



AVON GORGE AND DOWNS WILDLIFE PROJECT EDUCATION PROGRAMME ANNUAL REVIEW 2019



The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project is a partnership:



The Downs Committee



We also work with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

Introduction

The role of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project education programme is “to raise awareness of the importance of the Avon Gorge and Downs and to create opportunities to enable people of all ages and backgrounds to discover, learn more about and enjoy the wildlife and landscape of the site”.

Summary of Achievements in 2019

9,174 people engaged with the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project's education programme in 2019

- 738 people took part in one of our walks, talks, courses, children's or family events
- 1,468 school children and 190 higher education students visited us for education sessions, including three 'new to us' schools
- 114 playscheme children visited us for sessions
- We engaged with 6,664 people through giving guided walks and talks to community groups and at community events
- We worked with 15 older women from Dhek Bhal as part of the 'Botany without Boundaries' project, run in conjunction with Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery and the University of Bristol Botanic Garden
- We created and launched the Granny Downs Tree Trail in partnership with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge
- We created a new website for the project
- 54 volunteers and placement students gave us 530 hours of their time

Events Programme

The events programme continued to be popular with **738 people** taking part in our walks, talks, courses, children's and family events. We ran fewer events for the general public this year to enable us create the new Granny Downs tree trail, develop a new project website and to work on new funding opportunities.

- **241 people** attended **13 walks**, including 'Trees of the Granny Downs' walks, run in partnership with the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge (FOD+AG), to promote the new tree trail. We also ran a guided walk about the rare plants of the Avon Gorge which tied in with a wonderful exhibition of botanical drawings and paintings of the rare plants of the Gorge, created by artists from the Friends of the University of Bristol Botanic Garden which were on display at the Clifton Suspension Bridge Visitor Centre.
- **318 people** came to **four talks**, titled 'Urban peregrines', 'Helping hedgehogs', 'Fascinating fungi' and 'The wren'.
- Our **five courses** were attended by a total of **71 people**; these included an 'Origami animals' workshop, 'Picture perfect' nature photography course and an 'Identifying birds in autumn' course.
- **108 children and adults** attended a total of **six children's and family events**, including the 'Mammal detectives' children's half-term event (pictured above) and two music events for toddlers.



"Thank you so much for arranging the talk, which actually deserved its name! I thought the speaker packed in a phenomenal amount, and was utterly fascinating." Fascinating fungi talk

Formal Education Sessions

Primary schools

In 2019 we taught **1,468 school pupils** in **54 education sessions**. We welcomed back two schools who had come to us in 2018 as part of our Audience Development Plan (ADP) scheme to work with schools from areas of deprivation. An additional three schools visited us for the first time: Broomhill Infant School, Barton Hill Academy and Nova Primary. In one of the classes only four of the 28 children had been to the Downs before.

We gave an education session feedback form to the leader of each school group. Average scores for session content, presentation, length and level were all between 9.7 and 9.85 out of 10 and 100% of groups said they were 'very likely' to book sessions with us in the future. The form gives the opportunity for comments and views on the sessions, and we were thrilled to receive positive and enthusiastic feedback from many teachers. Comments included:

"The children think they're really familiar with the Downs because they live so close. However, these sessions make them see it in a different way - showing them unfamiliar places and the sorts of things that you might miss if you weren't looking. It's a very valuable lesson for life!"
Stoke Bishop Primary School

"As always the children got so much from these wonderful sessions. Jill and Mandy are a wealth of knowledge and really inspire the children. So, so fun and informative!"
Illminster Avenue



Ways of Listening Project

In January we attended the 'Ways of Listening' Symposium at the University of Bristol. This was a gathering of academics, teachers, musicians and environmental educators exploring alternative approaches to introducing young people and adults to birdsong. As part of the project, led by English literature lecturer, Francesca Mackenney, **20 Year 7 children** from Bristol Grammar School came to the Downs in May. We talked to the students about the birds that we could see and hear on the Downs, sharing information about their ecology, folklore and traditional names, and Francesca read extracts from poems by Keats, Coleridge and Clare. In response, the students created their own poetry and prose.

Higher education

We also taught **190 higher education students** in **11 sessions**. These included a lecture and guided walks for first year students on the foundation degree in Integrated Wildlife Conservation run by Bristol Zoological Society, in partnership with the University of the West of England. Three large groups of students from the University of Bristol School of Biological Sciences also spent a day on the Downs learning different biological surveying techniques. Following their sessions with us, several students joined our team of volunteers.

Holiday playschemes

Bookings from playschemes dropped a little this year, partly due to an unseasonable patch of very wet and windy weather in August which caused groups to cancel their visits. In total **114 children** from playschemes visited us for sessions during the school holidays.

The feedback we received was very positive with leaders giving average scores between 9.4 and 9.6 out of 10 for session content, presentation, length and level.



Audience Development Plan (ADP) and Your Downs Activities – Widening the Audience

Botany without Boundaries

For this ADP project we partnered with Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, the University of Bristol Botanic Garden and Dhek Bhal (a voluntary organisation that supports the South Asian community in Bristol). The project was part of the Museum's 'Natural Selection' exhibition and was funded by Arts Council England.

Over five sessions we introduced a group of 15 older women to the special plants of the Avon Gorge and Downs, and explored the ways in which throughout history people have collected, preserved, recorded and displayed plants in herbaria and through botanical illustration.

The project included tours of the Museum, the Botanic Garden and the Downs. They also took part in workshops to learn how to create botanical art, as well as how to collect and press plants to prepare herbarium sheets.

The project culminated in a display at the Museum where the participants shared the skills they had learnt with visitors. This was something that they clearly took pride in, with some participants inviting family along to see their work.

The final evaluation session showed that this project was enjoyed by all. The women had developed new skills and knowledge and had discovered hidden talents amongst their group. We also presented Dhek Bhal with a plant press, continuing the legacy of this project and enabling the women to continue to collect, press and display plants in the future.

"We learnt a lot from this project. Jill, Mandy, Rhian and Libby are excellent teachers. They taught us new things which we did not know before. A big thank you to all of you. We would like to do it again." CEO of Dhek Bhal

Your Downs

In partnership with FOD+AG, the Downs supervisor and Walking for Health, we continued to develop and deliver the Your Downs initiative (a series of events to widen the range of people who visit and enjoy the site).

Activities include a 'Trees of the Granny Downs' walk as part of the Bristol Walking Festival. We also ran a guided walk for the Man Alive! group who are based at the Knowle West Health Centre, and work with men suffering from depression or are at risk of isolation.

Our Christmas star party was also a great success with 51 people attending. Members of the Bristol Astronomical Society brought along their telescopes, and Explorer Dome guides explained the stories behind the constellations.



Community Events and Activities

During 2019, we engaged with **6,664 people** through outreach talks, walks for community and special interest groups and community events. Highlights include the following activities:

OVO energy volunteer day

Together with FOD+AG, we held a very successful volunteer day for employees of OVO Energy. The OVO Foundation had given us a generous donation, supporting programmes such as the Wild Adventures Project and the Downs Challenge (which we carried out in 2018), and also funded the development of the Granny Downs Tree Trail and the new project website (details below). The group re-built the dead hedges that protect the main meadow on the Downs from trampling by runners. In the afternoon we took the group for a guided walk. It was great to have an opportunity to show them the special wildlife of our site and to talk about some of the projects that their funding has made possible.

Bristol Festival of Nature

In June we joined the Bristol Zoo Gardens' and the Wild Place Project's education teams to run activities in a tree-themed tent at Bristol Festival of Nature.

In our section of the tent we focused on trees found on the Avon Gorge and Downs and promoted the Granny Downs Tree Trail. Visitors went on a 'mini tree trail' looking for pictures of trees that can be found on the Granny Downs and identified them using the id dial provided. The tree names were written into a crossword puzzle grid. Once filled in, this revealed the name of a very special tree - Bristol whitebeam - in a highlighted section of the grid. Having completed the trail and found the answer participants could meet a real Bristol whitebeam.

Our section of the tent was very popular with **5,899 people visiting the tent** over the weekend and **787 people taking part in our trail**.

The Downs Festival

At the end of August / beginning of September we attended the two-day Downs Festival. We took along our display and range of leaflets and talked to festival goers about the wildlife of the Avon Gorge and Downs. Many of the Bristolians we spoke with had no idea about the wildlife importance of the site.

University of Bristol Welcome Fair on the Downs

In September, the University of Bristol Students' Union invited us to bring a stall to their 'Welcome Fair' on the Downs. We had neighbouring stalls with FOD+AG. Two of our volunteers, who are current Bristol University students, joined us to share their experiences of volunteering with their fellow students. During the day we engaged with **101 students** and 54 expressed interest in volunteering with us.



Talks and guided walks for other community groups

The education manager gave a talk or guided walk to **413 people** from **12 community groups**. Groups ranged from the Parkinson's Society to residents at St Monica's Trust (Westbury Fields), and North Petherton WI to Downend Gardeners' Club.

"I just wanted to write and thank you on behalf of the sixteen of us, for a most interesting and enjoyable guided tour of the Downs. We saw so many wild flowers and the orchids were quite amazing. I have had so many ladies who have contacted me to say how delightful the afternoon was, and how very much they enjoyed your talk and the information you were able to pass on to us." Long Ashton Ladies Group

"That was one of the best talks we've ever had! It was an interesting topic which everyone enjoyed, I heard a lot of positive comments."

Parkinson's Society (Bristol Branch)

"It's the best talk we've had in a long time. I've lived in Bristol all my life and I didn't know half of what you've told us!"

St Monica's Trust resident

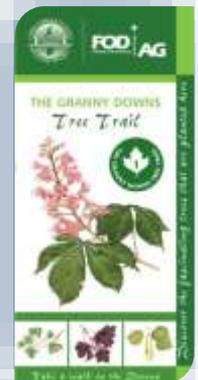
Granny Downs Tree Trail

Created as a collaboration between the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project and FOD+AG, the Granny Downs Tree Trail encourages participants to visit an under-explored part of the Downs and find out about 17 trees along the way.

The trail was officially launched in April with 48 people attending including: the Lord Mayor, Cllr Cleo Lake; members of the steering group; Downs Committee members; FOD+AG Committee members; the CEO and staff from Bristol Zoological Society, as well as representatives of OVO energy (who helped to fund the trail).

The trail was dedicated to the memory of Richard Bland (who carried out the preliminary research for the trail), and his family joined us on the day for the launch event and the inaugural walk of the trail.

The Bristol Zoological Society Marketing Team issued press releases and a couple of journalists came to the launch event. The BZS Digital Marketing Team also helped promote the trail. This resulted in good coverage in local magazines, through social media and on-line. As a result, the trail has been incredibly popular with the public.



New Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project Website

The new project website was developed and designed in collaboration with our National Trust and Forestry England partners from Leigh Woods. It was a huge piece of work (and there are still some sections which need writing and editing) but it is looking great. The website should encourage a wider range of people to discover, explore and enjoy the wildlife, geology and landscape of the Avon Gorge, Downs and Leigh Woods. The website redevelopment was partially funded through the grant from the OVO Foundation. You can see the new website at www.avongorge.org.uk

The website went live towards the end of the first week of June, in time for the Festival of Nature. We've had fantastic feedback including:

"...congratulations on what you and your team have achieved in developing the website. It is beautifully and eye-catchingly illustrated as well as being very effectively accessible and cross-referenced to use. The style is welcoming to the first time user and creates a clear and inspiring picture of your ambitions and achievements."

"I have just perused your website, and it is excellent, easy to use, and so inviting to explore."

"Love all the pictures, and so much useful information. And wow how much you do, and have achieved, congratulations."

Volunteer Support

Many of our events couldn't take place without the support of volunteers and work experience students. We're thankful to the **54 people** who gave **530 hours** of their time over the year.

Funding

At the beginning of the year we were facing a funding shortfall. Bristol Zoological Society's Development Team launched an appeal to encourage people to donate surplus foreign currency left over from holidays or business trips. We were delighted with the response, raising £799.

One of Bristol Zoo's keepers, Nicola Cooke, also ran a gruelling, sponsored, 44 mile ultra-marathon around the coastline of Cornwall, raising £685 for the education programme.

We've also been investigating and working on other, longer-term sources of funding, such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

We are grateful to the private individuals who made donations during the year and to the following organisations for funding the education programme during 2019:

Arts Council England, Bristol Zoological Society, Downs Committee, Natural England, OVO Foundation.



The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project is working to secure the outstanding wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge, Clifton Down, Durdham Down and Leigh Woods, as well as raising awareness and understanding of this unique location and its importance for people and wildlife.

www.avongorge.org.uk www.facebook.com/avongorge @AvonGorgeDowns