

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Downs Committee

25th January 2016

Report of: Andrew Gordon, Heritage Planning and Partnership Officer

Title: Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Review 2015 and the Report of the Activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer

Ward: Citywide

Officers Presenting Report: Becky Belfin 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 sixteenth 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 2015.

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 Zoological Society

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, Merchant Venturers, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Natural England, the University of Bristol, and Bristol Zoological Society. We also work with the National Trust, Forestry Commission and other landowners on the North Somerset side of the Gorge, as well as 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 2015.

Habitat management works throughout the Gorge and Downs

The winter conservation works on the Bristol side of the Gorge continued to focus on the removal of scrub and invasive species, in order to protect the rocky limestone outcrops, and restore them back to species-rich grassland. In the Gully, more trees and scrub have been cleared to help the goats continue their great work in the gradual process of opening up this area and restoring it to grassland.

The goats themselves are still effectively controlling the regrowth of scrubby species and they appear to be in fine health. The regular monitoring by the Council's Downs' Team and the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG) is continuing to ensure that they are well looked after.

Butterfly monitoring work by FOD+AG has suggested an increase in the number and percentage of grassland butterfly species in the Gully, indicating that this work is successfully shifting the habitat towards the desired species-rich grassland.

Volunteers are increasingly contributing to the conservation work, with FOD+AG helping to remove seed heads from the invasive Alexanders. There are also plans in place for a habitat management day with the University of Bristol's Conservation Group, and members of ClimbBristol (the local climbing group).

On the Downs, implementation of the Scrub Management Plan has begun. In this first year, significant clearance work is being carried out on Zoo Banks to protect and enhance this particularly valuable pocket of grassland.

Woodland Management Plan for the Gorge

The woodland on the Bristol side of the Gorge forms a linear feature, fringing the rock faces and extending into the less steep parts of the valley. Whilst the woodland here is of more recent origin than that on the North Somerset side of the Gorge, there are still opportunities to manage it to enhance its conservation value. With funding provided by the Forestry Commission, a Management Plan has been produced which seeks to maintain and enhance woodland as an important habitat, landscape feature and recreational resource, whilst managing it to safeguard rare populations of whitebeam species, and restore areas of valuable grassland habitat. The aim now is to add some of the woodland areas into the City Council Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement with Natural England, which will help to financially support the completion of the identified positive management works.

Silky wave moth monitoring

The Avon Gorge is the only site in England for the silky wave moth (*Idaea dilutaria*). From the second week of June through to the end of July, all three Bristol priority sites (Black Rocks, the Gully and Walcombe Slade), and all three Somerset sites (Blockhouse, Donkey Slide and Quarry 3) were surveyed weekly by the Bristol Zoological Society. Smaller satellite sites in the Gorge were surveyed once during the flight season, in order to ascertain moth presence or absence. This year, the Great Quarry was again surveyed weekly due to increased capacity of the survey team.

The peak flight week was generally earlier than in previous years. The overall maximum number of moths counted during the peak weeks was higher than in the previous two years. In general silky wave moth populations appear to be thriving and all sites surveyed had moths present.

The education programme

Overall, 13,680 people took part in one of our events, activities or educational visits this year.

Events programme

The events programme continued to be popular, with something for all ages and interests. New events included; a talk about the ecology of red foxes, a 'Starling stroll' walk, a 'Needle felt your own Gorge-ous goat' course and a 'Family animal sing along'.

The Avon Gorge and Downs seasonal education officer

For the eighth year running, we employed an Avon Gorge and Downs seasonal education officer. Downs Committee funded this part-time post (30 hours a week, from 17th March – 30th October). A full report can be found in the appendix.

School groups and Playschemes

It was our best year yet for teaching school groups with 1,840 school children taught (compared with 1,809 children in 2014). We welcomed five new schools who hadn't been to the Downs for education sessions before. The autumn was particularly successful, with more sessions taught in that term than in any previous year.

The number of playscheme visits was lower than last year. However, in discussion with the play leaders, the provision of low cost activities such as ours is of great importance, particularly for those groups that are based in the less affluent areas of the city who may not otherwise get out to explore the natural world.

Other educational activities

In April, we supported a practical study day on the Downs for 200 first year students from the University of Bristol School of Biological Sciences. This included working with the students in small groups, using transects to compare the diversity of plant species in unimproved limestone grassland and improved grassland areas.

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.

In partnership with the Clifton Suspension Bridge Community Learning Officer and the Council Community Learning Teams, we ran an all-day 'Family Learners' session for 14 adults and 11 children from Air Balloon Primary School Children's Centre and Speedwell Children's Centre.

Festival of Nature

This year we teamed up with Bristol Zoo Gardens and Wild Place Project to run the 'Bugs!' tent. Our aim was to increase positive attitudes towards invertebrates and to give ideas for how we can all be superheroes for bugs.

Prior to the festival, we worked with children from Clifton College to create eight giant willow minibeast sculptures and factsheets. They formed an integral part of the tent experience, allowing people to discover fascinating facts on a bug sculpture trail. We also had a minibeast fancy dress area which was a huge hit with young and old alike!

During the festival's schools day we taught 'Habitat and bug home' sessions, with Zoo education officers, for 250 children. A staggering 9,000 people visited the tent over the weekend.

Bristol 2015 Green Capital year

Throughout the year we took part in many extra events and activities these included:

Bristol 2015 Science Lab

In March, we were invited to run a drop-in day at the 'Science Lab' on the Waterfront. 118 people saw one of our wildlife films, made a wildlife mask, studied our display or picked up leaflets.

BRI Big Green Scheme

In April, we spent a day at the BRI's new Welcome Centre. We took along the display and our leaflets and spoke to staff, patients and visitors.

Best of Bristol virtual fieldtrip project

In July, Year 3 children from Parson's Street Primary school took part in our 'Fabulous peregrine falcons and food chains' session. The film was commissioned by the Green Capital education officer for the 'Best of Bristol virtual fieldtrip project'. It is intended that schools will use the film (launched in November at www.sustainablelearning.com), to get ideas of trips and activities that they can do with their pupils.

A Bristol Murmuration

Over the summer months, artist Zoë Cameron worked with community groups to create 1,020 ceramic starlings which were displayed on the Downs between 17th and 25th October. The installation aimed to bring attention to the decline in starling numbers. For the opening event, we worked alongside Zoë helping children to create starling puppets, and were on hand to provide information and leaflets about starlings and other birds of the Downs and Avon Gorge. Over the week, we ran two walks - one for adults (in conjunction with FOD+AG), and another for parents and toddlers.

Portway Sunday Park events

Following major sporting events, the Portway remained closed to traffic for five Sundays this year. For the first event in May, we took along our display, leaflets, craft activities and led a guided walk. Unfortunately, we were unable to attend the following two June events; a month in which we run at full capacity due to the Festival of Nature.

For the September event, we welcomed a group of nine Young Carers and two key workers for a picnic on the Downs. Afterwards we teamed up with experts from the Bristol Naturalists' Society and the Bristol Natural History Consortium to run an invertebrate identification workshop in the Gully. Many of the children had never been to the Avon Gorge before.

For the last event in October, we worked with a local geologist to run a guided walk focussing on the geology of the Avon Gorge.

Eurocities Environment Forum Green Capital tour

In October, the Eurocities Environment Forum conference took place in Bristol. The Downs supervisor and education officer took 15 of the European conference delegates, and five visitors from South Korea, on a tour of the Gorge and Downs.

Green Capital education group

We exhibited at the Bristol Green Capital Education Group evening, in November, which was attended by 25 teachers and higher education tutors. The education officer put up the project display and laid out a range of resources used in our education sessions on the Downs. She spoke to a number of teachers whose schools haven't booked with us before.

Other community events and festivals

In February, we gave a talk and ran a family wildlife mask-making day at the Royal West of England Academy of Arts, to tie in with the British Wildlife Photographer of the Year and Arboriculturalist exhibitions.

We also took part in Bristol Zoo's Bird Weekend in April. We set up our toy peregrine chick-checking activity, ran peregrine mask making workshops and took along our project display and leaflets. We interacted with 219 people over the weekend.

In August, Bristol's International Kite Festival took place for the first time on the Downs. Located in the main marquee, we ran wildlife mask making activities for children whilst adults explored our display and picked up our range of leaflets. We engaged with 715 people over the festival weekend.

Your Downs - Widening the Audience

In partnership with FOD+AG, the Downs supervisor and Walking for Health, we continued to develop and deliver the Your Downs initiative (a series of events to widen the range of people who visit and enjoy the site).

As well as jointly running activities at the Portway Sundays and Bristol Walking Festival, 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, enjoyed seasonal guided walks on the Downs. We also ran two guided tours for the Heartful Dodgers (a group of people recovering from heart attacks and strokes, plus nurses, from Southmead Hospital).

Talk and guided walks for other community groups

The education officer gave a talk or guided walk to 512 people from 20 community groups. Groups ranged from the West of England Friend's Housing Association to the Westleaze WI, and Thornbury U3A to East Quantock Probus.

Made in Bristol

The rare plants of the Avon Gorge, goats and peregrines feature in a series of prints, placemats and coasters launched to coincide with Green Capital year. We provided reference images for the artists and information to go with the products which were being sold in the Made in Bristol shops.

Bristol Magazine feature

In April, Bristol magazine ran a three-page article about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs and listed up-and-coming events. As a result, we had a plethora of bookings from people new to the project.

Countryfile

In May, BBC Countryfile repeated the film they made about the rare plants of the Avon Gorge in 2013. It was part of a special 'Where Town Meets Country' episode which was seen by 6.33 million people.

Made TV

In June, the seasonal wildlife highlights of the Gorge and Downs featured in a film shown on MADE TV's show 'The Source'. MADE TV is Bristol's local community Freesat Channel. 200,000 viewers watch the programme each week.

Shaun the sheep trail

One of the sculptures, 'Bloomin' Gorge-ous', was designed by Professor Alice Roberts and decorated with images of rare plants of the Avon Gorge. We contributed ideas for educational activities for the 'Shaun in the City Nature Explorer' booklet which could be picked up from the Tourist Information Centre. 40,000 copies were also given away in The Post.

The Downs App.

An app. for the Downs was launched in September. It was produced as a collaboration between the FOD+AG, UWE, Bristol Parkhive and the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project.

Volunteer support

Many of our events couldn't take place without the support of volunteers and work experience students. We're grateful to the 24 people who gave 605 hours of their time over the year. One of those people was a Spanish volunteer who worked with us for two months. This placement was arranged through Change Agents UK for Bristol 2015 Green Capital.

Proposal:

Other Options Considered

1. Not applicable

Risk Assessment

2. Not applicable

Public Sector Equality Duties

- a) *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.*

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 2015

Printed copies of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Annual Review 2015 - 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 2015

By Emily Smith

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.



We are also working in partnership with the National Trust and The Forestry Commission who each 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 2015

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

- 1,840 school children were taught compared with 1,809 children in 2014. There were more sessions taught in the autumn term than any previous year.
- 176 playscheme children visited us for sessions.
- 36 Year 4 children from Clifton College worked with us to create eight giant willow minibeast sculptures in the lead up to the Bristol Festival of Nature.
- For the Bristol Festival of Nature we teamed up with Bristol Zoo Gardens and The Wild Place Project to run the 'Bugs!' tent.
- Approximately 9,000 people visited the 'Bugs!' tent over the weekend.
- A further 250 children were taught at the Bristol Festival of Nature schools' day.
- 715 people took part in our activities at Bristol's International Kite festival, held on the Downs for the first time this year.
- We took part in more community events than any previous year, including a variety of Bristol Green Capital 2015 events (such as three of the Portway Sunday Park events).
- Not including the Festival of Nature, we interacted with 1,475 people at family, community and children's events in 2015, compared to 634 in 2014.

Introduction

I was employed as the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer from 17th March 2015 to 30th October 2015. This was a part time post (30 hours per week) that was funded by the Downs Committee.

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 visit the Avon Gorge and Downs by promoting the education sessions directly to them.

Methods

Just prior to my position starting in March, Mandy updated and re-designed our primary school programme leaflet to ensure it reflected changes in the national curriculum. This was posted out to 174 school contacts from across the greater Bristol area. At the beginning of May, I followed up with a PDF version of the programme which I emailed to all contacts who hadn't yet made a booking.

At the end of June, I updated the autumn primary programme and posted it out to 192 contacts at 114 schools. This was followed with a PDF version by email in July (just before the end of term), and a reminder email at the end of August (as teachers were preparing for the new school year).

Results

School	Date	Age	Session(s)	No. of sessions	No. of pupils
FdSc in Integrated Wildlife Conservation.	26 th March	Higher edu.	Lecture and walk	1	11
SS Peter & Paul	21 st April	Yr 4	Hairy Conservationists	1	29
University of Bristol	24 th April	Higher edu.	Botanic surveying	3	200
Colston's Primary	30 th April	Yr 2	Habitats & Mammal Detectives	4	59
SS Peter & Paul	6 th May	Yr 1	Mammal Detectives	1	30
St Bonaventures	12 th May	Yr 1	Habitats Woodland & Habitats Meadow	2	60
Andalusia School	19 th May	Yr 1	Habitats	1	23
Andalusia School	19 th May	Yr 2	Tree Trail	1	24
Andalusia School	20 th May	Yr 2	Tree Trail	1	23
Ashton Gate Primary	21 st May	Yr 6	Hairy Conservationists & Habitats	4	60
Clifton College	2 nd June	Yr 4	BFoN Project	1	35
SS Peter & Paul	3 rd June	Yr 2	Butterfly Lifecycles	1	29
Clifton College	4 th June	Yr 4	BFoN Project	1	35
Bristol Festival of Nature schools day	12 th June	Mixed KS2	Habitats (mini session)	9	250
Fishponds Academy	18 th June	Yr 4	Comparing Habitats	4	60
Stoke Park Primary	19 th June	Yr 2	Habitats Woodland	1	29
Air Balloon Primary School Children's Centre and Speedwell Children's	22 nd June	Mixed	Family Learner session run in conjunction with the Clifton Suspension Bridge	1	25

Centre.			Community Learning and Volunteer Officer, and the Council Community Learning Teams		
SS Peter & Paul	23 rd June	Yr 3	Peregrine Falcons and Foodchains	1	30
<i>Westbury-on-Trym</i>	<i>24th June</i>	<i>Yr1</i>	<i>Discover & Habitats</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>*</i>
Stoke Park Primary	25 th June	Yr 1/2	Habitats Meadow	1	26
Stoke Park Primary	26 th June	Yr 1	Habitats Meadow	1	27
Fairfield School	30 th June	Yr 1-6	Habitats, Discover & Wildflower Treasure Hunt	9	77
Westbury Park	1 st July	Yr 3	Hairy Conservationists & Tree-mendous Fun	4	61
Southville Primary	2 nd July	Yr 3	Hairy Conservationists & Wildflower Treasure Hunt	2	30
Elmfield	7 th July	Yr 3-6	Peregrine Falcons and Foodchains	1	12
Parson's Street Primary	8 th July	Yr 3	Peregrine Falcons and Foodchains (including filming for Green Capital)	2	29
Ashley Down	9 th July	Yr 1	Hairy Conservationists	4	60
<i>Filton Avenue</i>	<i>10th July</i>	<i>Yr 1</i>	<i>Mammal Detectives & Wildflower Treasure Hunt</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>*</i>
Cam Everlands	14 th July	Yr 1	Butterfly Lifecycles	1	18
Ilminster Avenue E-Act Academy	15 th July	Yr 1	Habitats & Butterfly Lifecycles	2	45
Fishponds Academy	22 nd Sept	Yr 4	Habitats & Tree Trail	4	57
Westbury Park Primary	23 rd Sept	Yr 1	Autumn Art	1	27
Westbury Park Primary	24 th Sept	Yr 1	Autumn Art	1	29
Clifton College	29 th Sept	Yr 5	Habitats (including invertebrate sketching)	2	43
<i>Broomhill Junior School</i>	<i>1st Oct</i>	<i>Yr 4</i>	<i>Habitats & Hairy Conservationists</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>*</i>
Hotwells Primary	7 th Oct	Yr 3	Autumn Art	1	29
Hotwells	9 th Oct	Yr 4	Tree-mendous Fun	1	32
Air Balloon Hill Primary	13 th Oct	Yr 6	Mapsticks and migration & Hairy Conservationists	2	55
Horfield CofE Primary	15 th Oct	Yr2	Autumn Art	2	60
Air Balloon Hill Primary	16 th Oct	Yr 6	Hairy Conservationists	1	30
Holymead Junior School	16 th Oct	Yr 6	Autumn Art	1	28
Holymead Junior School	20 th Oct	Yr 6	Autumn Art	2	53
TOTAL				83	1840

Blue = new school visiting for the first time in 2015

Grey * = school cancelled

Discussion

In 2015 we taught 1,840 school children in 83 sessions, compared with 1,809 school children in 98 sessions in 2014.

This year's summer programme mail out has been very successful. With an early Easter this year, we had received less bookings for education sessions prior to the school break and terrible weather over the Easter holidays unfortunately resulted in fewer sessions being booked for May, but following on from this we filled all available dates for school sessions during the remainder of the summer term.

Disappointingly though, two schools (totalling eight sessions) cancelled their visits at short notice due to administration errors on their part; Westbury-on-Trym CofE Academy would have been first time visitors.

The autumn mail out has also been very well received, with a huge 22 sessions being booked for the autumn, more than in any previous year. Again, we had a disappointing cancellation from Broomhill Junior School due to parents not returning permission slips in time, which resulted in the loss of four more sessions. Broomhill would also have been first-time visitors to the Downs.

All three schools who cancelled have expressed a strong interest in visiting us in the future, so we intend to make it a priority to speak to them all in the spring with view to them making a summer visit.

It is pleasing to note that a number of schools who haven't visited us in recent years returned in 2015, including Fairfield School, Colston's Primary and Ashley Down Primary, and we also welcomed five new-to-us schools this year. Overall, there is an increasing demand from schools for the service we provide, with twelve schools spending a whole day with us to best take advantage of the sessions on offer.



This year we have once again had to turn away bookings for the summer term school sessions. Unfortunately we could not provide six schools with a potential of 14 sessions during this period. There was also high demand during the autumn term, and we were unable to fit in a number of sessions for SS Peter & Paul. Increasingly schools want to bring multiple classes at the same time, to reduce travel costs, so we continued to

offer whole day visits where groups experience multiple sessions on rotation to include teacher-led activities. In future we would like to expand our reach to a greater range of participating schools, whilst also maintaining the strong relationship that we have with regular visitors such as SS Peter & Paul, St Bonaventure's and Westbury Park. 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 27 forms, which is a 59% return rate, which is reasonable in comparison with previous years.

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	9.4
Presentation	9.4
Length	9.4
Level	8.7

They were also asked how likely they are to book a session with us again (Very Likely, Fairly Likely, Fairly Unlikely and Very Unlikely). All but two said Very Likely (with those two saying they would be Fairly Likely).

The form gives plenty of opportunity for comments and views on the sessions, and we were thrilled to receive positive and enthusiastic feedback from many teachers:

Really lovely day; kids full of enthusiasm. Great group of adults that led the sessions. Would really like to do this every year.

Ashton Gate 21.05.15

Excellent delivery of session by Mandy - incredibly informative! This is what education should look like!

SS Peter & Paul 23.06.15

Emily was really friendly and great with the children. A great day, would book again!

Ilminster Avenue E-Act Academy 15.07.15

Really enjoyable session that held the children's focus and attention. The colour matching and collaborative art produced stunning results.

It is great that adults who accompany us are learning about their city's natural environment alongside the children; they always comment on how memorable the sessions are.

Hotwells 07 & 09.10.15



In addition to the praise we received on our feedback forms, some schools emailed to express their appreciation of our education programme:

Thank you for arranging such a fantastic field study for our Y4 children. They had a brilliant time and were amazed by the diversity of the invertebrates they spotted.

We are so grateful that you were able to arrange this for us at no cost – it means that we are able to access such high quality provision and also really formative experiences for our children.

Helen Adams, Assistant Principal, Fishponds Academy

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 2015 playscheme programme and also the contact list for playschemes. I then emailed the flier to 39 playscheme contacts. At the beginning of July, I followed this up with a further email to all contacts who hadn't yet booked. I also phoned/emailed specific playschemes that had previously visited but not booked this summer to encourage booking and get some feedback.

At the beginning of August, I contacted five local Rainbow, Brownie and Cub Scout groups who had not visited in 2014, offering early evening sessions until the end of September.

Results

Playscheme	Date	Session	No. of children
The Centre	2 nd April	Feathered Friends	Cancelled (low uptake from parents)
Southville Centre	24th July	Feathered friends	Cancelled (bad weather)
Southville Centre	28th July	Nature detectives	14
Oldbury Court	28th July	Nature detectives	13
Greenway	31st July	Hairy conservationists	12
Hannah More	4th Aug	Discover the Downs	27
Oldbury Court	5th Aug	Bugs, bees and butterflies	14
South Street	7th Aug	Bugs, bees and butterflies	12
Southville	11th Aug	Discover the Downs	13
Oldbury Court	14th Aug	Feathered friends	20

Hannah More	18th Aug	Nature detectives	Cancelled (lack of playscheme staff)
Southville	19th Aug	Bugs, bees and butterflies	Cancelled (bad weather)
Hannah More	25th Aug	Bugs, bees and butterflies	15
Totterdown	26th Aug	Nature detectives	20
Southville	27th Aug	Hairy conservationists	16
TOTAL		11 sessions	176

Discussion

Between 2nd April and 27th August 2015, seven groups booked 15 sessions with 176 children attending 11 sessions due to a number of cancellations.

Our playscheme mail out was initially well received this year, with three playschemes alone booking 11 sessions upon receiving the programme.



In comparison to last year, we saw fewer bookings for sessions overall during the summer holidays, and we did not deliver any sessions during the half-term and Easter breaks. In discussion with other educators, it is thought that council funding cuts may have affected playschemes and their ability to afford as many trips. Some playschemes appear to have closed down.

As we had a lower uptake than usual, I called playschemes that had previously visited but not booked this summer; feedback was positive but playschemes had just chosen alternative trips this year, and they indicated that they would like to return in future years.

In discussion with play leaders, the provision of low cost/free activities such as those that we provide is of great 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, but many still struggle to find funding for transport.

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 7 forms back, a return rate of 64%. 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	8.9
Presentation	9.1
Length	9.4
Level	8.9

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.

When asked for comments about their visit the group leaders wrote some lovely comments:

This is a great project offering children experiences they wouldn't get elsewhere.

Greenway Playscheme 31.07.15

The children really enjoyed making the 'potions', they were so excited about it!!

Hannah More Holiday Club 04.08.15

As always the children had a wonderful time. They love the games and always look forward to the next session with you.

Southville Centre 11.08.15

In addition to the feedback form, I received an email from the Project Manager at Working In Southmead for Health, who run the Greenway Playscheme:

Just a note to say thank you for the Hairy Goats session. I think your project is a fabulous one. For children to experience something new to them in an area they may visit often without knowing the hidden gems and nature that's around them helps encourage curiosity and a bit of adventure too.

From this feedback we can clearly see that the groups value the sessions we deliver.

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.

Bristol Green Capital

Bristol 2015 provided us with many extra opportunities to engage with the public, and to widen our audiences. We attended:

Bristol 2015 science lab

In March, we were invited to run a drop-in day at the 'Science Lab' on the Waterfront. We showed the 'Wildlife of the Avon Gorge' and the 'Gorge Goat' films. 118 people came in to make a wildlife mask, look at our display, pick up leaflets and find out about the work we do.

BRI Big Green Scheme

In April, we spent a day at the BRI's new Welcome Centre. We took along the display and our leaflets and in particular spoke to members of staff about the Project.

Best of Bristol virtual fieldtrip project

In July, 29 Year 3 students from Parson's Street Primary school took part in our 'Fabulous peregrine falcons and foodchains' session, parts of which were filmed for Best of Bristol, a film commissioned by the Bristol Green Capital 2015 Education Officer to promote the themes of Green Capital. It is intended that schools will use the film to get ideas of trips and activities that they can do with their pupils. Chloe Grant, the Education Officer, gave the following feedback:

"I just wanted to say a huge thank you to you and all your staff for your hard work last week re the Avon Gorge visit. I've been reviewing the footage, and it looks great- thanks again for all your positivity and enthusiasm!"

The film is due to be launched in mid-November on the accompanying teacher resource website www.sustainablelearning.com

A Bristol Murmuration



Over the summer months, artist Zoë Cameron worked with community groups across Henleaze, Stoke Bishop and Westbury-on-Trym to create 1000 ceramic starlings which were displayed on the Downs between 17th and 25th October. The installation was to bring attention to the decline in starling numbers over recent years.

For the opening event, we worked alongside Zoë helping children to create starling puppets, and were on hand to provide information and leaflets about starlings and other birds of the Downs and Gorge. Over the week, we ran a couple of walks – one for adults in conjunction with Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG), and another for parents and toddlers.

Portway Sunday Park events

In 2015, the Portway was closed to traffic for five Sundays. On 31st May, we took part in the first event, setting up a gazebo with our display, leaflets and wildlife mask-making. Mandy also led a walk into the Gully for people to discover the goats. Over the afternoon, we spoke to 80 people.

Unfortunately, we were unable to attend the following two events as they were held in June, a month in which we run at full capacity due to the Festival of Nature.

On 13th September, we welcomed a group of nine Young Carers and two key workers for a picnic on the Downs.



Afterwards we teamed up with experts from the Bristol Naturalists' Society (Ray Barnett, Mark Payak, Tony Smith and Gill Brown) and the Bristol Natural History Consortium (Livy Barnes). The young people had a wonderful time learning to identify and record invertebrates in the Gully. We walked down to the Gorge to enjoy it in all its splendour. Many of the children had never been to the Avon Gorge before.

Other community events:

Bristol Zoo Garden's Bird Weekend

On 25th and 26th April, Bristol Zoo Gardens invited us to join them for their first ever Bird Weekend to raise awareness of the bird conservation projects that the Zoo's involved with all around the World. We set up the project display, toy peregrine chick-checking and peregrine mask-making in the activity tent on the main lawn, where we spoke to 219 people over the two days. Many were regular visitors to the Zoo, with no idea what amazing native wildlife could be seen just over the road. It provided a fantastic opportunity to reach a new audience, with our 'Downs Spring Family Trail' and 'Bird Trail' leaflets proving particularly popular, and many Zoo members encouraged to make the Downs a part of their regular visits.



Festival of Nature (FON)

The Festival of Nature is the UK's largest celebration of the natural world.

This year's 'Wild Weekend' ran from Friday 12th June to Sunday 14th June. Our focus for the festival was invertebrates, and we teamed up with Bristol Zoo Gardens and The Wild Place Project to present the 'Bugs!' tent. The aim was to increase positive attitudes towards invertebrates, demonstrating their importance to us and how we can all be superheroes for bugs.

Pre- Festival school work

At the beginning of June, we worked with 36 Year 4 children from Clifton College and willow artist Julie Starks to create eight giant willow minibeast sculptures and accompanying fact sheets. Terrible weather meant we were unable to learn about native habitats and invertebrates out on the Downs as planned, so instead we visited Bug World in the Zoo; the children made careful sketch studies of a variety of invertebrates, looking at scale, body parts, texture and colour and were suitably inspired to move on to making their sculptures.



Julie instructed the children on planning their sculptures and showed them how to use the willow. In their science lessons, each group also worked together to produce a fact file to accompany their sculpture.

We took both the sculptures and fact sheets to the festival and displayed them in the 'Bugs!' tent. They formed an integral part of the tent experience for visitors, providing colour and information, allowing people to discover some fascinating facts on our bug sculpture trail. A number of the children brought their families to see their sculptures over the festival weekend, and we had many lovely comments about the work.

In the 'Bugs!' tent

We spent the Thursday before the festival setting up the tent displays and creating a colourful, exciting and informative environment for all visitors to the tent.

We created habitat themes throughout the tent, decorating it with the giant bug sculptures, which in turn formed our trail. We also had a minibeast fancy dress area and photo opportunity, as well as bringing along our display and leaflets.



Festival schools' day

Friday was the schools' day. We taught 250 Key Stage 2 children, from a variety of schools. We team-taught 'Habitat and bug home' sessions with two of the Zoo education officers. During the day we ran nine 30 minute sessions.

Public days on Saturday and Sunday

9,000 people came through the tent over the weekend, many more than in previous years. The tent was a constant hive of activity!



We had wonderful comments about the bug sculptures. I designed two versions of a trail activity sheet (a simplified tick sheet for younger children, and a fact-finding answer sheet for older children). 1,250 of these bug sculpture trail sheets were completed, and we actually ran out by mid-afternoon on the Sunday.

The minibeast dressing up area was also a huge hit with young and old a-like!



We took along the project display and our range of leaflets which were eagerly snapped up. Following the festival we had a flurry of bookings for events, from folks who are new to us.

The bug sculptures have now gone to Bug World in the Zoo and will be displayed there, along with the children's fact files.

Bristol International Kite Festival

For the first time, the International Kite Festival took place on Durdham Down, over the weekend of 22nd and 23rd August. We were located in the main activity marquee, alongside FOD+AG, with the weekend providing the perfect opportunity to reach a new and varied audience.



Children (and adults!) had the opportunity to make their own wildlife mask, and to learn about the diverse and special wildlife of the Downs and Gorge. Many people we spoke to were quite local to the Downs, but knew little about them and were thrilled to find out more. We took along our range of leaflets, encouraging people to explore the trails, and also our display. Over the weekend, we interacted with 715 people.

Children's holiday events

This year we have run a total of six children's holiday events, five of them since my position began. 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 attendees on the day
Brilliant Birdfeeders	18th Feb	10 (15 booked)
Brilliant Butterflies	28 th May	10 (13 booked)
Busy Buzzy Bees	23 rd July	16
Minibeast Magic	30 th July	12 (15 booked)
Gorge-ous Goats	13 th Aug	15 (18 booked)
Autumnal Antics	29 th Oct	18 (20 booked)
TOTAL		81

Our May half term event was 'Brilliant Butterflies', where children found out about butterflies of the Downs and then made their own wildflower garden to take home. Our first children's event of the summer holidays was 'Busy Buzzy Bees' in which we were joined by Rhian Rowson from the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery who helped the children to identify solitary and bumblebees before making their own bee and bug home.



For 'Minibeast Magic' we went on a bug hunt, made clay creatures and created fabulous minibeast pop-up books, and 'Gorge-ous Goats' was a very successful day where the children found out how our goats are helping to conserve wildflower species. In our last children's holiday event of the year, 'Autumnal Antics' we discovered some of the trees on the Downs, including their uses and folklore. In the afternoon the children made their own puppets and worked together to create some wonderful stories of their own.

Just to say an enormous thank you for such a brilliantly organised day! Molly and Harry loved it and came back full of facts and tree tales!! Thank you to you and your team.

Parent, children's event 29.10.15

Other Duties

Administration

Administration tasks that I assisted the Biodiversity Education Officer with include; taking bookings, producing posters and fliers for events, updating the website and advertising events through Visit Bristol and Green Capital websites, sending out events programmes and updating education resources.

Social media can be an extremely useful in getting information out into the public domain and for building and maintaining engagement with interested groups and people. 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. Popular posts have included photos from events, the Downs Diary and wildlife news from the Downs and the wider Bristol area. In July, we passed the 500 likes mark on Facebook. Facebook in particular is becoming an important tool for the Project, with page followers shooting from 320 likes in October 2014 to 520 likes in October 2015.

Volunteers

Volunteers are vital for us to be able to run our 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, 17 regular volunteers have given 310 hours of their time to this project. During this time two people on work experience came to work with us, working for 38.5 hours. In total these volunteers gave 348.5 hours of their time to this project.

Change Agents UK, Green Capital 2015

Between 9th June and 23rd July, Julia Guerrero joined us as a full-time European Volunteer placement, arranged through Change Agents UK as part of Green Capital 2015. Julia proved invaluable to the project helping with: the Bristol Festival of Nature, school groups, events and resource preparation, and our first two children's events of the summer. She was a great asset to the team, volunteering 174 hours of her time to the Project (making a final total of 522.5 hours of volunteer time overall). Julia really enjoyed the time she spent with us, emailing to say:

“Thank you for all the support that you have extended to me during my time in Bristol.

With you I had the chance to learn a lot, not only about the nature of the Downs and the Avon Gorge but also about environmental education and how to work no matter the weather! I also wanted to thank you for the warm welcome.

Volunteering for the AGDWP has been very enjoyable and I have learned and grown a lot.”



Summary

In 2015 the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project has taught more school children than ever before. We were fully booked for the summer term school sessions, and close to full capacity during the autumn term with more autumn school sessions booked than in any previous year. With both the summer and autumn term school groups we have had to turn away enquiries as we are currently running at capacity and could not deliver more education sessions.

Though playscheme bookings were disappointing this year, we have taken part in a huge variety of exciting community events, including the Festival of Nature, Portway Sunday Park events and the Bristol International Kite Festival, as well as a number of smaller events linked to Bristol's year as Green Capital. Without taking into consideration numbers for the Festival of Nature, we have more than doubled the number of people we have interacted with through children's and family events this year, from 634 people in 2014 to 1,475 in 2015. To meet future demand it is recommended that the seasonal education officer role is expanded, particularly where we are currently operating at maximum capacity.

From evaluation form feedback, and in discussion with 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.

30th October 2015

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?



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