

AGENDA ITEM NO

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL

Downs Committee

22nd January 2018

Title: Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project Annual Report 2017

Ward: Citywide

Officers Presenting Report: Becky Belfin Parks Development Officer, Parks Development Team
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Summary

To report, for information, on the activities of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project during 2017.

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

Sarah Blazier, Operations Co-ordinator North

External:

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.

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 2017.

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. 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. Sadly however, two of the goats have died in the last year as a result of being chased by dogs, despite signs on all the gates requiring dogs to be on leads. Measures have now been put in place to enforce a Public Space Protection Order in that area, which should reduce the likelihood of it happening again.

On the Downs, implementation of the Scrub Management Plan has continued for its third year, and is contributing to the gradual restoration of areas of species-rich grassland. The wildflower meadow areas continue to be managed on a hay cut to maintain their value.

Silky wave moth monitoring

The Avon Gorge is the only site in England for the silky wave moth (*Idaea dilutaria*). A total of 13 silky wave moth sites within the Avon Gorge were surveyed this summer by the Bristol Zoological Society. The survey season ran for three weeks from the third week of June to the first week of July 2017. For the majority of the sites the peak flight week was earlier this year than in the previous year i.e. in late June rather than early July. All sites showed a presence of silky wave moth.

This year the maximum peak count was 207 moths, which was an increase on the 2016 peak count. The peak moth counts on the Somerset side were the highest since the base line surveys began in 2011. Most sites showed comparable numbers given the cyclical trends we see for silky wave moths within the Gorge. We also surveyed Quarry 2 this year on the Somerset side to give us baseline data prior to habitat management work being carried out over winter.

The education programme

Overall, **11,174** people took part in one of our events, activities or educational visits this year.

The events programme continued to be popular with **882 people** taking part in one of our walks, talks, courses, children's or family events:

- 302 people attended one or several of 13 walks, including a spider walk in the Avon Gorge and an autumn bird identification walk;
- 361 people came to one or several of five talks, including the 'Myths, moths and butterflies' talk;
- Our six courses were attended by a total of 63 people; these included new wildlife-themed willow weaving workshops;
- 156 children and adults attended a total of seven children's and family events, including the popular 'Music with Mummy' sessions.



Juliette & Alex both really enjoyed both days. They brought back some lovely creations yesterday. Thanks for all your hard work.

'Fabulous falcons', 27.07
'Wild works of art', 03.08.2017

Formal education sessions

Primary schools

In 2017 we taught **1,947 children** from **23 schools** in **77 education sessions**, including 120 pupils during schools' day at the Bristol Festival of Nature. This is the busiest teaching season so far. We welcomed five new-to-us schools, and a few schools who hadn't visited for a while returned this year.

We received excellent feedback from teachers on our sessions, with scores for session content, presentation, length and level all between 9 and 9.2 out of 10. We were thrilled to receive positive and enthusiastic feedback from many teachers.



The session was tailored exactly to our needs. Outstanding addition to our classroom work. This is why we come back every year, such valuable learning experiences children remember and talk about for years.

Elmfield School for deaf children, 10.05.2017

Higher education

We also taught **165 higher education students** in **seven sessions**. These included a lecture and walks for students from the University of the West of England's foundation degree in Integrated Wildlife Conservation; lectures for students on Bristol Zoo Garden's Wildlife Conservation evening course; and two field sessions on the Downs for University of Bristol students. Following their sessions with us, several students joined our team of volunteers.



Holiday playschemes and uniformed groups

Bookings from playschemes and uniformed groups dropped a little this year, with **248 children** from **eight groups** taught over **13 sessions**. This included four new-to-us uniformed groups, of which three booked with us after hearing about our sessions through other group leaders – this shows that leaders really value our sessions and appreciate what we offer.

The feedback we received was extremely positive, with full marks received for session content, presentation and level, and 9.9/10 for length. All groups said they were very likely to return and we received some fantastic comments:



There is never a bad session with these amazing professionals. Please keep them for the children of tomorrow.

Thank you to Mandy and Ariane for a great summer of fun and education on the Downs. So sorry that summer is over and we have to wait a whole year before we come again.

Southville Centre, 16 and 24.08.2017

Community activities

In 2017, we engaged with **7,932 people** through **17 community activities** including outreach talks, walks for community or special interest groups, family activities, and community events. Highlights include the following activities:

Your Downs

In partnership with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (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).

We continued to work with the Inner City and East Bristol Health Improvement Team, running guided walks and half-day activities for adults from areas such as Easton, St Paul's, Montpelier, Barton Hill and St George, and families from the Easton Family Centre and the Somali Forum. We also ran three guided walks for Headway, a charity that works with people recovering from brain injury.

Our Christmas Star Party on the Downs was a success with 58 people attending.

Bristol Festival of Nature

The Festival of Nature is the UK's largest celebration of the natural world. This year's festival ran from Friday 9th June to Sunday 11th June. We teamed up with the education teams from Bristol Zoo Gardens, Wild Place Project and Bristol Dinosaur Project (University of Bristol) to present the 'Dinosaor' tent. The aim was to increase knowledge and understanding about dinosaurs and their evolution into birds, linking in with the 'Dinomania' exhibition at the zoo, and to raise awareness out about British bird species and how to help them.

On the Friday schools' day, children learnt about the Avon Gorge peregrine falcons, what makes them such good predators and how they fit in the food chain.

The public days were a huge success. Throughout the weekend, visitors to our tent could take part in our bird-themed activities. Approximately **500 bird identification trails** were completed, **400 origami blue tits** were folded and **500 origami robins** were made. It was really lovely to see visitors, from the youngest to the oldest, learning to recognise birds on the trail or concentrating hard to get their origami right.

Overall, our tent was visited by **7,180 people** and was possibly the busiest tent of the festival.

Cycle Sunday

Roads on the Downs were closed to motor vehicles on Sunday 16th July for the 'Cycle Sunday' event organised by Sustrans. **149 children** enjoyed making masks at our wildlife mask making stall. It was a successful event which resulted in a number of bookings for our summer events.



Peaceful Portway

The Portway was closed to traffic for the 'Peaceful Portway' event on the afternoon of Sunday 17th September 2017. This year's event was particularly popular: an estimated 7,500 people attended.

As part of the day, we organised a 'Gorge-ous Avon Gorge family trail' which took participants on a wild journey along the gorge. Overall, **181 people** took part in our activities (trail and mask-making) and we received positive feedback from participants who really enjoyed their day out.



Bristol University Fresher's Fair on the Downs

In September, the University of Bristol brought their Fresher's Fair to the Downs. We had a small stall (shared with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge) in their charities' tent. During the day we engaged with **164 students**; **three subsequently applied** to volunteer on our 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 **29 people** who **gave 391.5 hours** of their time over the year.

Audience development plan

In 2017, we started working on our audience development plan for 2018-2020. This involved assessing our current audience, meeting with potential partners, and developing new projects. This will inform our project work plan for 2018-2022 and will be used to support funding applications.

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