

Report for October and November 2023 summary of activities of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife learning and community engagement programme

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

In October and November we expect to directly engage with 1083 people (as at 28 November) and have currently engaged with 614 (as at 13 November) through the learning and community engagement programme.

Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife (AGDW) events programme October-November

We ran a family **'Owl Prowl'** event and a children's half term fun day **'Autumn Antics'** in October. We also ran an in-depth workshop **'Birds of a Feather'** where we learnt about birds on the Downs during the autumn and winter months. During November we ran a discovery walk on the Downs **'Buds, Bark and Beauty'**, and a wildlife talk on **Orang-utans in Sumatra** in the Conservation Education Centre. We also delivered two external talks to Bristol community groups in November.

Participants particularly enjoyed:

'Very good engagement between the staff and participants - children and their adults. The chance for a hands-on experience and root about in the owl pellet rather than just being shown.'

'Ed was a fantastic host. His tech was good, enough of a catch to make it fun and interesting. He had such a great pace, rapport and energy with the children. I think his knowledge is fantastic and it was a lovely evening.'

'The format and guide were excellent and the refreshments very generous.'

'It was wonderful to be guided by such a knowledgeable expert.'



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 and college learning sessions

During this period we engaged with eight different schools, colleges and home education groups both on the Downs, and during in-school workshops on a wide variety of topics.

Comments following these visit were:

"I have had great feedback from the group and they're already looking forward to the next one!"

"Thank you for engaging the children so well and giving us the opportunity to learn about this very important habitat!"

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 running its first pilot A level session in November. The pilot A level session from South Gloucestershire and Stroud College is not being charged.

Outreach to schools in areas of deprivation

We delivered an assembly to years 1 to 4 in Headley Park Primary in advance of their in-school workshops where we are following sessions over three days complementing the national curriculum in-school. In addition the same year groups will visit the Downs next spring and summer to build on their learning in school. We will deliver an assembly to Stoke Park Primary years 1-6 and three of their year groups in school connecting local Bristol wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs to support their in-school learning. We are also delivering a talk and walk to first year students at UWE on the conflict between human use and biodiversity on the Downs.

Pre-school age sessions

The first term of weekly pre-school age sessions with adults began in September and finished in mid-October. The second term runs from the end of October until the beginning of December. These sessions are being extremely well received, exploring the seasonal world of wildlife on the Downs. The sessions are still open to further bookings and we would like to increase the weekly numbers by a little. This is providing a small but steady income for the project as well as long-term exposure to and valuing of Downs wildlife by both local and non-local families.



Nature Works

Off the Record and AGDW are still considering how they will 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. After waiting until October the Engagement Manager has contacted Off the Record to talk about their needs once again.

Adoption West and Children in Care

Our contact at Adoption West forwarded our plan to her Service Manager who did not get in touch. The Engagement Manager has since followed up with our initial contact in order to take this offer forward during the winter or spring.

Bird survey

Our bird survey in conjunction with Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC) continues and in October our survey took place for the second time at the Gully and associated woodland and in November at Sea Walls. Members of the Downs Committee are welcome to view the data as it is uploaded and held on BTO's BirdTrack as a useful record to track species richness and abundance year on year.

Volunteers

Our volunteers continue to be a vital source of manpower to us and are very loyal to the project. In October we had 11 volunteers helping us for a total of approximately 73 hours on our events and school sessions (as at 31st October).

Social media and website

We have started using analytics for our website and our social media in order to understand what drives traffic to us and which aspects our users find most engaging. For our website most users come through an 'organic' search and we are trusted by other websites as a highly regarded source of information. With regard to our Facebook page many of our users find us through other Facebook pages showing good connections with other organisations. During five weeks during September and October a total of 1373 people used our website and our followers on Facebook currently stands above 2300. During October our Facebook posts reached 9207 people and increased by 36.8%. Our Facebook page can be found [here](#) , our Instagram page [here](#) and our website can be found [here](#).

Walk for members of the Downs Committee (Action Tracker)

A talk and walk highlighting the work of the project and the amazing wildlife of the Downs and Avon Gorge is offered to all members of the Downs Committee, the reporting officers and Susan Carter, during November. This aims to provide a wider understanding of the value of the site for wildlife, new developments in regard to the project's partners and an in-situ experience of the site.

25th Anniversary of AGDW

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 is hoped to be linked to AGDW website with activities for children and information for adults. SWPs are currently sourcing a suitable organisation which can produce the types of arboretum sign required to be attached to the trees. Another meeting is to be held during to establish our next steps in achieving this revamp.

Other

Steering Group

An AGDW Steering Group meeting took place in October and the recent actions of all the partners reported. There was a very engaged discussion around many topics from all partners including the development of the new management plan by BCC; the need for monitoring of the condition of the Avon Gorge rare species and the impact from recreation by Natural England; how monitoring might take place effectively and the engagement of possible groups as such; the need to care for the grassland species on the Downs itself by the Botanical Gardens; the need for a record to be created of the abundance and richness of rare species within the Avon Gorge to take over from Libby Houston; sorbus planting on the Leigh Woods side of the Gorge by Forestry England and National Trust.

Downs Advisory Panel

The DAP met on 2nd November at the former Bristol Zoo Gardens, and was attended by the Engagement Manager.

Staff Development

Anna attended briefly the West of England Nature Partnership conference to hear speakers talk about private finance within conservation. Both the Engagement Manager and the Officer attended the Communicate conference online and in London in order to benefit from new ideas and developments within the Communication for Conservation sector.

The position of Learning and Engagement Officer of the project has been approved by Bristol Zoological Society to carry on during 2024 on a part-time basis of two days for six months and three days for six months. The engagement team await to hear if they receive funding from the Downs Committee from April 2024.