

Busy Bees and Winter Works @Troopers Hill

Earlier this year Friends of Troopers Hill celebrated a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. Part of this money is paying for the Troopers Hill's 2012-2017 conservation management plan to be reviewed and replaced by a 10-year plan. There is also funding to carry out some of the recommended work.



Rupert Higgins of Wessex Ecological Consultancy has been employed to write the plan. He has worked Troopers Hill since the 1990s and knows it very well. His photographic surveys and reports from 1998 onwards can be seen on the Friends of Troopers Hill website www.troopers-hill.org.uk/survey.html

Many families in St George have met Rupert at Troopers Hill Bugs and Beasties events. He has been the expert identifying the finds that children have brought back in their nets and bug pots. Rupert's own find, in September, was Troopers Hill's 78th bee species. There are over 280 species of bee in this country.

This latest find is the Ivy Bee (*Colletes hederatae*). Like the majority of bees it is a solitary bee, only making a nest for its own eggs, but this bee likes making its nest in an

area with lots of other Ivy Bees. They like sunny, south-facing grassy banks and easy access to ivy flowers for their pollen and nectar. You will only see them in flight from September-November, coinciding with ivy blossoming.

For the bees and other wildlife to thrive on Troopers Hill careful conservation management work has to be carried out. Troopers Hill provides a unique habitat in Bristol and the wildlife here need the acid grass and heathland including bare areas for the bees to dig their nests. As usual, this winter Bristol City Council teams will be bringing machinery to the Hill to clear specific areas of scrub, young bramble and saplings. In addition, using the recommendations from the management plan, there will be some more extensive work pushing back the new trees that have started to invade the grassland from the northwest edge of the woodland towards the top of Troopers Hill. If you sit on the wooden-topped bench under the birch tree by the steps look to your right and you will see, how the scrub is advancing covering areas where heather and grasses were thriving only two to three years ago.

We also hope that the funding will cover a continuation of the work carried out by volunteers in their November conservation work party where an area of broom and bramble was taking over an area of grassland. Gorse has been a particular problem on the Hill starting with a few plants

identified in the 1990s and now blanketing an area of the Hill from the south edge of the Gulley (an old quarry) down to the path that runs parallel to Troopers Hill Rd. This has been cut on a number of occasions but regrows very successfully and has a good rate of germination from seed. Careful consideration will have to be given to using herbicide plugs in the cut off stems of large gorse bushes and painting new growth with the same herbicide. Until now the only herbicide used on Troopers Hill has been in the successful and essential control of Japanese knotweed by the landowner, Bristol City Council.

Draft maps of the Hill with descriptions of the management needed in each compartment will be taken to our next work party and discussed over our hot drinks and biscuits at the end. Why not come along and find out more? The Friends will also lead a guided walk on Sunday 16th December at 10.30am. To book your place ring Susan on 0117 947 5037 or visit the Troopers Hill events page, www.troopers-hill.org.uk/events.htm.

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

