

Friends of the Avon New Cut Newsletter 29 – Spring 2018



FrANC
Friends of the Avon New Cut

Welcome to our new-look Spring 2018 Newsletter, which contains a round-up of our activities so far this year and those planned for the months ahead, together with other items of local interest.....plus guest articles by two Committee Members and an appeal for a new FrANC Chairperson ! In this issue:

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1. Status of Riverbank Clean-ups 2018

So far this year we have organised three 2-hour Riverbank Clean-ups along different stretches of the New Cut between the Banana Bridge on York Road and the *Harvest Energy* petrol station on Coronation Road. On two occasions this has included tackling the litter that invariably accumulates on the slipways below Gaol Ferry Bridge. A big “thank-you” is due to the 49 volunteers who have turned out to help -



Photo: Richard Clutterbuck

between them, they have amassed 151 volunteer hours of litter-picking to date. The photograph above was taken at the end of our last clean-up along the Coronation Road riverbank on 10th March, and shows what was collected on the riverbank between the *Harvest Energy* petrol station and Vauxhall Bridge. This particular Clean-up was FrANC's contribution to the *Great Bristol Spring Clean 2018*.

Our last scheduled clean-up for 2018 will be held on **Saturday 14th April**, when we will aim to clear the stretch of York Road riverbank between the Banana Bridge and Bath Bridge. Further details will be circulated to FrANC members shortly and can also be found in the *News/Events* section of the FrANC website (www.franc.org.uk).

2. FrANC contributions to *Bristol Walk Fest 2018*

Bristol Walk Fest, the city's month-long walking festival, will again be held throughout May and FrANC will be contributing two guided walks this year, details of which are as follows:

- A “**Discovering Plants in Wild Places**” walk on **Saturday 12th May (2:30pm start)** – come and enjoy a leisurely walk around one of Bristol's newest City Nature Reserves and, under the experienced guidance of our skilled and knowledgeable botanist (Dr Clive Lovatt from the Bristol Naturalists' Society), discover some of the surprising variety of plant life flourishing in wild and often overlooked stretches of the banks of the River Avon and the New Cut.

Meeting location: Create Centre car park, Smeaton Road, Bristol BS1 6XN

- “**The Cumberland Basin**” walk on **Tuesday 22nd May (6:30pm start)** – during a tour through the Underfall Yard into the Cumberland Basin and some of the New Cut, walk leader Ed Hall will explain how building the locks and the New Cut allowed Bristol to deal with the huge local tides and created the Floating Harbour for shipping. There will be a little off-road walking so this walk is not suitable for prams, wheelchairs or high heels!

Meeting location: The Cottage Inn, Baltic Wharf, Cumberland Road, Bristol, BS1 6XG

Each of these walks will last around 1½ - 2 hours and there is a charge of £2 per person. You can book a place on either of the walks by contacting **Chris Hanmer** either by telephone (07411 980124) or email (chris.hanmer@blueyonder.co.uk).

3. Other events planned for later this year

In addition to the two walks organised for *Bristol Walk Fest*, we are also planning to run the following walks and talks later in 2018:

- a walk entitled “**The River Malago and its Culverts in Old Bedminster**”, to be led by Stephen Mason. This will be a repeat of the walk that Stephen led last year, which was well received, and will probably be held some time in June or July;
- a second **Tour of Thomas Ware & Sons Tannery** on Coronation Road, which was also held last year and proved to be very popular with the FrANC membership. This event will be held on a weekday evening, probably in July or August;
- we also intend organising a **Boat Trip/Geological Trip up the New Cut/Avon Gorge** and are currently investigating possible dates, as this event will have to coincide with a high tide which will also determine how much of the New Cut is navigable;
- a talk by Melvin Wood from the Environment Agency on the “**Origin of the River Frome**” (which flows underneath Bristol City Centre) will probably be scheduled for September/October.

Further information on each of the above events will be communicated when it becomes available and will also be posted in the *News/Events* section of the FrANC Website (www.franc.org.uk).

4. New FrANC Chairperson needed!

The current FrANC Chairperson, Sara Worth, writes:

“As a FrANC member for 10 years, a Committee Member for 8 years and now Chairperson for the 6th year (having taken on the role at the sad passing of John Purkiss in June 2012), I feel it is time for a new Chairperson. With this in mind I announced at the AGM in November 2017 that this would be the last year that I would stand for Committee and Chairperson.”

FrANC is a great organisation and has gone from strength to strength. There is no one on the current Committee who wishes to stand for Chairperson – so we need people to explore what the role entails and give serious thought to the future of a fine organisation. If you'd like to know a little more (without committing yourself!) please feel free to call me on 01179 544 888.

Thank you.”

Sara

5. Update of FrANC Mailing List using *MailChimp*

Towards the end of last year our Secretary, Derek Hughes, sent an email to FrANC members asking them to confirm that they wished to continue to receive notification of future FrANC events. There were two reasons for doing this:

- (i) our existing Mailing List was horrendously out of date;
- (ii) in order to comply with the new General Data Protection Regulation (effective from May 2018 onwards), FrANC needs to keep records of its members' consent for their personal information (e.g. names, email addresses and telephone numbers) to be used and stored electronically.

We received 95 responses to the email so that, including others who have since subscribed to our Mailing List via the FrANC Website, our membership currently stands at just over 100 (i.e. less than 50% of the previous membership list which is now considered to be obsolete).

The updated contact information provided has also been used to create a new electronic mailing list on *MailChimp*, which is the means by which news of all future FrANC events will be communicated to FrANC members. In fact, *MailChimp* has already been used to notify the membership of the two Clean-ups that were held in February and March of this year. The main difference is that the sender of the above (and future) FrANC mail shots is identified in recipients' mailboxes as "Friends of the Avon New Cut" and the return email address to which any replies will be sent is that listed on the FrANC Website, i.e. contact@franc.org.uk. Mail shots are also now addressed to each FrANC member personally. Thanks are due to John Smith, who has been instrumental in setting up the new FrANC *MailChimp* account.

It should be noted that the personal contact details that are held in the new *MailChimp* electronic mailing list will only ever be used to notify FrANC members of forthcoming events and will never be divulged to other organisations.

6. BS3 Wildlife Group

The BS3 Wildlife Group was re-launched in January of this year. The agreed aims of the group are to:

- (a) make local people more aware of the wildlife around them;
- (b) help make the BS3 area of Bristol more hospitable to a wide range of wild creatures and native plants;
- (c) collaborate with other agencies and groups in order to further the first two aims.

The group is working with Avon Wildlife Trust on a project called *My Wild Bedminster* which embodies the above aims. A number of observer teams have been formed to conduct wildlife surveys at various sites throughout BS3 and additional observers (and sites) are always welcome. Please contact the Secretary, Ben Barker (benbarker@blueyonder.co.uk) if you would like to join an existing observer team or even start a new one.

7. Spike Island *Open Studios 2018* - Call for Volunteers

Every year at Spike Island, hundreds of artists and creative businesses throw open their studio doors and visitors are invited to explore their working environments. *Open Studios* weekend includes a programme of family-friendly activities, tours and events and pop-ups by some of Bristol's best street food traders.

Spike Island are looking for volunteers to help at various times across the weekend, including supporting artists with specific performances and projects and helping them to inspire and assist visitors as they explore this extensive building.



Open Studios starts on Friday 4th May, 6:00pm – 9:00pm (followed by an after party until late) and continues from 11:00am – 5:00pm on Saturday 5th May, Sunday 6th May and Monday 7th May.

Volunteers must attend an induction session on Wednesday 18th April from 5:00pm – 6:30pm.

For more information, and to request an application form, please email the Volunteer Coordinator, Beckie Upton at beckie.upton@spikeisland.org.uk.

8. *Urban Buzz*

This project was launched in Bristol last year by *Buglife*, the Invertebrate Conservation Trust, and is due to end in March 2019. The objective is to make 100 sites across Greater Bristol more pollinator-friendly with the support of Bristol City Council, "Friends of..." groups and a huge team of volunteers. Work has already started with volunteers planting wildflowers, orchards and meadows.

If you know of any unused or unloved green spaces that could be turned into "buzzing hotspots", or could lend a hand for a day's digging, planting, scrub-clearing or surveying, then please contact Hayley Herridge (hayley.herridge@buglife.org.uk).

9. Podcast on the New Cut



Last year we were contacted by Sarah Connolly who was interested in starting a project called *Avon Stories* which combines podcasting, photography and walking to tell stories about the River Avon.

Sarah wanted to interview someone from FRANC about the history of the New Cut so

we suggested that she contact Roy Gallop who, as we all know, has a wealth of knowledge on this particular subject. The result was an hour-long podcast that was recorded by Sarah during a three-hour walk with Roy around the New Cut between Gaol Ferry Bridge and Ashton Avenue Bridge. You can listen to the podcast (and Roy's dulcet tones) by visiting Sarah's *Avon Stories* website using the link below:

<https://avonstories.com/2018/01/11/podcast-16-avon-new-cut/>

Alternatively, the podcast can be downloaded directly from the *Avon Stories* Soundcloud via the following link:

<https://soundcloud.com/avonstories/episode-16-the-avon-new-cut>

10. Results from Butterfly Junction Big Butterfly Count 2017



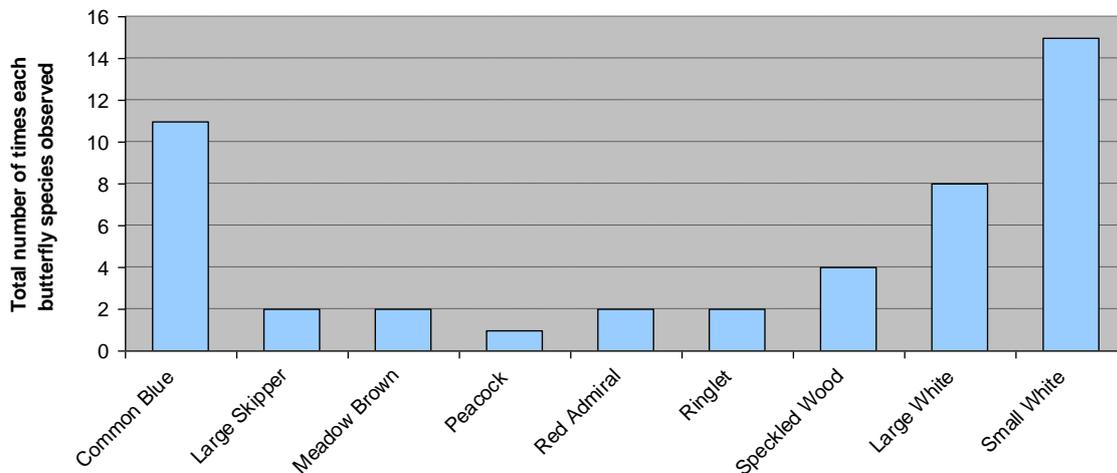
Last year, between 14th July and 6th August, FRANC carried out a survey of the butterfly population at Butterfly Junction, as part of the annual nationwide Big Butterfly Count organised by *Butterfly Conservation*.

The results of the survey have been analysed and are listed in the table below, where the table columns list the date and start time of each survey period, the

initials of the observer and the numbers of each butterfly species that were seen over a 15-minute period. The table rows contain the results for the dates and times at which each 15-minute survey was conducted. In all a total of sixteen visits were made to Butterfly Junction to record butterfly sightings by those who took part in the survey.

A simple summation of the numbers observed of each particular species could be misleading, as it is possible that the same individual butterfly could be seen by different observers on different days (or, in some instances, even on the same day!). Consequently, the bar chart below simply records the total number of times that each butterfly species was observed during the 47 observations that were made:

| Date | Start Time | Initials of Observer | Number of butterfly species observed during 15-minute period after start time | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---------|-------------|---------|---------------|-------------|-------------|--|
| | | | Common Blue | Large Skipper | Meadow Brown | Peacock | Red Admiral | Ringlet | Speckled Wood | Large White | Small White | |
| 14/07/2017 | 13:15 | JC / RC | | 1 | 1 | | | | | | 1 | |
| 17/07/2017 | 13:05 | JC / RC | 2 | | | | | | | 2 | 1 | |
| 18/07/2017 | 10:35 | JC | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | | | | 1 | |
| 19/07/2017 | 13:05 | RC | None seen today (grey and overcast) | | | | | | | | | |
| 20/07/2017 | 10:35 | JC | 2 | 1 | | | 1 | | 1 | 2 | | |
| 24/07/2017 | 13:25 | RC | 2 | | | | | | | 2 | 1 | |
| 25/07/2017 | 10:20 | JC | 2 | | | 1 | | 1 | 1 | 1 | | |
| 25/07/2017 | 14:45 | DH | 2 | | | 1 | | | | | 2 | |
| 27/07/2017 | 14:15 | JC | 2 | | | | | | | | 2 | |
| 31/07/2017 | 15:00 | DH | | | | | | 1 | 1 | 3 | | |
| 01/08/2017 | 11:00 | RS | 1 | | | | | | | | 4 | |
| 01/08/2017 | 16:45 | JC | 1 | | | | | 1 | 1 | 2 | | |
| 04/08/2017 | 13:15 | RC | | | | | | | | | 1 | |
| 04/08/2017 | 15:05 | DH | 1 | | | | | 1 | | 3 | | |
| 05/08/2017 | 10:40 | JC | 2 | | | | | | | 3 | 3 | |
| 05/08/2017 | 13:15 | PF | | 2 | | | | | | 6 | 2 | |



A total of 9 different butterfly species were seen, the most frequent being Large or Small Whites and Common Blues. Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper, Red Admiral and Ringlet were observed during two or more visits, but the Peacock species was seen only once.

The number of site visits last year (16) was over twice the number achieved during the previous year (7). However, there were apparently no sightings of Comma, Marbled White or Holly Blue butterflies last year.

Thanks are due to the five observers – Jane and Richard Clutterbuck, Pat Fung, Derek Hughes and Rachel Sellers – who took part in the 2017 survey.

We plan to repeat the survey at Butterfly Junction during this year's Big Butterfly Count, which runs from 13th July to 5th August 2018. It would be great if a few more people could get involved.

11. Artist who uses mud from the New Cut

Recently the FrANC Committee became aware of the work of Steven Sales, a graduate student from Bath Spa University, who uses mud from the New Cut to make ceramics. At our request, Steven has written the following article which describes what he does:

“During the final year of my Master’s studies in Ceramics at Bath Spa University I have been fascinated by a stretch of the New Cut near the Ashton Avenue Swing Bridge. As a resident of Bedminster, discovering a local source of clay was extremely exciting. I quickly became fascinated by the area and was thrilled to learn it was once the site of the Bristol International Exhibition and later the White City Barracks.

I was particularly drawn to the site’s physical identity and began casting found objects such as branches, rocks and litter in plaster of paris. Clay sourced from the river was turned into a liquid slip, which could be poured into the plaster casts creating a clay replica of the original object. When heating the clay to temperatures beyond 1240°C I discovered that the river clay melted and could be used as a glaze. A delightful nutty brown colour is achieved when the clay is heated to 1260°C, uncannily similar in colour to utilitarian Bristol pottery from the 18th century. Alternative colours, including a deep ox-blood red, can be achieved when the river clay is fired at different temperatures or when the clay is applied at varying thicknesses.



Photos: Steven Sales

A vase from my collection of work is currently on display at the Atkinson Gallery in Street, Somerset. A larger collection will be exhibited as part of the Master’s Degree Show at Bath Spa University, in September. For further information please visit www.StevenSales.co.uk.”

12. Chocolate Path closed again!



Photo: Derek Hughes

FrANC members will no doubt be aware that the Chocolate Path has been closed by Bristol City Council since 18th December last year because of “safety concerns”. According to a City Council press release, “*the closure will remain in place for the foreseeable future until detailed assessments are complete which cover the level of repairs and maintenance required and available funding*”. A figure of £5 million has reportedly been set aside for major maintenance and improvement works over a three-year period, but it is not clear whether this also includes maintenance work on the rest of the Floating Harbour.

The FrANC Committee have been concerned about riverbank subsidence along the New Cut for some time and one of our Committee Members, Ed Hall, wrote to Councillors Charlie Bolton and Stephen Clarke (Southville Ward) about this at the beginning of this year. These issues were subsequently raised by Councillor Clarke in a Bristol City Council Members Forum on 15th January at which the Bristol Mayor, Marvin Rees, was present. With the help of Councillor Clarke we have learned that a report on the current state of the Chocolate Path has been commissioned by the City Council and is expected to be published in April this year.....which we await with interest!

13. Perimeter Fence for Butterfly Junction?

In November last year FrANC volunteers carried out our annual meadow management at Butterfly Junction, during which a considerable amount of dog litter (i.e. poo) was observed on site. This may be due to the fact that this grassy area is now more open to the public, as the side that was once bordered by a Harbour Railway platform now has a tarmac walkway/cycleway which runs next to the newly-completed Metrobus busway (see photo right).

This matter has been discussed by the FrANC Committee, who would like to see a low fence erected along this open side to discourage the public (and dogs in particular) from straying onto what is still considered to be an important butterfly habitat. Also, although this open side has been replanted with what appears to be grass, there is still some construction debris around the Butterfly Junction Interpretation Board which needs to be removed as it gives this area the appearance of an abandoned building site instead of being part of a Local Nature Reserve!



We would obviously require funding from an external source (or sources) for this project to go ahead and the FrANC Chairperson (Sara) and Secretary (Derek) are due to meet with a representative from *ParkWork* in April to discuss the work involved and obtain a cost estimate.

14. *The Bristol Naturalists' Society* by Margaret Fay

The aim of *The Bristol Naturalists' Society* is to encourage a greater awareness of natural history and geology in the Bristol area. It is a thriving and friendly Society with something of interest for everybody, young or old, professional or amateur. It is actively involved in a long term programme of education, research and conservation. Each year its talks, trips and publications are enjoyed by many people wanting to find out more about our Natural World.

It was founded in 1862 by a group of eminent Bristol naturalists, scientists and geologists, maintaining close links with Bristol University and Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. Through the Victorian era and the twentieth century, members of the Society published detailed summaries of the geology of the region and its plant life, its birds, its insects, and the wildlife of the shores and estuaries. Nowadays, current members monitor the continuing changes, adding to and updating this important data.



The Society organises a number of indoor and outdoor meetings throughout the year, presented by experts in their field, which are free for members to attend. All information about these meetings, and other items of interest, are posted to members via a monthly newsletter.

There are groups within the Society specialising in particular aspects of natural history, for example botany, geology, invertebrates, mammals and ornithology, but many members simply have a general interest in their environment.

If you are interested in becoming a member then for more information please visit the website <https://bristolnats.org.uk/>.

15. A Newcomer's Perspective by Tim Wickstead

I walk regularly by the Avon New Cut, bang in the middle of a city where, yes, you would expect rattling construction lorries, screaming emergency vehicles, the heavy footfall of pedestrian commuters and passing crowds of football and rugby fans. Last week, not in deep countryside but deep inside this same bustling city, I saw the heron again and spotted the restless movements of long-tailed tits in the tops of the trees, then a wren searching the ivy on the ground, and a cormorant moving urgently up river.

As a newcomer – 18 months now on Coronation Road - I had vested interests in joining a Saturday riverbank clean-up outside my front door. Now, a year later, I've joined FrANC's Committee. I'm not a naturalist, botanist or geologist, not a historian, not an expert in a city's infrastructure or a council's planning regulations but by joining I can see I've given my curious, generalist self the opportunity to learn much, much more about the place where I now live. I think I may even be growing proud and protective of this unique Nature Reserve which borders such a massively tidal river.

A satisfying wrestle with litter on a Saturday morning really does provide the exercise, mystery and excitement you need to start the weekend: my searches last time contributed a meat cleaver, a champagne bottle and an ancient printer to the 40+ bags of rubbish collected. The reward afterwards of coffee and cakes in a local café is a good way to meet new people.

Such a special inner-city nature reserve needs managing and protecting. Some serious gradual changes need the vigilance and sensitivity of a FrANC Committee working in liaison with other agencies: the needs of the homeless in tents on the bank, major erosion of the former quaysides, a rusting, weary Gaol Ferry Bridge, yellow bikes and bigger items landing in the mud, and most recently a Chocolate Path now closed, shaken out of its wits by transport developments on Cumberland Road.

FrANC members are the sort though whose glass is half-full and the other members of the Committee are generous in sharing deep local knowledge, convivial and open to new ideas. Compared with sixty years ago The Cut is measurably cleaner. An otter was reported recently in the Bathurst Basin. 36 different species of plant and tree were identified on a guided walk along a section of the bank last June. Every day the changing light and wind playing on the water, on the vegetation (and on the mud!), means there is always the pleasure of a changing scene to raise our minds from concrete pavements.

Friends of the Avon New Cut (FrANC)

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