

Stroud beauty spot's new information board will help protect it

A new information board will allow visitors to discover more about a special Stroud common

An information board will replace the panel which stood next to the car park on Selsley Common and another one will be placed near the Toots Longbarrow.

Designed by local artist Steve Roberts of "Footprint Design", the board will help address inadvertent damage to the common, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Steve has completed many designs for conservation projects, including some alongside the Stroudwater Canal. A second SSSI display panel is near the Cotswold Way to inform walkers of the special nature of the Common. Tourism is very valuable to the Cotswolds, and the Cotswold Way attracts many walkers from abroad. This is likely to increase during 2020 as it is the 50th anniversary year of the Cotswold Way.

The need for the information panels was established by the increasing inadvertent damage to the SSSI areas of the Common. The steep, rough pasture of the quarries and slopes consist of rare, unimproved limestone grassland. This has developed into such a valuable and scarce ecosystem that our Common is a site of national importance and so has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. SSSI status is only granted where there are rare species of fauna or flora or important geological features. We have all of these.

Sadly, on Selsley Common, the most valuable areas for wildlife can be mistaken for waste ground and then damaged. Not realising its great value, people have dug up the turf to create cycleways, and burned it with campfires and barbeques. Dog poo can change the delicate chemistry of the soils. An increasing problem is the invasion of cultivated species, especially cotoneaster. Cotoneaster is valued in gardens as the bees love its flowers and birds gorge on the berries. However, in some countries cotoneaster is listed as an invasive pest, and entire quarries in our SSSI have been overwhelmed by it. The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens and work parties from Leyhill have spent many arduous hours trying to beat it back. Management of the SSSI is almost entirely by grazing, so the cattle play a vital role in preserving this habitat, but nothing seems to eat cotoneaster.

We hope that people will continue to enjoy this special place, but treat it with the respect that it deserves to conserve it for the benefit both people and wildlife. To help to achieve this, we are grateful to the following organisations for their financial support, encouragement or practical assistance:

Natural England

The Cotswold Conservation Board

Glos. County Council's "Growing our Communities" initiative

The Cotswold Way Association

Stroud District Council

King's Stanley Parish Council

The Cotswold Voluntary Wardens

Caring for the Cotswolds