



# Manor Woods Valley Group

## Annual Review June 2019 – May 2020

### Introduction:

June 2019 saw the launch of the Manor Woods Valley Group (MWVG), replacing its predecessor group, the Malago Valley Conservation Group (MVCG). In a busy year, we organised numerous volunteering activities and events and worked with local residents and a wide range of partner organisations. Our group activities came to an abrupt halt in March 2020 in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. This review gives a flavour of our work over the 12 months, and for a visual record, visit our Facebook page

### Thanks for the support:

We are enormously grateful to the many organisations that have supported us throughout the year with the activities and events summarised below: Bristol City Council Parks Services, Zion Community Space, Avon Wildlife Trust, Forest of Avon Trust, Bristol GoodGym, University of Bristol's School of Geographical Studies, School of Biological Studies and Finance Team, TSB bank staff and Bristol Parks Forum. Most especially, we are grateful for the volunteering support of local residents for the work they have done in helping to maintain the nature reserve for the benefit of wildlife and people, and for being such good fun to be with.

### Woodland Path Project:

Repairing the Woodland Path was a new venture for us. It involved over **50 people on 11 different occasions and 230 hours** restoring a steep flight of steps, replacing almost 100 metres of path edgings and filling potholes with eight cubic metres of crushed stone. The Woodland Path provides access to ancient and new woodland and great views of the Malago.

### Habitat Management:

Manor Woods Orchard and adjacent areas at the northern end of the reserve probably represent one of the most biodiverse pockets of land in Bristol. Managing its habitats has been a priority and over **40 people spent around 150 hours on 8 different occasions** cutting back Brambles and planting 18 fruit trees. It was also the scene of the first ever wassailing event attended by over 60 people. The area now has an exceptional population of Slow-worms and small clusters of Pyramidal and Bee Orchids as well as a variety of other wildflowers and grasses, and butterflies, moths and other insects.

### Wildlife Spotted:

We made and installed **six bird nesting boxes and five bat roost boxes**. These were attached to trees in the orchard and the new and old portions of Manor Wood. At least two of the nesting boxes were used by Great Tits this spring. Other notable wildlife sightings included a pair of Kingfishers on the Malago, Song Thrushes feeding fledglings and Tawny Owls. A Bullhead (a small fish that lives under stones) was found by students during one of their projects. An Otter was recorded, literally, hunting fish in a pond within a garden that backs on to the Malago, a few metres upstream of the reserve. This Otter will no doubt have travelled the length of the Malago having crossed the open ground between the lower stretch and the interceptor.

### **New Wildflower Meadow:**

At the southern end of the reserve we worked on improving the small wildflower meadow that we had created the year before. **Over 20 people spent around 125 hours on 3 occasions** raking and removing the cut grass. This is an annual task in late summer; it ensures that the nutrients from the mown grass don't enrich the soil and allows the wildflowers to compete with the new grass in the following spring.

### **Invasive Weeds:**

Manor Woods Valley has colonies of non-native invasive weeds, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. We carried out our annual survey of the former and passed the results to the Parks Services who are treating it, very effectively, with herbicide. We also pull out the Himalayan Balsam, along the river banks, by the roots every year. This year **seven people** took less than two hours to clear all visible Balsam plants on the first occasion, followed by two later visits to remove later emerging stragglers. In all only less than **18 hours** of cumulative effort was needed. This annual task is at last showing evidence that this weed is under control and will almost certainly be eradicated over the next few years.

### **Litter Picking:**

Thanks to the care taken by the vast majority of users of the nature reserve and a few dedicated regular litter-pickers, Manor Woods Valley is a relatively clean place to walk and play in and a safer place for wildlife. However, on occasions we have a grand clean-up and on two formally organised litter-picking events, over **30 people spent 70 hours** making Manor Woods Valley even more beautiful.

### **Wellbeing:**

It is a well-known fact that spending time in nature is good for peoples' mental and physical health. The Forest of Avon Trust continued to run their wellbeing courses in Manor Woods Valley. As well as foraging and cooking, the 8 members of the wellbeing project and 9 members of the woodland skills project helped us manage areas of the new woodland, coppicing Hazel and creating glades to improve wildlife habitats.

### **Learning:**

Bristol University Schools of Biological Sciences and Geographical Sciences conducted two projects each during the autumn and winter. They studied bird feeding behaviour, the use of dead-hedges by small mammals, subsoil in the wildflower meadow and substrates in the Malago. A local student surveyed butterflies during the summer months. The results of these studies help us gauge the impact of our habitat management work and help inform our future plans.

### **Young Rangers:**

The future care of Bristol's green spaces very much depends on the support of local communities. The Young Rangers project is a national initiative aimed at getting young people interested in their local parks. Manor Woods Valley Group was invited to join the project and we were involved in the training of a number of local recruits. The project has been temporarily paused by the coronavirus pandemic.

### **Events:**

In addition to our work in the nature reserve, we held quarterly open forum committee meetings attended by, on average, 20 people. Read the agendas and minutes on our website [www.manorwoodsvalley.org](http://www.manorwoodsvalley.org). We led guided tours of the nature reserve, though

three walks were planned in May as part of the Bristol Walk Fest which had to be cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic. We gave talks to local community groups, such as the Memories Café in Zion and the BS3 Working Together group and the South Bristol Gardening Club, but, again, other planned talks had to be cancelled. We promoted our work and volunteering opportunities at local community events such as the Children's Festival at Zion, the Over 55s event at the local Children's Centre and the Friends of Bishopsworth Library group. We estimate that we engaged directly with approximately 200 people during these events. We now have 130 supporters on our mailing list and 600 followers of our Facebook page.

**Training:**

Members of our organising group attended a number of training courses and conferences during the year, including battery powered tools training, management of mature fruit trees, youth participation and a non-native species conference. We contributed to a Bath Spa University 'Blue Spaces' research project. In total, in excess of 40 hours was devoted to training and learning, allowing us to improve our habitat management plans and practice.

**Planning:**

Manor Woods Valley Group receives the weekly lists of planning applications throughout Bristol from Bristol City Council and checks for any which may have an impact on the nature reserve. This year, there were none which required a response.

**Money:**

Income for the year was £7713.08, and expenditure was £1981.34. A detailed financial report will be available for the annual general meeting in September and on our website.

**Time and Effort Well Spent:**

In total over 600 hours were spent volunteering on site. All of this activity requires behind-the-scenes meetings and networking, especially with our partner organisations mentioned above. We estimate that this involved over 300 hours of volunteering time.

**Building Back Better:**

Lockdown in the last few months of the year gave us an opportunity to reflect on our priorities and to 'build back better' from the current health emergency. The contribution that Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve and our group makes to tackling the climate and ecological crises is likely to feature prominently in our future plans which we look forward to sharing at our, delayed, annual general meeting in September.