

Britain in Bloom South West Pride in Parks Award 2019

Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Author: Susan Acton-Campbell, Chair, Friends of Troopers Hill, 8th July, 2019

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve in St George, east Bristol, 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.

This document takes the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces Assessment criteria and gives evidence of how those criteria are met by Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve.

1. Community

In the 15 years of Friends of Troopers Hill's existence we have held over 143 events, excluding conservation work parties and Walking for Health walks. We have raised over £250,000 for works and activities on Troopers Hill. This makes the site attractive for further investment by grant funders and encourages Bristol City Council, the landowner, to use their resources to follow the Troopers Hill conservation management plan. The Friends work in close partnership with Bristol City Council.

We only undertake projects that have a high level of backing from the local community. Our latest project, Ways to Nature, www.troopers-hill.org.uk/waystonature/ started with a consultation in 2017. This resulted in an enquiry to the Heritage Lottery Fund, followed by a full application in 2018 for £44,800 under the "Our Heritage" scheme. This year the grant has paid for new fencing and gates to replace the preceding rotting fences and gates that were the only barrier to motorbikes. It is also funding £10,000 of conservation work following the recommendations of a new conservation management plan, also paid for by the grant. A fungi interpretation board, an invertebrates survey, guided walks and activities in 2019, including 4 outdoor education sessions for adults with learning difficulties are all being supported by this grant.

Local councillors supported us in our bid for £15,000 to be allocated from developers' contributions to Bristol City Council. This money was then used as match-funding to apply to a landfill trust for two grants, providing in total the sum of £62,500 for work on paths, also part of the Ways to Nature project. The paths would greatly benefit a wide section of the community including people with mobility issues and families with children in buggies to access the Hill all year round. It would also improve access for Bristol City Council vehicles emptying dog bins and carrying out routine maintenance such as grass-cutting.

A local company approached us in winter 2017 asking us if we would like to raise funds for a defibrillator near Troopers Hill if they contributed half the cost and provided the site. We succeeded in raising the funds via a Just Giving page and the defibrillator was formally unveiled in January of this year.

The Friends hold 5 or 6 meetings a year, locally advertised and open to all, to discuss plans for the future and review what has been done. We work very closely with the landowners, Bristol City Council.

A free emailing list is maintained and updates sent to our followers. We have moved on from having a paper newsletter and instead publish a monthly article in the free St George & Redfield Voice local paper that is distributed to 7,500 local homes. Links to the articles we have published are on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/newsletter.htm>

The Friends of Troopers Hill maintain an informative and regularly updated website www.troopers-hill.org.uk plus "@troopershill" Twitter and Facebook pages. Leaflets about Troopers Hill are distributed at local public events www.troopers-hill.org.uk/leaflets/index.htm and at Hill events. The Friends also make use of display boards at events to showcase aspects of the Hill and the activities there. There are clip frames on welcoming signs at the Hill's entrances that are used to promote forthcoming events and activities.

A record of all volunteer conservation work parties on Troopers Hill is maintained on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm and links are posted on Facebook and Twitter. The work parties are held monthly, on the 1st Saturday and 3rd Thursday. Children accompanied by responsible adults are particularly welcome. The drinks and biscuits time at the end of a work party are another opportunity for sharing news and feedback on possible plans.

Funding has been found to pay for ParkWork <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/> to carry out conservation work on Troopers Hill for ½ a day a month. This scheme provides training and skills development for those people needing additional support to secure permanent employment. Volunteers from the general public can also come to these sessions which are on the morning of the 3rd Thursday of the month.

Our free events are made as varied as possible to appeal to many tastes while always carrying the message of the importance of the site and the need to care for it. These range from guided walks, "Bugs and Beasties hunts" with naturalists to identify the finds, to looking at the night skies with the Bristol Astronomical Society. Details of future and records of all our previous events can be accessed via <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/events.htm>.

Since the play area that we raised £80,000 to create was opened in October 2016 on Troopers Hill Field, we have seen larger numbers of families, particularly with young children, visiting the Hill and in addition to the young boys that were already seen on the Hill we now have visits from more girls.

The Bristol Astronomical Society (BAS) supported the site to receive a "Dark Sky Discovery Site" designation www.troopers-hill.org.uk/DarkSky/ meaning that this is a good place to visit for star and planet watching, relatively protected from light pollution and with a good horizon. BAS work with us providing an annual winter star gazing event and a solar observation session in August.

Bridgwater College actually hire a coach to come here every year to look at our conservation management because Troopers Hill is a case study in their "A" Level text books. We are working on links with the University of the West of England as a resource to provide guided geological walks. University of Bristol Biological Sciences course students come here to carry out their projects and we share in their results. We are often the first point of contact when students wish to carry out studies on Troopers Hill and now have a checklist agreed with Bristol City Council's

Conservation Officer of what they need to provide, prior to being given the landowner's permission to go ahead.

We are particularly proud of our audio trail, put together by our volunteer Kit Elliott, a professional cameraman and sound recordist, which makes Troopers Hill come alive even to those who cannot visit it or see it.

The accessibility of Troopers Hill, by virtue of its rugged nature, is limited but is to the level approved of by the Bristol Physical Access Chain, a local group who assess accessibility. We were delighted to follow their suggestions to improve and add to signage along the wheelchair accessible route. We are working to improve the wheelchair access route (see page 1)

Details of all Troopers Hill trails, which also include a tree trail and a woodland trail, can be downloaded via www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails.

In 2015 we improved access to Troopers Hill woodland by paying for materials to add steps to a path leading from an informal parking area on Crews Hole Rd to the woodland adjacent to the Local Nature Reserve. The work has been done by young people participating in the ParkWork project www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/. Since then, thanks to funding from the Avon & Frome Partnership 13 wooden trail markers have been made and were installed since the last "Pride in Parks" judging.

This year we have supported the "Future Proofing Parks" project involving young people in green spaces. <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/hlf-future-proof-parks>

Our group has been awarded a level of "Outstanding" in the RHS "It's Your Neighbourhood" scheme for the years 2012-18. A summary of our aims and achievements on Troopers Hill for the year summer 2018- summer 2019, produced for the IYN judge can be read on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/achievements2019.pdf.

2. Maintenance and Development

All work on Troopers Hill follows the new 10-year management plan, dating from 2019 www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm developed for the site by Wessex Ecological Consultancy with input from Bristol City Council in partnership and Friends of Troopers Hill. 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. Regular photographic and species surveys are funded by Bristol Parks and ourselves, and/or are performed by students as part of their studies. The site achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14 when Bristol City Council stopped applying as they had no staff resource to support the process.

In accordance with the Management Plan maintenance of the site aims to balance the use of the site for recreation while protecting its natural beauty and its diversity. For example, while vegetation is cut back from paths to keep them clear this is not carried out too vigorously and it is accepted that occasionally visitors may have to brush past taller vegetation. The aim is for the site to be accessible but to look natural.

The role of Community Park Keeper disappeared within Bristol City Council towards the end of 2014. The Friends of Troopers Hill have worked closely with the Parks team to ensure that good quality maintenance has continued, following the Site Management Plan, under the new structure. We are extremely pleased with the provision of resource in these difficult times but we are concerned. Last year we were told the annual meadow cut carried out in the area of land on the Greendown had not been included in Bristol City Council's tender and an arrangement was made for a power scythe to be used and the arisings raked up by volunteers sourced by the Avon Wildlife Trust. A very high quality cut was achieved, covering a small area, which was then followed up strimming from the Bristol City Council Parks team.

In winter, earlier this year, we were able to pay for areas of gorse, scrub and broom to be cut back in priority areas, thanks to our Heritage Fund grant.

3. Environment

Litter and dog waste bins on the site are emptied twice weekly by the Parks staff. All entrances had a dog waste bin. Much litter is picked up by visitors to the Hill, particularly dog walkers. Other litter picking is done by Parks staff and the Friends. Cuttings from work parties were either concealed to compost at a location onsite or placed in one-ton sacks for collection by Parks staff at contractors' entrances. We have continued our relationship with a group called Street Goat who have a milking parlour and shed for a small number of goats in the allotments next door to our site. Goats love most of the cuttings we create so Street Goat members have helped on a small number of our work parties and taken cuttings from some more work parties to feed the goats.

Graffiti is addressed promptly but is rare. Police are advised. The Friends have graffiti removal spray provided by the Parks Department so we do not have to wait for Council staff to attend if it is a simple task. Where it is more complex we use Bristol City Council's online graffiti reporting system where usually graffiti is removed within 3 working days.

As a Local Nature Reserve the amount of "furniture"/clutter has to be limited to be in keeping with the site, a view supported by local people. There are welcoming signs on every entrance and a number of interpretation boards. Up to date leaflets on the history, geology, wildlife and events of the site are available in paper and electronic form. Seats are available at the top of each section of steep path. With the replacement of the boundary fence on Troopers Hill Rd two old, tired, entrance signs were "retired". One has been very recently replaced with a fungi interpretation board and a new welcoming sign has been commissioned for to replace the second sign.

We were delighted in April 2017 when Bristol Parks Byelaws were introduced. There is now a sign on every entrance saying what is permitted, when permission has to be obtained and what is not permitted. We are very pleased that, thanks to our reports of the impact of fires, Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve is the only council-owned green space in Bristol where barbecues are completely banned. The message does seem to be working and we explain why on our website <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/visiting/NoBBQs.htm>

In common with most green spaces dog fouling and dog control are issues. We encourage good owner behaviour through signage, Facebook and Twitter postings. We have worked with Bristol City Council's Dog Warden. More on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/.

We are delighted to say that the number of bee species recorded on site has increased to 78, with the Ivy bee, *Colletes hederæ* having been observed last year. This year on the first invertebrates survey visit by David Gibbs, a moth, *Dasystoma salicella*, was found on Troopers Hill that had not been recorded in this country for over 10 years.

4. Areas for improvement listed in last year's judging

1. New paths for better disabled access where possible.

Response: £62,500 raised. Contractors have visited the site with Bristol City Council and costings are being agreed prior to placing an order for the work to be carried out before winter 2019/20.

2. Encourage those who live locally and use the site frequently to report problems or any areas that need improvement.

Response: We do continually post on Facebook the links to use to communicate issues to Bristol Parks and have been pleased to receive message from local people saying they have reported a number of issues, particularly the breaking of byelaws to Bristol Parks.

New fencing and gates – part of the project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund's grant of £44,800



The newest interpretation board – installed 9/7/2019 – funded by the same grant



Fairy Tale Fungi



Fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)

A kingdom underground

Under Troopers Hill grow many fungi, present as narrow thread-like tubes called hyphae, weaving together to form mycelia. Fruiting bodies (sporophores) which you may know as mushrooms or toadstools grow up from the mycelia. As they mature the sporophores release spores, the fungal equivalent of seeds.

Fungi obtain their nourishment from living plants or from dead or dying matter including humus and even dead animals.

Look out for fungi on Troopers Hill all year round but particularly from September to November.

Colourful waxcaps

Troopers Hill's poor, acidic soil produces short grasses making the site ideal for spotting yellow, red, orange and snowy white waxcap (*Hygrocybe* sp.) fungi. A due is in their name. If you touch the cap it will feel greasy.

Please remember to always wash your hands after being in contact with soil or fungi.

The Blackening Waxcap (*Hygrocybe conica*) is perhaps the easiest to recognise. Starting with a bright red/orange cap on a yellowish stem, the tip of the cap gradually turns black and eventually the whole fruitbody blackens.



Above photos: Scaly earthball (*Scleroclema scrobiculatum*), Yellow waxcap (*Hygrocybe chlorophana*), Blackening waxcap (*Hygrocybe conica*)

Amazing shapes, not all fungi are shaped like parasols. Look out for the "fingers" of Golden Spindles (*Clavulinopsis fusiformis*) or the plain black earthtongue (*Geoglossum umbratile*). There are even fungi shaped like pasta shells and others like lumps of clear jelly.



More about fungi

Mycologist Justin Smith recorded the fungi on Troopers Hill from 2005 until his untimely death in 2014. View his records and more recent information, including details of the *Justin Smith Foundation*, created to inspire and educate about fungi, lichens and lower plants on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/fungi



Golden spindles (*Clavulinopsis fusiformis*), Meadow waxcap (*Hygrocybe pratensis*), Amanita muscaria (*Amanita muscaria*), Brown rollrim (*Paxillus involutus*)

Leave fungi for others to see

There is a wide range of fungi here, few are edible, several are toxic. Brown Rollrim (*Paxillus involutus*) is known to have a cumulative toxic effect. The fairy-tale, red and white fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) is known as "tue-mouches" in French, literally "fly killer"! Both species are found near birch trees.

Always take expert advice before eating wild fungi.

A Space for everyone

We hope you enjoy exploring Troopers Hill today. Please respect this special place; take your litter home, clean up after your dog and protect the Hill's delicate grassland by not using barbecues.

Find out more

Bristol Parks: www.bristol.gov.uk/parks
Friends of Troopers Hill: www.troopers-hill.org.uk
Download an Audio Tour of Troopers Hill from www.troopers-hill.org.uk/audio



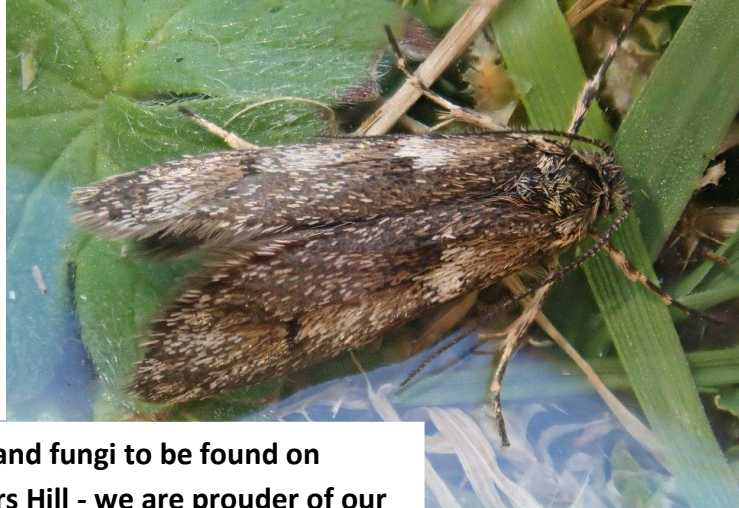
Thank you to National Lottery players. Funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund paid for this interpretation board and much more. www.troopers-hill.org.uk/waystonature

A fascinating mix of history and wildlife on your doorstep



Troopers Hill Wildlife

Dasystema salicella, a moth unrecorded in this country for over 10 years, presumed extinct, photographed on Troopers Hill by David Gibbs in April 2019



Lichen and fungi to be found on Troopers Hill - we are prouder of our waxcaps but the fly agaric does make a striking image



Plus the odd reptile - a common lizard that supervised a work party



Conservation Work Parties - Advertised online and with local posters

Work Party of Saturday 6th July, 2019

Objectives

2019 Management Plan Work Plan activities for this work party (ref no. indicates compartment)

7.3 Cut scrub & saplings across the area.

