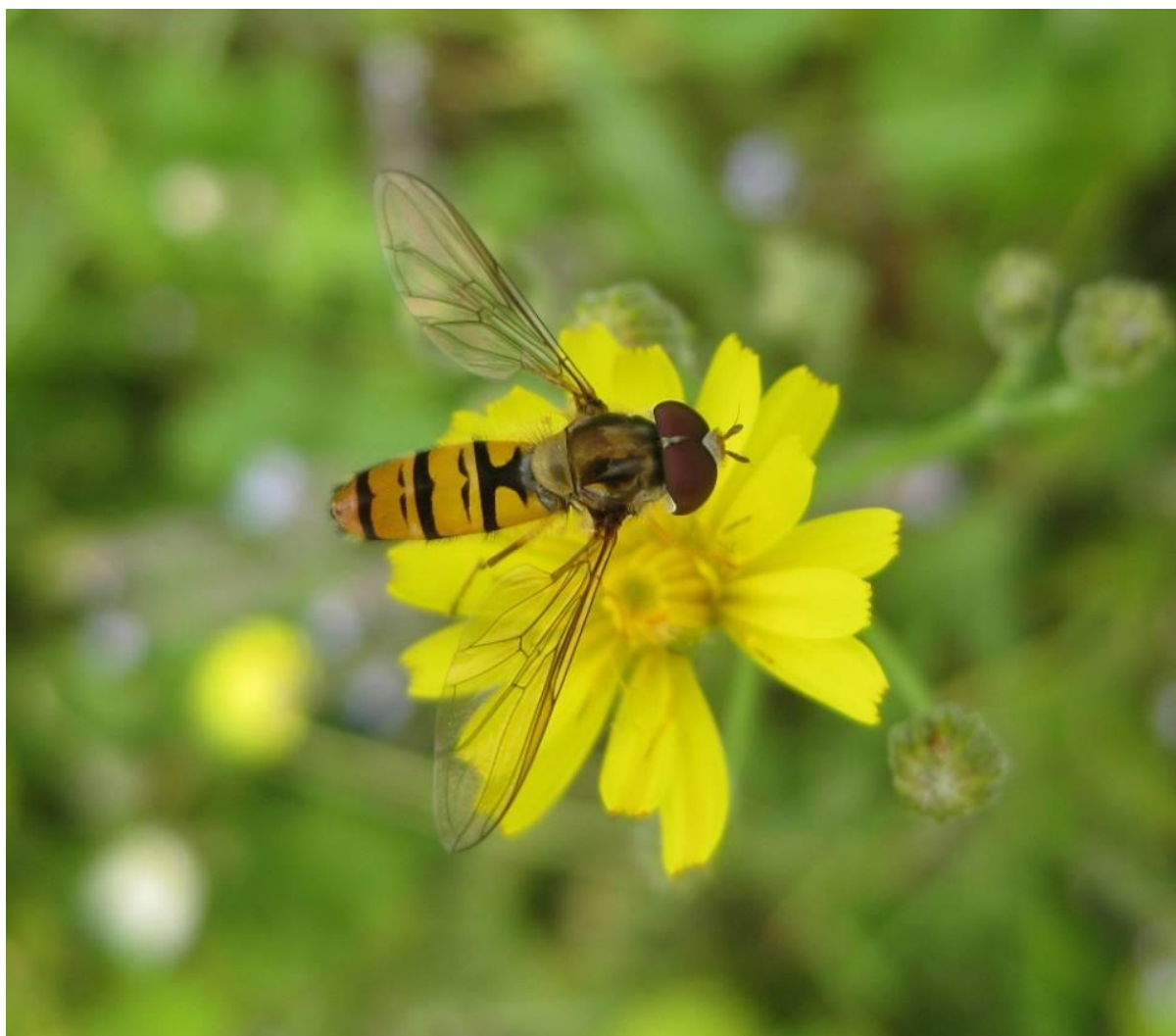


## **A pollen feast on Troopers Hill**

During June the lemon coloured flowers of mouse-ear hawkweed blossomed across Troopers Hill. They attracted a wide range of invertebrates looking for nectar for energy and pollen for protein. This hoverfly was just one of many “diners” who, in exchange, was providing a service to the plant as a pollinator.



Mining bees, who are also busy on the Hill, are particularly good at pollination because they are such messy eaters. They scatter pollen all over themselves so when they visit another flower of the same species they are very likely to brush pollen over the female parts of the flower.

Domestic bees are much neater, collecting the pollen carefully into the “baskets”. They are important pollinators but the majority of insect pollination is carried out by wild pollinators.

As this article is being written much of the mouse-ear hawkweed, identified by its small hairy green leaves that, with a bit of imagination, can look like mouse ears, has developed small balls of seeds like tiny dandelion clocks. The seeds will blow around the Hill providing next year’s plants.

Next on the menu is heather. Purple is starting to spread on the Hill. If you sit quietly you may spot bumblebees buzzing in and out of the blossoms. Bumblebees are the only social wild bees. In the same way as domestic bees they have a queen, workers (females) and drones (males). All the other wild bees are solitary although they may, like the ivy bee, choose to dig their nests very close to each other.

Less widespread on the Hill but visible, if you look carefully, are splashes of delicate pink. The small 5-petalled flowers of centaury will sway in groups at the end of slender, ridged, green stems. Like many other plants, as well as providing nectar and pollen, it is also a food plant for the larval stages of an invertebrate, in this case the caterpillar of the unflatteringly named Dowdy Plume Moth. So far this moth has not been recorded on Troopers Hill. It may be because there is not enough centaury for the caterpillar or that only one Bristol & District Moth group meeting has been held on Troopers Hill in July when this moth starts flying.

You can always come to Troopers Hill and identify insects for yourself. On the Saturday of Bristol Balloon Fiesta weekend, 11<sup>th</sup> August, Friends of Troopers Hill will have bug pots and nets to lend to you and your family and an expert, Rupert Higgins, to identify your finds. Natural Learners will be there running a craft activity on the theme of bugs and beasties. The Bristol Astronomical Society will be on hand to help you look at what's happening on our closest star, the sun. The Bugs and Beasties event starts at 4.30pm and finishes at 6pm, hopefully allowing those who stay on, to watch the ascent of the hot air balloons from Ashton Court. Bring a picnic and enjoy the views.

**Why not come to our next conservation work party and found out more about what makes Troopers Hill so very special?**

**There is a conservation work party on the 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month, starting promptly at 10am and finishing at noon. The volunteers meet by the red slide on Troopers Hill Field.**