

Hill & Hermitage

Newsletter of the Friends of the Hermitage of Braid & Blackford Hill
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THE ISLAND IS BACK, AND BETTER THAN EVER!

As visitors to the area will already have noticed, the island in Blackford Pond has reappeared after an absence of several years. The previous island, created with the help of funding from CALA Homes in the 1990s, had been gradually eroded by wave action until hardly any of it was left. This sad state of affairs was noted by CALA chairman Geoff Ball, who is both a local resident and a keen birdwatcher, and he generously offered to fund a replacement to the old island. This has now been constructed to a different and hopefully more long-lasting design, involving a surrounding underwater wall or 'bund' of Andesite rock filled with hardcore and topped off with attractive pink shingle and limestone rocks. The new island was officially inaugurated at a ceremony on Friday 9th June, in the presence of Mr and Mrs Ball, Countryside Ranger Fergus Cook and other local representatives including Councillors McInnes and Mackintosh, South Morningside school children and Friends Convener Rob Elton. As well as being an attractive visual feature in the pond, the island should provide a safe haven for nesting waterfowl with less risk of predation from rats, cats and foxes, and indeed the little wooden duck house is already home to a brood of mallard chicks. Some of the original trees have survived the destruction of the old island, and as ground vegetation also gets established we can look forward to enjoying this scenic wildlife habitat for many years to come.



Rob Elton



IT'S NICE TO BE ASKED...! FRIENDS COMMENT ON CITY DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The City Development Department has asked the Friends to comment on three new planning strategy documents, and these were considered by your Committee on June 1st.

The documents are - the latest draft of the City Local Plan, the Structure Plan Review 2020, and 'The Vision for Capital Growth'. The first of these is the most detailed, requiring an in-depth response, but one of the others has an unpleasant sting in the tail.

An earlier draft of the City Local Plan was positive in its 'green' policies, although we were unhappy that it showed

part of the Green Belt at Alnwickhill as zoned for housing. That has been put right in this version of the Plan, and again there is a pleasing amount of emphasis on LNRs, SSSIs, and other conservation areas.

We had one or two niggles - we have queried the Plan's definition of a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) such as Hermitage, as there are discrepancies in the terms shown. We approve of the prominent listing of the Agassiz Rock as an SSSI, although we've had to point out that the site is still 'anonymous' and unprotected - the Countryside Rangers

don't seem to be receiving the finance and resources they need to fully preserve and promote this site. (Also, the attached maps omit the Rock, for some reason, although other SSSIs are shown).

We are unhappy about the unilateral decision of the City to rename the Blackford RIGS (Regionally Important Geological Site) as the Hermitage Local Geodiversity Site. Since the Plan's own description of the Site as a 'crag and tail' applies specifically to Blackford Hill, we feel that 'Blackford' should remain in the title. Also, won't there continued on page 3...

HILL & HERMITAGE

During the changeover period please send all correspondence, including articles, letters to the editor, advertising enquiries and competition entries to:

Rob Elton
Tel. 0131 667 4079
or email:

rob@robeldon.demon.co.uk

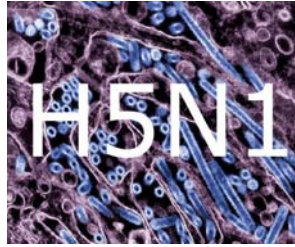
Have you been to one of the Friends events and would like to air your views? If you want to have your article considered for the next newsletter be sure to send it before the next copy deadline.

1st September 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

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



Not at first glance an exciting title. If I had called it "Bird Death Bug." You might have found it more dramatic. Asian Bird 'Flu' would have been more identifiable. An Asian bird flew out of Asia and set the cat among

the pigeons here in Scotland. A swan was washed up (in more ways than one) in Fife some weeks ago. It carried the deadly (to some birds) H5N1 strain of the virus. It had probably picked it up in north eastern Europe, or maybe Siberia. Perhaps it had met with a bird that had come from Asia, perhaps there was a chain of connection involving several individuals.

In any case the panic has passed. I thought you might be interested in a few points from the New Scientist (13th May '06) in an article by Deborah McKenzie. In a nutshell: the best outcome in this part of the world would be for the virus to die out quickly in the wild by killing their victims rapidly. This would still leave Asian poultry farmers with problems. This might mean larger production units where controls are easier, putting smaller farmers out of business.

The worst case would be a mutation of the H5N1 strain that was a bit less lethal. This could possibly happen if the virus cooks a way producing a series of variations in poultry flocks out east, with occasional breakouts of different varieties that could be spread by migrants. This can happen because in poultry flocks where the virus is no longer fatal, vast amounts of the virus are shed from the chickens in faeces. In this case there is a possibility of a strain developing that can kill other animals such as mammals; for example us. There could be a bad result for bird populations where there are few individuals left. Species where most of the individuals gather in a very few locations (e.g. the world's barnacle geese spend the winter on coastal areas of Ireland and north west Britain) could be vulnerable. Populations where there was little genetic diversity between individuals could conceivably be wiped out.

Experts agree that containing the virus to poultry flocks is the answer. \$1.9 billion was committed to helping poor countries do this by wealthier countries at a World Bank meeting in January. \$60 million has been confirmed. None has yet materialised.

Fergus Cook

Desperately seeking an editor!

Andrew Coates, editor of Hill and Hermitage for the past three years, is having to step down because of increased family and work commitments. It has been a pleasure to work with him over this period, and he has produced consistently interesting, varied and witty issues of the newsletter which always (just!) made the printing deadlines. We are now seeking a new editor for September and beyond, and would be delighted to hear from anyone who would like to help with this. There are two main prerequisites for the job, journalistic flair and IT skills, and not many people are able to combine the two as well as Andrew has, so we may decide to share these roles amongst an editorial committee of several people. Andrew has been responsible for maintaining the Friends website as well, so volunteers are also being sought for help with keeping this up to date in the future. Contact me on 667 4079 if you think you can contribute to either of these important aspects of our media profile.

Rob Elton

continued from front page have to be a lot of reprinting of posters and leaflets? (If you're interested in this subject, remember to come to our Geological Walk on September 5th!).

The plan is somewhat casual in its marking of flood prevention measures on the Braid Burn and we have requested that these be more exact. Committee members were mind-boggled to see that floods were expected to reach the upper walls of Braidburn Valley! Also, we note that Blackford Hill is a protected prehistoric

site, so we are asking the City what conservation measures they put in place at Hogmanay to preserve the archaeological remains from the howitzer recoil during the fireworks display, (None, we suspect!).

Despite these moans, we have nevertheless complimented the planners for giving nature conservation matters such a high profile in the City Local Plan. As for the other two documents...

These are rather vague, full of good intentions, but we

were pulled up short by this ...'we need to take a hard look at whether the traditional green belt concept is fit for the future'. The alternative seems to be green 'fingers' into the city, like the spokes of a wheel. We have suggested that if the present concept of Green Belt round the south of Edinburgh is actually doomed, we will need to have more evidence, and more detail proposals of alternative strategies, than City Development have given here. AJM

Friends Events June - September 2006

Sunday June 25th

Burn clean-up and balsam work day

11.00 am at Hermitage House

As usual the Braid Burn has been filling up with rubbish over the past few months, so why not enjoy a summer clean-up with the Friends and help improve your environment? This time we are trying a mid-morning start in the hope that some members will prefer to come at that time, and we will supply boots, gloves, bin bags, rakes and litter pickers, or bring your own if you prefer. If enough people come, or for those who prefer not to get their feet wet, we may also send out working parties to pull up Himalayan Balsam, which may look like (indeed is) a pretty pink plant but is also an alien invader that is taking over from native species in various parts of the reserve. If you can't get there by 11am, look for us working somewhere along the burn for most of the rest of the day.

Saturday Aug 12th

Orienteering event - See back page for further details

Tuesday Aug 22nd

Batty About Bats? Bat evening

7.15pm Hermitage House - Talk/Slide Show; **8.30pm Blackford Pond** - Bat Watch

COME LEARN ABOUT AND SEE OUR FURRY FLYING FLEDERMAUS FRIENDS!

Another of our ever-popular bat nights with our host Natalie Taylor of Lothian Bat Group. Great slides of and chat about bats, both local to the Hermitage and from further afield.

Free to Friends of Hermitage members, guests/others by small donation which will support the work of FoH and LBG.

No need to book. Children very welcome. Bring a torch.

More information - 07951849414

Tuesday Sept 5th

Geology walk

7.00 pm at the Observatory Car Park on Blackford Hill

Learn how events in the very distant past have created our present-day environment by coming along to this walk and talk by local geology expert Cliff Porteous. He will lead an evening stroll round both Hill and Hermitage to explain many of the interesting (and in some cases world-famous) features that are too often taken for granted by visitors to the area. No need to pre-book, just turn up and enjoy. Whatever the weather this should be an excellent evening experience.



Orienteering on Blackford Hill & The Hermitage

I expect you will have seen the posts with diagonal red and silver markers on them, strategically placed at intervals, and maybe wondered what they were for. They are the Controls, 26 in total, for the Permanent Orienteering Course which has been set up on the Hill by our Club, in co-operation with the City of Edinburgh Council Rangers.



This adds an extra dimension to the enjoyment of the Hill. You are probably aware that orienteering events using temporary controls are held here about once a year, and the terrain is ideally suited for this activity. You can use the Permanent Course Map Pack at any time for training runs, practising technique or just adding extra interest to a walk.

Orienteering is all about finding your way around using a specially prepared large-scale and very detailed map to navigate between the Controls. The easiest courses follow paths most of the way, and the hardest ones take you across open land or through the woods and require careful map-reading and compass work.

Our next event is on

Saturday 12th August, starting at the Observatory Car Park at 2pm.

All Friends are very welcome.

An introductory explanation of the basic principles of orienteering is offered at 1.15pm

Please contact me if you would like any further details.

Janet Clark,
President, Edinburgh Southern Orienteering Club
13 NW Circus Place, Edinburgh EH3 6SX
0131 225 7771 JanetClr@aol.com



Update on the Hermitage Dooct

Regular users of the Hermitage will no doubt have seen that the Dooct has been swathed in scaffolding for several months. The building is now looking better than it has done for many years with its new roof, and its freshly painted guttering and dormers. The Friends' Committee are delighted that the Council managed to fund this work on what is something of a historic landmark building within the Hermitage.



It would have been nice to restore the missing five stone urns that apparently once adorned this structure, one at each corner and one in the centre of the rear wall! Does anyone admit to having one of these in a corner of their garden? Did you know that the projecting string course of stone around the building is not just an architectural feature but a carefully placed device to stop rats climbing up the structure and getting in amongst the nesting birds? There is more to this interesting building than meets the eye, and the Committee will be looking at improving the interpretation of the structure now that we can be proud of its appearance once again.

Goff Cantley