

Near and far on Troopers Hill

While walking on Troopers Hill in winter you might not think there is anything very colourful to be seen but take along a magnifying glass or field lens. On rocks and twigs you will see patches of white, bright yellow, black, peach and different shades of grey and green. On the ground itself, where there has been little footfall, you might see splashes of scarlet or moss-like pillows of white that unlike moss feel dry and leathery to the touch. Under the magnifying glass you might see small cups on some of these lichens.



Lichens are an amazing partnership of fungi and algae or cyanobacteria. The algae or cyanobacteria produces organic carbon compounds by photosynthesis and the fungus provides an anchor, protects the algae with its filaments from the environment and gathers moisture and nutrients that benefit the algae or cyanobacteria.

Lichens can be used to work out the age of exposed rock up to a range of 10,000 years simply by knowing the rate of growth of a lichen. They can also be used as a guide to air pollution. It is good to see some “bushy” (fruticose) types of lichen on Troopers Hill; these do not grow where the air is heavily polluted. Some crustose lichens, those yellow patches you see on walls, gravestones and trees can survive with very heavy air pollution and are good indicators of high levels of nitrogen compounds sometimes generated from vehicle exhausts.

You can see some of the lichens that have been found on Troopers Hill on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/wildlife.htm#fungi The OPAL (Open Air Laboratories) website www.opalexplornature.org has a guide to help you make your own air pollution survey using lichens.

Lifting your eyes from the ground, winter skies are wonderful for stargazing. Troopers Hill is a designated Dark Sky Discovery Site. On a clear night it has a good horizon and for an urban site, there is limited light pollution. Enjoy star gazing. If you would like to find out more about what you can see now is the time to register your interest in our February star gazing event. The Bristol Astronomical Society will be providing their knowledge and telescopes for this free event. Register via <https://tinyurl.com/stargazing2018> for more information.

To keep Troopers Hill at its best for people and wildlife volunteers are always needed. If you can, please join the Friends for two hours of conservation work on the 1st Saturday or the 3rd Thursday

of any month, from 10am-noon. The meeting point is the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.
Saturday 6th January is the first work party of the 2018.

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