volunteering event. Putting up boxes/ cleaning, general clearing.** Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
DECEMBER	
Saturday 17th Dec 10.00-12.30	**Monthly bird walk with RSPB** Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Saturday 17th Dec 10.00-12.00	***Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12.*** **Yuletide Log and Wreath Making.** Join in the festive activities. Meet at Victoria Park Bowls Pavilion at 10am. Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903;

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

Mrs Sheila Austin, 1 Heol Gwrgan, Whitchurch, Cardiff CF14 1PP **Tel: 029—20 61 4245**

Email: Sheila@forestfarm.org.uk

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