

Statement to the Downs Committee on behalf of Bristol Ornithological Club

I am the secretary of Bristol Ornithological Club (BOC). The 15 January report of the Task and Finish Group on parking on the Downs was discussed at the last BOC Trustees meeting. We are concerned about the proposal to reduce the parking limit on the Downs from 5 to 3 hours.

The Avon Gorge as viewed from Clifton Down is a nationally renowned site for observing and photographing nesting Peregrine Falcons and their young. Bristol rightly celebrates these birds in leaflets and online. After a long absence Peregrines returned to nest in the gorge in 1990 and have bred successfully every year since. In the early years our club was involved in protecting the nest site and more recently have run annual events to show the birds to the public.

During the nesting season birdwatchers may spend many hours waiting for the birds to appear after periods of resting or distant flights. We feel that a time limit of 3 hours on parking will restrict our members' ability to enjoy the Downs and the wildlife there. In addition to the opportunity to witness the spectacular flying displays at eye level, the Avon Gorge Peregrines have enabled us to learn more about the birds through scientific research. By identifying chicks born in the Avon Gorge by leg rings we know that as adults they have reared their own young in sites across England. The ringing is undertaken by licensed ringers assisted by trained climbers, and their work would be impeded by a more restrictive parking scheme. Access to Circular Road in the future is also important, and any proposal to restrict this needs to include provision for those needing to bring equipment to the edge of the gorge.

We hope that the parking time restriction can be retained at 5 hours. This limit has had the desired effect of deterring commuter parking. We feel that the Task and Finish Group have not fully considered the needs of all legitimate users of the Downs in their report.

Gareth Roberts
7 March 2024