

Britain in Bloom South West Pride in Parks Award 2018

Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Author: Susan Acton-Campbell, Chair, Friends of Troopers Hill, 19th June, 2018

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve in St George, east Bristol, extending over 21 acres (8.4 hectares) of acid heath and grassland on a pennant sandstone hillside overlooking the River Avon. This wild and romantic site supports rare plants and wildlife and provides local people with a space for relaxation and recreation.

This document takes the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces Assessment criteria and gives evidence of how those criteria are met by Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve.

1. Community

In the 14 years of Friends of Troopers Hill's existence we have held over 137 events, excluding conservation work parties and Walking for Health walks. We have raised over £180,000 for works and activities on Troopers Hill. This makes the site attractive for further investment by grant funders and encourages Bristol City Council, the landowner, to use their resources to follow the Troopers Hill conservation management plan. The Friends work in close partnership with Bristol City Council.

We only undertake projects that have a high level of backing from the local community. Our latest project, Ways to Nature, www.troopers-hill.org.uk/waystonature/ started with a consultation in 2017. This resulted in an enquiry to the Heritage Lottery Fund, followed by a full application in 2018 for £44,800 under the "Our Heritage" scheme. We have succeeded in this bid. This funding will pay for fencing and gates to replace the existing rotting fences and gates that are the only thing keeping out motorbikes. It will also cover £10,000 of conservation work following the recommendations of a new conservation management plan funded by the grant, an invertebrates survey and guided walks and activities in 2019, including 4 outdoor education sessions for adults with learning difficulties.

When we have news of the success of this application we will work closely with local councillors to make the best case possible for money to be allocated from developers' contributions to Bristol City Council. This money would be used as match-funding to apply to a landfill trust for a grant to pay for the £75,000 of work on paths, also part of the Ways to Nature project. The paths would greatly benefit a wide section of the community including people with mobility issues and families with children in buggies to access the Hill all year round. It would also improve access for Bristol City Council vehicles emptying dog bins and carrying out routine maintenance such as grass-cutting.

This year, thanks to funding from the Nineveh Charitable Trust and the hard work of Bristol Natural Learners we are able to host 14 free Wild Play pre-school outdoor education sessions, 8 school holiday family activity sessions and 3 outdoor education sessions for schools.

A local company approached us in winter 2017 asking us if we would like to raise funds for a defibrillator near Troopers Hill if they contributed half the cost and provided the site. We are now very close to meeting the funding target, thanks to local people and businesses.

<http://tinyurl.com/crewsholedefib>

The Friends hold 5 or 6 meetings a year, locally advertised and open to all, to discuss plans for the future and review what has been done. We work very closely with the landowners, Bristol City Council.

A free emailing list is maintained and updates sent to our followers. We have moved on from having a paper newsletter and instead publish a monthly article in the free St George & Redfield Voice local paper that is distributed to 7,500 local homes. Links to the articles we have published are on <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/newsletter.htm>

The Friends of Troopers Hill maintain an informative and regularly updated website www.troopers-hill.org.uk plus "@troopershill" Twitter and Facebook pages. Leaflets about Troopers Hill are distributed at local public events www.troopers-hill.org.uk/leaflets/index.htm and at Hill events. The Friends also make use of display boards at events to showcase aspects of the Hill and the activities there. There are clip frames on welcoming signs at the Hill's entrances that are used to promote forthcoming events and activities.

A record of all volunteer conservation work parties on Troopers Hill is maintained on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/workp.htm and links are posted on Facebook and Twitter. The work parties are held monthly, on the 1st Saturday and 3rd Thursday. Children accompanied by responsible adults are particularly welcome. The drinks and biscuits time at the end of a work party are another opportunity for sharing news and feedback on possible plans.

Funding has been found to pay for ParkWork <http://www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/> to carry out conservation work on Troopers Hill for ½ a day a month. This scheme provides training and skills development for those people needing additional support to secure permanent employment. Volunteers from the general public can also come to these sessions which are on the morning of the 3rd Thursday of the month.

Our most recently completed project, to provide a children's play area on the flat playing field at the top of Troopers Hill, attracted a lot of local support. We raised over £80,000 to fund this project which is described on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/play/. Since the play area opened in October 2016 we have seen larger numbers of families, particularly with young children, visiting the Hill and in addition to the young boys that were already seen on the Hill we now have visits from more girls.

Our free events are made as varied as possible to appeal to many tastes while always carrying the message of the importance of the site and the need to care for it. These range from guided walks, "Bugs and Beasties hunts" with naturalists to identify the finds, to looking at the night skies with the Bristol Astronomical Society and open air picnics with a band providing music. Details of future and records of all our previous events can be accessed via <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/events.htm>.

The Bristol Astronomical Society (BAS) supported the site to receive a "Dark Sky Discovery Site" designation www.troopers-hill.org.uk/DarkSky/ meaning that this is a good place to visit for star and planet watching, relatively protected from light pollution and with a good horizon. BAS work with us providing an annual winter star gazing event and a solar observation session in August.

Links have been established with local primary schools resulting in the "Fun Learning Trails" so many visits can be self-managed by schools www.troopers-hill.org.uk/FunLearning/. For the last 2 years we have been asked to lead students from Bristol City College to explain our conservation management methods; Bridgwater College actually hire a coach to come here every year to look our conservation management because Troopers Hill is a case study in their "A" Level text books. We are working on links with the University of the West of England as a resource to provide guided geological walks. University of Bristol Biological Sciences course students come here to carry out their projects and we share in their results.

We are particularly proud of our audio trail, put together by our volunteer Kit Elliott, a professional cameraman and sound recordist, which makes Troopers Hill come alive even to those who cannot visit it or see it.

The accessibility of Troopers Hill, by virtue of its rugged nature, is limited but is to the level approved of by the Bristol Physical Access Chain, a local group who assess accessibility. We were delighted to follow their suggestions to improve and add to signage along the wheelchair accessible route. We are working to improve the wheelchair access route (see page 1)

Details of all Troopers Hill trails, which also include a tree trail and a woodland trail, can be downloaded via www.troopers-hill.org.uk/trails.

In 2015 we improved access to Troopers Hill woodland by paying for materials to add steps to a path leading from an informal parking area on Crews Hole Rd to the woodland adjacent to the Local Nature Reserve. The work has been done by young people participating in the ParkWork project www.bristolparksforum.org.uk/parkwork/. This year, thanks to funding from the Avon & Frome Partnership 13 wooden trail markers have been made and will be installed soon. In addition the same funding paid for 3 days of conservation work, opening up an overgrown track linking the woodland and the nature reserve and clearing invasive buddleia and some of the weaker hawthorn to provide a healthier ecological balance in the woodland.

Our group has been awarded a level of "Outstanding" in the RHS "It's Your Neighbourhood" scheme for the years 2012-17. A summary of our aims and achievements on Troopers Hill for the year summer 2017- summer 2018, produced for the IYN judge can be read on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/achievements2018.pdf.

2. Maintenance and Development

All work on Troopers Hill follows the 5-year management plan 2012-2017 www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm developed for the site by Bristol City Council in partnership with Friends of Troopers Hill. This plan is due for review and we have applied for funding for this as described on page 1. This plan links to the relevant sections of the UK and Bristol Biodiversity Action Plans. The latter is supported by bodies including Bristol City Council, Avon Wildlife Trust and Natural England. Regular photographic and species surveys are funded by Bristol Parks and ourselves, and/or are performed by students as part of their studies. The site achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14 when Bristol City Council stopped applying as they had no staff resource to support the process.

In accordance with the Management Plan maintenance of the site aims to balance the use of the site for recreation while protecting its natural beauty and its diversity. For example, while vegetation is cut back from paths to keep them clear this is not carried out too vigorously and it is accepted that occasionally visitors may have to brush past taller vegetation. The aim is for the site to be accessible but to look natural.

The role of Community Park Keeper disappeared within Bristol City Council towards the end of 2014. The Friends of Troopers Hill have worked closely with the Parks team to ensure that good quality maintenance has continued, following the Site Management Plan, under the new structure. We are extremely pleased with the provision of resource in these difficult times but we are concerned. We have recently been told that the annual cutting of bracken, part of the conservation management to prevent the spread of bracken into the acid heathland will not be able to be done by usual Bristol Parks team, due to staff shortages. Alternative arrangements are being made and we hope they will be sufficient. Similarly we have been told the annual meadow cut carried out in the area of land on the Greendown has not been included in Bristol City Council's tender and an arrangement is being worked on whereby Parks will cut the meadow and the arisings will be raked up by volunteers sourced by the Avon Wildlife Trust.

We have been particularly pleased to not only have Parks staff and our volunteers carrying out conservation management work on Troopers but also Community Payback teams. Offenders have been particularly useful in clearing part of a large area of gorse.

Work is needed on the south-east boundary fencing and entrances to prevent future motorcycle access. Consultation has shown that a new path is needed on Troopers Hill Field to improve access in the winter months for walkers, wheelchair users and those pushing children's buggies. In addition existing wheelchair access paths that are degrading need resurface and a track used for access by parks vehicle needs improvement and surfacing. All these issues are being addressed by the Ways to Nature project, as described on page 1 of this document.

3. Environment

Litter and dog waste bins on the site are emptied twice weekly by the Parks staff. All entrances had a dog waste bin. Much litter is picked up by visitors to the Hill, particularly dog walkers. Other litter picking is done by Parks staff and the Friends. Cuttings from work parties were either concealed to compost at a location onsite or placed in one-ton sacks for collection by Parks staff at contractors' entrances. However this year we have struck up a relationship with a group called Street Goat who have a milking parlour and shed for a small number of goats in the allotments next door to our site. Goats love most of the cuttings we create so Street Goat members are helping on our work parties and taking most of the cuttings away with them to feed the goats.

Graffiti is addressed promptly but is rare. Police are advised. The Friends have graffiti removal spray provided by the Parks Department so we do not have to wait for Council staff to attend if it is a simple task. Where it is more complex we use Bristol City Council's online graffiti reporting system where usually graffiti is removed within 3 working days.

As a Local Nature Reserve the amount of "furniture"/clutter has to be limited to be in keeping with the site, a view supported by local people. There are welcoming signs on every entrance and a number of interpretation boards. Up to date leaflets on the history, geology, wildlife and events

of the site are available in paper and electronic form. Seats are available at the top of each section of steep path.

We were delighted in April 2017 when Bristol Parks Byelaws were introduced. There is now a sign on every entrance saying what is permitted, when permission has to be obtained and what is not permitted. We are very pleased that, thanks to our reports of the impact of fires, Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve is the only council-owned green space in Bristol where barbecues are completely banned. The message does seem to be working and we explain why on our website <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/visiting/NoBBQs.htm>

In common with most green spaces dog fouling and dog control are issues, but audits carried out by our volunteers actually show the Local Nature Reserve itself has low levels of dog fouling, although a footpath in adjacent woodland is a "hot spot". We encourage good owner behaviour through signage, Facebook and Twitter postings and staged a 2015 Family Fun Dog Show at which we gave out free dog waste bags. We have worked with Bristol City Council's Dog Warden. More on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/clearUp/.

Good news gathered while going round paint spraying dog poo piles during our audit is that a number of dog owners not only pick up their own dog waste but other people's dog waste too.

Our group is proud that Troopers Hill was one of the sites visited in 2015 by David Notton, Senior Curator, Hymenoptera, of London's Natural History Museum, to collect bee specimens to create a DNA database for speedy identification of bee species. He identified 4 species that had not previously been recorded on Troopers Hill so as a result we now know the Hill provides a habitat for at least 77 bee species. He wrote, "It was great to visit a site which is so obviously valued and actively conserved".

4. Areas for improvement listed in last year's judging

1. To maintain this standard, further funding sources will be required as local authority spending decreases

Response: As an individual park group we are not in a position to take on the maintenance of a 20-acre site, nor can we successfully fundraise for maintenance. We will, while the space is maintained to what our members view as an acceptable standard, continue to provide the added value in terms of resource to address conservation issues and to find funding for capital projects. We are members of the Bristol Parks Forum and as part of a group of Bristol-wide park volunteer groups will lobby and investigate avenues by which parks can continue to be properly maintained.

2. A 'Local Memories' information board, drawing on local people's experiences of the area, would be an interesting addition

Response: We have 4 interpretation boards and hope to add a 5th on the subject of fungi and lichen, another special aspect of the site. We do have a strong mandate to avoid clutter on the site. There may be another way of addressing this as an art installation on Troopers Hill Field drawing attention to the Local Nature Reserve. It is on our list, after the fencing and paths to discuss options with the local community. An opportunity may have come about because a much-loved slide is now over 30 years old and nearing the end of its life. What replaces the slide could be a useful way to introduce the topic. We do have a memories page on our website <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/people.htm>

One of Troopers Hill's interpretation boards



Mining Coal and Mining Bees





Buzzard

Troopers Hill has long been at the heart of the local community. In past centuries, miners carved out a living from its rock and coal. Today, it is a much loved Local Nature Reserve with local people actively involved in helping to look after it.

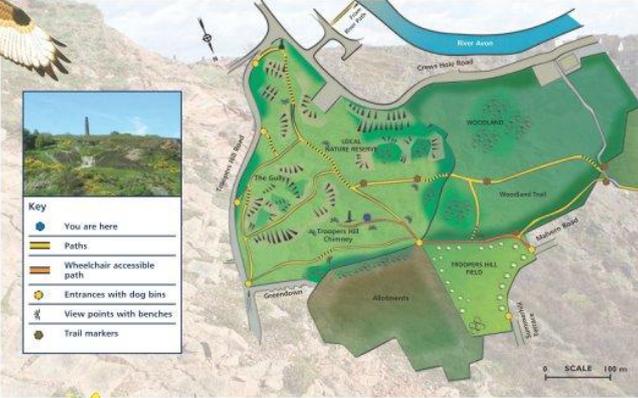
Lumps, bumps and dramatic drops

Troopers Hill has been mined, quarried, dug, and drilled in the search for coal, sandstone and fire clay. All this activity has left us with the dramatically shaped landscape you see here today.

A sooty smokestack

The chimney reminds us of what a busy industrial place this once was. It is thought to have been used by a copper smelting works near the river Avon in the late 1700s.

Welcome to Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve



Mining bees

Tiny mineshafts tunnelled by rare mining bees pepper the bare earth and sparse grassy areas. Keep an eye out for these unusual inhabitants as they disappear into their underground homes.

Getting around

We hope you enjoy exploring Troopers Hill today. Watch out for steep drops and please take your litter home with you. Dogs are welcome, but please remember to clean up after your dog.

Find out more

Please contact:
Bristol Parks www.bristol.gov.uk/parks
T: 0117 922 3719
Friends of Troopers Hill
www.troopers-hill.org.uk
Download an Audio Tour of Troopers Hill from www.troopers-hill.org.uk/audio



*Early mining bee
Bell heather
Heath bedstraw
Long winged conehead cricket*

*Yellow broom
Heather ling
Common lizard*

A blaze of colour

The hill is a blaze of colour in the summer months. Enjoy the carpets of purple heather and brilliant yellow flowers of the broom and gorse. An amazing twenty types of butterfly have been spotted here. Look out for common blues and marbled whites flitting about on sunny days.



*Common blue
Marbled white
Mouse eared hawkweed*

A fascinating mix of history and wildlife on your doorstep



Our play area – opened October 2016 after we raised £80,000





Bugs and Beasties Hunt

with expert Rupert Higgins
Saturday, 11th August, from 4pm
Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve

Bring a picnic

No Barbecues – Bristol Parks Byelaws



Craft activities with



Troopers Hill Wildlife



The ashy mining bee (*Andrena cineraria*) is regularly recorded on Troopers Hill. Photo taken April 2015. This bee has a cleptoparasite, *Nomada lathburiana* which is also regularly recorded on this site.

Lichen and fungi to be found on Troopers Hill - we are prouder of our waxcaps but the fly agaric does make a striking image

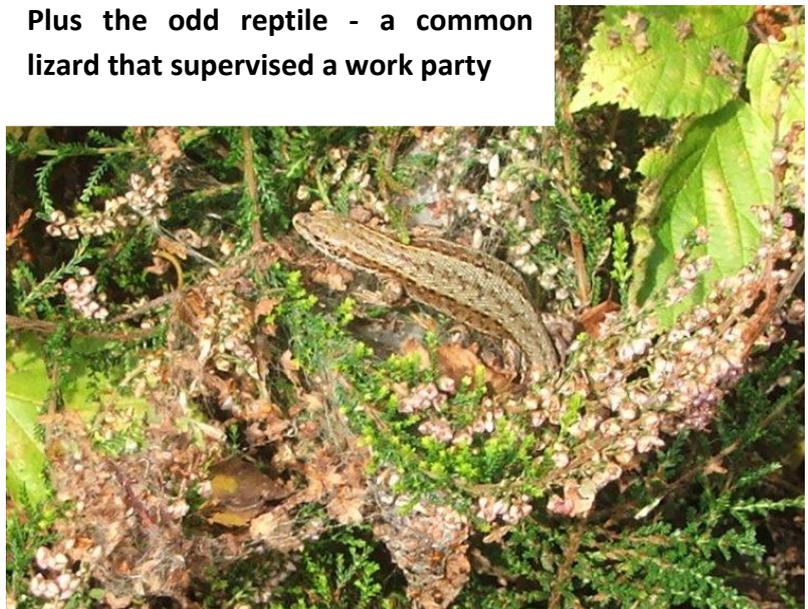


Talking deer ;-)



When are they going to replace that gate?

Plus the odd reptile - a common lizard that supervised a work party





Friends of
Troopers Hill

Saturday 2nd June, 10am-noon

Conservation Work Party

Help protect this very special area of grass and
heathland & feed the goats

Meet at the red slide on Troopers Hill field. We
supply tools, gloves, guidance on what to do and why

Find out more about what make Troopers Hill special
and help keep it that way



Free hot drinks, biscuits
and friendly chat to finish.

Volunteers from
Street Goat  will be
taking cuttings from our
work party to feed the

goats next door in The Farm Hill Allotments

For more information please visit

www.troopers-hill.org.uk/wp

or telephone Susan on 0117 947 5037

or email friends@troopers-hill.org.uk

www.troopers-hill.org.uk

FOLLOW @troopershill



Work Party of Saturday 2nd June, 2018

Objectives

2012 Management Plan Objectives for this work party		Compartment
6.2.2.9	Removal of all tree seedlings from grassland and heathland	3/4 & 9
6.2.2.10	Control bramble and scrub encroaching onto grassland and heathland	3/4 & 9



TROOPERS HILL

A Wildlife Web

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



Young purse web spider, Shelley McManmon

nationally, 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 four years to reach sexual maturity and may live as long as eight years. They eat beetles, bees, earwigs and woodlice. In 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. 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 at the Dawn Chorus Walk, last month,



Greenfinch, Lee Gardiner

we heard the wheezy tones of the greenfinch. Ed Drewitt, the guide for the event, 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.

Ed gave some good advice on how to continue to help with this recovery. If you find a dead bird near your bird feeders please stop putting out food for at least three 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.

There is a Friends of Troopers Hill conservation work party on the 1st Saturday and 3rd Thursday of every month, starting promptly at 10:00am and finishing at noon. Meet the volunteers at the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.