

Report for May and June 2023 Summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs wildlife project learning and community engagement programme

Reporting Officer: Anna Stevens Avon Gorge and Downs wildlife biodiversity engagement and learning manager

In May and June we directly engaged with **1046 (as at end of June on current bookings)** people through the learning and community engagement programme. We engaged indirectly at the Sparks installation with 8000 plus people in the first weekend but final numbers for the first week are not yet available from Sparks.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project (AGDWP) events programme May-June

As part of the events programme we ran: four Discovery Walks in May and June ('a Step through time', 'Dawn chorus spectacular', 'Trees of the Granny Downs' and 'Magical meadows'); and a 'Birdsong ID' workshop. Two of the walks are run as part of Bristol Walk Fest. We also ran a family event for the Festival of Nature on the Downs in June on a theme of 'Marvellous meadow minibeasties'. All of our events have been very well received with rewarding quotes given on feedback forms:

participants particularly enjoyed:

"..Mike's knowledge and enthusiasm!" and "The expertise of those guiding us."

"..Ed Drewitt is an excellent teacher. The information sent before the day was informative."

"..Mike Dilger as a guide. Anna plus her team giving extra info about site and facts."

Our events can be found here <https://avongorge.org.uk/whats-on/> and we welcome the attendance of any Downs Committee members.

School education sessions

During this period, we taught 837 (as end of June on current bookings) school and college children. We have taught children from 11 different schools on the Downs. This includes some local schools, some schools from outside Bristol, as well as schools from more deprived areas of Bristol and special schools and colleges. We are enjoying a partnership with the University of Bristol Botanical Gardens where we have used their wildlife pond for schools' engagement. This opportunity allows us to offer new curriculum linked sessions to both primary, and in particular secondary, schools. A session at the Botanical Gardens is easily combined with a session on the Downs to provide a rounded habitat investigation. Going forward this should be successful with regard to attracting secondary schools and we will be purchasing some necessary equipment. We'd like to thank the UoB Botanical Gardens for allowing us this opportunity.

We are continually updating and adding to our primary schools programme this summer, making changes where we can to modernise and bring in new ideas, perspectives and plans. This keeps our programmes relevant and ensures that we meet the schools' learning objectives and we will offer bespoke activities if required. Until this year programmes were only half day and many schools followed two sessions in one day causing an overload of information by studying two different topics. Most of the old programmes we are expanding from half day only to offering a full day option to allow more in-depth learning. We are continuing to offer two programmes in one day if the school requests it.

This changes the way we monitor our numbers. In the past if a child has attended on one day but attended two separate half day sessions they have been counted twice in the figures. Going forward if a child attends two separate half day sessions on one day they will only be counted once as if they are attending a full day session. This will most likely reduce our number count compared with previous years.

We have had very positive feedback from our schools so far this year:

schools commented:

"..Yes it matched perfectly with the science topic."

"..Yes. All activities were relevant and linked to our EYFS and school curriculum."

"..Yes- we've been doing a topic focusing on plants and minibeasts. It was perfect for that!"

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.

City Nature Challenge – outreach / citizen science

We worked in collaboration with Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust at the learning annexe by the suspension bridge to run one of our sites for the City Nature Challenge Bioblitz at the very end of April/beginning of May. Our second hub was on the Downs at the site of the Downs Café. The aim of the City Nature Challenge was to engage the public in recording as much wildlife as possible on the Downs onto the iNaturalist app for our AGDWP iNaturalist project. We offered owl pellet dissection and bug hunting as well as fun activities on birds and mammals to engage a variety of age groups. We directly engaged with a total of 110 people over the four and a half hours we were present on both sites, and over the full four days of the City Nature Challenge a total of 136 observations were added to our iNaturalist project.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project

City Nature Challenge
West of England

The Natural History Consortium

Our Aim
To record the animal & plant species on the Downs & Avon Gorge for the City Nature Challenge 2023

Be a Downs & Avon Gorge hero - help us discover what biodiversity we have in Bristol's jewel

Download the iNaturalist app

- Take an Observation photo - 2 or more if you can!
- Click on the iNaturalist suggestion
- Click on the species you think it is or use ID charts to help
- Share your results for verification!

QR codes are located at the bottom left and bottom right of the poster.

Bird survey

Our bird survey in conjunction with Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) continues and in May our survey took place for the second time at Fairyland and Zoo Banks and in June in the Gully.

Volunteers

In May we have had thirteen volunteers helping us for a total of approximately 88 hours on our events and with schools sessions.

In June we have had sixteen volunteers helping us for a total of approximately 130 hours on our events and with schools sessions.

Social media

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: 4412 to 26th May. We can be found at www.facebook.com/avongorge/.

Sparks project - outreach

We successfully completed our installation at Sparks Bristol the day before the opening of the site on 13th May. This is a creation by AGDWP in the style of 'Wake the Tiger' with help from a member of staff from the UoB Botanical Gardens as well as several of our very dedicated and creative volunteers. The installation is designed to hook the general public, and engage them through a series of scenarios with an aim to ultimately confirming positive behaviours for the benefit of our Downs and Avon Gorge wildlife. It also provides information on the amazing species which we are so lucky to have on our site. The installation has upheld well for the first week and two weekends of opening, and will be monitored regularly. The plan over the following six months is to update and develop the materials as we go through being open to the public. The site is open between Wednesday and Sunday until December 2023. The whole site attendance is being monitored by Sparks and on the first weekend of opening more than 8000 people entered the site. Our installation is situated in the Nature Area right at the front of the Broadmead entrance to the site. For more information on Sparks please visit <https://sparksbristol.co.uk/about/>. We continue to aim to deliver schools and playscheme workshops in Sparks later on in the year.



Festival of Nature - outreach

The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project will have a stand within the Bristol Zoo Project tent this year at the Festival of Nature in Bristol between 16th-17th June. AGDWP will offer activities such as 'owl pellet dissection' and 'guess the weight of the baby peregrines' for a scientific perspective and 'willow bird feeder' creation and other craft activities for a more generic interaction. We will also be suggesting and providing ways in which the general public can help in the conservation and long term success of wildlife and the ecosystem of the Avon Gorge and Downs.

AGDWP is also offering a family session on the Downs investigating invertebrates which live in the grasses, bushes and trees with an entomologist as part of the FoN.

Nature Works

The project is meeting with Off the Record Nature Works, a youth mental health charity, in order to plan a series of sessions for young people aged 11-25 in Bristol on the Downs. The aim of this is to produce calming and stress-reducing opportunities for those who may not find them in everyday life. Alongside this, trying new things, gaining new skills and learning ways to relax in the outdoors can be hugely uplifting and provide an invaluable opportunity to improve confidence, self esteem and resilience.

Other

Anna Stevens from the AGDWP has accepted an invitation from FoDAG to be on the first Downs Advisory Panel (DAP) and has agreed to facilitate the use of a meeting space within the CEC at the former Bristol Zoo site. We have also put out a request to the AGDWP Steering Group for a second person from AGDWP to be on the DAP. Councillor Katie Grant has expressed an interest in this and this interest has been passed on to Robert Westlake of FoDAG. An initial meeting of the DAP will take place on 9th June.

The lack of song birds on a sunny May afternoon was noted during a birdsong identification workshop by bird expert Ed Drewitt. There was some discussion as to why this might be and that this may be a cause for concern. Considerations with regard to this will be put forward to BCC following its request for information to inform the new management plan.

The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project is requesting that Vanessa Adnitt, the Project officer, is funded or part funded until the end of the year 2023. Vanessa is a valued member of staff and carries out a wide variety of administrative duties such as managing the volunteers, as well as teaching. If remaining in post Vanessa will also be in a position in the autumn/winter to run the pre-school age sessions which it is planned will begin in September, either at the Downs or in Leigh Woods. If the current officer is able to run these sessions there will be no need to employ a further tutor. The cost to continue the employment of Vanessa Adnitt is expected to be approximately £6,346 between September to December 2023.

Anna Stevens continues her studies for parts of June and July this year 2023, and will be taking some study leave with regard to this as agreed with Bristol Zoological Society.