

Downs Management Report for 20 September Meeting

Late Summer on the Downs usually consists of the last throes of grass cutting, the annual hay cut and getting ready for the upcoming football season. All these things are happening or have happened so far, but alongside that this year we are dealing with the most intensive period of events that the Downs has ever known. Whilst I have total recognition of why this has happened this year, I have to say that I think the committee need to consider dialling down the intensity and frequency a little for next year's programme. Myself and the team have been exceptionally busy during this time and I must credit them for the hard work that they have put in over this period.

Members will know that there has been an ambition for a while to increase the number of our conservation grazing Goats in the Gully. Due to the various travel complications in the last few years this was challenging. We gained 4 animals from a local rare breed conservation charity in the spring and took the number of our herd to 6. Now in addition to this we have finally been able to achieve our long-term aim of taking part in another Great Orme round up and getting more Kashmiri Goats from the Orme. Myself and a colleague went to Llandudno in July, chased goats around the Orme for a couple of days alongside Rangers and staff from Conwy County Council and were then able to bring back 4 more Kashmiri Billies around 1yr old. These (proudly Welsh animals) were released into their new home (in England) after a quick health check from vets from Bristol Zoo, on July 15th. After an initial period of suspicion from both sides, all animals look to have (mostly) joined up to make a herd of 10 animals. At this point in time, they look to be fully integrated and happy with their new surroundings. The rate of browsing (i.e. scrub control) has obviously been greatly increased from just the 2 months at the start of the year, thus the conservation aims of the project are being better met now than previously.

Members will recall from previous reports that we saw much greater visitor numbers, particularly around late winter, early spring this year. One of the effects of this was many more people walking through and across our wildflower meadow areas. Alongside wildlife and conservation officer from BCC, Becky Belfin and Mandy Leivers from AGADWP we have identified some areas that need extra protection from trampling. Members will notice extra signage and some roping off of areas to try to protect delicate plants from another potential winter of trampling.

The Downs football season 21/22 has kicked off on Saturday 11th September. At the time of writing, we still are not authorised to use the dressing rooms, but this is under regular review and is in line with the changing facilities in the rest of the wider parks dept. I hope to get them open as soon as possible.

Just the BU SU welcome fair and the circus to come now and we can park events 21 on the Downs and get into the winter works programme!