Chairman’s Report May 2019

As we come towards the end of summer, I am pleased to report a busy few months. One of the highlights was the inauguration of a brand-new Tree Trail at the Granny Downs. This is a fascinating and underused area of the Downs with numerous interesting specimens. Leaflets describing the trail are readily available.

This summer we lost another goat from the small herd in the Gully. The original compliment of six has now been reduced to just two. FODAG committee member Terry Hannan first observed an ailing animal whilst carrying out goat monitoring duties. Vets from the Zoo concluded that the animal was unlikely to recover and needed to be euthanised. We await confirmation of what caused the problem. The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Steering Group who oversee the Gully project are currently exploring all options for replenishing the herd.

Committee members have met with the City Councils new Volunteer co-ordinator Ella Hogg and we will be exploring new and exciting conservation projects for the coming winter. This will be on top of the many important tasks already carried out by our members.

Your committee is finalising an important document called the Way Forward. This is a blueprint for the future that identifies our priorities, retains focus and will dictate the way FODAG conducts its business going forward. The committee intend to submit the document for discussion and approval at our November AGM.

Members may well have noticed that this year there has been no summer bedding on the traffic island at the top of Blackboy Hill or on the triangle at the Urijah Thomas memorial fountain. The loss of this annual floral spectacle is a direct consequence of the cuts to Parks budgets and is a situation reflected around the City. However, there is a possibility that a FODAG led initiative could see these particular displays reinstated; but it would be dependent on there being sufficient volunteers to help with the maintenance. Summer bedding schemes are labour intensive but with just a few volunteer hours a week we could once again see this busy area returned to its former glory.

From October 1st FODAG will be staging a celebration of the Downs with a
festival of photography. Working with AXA Health Insurance we have secured space in the atrium of their building at the top of Blackboy Hill. The display will be a rolling electronic montage of all things Downs related and will be placed in one of AXA’s roadside windows. If you have suitable images that you would like included please forward them to us. Further details can be found on our website.

As always finance is a critical issue, no more so than for our beleaguered public services. Our parks are non-statutory and as such there is no obligation for the City Council to fund them. We are seeing right across the city a reduced level of service as Parks managers come to terms with providing a service with fewer and fewer resources. The Downs is not immune to these cuts and will be expected to generate sufficient income to be self-sustaining. It is our understanding that from 2020 the Downs will no longer receive a financial contribution from the City Council towards its running costs.

Members will be aware of an increased number of paying events on the Downs and concerns have been raised about the cumulative impact of back to back events on the greensward. Should we be considering alternatives rather than maxing out on events. In terms of income generation, the Downs is better placed than most venues across the City and with vision and enterprise should be capable of becoming self-financing without compromising the very thing we are trying to protect.

If members have viable ideas on how increasing income for the Downs might be achieved please share them with us.

Finally, a reminder that our November AGM will once again be held at the Redland Bowling Club. All members are welcome to join us. Come and have your say and enjoy a lively and convivial evening.

FODAG members are encouraged to keep up to date with all our events, links and activities via our webpage and Facebook.

Robert Westlake

Cover Photo; Young Female Peregrine Falcon in the Gorge—Ed Drewit
Near the top of Pembroke Road, once called Gallows Acre Lane, a gibbet stood. It was sometimes occupied by those who had committed robberies on the Downs and was last used in 1783 to hang Shenkin Protheroe for the murder of a drover. Stories quickly spread that he descended from the gibbet at midnight every night and stalked through Clifton. Such was the alarm that his body was cut down and buried. Downs History Trails No. 1, 2011.

A gibbet was an iron cage in which a man who had just been hanged was put on display, as an awful warning. In the account quoted above, a paranormal event led to official action. This is very unusual, and could be revealing for contemporary society.

Before describing my findings, some context is useful. In the C18 the Downs were split between the parishes of Clifton and Westbury on Trym, which were both in Gloucestershire. The City and County of Bristol was quite small in extent. The parish of Westbury-on-Trym reflected its importance in Saxon times; it extended west to the Avon and south to include most of Cotham. The Bristol gallows was just within the city boundary, at the junction of St Michael's Hill and Cotham Road. We are concerned with a separate system of justice.

Within Gloucestershire, serious crimes were tried at the Gloucester assizes. Since the convicted man was held in Gloucester goal, most hangings took place at a gallows close to the city. What was more complex was the small minority in which the body was destined for a gibbet. The gibbet was sited near the scene of the crime, or somewhere else with specific associations, and the hanging took place close by. To bring a condemned man all the way from Gloucester gaol to the Downs involved considerable trouble and expense. From websites on capital punishment and John Latimer's Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century, I am only aware of four occasions in the C18 when a gibbet was used on the Downs: in 1714, 1744 (two men), 1750 and 1783, the last being for Jenkin (or Shenkin) Protheroe, on 31 March. Prior to 1783, these gibbets had always been at Sea Walls, as a warning to visiting sailors. The History Trail is therefore incorrect in implying that there was a tradition of gibbeting near Gallows Acre Lane.

A recent overview, The Golden and Ghoulish Age of the Gibbet in Britain, by
Sarah Tarlow (2017), mentions Protheroe as the subject of a Royal Warrant addressed to the Sheriff of the County of Gloucester. This document is in the National Archives at Kew; a transcript is given below. The Warrant recites the terms of a local petition. It is dated 22 April 1783, when the gibbet had been up for only three weeks. So the petitioners wasted no time, to agree on the wording, collect signatures and deliver to St James’s Palace, where such requests would not be considered every day. The supporting case is made with some care. It starts with high society (Hotwells), to which the Court of St James could directly relate, continues with locals who ride for recreation (mostly middle-class), and ends with a poor widow whose cottage is nearby. The widow’s plight could be solved by moving the gibbet a few yards, which wasn’t the point. However, her special mention could help get poorer people to sign. All are equal in a petition, by contrast with the narrow suffrage of this time. The Warrant instructs the Sheriff to remove the body. The tone is regal; the Sheriff is ‘trustly and wellbeloved’, but is not addressed by name. It is ‘by His Majesty’s Command’; George III’s madness came later.

The Warrant starts by noting the involvement of merchants. This makes it likely that the petition was initiated by members of the Society of Merchant Venturers (as suggested to me by Francis Greenacre). They would be peeved at the erection of a gibbet on their land, and could call on the best legal minds for how to get rid of it. A successful NIMBY protest of 1783 was not so different from today. There is no mention of haunting. If it had been relevant, one might expect public hysteria to develop over time, whereas the petition was an immediate response.

My earliest account of the haunting is a century later, in Brief Romances from Bristol History by Joseph Leech (1884), where one chapter is titled Jenny Rudge: A story of old Durdham Down. Jenny was the pretty daughter of a farmer. She and a poor apprentice were in love, but the farmer was very protective. The apprentice knew that Jenny and her father would be riding home past Protheroe’s gibbet at night, and got a friend to pretend to be the ghost. The farmer panicked and lost sight of his daughter. The lovers made their getaway, and reached a contact in Aust. The farmer searched and despaired. The lovers sent word, he relented. They were married and later took
over the farm. The ‘haunting’ is integral to the action, but only the credulous farmer takes it seriously. To what extent is this romance Bristol history?

Joseph Leech’s tale is also instructive because of what he says about Protheroe. He was ‘a sort of demon cripple, without legs that would bear him up but with powerful arms’. He knew that a kindly drover would be walking across the Downs with gold in his wallet, late one day. He lay in a ditch near the lane. As the drover came near, he raised a cry of distress, claiming to be unable to extricate himself. When the drover tried to assist, he was stabbed. All this is paralleled by modern accounts. Here is a recent example:

*One of the most notorious of killers who lurked about the Downs was Shenkin Protheroe, an ill-formed dwarf with long and extra powerful arms. He ingratiated himself with kind-hearted passing travellers, who he would then grab by the throat and rob. On one occasion his victim died as a result of the attack.*

_The A-Z of Curious Bristol. Maurice Fells, 2014._

However, local newspapers for 1782 give a very different story, in reports of the Coroner’s inquest, held in Westbury on Trym. Protheroe was a Welsh drover, as was the murdered man, Evan Daniel. They were walking north across the Downs with Protheroe’s younger brother, who was told to go on ahead while the others went into a quarry:

*From the boy’s story it appears that the murderer and the deceased had stolen two oxen, and having sold them at Bristol, they retired to the quarry to divide the money, when the devil suggested to the one, that by murdering his comrade, he might possess the whole booty.*

_Gloucester Journal, 2 September 1782._

When Protheroe caught up with his brother, his clothes and stick were bloody:

He confess’d the horrid deed he had committed, and promised him half a guinea to be silent. … [The jury] brought in their verdict Wilful Murder … and he is committed to Gloucester gaol for trial at the
Protheroe had been pursued into Wales and arrested near Neath. The tale of him being crippled and lurking is a myth! What were Leech’s written sources? It seems likely that the demon cripple and scary ghost narratives have fed each other.

For the trial in March 1783, the Bristol newspapers only report the verdict. Further research in Gloucester newspapers or assize archives may reveal more about the man. For instance, why did he use several aliases? Many murderers were not gibbeted (for Gloucestershire, 1770-1785, 11 murderers executed, but only 3 gibbets). From a Gloucester perspective, the murder of a dishonest Welsh drover does not seem sufficient cause, by itself.

The report in a Bristol newspaper includes a standard justification:

… His body was fixt in irons … and hoisted on a gibbet, where it remains as a spectacle of the justice of the laws of this country, and a warning to all daring and incorrigible offenders. *Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal, 5 April 1783.*

However, there was a contrary and growing opinion, as discussed by Sarah Tarlow – that such a disgusting and unsubtle punishment was barbarous, and demeaned the state. The number of gibbetings in England and Wales was roughly constant for the 1750s to 1790s (at 30-40 per decade), but then fell sharply. In Gloucestershire the last was in 1784. The practice was abolished in 1834. However, she does not discuss the contribution of individuals in bringing about this change. Did the King often take the side of local activists? Such interventions could have a rapid effect on sentencing policy.

Paul Wood
Another summer has come and gone and regular users of the Downs will have again witnessed the annual incursion of travellers onto our revered open space. This year it seems to have been particularly bad with disparate groups setting up with impunity unauthorised camps at various Downs locations. Reports of fly tipping, intimidation and dangerous driving have been all too common this year. There have been very few days this summer when travellers have not been somewhere on the Downs.

All these reports of anti-social activity would lead the legitimate user of the Downs to believe that travelling communities are above the law and that the City council and the Police seem powerless to act. Travellers seem well versed in evading any responsibility for their actions.

The whole legal process to evict travellers seems protracted and unwieldy when it comes to enforcing an order, the perception being that the travellers can run rings around the authorities.

This has led to growing frustration, particularly for residents who live near and around the Downs and has led to the formation of a pressure group called Respect the Downs. There remit is to prevail upon those charged with the good governance of the Downs to act more robustly in applying the law in respect of illegal encampments.

FODAG understands that new legislation from central Government should give the Council and the Police new powers to act expediently when the law is breached. The Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge, whilst recognising the rights of travellers under the law supports any action, including a blanket injunction that will bring about an improvement to the current unacceptable situation and urges the powers that be to act in the best interest of legitimate Downs users.

Travellers are not the only concern. In recent years the Downs, along with other areas of the City has witnessed the growing phenomenon of largely resident van dwellers who have decided to make the Downs their permanent address. This is a situation that has been pre-empted by a significant rise in homelessness in general, a lack of affordable housing, escalating rents in the private sector, changes to welfare policy and for some, purely a lifestyle choice.
Travellers and Van Dwellers on the Downs

Ten years ago, there were just the odd overnighters or some largely itinerant van dwellers who stayed for a few days before moving on to new locations. At the time of writing there are around 30 such units, mostly centred around the Parry’s Lane area but now beginning to leach out to other parts of the Downs. Reports of littering and fouling are becoming more prevalent.

Currently if vans are legally parked, taxed and MOT’d then there is little that the authorities can do to move them on.

But what are we to do? Should we be more sympathetic to the plight of the homeless who are just looking for somewhere to call home or should we assume they are just a group that want to take full advantage of a lax system and make little or no contribution to the life of the city?

If they are evicted from the Downs. Where next? Unless some proper engagement is made to improve their situation, we will just be moving the problem to someone else’s doorstep.

Advice If you see Travellers on the Downs:

The official advice is to contact the police using the 101 number and report illegal encampments on the Downs and / or anti-social behaviour. The police have said that the more complaints they receive the more likely they are to take action swiftly.
Letters Re Parking on the Downs

The purpose of this letter is to make the case to end the practice of the Zoo using the Downs as a car park.

There are 3 reasons why car parking on the Downs should not be allowed. The first is environmental. The Downs are an attractive area of grassland of conservation interest and valued for recreation. Parking on the site has damaged its nature conservation interest, with bare earth, vehicle tracks and a decline in the quality of the grassland. Although the Zoo agrees an environmental protocol with the Council, in practice this is often ignored. The Downs are also a Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Site and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest.

The second reason is legal. FODAG members know that the Downs were established by their own Act of Parliament in 1861 which says that the Downs Committee must act so that the Downs “... shall for ever hereafter remain open and unenclosed ... as a place for the public resort and recreation of the citizens and inhabitants of Bristol ...”. By no possible stretch of imagination does overflow car parking fall within the meaning of the words “public resort and recreation”.

The third reason is planning. The Downs are protected by four planning designations; Important Open Space, a Site of Nature Conservation Interest, Local Historic Park and Garden and a Conservation Area. Parking on the Downs is in contravention of all these Development Plan policies.

The Zoo says that it has many visitors who come by car and so it has to use the Downs for car parking. The Downs Committee says that it needs the income from the Zoo. Both have a point. But the Zoo is a local business, like others located around the Downs, and I do not see why it should enjoy the unique privilege of using the Downs for car parking. Income is important of course, but income should not be earned by breaking the law of the Downs Act and by going against local planning policy. The Zoo currently has planning permission for car parking to the end of this year. 2019 must be the last year of Zoo overflow parking on the Downs. I urge FODAG and its members to stand against the use of the Downs as a car park in future.

Peter Weeks
The Purpose of this recent letter is to update FODAG members on the status of Zoo Parking on the Downs.

Despite the Zoo’s promise not to apply for planning permission, after the current planning permission expires at the end of this year, and repeated promises to find other solutions, the latest information from the Downs Committee as of July 2019 is that it is ‘negotiating a new agreement with Bristol Zoo to secure a substantial increase in licence fees for car parking with a greater tenure.’ A promise blatantly broken.

The Zoo has been given permission for car parking no less than 7 times in recent decades. Each time planners have said ‘this must be the last time’. Each time the Zoo has promised ‘This is the last time.’ It will never be the last time unless enough people who care about The Downs put pressure on the Downs Committee and the Zoo.

Overflow parking should not be allowed for strong environmental, legal and planning reasons as set out in my previous letter. The Zoo has no special status regarding the Downs 2019 must be the last year of overflow parking. I urge FODAG and members who care about the Downs to stand against car parking in the future.

Peter Weeks
The FOD+AG monitoring teams are halfway through this, our 10th consecutive season’s recording, as we approach the end of June. The patterns we have identified in butterfly numbers and species diversity on the Downs and in the Gully over the period since 2010, when UKBMS procedures were adopted, are evident once again in 2019. Fluctuations within the broad trends reflect variations in weather conditions especially those in temperature and cloud cover percentages from year to year as well as by the legacy amongst all hibernating populations of the previous season.

An outline of the 2019 data so far for our two transects – Clifton and Durham Downs (C-DD) and the Gully and Walcombe Slade (G&WS) showing numbers/species/week and cumulative species diversity - are presented below. Here fluctuations are apparent are more evident because they relate to a single season but they do show the effects caused by a warm and sunny spring can have on the emergence of adult overwintering species – Brimstones, Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshells, Commas and Peacocks as well as an early mini-explosion in our Orange Tip population.
For comparison, plots of data averages for 2010-2018 and cumulative figures for species diversity are included together with a few photographs of iconic species captured by associates of our team members, for whom we are extremely grateful for their permissions to publish them for your delight. As usual all data for the 2019 season will appear on our website shortly after the end of September.

For anyone sufficiently interested to include butterfly spotting as part of their visits to the Downs or Gorge you should be looking out for Small and Large White, Common Blues, Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers, Speckled Woods and Silver-washed Fritillaries all of which grace our skies at this time of year. In addition, if you are both eagle-eyed and fortunate you might also glimpse Small and Large Skippers, Small Coppers and a little later, on the scree slopes in the Gully, Chalkhill Blues.
and this year warm winds from the South aids the invasion from the continent and North Africa of species such as Painted Ladies.

If you register items of natural history in the media you are probably aware that a number of important, but rare butterfly species are for a variety of reasons making something of a come-back in some parts of the UK. These include Duke of Burgundy, Checkered Skipper, Large Blue and a new variant of Swallowtails. It is conceivable that some of these could find their way to the Limestone Meadows of the Downs and the Gorge and although it might take them some time to spread here we should be on the lookout. One sighting this year of a butterfly closely resembling Checkered Skipper has been reported in the Gully Transect but it is as yet too early to make a definitive identification such reappearances have happened before following years of apparent extinction – Small Blues and Chalkhill Blues to name but two, so please keep your eyes skinned.
Downs Butterfly Season April - June 2019

We are always pleased to receive one-off observations from you. Ideally, but not necessarily, reports should be accompanied by a photograph, date, time and rough location for your sighting to our website.

Martin Collins

Silver Washed Fritillary on Valerian
Downs Butterfly Season April - June 2019

Graphical Representation for Clifton and Durdham Down

Graphical Representation for Gully and Walcombe Slade
Another Mighty Oak.

FODAG members will be aware that the 2018/19 tree of the year was a Lucombe Oak. However, you may not be aware there is a further excellent specimen of this magnificent tree hidden away in a Stoke Bishop garden. It has a 5 metres girth and is estimated to be at least 255 years old. She is said to be a true grande dame keeping a watchful eye on the 30 or so other younger trees in the garden.

The Lucombe Oak is a naturally occurring hybrid of the Turkey Oak and the Cork Oak. It has the characteristics of both - being semi-deciduous, holding its leaves until late February - and having stunning cork like bark. It was first identified in 1762 by William Lucombe. He was so in love with the tree that he asked to be buried in a coffin made from its timbers. The owner of the Stoke Bishop tree has made no such request of his children!!

The gardens are at Lucombe House, 12 Druid Stoke Avenue and are open twice a year for the National Garden Scheme charities. However, it is possible to visit at other times by contacting the owner. Full contact details are given in the current NGS yellow book.

Malcolm Ravenscroft

FODAG Leafletting Support

Friends Of The Downs and Avon Gorge have published a new leaflet in order to promote and increase our membership. We are looking for some help in delivering these to households that are close to the Downs and might attract new people to join us.

The next area that we will be focusing on is Redland and Clifton. If you have some spare time and would like to help us deliver to about 8 or 10 streets then we would love to hear from you.

Please email me at derekcatterall@hotmail.com and I will deliver the leaflets to you along with the names of the streets we would like you to deliver to.

Derek Catterall
Robin Haward Interviews Mandy Leivers

Mandy Leivers ... Avon Gorge and Downs Biodiversity Education Manager for the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project.

Welcome, Mandy. Thanks for giving FODAG your time ..... what’s special at the moment?

It’s the twentieth anniversary of the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project!

For new members – what’s it all about?

The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project (AG&DWP) was set up to protect the outstanding wildlife interest of the Avon Gorge and Downs. We’re a partnership of organisations (Bristol City Council, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Downs Committee, Natural England, Merchant Venturers and the University of Bristol) which has three roles: surveying and monitoring wildlife; habitat management and education/community engagement.

The role of the 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”. Our team consists of me, my colleague Jill and our team of fab volunteers.

Do you happen to have any figures?

Since the project started we have engaged with over 125,000 people through walks, talks, courses, children and family events as well as through community events such as the Festival of Nature. We run education sessions for play-schemes (usually from disadvantaged areas of the City) as well as school groups City wide. Many of the children will be new to the Downs having never visited before.

You’re working with FODAG for some of this – how did that come about?

Well, that comes from the Your Downs initiative which was set up in 2013 to widen the range of people who visit the Downs and Gorge. It comprises myself from AG&DBP, FODAG, Ben Skuse Downs Supervisor and the Walking for Health Project.
**What sorts of groups have you worked with?**

A Five ways to well-being group from St.Pauls, Montpellier and Ashley; Headway (a charity which works with people recovering from brain injury) and the Heartful Dodgers (patients recovering from heart attacks and strokes from Southmead hospital.

**Cycle Sunday on the Downs (AGWP)**

Last year we ran the Wild Adventures Family Project which saw us working with Syrian and Refugee families. Through a series of visits to the Downs the families learnt about British wildlife, and improved their wellbeing by spending time together in nature, making friends and connecting with local people. For the Downs Challenge we worked with children from St. Pauls learning centre and the charity Imayla. It involved 5 sessions, over the year, for 18 children – helping them discover the wildlife of the Downs and Gorge and to form a relationship with the site.

**Where’s the challenge in that?**

The idea was to challenge the children to do things that they had never tried before. Several children had a major fear of minibeasts and of the dark. We helped them (along with Tony Smith of Bristol Naturalists Society, Mark Pa-
jak from the City Museum and Art Gallery, Ray Barnett and Jean Oliver from Bristol and District Moth Group). By the end of the special minibeast and spider session their fear of bugs had gone – they couldn’t stop looking for them! On the bat and moth nights by the time darkness fell..... we couldn’t get the children back on the minibus they were having so much fun.

*It sounds quite a challenge – is it true that kids who feared heights climbed up the sloping rock slab in the Gully?*

Yes that’s exactly what happened – they were so pleased with their achievement. The Imayla director said: “The Downs Challenge was really wonderful, you gave such care, support and skill to the young people and the staff....it was a great learning opportunity and I know the young people feel a better connection across the city.”

*Your Downs Wellbeing Walking Group (AGDWP)*

That seems to say it all. Did anything else come out of the Your Downs Project?

The Downs is now a Dark Sky Discovery Site and we’ve run a number of Star Parties attracting a very different audience to the usual events. We also run walks as part of Bristol Walking Festival with FODAG not forgetting Portway Sunday Park and Cycle Sunday.
What have you been up to recently?

The Festival of Nature was great: we were featuring and promoting the new Granny Downs Tree Trail (created with FODAG and in Richard Bland’s memory) Visitors to our tent could try out a mini tree trail identifying the trees and writing the answers in a puzzle grid. At the end of the trail participants could meet a real Bristol Whitebeam round behind a screen .... and then they got a certificate to prove it! Also we have just completed our new website – www.avongorge.org.uk where you can get all our trail leaflets, watch films, hear ‘voices from the wild’, find out about our work and events.

What about the rest of 2019?

Ah – we’re running the Botany without Boundaries Project working with older Asian Ladies from the charity DHEK BHAL which supports people in Easton and St. Paul’s. This is Arts Council funded and links with the brilliant exhibition at the museum called ‘Natural Selection’. The group are learning about the rare plants of the Avon Gorge, pressing flowers and producing herbarium specimen sheets, as well as having a go at botanical illustration.

I know that your funding has been cut, so are there any future plans?

We’re working on a National Lottery Heritage Fund bid with Forestry England and the National Trust which will focus on both sides of the Gorge.

You’ve done a lot for a lot of people, Mandy. FODAG earnestly hopes that funding for your job and your assistant is maintained for the future.

Robin Haward
Granny Downs Spring into Summer

Oh what a time of year this is on the Granny Downs. Every year we say that the horse chestnut spires are the best ever, and honestly, this year they are. Chestnut trees a cathedral with white and pink candles. And as I write (early June) we are waiting for the flowers of the lime trees to open with that perfume that makes me feel young again. By late April, the Granny Downs was strewn with petals torn off by the gales. This happens every year, the roads are lined with petal confetti.

And further gales meant that by the middle of June, the roads are lined with little green unripe conkers … still, there are many left to ripen on their spires. And now, as we head into July, the green conkers are getting bigger … and bigger.

I am fascinated by the opening phrases of birdsong. I hear the opening morning lyrics of the blackbird outside my window, but the opening phrases of song thrushes intrigue me more. There are so many song thrush opera singers on the Granny Downs, and as is usual, other birds are silent and crowd round to listen, especially wood pigeons. A few years ago, I determined to hear the opening phrase of one particularly virtuoso thrush and took myself to the Granny Downs before the dawn chorus began. I hid by a bush near the thrush tree and I was rewarded! There was a kind of avian clearing of the throat and then the bird rose through the branches and threw its opener into the air: only the beginning of the Sibelius violin concerto comes close, vulnerable, almost afraid, growing in confidence: truly rising up singing.

One of the song thrushes on the Granny Downs incorporates the nuthatch call into its lyrics: this is not surprising as there are many busy, vociferous nuthatches in this area. I am often fooled until the thrush changes its lyric. Nuthatches don’t do that!

There is spring cinquefoil growing on the Granny Downs – in July! The late, great botanist Colin Trapnell OBE once recorded this as growing on Christmas day on the Zoo Banks. I believe, though cannot substantiate, that his observations of the Avon Gorge are archived at Bristol University. If anyone can help with this, please contact me.

Interesting squirrel behaviour – grass diving! The grass had been cut and left in piles and a squirrel was diving into the pile, running along under the
Granny Downs Spring into Summer

green and emerging at the other end!

And now, into July, the fabulous scent of Linden blossom, most beautiful
tree scent in the world! And of course, the scent seems to intensify be-
cause the pollen falls and we are treading on a scented carpet as well as
walking in scented air. And here, under the lime tree, agrimony, lovely little
yellow rocket trails, smelling of apricots.

Geraldine Taylor

Victim of the Summer Storms on the Granny Downs
We are truly fortunate here in Bristol to have The Downs, a wonderful open space for all kinds of leisure and recreational activities throughout the year, and for dog owners it is an especially enjoyable area with plenty of space for them to run around and socialise with other dogs.

In summer The Downs becomes a very popular spot for picnics and barbecues and, whilst a lovely, relaxing way to enjoy a warm and sunny day, this can and does lead to some potentially serious hazards for dogs. Rubbish, especially leftover food and its packaging, is often not disposed of correctly in the bins provided or, if the bins are full, is not taken home but simply left on the ground around the bins. And this, with tempting meaty, foody smells, is very attractive to dogs. Often they have eaten something they shouldn’t before the owner has seen them or reached them.

Certain foods, including onions, grapes and chocolate, are poisonous to dogs and can make them very ill. Chicken bones are particularly dangerous as they can splinter easily and cause internal damage. Discarded portable barbecues can also present a serious risk as they often have a strong scent of meat on them but are clearly not intended for dogs to access and explore. Similarly, wooden skewers that have been used with food, if ingested, can also cause internal injuries and blockages. Hot charcoal can cause burns as well as sickness.

All these dangers have the potential to lead to serious illness and injuries in dogs which result in costly and very distressing visits to the vets. Although we should all be responsible for disposing of our rubbish properly year round, this is particularly important during the warm summer months and each season we sadly hear of several serious incidents. By simply disposing of your rubbish appropriately in a bin or taking it home with you, you not only keep The Downs clean and tidy for everyone but allow dogs and their owners to enjoy their walks risk free.

Thank you for helping to keep The Downs looking beautiful and for keeping it a safe place for our dogs!

Alfie and Bella
Views on the Proposed Leisure Loop

In the last few newsletters we have provided information about the new cycle loop. This is currently awaiting response from the Councils Place and Movement team and has generated a wide variety of opinion. We thought we would take the opportunity to publish 4 differing viewpoints that might help inform FODAG members and help them come to their own opinion.

Letter 1: Tim Clarke

Written statement to the committee recommending its support of the Downs Leisure Loop Proposal  I would urge the committee to support this proposal for the following reasons:-

1. Firstly, I believe that the proposal meets the aim, within its constitution, for FOD+AG to act on behalf of all legitimate users of the Downs and Avon Gorge and, where possible and appropriate, to support Bristol City Council, the Downs Committee and other groups to improve the Downs and Avon Gorge for the use of the citizens of Bristol and beyond.

2. The Loop would provide a marked improvement of the Downs for leisure use by cyclists and encourage more people to cycle and to use the Downs. A traffic-free facility, in such a pleasant and natural environment, where children and adults can learn to ride and increase their confidence would be a great community asset. I worked as a warden at the Cycle Sunday event two years ago and during a duty period of three hours three separate families told me that their child had learnt to ride that morning.

3. Cycling generally has significant health benefits for participants and any additional encouragement to get more people cycling in Bristol should be supported. It will also have a knock-on positive effect by reducing the dependence on vehicle travel and thus help improve air quality. This will contribute to the Bristol Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013

“This strategy has several themes and priorities of which the priority to ‘Create a high quality and well connected built and green environment, and manage the health impacts of Climate Change’ is most relevant to
Views on the Proposed Leisure Loop

the Downs. This priority is achieved by ‘promoting walking and cycling as the primary methods of getting to and from places through transport planning and encouraging the everyday take up of physical activity’.

4. Suitable proposals to encourage greater use of the Downs should be supported. The more people that appreciate the Downs, the greater the level of protection afforded to this wonderful open space.

5. I lived in London for around 13 years and have visited many times since and have often used and appreciated similar provisions in London parks which work very well, for example, Richmond Park, Hyde Park, Clapham Common, Highbury Fields.

6. From the design information attached to the proposal I have estimated that the additional area of the Downs required to provide this facility is approximately 4838 m$^2$. The total area of the Downs is 178 hectares i.e. 1.78 million m$^2$. This equates to a very small additional percentage, 0.27%, of the total area of the Downs to be used to provide the Loop, and I would consider this to be an acceptable amount of grassland to lose in contrast to the overall benefits that would be gained. Especially, as much of its length is already adjoining existing tarmac path or over worn and eroded sections used for jogging/walking.

Letter 2: Caroline Baker

I cannot support the dramatic changes proposed in favour of cyclists. As members of FODAG, we must consider conservation, environmental, political, and social issues. I strongly favour adapting/integrating the roads we have as cycle paths, without laying/widening hard paths. Bristol prides itself as being green city and must heed that when we make decisions.

Likewise, with the consequences of climate change looming over us, we must preserve every green space, not find excuses to build over it. Instead we must adapt what we have, and reduce our carbon footprint. We are working to reduce the use of the car.

Additionally at a time of financial challenges we must choose wisely how we
spend our money.

1. I am very happy to have better facilities for cyclists, but not to the detriment of the natural habitat of the Downs.

FODAG's brief is to preserve the Downs, and allow the least disturbance to the habitat as possible.

I therefore support the idea that no more hard paths should be created.

2. I believe cyclists should be separated from walkers.

My experience is that some cyclists behave as though the roadway is theirs, and I personally do not like having to pause for my safety as a cyclist passes, nor while walking not knowing if a silent cycle is about to bear down on me, and expect me to move, not him/her. I think walkers, wheelchair users, families should feel safe on footpaths.

3. I think we need to have an endgame in sight, and that is eventually to have no cars on the circular route. So plan the steps to achieve that. When that is achieved, we have enough hard surfaced roads available, and any additional hard cycle path will be redundant.

4. The cost of new cycle paths is prohibitive, and we can save money by adapting what we already have. I think that 'new and clever' root protection, foreign hardcore etc leads to more maintenance and unforeseen consequences. We must not be lured into thinking we are 'tree friendly' by doing this.

5. Though I hear the dangers of having a one wayroad for vehicles, because of the fear of speeding, I believe that can be overcome, as elsewhere.

6. I accept some pathways are not wheelchair friendly, but the wheelchairs will be able to share the cycle path where necessary.

7. In the future with one way, or when the road is closed, access for the Cafe and locals can be solved.

As with all the decisions, with give and take accommodation can be found.
Views on the Proposed Leisure Loop

Letter 3 Max Robinson

Firstly, I commend the thinking behind the general aim of the proposal to increase accessibility to the Downs for a greater number of people with differing leisure requirements and interests. The proposed ‘Loop’ appears to have a great potential for achieving that objective and many of the suggested changes are interesting.

However, as a resident who is fortunate enough to live close to the Downs I have concerns about the proposed suggestions for closing the Circular Road to traffic, either on Sundays or at worst permanently.

I can fully appreciate that the major concept of the ‘Loop’ is to encourage the use of cycles and I’m sure large numbers of people will use bikes to travel to the Downs. However, if the project is the expected success it will not just draw people who wish to cycle, run or walk but will become an even more attractive leisure outlet in itself, particularly taking into consideration the proposals for barbecue areas and to build a cafe near the Sea Walls. **This will not just attract those who are prepared to travel to the Downs under their own manual means or public transport.**

Whilst naturally acknowledging the need to reduce overall car use nationally and internationally there are as yet no truly successful ways for achieving this and in an affluent city like Bristol car ownership continues to rise at a pace.

The proposals for restricting car access to the Circular Road appears to make little concession to the likely increase in cars parking in the roads immediately surrounding the Downs. This would become an even bigger problem if the Leisure Loop were implemented, became successful (as would be hoped) and the Circular Road was permanently closed to traffic.

Forgive me if I am raising a well discussed issue and have missed any information you may have published on the matter. (I’m sure you must have done a study or have a clear indication of the number of cars likely to be displaced from the Circular Rd by closing on Sundays or permanently; both under present conditions and following a successful implementation of the ‘Loop’).
Views on the Proposed Leisure Loop

Letter 4 ‘G’

Thank you for inviting comment on the proposed new path on The downs. Here are my thoughts.

1. In principle I welcome the proposal which seems to have been carefully thought through and presented.

2. I have concerns about overuse, erosion and traffic speeds.

3. Unacceptable speeding is common on Rockleaze/Downleaze and Ladies’ Mile as well as Circular Road.

4. I am strongly opposed to one-way working for motor traffic as it encourages speeding. Various methods of discouraging speeding, for instance speed bumps and chicanes, should be introduced to the design.

5. Cyclists wishing to move fast should be encouraged to continue to use the road.

6. I would prefer to see an extensive area of pedestrian priority at Sea Walls; an area for lingering and wandering rather than progressing.

7. Missing from the proposal is any mention of a link with the proposed bridge over Bridge Valley Road; this should be given appropriate consideration.

8. All new infrastructure must be durable and require minimum maintenance. Responsibility and available funding for maintenance must be identified.

9. Sustrans &c are very good at this sort of thing and I would trust them to design and manage the installation well.
EVENTS:

**Conservation Sundays:** Second Sunday in the month starting 8th September. Robin Haward: robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk

**Wednesday September 25th:** FODAG social preceded by a short walk: 5.00pm at the Downs Café. Starts with a walk with Francis Greenacre. Social from 6.00pm. RSVP essential to robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk

**Friday September 27th:** FODAG stall at Freshers Fair on the Downs.

**Saturday September 28th:** First Deep Litter Pick of the Season: 10:00am register with Martin Collins martinandglen@hotmail.com

**Wednesday October 1st:** Launch of the FODAG photography festival. Drinks reception in the foyer of the AXA building at the top of Blackboy Hill from 6:00pm. The display of photos will then run for 3 weeks.

**AGM:** The 2019 AGM will be held at Redland Green Bowls club on Wednesday 21st November at 7.00 pm. The Speaker will be Ella Hogg fthe Bristol City Council Parks Volunteer Coordinator.

**Butterfly Monitoring and Goat Monitoring:** If you would like to get involved please email: martinandglen@hotmail.com.

**Dead Hedging and Alexanders Attack:** Working parties to help maintain the hedges and remove invasive weeds.

Robin Haward 01179 743385 or robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk
COMMITTEE:
Robert Westlake (Chair), Martin Collins, Derek Catterall, Terry Hannan, Joan Gubbins, Robin Haward, Bob Bell, Caroline Baker, Tim Clarke & Luke Hudson.

KEY CONTACTS:-
Membership: Joan Gubbins
Articles for the Newsletter: Robin Haward / Luke Hudson

Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Winter edition is 20th January 2019. Articles to robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk or fodagcontent@gmail.com)

Subscriptions: £10.00 per individual or £19.00 per household per calendar year. Please ask for a standing order.

mail@gubbin.co.uk OR by post: 3 Wallcroft, Durdham Park, BS6 6XJ, 01179739799.

SOCIAL MEDIA:
Website: http://fodag-bristol.weebly.com The website has further information on events and a regular blog on the Downs.

Facebook: Do please join the group on Facebook, and like/share the page to spread the word. @FODAGbristol.

Instagram: Friends_of_the_Downs.

Do please send any Downs & Gorge photos to fodagbs@gmail.com.
Roe Deer by the Avon (Graham Balfry)