FRIENDS

OF FOREST FARM COUNTRY PARK AND GLAMORGANSHIRE CANAL LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

WEBSITE REF: ww.forestfarm.org.uk/

ISSUE 82 DECEMBER 2011

Hello 'Friends'

Still a few shrubs in flower and leaves on the trees but this is the Winter edition—let's hope the season is better than last year!

Whatever the weather, once again, the reports from the Wardens(pp2/3) and the RSPB walks (pp5/6) show us how much there is to enjoy on the Reserve - " a wildlife jewel" and "a special place". However, there are also issues to make us think more deeply. We are aware of some continuing problems e.g. litter and the canal edge. Volunteering events (p7 and pp 11/12), the junior Wildlife Watch, educational sessions at the Wardens' Centre, walks and ad hoc events surely raise awareness and help us. There is a broader perspective though, as outlined in Chris James' article (p 4) which looks at managing the environmental future of Forest Farm. The Park Ranger Service are formulating this plan assisted by the Friends. It goes without saying that this is really important and I commend the report to you. Once the plan is finalised, we will be able to pass on more detail.

I have included a couple of book 'reviews' this time, there is also news about the water turbine at Radyr Weir (p11) and a descriptive Winter's Tale from Martin and for those of you not quite up to speed with the web—al little of what our website is about. Happy reading!

Sheila Austin

Deadline for articles for the next newsletter
7th February 2012 (See back for contact details)

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HAPPY CHRISTMAS



On behalf of all the Committee, thank you all for your wonderful support during 2011 and may we wish you

Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for the New Year

Forest Farm Reserve News

Back in August I saw a couple standing near the large barn next to the Wardens' Centre. They had spotted a red kite soaring on a thermal fairly high up. Red kites are becoming more common in Wales due to less persecution and the provision of feeding sites mainly in mid Wales.



Photo of a red kite from the Gigrin Farm Red Kite Feeding & Rehabilitation Centre which we visited in July

Recently, we have been cutting back vegetation on both ponds and in the 'two pond field' near Forest Lock. Yesterday, I hung up a feeder near the first hide. We are using this rather than ground feeding so that the squirrels and magpies will be having fewer free feeds!

There have also been recent repairs to the canal tow path edge – with the help of the 'Friends '. Dogs are entering the canal in increasing numbers and the damage is easy to see. This erosion has continued for the last 30 years with no major restoration work. We hope to be continuing to tackle the problem with both grant assistance and of course help from the Friends' volunteers.

The orchard is doing very well, with a higher yield than last year.

Finally, looking to the Winter, woodland work will include thinning in areas such as the old Coryton railway line and the area next to GE Healthcare.

Paul Davies - Reserve Warden

* * * * * * * * *

(This time, we also have a joint report from the 'other' Paul and Chris who would ...

... just like to start by introducing ourselves – Paul Pinnell, the other Ranger at Forest Farm and Chris Prince the Voluntary Ranger. Both of us have been based at Forest Farm since May 2010.

You will know that there is a litter problem on Longwood Drive which accumulates there and ends up on the Nature Reserve. Currently, this means that we are picking up litter on a **daily** basis. We have approached the management of companies in the vicinity concerning general litter and cigarette butts in that area and of these, would like to thank McLays Printers and GE Healthcare for providing bins for their staff.

With regard to wildlife spotted around the Wardens Centre recently, these include the resident Heron in the apple orchard, Wrens, Long tailed Tits in the hedgerows. Two Red Kites have also been seen, a Goldcrest in the maple trees, Garden Warblers on the hogweed near the apple orchard, Great Spotted Woodpecker on the nut dispenser and a female Sparrowhawk seeking out its prey such as Nuthatch and Titmice. In addition, there have been flocks of Mistle Thrush in the treetops along the Melingriffith feeder canal as well as Grey Wagtail and Dipper along the banks of the Taff. A red fox with cubs has been seen on a regular basis in the field adjacent to the Wardens Centre.



A nuthatch benefiting from birdseed provided on the Reserve

We would like to thank those Friends of Forest Farm we have met and worked with, and look forward to meeting and working with other members in the future. We would also like to thank you for your financial support and hands-on assistance, and the events and functions you organise. In addition, donations made for the bird seed have without a doubt kept hundreds of birds alive during the winter months, especially through the previous big freeze.

In the current financial climate, input from the Friends is a key factor in maintaining the wellbeing of the Nature Reserve and we value very much for your continued support.

Paul Pinnell and Chris Price

WINTER BIRD FEED

As you probably already know, we have been feeding the birds through the summer at the Wardens Centre.

With Winter approaching, we have just had our first delivery of bird feed 120 Kg weight costing £150. The mix consists of Red & White Millet, Sunflower Hearts, Kibbled Maize, Oats, Black & Striped Sunflower, Canary Seed, Red Dari, Black Rape Seed, Hemp, Linseed & Niger Seed and Granulated Peanuts.

Although we buy feed for the birds from our funds, if any-one who would like to make a donation, it would be most welcome. Cheques can be made payable to Friends of Forest Farm and write on the back BIRD FEED.

John Harding (Chairman)

Thanks to the former 'Betty's birders' for their cheque for £100 and all other individual donations.

FOREST FARM

Managing its environmental future



Since the formation of the Forest Farm Local Nature Reserve in 1967, many new habitats have been created. These have resulted in an increase in the numbers of animal and plant species occupying the site. The new habitats include: wetlands, wildflower meadows, scrub areas and a significant increase in the amount of woodland and hedgerows. These new habitats resulted from work objectives of the twentieth century Management Plan which was highly successful. However, this has been overtaken by Nature. Since the Millennium, many areas have become over-mature and are significantly changing the role of the original habitats. For example, many of the hedgerows have become tall with less dense vegetation. This has resulted in fewer hedgerow breeding birds on the site.

General overgrowth across the Reserve has resulted in the loss of a number of breeding species such as whitethroat, wood warblers and spotted flycatchers. Other species like the tree sparrow have disappeared from the site as part of national trends. Other examples of overgrowth are brambles and saplings encroaching into the wildflower meadows eradicating meadowland plants. Therefore, it is important to maintain a wide range of habitats so as to decrease the risk of losing more species and to attract lost species back to the site.

To reverse this natural process, which would ultimately end in the whole Reserve becoming bramble thicket and then mixed woodland, it is necessary to put in place a management plan that could be followed by the Park Ranger Service and various volunteer Groups.

Currently, the Park Ranger Service assisted by the Friends of Forest Farm is formulating a plan of prioritised tasks to create a programme of work which will lead to an overall improvement of the site. The objectives of the plan are to increase the numbers and diversity of animals and plants and to improve visual access to this wildlife for visitors. The Reserve is a wildlife jewel within the City and it is vitally important to maintain the area for future generations.

One particular area of concern is the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which includes the canal, alder carr (Sheeps' Bane Wood) and the beech woodland of Long Wood. The Canal was in operation for 150 years but for the last 64 years has been unused and has received little maintenance. Its environmental significance is very important, but it is also of historical significance. It is the only section of the former 23 mile Merthyr to Cardiff Glamorganshire Canal that contains water. The tow path in particular has suffered from "wear and tear" from wet dogs climbing out of the water and washing the bank away, and by occasional vandals pushing coping stones into the canal.

While the plan is being completed, work is still in progress on the Reserve: the Ranger Service is continuing to deal with current problems and maintenance at the appropriate times of the year. Also the Friends are working with the Ranger Service to apply for money to fund projects to improve the Reserve.

Chris James

Forest Farm/RSPB Walks August to October

Stella Wells

August is not my favourite time of year - it feels to me as if it is a tired month. The rigours of finding a mate, propagating the species, defending territories and feeding hungry youngsters has come to an end. Plants are starting to loose their vitality and even the birds are more quiet than usual.

My grumpy disposition wasn't helped by the fact that a steady drizzle was falling as I travelled to Forest Farm for the August walk. As I sat in my car, wondering if anyone would turn up, I was cheered up by the sight of a great spotted woodpecker in a tree a few feet away. I looked upon this as a good omen and the black cloud above my head evaporated.



Sparrowhawk from Festival Park Owl Sanctuary Ebbw Vale at our Open afternoon on 18th September.

It was ladies day on this walk and despite the weather we all enjoyed our stroll around the Reserve. I think the highlight of the morning was the spectacle of a sparrow hawk flying straight towards us as we sat in the hide. This would have been a photo to impress if a camera had been to hand!



A Jay seen on Forest Farm

We saw a few birds such as the stunning jays, a heron, blue, coal, great and long-tailed tits, wrens and nuthatch. Hidden in the foliage several other birds were apparent such as the green woodpecker and bull finch. The perfume of the wild clematis (or old man's beard) filled the hedgerows.

In September the tall purple loosestrife and Himalayan balsam, remnants of the summers beautiful flowers, brightened up a quiet day. The birds were few in number, but it was good to see a raven close by and to admire its size and the beautiful sheen on its feathers. A mistle thrush and a chiff chaff were noisy additions to the usual birds.

As I left my house to travel to the Reserve for the October walk, a flock of redwings flew overhead; another good omen perhaps. We are now well into Autumn and the trees are starting to begin their colour change. This is my favourite time of year especially when we can enjoy the crisp sunny days and vibrant golds, reds and auburns as the trees prepare for their dormant period.



Goosander

There were lots of jays busy collecting and burying their acorns which are so plentiful this year. As we arrived on the river bank we were treated to the sight of 5 goosanders, beautiful ducks with their distinctive auburn heads and hooked beak. They were busy fishing and so we were able to watch them for some time.

A dipper came into view and seemed unconcerned at our presence as it bathed in the river water. At one stage it was joined by a lovely grey wagtail. The river was running clear and not too rapidly so we hoped to see some fish, perhaps a salmon or two but not then - this came later. From the hide with no door we enjoyed the antics of a kingfisher for a short while.

At the end of the canal walk we walked further up river to the weir, hoping to see a leaping salmon. We waited for quite a while, but no sign. I stood looking down into the rushing water in the salmon run, and my patience was rewarded with the sight of a salmon. Sadly, no-one else saw it but this was the first time I have witnessed this and it made my day.

We never know what we are going to see as we set out on these walks and so I'm looking forward to next month, with maybe, some foreign visitors to swell the numbers.



Salmon leaping at Radyr Weir

(Why not join Stella for one of these lovely walks around the Reserve—3rd Saturday in the month 10.00 at the Wardens' Centre. Ed)

Cardiff and District RSPB Group
Conservation Group— *Doing something positive*

After the summer break, our return in late September is always with some trepidation. Everything seems to romp away during the months of July and August. We had a good turn out, so we could work in small groups ... tackling the jobs of coppicing hazel, cutting brambles and clearing pockets of knotweed; the spraying had certainly knocked it back.

A damp October morning saw us finishing off the jobs from our last visit. Rosebay willowherb has generally been ignored letting it die back in the Autumn. It has now roughly colonised a third of our open to the exclusion of most other plants with its dense foliage. Action was needed, so the rest of the morning we tackled this invasive plant clearing the area – a job well done.

Conservation work will be held on the coming Saturday mornings at Forest Farm, **Longwood Drive Whitchurch - 10.30 – 12.30**.

Programme 2012

January 28th	Scrub clearing/coppicing Top entrance
February 25th	Cutting and thinning out dead wood Middle Entrance
March 24th	BIG LITTER PICK. Come and help clear our patch 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, (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 2070 4889)

MEMBERSHIP

At the last count, the membership stood at 251 families plus 1 group.

To join the Friends, a form can be found on our www.forestfarm.org.uk or contact Noel Gale or any member of the Committee.

Change to the Evening Talk

Wednesday January 18th 2012 at 7.30 p.m.
Whitchurch Community Centre, Ty'n y Pwll Rd.
Whitchurch

The subject is now

"Edible Landscaping"
by Michelle Fitzsimmons

Should give us plenty of food !!!

A WINTER'S TALE



For the last 25 years Christmas morning started early with the excitement of little children and not so little children opening their presents. Christmas 2010 was different with both of my children having flown the nest, but this did not stop me waking early as day light broke.

With deep snow and ice I thought that this was an ideal chance to visit the Reserve with my dog Gelert. Wrapped up for the cold, Gelert wearing his coat, and remembering to take a bag of food with me, we headed for the cold with my outside temperature gauge showing -15C.

As I entered the Reserve, the quietness and beauty of it opened my eyes to this special place being so close to where we live. After following the feeder, I remembered that I had my bag of bird food and placed some in the feeding area. Almost immediately a large selection of birds arrived needing to restore their energy levels after another cold night and I literally had them eating out of my hand.

At this point, Gelert decided to impersonate a snow plough by running head down through the snow where no one had walked. We continued on our walk not seeing another person until, on Forest Farm Road, we met a runner wearing shorts and vest much to my and Gelert's surprise. As we reached home we were ready for the celebrations but I will always remember our Christmas walk in the snow and ice.

I write this article in early November; the weather is sunny and mild and I wonder what this year's Christmas weather will be.

On behalf of my family and Gelert, I wish you and your families a Happy Christmas and peaceful New Year.

Martin Chamberlain

Whitchurch Hospital Development

As we go to print, the Hospital Trust planning extension has still not come in front of the Planning Committee.

We are concerned that the Planning Department have made no contact with ourselves although they are fully aware of our concerns.

We are, therefore, requesting a formal face-to-face meeting with the Planning Department to see what discussions have taken place with the Hospital Trust and what influence can be brought to change the existing, but now expired, planning permission.

Martin Chamberlain

'A Single Swallow'
by Horatio Clare

Recommended non fiction reading

I thought that you may be interested in reading a fascinating book by local author Horatio Clare. The book had been nominated for Wales Book Of The year in 2010.

The title is **A Single Swallow** and is available from all Cardiff libraries. The Daily Mail commented on it as "travel writing at its very best...utterly, utterly brilliant" The Literary Review said " fizzing, entertaining. Horatio's prose has something of the swallow's flight: daring, sharp-edged, fast moving, graceful, and full of surprises".

This is the fascinating story of Horatio's expedition of a lifetime. He follows the flight of the swallows from the slums of Cape Town, where millions roost in February, to a barn in Wales, where a pair nests in May. Along the way he discovers old empires and modern tribes, a witch doctor's recipe for stewed swallow, and explains how to travel without money or passport. He travels by trains, motorbikes, canoes, one camel and three ships. You will be in good company as you turn the 321 pages with this brilliant writer and birdwatcher.

Duncan Hockridge

(Sounds like is must for theChristmas present list! Ed)



Don't Forget !

Sunday
15th Jan 2012
10.30—13.00

Post Christmas walk

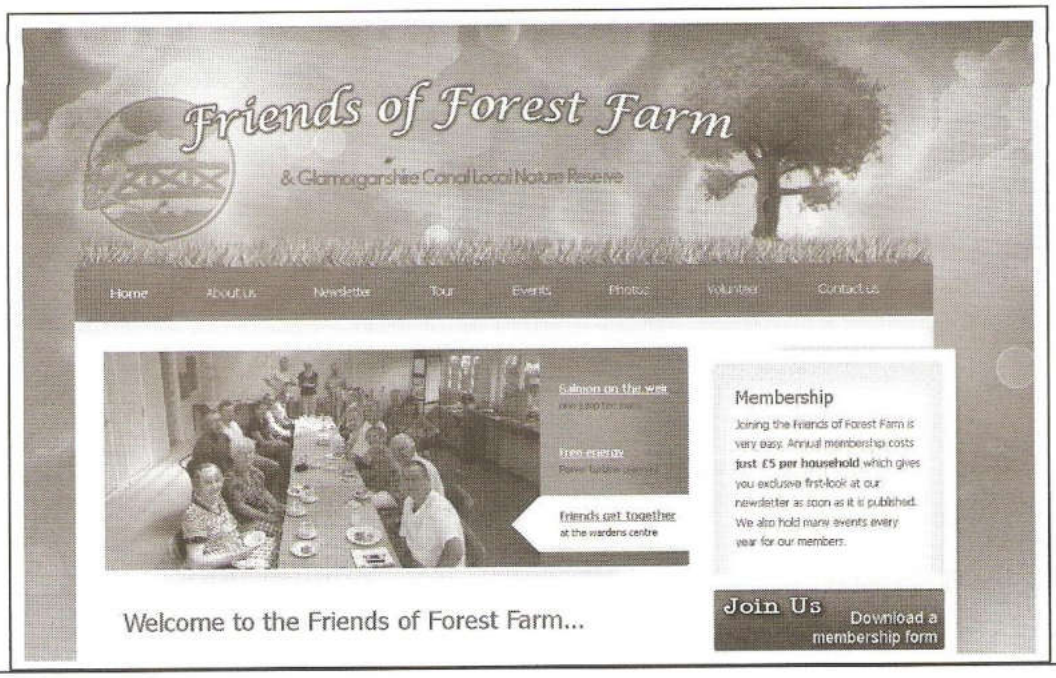
Hailey Park and Forest Farm.

Led by the Friends

Meet at
Melingriffith Water Engine
Ty Mawr Road

Refreshments available

www.forestfarm.org.uk



This picture is the home page of our website (www.forestfarm.org.uk).

For those of you who not too familiar with a computer, you can see that it gives a lot of information to those who do not know about us. This includes directions—where to find us, drop down pages on a history of the Reserve, a tour of the site; our events are listed and volunteering opportunities as well as copies of the newsletter (except the most recent one—which is just for members) and some wonderful photographs. Finally, we now have links to Twitter and Facebook—which is good for getting us known and publicising events. Last, but not least, its in glorious technicolour!

Do have a look and get your friends and family to look as well!

Sheila Austin

What a fascinating talk we had on 16th November!

It was entitled **'Seashore Safaris'**. The speaker—and writer of the book - was **Judith Oakley**, a marine ecologist. Among other things, we saw beautiful photographs of anemones, sea slugs, amazing starfish which looked like a pretty mosaic, sea gherkins; heard incredible facts about their life cycle and habitat. Get your wellies on and take this book with you!

Another book for Christmas - or anytime. Highly recommended.

Sheila Austin

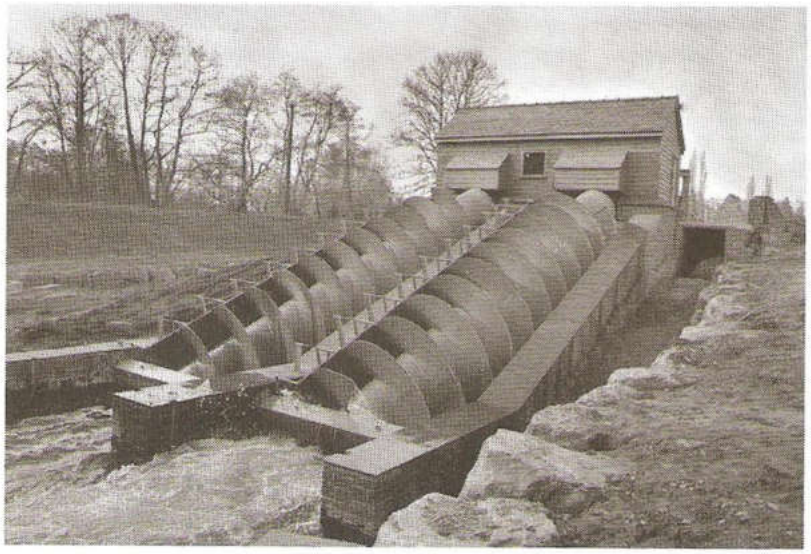


WATER TURBINE AT RADYR WEIR

In a previous newsletter, I reported on a proposed Water Turbine at Radyr Weir. I attended an update meeting and, after a feasibility study and subject to funding, the project will go ahead. I have seen the plans but unfortunately am unable to reproduce them - but the effect on the Reserve will be very limited.

There will a requirement to move a short stretch of the Taff Trail to the east. As part of this change we may have the opportunity to investigate the area which held the locks as part of the transport of material for the Melingriffith Tinplate Works.

This a picture of a similar, although smaller, installation on the River Monnow near Monmouth



The turbine for Radyr Weir will be enclosed and protected from access by unauthorised people.

Martin Chamberlain
Secretary

Events at Forest Farm
December 2011 to March 2012

DECEMBER 2011	
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; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
JANUARY 2012	
Sunday 15th Jan 10.30—13.00	**Walk off Christmas at Hailey park and Forest Farm.** Meet at Melingriiffith Water Engine Ty Mawr Rd. Led by the Friends. All ages; children must be accompanied by an adult. Dogs welcome. Refreshments available.
Wednesday 18th Jan 19.30	**"Edible Landscaping"—an evening talk by Michelle Fitzsimmons.** Whitchurch Community Centre Ty yn y Pwll Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 21st Jan 10.00—12.30	**Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB** Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch

Events at Forest Farm
January — March 2012 cont'd

Saturday 28th Jan 10.30—12.30	**Cardiff Conservation Group volunteering event. Scrub/coppicing clearing**. Meet at the top entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Saturday 28th Jan 10.00—12.00	***Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Activity to be notified.*** Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Sunday 29th Jan 10.30—13.00	**Volunteering event with the Friends of Forest Farm** Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd.Whitchurch Coppicing. Delicious home made soup for the volunteers!
FEBRUARY	
Saturday 18th Feb 10.00—12.30	**Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB** Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Saturday 25th Feb 10.00—12.00	***Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Activity to be notified.*** Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk
Saturday 25th Feb 10.30—12.30	**Cardiff Conservation Group volunteering event. Cutting and thinning our dead wood.**. Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Sunday 26th Feb 10.30—13.00	**Volunteering event with the Friends of Forest Farm** Meet at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm Rd. Whitchurch Check out our website www.forestfarm.org.uk nearer the time for what we will be doing on the Reserve
MARCH	
Saturday 17th Mar 10.00—12.30	**Monthly bird walk around the Reserve with the RSPB** Meet at the Wardens Centre, Forest Farm Road ,Whitchurch
Wednesday 21st Mar 19.30	**"History of Waun Treoda" An evening talk by Chris Soughton** at Whitchurch community Centre, Ty'n y Pwll Rd Whitchurch
Saturday 24th Mar 10.30—12.30	**Cardiff Conservation Group volunteering event. BIF LITTER PICK Come and help clean up our patch.**. Meet at the middle entrance Forest Farm, Longwood Drive, Whitchurch
Saturday 31st Mar 10.00—12.00	***Wildlife Watch Club - for children aged 8-12. Activity to be notified.*** Contact Kevin or Gareth on 029 20445903; email: communityparkrangers@cardiff.gov.uk

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

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

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