



Report of the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

JULY 2018

FOD+AG welcomes the opportunity to update the committee on our most recent events and some of the activities planned for the coming weeks.

We remain committed to our core values to represent fairly all legitimate users of the Downs and to support the City Council and the Downs Committee in the good governance of the Downs.

As reported at the April meeting FODAG volunteers committed to the repainting of the Downs White Tree. The work which was completed early in May caught the imagination of Radio Bristol and FOD+AG volunteer Richard Bland gave a very informative interview.

Action shots of FOD+AG volunteers appeared on several social media sites.

The Downs Commoners have made a further financial contribution to the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge. This is in addition to the donation reported at the April meeting. The Commoners generosity will be used to support Downs related projects including a commitment to bring parties of less privileged children from across the City and give them the chance to enjoy the Downs.

FOD+AG members have been encouraged to comment on the proposals to develop the Sea Walls site and others. As an organisation we offer our reserved support for projects that are sensitive to their environment, look to improve the visitor experience and have the capacity to generate much needed income for the Downs.

This summer FOD+AG volunteers working with our partner organisations will offer a record number of creative and interesting activities. Members will be able to attend talks on the geology of the Downs and Avon Gorge, learn how to

sketch the plants of the Downs with trained artists. Join our knowledgeable botanists for walks to explore and learn about the trees, wild flower meadows and the plant life of the Downs.

As part of FOD+AG's ten-year celebrations our members had an opportunity to demonstrate their artistic talents with an afternoon of 'Drawing the Downs' Experts were on hand to assist and give advice.

Early in September our goat monitoring co-ordinator Martin Collins and Ben Skuse will be at Redland Bowling Green to give a talk on the history, the progress and the future of the Goat and Gully Project.

The annual butterfly monitoring led by FOD+AG volunteers is once again underway. A cold and late spring discouraged the emergence of over-wintering adults leaving the Downs largely devoid of butterflies throughout April. Numbers picked up in May with sightings of several species including, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma's, Brimstone, Speckled Woods, Holly Blues and Large and Small White and Orange Tips.

An interesting pattern previously observed in 2017 has again become apparent and involves increased similarities between species seen on the Downs and in the Gully. This could be a strong indication that the decision to use biological controls to return the Gully to a limestone meadow habitat is vindicated.

This is a significant development as Limestone meadows are one of the most threatened natural habitats in the UK.

FOD+AG are considering a proposal that could bring a totally new feature to the Gully. Our members have had an initial meeting with a local sculptor with a view to installing a wildlife trail that would utilise on site timber that has died as part of the planned action of the goats.

Felled or standing timber would be used to sculpt a series of wildlife representations. The trail could be a valuable educational tool and encourage even greater use of this special area.

Further details will be brought to the Downs Committee as the project develops.

