

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Downs Committee

23rd January 2017

Title: **Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Report 2016**

Ward: **Citywide**

Officers Presenting Report: **Becky Belfin Parks Development Officer, Parks Development Team
Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager**

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RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted.

Summary

To report, for information, on the activities of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project during 2016.

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

Sarah Tyler, Operations Co-ordinator North Parks

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.

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 2016.

Habitat management works throughout the Gorge and Downs

The winter conservation works on the Bristol side of the Gorge continue 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, the goats are still effectively controlling the regrowth of scrubby species and they appear to be in fine health. The regular monitoring of the goats 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.

At the beginning of the year a habitat management day took place in Great Quarry, with the University of Bristol's Conservation Group, and members of ClimbBristol (the local climbing group). About 30 people took part, and a substantial amount of scrub was removed to benefit the dry grassland species that are important in the Gorge.

On the Downs, implementation of the Scrub Management Plan is continuing. The areas managed as wildflower meadows on the Downs have been extended this year, to increase their area, and better connect existing meadows. This has received positive feedback from people using the Downs.

Silky wave moth monitoring

The Avon Gorge is the only site in England for the silky wave moth (*Idaea dilutaria*). A total of 12 silky wave moth sites within the Avon Gorge were surveyed this summer by the Bristol Zoological Society. The survey season ran from the third week of June to the first week of July 2016. For the majority of the sites the peak flight week was the first week of July. All sites showed a presence of silky wave moth.

This year the maximum peak count was 181 moths, which was the lowest count since the base line surveys began in 2011, however this was comparable with the low figures in 2014. Most sites showed a decrease in moth numbers in comparison to last year. On the Bristol side both Black Rocks and Walcome Slade numbers continue to be on the decline, whilst the Gully moth number was comparable with last year. On the Somerset side the priority sites Donkey Slide and Quarry 3 both had lower numbers than last year but Blockhouse showed a slight increase. Most figures for both the priority and satellite sites were comparable with the cyclical trends we tend to see for silky wave within the Gorge.

The education programme

Overall, 9,586 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 solitary bees, a 'Birdsong and bubbles' walk around the Observatory, a 'Needle felt your own British butterfly' course and a 'Spring detectives' family walk.

Education sessions, playschemes and community events

The full 'Report of the Activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Seasonal Education Officer 2016' was presented at the November Downs Committee. In summary:

- 1,805 school children and higher education students took part in education sessions during 2016.
- 352 playscheme children visited the Downs for sessions.
- 5,461 people visited the 'Be fantastic, save wildlife from plastic!' tent over the Bristol Festival of Nature weekend. A further 160 children were taught by us at the festival schools' day.
- 917 people came to family, community and children's events.

Other educational activities

The Avon Gorge & Downs biodiversity education manager gave a lecture to students on the University of the West of England Foundation Degree in Integrated Wildlife Conservation. She also co-lectured on three Wildlife Conservation evening course sessions run by the Bristol Zoological Society.

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 running activities at the Peaceful Portway Sunday events we also ran two walks for the Bristol Walking Festival. We continued to work with the Bristol City Council Inner City Health Improvement Team, and in May, folks from the Easton Family Centre joined us for a lovely half-term walk (only three people in the group had been to the Downs before).

We also ran guided walks for the Heartful Dodgers (a group of people recovering from heart attacks and strokes, plus nurses, from Southmead Hospital) and Headway (a charity that works with people recovering from brain injury).

Talk and guided walks for other community groups

The education manager gave a talk or guided walk to 418 people from 16 community groups. Groups ranged from the University of Bristol Retirement Association to the Lincombe Barn Natural History Society, and Woolavington WI to Eastwood Gardeners' Club.

Interpretation

The interpretation signs for the Avon Gorge and Downs exhibit in the Zoo were rewritten, redesigned and installed in time for Easter. The exhibit takes the form of a little garden which showcases some of the rare plants of the Gorge, highlights the work of the project and encourages Zoo guests to visit the Gorge and Downs.

Three of the old 'Welcome / gateway' interpretation signs on the Downs were re-drafted, re-designed, printed and installed (by the Observatory, by the Water Tower and by White Tree roundabout). They were jointly created by Bristol Design, Francis Greenacre, the Downs supervisor and Avon Gorge & Downs biodiversity education manager.

As we had almost run out of copies of the popular Downs Bird and Downs Tree trail leaflets, (and we had lost a few of the trees on Christchurch Green), both trails were reviewed and amends made. 4,000 copies of the bird and 2,000 of the tree trail leaflets were printed.

Volunteer support

Many of our events couldn't take place without the support of volunteers and work experience students. We're grateful to the 29 people who gave 615 hours of their time over the year.

South West in Bloom

The Avon Gorge & Downs biodiversity education manager gave a presentation to the South West in Bloom judge as part of his tour of Clifton. The special wildlife of the Avon Gorge, the work of the Project, and the Brunel garden and Zoo rare plants displays were highlighted. In November we were delighted to hear that Clifton Village had been awarded a Gold medal and 'The Most Meritorious Urban Community Silver Salver Award'. Bristol Zoo also won a Gold Award.

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: None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers: None