

Saving Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Any casual visitor to Troopers Hill would not necessarily think that Troopers Hill is in danger. Thanks to many visitors who take away their own and other people's litter, there is little rubbish to be seen. The paths are clear; steps are in mainly good condition. The hedge and meadow area on the Greendown side of the Hill have been cut.



Twenty-two people booked places on a guided Troopers Hill Conservation walk in mid-December. They were shown evidence of changes that, if left unchecked, would lead to the loss of the ecological importance of Troopers Hill. The acid grassland and heathland, the poor soil and bare patches of ground are important factors providing a unique habitat in the Bristol area. Encroaching scrub, which includes bramble, young trees and gorse will, if left, take

over the 20-acre area, killing the grasses and heather, changing the habitat so that many of the more than 500 species of wildlife recorded on the site will no longer survive there.

Many of the species are pollinators including 78 species of bee which are responsible for much of the pollination of plants and fruit trees in the gardens, allotments and orchards in the area.

On the conservation walk, visitors were able to spot many small, seedling trees, an over-population of broom and large thickets of gorse. They were shown photos of Troopers Hill in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s where the hill can be seen almost bare of trees and bushes. There are two volunteer conservation work parties every month but not enough volunteers are coming to keep up with the encroaching scrub.

Bristol City Council, the landowner, plays their part, carrying out a number of days of winter works every year using heavy machinery and strimmers; they also cut the Greendown hedge and meadow at the right times of year, keep the paths clear, empty dog and litter bins, and reduce the bracken growth in summer.

This winter, following the recommendations of the new conservation management plan, using money granted by the Heritage Lottery Fund, work will be done in three areas that are in the most urgent need of attention. This will involve cutting back broom and scrub in an area to the right as you enter Troopers Hill from Troopers Hill Field, above the path that leads to steps down to Troopers Hill woodland. The second location will need some tree felling and scrub removal along a narrow line leading down from a bench under a large birch tree beside a wide area of grassland. This is where woodland is advancing into the grass land so this encroachment will be pushed back. The final area, above the second set of steps leading up from Troopers Hill Rd, involved the removal of

an area of gorse, about a third of the total mass. In the 1990s there were just a few gorse plants but these have increased into large thickets. The gorse is not only killing the grassland and heathland but creates an increased fire risk.

At the end of the conservation walk explaining the new conservation management plan, the walkers were asked to complete a very short feedback form. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive with everyone who completed the form marking as “True” the statement “I think the proposals for conservation seem sensible”.

If there is demand, Friends of Troopers Hill will arrange another walk, just contact them on 0117 947 5037 or email friends@troopers-hill.org.uk. There will certainly be another walk next December. You can also come to any Troopers Hill Conservation Work Party where questions are always welcomed and information is shared about what is being done and why.

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.