

Friends of Corstorphine Hill NEWSLETTER No.71



March 2022 Editor: Fred Davies Tel: 337 9232

www.corstorphinehill.org.uk



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Registered Charity No. SCO 28842

Chairman's Report.

It looks as if life is returning to normal, so hopefully we will be resuming a programme of events from April to September as usual. Hopefully, given enough volunteers, the Tower will be opening to visitors at the beginning of May. Other planned events are listed below. The re development of our website is almost complete thanks to Rowan Muir, and it should be possible to pay subs and donations through the website. We are aware of a major management restructuring in the City Council. The details are still unclear, but it appears that the Parks and Greenspaces Department will disappear and be subsumed into a larger Team. Sadly, David Jamieson the Head, will be leaving the Council. We have had very good relations with him and his department for many years, so this is a blow, and it is not clear what the new line of communication between Friends Groups and the council will be.

The Edinburgh Greenspaces Forum are holding a zoom meeting on the evening of March 15th, when David will say farewell, and hopefully shed some light on the future. Scurry Around held another successful fun run on the Hill, and a few of us helped out as marshals. The weather was kind, and it was a very enjoyable event.

Best wishes, **Gordon Swann, Chairman FoCH.**

EVENT.....

A guided walk on the Hill.....



'History and Geology of Corstorphine Hill' led by Gordon Swann, Sunday 3rd April 2-4 pm, meet in the Walled Garden 2pm.



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**Tower opens to visitors from Sunday
May 1st 2-4 pm.**

Buzzard pictured from the Tower with airport behind

Notice

*****ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING*****

**Will be held on Wednesday 27th April at 7.30pm
Dower House, St Margaret's Park, Corstorphine.**

All welcome. This is a chance to put your views to the committee.

CORSTORPHINE HILL BIRD REPORT



Winter 2021/22

Compared to the previous year, when 14 separate snowfalls cloaked the hill between Christmas and the end of February and it became impossible to reach the Rest & Be Thankful, we have experienced instead a winter characterised by mild and windy weather. Most gales blew in February, although it was Storm Arwen in late November that caused the greatest damage, a rare north-easterly that felled many trees normally sheltered from the prevailing westerlies. The absence of a prolonged cold spell resulted in fewer wintering birds visiting the woods than might generally be expected. A flock of about 20 Redwings frequented the south side, depleting the holly, and there were occasional sightings of Crossbill, Redpoll and Siskin, which feed on the retained seeds of conifers, birch and alder. Larger numbers of Siskins have moved into the area more recently, and these can be observed bathing at secluded springs.

Kestrels have been ever-present, occasionally hovering, but more often hunting voles from treetop perches. Interestingly, these are not members of the family which successfully raised two chicks last year. Buzzards, Sparrowhawks and Tawny Owls make up the quartet of birds of prey that live on the hill year round, and there were several sightings of Peregrine, no doubt attracted by the resident population of Woodpigeons and Stock Doves.

The tempestuous weather certainly did have an impact, bringing large numbers of birds from the surrounding district at times. A feeding flock on the Clermiston side on 5th February included 50 Oystercatchers, 75 Black-headed Gulls, 10 Herring Gulls, 15 Common Gulls, 2 over-wintering Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 200 Jackdaws and 6 Rooks. During this period the regular corvid roost on the sheltered east escarpment grew to 500 birds. And, at the foot of the hill, at the Water of Leith, the annual wintering Goosander flock reached 30 in number. Species that made brief visits to the hill or were seen in passing included a late migratory Greenshank in October, along with occasional sightings of Mute Swan, Grey Heron, Woodcock, Raven, Grey Wagtail and Brambling. Possibly the first Tree Sparrow this century was recorded on 6th March, perhaps displaced from lost habitat at Cammo. At the time of writing, signs of spring are in the air. The first resident breeding bird – a Mistle Thrush – began singing as early as 23rd December, and Chaffinches struck up in unison on 21st February. Pink-footed Geese will soon begin to stream north, and keep a keen eye out for a migrating Osprey. The first summer visitor proper has already arrived, an early Chiffchaff singing at the top of Kaimes Rd on 12th March. 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

**** ***Bird Walk*** with Ian Moore. ****



Saturday 23rd April, meet at Cairnmuir Road car park- 9am.

IMPORTANT..

**This event must be booked in advance. To book please contact:
Fred Davies, 5 Saughtonhall Place, EH12 5RH Tel: 0131 337 9232
or e-mail daviesfd@blueyonder.co.uk**

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Email Addresses.....Any email addresses provided will be held securely and only used for Newsletter/Information purposes to communicate with the membership. No details will be used for any other purpose or released to any other external party.

Your email address can be removed from the list at any time on request

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The Corstorphine Hill Walled Garden update.....

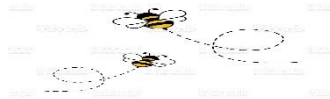


So far, in contrast to last year, winter has barely put in an appearance, at time of writing (5/3/2022 - early days), and the tender shrubs are standing up well. Forest Kindergarten and Fox Covert Primary make good use of the garden, and they have been allowed a 3m squared vegetable plot, which they will look after and plant suitably. An interesting challenge for pre-schools!

This year, a tiny “pond” has been inserted in the board-walk area, to try and extend hospitality to our amphibians who annually suffer from the rapid transition of wet-land to wadi, which usually occurs in late March. So far, I haven’t spotted any frogspawn, but the usual date of arrival is March 12th anyway. Whether any will appear, after the mass hijacking of all the spawn by our neighbours, in March 2021, remains to be seen. Motivated by attempts to “rescue” the spawn, it was neither scientifically approved nor was it appreciated by the local children, who lost the opportunity to follow the spawn through its development, to either success, or tadpole toast. Perhaps we’ll get a wet spring. For those of you unaware of the history, after the construction of wetland area in 2006 to a good standard, City of Edinburgh Council deemed it a health and safety risk and ordered that the impermeable liner be perforated. Kiddies marginally safer, amphibians not so.

The “Bee challenge” has been taken-up by the introduction of a bee-box, on the north wall. Solitary bees produce neither wax nor honey, and should therefore be left alone.

[Bumble Bee House instructions.](#)



[Place cursor over link, hold down Ctrl button and double click https://youtu.be/Y1fljaJvhJI](https://youtu.be/Y1fljaJvhJI)

The Council is seeking tenders for the stabilisation of the steeper paths, which continue to suffer from torrential rain.

Generally, the garden is shaping-up fairly well. The shrubs, particularly the Hamamelis and fernery, are filling-out, the bulbs slowly increasing in number, and always some colour, whatever the season. It could be tidier, but suits the “wilderness” brigade, and the small number of over-stretched volunteers.

Hugh Edwards- March 2022

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



City of Edinburgh Council Natural Heritage Service Report.

Spring has sprung: buds are bursting through, birds are gathering nesting materials and Corstorphine Hill is coming back to life! Some of our local nature reserves and natural heritage parks through winter can look a little dishevelled with muddy paths, bare trees and less evidence of wildlife activity. Spring is always a refreshing time of year.

Work has continued over the winter months aimed at tackling a large stand Japanese knotweed – this was treated with herbicide late summer 2021 with the remaining stems thrashed over the winter season. Inevitable regrowth will again be treated then thrashed again afterwards. This particular stand is on a steep gradient and difficult to deal with. Nature Scot's Nature Recovery Funding was used to employ a contractor to undertake this work. The same funding pot was used to undertake salmonberry clearance over the winter, there's still lots to clear and we'll begin again in autumn. Thanks also to Edinburgh University's Dirty Weekenders, the Green Team and the Conservation Volunteers for their efforts in clearance work too.

We've relaxed the cutting regime to the hedgerow that runs along Clermiston Rd over the last couple of seasons. The reason for this is to improve the feature for habitat value and this has certainly worked. Thanks to the Friends very own Ian Moore, it was noted that there was an increase in bird nest numbers along the whole extent of the hedge: some 43 current nests (approx. 1 every 24 yards) all recent i.e. the current year. Species noted were Dunnock, Greenfinch, Bullfinch, Wood Pigeon, Song Thrush and Blackbird. Some pairs nested more than once over the season. The old regime of cutting the hedge back to bare bones at the end of the year resulted in far fewer numbers nesting. The aim now is to thicken the hedge up by planting in behind and moving the grass path slightly further up the hill.

Some of the recent high winds and named storms had catastrophic effects on some of the trees on the east flanks of the hill, several mature specimens came down, some over paths, all of which have been cleared. The fallen wood is retained onsite to promote deadwood habitat and although it might look a little untidy at the edge of paths or within the woodland, it is of great value and will be left.

We've also recently been able to tap into some capital expenditure to improve path infrastructure with the aim of targeting the approach to the higher points of the hill from the south. The hope is to realign the path in from the Balgreen Road entrance at Corstorphine Road and formalise some of the grass paths that have become very muddy over the last year or two. From a site management perspective, it is very noticeable how well trodden many of the formal and informal paths have become over the pandemic period. With increased and continued working from home, the numbers of people utilising Edinburgh's parks for recreation and respite from the home office seems to have had an effect on wear and tear of the path network especially where informal routes are encountered, this work will hopefully counteract some of these issues.

Forest Kindergarten at Corstorphine continues to develop with staff and children becoming used to their environment and routine within. We are aware of the increased pressures on the site due to everyday use of certain areas and aim to mitigate as best as we can against this: some landscaping work is required to be undertaken round the Forest Kindergarten pods, assessments of areas of woodland regularly used by the kindergarten is ongoing with decisions needed on how best to protect such areas from denudation (sacrifice certain areas or move round to enable recovery?). Longer term, the young people who are being educated here will grow up to respect the environment and it should remain a special place for them in years to come. Local nature reserve designations are geared towards environmental protection but a strong element of this is also the educational resource they provide.

Changes to Council structures mean current resource is depleting. An important part of managing such sites is an ability to get out to site to check on things, undertake remedial actions and take forward project work aimed at improving such spaces. Regular users of the site play an important role in highlighting issues, complimenting actions and putting forward ideas and suggestions to aid this. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with suggestions, ideas or comments in relation to Corstorphine Hill Local Nature Reserve – the easiest way to do this is to email naturalheritageservice@edinburgh.gov.uk for the attention of David Kyles or feedback through the Friends of Corstorphine Hill.

David Kyles naturalheritageservice@edinburgh.gov.uk

City of Edinburgh Council Forestry & Natural Heritage Service

Inverleith Farm House, Inverleith Park, 5 Arboretum Place, Edinburgh EH3 5NY



Walled Garden woodland seat... How many animals can you spot.

