



Friends of Corstorphine Hill

NEWSLETTER No. 39

October 2010 Editor: Les Hutcheon Tel 334 3832

Update on Zoo and Land Issues

FOCH has continued to co-operate with the three local Community Councils and the Corstorphine Trust in seeking to persuade the Council not to hand over to the Zoo an area of 1.37 hectares – 13,745 square metres – all in the Local Nature Reserve and Green Belt public open space on Corstorphine Hill to the East of the Zoo's boundary and to the North of Murrayfield Hospital. In response to the strong local community opposition to giving public land to the zoo and as a sweetener to try to persuade the Council to agree to give them the land, the zoo is now offering to give the Council a strip of land along the northern boundary of the zoo in exchange for the area they wish to acquire. This strip totals a little more in area than the area the zoo is wanting to be given, but in the view of FOCH it is of very limited value to the public and in no way would justify the Council giving the requested area to the zoo.

Our group of 5 organisations set up a meeting with the zoo to try to find out what the zoo proposes to do with the land they covet and why they think they need it. They plan to build a road on it, which they claim is necessary under current legislation to create a road to the top of the zoo hillside which is not too steep. They also plan to build an animal hospital on it and probably other paths and buildings and to tame the currently rough ground, which is covered in gorse, wild plants, unspoiled paths and rocky sections. In preparation for putting our case to the Council, we have conducted a thorough scientific study of the area, which has shown that it is the best area on the Hill for many types of rare wild plants and is a region-wide asset. We are studying the question of the zoo getting its visitors to the top of its hill without breaking rules about access for all. For 50 years the zoo has had little buses which took visitors up the hill and then you walked gently down past all the animals. Why can they not have a modernised version of this now? At present the boundary between the zoo and the public part of Corstorphine Hill is unobtrusive, being provided by hedges, trees and earth banks. If the zoo's new boundary is to be in the middle of the open area, which is so much enjoyed by local families, children and dogs, a very visible tall fence will dominate the landscape and make it much less appealing for people to enjoy the part which would remain open to public access. The proposed new zoo land would include many of the best viewpoints of the Pentlands, which are a great attraction of walking on this part of the Hill. There are issues about badgers. Our basic position is that the Council should not give away to anyone a substantial part of a Local Nature Reserve and Green Belt, which is much enjoyed by the local community. If they do this once, the door is open for all sorts of organisations which wish to develop on Local Nature Reserves across Edinburgh. Councillor Paul Edie has been pursuing a proposal in the Council to set up a structure which would give greater security to defending Corstorphine Hill against parts of it being given away for development.

In the meantime the Zoo is still discussing with its developer colleagues how many houses they now wish to build adjoining Kaimes Road on their Western boundary. They are allowed up to 80 houses with no flats on Corstorphine Road and no building on the highest part of their ground.

Donald Gorrie

Corstorphine Tower

This year we have opened the Tower to visitors every Sunday from May to September. Enough volunteers have come forward to cover twice as many days as we had last year, so a big thank you to all of them ! Numbers visiting the Tower on Sundays have been typically 20-30 , lower on rainy days and World Cup matches, but over 50 one Sunday in August. Overall we have had more than twice as many visitors as last year, and so we shall continue to open every Sunday afternoon May-September next year. We now have a banner to advertise the opening on the Clermiston Road gate every Sunday, which has undoubtedly helped. The "Doors Open Day" proved to be particularly popular for visitors to the Tower being rewarded with good weather and excellent views.

Summer Walks

These have been much as in previous years, the Birdwatching walk in April was particularly successful in terms of birds seen, and all the others have been very enjoyable, but numbers have not been large. Kirsy Straughan was particularly unfortunate in doing her children's storytelling in July in a downpour !

2010 Year of Biodiversity

To mark our contribution to this year Brian Moffat, botanist and I organised a wild plant survey on the Hill with a P4 class from Fox Covert School in late June. The teachers and helpers and pupils from the school were really enthusiastic and we had a great day mapping the plants after two wet weather postponements.

Winter Talks Programme

The Winter Talks will be held at the Capital Hotel, 7.30pm.

Wednesday October 20th, Ian Cumming, one of the Forth River Pilots who manage shipping navigating the Forth Estuary, will talk about the work of the pilots who organise the shipping we all see every day from Corstorphine Hill.

Tuesday November 23rd, Carol Terry of East Lothian Bat Hospital will give us a talk on Bats and their habits. Bats are sometimes seen on the Hill and hopefully we might do a Bat Walk next year.

Thursday February 17th 2011, Dr. David McAdam will give us a talk on the Rocks and Early History of Corstorphine Hill. David wrote the invaluable leaflet we still hand out on the Geology and History of the Hill.

Gordon Swann

Autumn Shades

As September shades into October, the Walled Garden is a mix of positives and negatives. The approaching end of the growing season means that winter will be following all too soon. But in the meantime, there is still much to enjoy: while watching and listening to the aspen trees quivering and rustling, interspersed with the sounds of mums and toddlers, planes overhead and the number 26 bus.....

The dense planting of heathers and ericas puts on a show of purple, white, dusky pink- all against green and gold foliage. Further up the slope, orange crocosmia and white marguerites stand out, while close by are the yellow rudbeckia and deep purple buddleia bushes.

The silver birch in the central seat has changed colour and started dropping its leaves uncommonly early, but we hope it will revive next season. The fight against rose bay willowherb continues unabated, while buttercups are massing for another invasion. Deep blue sage puts on a fine late summer show, while the best of the yellow flag iris has now passed in a (rather dry) bog garden, still packed with the tall pink flowers of lythrum 'firecandles'.

Rowan berries are in abundance, fuschias glow red and the rose hips swell in crimson on the old fashioned rose hedge.

Mr Badger has a bad leg, which is in need of a good tree surgeon!!!

The meadow has had its once-a-year cut and our Corstorphine sycamore's leaves are showing their autumn colours. The biennial teasels' spiky seed heads stand out in the shrubbery. The new alpiners look set to flourish next year, together with some more spring bulb planting.

A Green Pennant for 2010 has been awarded to Corstorphine Hill Walled Garden. The Green Pennant Award is a national award that recognises high quality green spaces that are managed by voluntary and community groups. The Award is part of the Green Flag Award scheme.

Beautiful Scotland has given us an assesment of **Thriving** in the ***It's Your Neighbourhood*** catagory of community gardens. That is only just below their top result of Excellent and they urge us to "continue the good work to improve the site".

Pete Taylor

Wedding Photos in the Walled Garden

This year we have had five couples up at the walled garden for their Wedding photographs. They have arrived in various forms of transport, from the normal ribboned cars to white Rolls Royce and even horse drawn carriage. Each couple and their families have been very impressed with the garden and always congratulate us on the lovely setting.

I have one more couple this year who are coming for their photos in November, let's hope the weather is kind!

Fred Davies

Activities on the Hill

2010 has been a successful year for Corstorphine Hill LNR with the achievement of a Green Flag Award. This nationally recognised award overseen by BTCV and Keep Britain Tidy commends well managed parks and green spaces and is generally seen as a quality assurance scheme for such sites. Have you seen the Flag proudly flying just opposite the top of Drum Brae Drive? Edinburgh now has 13 of 26 Green Flags in Scotland, 4 of these are countryside sites managed by the Countryside Ranger Service. The sites are judged through onsite assessments and deskbound assessments where all management and maintenance plans are scrutinised and cross referenced with what is seen on the ground. A quote from the judge's feedback states;

"The staff at this site are extremely committed to the ongoing development and promotion of the site. The Ranger is extremely knowledgeable, pleasant and helpful, and it is clear that he cares deeply about the site. It is good to see that there is a positive link, obvious friendship and respect between the authority and the friends group who have the same aims and objectives".

Over the course of the season, Corstorphine Hill has been looking splendid. Several local school groups have been enjoying discovering the area, our network of volunteers have been undertaking a range of activities such as clearing drainage ditches, scraping paths and steps and controlling the problematic spread of invasive non-native species.

Several trees have fallen blocking paths which were either cleared by members of the Countryside Ranger Service or the Forestry Team.

An initial feasibility study has been commissioned into the establishment of a purpose built mountain bike trail on the southern slopes above Balgreen Road on less sensitive areas of the LNR with multi use paths incorporated and different grading for runs. This proposal would aim to relieve pressure on more sensitive areas of the LNR where this activity is scarring the hillside and on occasion interfering with the badger population. A full public consultation will be held prior to any final decisions being made.

Works will be progressing soon to improve access from Balgreen Road entrance to the LNR. The current path structure and surface can become quite hazardous after rainfall and due to the bedrock becoming apparent; improvements on this line are limited. An alternative will be provided following the boundary wall to the east up along the boundary of Murrayfield Golf Course towards Rest and Be Thankful.

Rest and Be Thankful will soon house a beautifully informative interpretive panel illustrating the history of the immediate area, wildlife to encounter and the views to behold so look out for this soon.

David Kyles
City of Edinburgh Council Countryside Ranger

Friends of Corstorphine Hill

Registered as a charity No. SCO28842

Chairman: Mr E Price, Corstorphine Hill Avenue Edinburgh EH12 6LF. Tel 0131 539 1088

Secretary: Mr D Gorrie, Garscube Terrace Edinburgh EH12 6BW. Tel 0131 337 2077

Website: www.corstorphinehill.org.uk