

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Downs Committee

29th January 2015

Report of: Andrew Gordon, Heritage Planning and Partnership Officer

Title: Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Review 2014 and the Report of the Activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer

Ward: Citywide

Officers Presenting Report: Becky Coffin, Nature Conservation Officer, Park Estates
Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Officer

Contact Telephone Number: (0117) 3525656

RECOMMENDATION

That the reports be noted.

Summary

To report, for information, on the fifteenth annual review of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project and to present the Report of the Activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer during 2014.

The significant issues in the reports are:

A summary of the Project's main achievements with regards to conservation management, wildlife surveying and monitoring and the education programme.

1. Policy

Not applicable

2. Consultation

Internal

Ben Skuse, Area Supervisor Downs, Blaise, Kingsweston estates

External

Chris Westcott, Natural England

Jen Nightingale, Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation

3. Context

The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project was launched on 23rd October 1999. It is a partnership of Bristol City Council, the Downs Committee, the Society for Merchant Venturers, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Natural England, the University of Bristol, and Bristol Zoological Society. We also work with the National Trust in Leigh Woods, the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, and ClimbBristol.

The aim of the project is 'to secure the future of the outstanding wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge and Clifton and Durdham Downs and to raise awareness and understanding of this unique location and its importance to people and wildlife'.

Annual review

This report provides a review of progress and key achievements of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project between January and December 2014.

Conservation grazing in the Gully

The goats are now a very well established and hugely popular feature of the Gully. As well as being visited by many members of the public they are still being monitored on a daily basis by the Downs team, and at the weekend by volunteers from the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FODAG). This regular checking proved invaluable when, during an early autumn storm, a large pine tree was blown down, destroying a section of the fence. The Downs team reacted quickly, removing the fallen tree and repairing the fence before the goats had even noticed.

Also during the summer it was noted that one of the goats was unable to bear weight on its front leg and after several days of close monitoring it was decided that we should intervene. The Bristol Zoo veterinary team tranquilised the animal and took it to the Zoo for treatment. After a short period of recuperation the goat was given the all clear and returned to the Gully, where it has been fine ever since. The diagnosis was a likely dislocated joint.

Throughout the year, general observations have indicated that the goats are continuing to help restore the overall habitat structure towards a more open limestone grassland with species like common rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) and glaucous sedge (*Carex flacca*) being noted more commonly across the area. To help with further development of an overall habitat monitoring programme, Natural England also tested a highly accurate Trimble R8 GPS unit within the Gully.

Habitat restoration in the Gully

During the winter, the Council's Woodland & Wildlife Officer co-ordinated scrub clearance works by a group of young people from Community Payback, with guidance and assistance from Natural England. This work has had a positive impact, helping to further increase the amount of open habitat within the Gully.

In the summer, FODAG volunteers collected wildflower seeds from areas of species rich-grassland adjacent to Circular Road. They were spread on the small grassland area at the Gully outcrop to increase the botanical diversity.

Habitat management works throughout the Gorge

Targeted conservation works have continued throughout the rest of the Bristol side of the Gorge. This is the fifth year of a more intensive programme of management. The winter clearance and targeted summer treatment is unquestionably helping to tackle the spread of scrub and invasive species. There are notably less problem plants in a number of locations, including Sea Walls, Gully Edge and Gully Outcrop, the Great Quarry, St Vincent Rocks, Fairy Land and the Observatory area, but continued high levels of management are still required to ensure that these problem species (which spread quickly and rapidly grow) are suppressed and do not take over again.

The Avon Gorge Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Site Improvement Plan

A series of meetings with the major landowners (on both sides of the Gorge) were organised by Natural England to discuss the Improvement Programme for England's Natura 2000 sites (IPENS), supported by EU LIFE+. The aim of the IPENS programme is to develop a strategic approach to achieving favourable condition on England's Natura 2000 sites (the Avon Gorge SAC designation) by reviewing the risks and issues that are impacting on and/or threatening the condition of the site. The project will work with key stakeholders, identify which mechanisms could be used to address the issues, how much it will cost and where the money could come from. A Site Improvement Plan (SIP), which pulls together the proposals, has been drafted and is being produced and published by Natural England.

A Scrub Management Plan for the Downs

In accordance with an action from the Clifton & Durdham Downs Management Plan, a Scrub Management Plan has been drafted for the Downs. The plan was prepared with input from a number of key stakeholders and a meeting will be convened in early in 2015 to finalise it. It is an important piece of work, which will be implemented to ensure the appropriate management of areas of scrub whilst seeking to balance the variety of interests, such as ecology, landscape, access and archaeology.

Silky wave moth monitoring

The Avon Gorge is the only English site for the silky wave moth (*Idaea dilutaria*). All three priority sites for the moth, on the Bristol side of the Gorge (Black Rocks, the Gully and Walcombe Slade), were surveyed weekly by Bristol Zoological Society, from the first week of June through to end of July. Smaller satellite sites were surveyed once throughout the flight season in order to ascertain presence or absence of silky wave moths.

The decline in peak counts across Black Rocks and the Gully, which began in 2013, has continued in 2014. At Black Rocks, which held the highest peak

counts across all sites in 2011 and 2012, there has been a decrease of over 50%, year on year, in 2013 and 2014. Decreases in peak counts at the Gully in 2013 and 2014, have been less dramatic, with annual declines of 12% and 22% respectively. However, conversely, peak moth numbers compared to 2013, increased by 40% at Walcombe Slade this year although this was still 54% down from the 2012 peak count.

Compared with the records from 2012, the 2014 peak counts were lower at all priority Bristol sites. Reasons for this observed decline are uncertain; it could be a natural population cycle, which is only being realised since regular surveys have taken place over the past four years.

The education programme

Overall, 6,686 people took part in one of our events, activities or educational visits this year.

Events programme

The events programme was as popular as ever, with something for all ages and interests. New events included; the 'Avon Gorge film night' (an evening where three recently-made films about the Avon Gorge were shown), 'Spiders of the Avon Gorge' walk, a talk by TV wildlife presenter Mike Dilger, a 'Spring detectives' family wildlife walk, and a music event for toddlers.

The Avon Gorge and Downs seasonal education officer

For the seventh year running, we employed an Avon Gorge and Downs seasonal education officer. Downs Committee funded this part-time post (30 hours a week, from 4th March – 31st October). A full report can be found in the appendix.

School groups and Playschemes

We had our best year yet for teaching school groups with 1,809 school children taught (compared with 1,495 children in 2013). All the available summer term school sessions were fully booked and we ran more autumn term sessions than in any previous year. The number of sessions increased significantly from 78 sessions in 2013 to 98 sessions this year.

We ran a similar number of sessions for playscheme groups as last year, but saw fewer bookings for sessions during the Easter and half-term holidays. We also saw increased bookings for evening sessions from Brownie, Beaver and Rainbow groups.

With both the summer term school groups and the holiday playscheme groups we have had to turn away groups as we are currently running at capacity.

In discussion with play leaders, the provision of activities such as ours is of increasing importance, particularly for those groups that are based in less affluent areas of the city and who may not otherwise get out to explore the natural world.

The wealth of positive feedback demonstrates that the Project continues to progress from strength to strength and has maintained its reputation for

delivering high quality outdoor learning.

Higher education sessions

Over two days, 133 first year students from the University of Bristol came to the Downs to take part in botanical surveying activities and to learn about the diversity of wildlife living in the Gorge and on the Downs.

The Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Officer also gave a lecture to students on the University of the West of England Foundation degree in integrated wildlife conservation.

Festival of Nature – celebrating peregrine falcons in the Wild Bristol tent

For this year's Festival of Nature we joined forces with the Bristol City Council Tree Pips team, Bristol Ornithological Club and local peregrine expert Ed Drewitt to run the 'Wild Bristol' tent. Our side of the tent was peregrine themed.

Prior to the festival, children from Hotwells primary school came to the Downs to learn about the Avon Gorge peregrines. Back at school, we worked with them to create stunning peregrine falcon sculptures and fact files which were displayed in the Wild Bristol tent. During the course of the weekend we had lovely comments from festival visitors about the gorgeous peregrine artwork (they even featured on the local BBC news) and many of the children bought their families to see them over the festival weekend.

During the festival's schools day we ran 'Peregrine adaptation and foodchain sessions' for 80 children and over the festival weekend, children enjoyed our 'Peregrine chick checker area' (weighing, measuring and ringing toy chicks), engaged in the 'Peregrine picnic' activity (matching pictures of prey remains to images of birds eaten by peregrines) or decorated a falcon mask.

Over the festival weekend 2,463 people came into the tent. This was about half the number of people we have seen in previous years and the festival as a whole was quieter than normal.

Your Downs - Widening the Audience

In partnership with FODAG and the ex-Downs Ranger, we continued to plan, develop and deliver the 'Your Downs' initiative (a series of events and activities to widen the range of people who visit, learn about and enjoy the site).

As well as the Star parties, Downs Discovery Day, Bristol Walking Festival, Wool Fair and the Walking for Health mass walk (see below) we continued to work with the 'Walking the five ways to well-being group' (which is co-ordinated by the Inner City Health Improvement Team). In April, July and October the group, which includes people from Easton, St Pauls, Montpelier, Barton Hill and St George, came to the Downs for seasonal guided walks.

Typical feedback;

"Oh my lord... So many beautiful places on your doorstep and you just wouldn't know... I've been telling everyone about our walk yesterday, thank you so much".

Henrietta.

Star parties on the Downs

The response to the Downs gaining Dark Sky Discovery Status has been tremendous. A press release announcing the designation at the beginning of the year resulted in articles in local newspapers and magazines, a radio interview, and a listing on the BBC website linked to the Stargazing Live programmes.

A torrent of bookings and enquiries meant that we ran three Star parties during the year, attended by 154 people. It opened up a whole new audience for us. Evaluation showed that over half of the participants hadn't been to one of our events before. And in response to the question 'What did you enjoy most?', *"The experience of being on the Downs, at night, with other people"* was typical, and sums up the value of this 'Your Downs' initiative.

The Star parties are run in partnership with FODAG, Bristol Astronomical Society and Explorer Dome.

Bristol Walking Festival

In April, we took the project's travelling display and leaflets to the launch of the Bristol Walking Festival. During the course of the day we spoke to 116 people. We also ran a walk, in conjunction with Martin Collins from FODAG, as part of the festival programme.

Festival of Nature Downs Discovery Day

In July, we teamed up with the Bristol Natural History Consortium, FODAG, Bristol Naturalists' Society and Bristol Ornithological Club, (with funding from GL Hearn), to run the Downs Discovery Day.

One of the central aims for the event was to widen the diversity of those who take part in activities on the Downs. We invited the Family Centre (for deaf children), and LinkAge (a cross-generational group for older people and their grandchildren). 82 people from these groups joined us on the day, taking part in minibeast hunts and sessions to learn about the peregrines. FODAG also ran two public walks (Tree and wildflowers and a Butterfly walk) and the Bristol Ornithological Club ran a public peregrine watch.

Climbing Festival

In July, we took the Project display and leaflets along to the first Avon Gorge Climbing Festival, organised by ClimbBristol. During the day, over 30 people picked up leaflets and asked about the wildlife of the Gorge and the work of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project.

Bristol Wool Fair

The first Bristol Wool Fair took place on the Downs in September. It was a perfect venue for us to explain about the history of grazing on the Downs and to promote our herd of goats and their role in making room for the rare wild flowers of the Avon Gorge. Children (and quite a few adults) decorated goat masks. We shared a tent with FODAG and co-led two guided walks with them on the Downs. In total we engaged with 416 people over the weekend.

Walking for Health mass walk

In October, 65 people from all the Bristol Walking for Health groups came to the Downs for a mass guided walk. Two FODAG members, and the Avon Gorge & Downs biodiversity education officer, led three walks of differing lengths. 100 people had been expected but there was torrential rain on the morning of the event. We also took the project display and our range of leaflets to the hall where the walkers were meeting, to encourage the walking groups to visit again.

Community groups

The education officer gave a talk or guided walk to 597 people from 15 community groups. Groups ranged from the Avon Sports & Leisure Club for the Visually Impaired to the Avon Federation of WIs, walking groups and gardening clubs.

Downs Family Nature Trail leaflets

Four seasonal Family Nature Trail leaflets for the Downs were launched and proved to be very popular. Each leaflet contains an activity sheet to guide children in their wildlife spotting, and an information sheet for adults to support their children as they learn and discover.

Radio 4 Open Country

In May, Radio 4's 'The Open Country' programme came from the Avon Gorge and Downs. The presenter interviewed Libby Houston (botanist who works in the Gorge), Ben Skuse (the Goat Keeper), Francis Greenacre (Local Historian, Merchant Venturer and member of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project steering group) and Ed Drewitt (peregrine expert), about the amazing wildlife and history of our site.

Nature in Avon

In November, the Bristol Naturalists' Society produced an Avon Gorge and Downs themed edition of their Nature in Avon publication. It contained a series of detailed articles about the history and biological interest of the area, written by a range of people, including members of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project steering group and local experts.

Volunteer support

Many of our events couldn't take place without the support of volunteers and work experience students. We're grateful to the 30 people who gave 523 hours of their time over the year.

Proposal:

Other Options Considered

1. Not applicable

Risk Assessment

2. Not applicable

Public Sector Equality Duties

- 8a) *Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:*
- i) *Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.*
 - ii) *Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --*
 - *remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;*
 - *take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);*
 - *encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.*
 - iii) *Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –*
 - *tackle prejudice; and*
 - *promote understanding.*
- 8b) *Not Applicable.*

Legal and Resource Implications

Legal

Not applicable

Financial

(a) Revenue

None

(b) Capital

None

Land

The land is under the control of the Downs Committee.

Personnel

Not applicable

Appendices:

Report of the activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer 2014

Printed copies of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Annual Review 2014 - will be handed out at the meeting.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None



Report of the activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer 2014

By Joss Smithson

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project is a partnership of Bristol City Council, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Natural England, University of Bristol, the Society of Merchant Venturers, the Downs Committee and Bristol Zoological Society.



Bristol Zoological
Society
Saving Wildlife Together

We are also working in partnership with the National Trust who manage part of Leigh Woods on the North Somerset side of the Gorge and the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

Summary of Achievements for 2014

During the eight months the Seasonal Education Officer was in post:

- 1,809 school children were taught compared with 1,495 children in 2013.
- 434 playscheme children were taught compared with 494 in 2013.
- Four children's holiday events were run, involving a total of 44 children.
- 30 Year 5 children from Hotwells Primary School worked with us to create willow and tissue paper peregrine falcon sculptures in the lead up to the Bristol Festival of Nature.
- For the Bristol Festival of Nature we teamed up with the Bristol Tree Pips team, Bristol Ornithological Club, Ed Drewitt and Martin Bradley to run the 'Wild Bristol' tent.
- 80 children were taught at the Bristol Festival of Nature schools' day.
- During the festival weekend 2,463 people came through the Wild Bristol tent.
- 82 people including folks from the Family Centre (for deaf children), and LinkAge (a cross-generational group for older people and their grandchildren), came to the Downs Discovery Day.
- 416 people took part in our activities at the first Bristol Wool Fair.
- 154 people attended our 'Star Party on the Downs' events.
- Various educational activities, resources and sessions have been introduced, reviewed and updated.

Introduction

I was employed as the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer from 4th March 2014 to 31st October 2014. This was a part time post (30 hours per week) that was funded by the Downs Committee. This was my second season in the post, having previously held the post from March – October 2013.

This post was set up to assist the Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Officer in *'developing and delivering a programme of education, interpretation and promotional work to encourage greater public involvement, understanding and enjoyment of the wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge and Downs and their management'* and to *'meet anticipated demand over the peak spring and summer period and to increase the number and diversity of people participating in education events and activities.'*



Formal education sessions

Aims:

- To teach a range of visiting schools and other education organisations about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs, with sessions linked to the National Curriculum.
- To encourage a wide range of schools to book by promoting the education sessions directly to them.

Methods

Having already held the post of Seasonal Education Officer in the previous year I was able to jump straight into the role and confidently lead and assist with all of the project's education sessions.

During March we updated our primary school programme leaflet and then posted it to 161 contacts at 82 schools from across the greater Bristol area. This was followed by a .pdf file of the programme which, in early April, I emailed to 159 contacts.

At the beginning of July, the autumn primary programme, updated by Mandy to meet the new curriculum links, was posted out to 169 contacts. Which I followed up by emailing a .pdf version to our schools contacts list. I then re-emailed the flier to teachers towards the end of the summer holidays when they are preparing for the coming term.

Results

School	Date	Age	Session	No. of sessions	No. of children
FdSc lecture and walk	27 th March	Higher Edu.		1	6
St Bonaventures	2 nd April	Yr 1	Treemendous Fun and Discover the Downs	2	59
University of Bristol	3 rd April	Higher Edu.	Botanic Surveying	1	73
University of Bristol	4 th April	Higher Edu.	Botanic Surveying	1	60
Hotwells	6 th May	Yr 1	Discover the Downs (plants focus)	1	27
St Johns	13 th May	Yr 3/4	Tree trail, Wildflower treasure hunt & Discover	9	86
Home Education Group	14 th May	Mixed	Tree-mendous fun	1	24
St Peters (Pilning)	15 th May	Yr 3	Mammal detectives & Habitats	4	60
SS Peter & Paul	16 th May	Yr 2	Butterfly lifecycles	1	29
St Werburghs	20 th May	Yr 2 + 3	Tree-mendous fun & Butterfly lifecycles	2	57
Ashton Gate	21 st May	Yr 6	Habitats & Hairy Conservationists	2	54
Hotwells	22 nd May	Yr 4	Habitats	1	29
Westbury Park	3 rd June	Yr 2	Habitats	1	30
Westbury Park	4 th June	Yr 2	Habitats	1	30
Hotwells	5 th June	Yr 4	Peregrine falcons and	2	30

			foodchains & FoN project		
Hotwells	6 th June	Yr 4	FoN project	1	30
Festival of Nature schools day	13 th June	KS2	Peregrine falcon adaptations and foodchains	8	80
Stoke Park Primary	19 th June	Yr 5	Tree-mendous fun	1	15
SS Peter & Paul	20 th June	Yr 1	Mammal detectives	1	30
St Johns	23 rd June	Yr 1	Discover the Downs and Mapsticks	2	28
SS Peter & Paul	24 th June	Yr 3	Tree-mendous fun	1	26
St Johns	25 th June	Yr 2	Discover the Downs and Mapsticks	2	29
St Johns	26 th June	Yr 2	Discover the Downs and Mapsticks	2	28
St Johns	1 st July	Yr 1	Discover the Downs and Mapsticks	2	30
Westbury Park	2 nd July	Yr 4	Peregrine falcons and foodchains	1	28
Westbury Park	3 rd July	Yr 4	Peregrine falcons and foodchains	1	30
SS Peter & Paul	4 th July	Yr 5	Hairy conservationists	1	30
SS Peter & Paul	8 th July	Yr 4	Peregrine falcons and foodchains	1	28
Westbury Park	8 th July	Yr 2	Habitats	1	30
Westbury Park	9 th July	Yr 3	Hairy Conservationists & Habitats	4	57
Ashton Gate	10 th July	Yr 2	Habitats, Butterfly lifecycles & Discover the Downs	9	89
St Phillips (Bath)	11 th July	Yr 3/4 & 4/5	Habitats & Wildflower treasure hunt	4	64
Horfield	15 th July	Yr 2	Butterfly lifecycles & Habitats	4	57
Stoke Park	16 th July	Yr 3/4	Hairy conservationists	1	25
Elmlea	18 th July	Yr 2	Tree trail, Wildflower treasure hunt & Discover the Downs	9	90
Christchurch	17 th Sept	Yr 1/2	Special spiders	1	30
Christchurch	21 st Sept	Yr 2	Special spiders	1	28
Christchurch	23 rd Sept	Yr 1	Special spiders	1	28
Westbury Park	9 th Oct	Yr 1	Autumn art	1	29
Westbury Park	10 th Oct	Yr 1	Autumn art	1	29
Holymead	15 th Oct	Yr 6	Autumn art	2	54
Holymead	17 th Oct	Yr 6 & 2	Autumn art	2	51
Whitehall	21 st Oct	Yr 2	Autumn art & Tree-mendous fun	4	Cancelled due to poor weather
Holymead	22 nd Oct	Yr 2	Autumn art	2	54
Brentry	24 th Oct	Yr 3	Autumn art, with plants	1	29
TOTAL				98	1,809

Red = new school visiting for the first time in 2014.

Discussion

In 2014 we taught 1,809 school children in 98 sessions, compared with 1,495 school children in 78 sessions in 2013.

This year's summer programme mail out has been very successful. However, we found many teachers were hesitant to book sessions in the first two weeks after the Easter holidays. This year had a very late Easter and many schools missed out on what has previously been a prime time to visit the Downs. Following on from this we filled all available dates for school sessions during the remainder of the summer term.

The autumn mail out has also been well received with more sessions being booked for the autumn period than in any previous year. A number of schools who have not visited us in recent years (Glenfrome, Colston's Primary, Fonthill and Knowle Park) all made strong inquiries about visiting us for sessions this autumn term but ultimately did not confirm bookings. We aim to especially target these schools next year to promote future participation in the project. There is clearly an increasing demand from schools for the service we provide.



This year we have had to turn away bookings for the summer term school sessions. Unfortunately we could not provide four schools with a potential of 9 sessions during this period. In recent years many primary schools in Bristol have had to increase their cohort size with year groups now often comprising two or three classes. Increasingly schools want to bring multiple classes at the same time, to reduce travel costs. To increase our capacity we have provided more whole day visits

where groups experience multiple sessions on rotation and also developed teacher lead activities for use on the Downs. As a result, the number of education sessions provided by the project has significantly increased from 78 sessions in 2013 to 98 sessions this year.

With three new-to-us schools this year, in future we would like to expand our reach to a greater range of participating schools. However, to meet future demand it is recommended that the seasonal education officer role is expanded, particularly during the summer season where we are currently operating at maximum capacity. With demand greater than we can meet it clearly shows the high value groups place in our education sessions.

Evaluation

We gave an education session feedback form (*see Appendix I*) to the leader of each school group that visited us. We received back 30 forms, which is a 63% return rate, which although somewhat lower than last year is in line with previous years return rates.

From these forms we have had some very positive feedback. Group leaders were asked to give a mark out of 10 for session content, presentation, length and level. The average (mean) results for these fields are:

Session Content	9.7
Presentation	9.8
Length	9.4
Level	9.6

They were also asked how likely they are to book a session with us again (Very Likely, Fairly Likely, Fairly Unlikely and Very Unlikely). 100% said Very Likely.

At the bottom of the form they were asked 'Do you have any other comments about your visit?' many teachers used this as an opportunity for praise:

The leaders had great knowledge and a great way with children. They clearly set out the rules to stay safe and the children learnt a lot of new facts.

St Bonaventures - 02.04.13

Thank you for inspiring, enthusing and educating our children in such an engaging 'awe and wonder' way! They were so proud of their work on display at the Festival of Nature.



Hotwells Primary – 13.06.14

We had a fantastic day. Joss was amazing, exactly the right balance of fun/education/control. My class have learnt so much. A day they won't forget.

Horfield Primary - 15.07.14

Absolutely fantastic sessions. Thank you very much Joss and Mandy!

Ashton Gate - 10.07.14

Holiday playschemes, brownies, beavers and rainbows

Aims:

- To develop and deliver sessions for playschemes in holiday time.
- To deliver these sessions to a wide range of groups visiting the Downs during the summer.

Methods

During May I updated the contact list for playschemes and then sent out our summer playscheme sessions flier to 45 contacts. By the start of the summer holidays we were completely booked up for the period.

Results

Playscheme	Date	Session	No. of children
The Center	18 th Feb	Birds and birdfeeders	17
Westbury on Trym Rainbows	3 rd June	Discover the Downs	15
29 th Kingswood Beavers	2 nd July	Discover the Downs	40
16 th Longwell Green Brownies	10 th July	Wildflower treasure hunt	21
Bishop Road	29 th July	Bugs, bees and butterflies	14
Ashley Down ASC	29 th July	Mammal detectives	14
Redhouse Children's centre	30 th July	Bugs, bees and butterflies	10
Hannah Moore	1 st August	Bugs, bees and butterflies	17
Greenway	4 th August	Feathered friends	18
Oldbury Court	5 th August	Bugs, bees and butterflies	14
Redhouse Children's centre	6 th August	Discover the Downs	Cancelled by play scheme
Southville Centre	8 th August	Feathered friends	15
Space Cadets	8 th August	Feathered friends	17
HAPPY	8 th August	Hairy Conservationists	21
Southville Centre	12 th August	Hairy Conservationists	Cancelled due to poor weather
Hannah Moore	13 th August	Feathered friends	16
Space Cadets	15 th August	Hairy Conservationists	15
Bishop Road	15 th August	Hairy Conservationists	9
Bishop Road	19 th August	Feathered friends	8
Oldbury Court	19 th August	Discover the Downs	14
Southville Centre	20 th August	Mammal detectives	14
Space Cadets	20 th August	Mammal detectives	18
Totterdown	21 st August	Feathered friends	14
Hannah Moore	22 nd August	Mammal detectives	15
Henleaze holiday club	26 th August	Feathered friends	Cancelled due to poor weather

Oldbury Court	27 th August	Mammal detectives	14
Greenway	27 th August	Mammal detectives	18
Southville Centre	28 th August	Tree-mendous fun	22
179th (St Bonnaventure's) Brownie pack	21 st September	Autumn art	24
The Center	28 th October	Mapsticks and migration	Cancelled by group
Total		30 sessions	434

Blue = Playscheme visiting for the first time in 2014.

Discussion

Our playscheme mail out has also been very well received this year, with all available summer sessions being booked. Between 18th February and 31st October 2014, 14 groups booked 30 sessions with 434 children attending, compared to 32 sessions with 494 children attending in 2013.

This year, we booked a similar number of sessions as last year but saw fewer bookings for sessions during the Easter and half term holidays and increased bookings for evening sessions from Brownie, Beaver and Rainbow groups. This summer we had fewer large group visits, with many play schemes only being able to afford to bring one minibus of people. In discussion with play leaders, the provision of low cost/free activities such as those that we provide is of increasing importance, particularly for those groups that are based in less affluent areas of the city who may not otherwise get out to explore the natural world.

Our summer sessions are very popular and we have many groups who return year on year. We have again had to limit the number of sessions provided per group so as to ensure as many interested groups as possible get to benefit from the work of the project. Many groups would like to experience more sessions with the project but we can only provide this if the role of the Seasonal Education Officer is expanded as we currently run at maximum capacity.



Evaluation

At the end of each session we gave the group leader a feedback form (see appendix II) to fill in and send back. We received a total of 16 forms back, a return rate of 72%. They were asked to give a mark out of 10 for session content, presentation, length and level. The average (mean) results for these fields are:

Session Content	9.6
Presentation	9.8
Length	9.8
Level	9.9

They were also asked how likely they are to book a session with us again (Very Likely, Fairly Likely, Fairly Unlikely and Very Unlikely), 100% said Very likely. From this feedback we can clearly see that the groups value the sessions we deliver and are keen to return for more.

When asked if they had any other comments about their visit the group leaders wrote some lovely comments or took the opportunity for personal praise:

The sessions are the highlight of our summer. The children have such a wonderful time and so do I, watching them learn and enjoy the fun.

Southville Centre 08.08.14

What was the best part of the day? All of it, Joss kept the whole group engaged all the time.

Bishop Road playscheme 29.07.14

All the activities were great fun, original and enjoyable. We really enjoyed it. Thank you.

179th (St Bonnaventure's) Brownie pack 22.09.14



Community events

Aims:

- To represent the organisation by planning and delivering activities at local community events.
- To increase the number and diversity of people participating in events and activities.

Festival of Nature (FON)

The Festival of Nature is the UK's largest celebration of the natural world. This year the festival expanded its scope, the main festival weekend in Bristol was renamed to the 'Wild Weekend' and the wider festival included 20 public events including our own 'Downs Discovery Day'.



The 'Wild Weekend' ran from Friday 13th June to Sunday 15th June. Our focus for the festival was the peregrine falcon. To present the 'Wild Bristol' tent we teamed up with the Bristol City Council Tree Pips team, the Bristol Ornithological Club (who were promoting the peregrine watch weekends on the Downs), Ed Drewitt (who had a display about peregrine diets and prey remains to show visitors) and Martin Bradley (a member of the Hawk and Owl Trust who recently published a children's book about peregrines). All around the walls of our side of the tent were stunning photos of peregrines taken by a 20 year old Bristol University student, Bertie Gregory.



Pre- Festival school work

In the week before the festival, 30 Year 4 children from Hotwells primary school joined us on the Downs for a session about the peregrine falcons. Our adult birds didn't disappoint, putting on the most thrilling two-hour aerial display! Duly inspired,

the children spent the rest of the afternoon and the following day, back at school, creating stunning peregrine falcon sculptures. They really got the peregrine bug, by also creating a wonderful peregrine falcon fact file book which showcased just how much the children had learnt.

We took both the sculptures and fact files to the festival and displayed them in our half of the Wild Bristol tent. During the course of the weekend we had lovely comments from festival visitors about the gorgeous peregrine artwork (they even featured on the local BBC news) and many of the children bought their families to see them over the festival weekend.



In the Wild Bristol tent

We spent the Thursday before the festival setting up the tent displays and creating a welcoming and fun environment for all visitors to the tent.

We provided a variety of peregrine themed activities for the public to take part in. Our popular craft table saw children of all ages making their own peregrine falcon masks. With the help of Ed Drewitt's expert knowledge and photographs we created a lock and key game where peregrine food remains had to be matched to the pictures of the prey species they came from. Through our 'Chick checker' activity the public were able to role-play being scientists as they weighed, measured and ringed soft toy peregrine chicks.



Schools' day

Friday was the schools' day. We taught 80 Key Stage 2 children, from a variety of schools, in half-hour sessions. They learnt all about the different adaptations that make the peregrine falcon the top predator in the gorge and the food chains it is involved in.

Public days on Saturday and Sunday

2,463 people came into the tent over the weekend. This was about half the number of people we have seen in previous years and the festival as a whole was quieter than normal. Perhaps a combination of superb summer weather driving people out of

the city and the nature of this year's festival being more spread out over multiple events. The numbers may have been lower this year but it felt more of a 'quality over quantity' experience, in that we got to really spend time talking to people about what we do on the Avon Gorge and Downs and promoting our trails and events.

Downs Discovery Day

As a part of the wider Festival of Nature and in partnership with the Bristol Natural History Consortium, Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, Bristol Naturalists' Society and Bristol Ornithological Club, and with funding from GL Hearn, on the 12th July we ran the Downs Discovery Day.



One of the central aims for our event was to widen the diversity of those who take part in activities on the Downs. We actively sought out the participation of the Family Centre (for deaf children), and LinkAge (a cross-generational group for older people and their grandchildren). 82 people from these groups joined us on the day to take part in minibeast hunts and discover all about the peregrines of the Avon Gorge. Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge also ran two public walks (Tree and wildflowers and a Butterfly walk) and the Bristol Ornithological Club ran a peregrine watch.

Bristol Wool Fair

The first Bristol wool fair took place on the Downs from 5th – 7th September at which we ran the children's craft tent. The wool fair was a perfect venue for us to explain about the history of grazing on the Downs and the effect that had on shaping the biodiversity and landscape of the gorge and Downs.



We were also promoting our herd of goats and took along a display about how they are helping us to make room for the rare wild flowers of the Avon Gorge. Children (and quite a few adults) decorated goat masks. In partnership with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG), two guided walks were run looking at the history of grazing and we visited the goats in the Gully. FOD+AG shared the tent with us and also brought along a display. In total we interacted with 416 people over the weekend.

Star parties on the Downs

To celebrate the Downs attaining a 'Dark Sky Discovery Site' designation we hosted three 'Star Parties' on the Downs in the spring and autumn. Presenters from Explorer Dome educated and entertained with stories and myths about the names of stars and constellations and showed us how to find these in the night's sky.

Members of the Bristol Astronomical Society brought along their telescopes and wowed us with views of the moon, planets and more distant bodies. Members of Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge supported the event as stewards and provided refreshments.

Despite the challenge of cold nights and passing cloud banks we had fantastic views of the moon's surface, Jupiter, Saturn, the Andromeda galaxy and even the International Space Station passing overhead. Over the three events we had 154 people attend.

These events were all very well received. Attendees were asked to fill in a feedback form (see Appendix III) and those responses returned were all very positive. Appreciation was expressed for being able to experience the Downs at night and for the knowledge and passion of the guides and presenters.

Some of the answers to 'What did you enjoy most about being on the Downs?' included:

Being out in the dark and feeling a part of nature.

The space and the view as well as the ingenuity of the event, including the delightful and knowledgeable people leading the event.

Being there at night (I'd normally only go in the day) – it made it feel like a different environment.



Children's holiday events

This year we have run four children's holiday events. Each of these is on a particular theme so that children learn about the wildlife of the Downs and Gorge through discovery, games and crafts.

Children's holiday event	Date	Number of places available	Number of attendees on the day
Birdbox bonanza	20 th Feb	15	12
Bugs, bees and butterflies	31st July	15	5
Feathered friends	7 th Aug		Cancelled due to building works
Mammal detectives	14th Aug	15	14
Autumn antics	30th Oct	15	13
Total:			44

Our February half term event was 'Bird box bonanza', in conjunction with 'Specialised nest boxes' each child built their own bird box to take home. Our first children's event of the summer holidays was 'Bugs, bees and butterflies' in which we discovered all about the amazing lives of the invertebrates of the Downs. In the afternoon we created felt bug adventure bags, inspired by the work of one of our volunteers. 'Mammal detectives' was a very successful day spent looking for the signs left behind by the mammals of the Downs, making clay creatures and animal print t-shirts. In our last children's holiday event of the year, 'Autumn antics' we made beautiful lanterns from sticks, leaves and tissue paper.

A reduction in available space and disruption due to the ongoing building works in the Conservation Education Centre meant that this year we have run fewer, and with reduced capacity, children's holiday events. It is hoped that with the opening of the new Education Centre we can return to a full programme of events next season.



Other Duties

Administration

Administration tasks that I assisted the Biodiversity Education Officer with include; taking bookings, sending out booking confirmation paperwork, producing posters and fliers for events, updating the website and sending out events programmes.

Social media can be an extremely useful tool for getting information out into the public domain and in maintaining interest from prior engagement activities. We have used Facebook and Twitter to advertise upcoming events, to display photos from events and to highlight significant wildlife sightings and activities on the Downs. Particularly popular posts this summer have been photo galleries of our events and the monthly Downs Diary.

Volunteers

Volunteers are vital for us to be able to run the sessions and events throughout the year. As part of my role I took charge of organising our volunteers, interviewing and inducting new volunteers, making sure that we have the correct number of volunteers to help us on any particular day, and ensuring that they knew where to be and when. We had a combination of volunteers that had helped out in previous years and new volunteers. Between 1st March and 1st November 20 volunteers have given 383.5 hours of their time to this project. During this time 10 people on work experience came to work with us, working for 140.5 hours. In total these volunteers gave 524 hours of their time to this project.

Summary

In 2014 the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project has run more school sessions than ever before. We were fully booked for both the summer term school sessions and the summer holiday playscheme sessions, and more autumn term school sessions were booked than in any previous year. With both the summer term school groups and the holiday playscheme sessions we have had to turn away enquiries as we are currently running at capacity and could not deliver more education sessions. We have also taken part in a variety of fun and exciting community events, including three new Star Parties, the Festival of Nature, Downs Discovery Day and the Bristol Wool Fair. To meet future demand it is recommended that the seasonal education officer role is expanded, particularly where we are currently operating at maximum capacity.

In discussion and feedback from group leaders many expressed their appreciation of the project's work. The high quality and low cost environmental education we provide is seen as increasingly important, particularly for those groups that are based in less affluent areas of the city, and who may not otherwise get out exploring the natural world. The wealth of positive feedback demonstrates that the project continues to progress from strength to strength and has maintained a reputation for high quality outdoor learning.

Appendix I – Education Sessions Feedback Form given to school groups



Education Session Feedback Form

Thank you for your visit today.

Please help us to improve our sessions for the future by giving us some feedback.

Date of visit: _____ School: _____ Year group: _____

Session: _____

How did you hear about the sessions?

How useful was your pre-visit information?

What was the best part of the session?

What could we do to improve the session?

Please give a mark out of 10 for the following:

Session Content Presentation Length Level

How likely are you to book a session with us again?

Very likely Fairly likely Fairly unlikely Very unlikely

Do you have any other comments about your visit?



Please return your completed form in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Appendix II - Sessions Feedback Form given to playscheme groups



Thank you for your visit today.

Please help us to improve our sessions for the future by giving us some feedback.

Date of visit: _____ Name of Group: _____

Session: _____

How did you hear about the sessions?

How useful was your pre-visit information?

What was the best part of the session?

What could we do to improve the session?

Please give a mark out of 10 for the following:

Session Content Presentation Length Level

How likely are you to book a session with us again?

Very likely Fairly likely Fairly unlikely Very unlikely

Do you have any other comments about your visit?



Bristol Conservation & Science Foundation

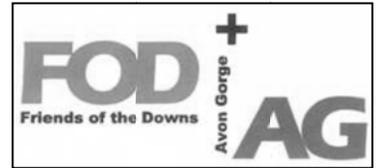
Please return your completed form in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Appendix III - Feedback Form given to attendees of a Star Party

Your Downs Event Evaluation

Event Title: Star Party

Date:



How do you rate this event? (please tick the most appropriate word)

Excellent Good Average

Poor Very poor

How did you travel to this event? (please tick the most appropriate word)

Walk Bike Bus Train Car Other (please specify)

Is this your first visit to the Downs? (please tick the most appropriate word)

Yes No

We're trying to increase the range and diversity of visitors to the Downs. To help us understand our visitors better please write down your postcode:

What did you enjoy most about being on the Downs?

What was the most interesting thing that you learnt?

How could we have improved your visit?

Any other comments?

Thank you for filling in this evaluation form.