

## Troopers Hill – under threat by a mystery gardener?

Over the years there has been a lot of publicity about the sensitive and special environment at Troopers Hill and why careful management is needed to preserve it. Many of the plants and associated animals on Troopers Hill are found nowhere else in the city. Some species, including invertebrates, are rare in the whole of the UK. This is why Troopers Hill has its formal designation as a Local Nature Reserve.

From time to time people contact Friends of Troopers Hill when they want to donate trees or plants that they have grown to the site. The Friends always explain the issues of introducing plants from elsewhere that could out-compete existing plants on site or bring disease with them, threatening the existing plants that provide an essential habitat for the rare species that live there. They also explain that the landowners are Bristol City Council whose Parks department carry out the regular maintenance on the Hill and are the contact for any discussions about activities on Troopers Hill.

Very, very occasionally something is planted on Troopers Hill without a discussion with the landowners. If these are obvious, such as the Christmas tree that appeared some years ago, these are removed as part of a volunteer conservation work party.

The most recent discovery has been two small Leylandii (*Cupressus leylandii*) trees. Readers may have heard of these as the fast-growing evergreen trees that sometimes feature in court cases between neighbours when they have been used for hedges. They can grow to 15 metres (49 feet) in 16 years. Literature seems to suggest that Leylandii cannot seed although it is possible that cross-pollination may be possible with other types of Cypress tree. We strongly suspect that someone has “donated” small cuttings which have only been noticed a year or so later.



People have also contacted us in the past suggesting that it would be a good idea to scatter a wildflower mix over the Hill. This is what Jan Walters, former Conservation Officer for Bristol City Council, wrote in our newsletter in

2012. "Even 'wildflower mixes', so much in the news at present, should only be planted where a site has low wildlife value to start with, as there may well be seeds inappropriate to the ecology of the area."

Troopers Hill receives regular donations of plants from wildlife ranging from acorns dropped by jays to seeds dropped in a "fertiliser package" by passing birds. Seeds can also be brought on people's footwear or parks machinery. This is why conservation work parties are so important to preserve the acid grassland and heathland, with volunteers cutting out the very young plants before they can do real damage. Winter is coming, birds are no longer nesting and this is the ideal time to play "catch up" conservation. Why not join the Friends on their next conservation work party?

**There is a conservation work party on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month, starting promptly at 10am and finishing at noon. The volunteers meet by the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.**



**Removing invasive weed, Himalayan Balsam from Troopers Hill in a 2016 conservation work party.**