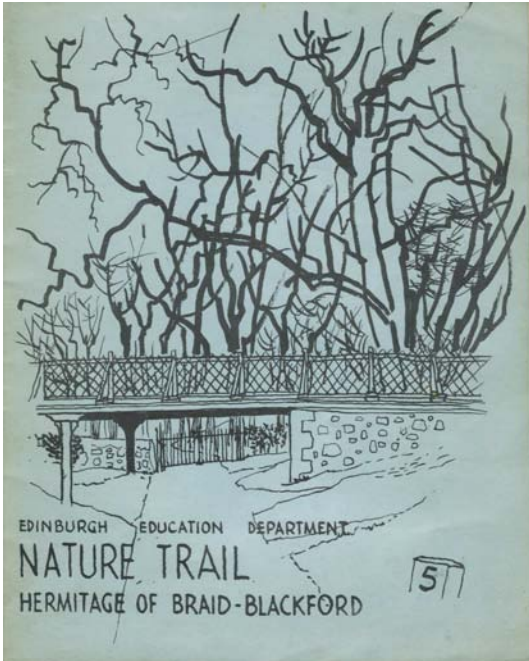


# Hill & Hermitage

Newsletter of the Friends of the Hermitage of Braid & Blackford Hill  
Winter 2006 Volume 7, Issue 2 ISSN 1470-9945



Will the front cover jog any memories?

## Nature Trail Treasure Trove

The Friends committee have for some time been considering the creation of a nature trail pamphlet that visitors to the reserve could pick up at Hermitage House to help them explore.

It seems however that this is not a new idea. A recent discovery in a local charity shop has unearthed a very comprehensive guide to the Hermitage produced by the Edinburgh Education Department. There is no date on the booklet but as an estimate it looks as if it was created in the 1970's.

We intend to contact the Edinburgh Education Department and see if they have any record of it or an updated version, but would also really like to hear from you, the readers. Does anyone know anything about it? Do you remember using it at school or were you part of the team that created it? Drop us a line to let us know.

## From the committee room.....

The Blackford Pond island has been rebuilt, with financial sponsorship from Cala Homes. Your committee was delighted to hear about this initiative, and we offered as much as we could afford to help in the rebuilding. But, with the City paying the balance, we can keep our cheque-book for other good causes.

One which will be beyond our means would be the replacement of the Scout Bridge. We understand

that the City Council is concerned about the state of the bridge - the long wooden footbridge connecting with the Lang Linn path - and we have alerted the Morningside Community Council to our concerns. After all, the structure is only 30 years old, and we shouldn't really be hearing about its possible closure as soon as this.

You may have noticed that steps are being built into the slope from the filled-in area of Blackford quarry to the bottom of the Howe Dean

path. Thanks to Rob Elton, Goff Cantley, and others for their hard work on this. What is needed now is surfacing materials and your committee has offered to purchase up to 3 tons of hardcore and whindust. Not a particularly interesting use of your subscription, but this should allow the Rangers to use their budget for something else. Meanwhile, if you can spare time during the week to help complete this project, contact Rob at the number shown elsewhere in this bulletin.

Sandy Mulla

# HILL & HERMITAGE

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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.

**9th June 2006**

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](mailto:rob@robeldon.demon.co.uk)

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friends of Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill

## Woodcock Year

by Tom Breheny

For me, this winter has been the year of the woodcock. I don't know if they are becoming more numerous or just more visible during the cold weather, due to feeding difficulties.

Many years ago I came across a woodcock nest at the foot of a tree on Dalmeny Estate. I marvelled at the eggs, their points turned inwards and so well camouflaged. It was only when the bird flew off in front of me that I found them.

On another occasion, on Mortonhall Estate, I witnessed another unusual incident. I was walking along a narrow path in a damp wood during early summer when a woodcock flew up from under my feet, only inches away. I could see quite clearly that this bird was carrying a chick, gripped firmly in both feet. I had heard of woodcock carrying their young away from danger but was very pleased to see the proof myself.

Late one summer evening I found a dead, still warm woodcock on Blackford Avenue, by the kerbside. I could only guess that it had been killed by a vehicle as it jinked out from one of the gardens.

One very severe winter, several years ago, when the ground had been frozen for about three days, I was walking towards the Hermitage, past the allotments at Midmar. I noticed a crow sitting on a low branch in a sycamore tree not far from the path. From its behaviour I suspected mischief and went to investigate the cause. Below the tree, sitting quietly on the frozen, icy ground, was a woodcock, its camouflage quite useless. I approached it, expecting it to fly off at any moment, and was surprised to be standing only a few feet away. In the snow nearby I could see where the bird had unsuccessfully attempted to thrust its long beak through the snow and ice to find food, but the ground was solid. I picked the bird up quite easily and could feel the keel bone through its emaciated body. I wrapped my scarf around it and started home with my dog, Finn, who didn't seem too happy with his shortened walk. What to feed it on was my main concern. Continued on back page...

## Work party report

A Friends working party has been busy over the winter at the eastern end of the Hermitage, building a flight of steps up to the Community Woodland in the landfilled quarry opposite the bridge to the Howe Dean. The aim is to open up new options for walkers, who will now be able to follow a circular route up to the Observatory area on Blackford Hill, down to the Braid Burn at the Scout Bridge and back along the valley (or of course the same route in reverse). Up to now this has only been possible for quite adventurous and agile walkers, who had to scramble up or down a steep and often muddy slope, but we hope once the work is finished that it will also become a popular route for more sedate visitors to the area. Most of the hard work was done by Goff Cantley (while I stood by and offered helpful advice), and we hope to complete the job this Spring once more materials have been brought in. Rob Elton

8	2	3	1	7	9	5	6	4
5	6	9	2	8	4	3	7	1
7	1	4	3	5	6	9	2	8
4	3	6	9	2	8	7	1	5
2	9	5	6	1	7	8	4	3
1	8	7	4	3	5	2	9	6
3	4	2	8	9	1	6	5	7
9	7	1	5	6	3	4	8	2
6	5	8	7	4	2	1	3	9

Last issue's teaser solution

## Friends Events March - May 2006

### Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March

#### Afternoon: Friends of Braidburn Valley clean-up

'Everything rolls down hill' and rubbish in the stream is no exception. Just a reminder that our upstream neighbours are planning their clean-up on March 19<sup>th</sup>. If we can help them bag and bin the rubbish then there is less likelihood it will be washed down into the Hermitage later on in the year. Wear boots and gloves.

### Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March

#### An Illustrated talk 'The Water of Leith and the Work of the Trust'

#### 7.30pm: Cluny Centre (Room 2) Cluny Drive

The Friends have arranged for Helen Brown, the trust manager from the Water of Leith Conservation Trust, to give a talk on the work done by the trust. Free to Friends of the Hermitage members, £2 (£1 concession) to non-members. Tea, coffee and biscuits provided.

### Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April

#### Workday

#### 1pm: The Wetland Patch

Work is required on the path that leads to the 'duck board' and dipping platform; the wetland patch is too wet (go figure) and the laying of a higher level access path / causeway is planned to give better access. Tools, wheelbarrows and path provided all you need to bring is stamina.

### Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> May

#### Dawn Bird Watch

#### 4.45am: Meet at Braid Road entrance of the Hermitage of Braid.

Bed lovers beware this one is for early risers only. Discover the bird life at sunrise and hear the dawn chorus whilst the rest of the city is sleeping. Bring waterproofs, boots and binoculars if you have some. Despite the insanely early start this is one of our most well attended events, advanced booking is required as places are limited. Contact Rob Elton [rob@robeldon.demon.co.uk](mailto:rob@robeldon.demon.co.uk) or phone 0131 667 4079.



The afternoon's rubbish haul.  
(dog not included)

## Burn Clean-Up February 2006

Yet again a determined and committed team turned out for the burn clean-up in what proved to be a relatively warm February day. After collecting tools and receiving the risk assessment from Jessica the duty ranger we split into two groups and embarked on the clean-up operation. The first group headed upstream and started collecting rubbish from the Braid Road entrance and the second group worked down stream from Hermitage House. Most of the river - down to the Scout bridge - was covered but our effort was curtailed by a lack of refuse sacks and not enthusiasm. We were pleased to be joined for the first clean up of the year by a group of volunteers from Edinburgh Global Partnerships <http://www.egp.org.uk> Their organisation usually gets

involved with small scale projects for overseas community groups at a grass roots level. We were however very appreciative that they came and helped out, thanks very much guys please do come again.

*continued* The compost heap was frozen solid so I couldn't get the obvious worms and grubs that were needed. I decided on a tin of dog food mixed with egg yolk. With the help of my wife, my daughter and a single chopstick we managed to

force feed the bird and give it plenty of water. The long beak made things difficult to begin with, but we became more confident as our patient seemed resolved to be helped. Immediately after feeding, the bird was put into a large cardboard box, with shredded newspaper and water to drink. The box was then put into a dark, cool room where it was left in peace. We fed the bird about every four hours and as late into the night as feasible to match its natural feeding pattern.

After two days there was a marked improvement and our by now frisky bird ran round the skirting board and along the full length of our bemused dog's back, up the tail and down the nose. Fortunately, the dog behaved well under provocation. On the third day, the bird flew up to the ceiling and round the kitchen, piercing our polyball lightshade with his slender bill. On the third evening I was happy with the woodcock's body weight and also with the weather, which was beginning to thaw, so I took him up to the woods where I had found him. I put him gently under a beech tree and left him in the darkness among the leaves.

Two days later, my dog flushed a pair of woodcock near to the release area, by the wooden bridge over the Braidburn, and they circled above. One of them looked fairly dishevelled, so I suppose this could have been ours.

I've always has a special affection for woodcock since that time, and always get a buzz when I see one.

### More birds

*It certainly came as a surprise to learn that woodcock use the hill from time to time. The author of this issue's reader's article was lucky both to have found and better still to have rescued such a bird. It shows how important it is keep observing when out for a walk even in the city.*

*The rangers have a very good idea of the variety of birdlife but in an attempt to see how numbers are doing in the reserve, both resident and migrant, I have tried without success to find a qualified surveyor to do just that. It is a big area to cover fully but maybe some readers have skills that might be harnessed or know of others who could be contacted. If this of interest could you please contact a member of the committee?*

*And watch out for Fergus Cook's dawn bird watch in May. Who knows what you might see!*

*Jo Doake*

**FRIENDS OF THE HERMITAGE  
AND BLACKFORD HILL**

invite you to an illustrated talk:

**THE WATER OF LEITH AND  
THE WORK OF THE TRUST**

to be given by

**Helen Brown**

**Trust Manager, Water of Leith Conservation  
Trust**

in Cluny Centre (Room 2) Cluny Drive  
on  
Tuesday 21st March 2006 at 7.30 pm.

Tea/coffee and biscuits

Free to Friends of the Hermitage  
Non-members £2 and £1 (concession)