

## **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**

#### **Schools education sessions**

During July, we taught 152 school children in 10 education sessions. This is a lot less than we would normally teach at this time of year but as mentioned in my last report we had spaced the sessions out so that we could follow covid precaution protocols (such as leaving extra time for cleaning and disinfecting equipment between school visits).

The schools that had sessions with us were really appreciative. A teacher from Hotwells, whose class took part in our 'Hairy conservationists' session, commented on their evaluation form:

*"Observing the goats was the highlight for children and staff! The session was brilliantly run by the team, parents who came on the trip were very impressed with the content and how engaged the children were. Thank you so much!"*

One of the other schools who visited was Andalusia Academy who brought the whole school over two days. Coming from a school located within the heart of Bristol without any grounds and the majority of children living in high-rise flats, this was an exciting experience for all, especially after a year of lock-down. The children were clearly impacted by their experiences, as one of the teachers reported:

*"The children loved the sessions and learnt so much without realising they were learning! All day my group have been looking at all the birds and trying to spot a peregrine falcon and pointing at a butterfly and telling me its life cycle! It's been the best trip I've been on. The sessions were pitched at the right level and there was a great mixture of learning and moving to keep the children engaged. Thank you again. I've already had several staff members ask if we can do it again next year."*

As the school didn't want to use a coach (because of covid) parents dropped off and picked up the children. This was a useful opportunity for the parents to see where their children had been exploring and how accessible the Downs can be for them on future occasions.

So far, we have eight education sessions booked in for the autumn term and are waiting for two schools to confirm if they would like to book sessions.

#### **Playscheme sessions**

Over the school holidays 65 children took part in our playscheme sessions. This included a group from the Lawrence Weston who visited us for the first time; they enjoyed seeing our new goats as part of a 'Hairy conservationists' session.

Compared to 2019, we were dramatically down on the number of sessions we ran. The Avon Gorge & Downs Learning and Engagement Officer contacted as many playschemes in the area as possible to encourage bookings. Unfortunately, some of the groups that had booked regularly in the past had folded (after a difficult year, last year) and some were not offering trips this year due to covid. We also had a couple of groups who were initially keen to book sessions but then decided they couldn't come after all, or cancelled due to covid-related staffing issues.

#### **Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project events programme**

We have organised seven events for October and November including: four walks, two courses and a children's event for the October half term. The first event, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October, will be a 'Postcard and poetry promenade on Clifton Down' that will be co-led

by Francis Greenacre and Dr John Wedgewood Clarke as part of the Wastes and Strays Project.

### **Your Downs Activities**

#### **Nature in the Streets / Rainbow Bridge 2 Nature**

We have had to pause the 'Nature in the Streets / Rainbow Bridge 2 Nature' project - a nature connection, art and wellbeing project for young people (aged 18 – 24) that we are running in partnership with Off The Record (OTR) and Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG).

Despite the OTR staff trying really hard to recruit and support the 16 young people who had signed up to the project, eight of them dropped out, only one young person was able to make the first session and no one could make it to the walks in early August. At the time, covid numbers were increasing dramatically. The OTR staff said that although the young people were really interested some of them had contracted covid, had to isolate, or were having mental health difficulties and pandemic-related anxieties. Apparently, this was not unique to our group but was a pattern being seen throughout youth services as a whole.

This is a great project, with great aims, and we're sure the young people will benefit from it hugely however the timing just doesn't seem to have been right.

One of our aims is to inspire young people about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs so we want them to have positive hopeful experiences in nature, and spring and summer are the best time for that. We have therefore taken the decision to re-launch the project next spring, when the young people will have had both vaccinations and covid pressures and anxieties will have lessened.

#### **Wastes and Strays / Urban Commons Futures**

We took part in the first two assignments of the In-common Sites / Urban Commons Futures creative mapping project. The first involved us taking photos and labelling a map of the Downs, marking features of interest and places of significance.

The second activity focused on how signs are used to guide how we interact with our urban green spaces. We labelled a map, showing the locations of the many different signs on the Downs and created a table containing more details about the content of each sign and its purpose.

#### **The Downs Festival**

We attended the Idles Downs Festival on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September. We took along our display and range of leaflets and talked to festival goers about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs and the work of the project. Later in September we'll also be taking along our stand to the University of Bristol Students Union 'Welcome Fair'.