



The Friends of Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill

Report for 2010 – 2011

Jo Doake, Convener

It has been an eventful year since the AGM last September. This went well with the new venue at Greenhill Church meeting with approval from those there. The plea for new committee members was successful and we have met regularly through the year. As always it is amazing how many things there are to discuss and plan for. Very sadly Jim Kyles one of the new members died earlier this year.

One of the first projects to be considered was the implementation of the Woodland Management Plan, for which Edinburgh Council had received considerable grants towards the 3 year plan of tree felling, tree planting and path improvements. Woodland is an ever changing habitat with trees becoming unsafe through disease, increasing size etc but when the felling started there was outcry from some of the public. It was realised that notices explaining the need for such drastic action in a nature reserve were urgently needed and the Friends produced a double length Autumn newsletter to help allay fears. Now several months on the situation has settled down and, after some of the fierce winds earlier in the year, the wisdom of removing dangerous branches and trees before they fell on anyone was vindicated.

It was another very snowy winter with lots of opportunity for sledging and brisk dog walks but it was good when the grass reappeared and spring flowers emerged to go with the returning migrant birds. There are again 2 swans on the Pond although they have not bred this year. An attractive new bird leaflet has been produced courtesy of SOC, with copies available at Hermitage House and the bird feeders are proving really popular with both human and avian visitors.

In spring there was major excitement when we heard that a Beechgrove Garden application had been successful, with the Walled Garden being chosen as one of the projects to be televised on BBC later in the summer. Despite hard work by several people there was no firm funding in place and the Rangers and Friends realised that the project was nowhere near ready for major publicity, so, sadly we had to decline the offer. The HLF applications continue but the scheme requires a lot of money and times are hard. Still, who knows where we may be with it next year?

On a regular basis the Friends continue to provide its programme of activities ranging from litter picks, burn cleans, balsam bashes, moth night etc. We now have high visibility vests so that when a group is working passers by can see who we are. Not everyone wishes to take part in activity days so we hope the colourful Newsletter keeps everyone in touch with what is going on and extra copies can be picked up in our local libraries.

We received a generous donation from the Waitrose charity of the month (thanks to all who put their green tokens in the box for FOHB) which will be spent on plants for a new bee project. We are also looking forward to handsome new gates (funded by a generous private donation) that will eventually be installed at the 2 entrances to Blackford Pond, by the Council blacksmiths.

The Friends work very closely with the Countryside Ranger Team in particular with Jessica Morgado. Jenny Hargreaves, Senior Ranger, Jessica and all the team do an excellent job in managing such a diverse reserve and we thank them for their hard work year round. Thank you to all our loyal members and to everyone on the committee who work hard for the Friends and do their best to support the Rangers. All this hard work has been recognised by the presentation of a prestigious Green Flag Award to the Reserve. Well done to the Ranger Team but to everyone who has done their bit large and small to achieve this great success!