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The Friends of Troopers Hill

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Spring 2013



Wow, what a difference a few weeks make! As your Ed sits here, penning these notes, the sun is shining and it is a beautiful March morning. Those of you who regularly walk the Hill will know just how muddy it became. Yet it has already pretty much dried out. Even the Field

has almost completely recovered and you know how badly that drains. In fact I would go so far as to say that Spring is here already. Daffodils are about to bloom, Blackthorn is doing its best to blossom and birds are already doing what birds do in Spring. Here's hoping for a better summer this year so that the many insects that have suffered over the last couple of years have a chance to recover.

We were very pleased to welcome five members of "[Goodgym Bristol](#)" to our work party on 2nd March. They ran from Temple meads to Troopers Hill, helped us clear some bramble and cuttings for three quarters of an hour and then ran home again. Hats off to them and we look forward to seeing them again some time.



Thanks to the guys from [Highline](#)

[Rope Access Services](#) who were inspecting the condition of our landmark chimney on top of the Hill in February. They very kindly took our cameras up to the top to give us the benefit of the unique view. You can see the photos on our [website](#) and there is also a [video available](#) of them at work.



The bad news at the moment is a problem that has increased all over Bristol—**Dog Pooh**. It has got noticeably worse in recent months. Let's not mince words here, if YOU own a dog and YOU don't clean up after it has left a mess, YOU are breaking the law and being very disrespectful of others. YOU are being anti-social. Exercising your dog in the dark is NO excuse.

As well as having a presence on facebook (www.facebook.com/TroopersHill), we are also now contactable on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/TroopersHill> or @TroopersHill for those of you who like to Tweet. For those of you who don't understand what on earth I am talking about, don't worry. I don't either!

A Path to the Future

For a long time Troopers Hill Field has been a muddy barrier to people wanting to reach Summerhill Rd or Troopers Hill Field. Many people had asked for a path across the Field but did not want to split the Field's large, open, green area. A tarmac path, running alongside to the beech hedge in the Field close to the boundary with Westleigh Nursing Home was on the Friends of Troopers Hill "shopping" list for a long time. Grants to cover this kind of work are not easy to find. In October, this wish was raised again at the Friends' meeting. Denise James, Area Environment Officer for Bristol City Council, suggested that we approach the St George Neighbourhood Partnership (SGNP) for Section 106 funding. This is funding given by developers to Bristol City Council to mitigate the effects of large development.

Two weeks later, Rob and Susan from Friends of Troopers Hill went to the SGNP Environment sub-group meeting and asked for the sub-group's support for this proposal.

The SGNP met on 11th December and the local councillors agreed the allocation of funds recommended by the sub-group. The amount included a bench close to the apple tree where the hedge curves.

In February Rob met with Bristol City Council Landscapes and confirmed the design of the path and position of the bench with them. Work started the following week. See: <http://tinyurl.com/brprzut>.

As I write, the path has been dug, a concrete base installed for the bench, a membrane put down, wooden edging supported by stakes are in place and a layer of stone mixed with dust has been laid and rolled. Still to come is the tarmac and then the bench.



Duncan and Tristan, the two people working on site, have been overwhelmed by people's interest. They tell me that people have been coming up and thanking them. For photos of the path being built by Duncan and Tristan, visit <http://tinyurl.com/cwumwu9>.

This story is an example of how Neighbourhood Partnerships (NPs) can work to support local projects and community groups. To give your input on how NPs should work in the future please fill in the survey on www.bristol.gov.uk/npask. The survey closes on 1st April. Find out more about the St George Neighbourhood Partnership by visiting www.stgeorgenp.org.uk.

Susan Acton-Campbell

Ed's note: Latest word is tarmac will be laid 25th March, other features in next couple of weeks—weather permitting!

Recovery from Fire

When Friends of Troopers Hill (FoTH) were set up, almost ten years ago, we produced a management plan in conjunction with Bristol Parks Dept. In that plan, several areas were identified, on the Hill, for work to be carried out to recover grass and heathland and encourage heather and broom. This required the removal of the ever increasing encroachment of bramble, which quickly takes over

and overwhelms the heathland areas so important to the Local Nature Reserve.

Perhaps nowhere was this more apparent than the area to the west of the steps up from the lower

chimney at the bottom of Troopers Hill Road. Many of you who walk the Hill regularly may remember how it looked. The area was quickly disappearing into scrubland, which then progresses to woodland when saplings take root. An early work party did a lot to clear the area and we continue to visit the area regularly.

Three years ago, in 2010, a fire broke out in this area, resulting in substantial damage to the area. Heathland fires are quite common. There have been several on the Hill over the years. At first sight, you might think

that this is disastrous news and certainly any of our reptiles (Common and Slow worms) would have had to move pretty fast to get away from the burning area,



but in fact the fire made life easier for us. Although the broom was badly damaged, so was the bramble and other saplings. It would seem that the fire encourages dormant seeds lying in the top soil and between that and the recent wet weather, the broom has really recovered. The area is now awash with young, healthy looking plants.

Clearly, we don't want to encourage fires on Troopers Hill. The risk of them getting out of control is very high and the close proximity of houses on Troopers Hill Road and surrounding area makes it extremely dangerous, but it is good to know that out of devastation, nature wins out and some good can come.

Bristol 99 Mini Bio Blitz

Sunday 26th May 3pm to 6pm



BRISTOL FESTIVAL
OF NATURE

A great chance for everybody to have fun exploring Troopers Hill and learning more about the heathland habitat and the many creatures that live there.

Part of 'Bristol99'

Organised by Bristol Natural History Consortium

www.bristol99.org.uk

Sponsored by Western Power Distribution

A Bad year for Butterflies?

A recent survey studied the effect of recent weather on butterflies. Overall, the survey showed last year was a washout for UK species. But grassland species, such as the meadow brown, ringlet and gatekeeper, benefited from "substantial grass growth" in the wet conditions.

Recorders counted more than 18,500 meadow brown butterflies - almost twice as many as in 2011.

"I was totally staggered that we had that many meadow browns," said Zoe Randle from Butterfly Conservation and co-ordinator of the [Wider Countryside Butterfly Survey](#) (WCBS).

Results from the survey, which involved counting species spotted in 700 1km-square grids across the UK, recorded 18,629 [meadow brown](#) (in 2012, compared with 9,736 during 2011).

Other species to do well included the [gatekeeper](#), [ringlet](#) and [marbled white](#).

Butterfly Conservation experts suggested that

Live on Troopers Hill

Music on the Hill
Saturday 22nd June
from 6.00pm

THE AMBLING BAND!



"Brass and Pink collide to create a rich cacophony of sights and sounds"
Not to be missed!

Bring a picnic (to protect the grassland, please no BBQs) enjoy the views and listen to the band for what is sure to be a very special evening of free music.



Friends of Troopers Hill

www.troopers-hill.org.uk
www.facebook.com/troopershill
www.twitter.com/troopershill
theamblingband.co.uk

the dry start to the year followed by the wet weather provided optimum conditions for bumper grass growth, providing certain species with abundant supplies of their favoured food sources.

But Dr Randle added: "As far as I am concerned, it is new to me that you could have such a dismal summer yet these species do so well. Typically, you imagine a nice, warm sunny day and butterflies out flying around, laying their eggs. These butterflies were out and about and being counted, but what's happened to the eggs that were laid? Who knows? We'll have to wait and see what happens this year."

Overall, the poor summer took its toll on UK butterflies, with 43% fewer species on average being recorded that during the 2011 WCBS survey, which is run by Butterfly Conservation, the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH).

The WCBS, which began in 2009, complements other national butterfly surveys - such as the [UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme](#) - and aims to "more effectively monitor the changing abundance of widespread butterfly species across the general countryside". The [common blue](#) was among the species

worst affected, with just 269 sightings compared with 748 during the previous year.

Dr Randle added that the sharp decline in common blue numbers followed on from a decline in previous years' surveys. She suggested it was likely that the impact of last year's wet summer will have repercussions this year.

"If butterflies are not out and about feeding, breeding and laying their eggs, it does not bode well."

Dr Randle added that she could not recall a summer that wet before, making it difficult to fully understand whether the conditions would have a lasting impact on particular species.

"We think this would be a short-term blip but if the terrible summers continue then it could have longer term implications," she explained.

"The weather obviously has a big implication on our butterflies but on top of that you have got things like agricultural intensification, habitat destruction and that sort of thing.

"All those factors combined with bad weather are going to have even more of a detrimental effect."

This article by Mark Kinver is reproduced from the BBC website: <http://tinyurl.com/d8mv47z>

Eastwood Farm

Family Fun Day & Dog Show

Lots of fun for all the family
- including your dogs!

Easter Monday 1st April 2013
2pm to 5pm

(FREE registration for the fun dog show from 1.30pm)



Dog show classes include:

Waggiest Tail, Best Child Handler Under 12, Best Rescue Dog and more...
visit www.eastwoodfarm.org.uk for details
Prizes and rosettes up to 3rd place

Fun wildlife activities include bird box making, bug hunting, hands-on arts and crafts sessions and face painting

Contact Paula Spiers on 0117 922 4325 or paula.spiers@bristol.gov.uk

Organised by the Friends of Eastwood Farm, Beese's Riverside Bar & Tea Gardens and the Wild City Project, with funding from the Greater Brislington Community Partnership



www.troopers-hill.org.uk

Jules's Diary

Hello Troopers,
so where were we? Oh yes, Winter. Well that came and went (sort of). We had some snow and the city ground to a halt as usual but then where would we be without our traditions. The usual tobogganing down the various bits of The Hill, and abandoning of bits &c. Many thanks to those 'collectors'! When I said "went" ha! it was snowing up there this morning, much to the delight of a group of Health Walkers... just like the Highlands!. "Troopers Hill: a MUGA (multi use games area) for the richer in years!"
Meanwhile the usual reclamation work continues with more emphasis on the interior this year. A case of whacking back what we've done in previous years then reclaiming the inner slopes from the bramble that's over running the heather, all in line with the Management Plan of course. Funny how plans seem to run in five year cycles... (well, it is a five year plan! Ed.) old Joe Steel had a few but he had Steppes not Steeps so ours will be more effective.
Somebody went up the chimney (a steeplejack not a small boy) and took some photos, and we're awaiting a visit up t'other one for a health check of that (not such nice views I suspect). Wonder how much of the associated building is still under the ground there? Perhaps we could get Mr Robinson et al. to expose the 'tops' of the walls... we could always divert the path around them. They've found Richard in Leicester and are looking for Stephen in Faversham (is that where the white feathers come from?) but Alfred's still missing... maybe we should start a rumour...
So... Spring is in the air, the reinvigorated new broom should be a dazzling flash of yeller judging by the buds and the adjacent woods will be full of the cries of lost children trying to find their way out... but no doubt Susan will write more of that elsewhere...
Cheers,

jules

ABC of Troopers Hill

O is for Ornithology (the scientific study of birds and their behaviour).

Friends of Troopers Hill commissioned a survey of the bird life on Troopers Hill in 2007. The report is at <http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/Flora/THBirds2007.pdf>.

30 bird species were recorded on the Hill and Crews Hole woodland, including 16 types of birds breeding in the Nature Reserve. Amongst them, Blackbirds, Blackcaps, Bluetits, Chaffinches, Dunnocks, Great Tits, Goldfinches, Greenfinches, Long Tailed Tits, Robins, Wood Pigeons and Wrens commonly visit gardens locally; whereas the Bullfinch, Chiff Chaff, Song Thrush and Lesser Whitethroat are less likely to be seen. Active birds' nests of all species are protected by law. Friends' Work Parties avoid areas where birds may be nesting between 1st March and 30th Sept. Friends have sponsored a series of Dawn Chorus walks over a number of years to identify the birds that sing on Troopers Hill and in the woodland on spring mornings. A Dawn Chorus recording made in 2008 is available via the web site at:

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

Bryn Friallen

Dates for your Diary

Regular events:

Work Parties: Saturdays Apr 6th, May 4th, June 1st, July 6th 10am—midday. Meet at Troopers Hill Road and Greendown. *Help us look after Troopers Hill. Gentle exercise and a bit of a laugh over some coffee.*

Meetings. Thursdays May 30th, July 25th. 7.15pm, Summerhill Methodist Church, 5 Air Balloon Road. *Come along and share your views on our Local Nature Reserve.*

St George Strollers: Mon 8th Apr: **Dundridge Panoramama** Meet 10.00am, Corner of Parslow Barton and Nags Head Hill. Tue 23rd Apr: **Blaise Castle.** Meet 9.30am Opp Aldi, Church Rd for coach pick up. Fri 10th May: **Clifton and Redland.** Meet Lidl Car Park, Lawrence Hill 10.20am. Bring £2 for train. Wed 29th May: **Snuff Mills to the Beehive.** Meet Hanham Maypole, 9.30am for Wessex bus 581. Wed 12th Jun: **Nightingale Valley.** Meet Terrell Gardens bus stop, Pile Marsh. 10.05am for bus 36. Mon 24th Jun: **Severn Beach.** Meet Opp Aldi, Church Rd for coach. 10.00am. Bring £2 for train return. Further details, contact Clare—see Contacts panel.

Walks: (booking essential—see contacts panel)

Sunday May 26th. **Tree Gazing Walk.** 10.30am – noon. *Walk through Troopers Hill woods with tree expert Tony Titchen.*

Other events:

Friday March 29th: **Good Friday Service on Troopers Hill.** *Procession starts from Summerhill Methodist Church.* 11.30am.

Monday 1st April (Easter Monday). **Eastwood Farm Family Fun Day and Dog show.** 2-5pm. By the river, next to Beeses. *Lots of fun for all the family, including your dogs.*

Sunday May 26th. **Bristol 99 Mini Bio Blitz.** 3-6pm. *A great chance for everybody to have fun exploring Troopers Hill and learning more about the heathland habitat and the many creatures that live there.* Part of Bristol99 - Organised by Bristol Natural History Consortium

Saturday June 22nd. Music on the Hill. From 6pm. *Join the Ambling Band "a rich cacophony of sights and sound" for a summer evening of music on Troopers Hill. Enjoy the views over Bristol while listening to some wonderful music. Bring a picnic.* Please, **NO BBQs**

Contacts:

For the latest news and updates, phone our
Information line: 0753 161 5983

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

Susan Acton-Campbell (Chair), Tel. **0117 947 5037**

You can also write to us at:

3, Corkers Hill, St. George, Bristol, BS5 8DT

Email:

friends@troopers-hill.org.uk

www.facebook.com/TroopersHill

www.twitter.com/troopershill

Or go to the online forum at:

<http://www.troopers-hill.org.uk/news&views>

To book a place on an event,
Phone Judith: 0117 955 9819 (Tue-Sat, 9am-5pm) Or email:
events2013@troopers-hill.org.uk

Walking for Health (St George Strollers)

Contact: Clare Willott

0117 941 4514

strollers@troopers-hill.org.uk

To report incidents on Troopers Hill, phone Bristol Parks:

0117 922 3719

Report criminal activity to the police on 999

or

Police beat manager, Pete Crawford, can be contacted on 07919 628 304

www.troopers-hill.org.uk