

Troopers Hill – A Wildlife Web

An exclusive for the St George & Redfield Voice – the Purse Web spider, *Atypus affinis*, has been recorded for the first time on Troopers Hill. The identification was thanks to one of our volunteers, a local resident who is studying at the University of West of England (UWE). She had recently completed a study of spiders and found a juvenile spider on her jumper as she walked through Troopers Hill. She had it classified, has recorded it with the Bristol Regional Environmental Recording Centre and passed on the news to us.

This particular spider has suffered a drop in population nationally but we are delighted to say that Troopers Hill provides its ideal habitat. It likes to burrow into loose soil under young heather, leaving most of its tubular web underground and disguising the web that is above ground by scattering loose soil over it. These spiders take 4 years to reach sexual maturity and may live as long as eight years. They eat beetles, bees, earwigs and woodlice. In its turn it is prey for the nationally scarce spider hunting wasp, *Aporus unicolor*, which uses it as a host for its larvae, which eat the paralysed spider. This wasp was found on Troopers Hill in surveys carried out by David Gibbs in 2006 and 2007.

Quoting from the Spider and Harvestman Recording Scheme website “The spider is vulnerable... without management to control scrub” it “will disappear”. Controlling scrub is exactly what Friends of Troopers volunteers do at their monthly work parties, more volunteers are always needed and very welcome. Please come and join us. Details of how to do so are at the end of this article.

Moving on from a creature that may be declining to one that seems to making a recovery, we were delighted at our Dawn Chorus Walk, last month, to hear the wheezy tones of the greenfinch. Our expert guide, Ed Drewitt, explained that a particularly nasty disease, Trichomonosis, that affects the birds’ ability to swallow food, had been killing them. However this year they seem to be making a comeback. We have been delighted to hear them every day on the Hill.

Ed gave us some good advice on how we can continue to help with this recovery. If you find a dead bird near your bird feeders please stop putting out food for at least 3 weeks and clean out all your bird feeders and tables. This will help control the spread of disease.

We hope you enjoy this photo of a very healthy looking greenfinch, feeding in Crews Hole not far from Troopers Hill. The photo was taken by Lee Gardiner who you can follow on Twitter as @wildwood_photos.

As promised here is how you can come and help the wildlife of Troopers Hill. **There is a conservation work party on the 1st Saturday and 3rd Thursday of every month, starting promptly at 10am and finishing at noon.**



Meet the volunteers at the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.