

The Friends of Troopers Hill



May/June 2007



The Online Forum is certainly starting to come into its own. As well as immediate responses to events taking place on the Hill (see elsewhere this edition), we are reaching Friends in faraway places who are sharing their memories and thoughts with us. We are delighted to have an article from Fiji in this edition and welcome Dick Best as a Friend of Troopers Hill.

On a recent work party, Friends were disturbed to discover many dead bees in in one particular spot. What caused it? Nick Hudson of Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) explains:

"Quick investigations have turned up a likely cause. When I found one dead bumblebee in Sally's Glade I noticed that its lower abdomen was missing and that it was just a shell with the innards missing. An ant ran out and I thought - ah, it's been killed/died and ants have cleaned up. Then when I notice that there were dozens of bees in exactly the same condition this explanation started to look rather unlikely.

The next possibility was that bumblebees (and other aculeate hymenoptera - bees, wasps and ants) can become parasitized by Conopid flies. An adult Conopid fly will lay an egg in the abdomen of a bumble bee, perhaps whilst the bee is feeding on flowers. Later on the egg hatches and the larva develops inside the bee, eventually filling the bee's abdomen, which as you can imagine will kill the bee! Having used the bee as a food source, the conopid fly larvae then leaves the bee's body, apparently via the last few segments of the abdomen, and then pupates, later emerging as an adult to start the cycle again. Not particularly pleasant from a human perspective but a very neat way to earn a living for the conopid fly. It was, however, rather early in the year for this solution to be likely and the parasitized bees tend to stay underground.

The most likely cause may simply be down to birds. Insects make tasty morsels for many birds—they may simply have been dining very well."

Quick tip from our local Community Park Manager. Drink your cans of drink first, put them on the ground (on their side) and then put your disposable barbecue on the cans. This will avoid singeing and burning the grass. Then take it all home with you when you are finished!

Start making your preparations and packing your picnic! It's time for Music on the Hill again. This year we are delighted to be welcoming the South Gloucestershire Youth Jazz Orchestra who will be entertaining us on Saturday 30th June from 6 pm. If the weather is anything like last year, we are certain of a very enjoyable evening. This year, it's completely free, although we will be having a raffle and waving buckets for donations to help cover our costs. We look forward to seeing you there.

The wheelchair path, originally funded by the Yanley & North Somerset Environment Company (YANSEC), is finally finished. It is already being used by people who have not been able to fully enjoy the Hill until now. Some of you do not like it, but please give it time to blend in. It will take time for the sides to grow properly and for the cleared areas on the Hill to re-grow the Broom and Heather. Meanwhile, we continue selectively to discourage the Bramble!

BRERC, and FoTH, are organising some flora and fauna training workshops, funded by the Lottery. Subjects covered will include plants, birds, invertebrates, heath land and a pond visit at Eastwood Farm. Places are filling up fast, so if you want to join in, contact Susan (see below).



CONTACT US

If you'd like to talk to us about any issues raised here, please contact:

Susan Acton-Campbell (Chair), Tel. **0117 947 5037**.

Sally Oldfield (Bristol Council Nature in the City),

Tel. **0117 922 4429**

The appearance of the first cut for the new wheelchair path caused much concern amongst Friends of Troopers Hill. It seemed, at first, that despite all our efforts and discussions with the council, a path totally unrecognisable as the one agreed to was about to be put in place. Friends were extremely put out. The online Forum, which has recently seen considerable activity, was fairly buzzing with angry and indignant comments. It seemed as though the Bristol Parks Department had taken the future of the Hill completely out of our hands after all the efforts we have been making over the last three years.

On the other side of the coin, the Parks Department folks, who it turns out monitor our Forum with close interest, felt extremely hurt at some of the comments made and the implications of thoughtlessness. In fact, they have been working flat out to plan the work that has been carried out and get it done in time for the Green Flag judgement. They felt they were now being unfairly criticised after all their efforts. Things were exacerbated by the fact that although they would have liked to post replies on the Forum, they are unable to do so as they would be seen as speaking on behalf of the Council.

Rob, our work party organiser and chief architect of the Management Plan, moved quickly to raise our concerns. As a result, all work was instantly stopped until further consultations had been carried out. Meetings with Bristol Parks were held, both on site and at council offices. A way forward was found by slightly reshaping the path and the work has now been satisfactorily completed. These meetings are now going to continue on a regular basis to try and avoid any repetition of the misunderstandings and upset caused by this incident.

Lessons have been learnt on both sides and we feel we now have a much stronger partnership with Bristol Parks. We are all working towards the same aims and understand each other's point of view and responsibility better.

We would like to make plain our appreciation of the people managing and carrying out the work that is currently taking place. We feel we are seeing a real commitment from Bristol City Council now and are confident that this commitment and effort is going to continue. The application for a Green Flag Award shows that Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve has been recognised as one of the best wildlife sites in Bristol. All the work being carried out is aimed at keeping it that way.

You can also write to us at: **3, Corkers Hill, St. George, Bristol, BS5 8DT**

Email:

chair@troopers-hill.org.uk or Sally.oldfield@bristol.gov.uk

Or go to the online forum at:

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/forum.html>

Crews Hole Revenge

Back in the far-off days of 1938 I was packed off in the summer holidays to stay with my grandparents who lived in a semi-country area to the south of Birmingham. Fields, a stream and river to fall into and a sheep dog to come with me on my expeditions and long summer days that were always sunny—or so it seemed. I was normally put on the Royal Blue coach which would drop me off just at the end of their road but in '38 I was considered old enough to go on the train which in those days was of course pulled by a steam locomotive and was the L.M.S. railway which, like the lines on which it ran out of Temple Meads, no longer exists.

The change in my mode of travel was very fortunate and I can't imagine the disaster that would have befallen me had it not been made !

My journey was for a Sunday and on the day before as per most Saturdays, my "gang" and I set out along the river towpath headed for Trooper's Hill and Conham to do all the sort of things that 11 year-old boys do: climb trees, explore overgrown tracks, filch the odd apple or two from some unfortunate's orchard. Netham was still a mostly functioning factory in those days and loaded materials and products on to barges just before and just after the lock gates at the end of the Feeder Canal. The loading about 300 yards after the locks was by a couple (or was it three ?) steam cranes which were mounted on archways over the towpath and were about opposite to the beginning of the Board Mills on the opposite side of the river.

It was a very hot afternoon and when we reached a point about level with The Lamb, we noticed that the strip of land between the towpath and the road had a whole group of Elderberry trees which were loaded with berries and which we got stuck into with complete abandon. They were rather like blackcurrants and went down very well. Someone said that wine could be made from them so we discussed whether we might get drunk - not being very wise on such things as this was well before our drinking days !

The rest of the afternoon was spent in the usual ways and in due course we went home. In the morning I was awakened early by what, depending on where you are, is known variously as Montezuma's revenge, Delhi Belly, Mbeya Quick-step etc., etc. It was an all out attack and how I got through the trip to Temple Meads I don't know. Needless to say I couldn't reveal my problem else I would have been in the biggest of trouble, tickets having been bought, arrangements made and the point of no return long reached !

I was very glad of the facilities available in corridor trains and a very subdued grandson met his grandma at New St. station. It took a couple of days to fully recover so my advice to all who find elderberries is to make wine with 'em but
DO NOT EAT 'EM .

Dick Best, Fiji

Nature in the City Events.

Contact Sally Oldfield for further details.

Friday 1st June: Through the Seasons Walk. One of four short and relaxed guided walks introducing the history and wildlife of the Hill.

Thursday 30th August: Aero-Bat-ics, Join us on Troopers Hill, looking and listening for bats!

Friday 7th September: Through the Seasons Walk. The third of the series of four short and relaxed guided walks introducing the history and wildlife of the Hill.

Troopers Hill—The Lizard Lounge!



Photo by Roger Parry

I hope you enjoy Roger's wonderful photo of 3 Common Lizards seen near the top of the Hill. The photo has excited a great deal of attention. This year has been a good year for sightings. Last

year I only saw one in early March. This year they seem to be enjoying sunbathing, particularly on logs or tree trunks. The photo shows 1 male and 2 female Common Lizards. The male is spotted.

We are lucky enough to have 2 of the 3 kinds of native lizards on Troopers Hill – the slow worm, which is a legless lizard and the Common Lizard.

The Hill is a great source of food for Common Lizards and provides lots of cover. They mainly eat insects, their larvae and spiders. Lizards in turn make a tasty morsel for some birds, badgers, foxes and household cats. They do have the handy escape mechanism of being able to drop their tails and eventually grow a new one.

Common Lizards deliver their young in sacs, anything up to 10 at a time. This gives them their other name Viviparous (bringing forth young in a live state) Lizards. They hibernate from October and start to appear again in March. They mate during April and May and about three months later the young are born from June to September. It takes almost two years for the male to become adult. Their lifespan is about 6 years.

A little known fact is that the males have two sets of sexual organs, but only use one at a time.

While the Common Lizard is not endangered we and BRERC (Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre) would be interested to hear details of when, where and what sex of lizard you have seen. So, we would be very grateful if you would either send those details to us, or record the details on the online form at:

http://www.brerc.org.uk/recording/online_form.htm

Susan Acton-Campbell

Dates for your Diary

Saturday 2nd June: Work Party. 10am– midday. Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Road and Greendown. Please come and help us.

Evening Work Party: 21st June. 7pm—8.30 pm approx. Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Rod and Greendown. Followed by a midsummer drink on the Hill?

Saturday 30th June : Music on the Hill from 6pm. A summer evening of music on Troopers Hill, provided by the South Gloucestershire Youth Jazz Orchestra. Bring a picnic.

Saturday 7th July: Work Party. 10am– midday. Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Road and Greendown.

Thursday 12th July: Meeting. 7.15 pm. Wesley Memorial Church Hall, Bryant's Hill.