

# Friends of Corstorphine Hill

## NEWSLETTER No.60



Autumn/Winter 2017 Editor: Fred Davies Tel: 337 9232

[www.corstorphinehill.org.uk](http://www.corstorphinehill.org.uk)

(e-mail: [daviesfd@bluevonder.co.uk](mailto:daviesfd@bluevonder.co.uk))

Registered Charity No. SCO 28842

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:-

The last two outdoor events, the Family Bug Hunt and the Fungus Foray both went well with good attendances and lots of bugs and fungi found by the children. Many thanks again to David Adamson for his invaluable help with both these events. Doors Open Days on 23rd and 24th September were very successful for us. We welcomed over 250 visitors on the two days, which was hard work but good for the Tower Fund. A big thank you to Marji Dobson, Stuart Clark, Steve and Shirley Scott, Alison Bowyer, and Christine Burton for your hard work on those days, and also all the other volunteers who have helped open the Tower this year. On the Saturday visitors were delighted by a musical recital in the Tower. John Hails of Napier University, composed a piece inspired by the Tower and it was beautifully performed by two of his music students, Eleanor Figures (French Horn) and Emily Greenwood (trombone). They played from 2-4 on the Saturday, and their atmospheric music resonated up and down the Tower as visitors ascended and descended the staircase. The day before I was interviewed by STV 2's 'Live at 5' programme, outside and inside the Tower as an item on Doors Open days. The interview was transmitted on Monday 25th. Lots of good publicity!

The Tower Repair Fund has now reached over £4000, and we have been in discussions with CEC, who have visited the Tower and are putting the repair work out to tender. It seems likely now that the Council will put some funds towards the repairs. We await more details, but we have found them very positive and helpful over the last few months.

Our hardworking Natural Heritage Officer, David Kyles, has been busy organising invasive species control volunteers to keep Salmonberry and Himalayan Balsam under control, as well as repairing walls and fencing, and enrichment seeding and planting in some grassy areas.

Ian Moore has prepared an excellent leaflet for visitors, describing and mapping a 3 ½ mile walk around the Hill covering the important features. We hope to have it printed and in use by next Spring.

**Gordon Swann (Chairman)**

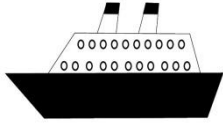
# AUTUMN/WINTER PROGRAMME

All talks are held at the Capital Hotel, Clermiston Road,  
Edinburgh.

Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 7.30pm



A look at the Shipping that may be seen  
from Corstorphine Hill.



Talk by Iain McGeachy

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**Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2018**

**7.30pm**

***“Walter Scott- His Life and Times”***



**Talk by Professor David Purdie.**

*The talk will include Scott’s writings in his  
journals about Corstorphine and the Hill.*

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**The Walled Garden. Autumn 2017**

There are a number of Japanese Acers (Maples) in the garden which have coloured-up well this year. From the butter-yellow one in the north-east corner, to the scarlet one in the south-west, with variations in between. They’re still small but should be more striking as they grow.

The Fernery in the south-east corner is establishing well and is making the most of what used to be a dreich, dark, rubble pile.

The roses on the north wall have survived – just – the spring drought, and are starting to flower. The “hedge” of Escallonia, Hamamelis etc on the other side of the north path is beginning to shape-up, but things go slowly in this challenging, dry and clayey garden.

Minor vandalism continues occasionally. This summer, 3 of the 4 legs of the Wistaria pergola walked, and we are left with a standard Wistaria with a very large stake! Grateful for that, at least. The wall cabinet by the gate was destroyed summer 2016, and its replacement had significant, but not-obvious damage, in October.

***Hugh Edwards***

## **BIRD REPORT----**



WITH ITS DIVERSE FLORA, and free from agrochemicals, Corstorphine Hill is an ancient oasis in a desert of modern monoculture. It produces countless millions of invertebrates and wild fruits, and is a vital feeding station for migratory birds.

In early August – an annual event – a large flock of some 100 **Swifts** and **House Martins** gathered to feed daily upon flies in the lee of the main escarpment. The Swifts departed for Africa on 20<sup>th</sup> August, while the martins remained until 12<sup>th</sup> September. During this period many passage migrants visited the Hill, with small parties of **Spotted Flycatchers** noted on 7 separate occasions – a scarce species, entirely dependent upon airborne insects for their food.

Other migrants passing south this autumn included **Redstarts, Garden Warblers, Meadow Pipits, Skylarks, Redpolls** and **Siskins**. Summer visitors enjoyed a successful breeding season on the Hill, and last records of these species were as follows: **Whitethroat** (19/8), **Willow Warbler** (16/9), **Swallow** (20/9), **Blackcap** (25/9) and **Chiffchaff** (5/10).

As regards winter visitors, the first **Pink-footed Geese** performed their annual fly-past on 15<sup>th</sup> September, taking advantage of a northerly flow from Iceland, and **Redwings** arrived – perhaps from Scandinavia – to begin gorging upon holly berries on 10<sup>th</sup> October. **57 species** of birds were recorded on the Hill during the autumn period, and you can keep up to date with the latest wildlife sightings at this web address – For photographic bird & wildlife updates see <http://chilloutdoors.tumblr.com> or click through from the ‘web links’ page of the FoCH website. **Ian Moore**.

### **Research on the Hill.....Megan Wallace.**

**As part of the Obbard Lab group, at the Institute of Evolutionary Biology, University of Edinburgh, I investigate the natural patterns of disease seen in wild fruit flies.**

On a monthly basis, I’ll be collecting fruit flies all across Edinburgh, Mid and East Lothian, until September 2019. You might see some traps-buckets or bottles containing bananas- around Corstorphine Hill, or a number of other Local Nature Reserves around Edinburgh and the Lothians.

I hope that by collecting these flies, and later, finding out what viruses they carry, in the lab, I’ll be able to learn about how the environment, and contact between species, influences the impact of disease on these insects. As you’ll be glad to hear, none of the diseases I’ll be finding infect humans, but we can make inferences about other insect transmitted diseases from this kind of study. Some fruit fly species can also significantly damage fruit crops, and so regular monitoring of the populations can benefit local farmers.

Since September 2016, when I started the study, I’ve collected a total of 429 flies from 11 different species across the 20 sites, and recently discovered 9 putative new viruses in these collections. I owe thanks to many local land owners and Natural Heritage Officers for allowing me to do this study, and would like to thank David Kyles, and the Friends of Corstorphine Hill volunteers for their help and advice. **Megan Wallace.**



## ***City of Edinburgh Council Forestry & Natural Heritage Service Report***

Corstorphine Hill is really quite spectacular at the moment – the variety of leaf colour and masses of berries; the autumn period is definitely my favourite! It also signals our short window in dealing with the pest that is salmonberry – out with nesting season and while the weather is fair salmonberry controls are undertaken through manually removing the plant and spot treating regrowth the following season with herbicide. So far since August, volunteers from the Royal Bank of Scotland and Standard Life have cleared spreading plants on the periphery of the mass, plants encroaching on paths and small pockets within the main invasion. Given the volume of salmonberry within the NE quarter of the reserve, this is likely to continue for some time. The other problem species in the same area is Himalayan balsam. There have been some attempts made at controlling it's spread over the summer period but again given how much there is we are looking at alternative control methods. Trials in England over the last few years have shown the release of a specific rust fungus can have detrimental effects on balsam proliferation. Licensing is not yet in place for release in Scotland but testing of seed for effective strains is being carried out in preparation. Corstorphine Hill will hopefully benefit from these studies.

Lately, a young lady local to the site named Alison Stobie (with help from her Mum) has been undertaking part of her Duke of Edinburgh Award voluntary service by clearing litter dropped throughout the site. Alison has almost completed 20 hours of litter clearance which has certainly made a difference and made my job a lot easier. Many thanks Alison! I'm often asked for more bins – unfortunately the bins must be in locations easily serviced therefore at all the major entrances you will find a bin. We also advocate a policy of any rubbish you generate, please take it away with you.

As you may already be aware, Corstorphine Hill Tower requires some tlc – nothing major but spending money now will prevent larger maintenance works being required later down the line. The Friends have been actively fundraising and there is also now a budgetary commitment from CEC Parks and Green Space. We will procure the works and as it is a B-Listed building ensure the repairs are completed on a like for like basis.

**David Kyles** [naturalheritageservice@edinburgh.gov.uk](mailto:naturalheritageservice@edinburgh.gov.uk)

**City of Edinburgh Council Forestry & Natural Heritage Service**

**Inverleith Farm House, Inverleith Park, 5 Arboretum Palce, Edinburgh EH3 5NY**

**Tel: 0131 311 7078**