



## **The Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill Autumn 2023 e-Newsletter**

**Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill e-newsletter, featuring our report of spring and summer activities around the Local Nature Reserve (LNR).**

In this edition we update you with the goings-on on Easter Craiglockhart Hill over the spring and summer of 2023. We have been extremely busy working to complete the Happy Valley Garden (HVG) project and our limited working hours have meant that quarterly newsletters have suffered.

We report on our Community Plant Sale which took place in May, our Corporate Volunteering project along the Meadowspot Path, and our continued planting efforts to fill the LNR with as much colour, vibrancy and biodiversity as possible.

We will also report on changes to the FECH team, our Annual AGM - held in July, and some of the events held over the Spring such as our popular Cygnet Countdown competition and Fungi Walk.

We will report on our recent volunteering activities, summarise achievements and let you know how you can get involved or support our work, including becoming a FECH trustee.

And of course, there will be an update on what's happening with our local swans, and plenty of other wildlife news too!

## Happy Valley Garden

We are delighted to inform you that the Happy Valley Garden project has been completed on budget and on schedule. We hope you are happy with the results and enjoy this newly modified area of the nature reserve which has become a particular haven for butterflies over the late summer months.

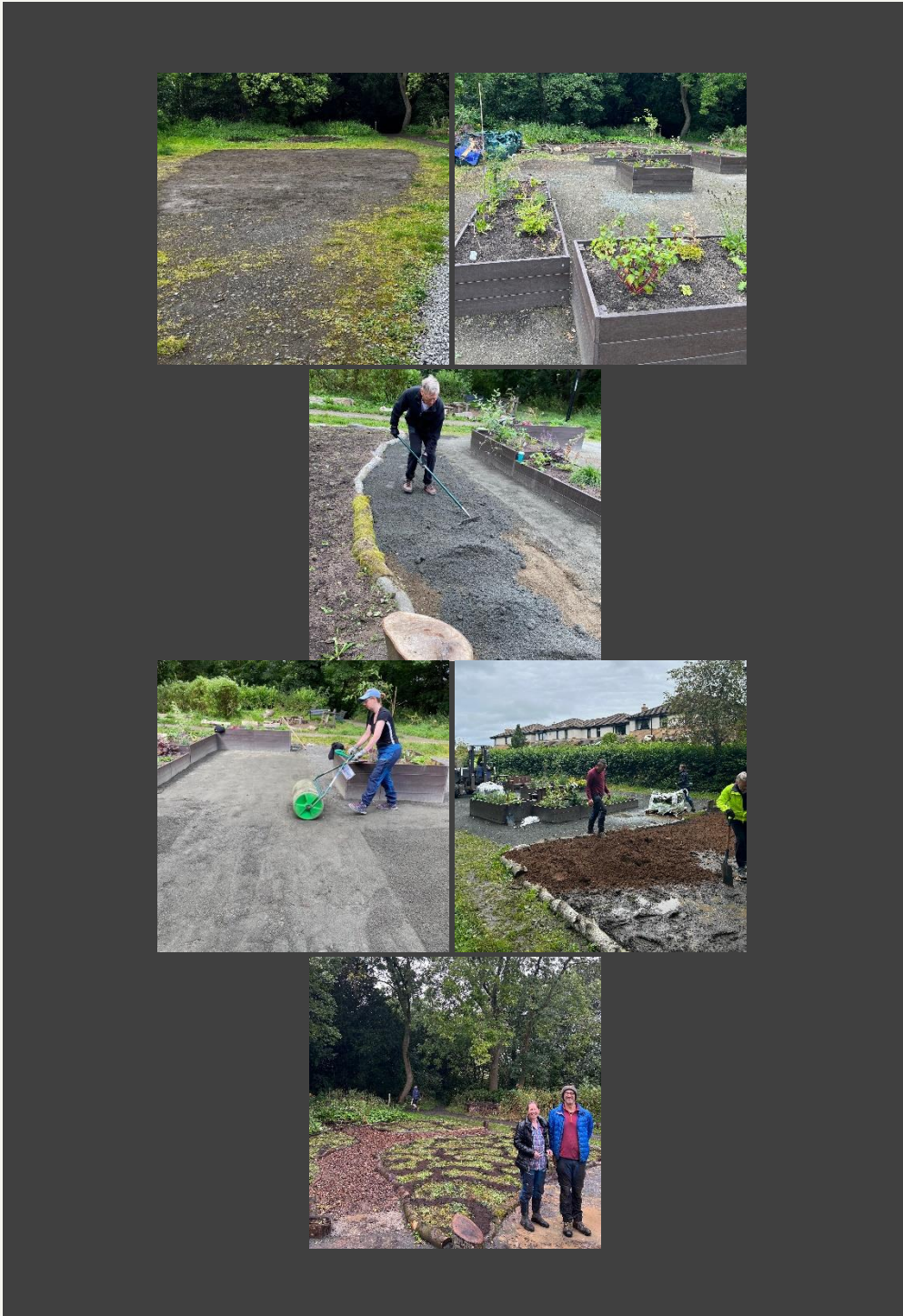


The garden was paid for by the National Lottery's Grants for All fund and some materials for the resurfacing and wildflower patch were also provided by the City of Edinburgh Council. However, the physical effort and time was donated by our wonderful team of volunteers - comprising of Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme candidates and our Hill Work Squad community members. It's been hard work pulling all the aspects of the project together and to adhere to the community feedback from the HVG consultation, held last winter/spring, as well as possible.



The area now boasts two banks of multi-level planters - to accommodate different sizes of plants and of the people who tend them, a centre-piece square planter, two new benches and a wheelchair-friendly picnic table. The plants in the planters are designed to produce a sensory experience by our fantastic Planting Team of Erin and The Lesleys, and were chosen for their colours, textures, and smells. To blend this garden area into the wilder space of the Nature Reserve, we've planted a wildflower patch containing over 35 species of plants with a wood chip path and log perimeter. This area will increase the biodiversity further by attracting a greater variety of pollinators, and will look great in the spring and summer months when flowering. During the darker, colder parts of the year this area will be cut and look a bit barer, but this is perfectly natural for the cycle of wildflowers and helps to produce a vibrant display the following spring.

We hope you agree that this project is helping to improve the welcoming appearance and utility of this entrance to the Nature Reserve, and enjoy stopping to explore the plants and wildlife, read a book, or have a picnic. Let us know what you think.



## FECH Plant Sale

The FECH Community Plant Sale took place on the 14th of May 2023, and was a great success! We raised a grand total of £1160 which will go

towards sustaining our planting programme. We'd like to extend a huge Thank You to everyone involved:

Firstly, to the Plant Sale team of; Lesley Arthur, Lesley Millar, Sheila Boyes, Fiona Cameron, Maggie Coombs, Nadine Harrison, Jo Young, and all of our Volunteer From Home (VFH) contributors, who grew-on seeds and plugs at home so we could sell them. All of this was masterminded by our wonderful Seeds & Planting Co-ordinator Erin Jackson.

Secondly, to the generous organisations and individuals who donated plants; Janice Peter at Inch Nursery, Becky & Clarissa at Redhall Walled Garden, Mortonhall Garden Centre, Waitrose Morningside, and anonymous donations from members of the local community!

Thirdly, to our fabulously dedicated and hardworking Duke of Edinburgh & Hill Work Squad volunteers who helped set up and run the show, and helped clear up afterwards.



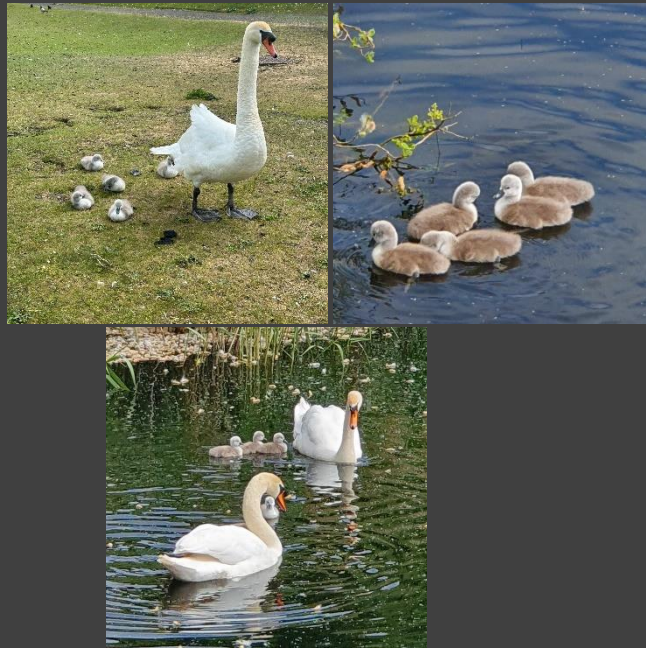
And finally, to everyone who came along and showed their support on the day, we couldn't have done it without any of you!

Plans are already beginning to sprout for next years sale. Keep a look out

for information. If you'd like to get involved in any capacity, please e-mail: [friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org](mailto:friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org)

Plant donations will also be gratefully accepted.

## Swan Watch



After the significant drama and turmoil surrounding the swans last year, we were relieved to have the pond return to relative normality. After the sad demise of the much-loved Siegfried, who finally succumbed to a chronic leg injury (see obituary below), our remaining Pen, Brigid, was free to mate with her new companion Tullius, who arrived from the Union Canal last Autumn after his own mate was killed in a traffic accident. The new couple produced a brood of five healthy cygnets, albeit belatedly, who hatched on the 3rd of June. Over the summer and autumn months, all five cygnets have grown strong and have been thoroughly schooled by their attentive parents, in preparation for leaving in the spring.

Thanks to everyone who entered our Cygnet Countdown competition to guess the date of the first hatching. The winner this year, and the new Swan Queen for 2023, is Violet Vaughan. Violet has an amazing knack for this competition having been the

runner-up last year, she went one better this year to take the crown! Congratulations Violet!

And now for the classified results:

- 1st - Violet Vaughan
- 2nd - Erin Jackson
- 3rd - Silver the Cat
- 4th - Toby Higgins

## SIEGFRIED SWAN (2012-2023)

### AN OBITUARY

Siegfried fledged in 2012 at Stenton Park in Glenrothes. He and his partner, Brigid, arrived at Craiglockhart Pond in 2016 and drove off the resident pair, Vesta and Leithie.

Over the following years, Siegfried, a handsome swan, won many friends and admirers. He was a diligent nest builder and a caring and protective parent.

In December 2022, Tullius, a widower from the Union Canal, flew in. Younger and stronger, he quickly displaced Siegfried from his territory and from Brigid's affections. Siegfried's last few months were not happy. He was a forlorn figure, often hiding in the reeds, bruised and battered. After a particularly vicious attack by Tullius and Brigid, a chronic leg injury became infected. He was taken to the Dick Vet and given antibiotics but did not respond well and the vet thought it kinder to put him down.

Siegfried spent seven happy years on Craiglockhart Pond and fathered more than 50 cygnets. His genes will ring on down the years and he will be missed by many.



RIP Siegfried

## Wildlife Update

As well as the drama surrounding the swan love-triangle and new cygnets, there has been plenty of other wildlife action observed on the hill in recent months. The clearing of the pond outlet stream and the creation of small pools there, has not only encouraged a beautiful kingfisher to frequent the area, but during the spring and early summer, has also encouraged a bloom of tiny frogs on the Causeway at the NE end of the pond. This stream and its pools will be re-cleared and expanded over the winter months, ready to



provide a lush home for wildlife in the spring. Another habitat developed in recent months was the dead hedge enclosure next to the Meadowspot path. This structure was created with help from our first, post-covid, corporate volunteer group, from Heineken. The idea of this structure is to provide habitat for insects, small mammals & amphibians - protected from dogs and humans. It features a 'Toad Abode' - which is designed to provide a dark, damp, subterranean place for the toads we have observed around the Meadowspot and Zig-zag paths. Finally, the walls are constructed exclusively from invasive plant species, so the structure has the double function of providing both wildlife habitats and a place to put cuttings.



We have had reports of some other interesting birds around the LNR too. As usual, there have been plenty of sightings of Kestrels and Buzzards near the hilltop, and the Tawny Owls are still frequenting the tall trees of the lower Craiglockhart Woods. During the summer there were up to four herons swooping and wheeling round the pond at the same time, vying for dominance. They put on quite a spectacle! A breeding pair of Jays were spotted with their chick, which is quite uncommon on ECH and on the pond

there was a pair of Little Grebes with their chick. Currently, there is also quite a rare male Pochard, and potentially one or two females - though they are rather harder to spot.





During the spring and summer months we conducted pollinator surveys with our volunteers, to start recording numbers and variety of pollinators on ECH, in order to gain long-term insight into the potential differences made by our planting initiatives. The survey was part of the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS), and so the data collected will also be aggregated with the wider national citizen science programme.





Finally, we've had plenty of the usual Fox and Roe Deer sightings, and whilst there is plenty of evidence of badger activity on the hill, there's only been a couple of reported sightings of our elusive black and white friends. Keep your eyes open out there and see what you can see, we'd love to hear about it, so do report interesting sightings and send in your photos and videos. For an emotive round-up of our wildlife sightings this year, check out our video linked below:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y\\_pJSUoERco](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_pJSUoERco)



## **Volunteering Update**

A large proportion of our volunteering sessions this year have been focused on delivering the Happy Valley Garden project at the Craiglockhart Terrace entrance (CTE) to the reserve, and we'd like to thank all of our intrepid volunteers who have helped throughout this period, contributing many hours of their own time and a great deal of effort, to improve Easter Craiglockhart Hill. During the last few months, we've also been working on various other projects and on-going tasks around the LNR with our Duke of Edinburgh award scheme participants, and our Hill Work Squad Volunteers.

Some of our achievements include; continuous litter picking, path clearing and scraping, bench maintenance, drainage maintenance, removal of invasive vegetation and the construction of a dead hedge enclosure for cuttings and habitat creation. We have continued to maintain our various willow features and are delighted to report that both willow spiling areas at the pond, and the recently replanted willow tunnel extension at the CTE, have started to 'take'. We have installed and maintained an Elf Door Trail to encourage young families to explore the woods. We have planted and mapped a variety of trees and wildflowers to help increase local biodiversity. We created a hilltop gorse clearing, which doubles as a fire-break, and as a place to plant suitable hilltop species such as bell heather, juniper, and bilberry.

We identified and removed thousands of highly aggressive and invasive Small Balsam plants from the Meadowspot woods. Small Balsam is related to the more famous, and similarly aggressive, Himalayan Balsam - which quickly colonises huge swathes of woodland and riverbanks in the UK, out competing native plants and producing an ever-spreading monoculture which greatly reduces biodiversity. It'll be an on-going task to monitor its return and to stay on top of its potential spread, but we're glad we caught it before it got too out of hand!



Small Balsam

Thanks to everyone who has been conducting individual Hill Patrols in their own time, and submitting Patrol Logs with valuable data about wildlife, human use of the LNR, and other issues (including Balsam!). All of these data are greatly appreciated and are being logged for future reference, please keep it up!

If you'd like to get involved in any of our volunteering activities, you'd be most welcome! Check out the 'Volunteer' tab on our website here: <https://www.eastercraiglockharthill.org/volunteer/> Sessions currently run every Sunday between 2-4pm but feel free to contribute however much time you have as all help is welcome. There will be a range of tasks from fairly gentle to fairly strenuous so something to suit everyone. If you'd like more information and weekly updates on specific tasks  
e-mail: [friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org](mailto:friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org)

**Volunteering Options 2023**


# Volunteering

@  
Easter Craiglockhart Hill

All New  
Options!

- 1 HILL PATROL
- 2 HILL WORK SQUAD
- 3 COMMUNITY ADOPTION
- 4 VOLUNTEER FROM HOME



 [friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org](mailto:friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org)





Our volunteering options are designed to allow people to engage to the degree that suits their lifestyle and means. Whether regular or occasional, individual or in a group, on-site or at home. We have an option that suits you.

There are four main options to choose from, check them out [here](#)

### **In Focus: Option 1 - Hill Patrol**

We still need more people to conduct regular Patrols and feedback data. Hill Patrolling is designed to be incorporated into your current routine - so you can do a Patrol whilst going for a walk, run, cycle or whatever. It is very quick and easy, and requires no specialist skills. You simply visit the LNR, take a wee note of what you see, and complete a quick Patrol Log when you get home. Data from Patrol Logs will be stored by FECH and used to paint a picture of park usage, wildlife diversity, and issues such as vandalism, fires, litter, etc. We can then use this to help direct Human Resources and funding to the most needed areas and issues. The aim is to create lasting historical records about on-goings in the park which will be useful and interesting for future generations.

Please get involved, the more data we can collect, the clearer the picture becomes! Look out for on-line training events, or come to one of our walk-rounds.

[View Patrol Log document here](#)

## **Community Call-To-Arms**

The funding for our community engagement worker runs out on 30 November 2023. As such FECH will not be able to do the amount of work we have in the last 4 years without others in the community picking up some tasks, or without a new round of funding being secured (which currently looks unlikely).

We are appealing to people in the community, members and volunteers to join us in actively doing the work that was done by Dan and previously Izzy in the role.

We have many tasks which can take from as little as 15 minutes a week up to several hours; some of which can be done using a computer from

home and some need to be performed on the hill. There really is something for everyone in the list no matter what skills people may have. In some cases, we'll need to handover the task to you with a little training but most of the tasks are self-explanatory.

If anyone would like to volunteer or know more about this work then please e-mail [friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org](mailto:friends@eastercraiglockharthill.org) and we'll provide more detail about what is required. We'd like to hear from you before Dan leaves post on 30 November 2023 please.

Below is a list of some of the tasks up for grabs:

<b>Task</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Duties</b>
Become a Trustee of FECH	A meeting every 8-12 weeks	6 hours per month + ad hoc	Attend trustee meetings, keep abreast of minutes, take any actions arising.
Website Updates	Monthly	2-4 hours	Keep website current, adding content such as AGM Minutes, and Accounts info.
Poet's Post Update	Monthly/Seasonally	1 hour	Choose, print and display a poem. *
Wildflower of the Month post	Monthly	1 hour	Choose, print and display seasonal wildflower. *
Social Media Posts & Monitoring	3-4 posts per week	3 hours	Content creation and response monitoring.
On-site Notice Board Monitoring	Fortnightly	3 hours	Ensure all notice boards are up to date, occasional printing and posterage. *
Newsletter Writer/Editor	Quarterly	12 hours	Collate, write and distribute quarterly newsletter to members via e-mail. *

Litter Patrol/Invasive Species Monitoring	Weekly/Fortnightly	3 hours	Regular litter picks around the hill. Checking Balsam hotspots
Volunteer Leader	Fortnightly/Monthly	3 hours	Help to run Duke of Edinburgh/Hill Work Squad sessions.
Fundraiser	Monthly	4 hours	Raise money through identifying and applying for grants etc.
Events' Organiser/Helper	Quarterly	8 hours	Plan and organise community events such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Cygnet Countdown, and Snowdrop Split. Help with larger events such as the Plant Sale.

\*Templates provided

## Board of Trustee Changes

We'd like to extend a special thank you to our former Chairperson Ewan Davidson, who stepped down from his role in February 2023 after over a decade serving FECH. Ewan's knowledge, diplomacy, eternal positivity, and guidance has been sorely missed and his dedication to FECH and to helping the LNR become, and remain, the beautiful place that it is, is greatly appreciated! We wish him well for whatever he goes on to do.

Thanks too, to Hilda Henderson, who served diligently as FECH secretary during the same period, and to Alastair MacBeth & Graeme Hastie, who served as trustees. Our appreciation goes out to you all. Thank You.

We'd like to extend a warm welcome to our new Chairperson Jim Heath, who courageously put his hand up when Ewan stepped down and has subsequently settled into the role and driven our recent activities forward with great enthusiasm. Similarly, we'd like to welcome our new secretary Iain McLeod and new trustees Bryce Morrison and Paul Duncanson, and extend our thanks for pledging your time and expertise to the group.



For further information about The Friends of Easter Craiglockhart Hill please visit: [www.eastercraiglockharthill.org](http://www.eastercraiglockharthill.org)

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We are a SCIO regulated by OSCR

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