

The trail is flat with no steps, significant slopes or stiles. The paths are covered with short grass. The nearest toilets are beside the Water Tower where there are disabled toilets and baby-changing facilities.

**Visitors with wheelchairs and pushchairs**



Because the Downs have such large areas of limestone grassland they have been designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest.

## Great for wildlife

Nowadays the best areas of 'limestone grassland' are left to grow tall as meadow areas, and are cut for hay in late summer. This gives the wild flowers and grasses time to flower and set seed.

For centuries people grazed sheep and cattle on the Downs creating a downland of short turf, bracken, gorse and hawthorn trees. This grazing encouraged a wide variety of wild flowers and grasses to flourish here and kept trees and scrub in check.

When grazing stopped in the 1920s the flatter areas of the Downs were regularly mown to keep the grass, trees and scrub under control.

Today the best areas of 'limestone grassland' are left to grow tall as meadow areas, and are cut for hay in late summer. This gives the wild flowers and grasses time to flower and set seed.

Nowadays the best areas of 'limestone grassland' are left to grow tall as meadow areas, and are cut for hay in late summer. This gives the wild flowers and grasses time to flower and set seed.

For a glorious couple of months they transform from an inconspicuous area of short turf to a knee-high sea of rippling grasses, packed full of colourful wild flowers. The area is also humming with activity as colourful butterflies, moths and other insects take advantage of the summer-time bounty to feed and breed.

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!



- KEY**
- Meadow Trail
  - Start here
  - Whitebeam trees
  - Wild flowers
  - Hawthorn trees
  - Butterflies
  - Moths
  - Other insects
  - Grasses
  - Green woodpecker
  - Parking (P)

## THE DOWNS Meadow Trail

This Trail takes around 30 minutes. It is 1.1 km [0.7 miles] long.



## Marvellous Meadows

In summer the meadow areas on the Downs are simply a magical place to visit.

For a glorious couple of months they transform from an inconspicuous area of short turf to a knee-high sea of rippling grasses, packed full of colourful wild flowers. The area is also humming with activity as colourful butterflies, moths and other insects take advantage of the summer-time bounty to feed and breed.

This guide will give you an introduction to just some of the plants and animals that thrive here. A marvellous world of meadow life awaits you!

### Tips for wildlife watching in the meadow

- 1 At some point on the trail simply stand still for a few minutes and see what interesting creatures come your way. Listen too for the natural sounds of the Downs.
- 2 The wild flowers that grow here are beautiful. Please don't pick them but leave them for others to enjoy. Butterflies, bees and other small creatures need them for food.
- 3 Getting close enough to butterflies to identify them can be tricky. Tread carefully and make sure the sun isn't behind you – your shadow falling on a butterfly will make it fly away. It takes a bit of practice!
- 4 Never pick up insects – you may damage them. The scientific name for moths and butterflies is *Lepidoptera*. It means 'scale wings'. You can't see these scales easily without a magnifying glass but if you handle these insects the scales will fall off.
- 5 Don't be disappointed if you don't see everything in this leaflet in one visit. You'll see different things in different months and at different times of the day.

### How to get here

**By Bus:** the following services all run past the Downs – 1, 8, 41, 42, 43, 54, 55, 99, 586 and 587. For further information call Traveline on 0870 6082608.

**By Train:** the nearest train station is Clifton Down Station, 10 minutes walk from the Downs. For further details call National Rail enquiries on 0845 7484950.

**By Road:** follow the map below.



### Contacting us

If you would like further information about the Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project, a copy of our leaflet 'Discover the wildlife of the Avon Gorge & Downs', a copy of our Bird Nature Trail or our Events Programme please contact:

**Mandy Leivers, Avon Gorge & Downs Biodiversity Education Officer,**  
 Education Department, Bristol Zoo Gardens, Clifton, Bristol, BS8 3HA  
 Tel: 0117 9030609 Fax: 0117 9736814  
 E-mail: mleivers@bristolzoo.org.uk  
 www.bristolzoo.org.uk/conservation/avongorge.htm

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project is a partnership of:



We are also working with the National Trust who manage part of Leigh Woods on the North Somerset side of the Avon Gorge.

Production of this leaflet is supported by:



Photography and credits: Bristol whitebeam (Helen Hall) – Oxeye daisy (Helen Hall) – Meadow brown butterfly (Avon Wildlife Trust) – Hawthorn tree (Chris Jones). Illustrations: Abi Stubbs. Design: Clare Challice. Printed on recycled paper.



## THE DOWNS Meadow Trail



Take a walk in the meadow during May, June and July

Discover the wildlife that thrives here

## ↓ Where to begin?

The map overleaf shows our suggested route around the main meadow area on the Downs. The trail is marked on the map in a green dotted line.

Apart from the whitebeams, you may encounter the plants and animals in this guide at any point along the trail. We have marked the places you are most likely to see them with symbols on the map.

We hope you enjoy your walk!

## Bristol whitebeams

Have a look at the six trees planted here. Four of them are Bristol whitebeams. Look for the trees with leaves shaped like this →

The name 'whitebeam' means 'white tree'. Look at the underside of the leaves and you'll see that they're covered with white hairs.



These trees are endemic to the Avon Gorge. This means they grow naturally here and nowhere else in the rest of the world!

The two other trees growing here are a common whitebeam and a rowan. Compare their leaves with those of the Bristol whitebeam.



## Wild flowers

Leave the whitebeams and walk down the path into the area of long grass.

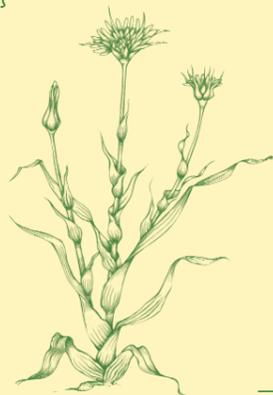
In summer the meadow areas on the Downs are packed full of wild flowers. See how many of them you can identify.

*Oxeye daisies* have a dazzling disc of white petals and a sunshine yellow centre. Also known as moon daisies or dog daisies they were traditionally used in medicines to cure diseases of the chest and liver.



*Bird's-foot-trefoil* – The yellow and red petals of this little plant give it its common name 'eggs and bacon'. Other folk names for it include: 'crow's toes', 'Tom Thumb' and 'granny's toenails'.

*Goat's-beard* is also known as 'Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon' because its yellow dandelion-like flowers open early in the morning and close around midday. In seed it produces a big 'dandelion clock'.



*Small scabious* has pinkish-purple flower heads. The stamens (male parts) stand proud, which make the flower-head look like a pin-cushion.

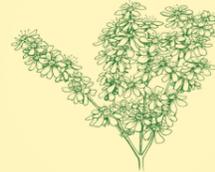
The name scabious comes from the Latin word for 'itch' and it was used in the past to treat scabies, dandruff and even to get rid of freckles.



*Lady's bedstraw* has flower-spikes consisting of clumps of little yellow flowers. According to legend, the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus on a bed of this plant, hence its name.



*Dropwort* flowers start off as little pink balls. These open out into beautiful vanilla blooms that resemble hawthorn flowers.



Bend down and sniff them to discover their sweet honey scent.

*Black knapweed* is also known as hardheads. Each flower-head is made up of many individual bright pink flowers.



Other wild flowers to look out for include: salad burnet, thyme, harebell, cat's-ear, yellow-wort, yellow rattle, fairy flax, common centaury, betony and orchids.

## Hawthorn trees

Hawthorn trees are a traditional part of the Downs' landscape. Some of them are at least 200 years old. In summer, insects munch hawthorn leaves and lap up nectar from the flowers. In winter the berries are an important source of food for migrant birds such as redwings and fieldfares.



*Hawthorn* flowers are a creamy white but they can be pink or red.

## Butterflies

Warm, sunny days are the best time to see butterflies. Over 21 different kinds can be found on the Downs. Butterflies that might flutter your way include:



*Meadow brown* – This is the most common butterfly you're likely to see in the meadow area. Their wings are dark brown with orange splotches and 'eye-spots' on the forewings. They're on the wing from June to September.

*Common blue* – Male common blues have bright blue wings with black markings running along the edge. The females have brown wings with a hint of blue, and orange patches. These butterflies are flying around from May to September. Their caterpillars eat bird's-foot-trefoil.



*Marbled white* – This distinctive black and white butterfly is on the wing from mid-June. Their caterpillars eat red and sheep's-fescue (two grasses that grow on the Downs).



Other butterflies to look out for are small skipper, comma, orange-tip and gatekeeper.

## Moths

As well as butterflies, day-flying narrow-bordered five-spot and six-spot burnet moths can be found on the Downs from June to August.



*Six-spot burnet moths* – The scarlet and black markings on these moths warn predators not to eat them. Their caterpillars also feed on bird's-foot-trefoil.

Look out for their boat-shaped papery cocoons stuck to grass stems.

## Other insects

In peak summer the meadow area is buzzing with a diversity of other insects besides the moths and butterflies.

A plethora of bees collect pollen from the wide variety of flowers that flourish here. Meadow and field grasshoppers and speckled bush-crickets chirp amongst the swaying grasses, and common darter and emperor dragonflies cruise just above the sea of grass, hunting for other insects to eat.

*Meadow grasshoppers* have green bodies often with a dark brown stripe running down the body and the legs. Grasshoppers have short antennae (feelers) compared to crickets.



## Grasses

As well as gorgeous wild flowers the meadow overflows with a variety of beautiful grasses. How many different kinds can you spot? Here are a few to get you started:



*Upright brome* is the most common or 'dominant' grass growing here.



*Quaking grass* gets its name from the way its triangular, purplish-green flower-heads tremble in the wind. Also known as 'rattle grass', 'doddering dickies', 'digger' and 'lady's hair grass'.

*Cock's-foot* – The flowering head of this grass is supposed to resemble the foot of a cockerel. (You may need to use your imagination a bit!).



## Green woodpecker

Listen for the laughing call (or yaffle) of the green woodpecker.

They spend a lot of time on the ground searching for their favourite food – ants. They also use their 15cm-long tongues to wheedle out wood-boring insects and their grubs from rotten wood.

*Green woodpeckers* have olive green wings with a paler green body and yellow rump. They also have a red cap and a black patch around the eyes.

