Friends of Forest Farm

SPRING 2026 138

"That is one good thing about this world…there are always sure to be more Springs."-from Anne of Avonlea by L M Montgomery



Spring is now well upon us with new life returning where ever you look. For many of us this is our favourite time of year.

For Forest Farm visitors a time to look, enjoy and wonder. We have also been delighted to have a special visitor, namely an Otter, spotted by a lucky few; more detail in the Rangers Report.

Campaigning to remove the tree planting in "The Bowl' area has finally proved successful with the restoration of this area, please read the update. The restoration of the Dragonfly Pond remains on our agenda and we are hopeful that the initial work will be undertaken soon. Many of you will have noticed the clearance work around the Barn; looking much better already! The rebuilding is due to start imminently, which we all look forward to. The Orchard is looking better too, following all the pruning done recently. We have plans for pruning to be done on a regular annual basis and some of us recently attended a tree pruning workshop. Action is also being taken for the installation of information panels in the orchard.

Our regular activities continue. The Winter Talks had two more well attended meetings, one about the innovative North Cardiff Woodlands Project and the other considering the Butterflies of Wales, a real beauty pageant. The regular Saturday walks and the volunteer sessions continued, increasingly well attended; both an important part of our role.



Thanks to Sheila and Phil who retired from the Committee, at the AGM, after many years of commitment and dedicated work on our behalf.

Naomi & Paul Brightmore

The editors advise that all views expressed by contributors are their own.
Published on behalf of The Friends of Forest Farm and Glamorganshire Canal Nature Reserve.
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RANGERS' REPORT: SPRING 2026

Winter is over and another Spring begins at Forest Farm. It's wonderful to see the Spring flowers re-appearing. After the first flush of Snowdrops and then Daffodils, came Marsh Marigolds, Native Bluebells, Wood Anemone, and the insect-luring Lords and Ladies (Cuckoo Pint). Celandines and Dog Violets are everywhere too. The bare Blackthorn spikes have blossomed into dainty white flowers and the Hazel catkins and tree buds have swollen in size. Soon the orchard will be in blossom.

Flowers of course bring insects, and Red Admiral butterflies which over-winter, are now often seen. Brimstone and Peacock butterflies had also appeared by early February. Orange tips will soon be seen, feeding on the Ladies Smock as it flowers in the damper areas. Queen bees are busy seeking out their new homes and Hoverflies and bugs are enjoying the sun when it shines.

Unusually there have been a number of day-time sightings of an Otter, a normally shy and nocturnal animal and still a rarity at Forest Farm. Occasionally this has been confused with a Mink, a smaller non-native mammal with similar habits but more commonly seen during the daytime. The Otter is possibly a young animal learning to fend for itself. Other water creatures are also evident – both Toads and Frogs have spawned in the ponds and their tadpoles can now be seen.



Highly visible birds include Herons and Little Egrets, Dippers and Kingfisher,



whilst some of the most vocal are the Nuthatch and the Chiffchaff. Spring is most definitely here! The nestbox project with the Wildlife Trust has begun again and there will be monitoring at the end of the season.

Following the hard work during the Winter, with the first stage of canal work finished, it has been good to see the canal banks already greening up after the de-silting, and the areas around the hide-ponds rapidly re-establishing. Along the canal, dead-hedging has been built to prevent the spread of the silt that was removed. Jobs lined up for these areas next Winter include de-silting the next section of the canal. The main pond at Hide 1 is still leaking and so there will also be further disruption for re-lining it. However, apart from the addition of some marginal planting, now is the time to let these areas rest so that the birds and other wildlife are un-disturbed during the entire breeding season.

Whilst the contractors were at Forest Farm, we were pleased that they were also able to assist with renovation of the two disused fish ponds. These are hidden from view in the field opposite the Wardens' hut and were originally created and used by a local anglers group for fish breeding. They have recently been dug-out and relined to form one large pond which graduates from shallow to deep.

It's good to see that Toads have already moved in to spawn and there are plans to build an Otter holt, to sow native mix flower seeds, and to establish a Bee bank. Oxygenators and marginal plants will also be established at the waters' edge. A natural hedge has already been planted, and

some trees in the surrounding field. The area will remain fenced off to protect it from dogs and other intruders and will become available as a feature for wildlife and for educational visits only. There will be no public access. It is expected that some of the first creatures to 'move in' will be Dragonflies. This is an exciting project that will take two to three years to mature.



Another water feature much in need of attention is the Dragonfly Pond at the entrance to the reserve. Following donations from Sacyr and the Friends, this will very soon be dug out and re-lined. A second part to this project will establish natural re-filling of the pond using a green-roof water-harvesting system from the farm-buildings opposite.



Adjacent to these is the barn which has at last been cleared following the arson five years ago. Rebuild, in the original format, will take place soon (April), including restoration of the hide. Water from the roof will be directed into the Mary Gillham bog area so that Marsh orchids will once more thrive. The area will be protected by new fencing.

Volunteering has continued in good numbers. One job that volunteers have done in the past is caring for the top meadow. Therefore, it's great to report that the trees that were wrongly planted in this area known as 'the Bowl' have finally been removed. Natural restoration will now take place, with annual cut and lift management.

Some of the regular volunteers attended the recent Orchard Management course run by the LNP and their knowledge will be very useful for the two annual volunteer Orchard pruning sessions that are now planned. An information noticeboard about the orchard is being developed by Friends of Forest Farm which will be funded by the Local Nature Partnership (LNP).

Volunteering is a great way to find out more about Forest Farm and to play a useful role on the reserve. Thank you to all our existing volunteers! A warm welcome will be offered to any newcomers and there will be plenty of Himalayan Balsam to be pulled, and other jobs during the Summer ahead!

Alec Stewart, Ranger

TREES IN THE BOWL UPDATE: SPRING 2026



They've gone! We've been keeping you up to date about this inappropriate tree-planting for nearly two years. The saplings were planted in January 2024 by the Velindre Hospital Trust as part of their NRW Dormouse mitigation licence. However, the Bowl location was strictly to be avoided since it has long been managed as a wildflower meadow. It was not, and to our horror it was filled with tree saplings.

Ever since, Committee members backed by our MP, MS and local councillors, have been campaigning for the trees to be removed. We are therefore delighted to report that this has at last happened!.

The area is now back under the management of the Forest Farm Rangers and will be allowed to regenerate naturally. An annual cut and lift will take place to remove old grass and other vegetation. Volunteers may once again be required to assist with clearance of invaders such as Brambles and Balsam. A photograph of the cleared area is included here, taken in mid-March. We can't wait to show you photos of the flowers as they begin once again to thrive there!

FOREST FARM – 21 YEARS.

As I leave the Committee after 21 years (and I am by no means the longest serving member!), I was thinking about what had changed since I first joined in 2005.

At that time, I was new to Cardiff and we had (fortuitously) decided to live in Whitchurch. To make new contacts and find out about the area, Albyn and I attended a Friends' talk, which happened to be the AGM. Nudged by him to offer help, my involvement with Forest Farm began, generally the Committee, and in particular the newsletter. It was a rather steep learning curve, particularly after the death of Robin Sotheby who had so ably done the layout. Happily, the newsletter is currently in the very good hands of Paul and Naomi.

Much later, I began to lead the Nature Walk. Phil Baker, an RSPB member, was leader at the time I took over the newsletter, followed by Stella Wells and her expertise. Both contributed interesting and informative articles about the birds and native plants. If you can help with leading the walk, only 2 hours once a month, that would be wonderful. Maybe a few people could share it?

So, what else has changed over 21 years? As with all change, some things have gone and some things are new. Actually, there have been quite a lot of improvements, some funded or part funded by the Friends, and all in conjunction with the Rangers. These are not in order. The canal - much repair has been carried out over the years. It is a treat to see the recent de-silting at Middle Lock, the Longwood Drive end of the canal. Such a difference!

The pond behind the Wardens' centre is another 'new' asset to the Reserve, a place for interesting pond dipping, and the occasional meal for the Herons! I think John Harding, Chair for many years, was actively involved also suggesting the idea for our nearby orchard. With heritage varieties of fruit, it has been a real success and much appreciated, especially for our October Open Day. This

event was revived in recent years and is really enjoyed by all the visitors with a range of attractions. The children especially enjoy pond dipping and helping with production of apple juice. The Rangers installed another pond, the 'Dragonfly pond', opposite the old farm buildings too, but it's currently dry - the liner needs to be replaced - due soon, I'm told.

Sadly, we have had several instances of arson in recent years. Both the replacement metal bird hides have had 'green roofs', thanks to the Friends, and some lovely information boards. It is great to hear that work will start soon to replace the barn area too. Hopefully, this in turn could bring back to life the bog area which was created in memory of Dr Mary Gillham – a 'Friend', as well as a much-respected naturalist who lived in Cardiff.



Greatly appreciated additions to our pleasure around the Reserve were the sculptures by the aptly named Chris Wood. There are a number in the parking/picnic area, where the 'giant' originally had a Fox for company. That 'vanished', to be replaced by a Badger! Birds have used it for nesting; it's been a habitat for bees too. Sadly, the three stages of the life of a butterfly, near the orchard pond, was burned.

I remember some excellent coach trips for the Friends. For a number of years, Committee member Duncan Hockridge organised these, complete with quizzes and prizes! They were a great success and much enjoyed by members with friends and family.

Going back to the newsletter for a minute, I have noticed that some aspects of the newsletter have changed in terms of reader participation. We used to have articles submitted by our members about things they had noticed or experienced on the Reserve, or queries, or memories/historical information, even the occasional 'letter to the editor'. Perhaps you have something to contribute?

Volunteering has always been a significant feature of Forest Farm, as for all the other 'Friends' groups of green spaces in Cardiff. This is not just people associated with Forest Farm but businesses and organisations in the Community. RSPB Cardiff Conservation Group led by Hugh Harrison came to volunteer monthly over many years. Their 'patch' was that part of the Reserve the other side of Longwood Drive. The other area of the Reserve is, of course, the 'Asda' end of 'meadows' – impacted by the new road, Velindre Hospital construction, and some inappropriate planting. As reported elsewhere, happily this has now been removed.

I don't know whether maintenance counts as 'improvement', but the Reserve would certainly be in a much worse state without it. Volunteers are essential to help the Rangers, to maintain its biodiversity and to make it enjoyable and safe for visitors. The Rangers take account of the seasons of the year so that work can be carried out without a detrimental effect on wildlife. Tasks include: maintenance of paths, edges of the canal, the canal itself, foliage under control, hide ponds managed, invasive species tackled, habitats created to encourage species/plants. The annual funding round brings the threat of, and actual reductions, which affect the number of Rangers and therefore, the availability of volunteers to work on these sites. They can only work when a Ranger is present.

The installation of the hydro scheme at Radyr weir was a great event. I was there watching as one of the huge Archimedes screws was lifted from its transporter lorry to beside the Taff. Very dramatic!

Finally, I must mention the Green Flag award for Forest Farm, achieved by all the hard work of the Rangers and Volunteers. A great achievement.

There is still much to do and plans are afoot for several projects. We are so lucky to have this on our doorstep. I will continue to visit and help with Forest Farm when I can and I hope you will do the same.
Last but not least, thank you to the hard-working Committee - particularly Martin Chamberlain, and the other longest serving members, John Harding and Phil Baker for their long-term commitment, the amazing Rangers, the wonderful photographers, and all who have helped me over the years.

One thing that hasn't changed is the continuing, delightful presence of the Kingfisher!

Sheila Austin


Dave Kitson

Editors' note: Many thanks to Sheila for her hard work and dedication to Forest Farm over the years. Taking over the newsletter from her was a hard act to follow! She is right to say that we would very much welcome thoughts, ideas, observations, articles from readers! Send to editor@forestfarm.org.uk

NATURE WALK

January: Despite having to scrape ice off the car windscreen, the weather was dry and sunny with a bit of wind, fine for a walk. We did our usual route, going past the farmhouse and then beside the Taff up to Radyr bridge. The river was high and fast flowing, so there were no pebbly areas where Grey wagtails or Herons are often seen. We saw not a single bird, not even a duck! But there were early signs of Spring with Lords and Ladies foliage evident and quite a few Snowdrops out around Hide 2.

We heard plenty of birdsong, including the distinctive 'laughing' sound of a Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridus*). Apparently, they have four different calls; territorial, alarm, flight and drumming. Sadly, we didn't actually see it, but we did see 21 other birds. Plenty of Pigeons, Crows and Magpies, but I was particularly pleased to see Bullfinch and a female Chaffinch and Nuthatch near the hide, as well as all the Tits (Blue, Coal, Great and Long-tailed). The other delight was a Song Thrush. Moorhen were in the pond and a Heron flew overhead. On our way from the hides towards the canal we noticed some Jackdaws looking as though they may be keen to move into one of the Owl boxes.



The canal was very full and looked rather cloudy as we walked to Forest Lock, but clear enough to notice the lovely reflections of the male Mallard's iridescent head in the water.
A notable improvement is at the end of the canal (near Longwood Drive). This previously overgrown and muddy area with often just a small stream of water running through, has been

cleared of silt and debris, and the flow of water is considerably better. There is even a new small bridge across the canal there and we were lucky to see a Grey wagtail.

To round up our tally, Robins, Blackbirds, Sparrows and a Dunnock were seen, and, as I was walking back to the car, Paul, one of the photographers, pointed out a Tree Creeper. I was also delighted to see Cliff Woodhead again in Hide 2. Cliff has been photographing at Forest Farm for many years and we have often used his pictures in our newsletters.

The March Nature Walk had a fine, sunny day and attracted ten people. Seven were new to the walk and included two children. I led the walk as Sheila was unwell and fortunately, a couple of regulars were far more knowledgeable about birds than myself! We saw or heard 24 species of birds. Wrens were especially noisy though well-hidden and we also heard but did not see a Chiffchaff and a Green woodpecker. A lady told us she had just seen an Otter in the Taff, but we didn't see it sadly. Did she see an Otter, largely nocturnal, or perhaps a Mink? *

Highlights were seeing the Little Egret, a Sparrow Hawk, a couple of Nuthatch. In the second hide we had a very good view of a Heron searching the grass in front of us, while a Fox slunk across on the far side. We also saw several Rats. A large gull flying over us was recognised as a Lesser Black-backed Gull.


Cliff Woodhead

Bracket and Elf cup fungi were also seen. Flowers included Primroses, Celandines, Wild Garlic, a few early Bluebells and Blackthorn blossom. Garden escapees included Daffodils and Periwinkles.

We were pleased to see that work had begun on the burnt down barn beside the Warden Centre with the corrugated iron roof removed and the area cleared of burnt out tools and other items stored there. Two very pleasant mornings, and you are most welcome to join us on the 3rd Saturday each month, meeting at 10am at the Wardens Centre Forest Farm.
Sheila and Albyn Austin

*Editors' note – An Otter was actually seen and photographed on the February Nature walk, which was kindly led by Frank Sengpiel. New volunteers to lead the nature walks are most welcome.

VOLUNTEER REPORT: WINTER/SPRING 2026



JANUARY: On 17 January, a typically grey and cold winter day, a loyal group of volunteers spent a satisfying morning cutting back the Cherry Laurel that had been a focus during the Winter months. Although laurel makes a dense all-year round green coverage beneath the trees and along roads and paths it is a vigorous and invasive plant and its presence in volume is seriously detrimental to the growth of other less vigorous native plants. A large amount was removed from an area at the top of the reserve



between River Taff and Longwood Drive opening up the area to light and moisture.

FEBRUARY: 8 February again dull and grey, but this didn't deter a large group of about 15 volunteers of all ages. Alec had the buggy already loaded up with tools and we set off to the conservation field next to Hide 2. Clearance work had already been started in the area behind the canal which we continued .



Alec pointed out a noise monitor that had been placed in one of the trees as part of a Cardiff-wide project on the effects of noise on Bats. He was very pleased to tell us that the calls of the Lesser Horseshoe Bat had been positively identified. This very rare species has not previously been known in the area. Another proof of the importance of Forest Farm in nature conservation.

Time to begin work. There were Brambles to clear, Hazel to coppice, other smaller shrubs and undergrowth to tidy, and an entire barbed-wire fence to remove (not for the faint-hearted!). Some wonderful Fungi were again found, including Scarlet Elfcup (*Sarcoscypha)* the gloriously named Hairy Curtain Crust fungus (*Stereum hirsutum*) and also a very strange-looking Tripe Fungus (*Auricularia mesenterica).* It was good to see Spring growth beginning to push through the soil.

Nothing we removed was wasted: the Brambles were piled on top of the Brambles in the middle of the field, whilst the Hazel and other cuttings were used to construct two new habitat piles. Meanwhile, the fence was reduced to two piles of carefully coiled up wire for safe removal, and the fence posts set aside for re-use. The pond previously hidden by Brambles was now clearly in sight, and two new habitats for invertebrates and small mammals were created. An excellent mornings' work.

MARCH: Saturday 21 March lived up to its' name as the first day of Spring, lots of warm sunshine, encouraging more than 20 people to come along; so many we almost ran out of tools. We worked in an area behind the canal not open to the public. It's always exciting to go 'off piste' for a bit. We walked through the trees and towards the canal towpath near to the Forest Lock (the one in the middle). The silt that was removed from the canal during the Winter was heaped along the path edge. Our task was to build a 'dead hedge' barrier to prevent the silt from sliding into the woodlands where it could choke the plants and possibly spread Himalayan Balsam.



A dead hedge is an attractive-looking barrier created from fallen or coppiced wood, and once created it also becomes a haven for all sorts of invertebrates and small mammals. The first step is to make a line of sturdy wooden stakes to hold it in place. Then use the wood litter around to fill up the gaps. With so many people, it was astonishing how quickly the empty line transformed into an attractive hedge, whilst at the same time the woodland floor became clear to encourage new growth.

As we worked it was cheering when people walking along the canal thanked us for our efforts. As usual there was a lot of fun and laughter, the chance to learn new skills, and the reward of doing a useful job in the sunshine.

The renovated fish-pond opposite the Warden's hut was visited with Alec afterwards. You can read more about this interesting project in the Rangers' Report, but it was great to be some of the first to see it in its early stages.

The **next session** at Forest Farm will be on **Saturday 25 April at 10am** and all are welcome.



EVENTS AT FOREST FARM

Nature Walks / Volunteering: the Warden's Centre, Forest Farm CF14 7JH, 10.00 -12.00

Sat 18th April © 10am-3pm	North Cardiff Woodlands Project Launch Event Fforest Fawr (Castell Coch) More details https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/events/dawn-chorus-walk-at-hendre-lake-2/	Andrew
Sat 18 April	Nature Walk	
Sat 25 April	Volunteering	Alec
26 April 4.30 - 6.30 am	Dawn Chorus Walk at Hendre Lake More details: https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/events/dawn-chorus-walk-at-hendre-lake-2/	Rangers. registration essential
Sat 16 May	Volunteering	Alec
Sat 16 May	Nature Walk	
20 June	Nature Walk	
Sun 28 June	Volunteering	Alec
Sat 18 July	Nature Walk	
Sun 19 July	Volunteering	Alec
Sun 9 August	Volunteering	Alec
Sat 15 August	Nature Walk	

For current information about events check our website or Facebook pages.

For more information about Friends of Forest Farm: www.forestfarm.org.uk
Also on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/forestfarmuk/

A SHORT HISTORY OF TRANSPORT FOR THE MELINGRIFFITH TINPLATE WORKS



The Melingriffith Tin Plate works opened in around 1750. They were located to use the water power provided by the River Taff, and according to local historian Nigel Lewis they became the largest in the world. They were immediately faced with the problem of how to get the raw materials of coal, limestone and iron ore from distribution in the Pentyrch area to the works.

Initially these raw materials were transported using horses from the Pentyrch iron works, and then carried on tub boats to Radyr Weir. There is some dispute whether the Melingriffith Feeder was used to transport the tub boats to the works. However, this is possible since there is some apparent evidence of a lock system at Radyr Weir.

As output from the works increased, the use of tub boats had its limitations due to the variable water flows of the River Taff. In 1815 they were replaced by the Melingriffith and Pentyrch Tramway, which although horse drawn provided a much better and more reliable form of transport.



Access to the East bank of the Taff was provided by the construction of a bridge over the Taff next to the existing Gelynis Farm (The Iron Bridge). There is a reconstruction of the tramway below Radyr Weir.

In 1871 there was a major change with the introduction of standard gauge railway. Its' saddle tank, The Emerald Isle, continued to be used until the works closed in 1958.



Little remains of the standard gauge Melingiffith and Pentyrch Railway. However, there are the remains of the level crossing on Forest Farm Road next to the electricity sub-station. Interestingly sleepers were unearthed by storm damage to the Taff Trail above Radyr, by Storm Dennis in early 2020, as you can see in the final picture.

Martin Chamberlain

Image sources: Cardiff Now and Then FaceBook page, and Friends of Forest Farm

RSPB UPDATED GUIDANCE ON FEEDING GARDEN BIRDS

We all want to help birds and make our gardens or outdoor spaces a place where all wildlife can thrive. But some species, such as Greenfinches, are experiencing serious declines because of the disease, trichomonosis. This is a highly contagious disease and can spread where birds gather in large numbers such as at bird feeders.

Busy bird feeders can become hotspots for disease. To help keep birds healthy, it's vital to keep things clean which is why the RSPB have updated their hygiene guidance. The good news is that we can help reduce the spread of disease by making two simple changes to the way we feed our birds.



Feed seasonally.

1 May to 31 October

•Pause filling your bird feeders with seeds or peanuts.
•You can continue to offer small amounts of mealworms, fatballs or suet.

1 November to 30 April

•You can feed your birds a full range of bird foods, including seeds and peanuts.

Feed safely.

- Clean your bird feeders and water baths at least once a week. Good hygiene is essential. Be sure to also clean away any old food or droppings from beneath feeders.
- Place your bird feeders in a different spot every week. This will help to prevent any build-up of potentially contaminated debris underneath. If you have more than one feeder, put them in different areas to reduce the number of birds in one place and the mixing of different species.
- Avoid putting feeders under places where birds roost, such as under trees. This will help to avoid contamination through droppings.
- Don't use bird feeders with flat surfaces, such as bird tables, window feeders and feeders with trays. Research has confirmed that there's a higher risk of disease spreading on flat surfaces, where contaminated food can collect.
- Feed in moderation. Make sure all the food you put out is eaten within one to two days. Adjust the amount you offer based on demand to avoid overfeeding.
- Keep food as dry as possible. Damp food allows disease to survive and spread. Choose feeders that prevent rain getting in and limit condensation.
- Change water in bird baths daily. Only offer water if you're able to change it every day and make sure it's tap water. A pond is the best way to provide birds and other wildlife with water.
- Help birds find their own food. One of the best ways to support garden birds in the long-term is to help them find their own food. So fill your outdoor space with bird-friendly plants – such as sunflowers, teasels and ivy. These help provide natural food sources for birds.

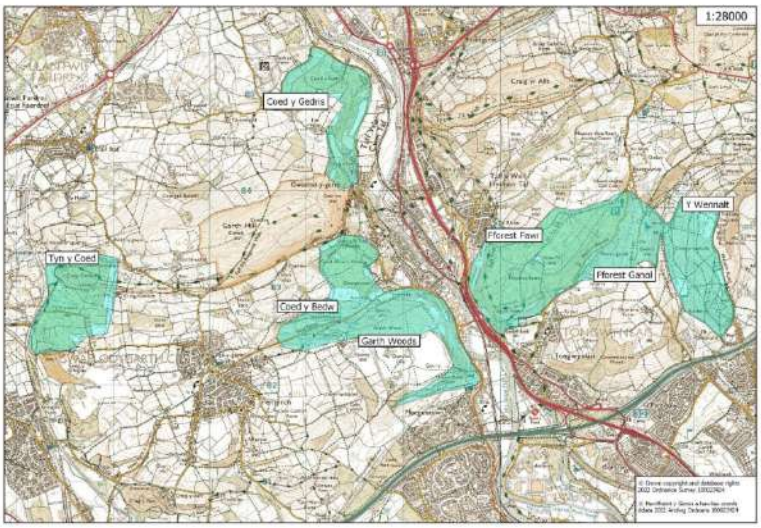
Please view the RSPB website for more detailed advice: https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/how-to-help-garden-birds

FRIENDS OF FOREST FARM WINTER TALKS

The North Cardiff Woodlands Project

Andrew Bodgen, was our speaker for the March talk. Andrew, recently a trainee ranger and known to many at Forest Farm, is now project officer for **The North Cardiff Woodlands Project, f**unded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The project is a new collaborative approach to managing the recreational pressures on this important area of natural landscape on the edge of Cardiff. However the woodlands have various owners including the quarry company Breedon Group, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Cardiff Council. This makes coordination management and forward planning more difficult.



The woodlands are protected under conservation designations in recognition of their natural significance. Over the last few years, the ecological condition of these sites has deteriorated due to increasing recreation. Inappropriate usage also poses a safety risk to other users.

The North Cardiff Woodlands are the predominantly Beech Woods to the north of the M4 and stretching from the Garth to the Wennallt via Fforest Fawr and Fforest Ganol. They are all either SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) or SAC (Special Area of Conservation).

The SAC designation is because Cardiff Beech Woods contains one of the largest concentrations of Asperulo-fagetum Beech forests in Wales, and is close to the western limit of its past native range. A crucial factor is the rare woodland soil with its unique microflora and fungi.

There are also characteristic species of ground flora, some rarely found elsewhere, including Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-cripta*), Celandines (*Ficaria verna*), Wood anenome (*Anemonoides nemorosa*), White violets (*Viola odorata*), Ramsoms or Wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*), Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*), Bird's-nest orchid (*Neottia nidus-avis*) and Yellow bird's-nest (*Monotropa hypopitys*). The UK has 75% of the world's wild bluebells and the Wennallt especially is visited by botanists from all over the world to see them here in Cardiff.



This area has been wooded since time immemorial. It was mainly Beech woodland before 1600 and is classed as native woodland; now one of the largest areas remaining in the UK. The special soil of this old, native woodland is unique to this area of North Cardiff.

Now Cardiff Council, Natural Resources Wales and the Wildlife Trust South & West Wales (WTSWW) are working together with user groups and local communities to restore the woods, while ensuring appropriate and safe access for everyone.

Project Vision: Healthy, resilient woodlands with people and nature in balance.

Project Aims:

- Healthy nature, Resilient ecosystems
- Increased public involvement and engagement
- Better trails, in the right place

A significant cause of deterioration was the increasing number of unofficial mountain bike trails being built in the woods. Unfortunately, digging damaged the woodland soil and trail usage caused erosion. However, mountain biking is an important recreational use. A meeting was held with the mountain bikers to discuss the problem and they proved sympathetic. In particular, a local lady (a former world champion), was very supportive. North Cardiff Trail Collective was created by the bikers, working with land owners and managers of the North Cardiff woodlands to maintain the mountain bike trails in the area in a way that increases safety for all users and reduces the environmental impact. The existing plethora of unofficial trails was re-engineered to six key trails. The other trails are becoming disused and beginning to show signs of recovery. https://northcardifftrails.org/



Monthly meetings have been set up with representatives of walkers, mountain bikers and equestrians. The aim is to have healthy, resilient woodlands where people and nature can live in harmony. A collaborative approach is being used, coordinated by the project officer.



Action has started cutting back vegetation from bike trails, footpaths and bridle ways. Dead trees are being felled and used to make habitat piles. Bridle paths have particular needs to enable horse rider safety; work has begun on clearance of overgrown bridle paths. The Wildlife Trust has made a survey of invasive species. Fortunately no Japanese Knotweed, but Himalayan balsam is present together with Buddleia. Volunteers have started to remove Box Leaved Honeysuckle and Laurel. (*Albyn Austin*)

The project will be formally launched on 18th April at Forest Fawr. For more information: https://www.outdoorcardiff.com/events/routes-to-resilience-launch-event-fforest-fawr/ All are welcome. Andrew can be contacted by email at andrew.bodgin@cardiff.gov.uk

A Year Photographing Butterflies

In 2023, Frank Sengpiel, our speaker for February, set himself a remarkable challenge: to photograph all of the Butterfly species known to be found in Wales, and to do so within a 20 mile radius of his home in Rhwibina if possible! As a member of Butterfly Conservation and an experienced wildlife photographer, he at least had some experience about where to start! Identification was assisted by his knowledge that different species emerge at different times of year and most are very specific about their food-plants and habitats. Another important factor is the under-wing, which is sometimes overlooked, but can be very beautiful and is unique to each species.

Frank gave a fascinating account of his year, illustrated with his own beautifully detailed photos and telling us when, where and how he found each Butterfly. We learned that of the 59 UK species of Butterfly, 43 are known to occur in Wales (see insert). Frank found and photographed 40 of these in 2023, having to wait until the next year to spot the final 3. A truly remarkable feat!

He was not surprised that his first find was a Red Admiral in Bute Park in early February, since this species over-winters. Next came a Small Tortoiseshell, at Forest Farm on 23 March. This was particularly pleasing since the species has been in serious decline. And so the talk continued through Spring, where he saw for example Peacock, Comma, Holly blue, Brimstone and Orange-tip Butterflies. May was a busy month including Small Heath, Brown Argus, Green Hairstreak, Small Blue and the surprisingly pretty little Dingy Skipper. Many more emerged in June such as Painted lady, Gatekeeper, and the large and graceful Silver-washed Fritillary. A highlight of July was the Essex Skipper at Lavernock Point, and it wasn't a surprise to see in early August the Wall Brown since this has two annual generations – Spring and late Summer. As late as October, Frank rounded off his hugely successful year with another Red Admiral, feeding on Ivy, a vital late source of nectar for both Bees and Butterflies.

A few amazing moths were also included, perhaps most notably the Emperor Moth, which is the size of a Peacock Butterfly! And later in the year, the remarkable Scarlet Tiger day-flying moth and the Humming-bird Hawkmoth.

Franks' knowledge and willingness to share it enthusiastically were inspirational, and greatly appreciated by an excellent turnout.

o Brimstone	o Holly Blue	o Silver-washed Fritillary
o Brown Argus	o Large Heath	o Small Blue
o Brown Hairstreak	o Large Skipper	o Small Copper
o Clouded Yellow	o Large White	o Small Heath
o Comma	o Marbled White	o Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
o Common Blue	o Marsh Fritillary	o Small Skipper
o Dark Green Fritillary	o Meadow Brown	o Small Tortoiseshell
o Dingy Skipper	o Orange-tip	o Small White
o Essex Skipper	o Painted Lady	o Speckled Wood
o Gatekeeper	o Peacock	o Wall
o Grayling	o Pearl-bordered Fritillary	o White Admiral
o Green Hairstreak	o Purple Hairstreak	o White-letter Hairstreak
o Green-veined White	o Red Admiral	o Wood White
o Grizzled Skipper	o Ringlet	
o High Brown Fritillary	o Silver-studded Blue	

A wealth of knowledge was shared, often providing interesting little pieces of information about each Butterfly species. When asked for some of his photographs to accompany this article, Frank

was unable to select a favourite, instead providing nine! Here is some of the information he gave on each of these, in approximate order of their appearance in the year:

Orange Tip (April) - One of the earlier Butterflies, whose food-plant is Cuckoo-plant (Lords and Ladies). Only the male has orange-tipped wings.





Pearl Bordered Fritillary (April) – has a particularly beautiful under-wing.



Green Hairstreak (May) spotted at Graig y Cilau, this very territorial Butterfly is named for its green under-wing. The upper-wing is brown.



Marsh Fritillary (May) – a pale-bordered Fritillary, endangered Europe-wide, and re-introduced to Wales by Nature Conservation Wales.

White Admiral (June) – less common than the Red Admiral, but spotted at Slade Wood near Caldicot, where it can be reliably found.





High Brown Fritillary (June) – likes Thistles and is one of the most endangered species in the UK

Purple Emperor (July) – not found in Wales, seen near Marlborough. This magnificent Butterfly has a yellow proboscis and a liking for fox and dog poo! It also spits on rock to dissolve and drink the minerals within.





Brown Hairstreak (August) – spotted near Carew



Clouded Yellow (September) – spotted at Gilestone, this Butterfly likes Hawkweed

We hope you enjoy these wonderful photographs!