

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Downs Committee

30th January 2012

Report of: Richard Ennion, Neighbourhoods and City Development

Title: Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project – 12th annual review

Ward: Citywide

Officers Presenting Report: Richard Ennion, Bristol Parks,
NH & CD
Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs
Biodiversity Education Officer

Contact Telephone Number: (0117) 92 22001

RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted.

Summary

Report of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project 12th annual review.

The significant issues in the report are:

Conservation Management Programme - progress
Education Programme - progress

1. Policy

1.1 Not applicable

2. Consultation

2.1 Internal

Not applicable

2.2 External

Chris Westcott (Natural England)

3. Context

- 3.1 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 the Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation.
- 3.2 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

- 3.3 This report provides a review of progress and key achievements of the project between January and December 2011.

Conservation Grazing in the Gully

- 3.4 After many years of careful planning, our Gully goat project came to fruition in June. Specially trained goat keepers, staff from Natural England and the City Council Nature Conservation Officer went to the Great Orme, in North Wales. They returned with six young billies who were health checked by Bristol Zoo's vet and introduced into a specially fenced area in the Gorge.
- 3.5 As a primitive breed, these goats naturally prefer to eat scrubby vegetation and are at home in the steep and difficult terrain of the Gully. Their constant browsing will give botanically rich grasslands and rare plants the chance to thrive and spread.
- 3.6 Our herd is being well looked after by the Downs Ranger's team who check them on a daily basis. At weekends, Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FODAG) do a secondary check as well. The Gully goat project receives funding from Natural England under the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme (HLS).
- 3.7 The goats look fantastic in their new home and despite only being here for a short time, the impact they're having on the scrub is evident. They're also very popular with the public. A talk and 'Meet the goat keepers' walk were very well attended so further events have been planned. The story of the goats' introduction was well covered by the local media and in October, BBC Points West showed interviews with Chris Westcott from Natural England and one of the goat keepers on the evening news. The Downs Ranger also gave an interview on BBC

Radio Bristol.

- 3.8 Information panels explaining this conservation story have been designed and will be installed early in 2012. School education sessions focusing on the project are also being developed and will be directly funded by an Educational Access payment under the HLS Scheme.

Managing the Gorge

- 3.9 We continued to implement a detailed programme of conservation works in the Gorge. Winter works focused on scrub removal from key areas of limestone grassland. During spring, tree guards were installed and an exclusion area created within the Gully to protect rare whitebeam trees from goat browsing and to provide an area for germination. Summer works focused on controlling invasive non-native species, like everlasting pea and holm oak, in areas around Sea Walls, the Dolomitic conglomerate, Gully edge and Great Quarry edge

Invertebrate Survey

- 3.10 An invertebrate survey of the Gully revealed the rich diversity of the site. 385 species were identified of which 22 were nationally scarce and seven were Red Data Book species. Of particular interest was the discovery of a nationally scarce ant (*Solenopsis fugax*), never recorded here before.

Silky Wave Moth Monitoring

- 3.11 Staff from the Bristol Conservation and Science Foundation took over the co-ordination of the silky wave moth survey programme. Transects were carried out on 15 sites around the Gorge, for nine weeks during the summer. Good numbers of moths were recorded and management recommendations have been given to the Project.

Events and Activities

- 3.12 The events programme was as popular as ever. During the year we expanded our repertoire to include new events such as; a talk about the ecology of bumblebees, an historic tree-grazing, a bus top safari with City Sightseeing and dinosaur detectives family events.

Summer Education Officer, School Groups and Playschemes

- 3.13 For the fourth year, we employed an Avon Gorge and Downs Summer Education Officer. She was particularly successful in attracting schools and playschemes from areas of Bristol that do not usually visit the site and enabled children who've never visited the Downs before to explore

and learn more about wildlife. We were also able to extend our teaching season by developing an autumn programme. In total we taught 1,307 children.

150th Downs Celebrations

- 3.14 We were part of the working group set up to plan activities to celebrate the 150th anniversary of an Act of Parliament, which preserves the Downs.
- 3.15 In May, we took part in a commemorative photo with Downs Committee members, 300 children from St John's Primary School and members of FODAG. The photo was featured in the Bristol Evening Post and ITV and BBC Points West both showed footage on the news.
- 3.16 The following weekend, we ran a children's marquee at the 150th Victorian family picnic. 350 children made top hats or bonnets decorated with wildlife (Bristol onions, butterflies etc.) and 100 wildlife masks were crafted.
- 3.17 During the rest of the year we organised events that looked at the changing landscape over the 150 years. Some of these were linked to an excellent history exhibition and two trails produced by Francis Greenacre.

Tree-mendous Trees Project

- 3.18 As part of the International Year of Forests, and in the run up to the Bristol Festival of Nature, we worked with pupils from Henleaze Junior school. 90 Year 3 children visited the Downs to learn about trees. Back at school, the children worked with artists from 'Unearthed' to create three 'poet-tree' friezes inspired by what the children had learnt on the Downs. They also planted a Bristol whitebeam in their school grounds with Nick Wray, from the University Botanic Gardens.

[Wild About Trees](#)

- 3.19 For this year's Bristol Festival of Nature we joined forces with Bristol City Council's Parks and Estates, Tree Bristol and the Forest of Avon Trust to create the Wild About Trees tent.
- 3.20 The walls of the tent were decorated with the 'poet-trees' created by the Henleaze School. We also had a display of rare whitebeams and botanist Libby Houston was there to talk to visitors. 428 children enjoyed making Bristol whitebeam masks.
- 3.21 A 'tree of life' sculpture was commissioned with Arts Council funding,

and over the festival weekend the public decorated 750 templates of tree-dwelling animals to place in the tree.

[The Downs Lichen Trail](#)

3.22 In January, we launched the Downs Lichen Trail, the fourth nature trail leaflet in our series. A talk and two guided walks about lichens were very well attended. The trail is exceedingly popular with the public and it has been well publicised through the local media. The trail was a collaboration between the Project, local lichen expert Sheila Quin, the British Lichen Society and the Bristol Naturalists' Society.

[Volunteer Support](#)

3.23 Many of our events couldn't take place without the support of volunteers and work experience students. We're grateful to the 21 people who gave 1,079 hours of their time over the year.

[Britain In Bloom Awards](#)

- 3.24 With FODAG, we made presentations to both the South West in Bloom and the national Britain in Bloom judges during their tours of the city. Bristol won gold medals in both competitions.
- 3.25 We were also delighted to hear that the national Britain in Bloom judges had awarded the Avon Gorge and Downs the Royal Horticultural Society Sutton Seed Cup for 'an outstanding area of nature conservation'.

[Green Flag Award](#)

3.26 The Downs were awarded a prestigious Green Flag for the fifth year running. This award is given to the best parks and green spaces in England and Wales.

4. Proposal

4.1 None, report is for information only

5. Other Options Considered

5.1 Not applicable

6. Risk Assessment

6.1 Not applicable

7. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 7a) 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 None for the purpose of this report

Financial None for the purpose of this report

Revenue None for the purpose of this report

Capital None for the purpose of this report

Land None for the purpose of this report

Personnel Not applicable

Appendices: None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
Background Papers:

A printed copy of the Annual Review will be presented at the meeting