

Friends of Troopers Hill - It's Your Neighbourhood 2022

1. Aims of the Project

Troopers Hill is a Local Nature Reserve 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. Friends of Troopers Hill is a community conservation group of primarily local residents, formed in December 2003 to:

- provide a friendly community focus for people who care about Troopers Hill
- undertake practical conservation tasks
- organise public events, including walks and talks
- work with Bristol City Council Parks department to ensure Troopers Hill is properly managed.

Our constitution is at <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/constitutionF.pdf>

2. Achievements since the IYN judging of 2022

In addition to our usual activities (see section 3), we have

1) worked in partnership with Bristol City Council to ensure the completion of the project for which we raised £62,500 in funding to resurface the deteriorating wheelchair access paths and create a new path from the play area to make it easy for young families to access the Hill. This was partially completed in October 2020 creating a surfaced, circular route around Troopers Hill Field that had unexpected benefits. In addition to improved access the new "circuit" has turned into a training area for young children learning to ride bicycles and building their confidences on scooters and skateboards. The timing of this project was ideal allowing people more opportunities to access outdoor space during Covid restrictions, particularly during winter, when Troopers Hill Field turns into a quagmire.

The resurfacing of the final section of path, enabling improved access to Troopers Hill Local Nature Reserve, was completed in May 2022. Thanks to the generosity of a local family a new bench was installed as part of this project. For more information see

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm#THpath>

2) completed the £12,000 project to install a new slide with safety surfacing, replacing a much-loved 40 year old slide that had come to the end of its life in 2019. Details of the project on

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/field.htm#RedSlide>

3) led corporate groups, students from Bristol University's students union and year 12 students from Cabot Learning Federation on nature conservation work parties.

4) welcomed the youngest groups we have ever guided around Troopers Hill, 2 classes of year 1 pupils from Summerhill Infants school. This spring visit was perfectly timed for the youngsters to observe the activities of some of the 83 species of bees who benefit from Troopers Hill's habitats.

This contrasted with 'A' level Geography students from the Olympus Academy Trust we guided on a tour of Troopers Hill explaining the nature conservation carried out in this very urban environment.

5) introduced the "drop in gazebo", where 4 times a year we put up gazebo with displays of what we do and give free chalk to "budding artists". This gives the opportunity for people who cannot or do not interact with us in other ways to ask questions, exchange ideas and learn more about Troopers Hill.

3. What we have achieved since we started

In December 2003 paths were obscured under vegetation, large quantities of litter had accumulated, and, most importantly, scrub was invading the acid grass and heathland that justifies the Local Nature Reserve classification. Maintenance visits took place only for brief periods every 6-8 weeks.

Now the site is well managed according to a management plan <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/plan.htm> agreed with Bristol City Council. 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.

The site achieved Green Flag status each year from 2007/8 to 2013/14. Bristol City Council no longer had staff resource to support the process so in 2014 we entered the Britain in Bloom South West Parks and Open Spaces scheme and received a gold award. In 2015 Troopers Hill was given the top level, 5 stars, Pride in Parks award by Britain in Bloom South West. This was repeated in 2016 and in addition Troopers Hill was awarded the Suttons Seeds Cup for an outstanding area of nature conservation. We organise 2-3 work parties every month, mainly addressing encroaching scrub. Bristol City Council undertake machine-based maintenance, while Friends of Troopers Hill continue with manual tasks that would not otherwise be practicable, e.g. removing brambles growing in and around broom plants, and pulling out bracken amongst the heather, etc. Over 50 different local people have volunteered at our work parties and we now have ParkWork carrying out ½ a day of work per month. ParkWork help people who have difficulty finding employment by providing training in parks tasks while volunteering and are also working with students from Bristol City College.

In 2006, to preserve a boundary, 20 volunteers planted an 80-metre hedge of native species. Local residents were consulted about hedge management: the majority favoured cutting over hedge-laying. Volunteers hand-pruned the hedge annually until December 2012 when it was sufficiently mature for an annual flail cut by Bristol City Council.

We have over 2,458 Facebook, 1,300 Twitter and 816 Instagram followers and a free email newsletter which is opened by over 60% of recipients. We maintain an informative and regularly updated website www.troopers-hill.org.uk. The website is often a first point of contact for students seeking further information about Troopers Hill.

Notices and details of all the activities are physically posted on the site. Zoom became the best way of having meetings during Covid and a survey of members as restrictions eased led to a decision to continue with Zoom for a further year. To ensure continued face to face contact we have introduced “drop in” gazebo sessions as described on the first page.

Our Ramblers Wellbeing Walks group, the St George Strollers, has celebrated its 11th anniversary. The Strollers have walked more than 600 miles and completed over 200 walks attended by more than 130 people. This year in addition to our 3-mile/90-minute walks we have introduced a 30-minute monthly “St George Park Stroll” which is greatly enjoyed by those with less walking ability. Photos on <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wfhsusan/albums/72177720296067404>

In addition to work parties and regular meetings, we have organised over 150 free public events since 2004, including guided nature, history and geology walks, concerts, dog shows, tai chi classes, star gazing and craft activities for children and families. We provided virtual self-guided walks and a Zoom poetry workshop during Covid.

Since 2003 Friends of Troopers Hill have raised over £300,000 for different projects. We work closely with Bristol Parks, are members of the Bristol Parks Forum, and support the St George Community Association.

Troopers Hill is a venue for educational visits by primary school and ‘A’ level pupils. The site provides study material for University undergraduates and Ph D students.

Professor Jane Memmott of Bristol University, who presented the findings of the Urban Pollinator Project to parliament, wrote in a letter supporting our application for a Heritage Fund grant

“Troopers Hill is a very special site in Bristol for both wildlife and people.”

4. What we are aiming for in the future

We will continue with conservation work and promoting Troopers Hill, particularly via events. Better dog control and reducing dog fouling will remain a priority. Both of these issues are visibly improving.

We have now achieved our “shopping list” of Troopers Hill’s major needs. What remains is continuous conservation and maintenance with Bristol City Council and the volunteers playing their part. We have just applied for a £5,000 grant to fund winter conservation work over the winters of this year and the next.

“Unveiling” the new and improved paths – over £60,000 raised



Committee member of Friends of Troopers Hill celebrating Phase I in October 2020 with the Trust Manager of Ibstock Enover Trust, Angela Haymonds, Bristol City Council’s Landscape Works and Play Manager, Susy Feltham and an enthusiastic supporter of the project, Lizzy Horn.

Pre-paths - A typical view of Troopers Hill Field in winter – the paths were much needed



Phase II – the final stretch, in coloured tarmac, is completed, May 2022



Some 2021 and 2022 events

Sunday 24th October 2021 – The “Slider” Celebration - (“Slider” is Bristolian for “slide”)

£12,000 is raised and a new slide, replacing the 40-year old “slider” that had to be removed for safety reasons in 2019, is added in 2021 to the £80,000 play area funded by the Friends of Troopers Hill in 2016.



A chance to show off the entries to our art competition www.troopers-hill.org.uk/art25/



Friends of
Troopers Hill

Dawn Chorus

Sunday 13th March, 5.30am to 7am

Book your place(s) on this free guided walk
with bird expert Ed Drewitt on
Troopers Hill and in Crews Hole woodland.



Book your place on www.tinyurl.com/dawnchorus2022
or phone Susan on 0117 947 5037

Why is Troopers Hill great for birds?

NATURE CONSERVATION WORK PARTIES

Please come and help

Tools and gloves provided

More information on www.troopers-hill.org.uk/wp

or email friends@troopers-hill.org.uk or phone 0117 947 5037

  **@troopershill**

Visit our “drop in” gazebo on Troopers Hill Field 2.30pm -5pm

Sunday 27th February

Free chalk for artists of all ages



Enjoy the many walks featured in this year's
Bristol Walk Fest. Full details on

www.bristolwalkfest.com

To book your place(s) on the
Troopers Hill History Walk for
Sunday 22nd May 2pm-4.30pm

visit www.tinyurl.com/thwalk2022



The St George Strollers will be discovering
the Meanwhile Park on Monday, 23rd May
www.troopers-hill.org.uk/strollers



www.troopers-hill.org.uk



A Busy June 2022 for Nature Conservation Work Parties

Tuesday 28th June 2022 CLF Post 16 - Community Action Day

We were very pleased to host a group from year-12 at Cabot Learning Federation Post 16 as part of their Community Action Day.



In the morning the group completed the work we had started the day before, clearing bracken in areas where there was a good diversity of other plants being over shadowed. This was done both sides of the Gully.

After a picnic lunch the group cleared saplings from the bowl area in the gully.

We enjoyed working with an enthusiastic young group and hope that CLF will return to the Hill in the future.

2019 Management Plan Work Plan activities for this work party (ref no. indicates compartment)

13.2	Remove saplings, retain rowan
15.6	Hand pull or cut bracken from heather and broom on edges of areas cut by BCC

Monday 27th June 2022

A small group tackled an area of bracken at the east end of the gully



We were very pleased that removing the bracken revealed a good diversity of other plants, in previous years much of this area had been so dominated by the bracken that little else was surviving. This suggests that we are having a long-term impact in reducing the bracken cover.

2019 Management Plan Work Plan activities for this work party (ref no. indicates compartment)

15.6	Hand pull or cut bracken from heather and broom on edges of areas cut by BCC
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Thursday 23rd June 2022

Joe from Parkwork brought some 'tree poppers' to try out to remove some of the blackthorn suckers that are spreading into the grassland from the hedge at Greendown.



We found that most of the saplings were too young for the tree popper to grip, so we ended up removing them with loppers. The aim is to weaken their growth and prevent them overshadowing this area of grass later in the summer.

We are very pleased that there is a lot of yellow rattle spreading in this area - this should weaken the grass and allow an even wider range of flowering plants to grow here in future years. This area of grassland is the only area on Troopers Hill that needs cutting. It has a hay cut once a year in late summer.

1.x	Remove blackthorn suckers in grassland - additional item, following discussion with ecology officer June 2022
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Saturday 11th June 2022

On a sunny morning we worked on the area adjacent to where we were on 21st May, this time focusing on the bracken.

We are aiming to reduce the bracken here and cutting or pulling it in June will take energy from the rhizome as it regrows. There was clear evidence that we are succeeding in the amount of grass and flowering plants growing in areas which were previously 100% bracken.

To the left of the path areas of heather were just coming into flower, we have certainly stopped the spread of bracken in this area.

As we were working we saw meadow brown and marbled white butterflies as well as a range of spiders, grasshoppers, crickets & a lacewing.



11.2

Cut or pull bracken growing through heather and in other areas unsuitable for Parks cutting equipment

