

Autumn on Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

The birdnesting season comes to an end as we move into autumn. This means more conservation work can be done. The conservation work on Troopers Hill of the highest importance involves cutting back scrub from areas where it is invading and destroying the important acid grassland and heathland. The open areas provide a very important habitat for hundreds of invertebrates, some of which are endangered species. Even areas that are completely bare of vegetation are important as they provide nesting sites for some of the species found on Troopers Hill, including a range of mining bees. The ideal for these species are bare patches of ground with plenty of nearby suitable flowers from which to collect pollen and nectar.

At the Friends of Troopers Hill early September conservation work party, volunteers were lucky enough to see Heather Colletes bees (*Colletes succinctus*) nesting in a groove in the soil and rock, flying back and forth from nearby heather flowers. These are solitary bees but they live in large colonies, each bee digging its own nest in south-facing earth banks. This behaviour is a little like huge colonies of seabirds nesting together on cliffs. The majority of bees are solitary bees with just male and female bees. Only bumble bees and 7 species of bee in the *Apis* (honey bee) genus are social, with queens, workers and male bees.



By the end of October most of the solitary bees will have died, leaving their eggs and grubs developing in their nests. The new bumblebee queens will overwinter, hibernating in north-facing banks and from spring onwards will start looking for nest sites in which to lay their eggs and start rearing the first 16 worker bees that will help to establish their nests.

Another kind of life will become more obvious in October. Fungi (mushrooms and toadstools) are present all year round but more fruiting bodies become visible above ground through September to November. Troopers Hill's acid conditions mean it is a good habitat for waxcap fungi some of which are vivid reds, brilliant yellows and snowy white. Friends of Troopers Hill will be making bookings available in early October for a fungi foray to take place in November, led by experts John and Doreen Bailey of the North Somerset and Bristol Fungus Group.

Also in November Friends of Troopers Hill will meet with Bristol City Council officers and agree conservation work for the winter. All the work will follow the recommendations of the conservation management plan for the site. Thanks to National Lottery players and money remaining from a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, outside contractors can be hired to do work in addition to the limited amount that Bristol City Council can resource. About one third of Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve's open grass and heathland area has been lost to scrub and woodland since 1946, reducing the site's ecological value.

Volunteers are always needed at conservation work parties, throughout the year. **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.**