

Fantastic Beasts – on Troopers Hill

The Harry Potter stories mention a book called “Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them”. While you will not find a Hippogriff on Troopers Hill you will find some amazing creatures. Ecologist Rupert Higgins will be on hand at the Troopers Hill Bugs and Beasties hunt on Saturday 12th August to tell you more about them. Thanks to a donation from the Children of Summerhill Out of School Club there will be plenty of bug pots and nets to help children and adults take a closer look at local wildlife. Charly Crump of the RSPB will also be helping with activities, supplies and knowledge.

Harvestmen are one of the most common finds at this Troopers Hill event. These creatures have eight long, slender legs and a tiny body with no waist. They are not spiders but like spiders they are arachnids. Their method of catching their prey is to cage them within their legs and then use their body to batter them. Recent research has shown they squirt tiny amount of “glue” from their forelegs to stop their victims escaping.



Male Common Blue butterflies are regularly recorded, perhaps because this small, bright blue butterfly is so easy to see. However no-one has ever captured a female Common Blue at this event. This may well be because they are brown with orange marking on the edges of their wings, making them much harder to spot.

Nearly everyone leaves the Bugs and Beasties event knowing how to tell the difference between grasshoppers and crickets. It is very easy to see once you look at them through the magnifying glass of the bug pot. Grasshoppers have short antennae whereas those of crickets sweep back from their heads along most of the length of their body. Less commonly known is that grasshoppers commonly detect sound by little “ears” at the base of their abdomen but in crickets these are on their front legs.

The hunt will start at 4pm. There will be lots of coloured pens on hand for hunters to record the names of their discoveries. You will also have the chance to find out more about your nearest local star, the sun. The Bristol Astronomical Society volunteers will be taking solar observations. You might be lucky enough to see a solar prominence, a large bright, gaseous feature extending out from the sun. The volunteers will be very happy to show the images that they will taking of the sun and explain what can be seen and talk about their specialised observation equipment.

At 6pm any creature still in a bug pot will be released and everything will be put away. Those “in the know” will stay on with picnics hoping to see the hot air balloons of Bristol Balloon Fiesta launch from Ashton Court. Let’s hope the weather will be kind.

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