

Downs Committee

Supplementary Information



Date: Monday, 15 January 2024

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: City Hall

12. Downs Community Engagement report

(Pages 2 - 23)

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Date: Monday, 15 January 2024



Report for December 2023 summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife learning and community engagement programme

Reporting Officer: Anna Stevens Avon Gorge and Downs wildlife biodiversity engagement and learning manager

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife (AGDW) events programme

Unfortunately due to separate reasons – illness of the workshop leader for our **Christmas Wreath** workshop and the weather for our **Star Party on the Downs** event – both our events in December were cancelled. However, luckily had discussions with Explorer Dome who are partners in our Star Party and we will run an altered session in February half term so as not to lose our audience. We had taken around 60 bookings on this event, many of which will be a new audience. We aim to run the event so that even in the case of poor weather visibility we can still go ahead.

Our 2024 programme of funding events has now been finalised and will be available to book online shortly. Our events programme this year will begin in February.

Formal educational sessions

Our first A level pilot session took place in late November and was well received and went according to plan. There are some areas which we will work on to improve the learning offer. We will now be offering secondary sessions through this year. We have purchased some equipment for this purpose but also have the use of the Higher Education department equipment at BZS.

Committee members are welcome to observe any learning session AGDW runs this year in order that they can understand how we operate in the formal education capacity. AGDW will need to seek permission from the education group attending.

Outreach to schools

We delivered an assembly to all years at Stoke Park Primary as well as their in-school workshops where we followed sessions over two days complementing the national curriculum in-school. Bespoke sessions were created to this purpose. Assemblies and workshops were well received and it is planned to deliver in further schools next winter. One comment given in feedback was:

“The workshops were engaging and full of incredible local knowledge for our children. We are from a community who do not always access the Gorge or Downs but Anna brought the location to us and a smile to our children's faces! Thank you so so much!”

Pre-school age sessions

Our very last session of term took place before Christmas and had a fabulous Christmas theme which saw the children leaving with fun natural decorations they had made to hang on the tree. Sessions continue and begin in January to take us through to the half term break every Monday until 5th February.



Nature Works

After discussions with the Off the Record representative, who would like this session to be drop-in for their young people, we are happy to go with this plan. To this end we feel the summer break is the best time to offer these sessions to Off the Record when we have fewer groups than in the spring and summer terms, and will result in no other children or young people missing out. This could be the case if none of Off the Record young people attend on days when we could be delivering to school groups. The Learning Engagement Officer will take this project forward in 2024 with the representative from Off the Record.

Adoption West and Children in Care

We have now been put in touch with a service manager who deals with the Recruitment and Assessment teams and we are waiting to hear how they would like to proceed with our offer of engagement.

Bird survey

Our bird survey in conjunction with Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) continues but due to lack of time and manpower we combined our November and December sessions and ran only one survey at Sea Walls. Surveys will continue next year and we are building up a useful overall picture of diversity of birdlife on the Downs.

Volunteers

Our volunteers were invited to the Bristol Zoological Society Christmas party and each received a very thankful Christmas card from the AGDW engagement team for all their incredible support in 2023.

Social media and website

During the past month a total of 1626 people used our website and our followers on Facebook currently stands above 2300. During the past month our Facebook posts reached 3345 people and our Instagram posts 144. Our Facebook page can be found [here](#) , our Instagram page [here](#) and our website can be found [here](#).

25th Anniversary of AGDW

Tree Trail

One of the main plans is to completely revamp the Tree Trail at the Observatory and the Promenade. We met again with Sarah's Wildlife Projects representatives to discuss the new trail and to go via each tree in turn to assess which activities will work at each tree. Sarah's Wildlife Projects are kindly offering to donate the cost of the signage which will be needed in order to achieve this revamp. The trail is planned to be linked to the AGDW website with activities for children and families and information. A suitable organisation which can produce the types of arboretum sign required to be attached to the trees has now been found. Further work on this will be taking place in January.

Sponsorship of 3x3s

A proposal is put forward to the Downs Committee for the Engagement team to run a sponsorship programme in celebration of the 25th anniversary of ADGW, whereby members of the public can financially sponsor a 3mx3m plot of the Downs or Avon Gorge (to be decided which areas exactly). This will be a fundraiser for the project and helps to raise awareness and nurture ownership and value of the sites. It also encourages people to look after their plot through litter collection and reporting of any issues. This scheme has been used successfully by other organisations to raise awareness and raise funds.

Other

Steering Group

A Steering Group meeting takes place in late January.

Sparks Project

The Engagement Manager and AGDW partners, the Botanical Gardens, spent some time down at Sparks sustainable department store in Broadmead prior to the Christmas holidays to carry out some minor repairs to their installation in advance of the Christmas holidays. A new sculpture created by schoolchildren along with Heart of BS13 stands alongside our installation to highlight local biodiversity. In regard to this the Engagement Manager has contacted the CEO of Heart of BS13 to ask if they are willing to meet in early 2024 to discuss some ways in which we might collaborate, to introduce and engage both adults or children in the community with their incredible city wildlife.

Talks

A talk will be delivered to a Women's Institute group in January which allows for some small donation to the project.

Team Days

Both the Biodiversity Engagement Manager and the Engagement Officer will attend two team days at Bristol Zoological Society as part of their training in January.



AVON GORGE AND DOWNS WILDLIFE ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING ANNUAL REVIEW 2023



Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife is a partnership:



Bristol Zoological Society



The Downs Committee



BRISTOL ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Overview

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To this end in 2023 Avon Gorge and Downs continued to provide free engagement sessions to primary school aged children, welcoming new schools who had not previously visited the site or the project as well as the local schools who have regularly visited in past years. We have changed many of our programmes to offer a full day option for a more in-depth engagement with our wildlife and added some new programmes, including an option to pond-dip and learn about freshwater habitats and wildlife in conjunction with University of Bristol (UoB) Botanical Gardens. We have changed our numbers recording system so that children attending two sessions over a single full day visit are recorded only once and not twice, as previously.

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30 volunteers gave us **781** hours of their time.

Events Programme

We enjoyed a wide and varied programme of events this year with some annual and much loved favourites as well as some new and different activities. We enjoyed collaborating with UoB Botanical Gardens, Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FoDAG) as well as Forestry England (FE) in order to host our events.

Our inside **talks** included an in-depth look into the priority species **hazel dormice** in Leigh Woods, the nationally rare **silky wave moth** in the Avon Gorge and a sneaky peak at Silverback Film's new production on critically endangered **Sumatran orang-utans** and an overview of their natural history. **Ninety-three** people attended our talks.

Outside our adult focused **walks** and engagement opportunities provided a wealth of information and hands-on discovery from expert leaders on so many fascinating subjects: our nationally **rare botanical** species in the Gully; our extraordinary plethora of **whitebeam** species; our fantastic **wild goats** and the scrub management they provide for us; our UK and **local bat** species; the **history** of the Downs; our Downs bird species in the **dawn chorus**; the wonderful array of unusual tree species on the **Granny Downs**; the richness of native **wildflowers** in our calcareous summer meadows; the diversity of **butterflies** on Zoo Banks; summer tree identification and woodland management at **Leigh Woods**; the tricks to identifying our **Downs trees** in winter. In all **179** people attended our range of walks.

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Overall in 2023 we taught **2,549 primary, secondary children** and **higher education students** in **104** learning sessions. Our summer **playscheme, uniformed groups** and **pre-school age children** totalled **409** in **27** engagement sessions. We are also on a push towards introducing and encouraging full day in-depth sessions on one topic rather than two separate unrelated sessions.

Primary

We welcomed to the Downs primary schools who have been visiting the project for many years with all of their year groups, as well as new schools who had not previously visited us from within Bristol, such as Ilminster Avenue E-ACT academy, Clifton High school and St Augustine's Catholic primary school. We also welcomed new schools from outside the city such as Fairfield school in Backwell, Winford primary school, Somerdale Educate Together from Keynsham and St George's primary school in Weston-super-Mare.

For the first time we offered four schools an opportunity to learn about their local Bristol wildlife in the Gorge and Downs in-school; one a very local school and three further afield in Southville, Headley Park and Stoke Park. This worked well during quieter times with school visits in the winter/early spring months. The workshops for the schools are bespoke and designed for each class to complement their in-school curriculum as well as linked to the wildlife of our site. In addition two of these schools with higher levels of Ever6FSM children and which are more geographically distanced from the Downs, received an assembly where a larger number of pupils (and often teachers) discovered what unusual and incredible wildlife we have in the Gorge. One school visited the Downs for related workshops with each of their year groups and it is planned that the other three schools will visit us in 2024.

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Our visit was wonderful. The activities were very accessible to the children ... they linked very well with the learning we had already completed in school.

Headley Park primary school

St Augustine's Catholic primary school



Secondary and Higher Education

For the first time the project offered a pilot A level session to Year 12 biology and geography students from South Gloucestershire and Stroud College (SGS). This incorporated an introduction on why we survey and carry out statistical analysis as well as an introduction to the wildlife in the Gorge, followed by fieldwork sampling of botanical species on the Downs – a required practical component of A level, BTEC and T level courses with an ecology element. Back inside for the afternoon the students used their recorded datasets to carry out statistical analysis looking for relationships.

Two large groups of University of West of England (UWE) BSc Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Science undergraduate students enjoyed a session learning about the Downs and Gorge's wildlife with a focus on the ecological relationships between people and habitat in this special ecosystem, for their Wildlife and Society

module. The session was a mix of an inside introduction and a long walk studying evidence of human impact and habitat management.

A group of supported Year 13 internship students from City of Bristol College joined us for some work experience which we followed up in the summer with a sensory and invertebrate sampling session on the Downs by way of a thank you for their kind help.

Biology & geography SGS students had an excellent experience with the education department. Thank you very much to AGDW who gave our students such an excellent opportunity.

They really enjoyed the 1st hand experience collecting data ... they learnt how to analyse data which will be exceptionally useful during their exams & NEA write up.

Being able to get them out of the lecture theatre to observe the work going on in their local area & discuss the challenges of balancing wildlife conservation with recreation is really beneficial.

MG, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College

BS, UWE



Summer playschemes, uniformed groups, home schooled and pre-school age

During the summer holiday months some children in Bristol are in need of support, food and activities when they are not at school. Bristol City Council runs Your Holiday Hub which financially supports many holiday schemes through the HAF funding scheme, and we were lucky to welcome several of these playschemes during the summer holidays as well as other schemes funded by different means. Each playscheme enjoys activities on the Downs learning through fun activities about wildlife and eats a healthy lunch whilst with us. In total we welcomed **11** holiday schemes and **182** children during the summer holidays.

Some brownie, cubs and beavers groups enjoy sessions with us during the lighter evening months of the year, following fun learning activities. This year we welcomed **three** uniformed groups with a total of **64** children. We also welcomed two Bristol based home-schooled groups of children with their adults for **two** sessions on the Downs and at the Botanical Gardens, with **43** children and adults learning through pond dipping and mini-beast hunting. These home-schooled groups cover a wide range of areas within Bristol and children came from the following range of postcodes: BS20, BS8, BS5, BS25, BS6, BS16.

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife introduced its new pre-school age with adult nature club 'Little kids on the Downs' in September. This club runs weekly following seasonal themes to introduce the natural world of the Downs year to children aged between two and four and their accompanying adult. The club follows fun age appropriate activities on native wildlife and always incorporates a creative element towards the end of the session. These sessions instil a love and an understanding of the natural world which develops as a child grows, and takes with them a respect of wildlife as they mature. During the autumn term we ran **11** pre-school sessions.

We wanted to extend a massive thank you to you & your team as the children had a great time & learnt so much.

Kind & welcoming & informative. Lots of interaction & varied activities each week.

Thank you for engaging the children so well & giving us the opportunity to learn about this very important habitat.

Unity

holiday hub

FS, Little

kids on the Downs

NB,

Home schooled group



Community Events and Activities

Talks to local groups

In 2023 we gave **three** talks and walks to local community groups who were interested in discovering more about the wildlife in the Avon Gorge and Downs and the work that goes into conservation, as well as encouraging people to value it. In total the numbers of people who attended was approximately **100**.

Sparks

We successfully completed our installation at Sparks Bristol the day before the opening of the site in May. This creation by AGDW in the style of 'Wake the Tiger' came together with help from a member of staff from UoB Botanical Gardens as well as several of our very dedicated and creative volunteers. The installation is designed to hook the general public, engaging them through a series of scenarios with an aim to ultimately confirming positive behaviours for the benefit of Downs and Avon Gorge wildlife. It also provides information on the amazing species which we are so lucky to have. Whole site attendance is monitored by Sparks and on the first weekend of opening more than **8000** people visited, thereafter with **1,500** people on weekdays and **2,500** on weekend days. In addition we spent an afternoon with the general public crafting additions to the installation whilst talking about Gorge and Downs biodiversity. Our installation is situated in the Nature Area right at the front of the Broadmead entrance to the site.



City Nature Challenge

We worked in collaboration with Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust (CSPT) at the Suspension Bridge learning hub to run one of our sites for the **City Nature Challenge (CNC) Bioblitz** in early May. Our second site was on the Downs at the site of the Downs Café. The aim of CNC was to engage the public in recording as much wildlife as possible on the Downs onto an app for our AGDW iNaturalist project. We offered owl pellet dissection and bug hunting as well as fun activities on birds and mammals to engage a variety of age groups. We directly engaged with a total of **110 people** over the four and a half hours we were present, and over the full four days of the CNC a total of **136 observations** were added to our iNaturalist project. In September we set up at the Suspension Bridge learning hub once again to take part in the **Eurobioblitz** and engaged with **108 people**.

Festival of Nature

AGDW spent two days in the Bristol Zoological Society (BZS) tent at the **Festival of Nature** in Millennium Square offering several engaging activities of owl pellet dissection and guess the weight of the baby peregrines for a

scientific perspective, and willow bird feeder creation for more generic interaction. These activities were hugely popular with adults and families and gave us the opportunity to chat with the general public about the Downs and Avon Gorge and the wildlife which thrives in these habitats. In all we carried out activities with a minimum of **532 people**.

Forwards Festival

The project attended the **Forwards Festival** on the Downs in early September to engage with the general public and directly interacted through activities with **175** people over two days. This was a fantastic outcome and allowed us to talk about the biodiversity on the Downs and in the Gorge with people who may not ordinarily come to the site. We were also able to talk about our upcoming programme for the autumn.

Student Fayre

The project attended the **Student Welcome Fayre** on the Downs to engage students into the project through volunteering, as well as push the message about the damage that barbecues and fires do to biodiversity on the Downs. We spoke to **131** students at the Fayre.



Social media

Analytics for website, Facebook and Instagram

We started using analytics for our **website** and our social media in July 2023 in order to understand what drives traffic to us and which aspects our users find most engaging and tailor our content accordingly.

For our website most users come through an 'organic' search and we are trusted and referred by many other websites as a highly regarded source of information. Since we started using analytics in July visitors increased steadily over the last 6 months of the year, with a total of **4,952 visitors** on **6,380 sessions** between **July** and **December**.

With regard to our Facebook page many of our users find us through other Facebook pages showing good connections with other organisations. During 2023 our **Facebook** posts reached **31,994 people**, up by **31.5%** on the previous year and our followers on Facebook currently stand very near to **2400**. We opened an **Instagram** account during 2023 to boost awareness of the project and our Instagram reach stands at **470**. Our Facebook page can be found [here](#), our Instagram page [here](#) and our website can be found [here](#).

Surveying and monitoring

At the beginning of 2023 we started a **monthly bird survey** on the Downs and in the Gully with Alastair Fraser, a bird identification expert who already works with the native species team at Wild Place Project (WPP). We cover four transect walks in rotation, one per month covering the four different habitats on the Downs and in part of the Gorge. These are Fairyland and Zoo Banks, Peregrine Watch point into the Gully, Sea Walls and Sneyd Park copse, scrub patches. We record the data on BirdTrack which automatically uploads to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and allows us to view our data at any time. There is a lack of bird survey data within AGDW and this will allow us to monitor any changes in species richness and abundance at different times of year, over time. Highlights so far are sightings of the elusive firecrest and the peregrine falcons. Students on the MSc AWCiP (UWE/BZS) and volunteers help us on these surveys to ensure we record the full wealth of data available.

We took part in the **silky wave moth** annual survey in June to help us understand more about the nature of this rare species and to help the BZS Native Species Team in the data collection. Numbers were strong this year although in a long term overall decline.

We continue to receive the **butterfly** datasets which are recorded by Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FoDAG) yearly, and this year we ran a butterfly walk to aid the collection of data with the general public along Zoo Banks. This was very well received and a total of **17** species were recorded during the walk including the silver washed fritillary.

Rare plant species and species of **Sorbus genus** continue to be monitored by Libby Houston, the local botany expert in conjunction with Natural England and UoB Botanical Gardens. We ran walks and workshops on these rare species with both Libby and the Botanical Gardens.



Partnerships

Suspension Bridge Trust

Botanical detail was commissioned from Libby Houston by the project and supplied to the CSBT for a fundraiser in partnership with #HazardOne, a Bristol street artist who created an amazing mural of the rare Avon Gorge species for the public to enjoy. It was sited at the Suspension Bridge. In addition, Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife volunteers were able to enjoy a fantastic tour of the Vaults at the Suspension Bridge free of charge with the team from the CSBT, which received wonderful feedback.



Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge Downs Advisory Panel

We work closely with FoDAG and are together able to work towards a balance of the biodiversity of the Downs and Avon Gorge alongside the public function of the sites as a necessary green space on the edge of a city of more than 500,000 people. FoDAG chairs the Downs Advisory Panel (DAP) which was set up in 2023 to advise the Downs Committee from the perspective of a variety of interested parties and AGDW sit on the panel to represent biodiversity and public engagement.

Forestry England

The south side of the Gorge was more in focus last year as it plays a fundamental part in the eco-network of the Avon Gorge and we hope to represent this in the engagement element of Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife. We enjoyed jointly delivering a public engagement session with Forestry England in Leigh Woods to this end last summer and hope to continue this strong partnership into the future, through further delivery on the Leigh Woods side.

University of Bristol Botanical Gardens

We have been delighted this year to have been able to use the Botanical Gardens for freshwater activities with children to enhance their understanding of this habitat and its species, and as a comparison with meadow and woodland habitats. We have also enjoyed the expertise and collaboration of members of the University based at the Gardens for delivering our workshops and in the development of our installation in Sparks.

Volunteer Support

Last year, **30** volunteers gave **781** hours of their time over the year for which we are very grateful as we would not be able to operate without their support. They joined us in all sorts of different ways from helping weekly with the pre-school age nature club to crafting with the general public in Sparks to bringing up the rear on a night-time walk!





AVON GORGE AND DOWNS WILDLIFE ANNUAL REVIEW 2023



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**The Downs
Committee**



**Bristol Zoological
Society**



**University of
BRISTOL**



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Photo credits: Chris Westcott, Mark Parsons, Denice Stout, Libby Houston, John Martin, Beverley Guard, Jon Craig, Kathi Held

ecology element. Back inside for the afternoon the students used their recorded datasets to carry out statistical analysis looking for relationships.

Two large groups of University of West of England (UWE) BSc Wildlife Ecology and Conservation Science **undergraduate students** enjoyed a session learning about the Downs and Gorge's wildlife with a focus on the ecological relationships between people and habitat in this special ecosystem, for their Wildlife and Society module. The session was a mix of an inside introduction and a long walk studying evidence of human impact and habitat management.

A group of **supported** Year 13 **internship students** from City of Bristol College joined us for some work experience which we followed up in the summer with a sensory and invertebrate sampling session on the Downs, by way of a thank you for their kind help.

Biology & geography SGS students had an excellent experience with the education department. Thank you very much to AGDW who gave our students such an excellent opportunity.

They really enjoyed the 1st hand experience collecting data ... they learnt how to analyse data which will be exceptionally useful during their exams & NEA write up.

Being able to get them out of the lecture theatre to observe the work going on in their local area & discuss the challenges of balancing wildlife conservation with recreation is really beneficial.

MG, South Gloucestershire and Stroud College



BS, UWE

Summer playschemes, uniformed groups, home schooled and pre-school age

During the summer holiday months some children in Bristol are in need of support, food and activities when they are not at school. Bristol City Council runs Your Holiday Hub which financially supports many **holiday schemes** through the HAF funding scheme, and we were lucky to welcome several of these playschemes during the summer holidays as well as other schemes funded by different means. Each playscheme enjoys activities on the Downs learning through fun activities about wildlife and eats a healthy lunch whilst with us. In total we welcomed **11** holiday schemes and **182** children during the summer holidays.

Some **brownie, cubs** and **beavers groups** enjoy sessions with us during the lighter evening months of the year, following fun learning activities. This year we welcomed **three** uniformed groups with a total of **64** children. We also welcomed two Bristol based **home-schooled groups** of children with their adults for **two** sessions on the Downs and at the Botanical Gardens, with **43** children and adults learning through pond dipping and mini-beast hunting. These home-schooled groups cover a wide range of areas within Bristol and children came from the following range of postcodes: BS20, BS8, BS5, BS25, BS6, BS16.

Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife introduced its new **pre-school age** with adult **nature club** 'Little kids on the Downs' in September. This club runs weekly following seasonal themes to introduce the natural world of the Downs year to children aged between two and four and their accompanying adult. The club follows fun age appropriate activities on native wildlife and always incorporates a creative element towards the end of the session. These sessions instil a love and an understanding of the natural world which develops as a child grows, and takes with them a respect of wildlife as they mature. During the autumn term we ran **11** pre-school sessions.

Photo credits: Chris Westcott, Mark Parsons, Denice Stout, Libby Houston, John Martin, Beverley Guard, Jon Craig, Kathi Held

We wanted to extend a massive thank you to you & your team as the children had a great time & learnt so much.

Kind & welcoming & informative. Lots of interaction & varied activities each week.

Thank you for engaging the children so well & giving us the opportunity to learn about this very important habitat.

Unity holiday hub

FS, Little kids on the Downs

NB, Home schooled group



Community Events and Activities

Talks to local groups

In 2023 we gave **three** talks and walks to local community groups who were interested in discovering more about the wildlife in the Avon Gorge and Downs and the work that goes into conservation, as well as encouraging people to value it. In total the numbers of people who attended was approximately **100**.

Sparks

We successfully completed our installation at **Sparks Bristol** the day before the opening of the site in May. This creation by AGDW in the style of 'Wake the Tiger' came together with help from a member of staff from UoB Botanical Gardens as well as several of our very dedicated and creative volunteers. The installation is designed to hook the general public, engaging them through a series of scenarios with an aim to ultimately confirming positive behaviours for the benefit of Downs and Avon Gorge wildlife. It also provides information on the amazing species which we are so lucky to have. Whole site attendance is monitored by Sparks and on the first weekend of opening more than **8000** people visited, thereafter with **1,500** people on weekdays and **2,500** on weekend days. In addition we spent an afternoon with the general public crafting additions to the installation whilst talking about Gorge and Downs biodiversity. Our installation is situated in the Nature Area right at the front of the Broadmead entrance to the site.



City Nature Challenge

We worked in collaboration with Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust (CSBT) at the Suspension Bridge learning hub to run one of our sites for the **City Nature Challenge (CNC) Bioblitz** in early May. Our second site was on the Downs at the site of the Downs Café. The aim of CNC was to engage the public in recording as much wildlife as possible on the Downs onto an app for our AGDW iNaturalist project. We offered owl pellet dissection and bug hunting as well as fun activities on birds and mammals to engage a variety of age groups. We directly engaged with a total of **110** people over the four and a half hours we were present, and over the full four days of the CNC a total of **136 observations** were added to our iNaturalist project. In September we set up at the Suspension Bridge learning hub once again to take part in the **Eurobioblitz** and engaged with **108** people.

Festival of Nature

AGDW spent two days in the Bristol Zoological Society (BZS) tent at the **Festival of Nature** in Millennium Square offering several engaging activities of owl pellet dissection and guess the weight of the baby peregrines for a scientific perspective, and willow bird feeder creation for more generic interaction. These activities were hugely popular with adults and families and gave us the opportunity to chat with the general public about the Downs and Avon Gorge and the wildlife which thrives in these habitats. In all we carried out activities with a minimum of **532** people.

Forwards Festival

The project attended the **Forwards Festival** on the Downs in early September to engage with the general public and directly interacted through activities with **175** people over two days. This was a fantastic outcome and allowed us to talk about the biodiversity on the Downs and in the Gorge with people who may not ordinarily come to the site. We were also able to talk about our upcoming programme for the autumn.

Student Fayre

The project attended the **Student Welcome Fayre** on the Downs in the autumn to engage students into the project through volunteering, as well as push the message about the damage that barbecues and fires can do to biodiversity on the Downs. We spoke to **131** students at the Fayre.



Social media

Analytics for website, Facebook and Instagram

We started using analytics for our **website** and our social media in July 2023 in order to understand what drives traffic to us and which aspects our users find most engaging and tailor our content accordingly.

For our website most users come through an 'organic' search and we are trusted and referred by many other websites as a highly regarded source of information. Since we started using analytics in July visitors increased steadily over the last 6 months of the year, with a total of **4,952 visitors** on **6,380 sessions** between **July** and **December**.

With regard to our Facebook page many of our users find us through other Facebook pages showing good connections with other organisations. During 2023 our **Facebook** posts reached **31,994** people, up by **31.5%** on the previous year and our followers on Facebook currently stand very near to **2400**. We opened an Instagram account during 2023 to boost awareness of the project and our **Instagram** reach stands at **470**. Our Facebook page can be found [here](#), our Instagram page [here](#) and our website can be found [here](#).

Surveying and Monitoring

At the beginning of 2023 we started a **monthly bird survey** on the Downs and in the Gully with Alastair Fraser, a bird identification expert who already works with the native species team at Bristol Zoo Project (BZP). We cover four transect walks in rotation, one per month covering the four different habitats on the Downs and in part of the Gorge. These are Fairyland and Zoo Banks, Peregrine Watch point into the Gully, Sea Walls and Sneyd Park copse, scrub patches. We record the data on BirdTrack which automatically uploads to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and allows us to view our data at any time. There is a lack of bird survey data within AGDW and this will allow us to monitor any changes in species richness and abundance at different times of year, over time. Highlights so far are sightings of the elusive firecrest and the peregrine falcons. Students on the MSc AWCiP (UWE/BZS) and volunteers help us on these surveys to ensure we record the full wealth of data available.

We took part in the **silky wave moth** annual survey in June to help us understand more about the nature of this rare species and to help the BZS Native Species Team in the data collection. Numbers were strong this year although in a long term trend of overall decline.

We continue to receive the **butterfly** datasets which are recorded by Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FoDAG) yearly, and submitted to UKBMS, and this year we ran a butterfly walk to aid the collection of data with the general public along Zoo Banks. This was very well received and a total of **17** species were recorded during the walk including the silver washed fritillary.

Rare plant species and species of the **Sorbus genus** continue to be monitored by Libby Houston, the local botany expert in conjunction with NE and UoB Botanical Gardens. We ran walks and workshops on these rare species with both Libby and the Botanical Gardens.



Partnerships

Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust

Botanical detail was commissioned by the project from Libby Houston and supplied to the **CSBT** for a fundraiser in partnership with #HazardOne, a Bristol street artist who created an amazing **mural** of the rare Avon Gorge species for the public to enjoy. It was sited at the Suspension Bridge. In addition, AGDW volunteers were able to enjoy a fantastic **tour** of the **Vaults** at the Suspension Bridge free of charge with the team from the CSBT, which received wonderful feedback.



Photo credits: Chris Westcott, Mark Parsons, Denice Stout, Libby Houston, John Martin, Beverley Guard, Jon Craig, Kathi Held

Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

We work closely with **FoDAG** and are together able to work towards a balance of the biodiversity of the Downs and Avon Gorge alongside the public function of the sites as a necessary green space on the edge of a city of more than 500,000 people. FoDAG chairs the **Downs Advisory Panel (DAP)** which was set up in 2023 to advise the Downs Committee from the perspective of a variety of interested parties and AGDW sit on the panel to represent biodiversity and public engagement.

Forestry England

The south side of the Gorge was more in focus last year as it plays a fundamental part in the eco-network of the Avon Gorge and we hope to represent this in the engagement element of AGDW. We enjoyed jointly delivering a public engagement session with FE in **Leigh Woods** to this end last summer and aim to continue this strong partnership into the future through further delivery on the Leigh Woods side.

University of Bristol Botanical Gardens

We have been delighted this year to have been able to use the **Botanical Gardens** for freshwater activities with children to enhance their understanding of this habitat and its species, and as a comparison with meadow and woodland habitats. We have also enjoyed the expertise and collaboration of members of the UoB based at the Gardens for delivering our workshops and in the development of our installation in Sparks.

Volunteer Support

Last year, **30** volunteers gave **781** hours of their time over the year for which we are very grateful as we would not be able to operate without their support. They joined us in all sorts of different ways from helping weekly with the pre-school age nature club, to crafting with the general public in Sparks, to bringing up the rear on a night-time walk!

Project Funding

AGDW is incredibly grateful to all its funders for their financial and other support in encouraging awareness and understanding of the unique Avon Gorge and Downs and its importance for wildlife, people and local habitat. Organisations who funded the project in 2023 are: **Downs Committee, Bristol Zoological Society, Society of Merchant Venturers, Natural England, Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity**. Thank you to all those individual donors for their kind support.

Anna Stevens, Biodiversity engagement and learning manager

Bristol City Council Report 2023

Winter Conservation

The winter conservation works on the Bristol side of the Gorge continue to focus on the removal of scrub and invasive species. These works are essential in order to protect and restore the areas of species-rich grassland and the rare species found on the rocky limestone outcrops. Bristol City Council (BCC) are working with botanist Libby Houston to identify priority areas for these works. Scrub removal was undertaken on the cliff faces around the Great Quarry and St Vincent's Rocks areas by rope access contractors in February 2023. Further works are scheduled to take place around Sea Walls, the Gully Edge, Great Quarry cliff-top and St Vincent's Rocks in January and February 2024. The BCC Downs team are also undertaking scrub management works along the bases of Great Quarry and Black Rock Quarry this coming winter 2023-2024. On the Downs, implementation of the Scrub Management Plan has continued for its ninth year and is contributing to the ongoing restoration of the wildflower meadows. The plan expires in 2025, and therefore the progress of the management prescriptions will be reviewed over the next year.

Ash Die Back

Works were carried out in January and February 2023 to remove ash trees infected with ash dieback disease, which pose a heightened risk to highway users along Bridge Valley Road. At the same time, the BCC Downs team were able to utilise the traffic management and removed invasive scrub on the Dolomitic Conglomerate Outcrop, where several rare plant species are found.

Photo credits: Chris Westcott, Mark Parsons, Denice Stout, Libby Houston, John Martin, Beverley Guard, Jon Craig, Kathi Held

Drone Survey Mapping

A drone survey was carried out by the BCC GIS team over winter in 2023. The footage has been used to create an interactive 3D model of the Avon Gorge. This currently only shows the Bristol side, but there are plans for further flights to include both sides. This will allow more accurate mapping of the rare habitats and species found in the Avon Gorge. There is also the potential for repeated drone flights to monitor changes in levels of invasive scrub and inform future management.

Walcombe Slade (the Gully)

In the Gully, the herd of four Bagot and three Kashmir goats are keeping the scrub regrowth under control, with continued monitoring from the Council's Downs' team and the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG). The University of Bristol Botanic Garden carried out planting of 111 honewort plants in the Gully during January 2023, assisted by volunteers and the BCC Downs team. Honewort is a nationally rare plant, and the Avon Gorge is the northernmost place it grows. The plants had been grown from seed collected from the existing Gully population. The plants will continue to be monitored by the Botanic Garden.

Ongoing

During the coming Winter 2023-2024, the BCC Downs team will be carrying out removal of climbing and self-seeded vegetation on the rock faces alongside Bridge Road (adjacent to the former toilet block and café) and adjacent to the Clifton Playground site. This is to facilitate rock safety assessments.

Rosie Jackson, Nature conservation officer, Bristol City Council



Photo credits: Chris Westcott, Mark Parsons, Denice Stout, Libby Houston, John Martin, Beverley Guard, Jon Craig, Kathi Held