

Friends of Troopers Hill - It's Your Neighbourhood 2018

1. Aims of the Project

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve extending over 21 acres (8.4 hectares) of acid heath and grassland on a pennant sandstone hillside overlooking the River Avon. This wild and romantic site supports rare plants and wildlife and provides local people with a space for relaxation and recreation. Friends of Troopers Hill is a community conservation group of primarily local residents, formed in December 2003 to:

- provide a friendly community focus for people who care about Troopers Hill
- undertake practical conservation tasks
- organise public events, including walks and talks
- work with Bristol City Council Parks department to ensure Troopers Hill is properly managed.

Our constitution is at <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/constitutionF.pdf>

2. Achievements since the IYN judging of 2017

In addition to our usual activities (see section 3), we have

- 1) been granted £44,800 (announced in June) by the Heritage Lottery Fund. This will be used for:
 - replacing the rotting wooden fences and gates on our Troopers Hill Rd boundary to prevent motorbikes accessing the site and destroying the habitat
 - creating a new conservation management plan
 - £10,000 of conservation work to carry out the recommendations of the new conservation management plan
 - invertebrate surveys the last of which was carried out in 2007
 - a new interpretation board on fungi and lichens
 - events through 2019
 - 4 outdoor learning sessions for adults with learning difficulties.
- 2) been granted £5,380 by the Nineveh Charitable Trust to fund Natural Learners to provide 14 Wild Play pre-school outdoor education sessions, 8 school holiday family activity sessions, 3 outdoor education sessions for schools
- 3) received funding from the Avon & Frome Partnership to make 13 wooden trail markers for the woodland paths and for 3 days of conservation work, opening up an overgrown track linking the woodland and the nature reserve and clearing invasive buddleia and some of the weaker hawthorn to provide a healthier ecological balance in the woodland.
- 4) Hosted another visit from the City of Bristol College explaining the conservation management carried out on Troopers Hill.
- 5) Welcomed another visit from geography students from Bridgwater College. Troopers Hill features in a Geography 'A' level textbook they use.
- 6) Agreed with our local councillors that they will negotiate for us to have funding from developer payments known as the Community Infrastructure Level to use as match-funding to apply for a landfill grant to resurface the deteriorating wheelchair access paths and create a new path from the play area to make it easy for young families to access the Hill. We will find out if the councillors have been successful in September.
More details about our fences and paths project on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/waystonature
- 7) Agreed with Street Goat that most of the cuttings from our work parties will be goat fodder.

3. What we have achieved since we started

In December 2003 paths were obscured under vegetation, large quantities of litter had accumulated, and, most importantly, scrub was invading the acid grass and heathland that justifies the Local Nature Reserve classification. Maintenance visits took place only for brief periods every 6-8 weeks.

Now the site is well managed according to an annually updated 5-year management plan <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm> agreed with Bristol City Council. This plan links to the relevant sections of the UK and Bristol Biodiversity Action Plans. The latter is supported by bodies including Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust and Natural England. This plan ran to 2017 and will be rewritten, hopefully using the Heritage Lottery Fund grant that we have applied for.

The site achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14. Bristol City Council no longer had staff resource to support the process so in 2014 we entered the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces scheme and received a gold award. In 2015 Troopers Hill was given the top level, 5 stars, Pride in Parks award by Britain in Bloom South West. This was repeated in 2016 and in addition Troopers Hill was awarded the Suttons Seeds Cup for an outstanding area of nature conservation.

We organise monthly Thursday and Saturday work parties, mainly addressing encroaching scrub and litter picking. Bristol City Council undertake machine-based maintenance, while Friends of Troopers Hill continue with manual tasks that would not otherwise be practicable, e.g. removing brambles growing in and around broom plants, and pulling out bracken amongst the heather, etc. Over 50 different local people have volunteered at our work parties and we now have ParkWork carrying out ½ a day of work on the date of the Thursday work party. ParkWork help people who have difficulty finding employment by providing training in parks tasks while volunteering.

In 2006, to preserve a boundary, 20 volunteers planted an 80-metre hedge of native species. Local residents were consulted about hedge management: the majority favoured cutting over hedge-laying. Volunteers hand-pruned the hedge annually until December 2012 when it was sufficiently mature for an annual flail cut by Bristol City Council.

Our free email membership list dropped from over 400 to just over 100 names with the new data protection changes but is rebuilding. The percentage of people who now open their emails is now over 60% whereas before the cull emails were only opened by just of 20% of recipients. We have 1,194 Facebook 'likes' and 823 Twitter followers. We maintain an informative and regularly updated web site www.troopers-hill.org.uk and email updates several times a year to our members. We publish a monthly article in the free paper St George & Redfield Voice which goes to 7,500 homes. The website is often a first point of contact for students seeking further information about Troopers Hill.

Notices and details of all the activities are posted on the site. Our meetings are open to all. We focus our publicity locally, encouraging people to walk, cycle or use the bus.

Our Walking for Health group, the St George Strollers, has celebrated its 7th anniversary. The Strollers have walked more than 500 miles and completed over 166 walks attended by more than 130 people. In addition to work parties and regular meetings, we have organised over 137 free public events since 2004, including guided nature, history and geology walks, concerts, dog shows, tai chi classes, star gazing and craft activities for children and families.

Since 2003 Friends of Troopers Hill have raised over £180,000 for different projects. We work closely with Bristol Parks, are members of the Bristol Parks Forum, and are represented on the St George Neighbourhood Partnership.

Troopers Hill is a venue for educational visits by primary school and 'A' level pupils. The site provides study material for University undergraduates and Ph D students.

In July, 2015, David Notton, Senior Curator (Hymenoptera) for London's Natural History Museum wrote, "it was great to visit a site which is so obviously valued and actively conserved".

4. What we are aiming for in the future

We will continue with conservation work and promoting Troopers Hill, particularly via events. We aim to attract new members from the local community who will contribute to the care and promotion of the Local Nature Reserve. Better dog control and reducing dog fouling will remain a priority.

We aim to fund improving the existing wheelchair access route to Troopers Hill and hope to hear soon that we can replace deteriorating wooden fencing and gates to keep out motorbikes.

Resource cuts to Bristol Parks staffing and services will present a challenge for the years ahead. We will work with the Bristol Parks Forum to lobby and identify ways to ensure parks continue to be maintained adequately.

Friends of Troopers Hill raised over £80,000 to pay for this new play area



The Avon Glen Pipes and Drums came to help us celebrate the opening on Saturday 22/10/2016



Next Troopers Hill Event



Bugs and Beasties Hunt

with expert Rupert Higgins
Saturday, 11th August, from 4pm
Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Bring a picnic

No Barbecues – Bristol Parks Byelaws



Take a closer look at your nearest star
with the Bristol Astronomical Society

Stay on for BALLOONS*!
*fingers crossed

Craft
activities
with



TROOPERS HILL

A Wildlife Web

THE Purse Web spider, *Atypus affinis*, has been recorded for the first time on Troopers Hill. The identification was thanks to one of our volunteers, a local resident who is studying at the University of West of England (UWE). She had recently completed a study of spiders and found a juvenile spider on her jumper as she walked through Troopers Hill. She had it classified, has recorded it with the Bristol Regional Environmental Recording Centre and passed on the news to us.

This particular spider has suffered a drop in population



Young purse web spider, Shelley McManmon

nationally, Troopers Hill provides its ideal habitat. It likes to burrow into loose soil under young heather, leaving most of its tubular web underground and disguising the web that is above ground by scattering loose soil over it. These spiders take four years to reach sexual maturity and may live as long as eight years. They eat beetles, bees, earwigs and woodlice. In turn it is prey for the nationally scarce spider hunting wasp, *Aporus unicolor*, which uses it as a host for its larvae, which eat the paralysed spider. This wasp was found on Troopers Hill in surveys carried out by David Gibbs in 2006 and 2007.

Quoting from the Spider and Harvestman Recording Scheme website: "The spider is vulnerable... without management to control scrub [it] will disappear". Controlling scrub is exactly what Friends of Troopers volunteers do at their monthly work parties; more volunteers are always needed and very welcome. Details of how to do so are at the end of this article.

Moving on from a creature that may be declining to one that seems to be making a recovery at the Dawn Chorus Walk, last month,



Greenfinch, Lee Gardiner

we heard the wheezy tones of the greenfinch. Ed Drewitt, the guide for the event, explained that a particularly nasty disease, Trichomonosis, that affects the birds' ability to swallow food, had been killing them. However this year they seem to be making a comeback.

Ed gave some good advice on how to continue to help with this recovery. If you find a dead bird near your bird feeders please stop putting out food for at least three weeks and clean out all your bird feeders and tables. This will help

control the spread of disease.

We hope you enjoy this photo of a very healthy looking greenfinch, feeding in Crews Hole not far from Troopers Hill. The photo was taken by Lee Gardiner who you can follow on Twitter as @wildwood_photos.

There is a Friends of Troopers Hill conservation work party on the 1st Saturday and 3rd Thursday of every month, starting promptly at 10:00am and finishing at noon. Meet the volunteers at the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.



Conservation Work Parties

www.troopers-hill.org.uk/wp

Thur 21st June, Sat 7th and Thur 19th July
10am-noon

Meet at the red slide on Troopers Hill Field



Tools, gloves, guidance and a friendly welcome will be waiting

for YOU to

help to keep this site special for wildlife & people

Is this a bee or..a fly?
Come along & find out.



WHAT NEXT FOR TROOPERS HILL?

Events

MEETING

Slide?

Fences

Thursday 28th June 7.15pm-9pm

Back room Summerhill Methodist Church,

Paths 5 Air **BALLOON RD, BS5 8LB**

Maintenance

ALL WELCOME

Conservation

www.troopers-hill.org.uk/meetings



www.troopers-hill.org.uk

 Follow us on Facebook and Twitter

@troopershill 

June's Saturday Work Party

2012 Management Plan Objectives for this work party		Compartment
6.2.2.9	Removal of all tree seedlings from grassland and heathland	3/4 & 9
6.2.2.10	Control bramble and scrub encroaching onto grassland and heathland	3/4 & 9



Troopers Hill Dark Sky Discovery Site

Troopers Hill has now been declared as a
"Orion Class" [Dark Sky Discovery Site](#).

Despite its location in the midst of brightly lit St George it is a good place to visit for star and planet watching, relatively protected from light pollution and with a good horizon.

Dark Sky Discovery Sites are places that:

- provide good sightlines of the sky
- are away from the worst of any local light pollution
- have good public access, including firm ground for wheelchairs and are generally freely accessible at all times.

"Orion" sites are those where the seven main stars in the winter constellation Orion are visible to the naked eye. Typically, this means away from, or shielded from, bright lights such as street lights, security lights or approaching car lights.

Visiting Troopers Hill for Star Gazing

Maps & directions to Troopers Hill

Star gazers should visit Troopers Hill via the wheelchair access route from Malvern Road, use torches and either keep to the wheelchair access path or keep north and west of the chimney on the fairly flat area of turf nearby. As Troopers Hill is an exposed hillside, layers of warm, windproof clothing including head covering are advised.

The best observing site is near the chimney on top of the hill where you are above the City's lights.

The Hill is in a residential area, please consider our neighbours and keep noise to a minimum, especially if visiting late at night or early morning.

