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# The Friends of Troopers Hill

*Broom Edition.*

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# The Hill

Summer 2009



As well as our concert on Saturday 20th June, from 5 pm there will be a display showing design ideas for possible improved play facilities on Troopers Hill Field. A consultation process has been taking place and this is a further chance for you to have your say. So, come along and have a look. It will be too late once any changes are in place! The plans will also be available for viewing on our website from Monday 22nd June.

**Tony Oscar**, the "giant dragonfly" that made an appearance at last year's Trooping the Hill made off at the time causing much puzzlement when we went back to collect him. The mystery was solved recently when he was discovered hiding in the woods. He had obviously been hibernating and apparently came out to play with the kids who use the swing rope attached to one of the trees. His reappearance enabled us to dispose of the plastic bottles and wire he was made of properly.

We have recently had several young people from Cabot's Academy building some steps in the woods on the "DOE" path. They have been doing this as part of their Duke of Edinburgh Award and a very cheerful bunch they are too. They have needed to be. Some thoughtful soul recently pulled up and destroyed the whole lot! This was not, we think, the work of bored kids. This seems to have been the work of some anonymous spoilsport determined to undo any changes, no matter what they are. There is a place for people to air their views if they think things are not being done for the best and that place is at our meetings — or on the Forum. If you know who did this, you may like to encourage them to come along and tell us why—details of our meeting are on the back page. Meanwhile, the DOE students are stoical and have simply started rebuilding the steps.

The work on the corner of Greendown and Troopers Hill Road is to replace the old wooden fence and gate with new metal estate fencing. The altered path is to improve safety entering and leaving the reserve. Funding was raised by FOTH last year as part of a specific project and does not involve the funding — which is the Council's — for any play improvements on Troopers Hill Field. So there.

Rob and Susan very much appreciate your phone calls but sometimes they do go away on holiday. If it is anything urgent that needs fixing on Troopers Hill then please do call Bristol Parks on 0117 922 3719 Mon to Fri 8.30am - 5pm (4.30pm Fri) - there is no message service outside these hours. By all means ring Rob and Susan as well. Obviously if there is any criminal activity dial 999 or contact the police for non-emergency issues on 0845 456 7000.

Music on the Hill

A green graphic featuring a stylized hill shape with three musical notes floating above it.

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June 6.00pm

A summer evening of music on Troopers Hill.

Join the Friends of Troopers Hill with music provided by the Bristol Concert Wind Band

Bring a picnic and drinks to enjoy the wonderful views over Bristol from the top of Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve while listening to great music. We recommend that you bring blankets or cushions to sit on.

**Please respect our Nature Reserve by not bringing disposable BBQs since they damage the grassland.**

[www.troopers-hill.org.uk](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk)

Troopers Hill is the only area of acid heathland in the Bristol Council area and broom is rarely seen elsewhere in the city. This may not always have been so, especially in the wider Bristol Area. A study of the A-Z for the area reveals the following. There is (confusingly) Broom Hill in South Bristol, and Broom-hill in North Bristol, not forgetting Bromley Heath (Bromley and Bramley can mean a clearing in a broom wood or a field of broom). We have Bramley Close, Court and Drive, and The Bramleys. Also, Bromley Drive and Road, Bromley Heath Avenue and Road. Lastly, Broom Farm Close, Broomfield Walk, and Broomground.

## The Ballad "Green Broom" (trad.)

The story is that a broom cutter has a lazy son. The boy is prompted to go and cut broom and finds it very saleable; eventually he marries a satisfied customer.

*"There was an old man and he lived in the West,  
And his trade was a-cutting of broom, green broom;  
He had but one son and his name it was John,  
And he lied abed till 'twas noon, bright noon.*

*The old man arose and to his son goes,  
And swore he'd set fire to his room, his room,  
If he would not rise and unbutton his eyes,  
And away to the woods for green broom, green broom.*

*Then Jack he did rise and did sharpen his knives,  
And he went to the woods cutting broom, green broom;  
To market and fair, crying everywhere:  
O fair maids, do you want any broom, green broom?*

*A lady sat up in her window so high,  
And she heard Johnny crying green broom, green broom;  
She rang for her maid and unto her she said:  
O go fetch me that lad that cries broom, green broom.*

*Then John he came back, and upstairs he did go,  
And he entered that fair lady's room, her room,  
Dear Johnny, said she, O can you fancy me,  
Will you marry a lady in bloom, in bloom?*

*Then John gave his consent, and unto the church went,  
And married this lady in bloom, in bloom,  
Said she: I protest there is none in the West  
Is so good as the lad who sells broom, green broom."*

## Interesting Facts about Broom

1. The ancient Celts regarded broom as a magic shrub, that fairies often spoke from.
2. Broom belongs to the pea family (aka Fabaceae/Leguminosae) which also includes the garden pea, sweet pea, laburnum, clover, vetches and gorse.
3. In common with other plants of the pea family, broom has a symbiotic relationship with certain soil bacteria that form nodules on the roots and fix atmospheric nitrogen. Some of this nitrogen is taken up by the growing plant but some can also be used by other plants growing nearby.
4. Broom flowers have a characteristic five petalled structure – a 'standard' petal which sticks up at the rear, a pair of side or 'wing' petals and a pair that form the 'keel'.



5. Typically broom flowers are golden yellow, but variations occur. Those on Troopers Hill display at least fifteen listed colour variations, from all-cream



flowers, through combinations of gold, lemon and even pink-flushed standards with cream, gold, lemon, orange, blood-red, rust or tan wing petals.

6. Broom flowers have a strong bitter smell. Fortunately this does not discourage the bees that pollinate them. The weight of the bees landing on the keel causes the stamens and pistil (male and female parts) to be exposed. The bees travel from flower to flower taking the pollen with them.
7. The broom plant is not self-fertile, that is, each one needs pollen from another plant to produce seeds.
8. Broom seed pods are hairy.
9. The dried seeds may be ground and used as an addition to, or substitute for, coffee.
10. The flower buds are listed as edible, either added to salads or pickled and used as a substitute for capers. Be aware, though that the plant may be mildly toxic if taken in large quantities.
11. Note to home brewers: it is possible to use the tender green tops of broom as you would hops, to give a bitter flavour to beer and, reputedly, make it more intoxicating.
12. Fibre from broom plants may be used for making paper, cloth and nets. The fibre is obtained by steaming the stems.
13. Broom bark yields a yellow and a brown dye. A yellow dye may be had from the flowering stems and the young tops and leaves give a green dye.
14. Broom has multiple other uses including thatching, fence rows and cattle fodder. The woody plant was once used for tanning leather and the old wood for veneering.
15. Broom is a native European shrub. Where it has been introduced to parts of Australasia and North and South America, it has become of environmental concern due to its invasiveness.

## One for Sorrow, Two for Joy?

The Magpie (*Pica pica*), the subject of the rhyme and suspected black and white avian vandal, seems to have become somewhat more numerous this year. Opinions about the birds themselves tend to be simple — you either love them or you hate them. Their raucous arguing wakes you up in the morning, but their silly antics can amuse you for hours.

**W**e are not alone in having divided feelings about magpies, since even wildlife charities are unable to agree about their desirability. Some, such as "Songbird Survival" and the "Countryside Alliance" consider them vicious marauders and claim they snatch chicks and eggs from nests and are having a devastating impact on our songbird population.

**O**thers, such as the RSPB and the RSPCA defend them and are endeavouring to prevent the mass culling of thousands of the birds. They claim that intensive farming practices are more the cause of the apparent loss of songbirds, rather than magpies. Their surveys indicate that although there was a huge increase in the magpie population from 1970 to the mid 1990s, it has stabilised since then.

**D**uring the bird breeding season, many people think they have a right to trap and kill magpies. However, if they do they face a fine of up to £5000 or six months in prison. Supporters of Songbird Survival, a charity set up to save the dawn chorus, believe that it their duty to keep magpie numbers down to save other species such as song thrushes, starlings and house sparrows. The law does allow them to do so for "purposes of bird conservation".

**H**owever a spokesman for the RPSB, David Hoccom, recently said that they urge everyone to leave magpies alone, not least because there is a risk of causing suffering to the birds if the public attempt to catch and kill them. The RSCPA has said it is prepared to bring a prosecution against anyone being cruel to magpies.

**P**enelope Elliott, a retired nurse from Devon, says she has been culling around twenty-five magpies every year for the past five years. "It's definitely had a positive impact and we now have more wrens, finches and blackbirds."

**N**ick Forde, a trustee of the Songbird Survival charity, insists "There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence that a magpie can go down a whole hedgerow taking out every songbird nest....I don't like harming animals, but if they are destroying our biodiversity then we have to take

action. But trapping and killing must be done humanely and properly."

**N**ot surprisingly, the Countryside Alliance are concerned to protect pheasant and partridge chicks. "We would encourage people to help manage the magpie population. Gamekeepers have long known that magpies have a detrimental effect on wild bird breeding success." said their spokesman Tim Bonner. "The RSPB carries out corvid control on its own reserves and should be encouraging,



not discouraging, the trapping of magpies for the sake of songbirds."

**B**ill Hookey, who lives in Surrey, noticed an increase in magpies and how they attacked blue tits when they emerged from their nesting boxes. Reducing the numbers of the predators was the solution he decided on and has since been culling about 14 every year. He claims he has observed a threefold increase of green finches and a return of song thrushes. "My observations have shown how effective these predators are and, in the interests of allowing songbirds to nest, it is essential to reduce the numbers."

Source: The Times.

**T**he Friends of Troopers Hill do not endorse the "killing or taking" of any wildlife whatsoever. This article is merely to illustrate the differing opinions on such matters and we do not advocate any of the views given. However, we would be very interested in knowing your opinions. There is now a poll taking place on our Forum. You have to register with the forum first (if you haven't already) but then you can vote on the statement: "The increase in the number of magpies is reducing the wildlife in my garden" by going here:

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/discuss.htm>

## Jules's Diary

Hello Troopers.

**R**egime Change is an idea that appears to float in and out of fashion. Quite popular at the moment it would seem, either calling for or undergoing, though rarely popular then. There have been a couple (at least) in Bristol recently and elsewhere in these pages no doubt there will be an update on one of the more popular ones, though two lines from, perhaps, Pete Townsend's best penning occasionally come to mind. No. Not "I can see for miles" though that is pertinent to The Hill as visitors will know, especially on clear days. A 'breath of fresh air', get plenty of those on the top! I was enjoying several the other day, wandering around with my bag and litter-picker, and contemplating personal regime change. Maybe I should learn or rather re-learn to dance. This was inspired by two buzzards that had launched themselves from the woods alongside Troopers Hill Field. Making lazy circles in the sky they rose high enough to catch a really strong current and so just hung there for a while matching wing with airspeed. Then, dipping and soaring. they seemed to be dancing with each other and the wind shrugging off the niggling crows who just couldn't keep up with their aerial agility. How lucky to be able to enjoy such sights in a city! Heather Small's voice drifted across from the van stereo: "I step out of the ordinary, I can feel my soul ascending..." For an exceedingly brief nanosecond the thought 'and I get paid for this!' flitted across my mind. But, like the buzzards, it was quickly 'Gone with the Wind' as I emptied the Dog-Bin. Which reminds me... When you spot me around, if you need any of those little bags for picking up you know what give me a shout. I've always got some in the truck.

## ABC of Troopers Hill

**B** is for Broom. Flowering from April to June, the yellow Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) is a stunningly attractive feature of Troopers Hill. The plant is native to Britain. In the past, as its name suggests, its branches were gathered and used to make sweeping brushes. The large bright yellow flowers have a great attraction for bees, they contain no nectar, but an abundance of pollen. They are succeeded by oblong, flattened seed pods which blacken as they mature. They burst with a sharp report when the seeds are ripe flinging them to a distance with a twisting action. On a fine summer day on the Hill, you can hear a continuous popping sound as the pods crack open in the warmth of the sun. Friends of Troopers Hill foster the growth of Broom, where appropriate, by removing overgrown bramble that competes with the Broom for light, space and water.

## Friends of Troopers Hill: Dates for your Diary

**Saturday 20th June: Music On The Hill.** From 6pm. *A summer evening of music on Troopers Hill, provided by the Bristol Concert Wind Band. Bring a picnic and relax.*

**Saturday 4th July: **Work Party**.** 10 am—midday. Meet at corner of Troopers Hill Road and Greendown. *Come along and help us look after the nature on Troopers Hill. Then join us for a cup of coffee and some relaxing conversation.*

**Sunday 12th July: Tai Chi on the Hill.** 10—11.30 am. *Join the Bristol School of Tai Chi for some gentle exercise. No experience is necessary and there is no charge. Meet at the end of Malvern Road.*

**Tuesday 14th July: **Meeting**.** 7.15—9 pm. Wesley Memorial Church Hall, Bryants Hill. *Come along and share your views with us. We don't bite!*

**Sunday 26th July: **Tai Chi on the Hill**.** As 12th July.

**Saturday 1st August: **Work Party**.** As 4th July.

**Sunday 2nd August: **Tai Chi on the Hill**.** As 12th July.

**Saturday 8th August: Family Fun Picnic and Bugs & Beasties Hunt.** 3 pm onwards. *Fun for all the family. Rupert Higgins will lead the hunt for some of the Hill's smaller inhabitants.*

**Sunday 9th August: **Tai Chi on the Hill**.** As 12th July.

**Saturday 5th September: **Work Party**.** As 4th July.

**Sunday 6th September: **History Walk**.** 10 am. *A guided walk to explore Troopers Hill and learn about the history of the Hill and the surrounding area. Booking essential.*

**Wednesday 9th September: **Meeting**.** As 14th July.

## Contacts

If you'd like to talk to us, please contact:

**Susan Acton-Campbell** (Chair),

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You can also write to us at: **3, Corkers Hill,  
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Email:

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Or go to the online forum at:

[http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/  
forum.html](http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/forum.html)

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