

Summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project education programme

Officer Presenting Report: Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager

After almost a year of being on furlough (with a few false starts), I returned properly just after Easter. It's been a busy time getting the education programme back up and running again, especially with all the covid considerations, new systems of work and new risk assessments to write.

Avon Gorge and Downs Learning and Engagement Officer and volunteers

In April we began the recruitment process for the Avon Gorge and Downs Learning and Engagement Officer. Vanessa Adnitt was appointed and began, in post, on the 24th May. Thereafter followed an intensive induction and training programme to get her up to speed.

Our volunteers are vital in helping us to deliver the education programme so it was important to spend time re-building the volunteer team. I contacted our pre-lockdown team to find out who was still able to volunteer with us, and thanking those that had moved on. With support from the Bristol Zoological Society's Volunteer Services Manager we began recruiting and training new volunteers. We ran a successful 'Volunteer welcome evening', via Zoom, and now have a great team made up of returning AG&DWP volunteers, newly recruited volunteers, and BZS volunteers who have switched roles (whilst their previous or current volunteer roles are limited due to covid).

Schools, uniformed groups and playschemes

I returned from furlough to lots of emails from schools, eager to book education sessions with us. From mid-June to mid-July we will be running 18 sessions, teaching approximately 474 children. This is a lot less than we would normally teach at this time of year but we are starting back slowly so that we can follow covid precaution protocols. This includes giving ourselves extra time for cleaning and disinfecting equipment between school visits. At the time of writing, we have already run our first education sessions and these have gone really well. Before the end of term, we will be contacting schools to offer sessions for the autumn term as well.

We've also run a 'Discover the Downs' session for a brownie group. Their session was re-scheduled from July 2020. We're also in the process of contacting playschemes to offer them sessions for the summer holidays.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project events programme

The majority of our spring and summer 2020 events had to be cancelled but two of the courses 'Birdsong on the Downs' and 'Spring on the Downs in batik' were re-scheduled. Part one of the Birdsong identification course took place, via Zoom, on 9th April and the second part happened, on the Downs, on 23rd May.

The Batik workshop was re-scheduled to 26th June but as it was taking place indoors, and there was going to be a delay in lifting the restrictions, we took the decision to cancel the event until restrictions are fully lifted.

Your Downs activities

We've begun planning the 'Nature in the Streets' project - a nature connection, art and wellbeing project for young people (aged 18 – 24). We are running this particular project in partnership with Off The Record and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge

(FOD+AG), with funding from the Co-op membership scheme, and the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity.

On 6th June, Robin Haward (FOD+AG) and I co-lead a guided walk, on the Downs, for the Long Ashton Horticultural Society.

Wastes and Strays

In 2019, Ben Skuse, and Downs Committee members Councillor O'Rourke and Councillor Abraham, went to a meeting about the Wastes and Strays project. It's a project, coordinated by Newcastle, Exeter, Sheffield and Brighton Universities who are studying four 'Urban Commons', and "will promote them as publicly accountable, open, green, spaces vital for culture, health, wellbeing and biodiversity in the metropolitan context". The project involves:

- Researching their history and contemporary perceptions of biodiversity and use.
- Working with stakeholders to generate ideas for the future.
- Trialing new methods of engaging communities.

You can find out more here: [Wastes and Strays | Wastes and Strays | Newcastle University \(ncl.ac.uk\)](#)

At the original meeting various commons were invited to be part of the project, and the Downs was chosen to be one of the four.

Livi Dee, a researcher associate at Newcastle University has already started to gather oral histories. FOD+AG members, Ben Skuse and I have been interviewed by Livi. John Wedgwood Clarke (from Exeter University) will be a 'Poet in Residence', on the Downs, this year. As part of our school education sessions, John ran workshops with two classes from Westbury Park School, creating poetry about the wildflowers in the meadows on the Downs.

We have planned two history / poetry guided walks with Francis Greenacre, as part of the public Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife events programme. John will also run a workshop with FOD+AG members. A celebration event, to showcase the work that's been created, is also being planned for the end of project.

Publicity about the new goats

As you know, at the end of March, four rare breed Bagot goats joined our two Kashmir goats in the Gully. After the goats had had a month to settle in, I drafted a press release with contributions from Chris Westcott (Natural England), Becky Belfin (Bristol City Council Nature Conservation Officer) and Ben Skuse. This was then passed to the Bristol City Council news desk who edited and issued it. As a result, Ben, Carol Laslett (Bristol Street Goat) and I were interviewed for a piece on the ITV teatime news.

Posts about the goats on our Project Facebook page www.facebook.com/avongorge have been very popular!