



Manor Woods Valley Group

Annual Review June 2021 – May 2022

Introduction:

This was our busiest year ever; we organised a record number of volunteering activities and embarked on several new projects. This review gives a flavour of our work over the 12 months; for a visual record, see the illustrated Annual Review presentation at our annual meeting and 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, ParkWork, Zion Community Space, Forest of Avon Trust, Bristol GoodGym, University of the West of England students, Your Park - Bristol and Bath, Active Travel Bristol 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.

Habitat Management:

Manor Woods Valley has some of the most biodiverse pockets of land in Bristol (various woodland types, Manor Woods Orchard, Orchard Triangle, Rabbit Field and wildflower meadows). Managing and improving these habitats has been a priority, particularly in response to the ecological emergency. This year we focussed on cutting back Brambles, planting trees (including fruit trees in the orchard) and restoring wildflower meadows. The Orchard and surrounding area now has an exceptional population of Slow-worms and surveys have confirmed their presence in other parts of the reserve. These areas are also home to small clusters of Pyramidal and Bee Orchids as well as a variety of other wildflowers and grasses, and butterflies, moths and other insects.

Woodland Path Project:

We continued with repairs to the Woodland Path, replacing rotted and damaged path edgings and filling potholes with crushed stone. The Woodland Path saw increased footfall during lockdowns and many users described it as 'an exercise lifesaver'.

Apple Harvest and Wassail:

During October and November we picked over a tonne of apples and had them juiced by a cider maker in Gloucestershire in return for 60 litre bottles of Manor Woods Orchard apple juice, half of which were donated to Carpenter's Food Bank in Withywood and half were used as refreshments for volunteers. In January we held the annual Wassail but, this year, it was a relatively low-key event because of the pandemic.

Invasive Weeds:

Manor Woods Valley has colonies of non-native invasive weeds, namely 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 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:

Manor Woods Valley is a relatively clean place to walk and play in and is a safer place for wildlife, thanks to the care taken by the vast majority of users of the nature reserve and a dedicated band of regular litter-pickers. During lockdowns, when group activities were not possible, we supplied 12 free litter pickers to individuals interested in litter picking while exercising. This has proved a great success and we now no longer need to organise large scale clean-up events. However, dog fouling and fly tipping continue to present health hazards to people and wildlife.

Wellbeing:

The Forest of Avon Trust continued to run their wellbeing courses for adults with long-term mental health problems, known as Forest Fridays, in Manor Woods Valley. We also supported them in running a wellbeing course for City of Bristol College students with learning disabilities. We installed a 2.5k exercise trail with way-marker posts, with the help of a grant of £500 from Active Travel Bristol. We also mapped sensory walks and registered them with the charity Sense and applied for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to install more accessible barriers at the entrances to the reserve.

University Student Volunteers:

Following a presentation by Peter Loy-Hancocks, our vice-chair and ecology adviser, for conservation science students at the University of the West of England (UWE), just under 30 students signed up to volunteer in Manor Woods Valley and spent over 800 hours of volunteering between October '21 and April '22. They made a huge contribution to the management of wildlife habitats and learnt a lot about wildlife conservation in the process.

Forest School:

Thanks to an approach by Jay Croney, a local Forest School leader, we ran a pilot six-week Forest School course in June '21 and then were awarded £1000 from the Your Park – Bristol and Bath charity to run two more courses for pupils at Parsons Street primary school and Bedminster Down secondary school.

Surveys:

We conducted a number of wildlife surveys including surveys of Orchids, Butterflies, Malago vegetation, Malago fish, and Japanese Knotweed. These help to inform our habitat management decisions.

Wildlife Spotted:

Notable wildlife sightings during the year included Kingfishers on the Malago, Song Thrushes feeding fledglings, Tawny Owls, Greater Spotted woodpeckers, Nuthatches, and Weasels. Bullheads (a small fish that lives under stones) and Eels were found by students during one of their survey projects.

Development Planning:

We considered plans to build on the Novers Hill, a nearby green space rich in biodiversity, to be a direct threat to the wildlife corridor that includes Manor Woods Valley. We submitted a detailed statement objecting to the development and we await the outcome of the planning application.

Events:

In addition to our work in the nature reserve, we held quarterly open forum committee meetings on line attended by, on average, 12 people. Agendas and minutes on our website www.manorwoodsvalley.org. We led guided tours of the nature reserve, including four as part of the Bristol Walk Fest in May. We contributed to local community groups, including the Malago and Pigeonhouse Alliance, Friends of Crox Bottom, Friends of Western Slopes and the BS13 Wildlife Group. We now have over 250 supporters on our mailing list and over 1300 followers of our Facebook page.

Awards:

We were awarded an 'outstanding' level in the Royal Horticultural Society's (RHS) South West in Bloom scheme.

Money:

Income for the year was £1213.74, and expenditure was £1310.54.

Time and Effort Well Spent:

In total over 1700 hours (including over 800 hours by UWE students) were spent volunteering on site. This doesn't include the many behind-the-scenes meetings and networking, especially with our partner organisations mentioned above. The result is a well maintained local amenity where wildlife thrives and that is valued and respected by its users.

Challenges:

Dog mess, dogs out of control, fly tipping, small acts of vandalism are ongoing challenges that we've so far been unable to have an impact on. We could always do more – more campaigning, more events, more fundraising etc – we're always looking for volunteers to help with new and existing projects and activities.

The Year in Numbers:

1700+	total hours of volunteering on site (equivalent to 227 person days)
800+	hours of student volunteering
80+	total volunteers
70+	total volunteering work parties (including students)
35	student volunteering work parties
10	guided walks
1300+	Facebook followers
5500+	People reached on Facebook
250+	Members (supporters on mailing list)
1200	Income £
1300	Expenditure £