

VOL. 1 ISSUE 2 • JULY 2023

# SUPER TROOPER

Newsletter of Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve



## From Hilltop to Heart: A Volunteer's Story

BY ROSIE TORRE



After retiring 11 years ago from my 20-year stint as a manager at Bristol Law Society, I had more time to spend on my own interests. Nature, and the Hill has always been very important to me.

I love joining the conservation parties. The fresh air, the sweeping views, the physicality, and the camaraderie - it's a real tonic. While I may not be the quickest or the strongest, as a team we help to preserve this special natural habitat.

Being on the Hill offers more than physical activity, it gives a sense of openness and health, and helps me stay grounded in the present. It's also a great opportunity to chat. We share laughs, stories, and knowledge, which creates real community.

One of my most memorable encounters was lifting a large piece of corrugated iron to reveal four beautiful grass snakes curled up asleep underneath. They vanished quickly, but the sight was unforgettable.

I highly recommend the events on the Hill, particularly the upcoming Bugs and Beasties event. It's not only great fun but a fantastic opportunity to appreciate our environment as a community.

## Editorial

BY RUTH SEMPLE



Strolling over the Hill, butterflies dance around me, a testament to its thriving biodiversity. This heartwarming scene is thanks to dedicated volunteers like Rosie and our resident ecologist, Rupert. If their stories inspire you, join us in preserving this haven for wildlife. We can all make a difference!

Don't miss our upcoming Bugs and Beasties event where you can discover the intriguing world of our Hill's smaller residents. It's an adventure you won't forget!

0117 336 4015



# The Hill: A Microcosm of Biodiversity

BY RUPERT HIGGINS AND RUTH SEMPLE

## A Journey into the Heart of Urban Wilderness



As an ecologist and a nature lover, my fascination with the natural world began with the simple joy of birdwatching. This early interest expanded into a deep appreciation for botany and entomology, leading me to embark on a lifetime journey of exploration and learning in the great outdoors. One place that continues to captivate me is Troopers Hill because of its beauty and richness.

## The Wondrous Diversity of Troopers Hill

My first encounter with the Hill dates back to 1985, after I had moved to Bristol for my degree in Botany and Ecology. From the get-go, the Hill struck me with its sheer uniqueness, especially its diverse habitats. I've learned that the excitement of nature is not just in identifying a plant or an insect, but in understanding why it's there, why it's growing, and the intricate relationships it maintains with its surroundings.

## A Tale of Geology



The Hill's unique biodiversity is deeply connected to its geological history. Most of the terrain around Bristol is characterised by limestone soils. However, the Hill stands out, with its sandstone rock composition resulting in acidic soils - a perfect environment for Heather and Broom, species that cannot tolerate limestone.

## Humans and the Hill: A Symbiotic Past

There's no denying the Hill's varied past, with its history of quarrying and industrial use. Unlike uniform heaths in Wales or Scotland that support the same vegetation for acres on end, the Hill is a beautiful tapestry of diversity, thanks to its history of human activity and its varied microclimates. These factors work together to foster a vast range of species, especially insects, many of whom spend much of their lives within the Heather bushes but also require flowering plants to provide nectar and bare ground for basking and egg-laying.

**"The Hill is a beautiful tapestry of diversity, thanks to its history of human activity and its varied microclimates."**

Rupert Higgins is an ecologist at Wessex Ecological Consultancy. His expertise, honed over 30 years, spans from advising on sustainable development to conducting in-depth ecological surveys. With a keen eye for the natural world, Rupert also captivates audiences through his wildlife writing and photography, making him a compelling voice for biodiversity.



## An Urban Bee Haven

84 of Britain's 250 bee species are thriving on the Hill due to its ideal soil and ample nectar sources. This rich ecosystem, however, also presents challenges like resource competition and predation, but this makes the Hill a dynamic hub of biodiversity.

## The Struggles of Insect Populations

Climate change and intensive farming threaten ecosystems globally. Their effects, like irregular weather and pesticide use, drastically impact insect populations and the birds, bats and plants that rely on them for survival.

## A Community's Role in Conservation

Community efforts offer hope for preserving ecosystems like the Hill. Through conservation work parties, active volunteers are enhancing its biodiversity, exemplifying how local engagement can protect our natural gems.



## Keep the Habitats Open

Controversial as it may seem, occasional pruning and cutting down of trees and scrub on the site is crucial to preserving the open habitats that support a diverse range of species. Without it, we risk losing our local biodiversity and many rare species that make the Hill so special.

## Nature's Gift to Us

The beauty of the Hill extends beyond its ecological importance. There's something inherently uplifting about being out in nature - hearing the birds sing, admiring the blossoms, watching insects at work. But beyond enjoyment, it's a symbol of our interdependence. We're reminded that our existence is intertwined with these biological systems. Any harm to this delicate balance risks not just the natural world, but our survival as well.

## Calling All Urban Conservationists



Preserving Troopers Hill's biodiversity is a collective responsibility. We can support insects by cultivating diverse plants and welcoming 'untidiness' in our spaces. By maintaining the Hill and similar reserves, we're safeguarding ecosystems for future generations, enriching our lives, and ensuring our survival. Let's act to preserve this biodiversity for us and its native species.

# Events

Drop in Gazebo  
Troopers Hill Field  
**2.30-5PM, 2 JULY**

20th Anniversary Walk  
**3PM, 2 JULY**

Sensory Walk  
**10.30AM, 30 JULY**

Bugs and Beasties  
**4PM, 12 AUGUST**

Drop in Gazebo  
Troopers Hill Field  
**2.30-5PM, 3 SEPT**

## CONSERVATION WORK PARTIES

Would you like to offer your time to help maintain the biodiversity of the Hill?

This two hour nature conservation work party is a great way to meet people and connect with nature.

Most of our work involves cutting back scrub that is threatening this area of acid grassland and heathland.

**Call Susan on  
0117 9475037  
for more information**



# BECOME A BUG DETECTIVE!

## A Beginner's Guide to Insect Identification



### 1

#### LET'S GO ON A BUG HUNT!

- *Explore* where two worlds meet - like a grassy picnic spot inside the woods!
- *Discover* the sunny flower patches - hogweed, bramble, ragwort, and thistle are bug hotspots.
- *Inspect* sun-kissed leaves on trees and shrubs - bugs love to sunbathe too.
- *Dive* into the world of logs and dead wood - it's a bug city in there!



### 2

#### BECOME A BUG MAGNET!

- *Sweeping Challenge:* Can you gently swing a net in tall grass without hitting any brambles? Let's find out!
- *Moth Party:* Set up a light trap at night. How many moths can you attract?
- *Photography Fun:* Can you capture a bug's best side? Try taking pictures from different angles.



### 3

#### DECODE THE BUG MYSTERY

- *Bug Twins:* Some bugs look alike, even the best bug detectives get puzzled. And that's okay.
- *Book Adventures:* Dive into the 'Insects of Britain & Ireland' by Paul D. Brook, it's full of bug secrets.
- *Web Explorers:* Set sail on the web to websites like [britishbugs.org.uk](http://britishbugs.org.uk) and [naturespot.org.uk](http://naturespot.org.uk), and discover Steven Falk's bug photos on Flickr.
- *App Quest:* Try out bug identifying apps like Obsidentify and iNaturalist. They're like your personal bug identification wizards.



### 4

#### BE A BUG HERO!

Once you've unlocked your bug's secret identity, share it with the local records centre (like BRREC for the Bristol area). Every bug you find helps us protect nature better!

