

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

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In January, February and March we directly engaged with 459 people through the learning and community engagement programme.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project (AGDWP) events programme Jan-March

As part of the events programme we ran: two Wildlife Talks ('Sensational Silky Wave Moth' and 'Delightful Dormice'); an 'Amble with the Avon Gorge goat keeper' Discovery Walk, and a 'Brilliant Birds' children's holiday activity. All of our events have been very well received with rewarding quotes given on feedback forms: ...

"..kids had a great day, learnt lots and keen to identify birds by their call ' teacher teacher!'"

"..loved making the bird feeders."

"..it was great and well-pitched."

"Expert knowledge. Clear delivery. Cute photos!"

"Speaker was very knowledgeable and articulate; subject fascinating."

Our events can be found here <https://avongorge.org.uk/whats-on/> and we welcome the attendance of any Downs Committee members, who are able to attend for free this year on any paid event if the event is not already fully booked. We would love to show you how we engage the general public with the biodiversity of the Downs and Avon Gorge. Please contact us so we can reserve you a space.

School education sessions

During this period, we taught 354 school children. We have taught children from 2 schools on the Downs and in-school. Our in-school sessions support the sessions we will run on the Downs with the same children but have the advantage of raising a small amount of income for the Project (£250). This was at the discretion of the AGDWP Engagement manager as the school has access to a small budget for the provision of outdoor learning in the school grounds. Committee members are welcome to observe any education session AGDWP runs this year in order that they can understand how we operate in the formal education capacity. AGDWP will need to seek permission from the education group attending.

Collaboration with the Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust (CSBT)

We worked in collaboration with CSBT to aid the creation of an Avon Gorge mural sited at the learning annexe by the suspension bridge. A well-known street artist, HazardOne, was keen to create a mural representing the rare and scarce species here in Bristol. AGDWP provided scientific detail and images of the botanical and invertebrate species in order that the portrayal is scientifically accurate. The mural was officially opened on 24th March and a fundraising competition launched by CSBT to win one of the mural panels. The mural is beautiful and engaging, a wonderful way to reach the large numbers of people who frequent the suspension bridge but may not normally engage with our local biodiversity. There is information next to the mural on AGDWP so that people can find out more about and engage with the project.

History walk

Anna and Vanessa have attended two history walks with expert Francis Greenacre in order to learn the history and heritage of the Downs. We enjoyed these so much that Francis has kindly agreed to run a history walk for the general public during Bristol Walk Fest in May.

Bird survey

We have started a monthly bird survey with Alastair Fraser, a bird identification expert who already works with the native species team at Wild Place Project (WPP). We have been on four transect walks, one per month covering four different habitats on the Downs and in the Gorge. We are recording our data on BirdTrack which automatically uploads the data to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and allows us to view our data at any time. There is a lack of bird survey data within the AGDWP and this will allow us to monitor any changes in species richness and abundance at different times of year, over time. We aim to tie this information in with the scrub management plan to note impacts. Highlights so far are sightings of the elusive firecrest and a peregrine falcon.

iNaturalist project

With the help of the Natural History Consortium (NHC) we have now set up a project for the Downs and Avon Gorge on iNaturalist so that the general public can upload sightings of plant and animal species in our designated project area, and this will be recorded officially. The aim of this is to allow citizen science to play a part in our survey and monitoring programme and to establish a record of which species have been recorded on site – sightings are verified to research grade. Over the City Nature Challenge weekend in late April we will be guiding and helping the general public at two Downs' sites, to set up the iNaturalist app in order to take part in the NHC national bioblitz.

Volunteers

In February we had five volunteers who helped at and benefitted from attending our events. In March we had fifteen volunteers who helped at and benefitted from attending our events.

Sarah Booley project

Sarah Booley was a young ecologist who loved the Downs and tragically died whilst waiting for an operation during lockdown. Her family are keen to help, financially and through provision of ecological knowledge, with the design and implementation of a new family friendly tree trail around the Observatory and Promenade on Clifton Down. Anna attended a special anniversary event with Sarah's family and friends and discussions are ongoing with regard to how the trail will be developed. There is no time frame as yet in place on this.

Social media

The AGDWP now has an Instagram account for the sharing of particularly interesting and engaging images at www.instagram.com/avongorgeanddowns_wildlife/.

We have been widely sharing our Facebook posts in order to extend our reach to the general public as well as specialised Facebook groups and this effort has been rewarded through an increase in Facebook views: 3,029 in January, 6,612 in February and 20,667 in March. We can be found at www.facebook.com/avongorge/.

Sparks project

We have attended two in person meetings with the hosts and other stakeholders of the Sparks Project 2023 in order to prepare and plan for our presence at this installation. Sparks is a collaboration of different providers to form a temporary creative sustainability hub in Bristol city centre. It aims to create a playful and welcoming space that gives people easy, affordable ways to address the climate, ecological and cost of living crises and is inspired by the UN Sustainable

Development Goals. As representatives of the incredible local biodiversity present in Bristol we feel it is essential that we are involved in this project and we are working with Bristol City Council and the Botanical Gardens to provide interactive content, including workshops. We have applied for an outreach grant from British Ecological Society (BES) to help fund our presence. This is an opportunity to reach thousands of people of all ages from in and around Bristol who may not otherwise engage with their local biodiversity. The aim is to facilitate positive behaviour change which results in ongoing conservation of biodiversity.