

The Secret Garden Outdoor Nursery



Newsletter
November 2009

At last, a very belated newsletter to bring you all up to speed with what's been happening in the woods.

In August we had a surge of new Secret Gardeners: welcome to Fiona, Freya, Alasdair, Elliot, Noah, Martha, Ronan, Madeline, Flora, Torin and Atholl.

With the clocks changing last week there's been a noticeable difference as darkness approaches ever earlier. At present it's dark by 5pm in the park. Torches will be needed in the woods very soon. We don't have enough torches for everyone so we encourage sharing the few we have. If your child wishes to bring their own torch it's not a problem, other than the potential of it getting lost in the woods.

We're having a season of visitors at present beginning with our garden helpers Leilaini, Aliyah and Samadi who helped us eat the rewards of our leeks, tatties and onions. Soup was made at the foot swing, very enjoyable.



Our pumpkins were visited by not so friendly people; one Tuesday we appeared to find a pumpkin rolled down the hill and another smashed. The remaining one had been well hidden by leaves and continued to grow and change colour – green to orange. We picked the pumpkin last week, making a lantern that's hanging at the White Tent and using the pulp for muffins to be enjoyed this week at snack time.



Again at the garden we were surprised by a motley crew of mice hiding out in the garden storage box. Four of the mice scurried away quickly, the fifth one had a bit more difficulty – possibly due to all the rubber tractor wheels it had enjoyed! We can't imagine the mice actually swallow the bits of rubber – if you know anything of mice eating habits please let us know!

Donald from the farm visited with a straw bale. It's been wonderful to watch the older children recall how to climb upon it, devise new methods, pass these skills onto the younger children and those that weren't here last year: all becoming adept at the challenge. In NaT curricular terms beautiful examples of rowan, elder, rat and ant.



2 weeks ago, on a Wednesday, Johanna, the Fife Red Squirrel Education Officer came out to play with us, bringing Sally the Squirrel with her. We were given the task of creating dreys in the trees for Sally to check out. Ours were situated just a bit lower to



the ground than a traditional drey would be! Sally was very appreciative and reckoned her kittens would be safe and warm there. Sally is still with us and all the children will have opportunities to build dreys and try and eat with only four fingers – very challenging.



A rather unexpected but much admired visitor was the fire engine. We had a fire in the woods that despite all our usual precautions when leaving a fire site continued to slowly smoulder. On discovering that it still held a lot of heat deep in the earth we used all available water to try and extinguish but when this failed we called in the experts. The firemen, and lady, completely dug the fire place out, poured a lot of water in the hole and then refilled the hole. They were extremely friendly with children, allowing them

to explore the engine and try on hats – many thanks go to them for their prompt response. We've all learnt a lot from this experience – the main thing being to choose our fire sites with greater awareness.

Jim, Midge, Rachel and Grace of the School House have 2 pigs that we're regularly visiting as we head in and out of the East Wood. Lavender and Flo appear to appreciate our visits with the scraps from our snack time and perhaps we'll be able to buy sausages from the Rotherhams when that time approaches.



On Thursday 5th November Magdalene Sacranie is coming to visit us to tell us stories from her African Dreamtime storybook. She'll also be bringing carved wooden animals made by crafts people in Malawi. Given the enjoyment that the children have with the dinosaurs and animals that they bring into the woods we reckon that some wooden animals will be a welcome addition to the play. We'll buy a set of 10 for the Secret Garden. It's possible to purchase the animals individually, and the book at £14.99. Magdalene has created a charity to which all profits from the books and animals go.

Still to come is Sylvia Troon, story teller and puppeteer and a visit from someone 'batty'.

Tony Wilson from the Fife Coast and Countryside Ranger service will be joining the staff meeting on Fri 20th November. We're hoping to extend our knowledge of what is here in the woods with us which we can then pass on to the children.

The idea of issuing a map to all families has been hovering in the ether for a long time. At last it has been created with the main play locations marked and plenty opportunity for each child and family to 'customise'. It will arrive in the post with your child's pictorial newsletter.



A favourite location for all the children is the White Tent – a particularly good high swing is here plus the garden, tools, blocks and barrows and a cage . . .

An area not visited much in summer due to the nettles is the cooking tree. As the season changes the area is now more accessible and much

role play and climbing has been happening here. It's



also one of the winter sunny spots. Come spring time this is one of the best areas for watching the larch cones appear and grow. From this location there is also a magnificent view of the Howe, many a child is witnessed simply gazing out over the horizon, a few notice the quarry and big vehicles – possibly a visit for us to take.

From the map you'll also see how much of the woods lies undiscovered, many more places to seek out on adventure.



The children have been coming out to the woods dressed for whatever the weather and we're very grateful for your diligence in providing suitable clothes for the woods. As the layers start piling on the routine tasks of toileting can be more challenging and quite time consuming. We try to encourage the children to be as independent as possible but are aware of their limitations particularly on bad weather days so are always at hand to help .

Staff and Directors would like to thank you all for your phenomenal support as we've worked on returning the the Care Commission Draft Inspection Report. The response to the questionnaire was almost 100% and the comments were a delight to read. Each comment was expressed in a wholly individual way, offering the Care Commission and very full and complete understanding of how you feel regarding toileting and hand washing. We have asked for a meeting with CC and would appreciate a parental presence at this meeting. If you have a particular wish to be present please contact Morven.

We have 2 fund raising initiatives ahead of us:

Tuesday 10th November we have a Barefoot Books evening, 7.30pm at Upper Kinnear House, North Union Street, Cupar. The Secret Garden will receive 20% of the books sales in a combination of books and money. If you're unable to attend but would like to take a look at and order books check the website.

www.barefootbooks.com/uk/shop/

Please e-mail your order through to Morven or Cathy.

We've also ordered our own Secret Garden cloth bags that will be available for Christmas sales – more info as they arrive

Please put into your diaries our Winter Celebration on Sunday 20th December – more information will be issued nearer the event.

A reminder that The Secret Garden is closed over Christmas and New Year from 21st December – 1st January.

Cathy, Roz, Mairi, Hazel & Nova

Woods Mobile: 07592 400171