



Hill & Hermitage

Newsletter of the Friends of the Hermitage of Braid & Blackford Hill
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Let us point you in the right directions

If any of you have ever been lost in the Hermitage then help is now at hand. Since the start of summer there has been a new member of the Friends of the Hermitage on permanent duty helping wayward visitors

(thanks yet again to the ranger service for their help), with money obtained from a Local Development Committee (LDC) grant. Another slice of the grant was spent on the refurbishment of the path around Blackford pond.

It was felt that a sign post, as well as being very useful if lost, would also be a good way of publicising the



The new four finger signpost.
Photograph courtesy of the editor.

Friends of the Hermitage. As a result one of the directional fingers points to ethereal website of the Friends www.fohb.org (No! to the tourist who asked if it was Gaelic).

It may be coincidental, but since the erection of the signpost there has been a marked increase in the number of visitor 'hits' to the Friends website, perhaps old technology is still required to point us in the right direction of all this new fangled stuff .

find their bearings. Our newest and most diligent member is just over seven feet tall, has four arms, is thin and very quiet, (the tall silent type I can hear you saying, well some people have not been as charitable and have accused him of being as thick as two short planks, but in fact he is very well read). If you are interested in meeting he can always be found in the shadows of the 'Scout Bridge' at the east end of the LNR.

Introductions over I can now tell you a little bit more about his history. The new four finger signpost was erected,

Burn Clear-Up

Sunday 31st October 2004

Meet at Hermitage House 1pm

Bring the family, all welcome.

HILL & HERMITAGE

All correspondence, including articles, letters to the editor, advertising enquiries and competition entries to:

Andrew Coates
Tel. 0131 447 0370 or email:
andcoates@blueyonder.co.uk

We are always seeking writers of articles.

Have you been to one of the friends events and would like to air your views? If you want to have your article considered for the next newsletter be sure to send it before the next copy deadline
14th December 2004

For information about paying your annual membership by **Gift Aid** or about **joining Friends of the Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill**, please contact **ROB ELTON (Membership Secretary)** on 0131 667 4079 or email: rob@robeldon.demon.co.uk

Articles and Letters to the Editor

The case of the magpie

Spring at the Hermitage heralded the arrival of a great increase in the volume of birdsong and the delightful activities of songbirds busily involved in courtship rituals and nesting preparations. However, in one of the large gardens that border the Hermitage to the north, it also heralded the arrival of the Larsen trap. A Larsen trap is a large wire cage designed to catch magpies. It consists of two compartments, one containing a live captive magpie which acts as a decoy bird, and a second compartment which is the catching compartment or trap. On the top of this second compartment is a spring-loaded door held open by a split perch. A magpie, lured to the trap by the presence of the decoy, will land on the perch which immediately gives way under its weight. The bird falls inside, the door the springs shut behind it, and the bird is trapped. It will later be destroyed. The Larsen trap is perfectly legal, provided that it is used for the 'purposes of conserving wild birds' and checked regularly to ensure that the decoy bird has sufficient food, water, shelter and room to stretch its wings. It is not, however, commonly seen in town gardens, being more usually found in the countryside in the domain of gamekeepers. And its presence on the very edge of a nature reserve has a certain ironic twist. For the birds that it traps and eliminates are the very birds whose breeding territory is within the range of the Hermitage, a nature reserve supposedly protected from such dangers. No one will dispute the fact that the magpie will take the eggs and nestlings of songbirds during the breeding season. No doubt the owner of the Larsen trap sees himself upholding the case for the conservation of the hedgerow sparrow each time he wrings the neck of an entrapped magpie. But what about the other predators of wild birds? Would he also like to trap and eliminate the sparrowhawk if that were legal? And the domestic cat? A moggie will destroy many a brood before Spring has sprung, but would anyone attempt to trap and kill every single domestic cat that slinks across a lawn dribbling blackbird? They would never get away with it.

The gradual decrease in the numbers of certain species of our hedgerow birds is not purely the fault of the magpie. It is far more complex than that. It may even be we who are to blame for the decline in numbers with our tendency to tidy up our gardens and make them unattractive for feeding and nesting birds. We remove all the wild patches beloved by rummaging sparrows, cut down all the overgrown areas which provide cosy nesting sites, tidy up all the untidy borders, replace native plant species with foreign imports and deck the lawn. No, the Larson trap goes nowhere in addressing the problem of the decline in numbers of certain species of wild birds. It only kills magpies. And must it continue to do so each Spring on the very edge of a nature reserve?

Dear Friends of the Hermitage,

Thank you so very much for providing the opportunity for me to go badger watching. I had an absolutely fantastic evening and still can't believe how close the badgers came to us, seemingly unperturbed by our presence. Having never seen a living badger before it was an experience to see a family of four all at once, what amazing creatures. I have been recommending the evening to all my friends telling them if they get the chance they should try and attend a future badger watch. You are going to have more aren't you?

Thank you VC. Edinburgh

Events

Geology Walk on Blackford Hill

Date: Tuesday 21st September 2004.

Time: 7.00pm

Venue: Observatory car park.

A journey through geological time that will explain the processes and forces that shaped the Blackford Hill we know today. Find out the importance of the shallow grotto known as Agassiz Rock, named after the Swiss geologist Louis Agassiz who visited Blackford Hill in 1840. The walk will be lead by Cliff Porteous of the Edinburgh Geological Society.

For further information please e-mail enquiries@fohb.org or telephone Pete Matthews on 0131 466 2392.

Burn Cleanup!

Date: Sunday 31st of October 2004 at 1pm.

Venue: Hermitage House

The recent unseasonably wet weather has no doubt washed more rubbish than normal into the Hermitage section of the Braid Burn. So once again its time to make a positive contribution to your local environment and help out with the burn clean up. Tools, gloves, wellies/waders and safety advice all provided – wear outdoor clothing and strong footwear. This event will go ahead whatever the weather, so see you there if you can spare the time.

If you can't make it by 1pm, come along later and you will find us working somewhere along Braid Burn.

For further details e-mail enquiries@fohb.org or telephone Rob Elton on 0131 667 4079.

Annual General Meeting:



Victoria Noble BA, MT, OSM

Swedish Massage Therapist
On-Site Massage, Reiki II
Indian Head Massage

07900 98 68 63

Victoria@vnmassage.co.uk

advert

A STING IN THIS TALE

Thinking of volunteering to help at the Hermitage? Fair enough – but be warned. There's something nasty in them thar weeds, just waiting to get you.

Nettles.

You scoff, you laugh. Nettles? Haven't been stung by one of them for years. Nettle stings only affect kids, surely.

You couldn't be more wrong. Children are comparatively unaffected by nettle stings. Compared to adults.

Nettles produce formic acid as a means of defence against destruction by predators. A blister forms on your skin within seconds, but that's just the least of it. After one ground-clearing exercise, one of our Friends volunteers (all right, me) suffered very painful pins-and-needles for nearly 18 hours. So don't ignore nettles, treat them with respect.

But here's the thing. We don't want them destroyed either. *Urtica dioica* to give it its specific name, is a breeding-ground and food-source for Vanessids. And if you don't know what Vanessids are – well, think skippers, think admirals. Butterflies are not the only ones to find something enjoyable in the common stinging nettle. While the stalks are the area you want to avoid, the leaves are a rich source of nutrient. Any supermarket now sells Nettle Tea (one at Lady Road does, for a start) and this is guaranteed as a cleansing agent.

To be honest, I'm not quite sure what it actually cleanses you of, but never mind. If you go on to the Internet and punch 'Nettle' into your search engine, you'll find lots of recipes for everything from nettle soup to nettle fritters. But remember, grow your own, don't pinch the Hermitage's. And don't forget to use the gloves provided when you next take part in a Friends' or Rangers' workday.

Sandy Mullay

