

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

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In July and August we directly engaged with 621 people through the education and community engagement programme.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project events programme

As part of the events programme we ran: two guided walks ('Butterflies of the Downs' and 'Spiders of the Avon Gorge'); a 'Bat and moth night', and a 'Gorge-ous goats' family walk. The families had lots of fun on the goat walk and one participant posted on our Facebook page, *"Thanks to the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project for organising this fun, informative and local event!"*

Another emailed to say, *"(his daughter) was very happy and really liked all the activities and the story in particular. She recognised a Bagot goat when we came across one in a totally different context last week (I had entirely forgotten the name of the breed) and has been pointing out pineapple weed. Thanks again for a lovely morning"*.

School education sessions

During this period, we taught 236 school children. One of the schools, Kingsweston School **came for the first time** to learn about 'Butterfly lifecycles'. The group consisted of 16 children and teenagers with autism. The teacher who organised the trip said, *"It was so perfect, thank you. It was a tough ask – catering for children with a range of ability levels and fluctuating attention spans! The range of activities was perfect. The communication throughout was very helpful too."* When asked what their highlights were, she said, *"The children really enjoyed the craft activity and Vanessa being dressed up as a butterfly was a real wow moment for our WOW trip!"*

Katie Atkins, who runs Bristol's Nordic4 group, brought a group of six children with autism from Stoke Bishop Primary School. The children Nordic walked their way across the Downs to take part in a 'Peregrine falcons and foodchains' session. Katie reflected on the best bits of the session, *"The highly informed teaching and resources delivered in an energised way, pitched perfectly for Y5 - the children became more engrossed as the session went on."* She added, *"Two parents have written emails of effusive thanks and the children loved their time."*

Playschemes and sessions for uniformed groups

For a second year running, the 57th Bristol Brownies visited the Downs to enjoy our 'Wildflower treasure hunt'. They enjoyed it so much that they have already made a booking for next year. The leader fed back on the evaluation form, *"It was clear how much preparation and effort had gone into the session and this meant it was such a memorable evening for the girls."*

We ran thirteen education sessions for summer playscheme groups. This included children from Totterdown Children's Community Workshop and Southmead Development Trust playscheme (this was their **first time visiting** for our sessions). We paid for the transport for these groups, using a grant from the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity aimed at enabling groups to visit who wouldn't normally have the funds.

Bridge to Nature Project

After the mural was painted at the Upfest street art festival, the Bristol Zoo Maintenance Team brought it back to the Zoo and installed it in the Zoo grounds. The mural was included in the 'Zoo and You Legacy Art exhibition' as part of the 'Big Summer Send-Off'.

We prepared and put up some interpretation to explain to visitors about the project and the special plants and animals of the Avon Gorge, Downs and Leigh Woods that feature in the artwork.

On 31st July, Vanessa met with some of the young people who had taken part in the project for a picnic in the Zoo and to give them the opportunity to view their amazing mural on display.

The 'Bridge to Nature' project was a nature connection, art and wellbeing project for young people aged 18 to 25. We ran the project in partnership with Off The Record (OTR), Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, the National Trust and Forestry England. It was generously funded by the Co-op Local Community Fund and the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity.

Interpretation panel revamp

The majority of the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project interpretation panels on the Downs are over ten years old and were in a very poor state of repair. So nine of the panels have been updated, printed and installed.

The panel revamp was funded from a number of sources including: the Commoners of Durdham Down and Durdham Downs Charity; a private donor; and by the family of Sarah Booley (a young person who loved the Downs and tragically died whilst waiting for an operation during lockdown).

A4 Portway Route

Robert Westlake and I went to an online meeting, about the proposed 'Traffic Improvements to the A4 Portway Route', run by the Bristol City Council Transport Engagement Team. I talked about the ecological and geological importance of the Avon Gorge and explained about the desire to create safe, circular walking routes from the Downs and into the Gorge.

Training for the Clifton Suspension Bridge engagement team

Vanessa and I gave an illustrated lecture, about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs and the work of the project, to five members of the Clifton Suspension Bridge engagement team. They will share this knowledge with groups visiting the bridge for school sessions and guided tours.

Thank you

This is my final report. By the time of the next Downs Committee, I will have started a new job as the Severn Treescapes Community Engagement and Communications Coordinator with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

After 21 years of working on the Avon Gorge and Downs I am very sad to be leaving but I feel it's time for a change and this is a good time to let someone else, with some new and fresh ideas, take the role on.

My fantastic colleague, Vanessa Adnitt (who has been the Avon Gorge & Downs Learning Engagement Officer this year and last), is staying in post and will provide continuity whilst my replacement is recruited.

May I thank you all for all of your support, help and encouragement over the years.