

Friends of Corstorphine Hill

NEWSLETTER No.68



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Registered Charity No. SCO 28842

Chairman's Report.



SEASON'S GREETINGS

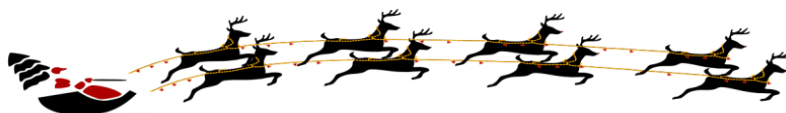
Dear Friends,

This Newsletter is to update you on what has been happening on the Hill since lockdown in March. As you know, there have been no walks, talks or tower visits since then. We hope to be able to start guided walks again in March-April, and tower visits in May. We will let you know details nearer the time.

The Hill and Walled Garden remained open over lockdown and since then, and like most parks have been very well used, especially during the fine weather in April – May. Our volunteers continued to keep the Walled garden looking good, and we were awarded our annual Green Flag this summer. Ian Moore has continued to update us on wildlife with his chilloutdoors website, and David Kyles and his team have been working hard all summer and autumn. Our thanks go to all the above who have maintained the Hill in such good order this year.

I hope you continue to enjoy our beautiful greenspace, and wish you all a happy and healthy Festive Season.

Gordon Swann.



CORSTORPHINE HILL BIRD REPORT 2020



In a year in which visits to the hill by members of the public rose markedly, perhaps surprisingly bird numbers also increased – in particular those summer migrants that travel from Africa to breed. Populations of Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Whitethroat were up by about 50% compared to previous seasons – speculation has it that the Mediterranean lockdown saw fewer birds trapped en route in spring (*Birdlife* estimates that 25 million migratory birds are killed each year).

Resident populations also appeared to thrive, and thankfully there were few gorse fires in 2020. The hill is a local stronghold of the Long-tailed Tit, which relies heavily upon gorse for protected nesting sites, along with a dozen other species. In general, the bird population and the influx of locked-down humans taking exercise seemed to coexist successfully.

In all in 2020, around 40 species of birds bred on or in close association with the hill; if not breeding here, then coming regularly to feed (examples of the latter would be Starlings and Swifts, which prefer to nest in buildings but for which the hill is a vital source of invertebrates). Sadly, the species lost in recent years have not yet returned to breed. These include Yellowhammer, Linnet, Green Woodpecker, Kestrel, Rook and Pied Wagtail. Probably they will remain absent until a change in UK agricultural policy enables a recovery of our farmland bird population.

Among the annual autumn migrants were small family parties of Spotted Flycatchers in August/September and vast skeins of Pink-footed Geese in September/October. Winter visitors in 2020 included birds such as Redwing and Common Gull, with more occasional sightings of Goosander, Fieldfare, Crossbill, Brambling, Siskin and Redpoll (the latter 4 species being members of the finch family that come to feed on plentiful seeds).

Other birds passing or dropping in during the year included Cormorant, Grey Heron, Greylag Goose, Mallard, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Collared Dove, Cuckoo, Raven, Hooded Crow and Grey Wagtail. New additions were Canada Goose in March, Red Kite in June and Whooper Swan in November, taking the number of species recorded to a grand total of 104.

For regular updates on seasonal sightings of birds and some of the other amazing wildlife on our doorstep, visit: <https://chilloutdoors.tumblr.com>

Ian Moore, Committee Member

Seasons Greetings

From the Walled Garden



The garden has been more heavily used than usual this year, and since tourism has been reduced by travel restrictions, the implication is that it has been mainly locals, which is heartening.

April and May were sunny months, but the summer was cooler than average and greyer. Late September and October were relatively mild and settled and the autumn colours were very striking.

Plant losses include the *Sorbus hupehensis*, which was in the lawn to the west of Eddie Price's bench. It was an original planting but had been ailing for a couple of years and was terminal by July. There was a sucker from the base which was left to see if it would perform, but it didn't. On removing the stump in October, the problem was found to be "root circling" which occurs when a pot-bound plant is planted out without the roots being teased out. The stump can be inspected where it lies by the fire area.

New plantings include a memorial gift of an *Exochorda macrocantha* (in the lawn just to the north of the late *Sorbus* mentioned above): an *Abelia grandiflora*, and a screen of shrubs to attempt to hide the top hut and dustbin, conspicuous in the north east corner. The clump of *Cyclamen hederifolium* has performed well and the *Arum italicum* is establishing. There have been several other contributions, from gardening volunteers, including a *Gunnera* and several *Hebes*. The *Corydalis lutea* is spreading on the north wall by the gate and is very floriferous. The fernery is going from strength to strength as have the shrubs along the south border.

The number of volunteers waxes and wanes, but there have been up to 8 working in garden at one time this year. We miss the Scott brothers who have provided sterling service over the past 5 years and who are now busy with their careers.

An attempt was made in July to establish a hive of bees, an enclosure having been provided by the Council, but it was vandalised within 24 hours and had to be removed.

The garden has again been awarded a Green Flag.

Hugh Edwards.

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Friends of Corstorphine Hill thank the following for their funding:-



Building communities. Transforming lives.



City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Service Report.

General site use/maintenance

Over the spring and summer and throughout lockdown, it became very clear how well Edinburgh's parks are used and looked after. Corstorphine Hill like most other parks in Edinburgh was busier than usual and from the increase in numbers and associated feedback it is clear Corstorphine Hill is held in high regard by many. Council resource during this time was depleted and scaled back to necessary activities only, so much of the work normally undertaken on the hill in keeping paths and drains clear and invasive species at bay was lost. Some groups have been in recently undertaking socially distanced conservation work as part of educational activities but the large numbers of corporate groups we normally host were greatly missed. I hope some kind of normality will resume next season and already have an offer from local scouts to kick start some conservation work in the early new year.

Not all work ceased or resource was diverted during this period though:

- Volunteers were out socially distancing collecting litter
- The walled garden continued to be cared for and tended
- Trees and limbs that were either dangerous/leaning or fallen were promptly dealt with
- Reports of groups congregating on the hill during lockdown were passed to appropriate authority
- Covid-19 guidance was appended across the site, updated as legislation and guidance changed
- Replacement fencing installed on eastern path network
- Unsuccessful attempt at locating bee hives within the walled garden
- Orienteering course control markers replaced where missing/damaged, a few still to do (thanks to ESOC for their support)
- Liaison with mast owners regarding programme of maintenance scheduled
- Biodiversity recording of badgers through camera deployment at known locations. Further recording of bat populations to proceed next season.

John Muir Way environmental enhancement with Buglife

We have been engaging with Buglife over funding they have for greenspaces adjoining the John Muir Way for improvements to biodiversity. We have fattened up hedgerows and extended them on western peripheral areas which is continuing. We have prepared areas within the grass slopes on western flanks for wildflower seed sowing specifically yellowrattle which helps to promote less grass through acting as a parasite opening up space for wildflowers to flourish. There are more examples of this type of enrichment work being carried out throughout the city in other parks such as Little France Park and Cammo Estate Local Nature Reserve. We hope to continue this work in the spring.

Forest Kindergarten

Edinburgh Council has a commitment to provide the appropriate amount of nursery provision as set out by the Scottish Government. Due to an increase in this allowance, the Council has been exploring mechanisms to accommodate these extra numbers. With Forest School becoming ingrained within the local curriculum over the past decade, Forest Kindergarten is a slightly more advanced stage whereby for at least half a day or in some instances a whole day, children will undertake their nursery experience in the Forest Kindergarten environment on a full time basis over a term. Pilot projects have been running at Cammo Estate, Bonaly and Lauriston Castle successfully and the roll out to other sites has begun. After local consultations and a delay relating to the pandemic, we have received notification from the Council's Early Years and Childcare Officers and the School Estates Planning Officer that the bespoke facilities that have been agreed to be housed onsite are scheduled for installation December 2020 ready for use early 2021. These will be located discreetly just below the walled garden with minimal impact and loss of vegetation/shrubbery. There will be a marked increase in activity in this area from then on.

Green Flag Award, Green Flag Community Garden Award and Parks Health Assessment

We are delighted to hold 36 Green Flag Awards (<https://www.greenflagaward.org/>) as a local authority, Corstorphine Hill and walled garden both holding an award each. This demonstrates a quality greenspace and reflects the hard work put in to keep it that way. The pandemic has also highlighted parks as useful entities to combat mental health issues as well as all the other provision they bring in terms of health benefits and wellbeing. The Council's Thriving Greenspaces Team have put together health questionnaires designed to gauge the specific health benefits and values parks hold which will identify enhancements that can align with public health priorities. The value of these benefits can then also be compared against current spend and used to identify how potential investments can deliver maximum value to Edinburgh's parks. Further information can be found at <https://www.thrivinggreenspaces.scot/> and the information collected should make for interesting reading.

I rely on people bringing things to my attention regardless of how insignificant the matter may be considered to be whilst out on Corstorphine Hill and other greenspaces in Edinburgh. I'm open to suggestions on how the site can be improved or if there are particular issues that need addressing. Please do get in touch. david.kyles@edinburgh.gov.uk 07710 114 145.

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Autumn Leaves Lie Thick & Still – *The Adventures of Shirlie Basset*

Hi everyone, it seems ages since I did my last 'Dog Blog' for the Friends of Corstorphine Hill Newsletter and what a year it has been!

'The Hill' is still my favourite walk and it seems lots of other dogs and their people are loving to use it too. There seems to be lots and lots of little puppies out & about exploring the beautiful paths and playing in amongst the trees and it takes me back to when I was only a wee Basset.

I keep hearing about this 'lockdown' thing but I'm not really sure what it means although I do know that it meant my mum, Gail, and her dog walking friends from **Putting Dogs First** weren't able to do any group walks for what seemed like ages. She really missed her friends and her visits to the hill.

It's great fun up on the hill, at the moment with all the leaves lying about to play in and I don't know if you've noticed, but I certainly have, there are loads of SQUIRRELS!!! I love Squirrels - they are brilliant for chasing but just a bit too quick for me 😞. One of these days I'm going to learn how to climb trees!

There are some new dogs in mum's dog crew and she is still having a great time taking them round Corstorphine Hill every morning. She has one that is called 'Oh No Wilbur!!' and he totally loves jumping in to puddles. I like puddles too but I'm not really supposed to go into them, unless mum isn't watching me....

Unfortunately my sister, Naughty Macy has got a bad back so she doesn't really get to come up to the hill as often as I would like, it's just a special treat. She is still getting up to mischief in other places though!

With all of these new dogs and all of their people exploring the hill it's great to see how much enjoyment everyone gets but it's important for me that the people keep picking up all of their rubbish as I don't want to cut my paws or get sick from eating the wrong thing, and you know if there is any food lying about, I am going to eat it....

Anyhow, for now, thanks for reading my latest 'tail' and I hope to see you soon up on the Hill (remember to say hello, and..... ahem, remember.....I love treats!)

Love from Shirlie Basset.....

