

Report for July, August and September 2023 summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife learning and community engagement programme

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In July, August and September we directly engaged with **783** people (as at 7 September) through the learning and community engagement programme. We engaged indirectly at the Sparks installation with an estimated 1500 people per weekday and 2500 per weekend day (Sparks own statistics).

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife (AGDW) events programme July-August

We have a quieter time in our events programme during the summer months and we ran two Discovery Walks in July and August. **Butterfly Heaven** in conjunction with FoDAG and **Ramble with a Woodland Ranger**, our first foray into demonstrating the landscape approach to conservation in the Avon Gorge, in conjunction with Forestry England. Both these events were fantastic with positive quotes given on feedback forms. In September we ran two further Discovery Walks – **Batty Beauties**, to discover which species of bat we have on the Downs, and **Whitebeam Wonders** which is an in-depth look at the variety of and variation in whitebeam species we have in the Gorge. This second walk is run in conjunction with the University of Bristol's Botanical Gardens.

Participants particularly enjoyed

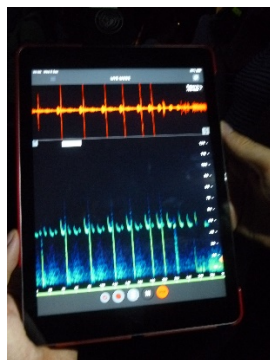
"..The enthusiasm and knowledge of the leaders. The information provided was interesting and at the right level."

"..The obvious passion and enthusiasm of all the leaders - truly inspirational."

"..More of the same and similar for us paying adults .. but not to detract from, maybe to better support, great work you're doing with kids and families."

"..The balance of areas covered was very good, ranging from identifying individual trees and plants to how the woodland is managed as a whole."

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



School learning and playscheme sessions

During this period we engaged with eight different schools and 357 children both on the Downs, and also in-school in the last three weeks of term, as well as 28 brownies. We were able to go into school twice where coming to the Downs was not an option allowing us to outreach in Knowle West and Southville.

We have been very pleased to welcome seven different holiday playschemes to the Downs with several of them bringing different children two or three times over the summer holidays. The schemes are part of the Your Holiday Hub scheme in Bristol funded by the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme providing free food and activities for children who qualify for FSM. It affords children who may not be able to access breakfast or lunch during the summer, good food, along with a variety of experiences and activities. We have worked with schemes from Totterdown, Lawrence Weston, Easton, Oldbury Court (Stapleton/Fishponds), Knowle West, St Werburghs, Eastville and in two cases have visited the scheme in a green space at their site due to lack of transport. Sadly two schemes had to cancel their visit due to lack of their own staff members. Altogether we have worked with 182 children during this period plus their helpers.

We have had very positive feedback from our schools and playschemes this summer:

schools commented:

"..Our visit was wonderful. The activities were very accessible to the children and they thoroughly enjoyed them. They linked very well with the learning we had already completed in school."

"..It was perfect for our children."

"..Children really enjoyed it - inspired and want to go back with their families to see the peregrine falcons."

"..For our needs, a place for the children to eat lunch under cover in case it rained and the access to toilets was perfect. The time we spent on the Downs provided the children with different natural environments, meadow and woodland."

playschemes commented:

"..The leaders are always brilliant!"

"..We have brought the children to these sessions for the past few years so knew what to expect, they are always really good and very appreciated."

"..the sessions are very appreciated for groups like ours as a charity we are able to take our children who would not necessarily get to access trips through the summer holidays."

Committee members are welcome to observe any learning session AGDW runs this year in order that they can understand how we operate in the formal education capacity. AGDW will need to seek permission from the education group attending.



AGDW is offering its first paid sessions on the Downs to two private schools in September and is running its first pilot A level session in November (unless another request comes in before this date). The charge for the private school is currently at £8.00 per child and the pilot A level session from South Gloucestershire and Stroud is not being charged.

Outreach to schools in areas of deprivation

Headley Park and Stoke Park primaries were contacted before the summer holidays and have since been contacted again at the beginning of this term, offering in-house assemblies and workshops during the autumn and winter months, to find out more about the nature of Bristol. This is hoped to also lead to their visiting the Downs in 2024 with a variety of year groups. We are meeting Headley Park Primary to discuss ideas and dates with them in the second week of September, and aim to book in an assembly and some workshop sessions in-school. This opportunity will also be used to encourage a visit the Downs to complement their in-school sessions. We wait to hear back from Stoke Park primary and will contact them again once school has settled into the new term.

Knowle Park primary have been contacted this term with the aim of arranging some further after school club sessions in-school.

Action tracker from June 2023; there has as yet been no contact with Cllr Christine Townsend and we welcome any list of schools or charities which are suggested by either Cllr Townsend or the Chair.

Outreach

The project attended the Forwards Festival on the Downs in early September to engage with the general public and directly interacted through activities with 175 people over two days. This was a fantastic outcome and allowed us to talk about the biodiversity on the Downs and in the Gorge with people who may not ordinarily come to the site. We were also able to talk about our upcoming programme for the autumn.

The project attended the Student Welcome Fair on the Downs to engage students into the project through volunteering, as well as push the message about the damage that barbecues and fires do to biodiversity on the Downs.

The project took part in the Euro BioBlitz 2023 at the end of September by running activities from the Learning Hub at the Suspension Bridge. The aim of the BioBlitz is to record as many species as possible over two days in order to build up a picture of biodiversity on the Downs. We run this in conjunction with the Natural History Consortium and iNaturalist.



Sparks project

We have been updating and revamping our installation at Sparks in Broadmead adding colour through crafted dragonflies and flowers as well as Bristol onions. We also replaced the dead whitebeam trees courtesy of the UoB Botanical Gardens. We had a crafting session on site with the general public in August to increase awareness of AGDW and to create leaves and berries for the

whitebeams. Anna met with the Global Goals lead to discuss how workshops will function in the education space and fit in with the other activities on offer. To find out more about Sparks please visit <https://sparksbristol.co.uk/about/>.



Nature Works

The project met 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. Off the Record and AGDW are still considering how they would best engage this group on the Downs in order that they develop a sense of responsibility, engagement and ownership. Off the Record requested reconvening in September and AGDW is waiting for Off the Record to return from the summer currently.

Adoption West and Children in Care

After an initial very positive meeting with Adoption West where we discussed thoughts and ideas to best help families in the early stages of adoption, this was put on hold as our contact at Adoption West went on sick leave for some time over the summer. She is now back and a plan will be taken forward with her Service Manager.

Katherine Juniper, Senior Education Advocate from the Hope Virtual school thanked us for our offer and declined as this was not timely for them at present. However, Katherine has passed our details through to the Chair of the Bristol Foster Carers' Association (BFCA) as they are in a position to offer events to foster carers and their families at weekends and during holidays.

Bird survey

Our bird survey in conjunction with Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) continues and in July our survey took place for the second time at Sea Walls, in August at the scrub patches and in September at Zoo Banks and Fairyland. We are now inviting MSc students who are joining us to record on BirdTrack. We hope at some stage to hand over to students.

Volunteers

The volunteers had a fantastic visit to the Vaults courtesy of our strong relationship with the Visitor Centre at the Suspension Bridge. In July, August and September we have had 15 volunteers helping us for a total of approximately 206.5 hours on our events, school and playscheme sessions (as at 7th Sept).

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. Facebook views as at 7th September: 10,410. We can be found at www.facebook.com/avongorge/.

Pre-school age sessions

The first pre-school age sessions with adults begins on September 18th and will run on a weekly basis. The current charge is £5.00 per session to provide for direct costs as well as to make a small income for the project.

25th Anniversary of AGDW

Ideas are being considered for some suitable events and activities to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the project. One of the main plans currently is to completely revamp the Tree Trail at the Observatory and the Promenade. We met with Sarah's Wildlife Projects representatives to discuss this in September as they are kindly offering to donate the cost of the signage which will be needed in order to achieve this revamp. The trail will be linked to AGDW website with activities for children and information for adults. They are currently sourcing a suitable organisation which can produce the types of arboretum sign required to be attached to the trees. Sarah's Wildlife Projects have previously donated to the project through the production of interpretation boards on the Downs.

Other

An AGDW Steering Group meeting took place in July and the current actions of all the partners reported and discussed. This included such topics as the goats in the Gully; the new DAP; the Botanical Gardens' new strategy on civic and global engagement; Natural England's focus on the Avon Gorge woodland and grassland monitoring and the impact of recreation. The role of the AGDW project officer was also discussed.