FOD+AG have a growing reputation for representing users of the Downs who are compatible with the unique natural environment. Our quality of input is based firstly on experienced, devoted individuals working in teams and working alongside other like-minded groups.

The question I ask now is **what is FOD+AG’s role to be in the future?**

Some thoughts to start!!!!!!!!!

We need to look beyond identifying problems:

a) *purely income generation uses without looking into*
   - potential private sector contributions,
   - Trusts,
   - Sponsors,
   - Donations,
   - Lottery.

b) *Car usage and parking without commenting on,*
   - the quality of the public transport provision.

c) *Air Pollution without looking into,*
   - renewable sources of energy.

d) *the quality of governance,*
   - without examining what has been achieved elsewhere.
e) Non Downs user obtaining income from using the Downs, without seeking full transparency in finances.

….let the debates, (and actions), begin.

Wind and Solar Powered Street Lighting in Avignon, France.

Jack Penrose—Chair

People of the Downs

To celebrate 10 years of FOD+AG, we have contacted a variety of people who have made significant contributions to the life and conservation of the Downs to hear their views of what The Downs means to them, what has changed over the last 10 years, and where they see the future of the Downs. We have spread these through the newsletter and called these recollections and interviews ‘People of the Downs.’ We hope to extend this over the next few editions of the newsletter.
Butterfly Monitoring 2017

Since 2010 our Butterfly Monitoring teams have been collecting data about the local butterfly communities of the University Botanic Garden, Downs & Gully to send to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Survey. There, with data similarly collected from transects carried out nationwide, a picture of the UK’s butterflies, their populations, distribution and their ongoing status in terms of conservation/endangerment can be built up. Summaries of the data we have accumulated over the past 8 years can be found on our website.

In 2014 we were asked by Nick Wray, the curator, to monitor the butterflies at the University of Bristol Botanic Garden. Despite the somewhat artificial nature of the plant communities there and the relative compactness of the site, it was decided to set up a transect there using the same UKBMS guidelines as we used for the rather more natural environment of our Downs and Gully transects. Thus we have accumulated a parallel data bank for the Botanic Garden for the last 4 years, which although not directly comparable to our data ‘from the wild’ is nevertheless of interest in it’s own right as a source of insight into the ecology of these most accessible and colourful members of our local wildlife.

Red Admiral—Martin Collins
As promised in issue 26 of this Newsletter in the article about the UBBG meadow plot there follow some observations on the 2017 data from the Garden (UBBG), and for purposes of comparison, parallel data from the Downs (C-DD) and Gully (G&WS) for the same period. In addition and for the benefit of a number of people who have expressed an interest in the impact of the nationally recognised rather dire year for butterflies of 2016, I have incorporated our data for that year in the summary table below:

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers Seen</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of species</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Families represented</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Whites/ Browns + Blues</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Species with longest season (by % presence)</td>
<td>Sp. Wood 76%</td>
<td>Sp. Wood 58%</td>
<td>Sp. Wood 80%</td>
<td>Sp. Wood 58%</td>
<td>Sp. Wood 84%</td>
<td>Sp. White 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peak period (by number &amp; diversity)</td>
<td>Weeks 12 to 17</td>
<td>Weeks 15 to 18</td>
<td>Weeks 11 to 16</td>
<td>Weeks 13 to 19</td>
<td>Weeks 11 to 22</td>
<td>Weeks 13 to 22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The headlines to which I would draw your attention are as follows:

- Numbers and diversity of butterflies have recovered substantially from
Butterfly Monitoring 2017

the disturbingly low figures for 2016 although in none of the 3 tran-
sects are back to the levels which we have observed in the past.

- The peak period for all transects started approximately 2 weeks earlier
  in 2017 reflecting the fact that spring 2016 was when the major dam-
age to the butterfly communities was done last year.

- The overwhelming majority of the species in this area are members of
  the Pieridae (Whites), the Satyridae (Browns) and the Blue section of
  the Lycaenidae making up between 85 – 95% of sightings.

- The commonest species, with minor differences only in their positions
  in rank order, are Speckled Woods, Small Whites and Meadow
  Browns, with Large Whites and Ringlets muscling in on occasions.

- Almost invariably the species present for the greatest number of
  weeks in all transects and in both years is the Speckled Wood, which
  leads to speculation as to whether with ongoing climate change this
  species will join our small clique of butterflies which overwinter as
  adults,

Not evident from the summary table above but interesting and worthy of note
are

- Populations and community diversity of Downs and Gully butterflies
  are becoming much more alike than in the years before the feral goats
  were introduced into the Gully. It is almost certainly their browsing of
  scrub and trees beginning to change the ecology of the Gully to that of
  a meadow – i.e. the restoration of the grazed habitat which preceded
  the scrubland and secondary woodland which had invaded after the
  cessation of sheep grazing on the Downs in 1925. This, in case you
  were unaware, is why the goats were introduced as a means of bio-
  logical control. Our data is an indirect indication as to how successful
  that strategy has been.

- Rare Small Blues and Chalkhill Blues continue to survive in the Gully
  thanks to the specialised habitat and local flora provided by the scree
Butterfly Monitoring 2017

slopes, rocky outcrops and thin calcareous soils.

- After a relative dearth of their vibrant colours in the earlier part of 2017, the Vanessidae were spectacularly represented by a population explosion of Red Admirals in September.

As ever my thanks to the members of the monitoring teams in each location without whom these records would simply not exist. Their interest, enthusiasm and reliability remain an inspiration.

Tim Clarke, warden of AWT’s new reserve at Bennett’s Patch adjacent to the Portway, who introduced us to the reserve in issue 26 of our Newsletter, is also monitoring butterflies at that site. Perhaps next season I can persuade Tim to write about his findings and add to our growing, both in area and duration, insights into our local butterflies.

Speckled Brown—Martin Collins

Martin Collins
Memories of The Downs

I sent copies of the beautiful Welcome Issue of the newsletter to various friends who have moved away from Bristol. Two of them wrote to say what a great part the Downs had played in their lives and sent the following reminiscences.

Barry Williamson

The booklet made me realise how influential the Downs have been on my life. Initially we did not live very near but there were the football games arranged with school mates during every holiday, meeting at what was then The Seven Sisters; hanging onto the rear handrail of the Number 1 bus for a tow along the road from the White Tree to the top of Blackboy Hill during winter's south west gales; the annual council-organised Guy Fawkes bonfire on the land just near the Water Tower; watching the sun rise one summer morning with a group of fellow senior Scouts; walking with a girl friend to Black Rocks from the Sunday evening services at both Saint Albans and the Etloe Road Methodist Church......

Then much later when we came back to Bristol, watching our children Karen and Robb climbing the Hawthorn trees at the end of Royal Albert Road, with Moray in a pram; playing hide-and-seek with the three of them off Ladies Mile; walking with Carol's mother to Sea Walls and playing football with the two boys at the top of Parry's Lane...

The Downs have been a lifelong and life-enhancing influence on our lives.

Ian Stevenson

(Ian lived in Bristol during the Second World War and returned in the 1970s)

Our Downs 1964-77

When we moved to Westbury Park in April 1964 almost our first action was to visit the little nursery on the Triangle and buy four small trees for our tiny garden (including a cotoneaster which is still thriving). On our very first
morning I had looked out of our bedroom window and burst into tears. There was not a tree to be seen and for someone brought up in the shade of a beautiful beech tree in Surrey this was a major disaster. Those little trees were a comfort but very soon we discovered The Downs and things really began to look up.

At first we enjoyed Durdham Down, particularly lovely at that time of year with chestnut, may and laburnum in full flower. But very soon we crossed the main road onto The Downs proper and began to explore the delights of those seemingly endless green acres. They offered such an amazing feeling of liberation. At the far side the views over the gorge served to enhance the feeling of freedom and space and the sight of an occasional horse and rider on the Ladies' Mile added to the impression of rural tranquility.

By 1969 we had three small children and our appreciation of The Downs changed in nature. We found that the flat area by the gorge was the best place to fly a kite. A shady tree in the middle of a level patch of grass not far from home became the birthday tree, as party picnics for our own and friends' children were often held there. The availability of ice cream near the water tower at the top of Blackboy Hill began to change the direction of our walks. It was here that there were occasional special attractions like the circus (with elephant dung for sale!) and the Bristol 600 exhibition.

In the early days a walk across Durdham Down was a pleasant way to begin a trip into town but, to be honest, by the time we moved from Bristol in 1977, traffic had increased to such an extent that we had to walk further and further to get away completely from the noise and smell. Still, nothing could seriously detract from the feeling of limitless space provided by those acres of green.

The Downs did so much to compensate for our pocket handkerchief garden and to alleviate the feelings of claustrophobia that sometimes came over us among the densely packed houses of Westbury Park. The Downs were a hugely important part of our life.

Gill and Alastair Humphries
Dear Committee,

I am shocked by Richard Bland’s article about the Downs crisis. “Public parks will receive no money from the city after 2020....” I have read few things that have caused more despair.

How can it happen that in 2017 in one of the richest countries in the history of the world, e can no longer afford to maintain the green spaces which are so vital for the health and happiness of everyone in our lovely city. We must be committing wilful self-harm. We are a land glittering with wealth; look at some districts of Bristol or the Cotswold villages. We must be at the mercy of a corrupt and twisted ideology.

What is the cause of the crisis? The Council has to cut some £100 million from its expenditure because of government Cuts. The Westminster government has decided that public expenditure, the sustaining of public services built up overlong years must be drastically reduced. There is nothing inevitable about this. It is a political decision; “shrinking the state”, fostering privatisation. I simply do not understand. Germany, admittedly a fragile economy (!), spends 44% of its GDP on state services; the aim here is to reduce our spending to 36%. I do not understand why.

Our public parks have been created over long years as a manifestation of the belief that the common good is above private greed and gain. I ma proud to be a citizen of Bristol. I want ALL my fellow-citizens to enjoy the good things in life and not be at the mercy of “market forces”. The Downs will survive with the contribution of the Merchant Venturers and the strength of the wealthy communities on its perimeter but what about other parts of Bristol which are not as strong as we are? Do we simply turn the other way and hope their parks will survive? Wish them Good Luck? National Trust take-over? that must be a joke. Richard Branson purchase? No way.

There is nothing inevitable about all this. MPs vote at Westminster for the Cuts that are doing so much damage. It is not the decision of our local council. The Bankers’ crisis was 9 years ago. We have recovered and our precious civic life can and should flourish.

I am old and shall not live much longer. For nearly 80 years my family has
enjoyed the Downs and other Parks in Bristol, maintained by our Council for the good of all. I never thought I would live to see this criminal activity by our central government, all in the cause of a twisted ideology. We cannot accept it.

Barry Williamson

Review of the Year: Richard Bland

2017 was a year of drama. It began with the Mayor’s announcement that deep cuts were necessary in all non-statutory activity, and that Parks would have to be self sufficient by 2020. There was an immediate threat to the work of the Zoo’s Avon gorge and Downs wildlife Project. A lot of hard work saved the project for the current year, and led it to start seeking grants. In December a consultation was put out, looking at ways to save about £1.5 million of the five million parks budget by a combination of increased income from commercial activities, and savings on maintenance. By then a variety of schemes for devolving responsibility from the council had been considered. The problem was a common one across the country, and it was clear that parks would operate in future in a rather different manner. It was expected that the role of the volunteer would increase.

The main achievement of FOD+AG was the cleaning and repair of the Haven, a listed shelter at the top of Blackboy Hill, created in 1917 for wounded soldiers at the Victoria Hospital across the way. The finishing touch, an information panel, was installed in October. The scheme was a partnership with Maggie Shapland and the Redland and Cotham Amenities Society who had funded a previous restoration.

We planted three Tulip Trees on March 20th, on Clay Pit Road. They were replacements for Horse Chestnut trees that had died, and were part of a
scheme which planted some 70 trees to fill gaps in the Avenues on the Downs that had been pointed out by FOD+AG four years previously. It was a wet, cold, miserable day and the men from Gristwood and Toms were magnificent. There are still gaps and stumps that need replacements, and we will hope to get them filled when money is less tight.

The shock of the year came on July 29 when one of the herd of six Afghan goats was chased over the quarry edge by a runaway dog and killed, as was the dog. This was the first serious problem since the goats arrived in July 2011, but, alas it was followed by a second death in the same manner on Nov 19th. Natural England are considering the future of the project, which has in every other way been a huge success.

The Zoo gained planning permission for three more years of use of the land off Ladies Mile for parking, but declared that this was the last time it would seek it. A large campaign of opposition was led by the Ramblers Association, on the grounds that too little money reached the Downs, and that while the Zoo had this back up they would never seek a permanent solution to their parking problem. The poor weather in August ensured that little use was actually made of the facility this year.

In June we held two sessions on the Canopy below the Suspension Bridge to try to control the spread of Alexanders that were destroying the rare native limestone species that had managed to establish on this special spot. On August 12th after three years of hard work the new Café, the 360, on the roof of the Observatory was finally opened, and soon afterwards the lower room became available for hiring. This site, linked to the Bridge visitor centre, has huge potential.

The second Pop concert on September 2nd was a success. Some £18000 was raised by a surcharge on ticket sales, and the hiring fee was over £40,000, so that real money is starting to come into the Downs. Let us hope that it is properly managed and accounted for.

Peaceful Portway on September 17th finally managed to attract reasonable crowds, with balloons taking off, mad cyclists parading, songs being sung. It was a joyous event.
And, to cap an extraordinary year, finally on Oct 27th the Inspector rejected all the nonsense that had been peddled about trees and tree replacement and gave full planning permission to the scheme to create a bridge over Bridge Valley Road, and link the two halves of the Downs torn apart by roaring traffic. As those who attended the AGM will know, we are still a very long way from actually building the bridge, but we are already well travelled. Adrien Tomorr does not easily give up.

And what will 2018 hold? It may be the tenth anniversary of FOD+AG, but it is the 300th anniversary of the first recorded horse race in 1718, using what today we would call the Pop concert site. Horse racing was abandoned in 1838 because it encouraged rowdy activity! Road charging, in the form of turnpikes, was started 291 years ago, and Bridge Valley Road, designed by the great John Loudon Macadam, was opened 196 years ago. It is forty years since the Portway was closed and the Gorge face pinned and netted, and 30 years since the Downs meadows were first left unmown. There is much to do, and much to celebrate.

Richard Bland
When evening came and the warm glow grew deeper,
Serenely far there swam in the sunny height
A buzzard and his mate who took their pleasure
Swirling and poising idly in golden light.

On great pied motionless moth-wings borne along,
So effortless and so strong,
Cutting each other's paths together they glided,
Then wheeled asunder till they soared divided
Two valleys' width (as though it were delight
To part like this, being sure they could unite
So swiftly in their empty, free dominion),
Curved headlong downward, towered up the sunny steep,
Then, with a sudden lift of the one great pinion,
Swung proudly to a curve, and from its height
Took half a mile of sunlight in one long sweep.

And we, so small on the swift immense hillside,
Stood tranced, until our souls arose uplifted
On those far-sweeping, wide,
Strong curves of flight – swayed up and hugely drifted,
Were washed, made strong and beautiful in the tide
Poem Pages - ‘The Buzzards’

Of sun-bathed air. But far beneath, beholden
Through shining deeps of air, the fields were golden
And rosy burned the heather where cornfields ended.

And still those buzzards whirled, while light withdrew
Out of the vales and to surging slopes ascended,
Till the loftiest flaming summit died to blue.

Martin Armstrong

Common Buzzard: Buteo Buteo
My husband is disabled so I never go far from our home near the White Tree roundabout. I thought my discovery days were over – but no!! Wasp orchid in White Tree meadow this year, and the biggest discovery of all last year, repeated this year as I write.

There’s a little stand of conifers not far from the pillar box in Saville Road, and quite near the original and the new Seven Sisters. Falling needles, deep shade and chunks of bark have created a forest floor unique on the Downs.

Initially, my treasure was two of the tiniest earthstars, (possibly Geastrum quadrifidum), I have ever seen. Ravens glided overhead, and a Nuthatch was close at hand, expressing his annoyance at my presence in what was obviously the centre of his domain.

Also, scattered throughout were miniature flowers of white Herb Robert, the second flowering of this plant even tinier than the first. But then, late July last year, parts of the forest floor were also strewn with bright white discs, the size of a 5p.

What’s this? I thought, kneeling to look and as I turned one over, the disc fell away to reveal a bird’s nest with four miniature silver eggs in it. The holy grail of fungi! Bird’s Nest Fungi – the tiny Cyathus olla I think, because that has the pure white disc covering the spores until they are ready for release.

I cannot emphasise fully how beautiful, what awesomely perfect miniatures these felty nests are. I’ve long known about this fungi and all but given up hope of ever seeing it.

As researcher Dacher Keltner of the University of California comments: ‘Put aside the myth that awe is rare.’ *

Geraldine Taylor

* quoted in New Scientist 29th July 2017
Before deciding to make Bristol my home city I spent quite a lot of time researching to see what made Bristol a more attractive option over other cities. Having lived and worked in Greece for eleven years I was returning to the UK, but this time with two small children and I wanted to find a city that would offer them, as well as myself, as many opportunities as possible.

Bristol came out tops, good schools, two Universities, good diverse communities, lots of history and places to visit and above all lots of green space.

The Downs became our go to place for walking, meeting friends, having picnics, enjoying the views, getting away from the hubbub and enjoying the peace and tranquillity, sometimes whiling away a whole day and of course the fact that it was accessible at all times and free to use was crucial. My visits to The Downs have evolved over the years and now, like many other people, I visit them every day to walk my dog, but also I am lucky enough to work and earn my living on them.

Converting the gent’s toilets into a café was an inspired use of one of a pair of Edwardian toilet buildings (the ladies also being converted to house both gents and ladies’ toilets). Over the years The Café has become a key destination for people, particularly using it as a meeting point and there is no typical demographic of the people visiting The Downs, or using The Café. In an average day the diversity of people we welcome in The Café is amazing, from trades people on their way to and from work, ambulance crews and Paramedics coming in for a hot drink, business people using it as a meeting place, dog walkers, Mums with little ones meeting other Mums, Grandparents bringing in their grandchildren, visitors to Bristol for hospital appointments, people searching out other company to pass their day, children after school coming to The Downs to let off steam, University students (quite often with their visiting family and friends) to name but a few.

The different groups of sporting people using The Downs is a fantastic tribute to Bristol and its encouragement of locals to embrace and use its green spaces - from runners, joggers, walking groups, Nordic walkers, cyclists, PT fitness groups, footballers, rugby players, hockey and lacrosse players, American football and yes there is even a Quiditch team that regularly practises.
People of the Downs - Gayle Tate

For me Bristol was a great choice of city and every day I find out something new and inspiring about The Downs; we are lucky to have such a great green space and we must all not only use it but look after it so it can continue to be enjoyed.

Gayle Tate

A-Z of the Downs

FOD+AG Committee member Richard Bland has compiled a very exhaustive A to Z of features of the downs covering over 150 different locations, ranging from ‘The Cabman’s Shelter to the ‘Centenary Oak’, and including a handy Index.

The downloadable file of the A-Z is available on the FOD+AG website under ‘Associated Information’.

Weblink:
https://fodag-bristol.weebly.com/associated-information.html
An interview with Francis Greenacre by Robin Haward

RH: How long have you been passionate about the Downs and the Gorge?

FG: I came to Bristol in 1969 and I remember driving into Bristol along the Westbury Road, from which the Downs seemed rather flat and featureless. But that was before I had got the wider picture, and I was soon inspired by the views of the Avon Gorge in the paintings in my care in Bristol Art Gallery.

RH: With regard to paintings of the Downs, who leads for you...and why?

FG: It has to be a watercolour by Francis Danby looking across the Downs to the Bristol Channel and Wales – he so well suggests the extent of the once treeless Downs and he’s even captured the moistness of a late summer evening. Exciting pictures are still being rediscovered and photographs also tell us much - about quarrying, vast agricultural fairs, lost viewpoints, for example. One day maybe World War II photographs will be found that reveal the Downs’ crucial role in preparations for D-Day.
RH: Shall we mention scrub?

FG: That has long been a concern. But at last there is now a scrub management plan in place – carefully thought through, but inevitably not as draconian as I would have wished.

RH: Do you have a couple of favourite areas of the Downs or Gorge?

FG: Well....one used to be Fairyland but I would say no longer, precisely because of the advance of scrub – it’s lost a third of its open space in my time. The other? Looking over the Downs towards Sea Walls from beyond Ladies Mile – that sense of space and of history: horse racing…cricket…the box kite taking off and an ever changing sky.

RH: You produced a superb display about the history of the Downs for Downs 150 celebrations (displayed on the water tower railings) Did you enjoy getting this together? Were there, for you, any new discoveries?

FG: I thoroughly enjoyed it; it was only difficult to decide what to leave out. I also had to learn a little about the iron-age history of the Downs and I certainly enjoyed coming across that marvellous photograph of the stately progress of tweed-suited Bristol Cycle Club riders on their penny-farthings.

RH: What is your favourite tree?

FG: I’ve got two: the great Sycamore at the top of Bridge Valley Road and the Hawthorn or May Trees. Many were planted in the 1860s and the 1920s and most have since been swamped by the advance of scrub. The May blossom is no longer the major Bristol event it once was, but it is still a delight.

RH: What comes immediately into your head when you hear the word ‘Alexanders’??

FG: Libby Houston, botanist and poet, whom we both greatly admire!

RH: How do you feel about the recent work Ian has done at the Observatory?

FG: Much impressed, especially by the new displays about the building’s fascinating history and its links with the very earliest years of photography.
RH: You are a long-standing member of the Downs Committee – what do you enjoy most about this work?

FG: Yesterday! Yesterday the first meeting of the new Events and Finance sub-committee took place. And because of much work over previous months by officers, councillors and merchants, and despite the fearful problems all Bristol parks are presently facing, I am suddenly optimistic. Our finances are under control. There is a new understanding of the Downs Committee’s role as an independent body. There is a determination to find ways of keeping open or in due course re-opening the three public lavatories after their ‘closure’ on 1 February. And much more.

RH: What advice would you give our elected mayor about the Gorge and Downs?

FG: No other city has such a large and spectacular landscape so close to its centre. Celebrate it and for goodness sake find a parks director who will champion all Bristol’s parks.

RH: Well, what advice would you give the people of Bristol?

FG: Come. And explore both sides of the Avon Gorge. The Downs and the Avon Gorge are a quite extraordinary asset, available for all.

I had spent a most enjoyable and instructive hour with Francis. I thank him warmly for his time – and for the coffee.

Robin Haward
These pictures of workman on the Downs, were provided by Robert Westlake. We don’t know any of the names, just that the photos date from the first half of the 20th Century, and show workman doing many of the
same jobs that are done today, but obviously using rather different tools and a lot more manual effort. If you have any similar pictures we would love to see them—see contact details on the Noticeboard page of the newsletter.
Monitoring the Birds of the Downs

Since 1994 I have done a standard walk across a section of the Downs counting all birds seen and heard on a weekly basis. The transect runs south from the Peregrine Watch Point to the Clifton Rocks Railway, then turns up through the Mall Gardens, across Clifton Green and through Clifton to the Zoo entrance. This is a distance of 2000 metres within the one kilometre square ST5673. The method uses the standard British Trust for Ornithology Breeding Bird Survey, but done weekly instead of twice a year. The results measure seasonal changes caused partly by changes in bird behaviour, such as singing or moultung, and real changes in bird numbers as a result of migration. They also show annual changes over 23 years. The walk takes approximately 70 minutes, depending upon conditions and the number of birds seen, and the totals are calculated as a rate per hour over the whole year at which birds are seen. The area probably has a greater density of birds than the more open areas of the Downs around Stoke and Westbury Roads, but the pattern of change is likely to be similar.

On average 46 species a year have been seen (Max 53, min 40), and the average total counted has been 171 (Birds per hour), with a maximum of 269, and a minimum of 105. The changes have been substantial, in part reflecting national trends, which have above all been controlled by changes in agricultural land use, and partly local conditions. On the face of it the basic habitat is totally unchanged, the roads, buildings, gardens and Downs management all look the same, but, as the national collapse in House Sparrows in the 1990s showed, tiny changes in the way we live can easily make huge difference to bird populations.

The biggest change has been a collapse in the numbers of Feral Pigeons. In 1994 they represented two thirds of the totals. There were two very large flocks, one centred on the Zoo, the other around the Suspension Bridge, which often numbered over 100 birds. Today there is a small flock of around 20 birds around Clifton village. This change is partly the result of changes in the way the Zoo feeds its animals, partly the fact that since 1990 there has been a pair of Peregrines nesting in the Gorge. Their favourite prey is Pigeons. Secondly the number of Starlings peaked in 1996
at about 10% of the total and numbers then fell effectively to zero in 2008. This change has been a national one.

The number of Jackdaws has halved. There is a flock that nests on St Vincents Rocks, and feeds in the Mall gardens and Clifton Green, but they have been disturbed in the breeding season by the more or less continuous work on the Suspension bridge in the past few years. There are two other breeding flocks, one in the Great Quarry, the other at Sea Walls. I have not counted them, but casual observation suggests their numbers are fine. Collared Doves, which arrived in Bristol in 1960, and used the Zoo as an early base, increased steadily to 2002, but are now confined to the Mall Gardens and the Zoo, and this fall is also national. Greenfinches showed a similar pattern. Numbers tripled between 1994 and 2003, but have collapsed almost to zero since, the change being driven by an unpleasant parasitic disease. This has also affected Chaffinch numbers that have halved. There was a tiny population of House Sparrows in the 1990s but they have effectively been absent since 2003, though there is still a population in the Zoo.

Some species have increased almost as dramatically. Wood Pigeons, which in the 1990s were less common than Starlings, tripled between 1994 and 2015, assisted by some large winter flocks, and despite the depredations of the Peregrines. The two big gulls, Herring, which stay all year, and the Lesser Black-backed, that are essentially summer visitors, were expanding rapidly between 1994 and 2006, but numbers since then have stabilised. There are two or three regular nest sites in the village, often protected through the year by their owners, but the feared rapid expansion has been checked. Dunnock and Song Thrush have also shown an increase.

Nationally Crows and Magpies have increased despite the agricultural changes because they are aggressive omnivores, not dependent on insects for their chicks or grain for their winter food, but on the Downs their populations have been stable. The limitation may be the size of their nesting territories. There is a large non-breeding flock of Crows in the Sea walls area.

The number of winter visitors, Redwing and Fieldfare, vary sharply from year to year depending partly on conditions elsewhere in the country, partly on
Monitoring the Birds of the Downs

the size of the remaining berry crop. 1996 was the best winter for both of them. Blackcap and Chiffchaff are both breeding summer visitors whose numbers fluctuate. Swifts counts tend to be of feeding flocks, rather than of breeding pairs but these counts have fallen locally as they have nationally.

Numbers of most of the familiar common birds, Wren, Robin, Blackbird, Great Tit and Blue Tit have fluctuated with weather conditions. At present numbers are rather low because of the terrible breeding season in 2012 when it rained all summer, and many species failed to raise any young. As they are all very short-lived it will take time to build numbers back. The same thing happened after the 1963 winter; I recall hearing my first Wren in that year in July. Long-tailed Tits and Goldcrests also have violent population swings that are weather related.

Species including Green Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nut-hatch, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Mistle Thrush and Raven all have fairly large territories, are fairly elusive and form a very small part of the total population, but have continued to be recorded on an annual basis.

It is fascinating to find that population changes driven by changes in agriculture, above all the switch to autumn sowing and the massive use of insecticides, which together have removed a vital over-winter food source, and the caterpillar essential for baby birds, can be measured with some precision by a regular hours walk across the Downs.

Richard Bland
I was very fortunate as during my final twenty years of full time work with
NHS Mental Health in North Bristol, I was based at Grove Road Day Hospital
near the top of Blackboy Hill. Soon after I started working there in 1992 I initi-
ated a weekly walking group because I strongly believed in the benefits of
walking for mental health. We linked up with Bristol City Council’s Walking
for Health Initiative (WHI) in the early years of this century and we trans-
ferred the sessions to WHI in February 2012 in preparation for the closure of
Grove Road Day Hospital in June 2012. Following my retirement from full-
time work in September 2012 we expanded the walking sessions to three
days a week (Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays with an expanded team of
volunteer walk leaders) and these walks have continued over the last six
years. We celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Monday walking group in
September 2017 with a meal at the Retreat Café.

It was in 2009 that I came across Martin Collins picking up rubbish on the
Downs and I was happy to join his monthly sessions, as we frequently
picked up litter during our regular WHI walks. He quickly enrolled me into
FOD+AG and early in 2010 asked if I might be interested in going on a but-
terfly monitoring walk. His face fell when I turned up for the first session on
Zoo Banks with my left arm in a sling (having fallen down racing my 7-year-
old son), as I realised that he had me ear-marked for monitoring butterflies in
the Gully.

And so, I was confined to the flat part of the Downs for the first season, but
this was truly a transforming moment in my life. Somehow, butterflies previ-
ously had simply escaped my notice; but I was captivated very early on and
my Downs walks took on a new lease of life. Each year since 2010 I have
looked forward to the annual return of the various species – my particular
favourite is always the Marbled White in early to mid-June.

Having been entranced by the Gully since my regular visits from 2011 on-
wards, it was only natural that I should join the weekend goat-monitoring ro-
ta, as Martin was by now confident that I could differentiate between goats
and butterflies. My preferred time for carrying out my goat duties is at first
light, when the Downs are magically quiet and undisturbed.

Dawn is when one can best appreciate the beauty of bird-song. I was very
grateful when Richard Bland guided me through the principles of monitoring birds along Zoo Banks on New Year's Day 2015, leading me to record my hearings on 112 occasions through that year.

Acquiring a new member of the household in July 2013 meant that daily patrols were needed along Zoo Banks and so this particular area has taken on special status for myself as I wander with Megan and a plastic bag in a regular circular walk; this was first regularly undertaken with my young great-nephew Regan. Together, we numbered all the benches in the area (from the chimney at the top of Pembroke Road as far as Fountains Hill, coming back via the small meadow area and the boundaries of the Lichen Trail) as these benches were always homing points for litter.

Special memories / what the Downs means to me...

- Varied birdsong alongside Ladies Mile at almost any time of year
- Comparing the view towards Wales from the Sea Walls and the Peregrine Watch: can you see the Brecon Beacons or the Sugar Loaf?
- The congenial company of friends and strangers along the taken paths
- Paying regular respects to the great trees of the Downs (thank you, Richard, for the list of nineteen)
- Sitting on Bench No. 2 to rejoice at the Marbled Whites
- Looking for winter Redwings on the green near Christchurch
- Sunday morning birdsong at dawn
- The hawthorns in blossom in Maytime
- Catching some moments of bird evensong in May
- Gently spying the orchids alongside the Circular Road in June
- Walking around the Gully on a closed Portway Sunday
- October Ladybirds on the chimney near Bench No. 8
- Walking up the Promenade on a November afternoon with the sun
shining through the windows of the great nave

- Enjoying the profiles of winter trees on Durdham Down as one walks from east to west along Saville Road
- Sitting on Bench No. 4 (facing the long-emptied zoo carpark) to admire the winter sunsets
- Still seeking the scratchy song of the Bullfinch

The last ten years

- The expansion of the meadows and opening of the grasslands
- Gently guiding the runners away from wild flowers via dead-hedging
- Reduction of litter on the Downs
- Improvement in Information about the Downs

The next ten years

- Continuing the battle with litter, creating litter-free zones through regular monitoring
- Reducing, (eliminating?), the number of dog-poo bags in the bushes
- Highlighting the butterfly hotspots on the Downs and the best places for birdsong.
- Updating the information on the special trees of the Downs
- Safer road-crossing on Ladies Mile and Stoke Road via traffic-calming
- Finance-raising events on the Downs with at least some of the profits being ploughed back onto the Downs (whilst recognising that the Downs is best placed to raise money for other parks in Bristol).

Many thanks to my fellow Downs Walk Leaders and other walkers, and to Ben and the Downs team, Mandy Leivers at Bristol Zoo, to Martin, Richard and Robin at FOD+AG and all the other people who have worked to create such a special place.

Timothy Dowling
On the 16th November nearly 60 members of FOD+AG met at Redland Bowling Club for the Annual General Meeting. FOD+AG wishes to extend its thanks to the Redland Bowling Club Committee for the use of the pavilion.

Chairman Jack Penrose welcomed everyone and explained that the first part of the evening would be given over to the formal business of the organisation followed by refreshments and a guest speaker. The final part of the evening was reserved for members to mingle informally. Jack explained that the organisation was almost ten years old and had gained an enviable reputation as an effective volunteer group.

The Chairman signed off the approved minutes for 2016 which was followed by the Treasurers Report. Bob Bell gave a summary of income and expenditure and described funds currently on deposit.

A motion proposed by Bob Bell to implement some minor constitutional changes was carried and a further motion from Bob to rationalise subscriptions also carried.

The chairman proposed that two FOD+AG stalwarts' be offered life membership. The recipients were Mandy Leivers from Bristol Zoo and Gayle Tate from Café Retreat. Both had shown unquestionable support and enthusiasm for FOD+AG. The proposal was seconded by Colin Butcher and passed.

The current Committee stood down and were reappointed without objection.

Officers to the Committee will be appointed at a subsequent meeting.

In addition there were three nominations for Committee from the membership. Karen Findlay, Joan Gubbin and Caroline Baker were proposed and carried.

Four Committee members reported on a few of the activities carried out during the last twelve months.

Richard Bland described monitoring works at the Botanical Gardens, the planting of Tulip trees and scrub and Ivy clearance. Richard also informed members about further Council cuts, the Consultation process and the likely impact on the Downs.
Martin Collins informed members about our volunteer work, including deep litter clearance, butterfly and goat monitoring and important work with meadow restoration.

Robin Haward explained about a significant piece of work to remove a persistent weed called Alexander from the roof of the Portway Canopy and an annual project to construct and maintain the Downs dead hedges.

Robert Westlake illustrated the value of partnership working and the volunteer contribution when describing the restoration project at the Haven Shelter.

FOD+AG Chairman Jack Penrose presented a short report including topics on Downs parking, energy regeneration, transparent accounting, income generation and appropriate uses for the Downs.

Following a break for refreshments Robert Westlake introduced the evening’s guest speaker Dr Adrienne Tomer. Dr Tomer a renowned structural engineer presented to members an exciting project to span the top of Bridge Valley Road with a classic masonry bridge. When complete this will provide cyclists and pedestrians a safe crossing point at a particularly difficult junction.

Dr Tomer’s warmly received presentation generated a lively discussion which concluded the formal part of the AGM.

Robert Westlake
People of the Downs: Ben Skuse

I have lived near enough to the Downs for all of the time that I have lived in Bristol. Because of this I have always been aware of it and have visited for recreation of all types on many occasions throughout my life to date.

Some of my earliest memories feature sliding down the rock slide at Clifton Observatory through to playing Football with friends as a child, and finally sitting in cars of an evening at Sea Walls, newly licensed car drivers as teenagers, smoking cigarettes etc. At that time never really thinking that I would end up being employed to work in this place.

So yes, the Downs have always been present in my life as a child through to a teenager, then after university as a place of employment. As such, undoubtedly, it holds a very special place in my heart. I feel very lucky to now be able to work here and am passionate in playing my part in maintaining this resource for people across the city to come to enjoy fresh air, views, exercise, sport, nature, history and general fun with friends and families. Many people in this city do not have access to some of the things mentioned above so we maintain this place for them and the whole city.

Special memories of the Downs, I have lots, but I will pick 3 ,

1, The Downs 150 celebrations,

In 2011 an event to celebrate 150 yrs since the act of parliament was passed (that protects the Downs from development for the people of Bristol) was held at the Downs. It was special to be involved in an event that attracted so many people to celebrate something that is so crucial to protecting the Downs today as we know it..

2, Goats in the Gully,

Again in 2011, being centrally involved in the whole process of this project. From using chainsaws to cut through a line in the woods where the enclosure fence would be, to going to the Great Orme and rounding up our 6, and finally releasing them into the Gorge. Then to this day, doing walks and talks with the Avon Gorge and Downs wildlife project to explain the job they are doing for us. It’s a special feature for the Downs and one of many that sets this place apart from other green spaces in the city.
3, Massive Attack, 
Controversial with many readers I know !! but for me, being a huge fan of 
this group, to be there to see them come on stage and to be able to reflect 
on the part I had played in the event happening at a site that I help to man-
age was pretty special.

Changes:

For me personally, the biggest change of the last 10 years of my time at the 
Downs has been the role I have in the process. Going from working in the 
team carrying out the ( real ) work, in my first proper job after university 
through to now managing that team is obviously a big change.

Another change in those years has been the challenging financial situation 
that Bristol City Council now finds itself operating in. It is undeniable that this 
challenge has the potential to have many and as yet unforeseeable changes 
going forward. Although the Downs has some ability to stay away from 
some of the worst of those consequences, challenges will be ahead..

Future:

See above, the future is very hard to predict with some potentially bad situ-
ations and outcomes out there. However I remain confident that the Downs 
will continue to protect itself by being such an amazing and obvious asset to 
all people in Bristol and visitors, that it will prove to make no financial sense 
to let it’s undoubted qualities regress. I also have real faith in the skills and 
knowledge that my team possess here to continue to keep standards high 
and also the huge contributions to Downs life made by the likes of Mandy 
Leivers and FOD+AG members alongside Natural England and other part-
tners. There is way too much knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm 
here for ways forward not to be found.

I hope that my 4yr old daughter is going to get as much out of this place as 
I have. She already loves helping me search out Goats !

Ben Skuse
Background of BFVS

The Bristol Film and Video Society (‘BFVS’) was originally established in 1934, and since then has promoted amateur film making in Bristol and the West Country. We organise twenty four formal meetings per year which feature lectures, demonstrations and training sessions, often led by film making professionals.

Since its foundation, we have produced an enormous number of high quality films, and the historic collection is now held by Bristol Archives for posterity. Particularly interesting films, and most of the recent productions can be watched online (see the weblink at the bottom of the page.)

Bristol is a well-known ‘media city’ with many professional organisations, but the purpose of the festival is to encourage wider participation in film making by people outside of the industry.

Some of our productions have been costume dramas and documentaries on local themes, and these include the slave trade, John Cabot’s voyage to America, Bristol Docks, and Edward II at Berkeley Castle (in association with Bristol Films).

Often, BFVS works with local charities such as Headway Bristol and other organisations such as the Community Apprentice Programme, providing them with promotional videos, and also recording live events.

The Festival

BFVS recently made a light hearted and informative docudrama about Clifton and Durdham Downs provisionally called ‘The Downs—From Dinosaurs to Massive Attack.’ Then we had the bright idea of staging a public outdoor premiere of the film actually on The Downs!

The intention now is that this will form the climactic evening of an all-day Film Making Festival, with the aim of encouraging members of the public to become involved in amateur / non-professional film making.

Film making is a complex and enormously enjoyable activity, which includes a vast array of diverse challenges such as writing, photography, videography, editing, directing, producing, acting, researching, costume designing,
prop making, lighting designing, sound recording, graphic design, music composition, and many more. So it appeals to people from all sorts of backgrounds!

During the day of the Festival, as well as a marquee showing selected films, particularly those about Bristol, there will also be various events, including demonstrations of film making by a film crew, film equipment and exhibitions.

We hope that members of FOD+AG will be interested in supporting our Film Making Festival later this year or early next.

Tim Smart

Bristol Film and Video Society Details:

Main Webpage: www.bristolvideo.org.uk

Email: chairman@bristolvideo.co.uk

Film Archive: http://www.bristolvideo.org.uk/index.html

Meetings: First and Third Tuesday of the month at Filton Pavillion

Still from the BFVS film; showing Goram and Vincent creating the Avon Gorge.
FOD+AG Newsletter

Winter 2018

Lord Mayor.

The report is to update Committee on our recent activities, our achievements and our plans for the future.

FOD+AG remains committed to our Terms of Reference to fairly represent legitimate users of the Downs and actively seeks to support the Committee on a range of initiatives.

However it remains FOD+AG’s intention to keep a watchful eye on what still seems like an uncertain future, and where appropriate bring to the attention of the Committee any concerns that we may have.

Activities and Achievements: FOD+AG continue with all our usual volunteer activities across the Downs and Gorge, including, goat monitoring, butterfly surveys, litter collections, clearing pernicious weeds, maintaining dead hedges and scrub removal. We regularly update our website and the Downs app. We can also be followed on our Face book page.

In addition to our regular activities FOD+AG volunteers attend many Downs and Avon Gorge events. In July FOD+AG volunteers were alongside the Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project and Sustrans in support of Cycling Sunday. This was a wonderful celebration of all things bike and a treat to see so many youngsters enjoying a traffic free day on the Downs.

Last month FOD+AG members provided a significant presence at the Bee Festival at the Botanic Gardens. Our stand generated a great deal of interest with many questions about the future of the Downs.

FOD+AG volunteers have a stand at the Universities Fresher’s Fair and earlier this month had a very successful day at the Peaceful Portway event.

Throughout the summer months FOD+AG in conjunction with The Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project have supported many walks and talks on a wide range of Downs’s related subjects.

It was with great sadness that the FOD+AG volunteers who monitor the goats at weekends learned that one of the six had died. As we have heard from the Downs Supervisor the goat fell from one of the cliff edges after pur-
suit by a dog. We support the Downs teams efforts to further secure the compound and can only hope this is a one off incident.

It is important that this setback does not impact on the overall initiative to restore the Gully to its botanical importance. Committee may be interested to note that at the start of the project our own botanical expert Richard Bland observed 75 different plant species; in 2016 this was up to 129 and now stands at an impressive 135. A genuine success story.

FOD+AG volunteers are planning to organise a cleaning rota for the recently renovated Haven. The shelter has become somewhat a victim of its own success, ironically with smokers from nearby medical institutions.

Our members will carry out regular cleaning and monitor the condition of the structure.

Every year FOD+AG contribute in excess of 500 volunteer hours to the betterment of the Downs, this is exclusive of any support and organisational time required to maintain all its activities and inputs.

The FOD+AG committee strives to fairly represent the views of our members and all legitimate users of the Downs and will this year and next be looking to improve the diversity of our own organisation. We intend through our quarterly newsletter and at our AGM to encourage a wider range of representation than is currently the case.

Looking forward to next year FOD+AG will be celebrating its first ten years of existence. A range of activities will be presented to mark the event.

FOD+AG members sit on ‘Your Downs’ group committee and two FOD+AG members attend all Bristol Parks Forum meetings.

Thank you Lord Mayor.

Robert Westlake
Key Events 2018

Deep Litter Clearance: The last two session of the year are on Saturday 24th February and Saturday 24th March 10-12 am, please email Martin Collins—martinandglen@hotmail.com.

Butterfly Monitoring: This commences again for 2018 in April, if you would like to get involved please email Martin Collins—martinandglen@hotmail.com.

AGM—date for your Diary. The 2018 AGM will be held as usual At Redland Green Bowls club on Wednesday 21st November at 7pm.

For a full details of other regular and one-off events FOD+AG activities see the ‘Events’ page of the website. (http://FOD+AG-bristol.weebly.com/)
Committee:
Jack Penrose (Chair), Martin Collins, Karen Findlay, Derek Catterall, Richard Bland, Robert Westlake, Terry Hannan, Joan Gubbin, Robin Haward, Jac Solomons, Bob Bell, Caroline Baker & Luke Hudson

Contacts:
Deep Litter/Butterflies/Goats—Martin Collins.
History/Birds/Trees—Richard Bland.
Projects—Robert Westlake.
Working Parties (e.g. dead hedging)—Robin Haward.
Website—Stephanie Wooster

Articles for the Newsletter: Robin Haward: robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk & Luke Hudson: Fodagcontent@gmail.com

Please Note: Deadline for submissions for the Spring edition is 20th April 2018.

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

robinhaward@blueyonder.co.uk OR by post 7 Exeter Buildings BS6 6TH

Website:
http://FOD+AG-bristol.weebly.com/
The website has further information on events and a weekly blog on the Downs.

@FODAGbristol

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

Communication: if you have an email address but have not told us....please do!
Workers on the Downs in the 1950s —Robert Westlake