

REGIONAL PARK



LAGAN VALLEY



DISCOVER | EXPLORE | ENJOY

Annual Report 2014/15

A Visionary Year

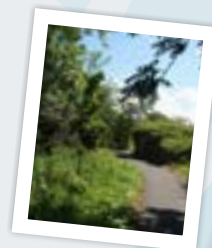
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Volunteering Excellence

- A visit to Buckingham Palace for the ceremony of Queen's Award for Voluntary Service; the equivalent of the MBE for voluntary groups
- Total of 732 volunteer days recorded
- Finalist in Nature Conservation category for Brighter Belfast Environmental Awards
- Eamonn Jordan (Volunteer Ranger) Awarded the Special Judges Award
- Living Heritage - Cottage and Barge Open to Public

Ranger Service

- 'My River' Initiative wins Coca-Cola Coast Care Awards 2014
- Eamonn Jordan a finalist for the Young Environmentalist of the Year
- The Towpath Initiative; raise awareness of considerate use of the Towpath
- Annual Events Programme with 31 events engaging with over 2000 people
- Nine volunteer rangers contributing 756 hours of support to the Ranger Service
- 4 information stands at fairs and shows
- Over 42 km of trails and Park paths patrolled weekly
- Over 1100 enquires from members of the public
- 370 bags of litter collected
- Facilitated over 16 events by outside organisations



The LVRP Board

The LVRP Board met on five occasions this year; four quarterly board meetings and the AGM

Director	Representing	Board Meeting Attended					
		June	Sept	AGM	Dec	Mar	Total
Cllr Jenny Palmer	Lisburn City Council	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
	Lisburn City Council	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	4
Ald Sara Duncan	Castlereagh Borough Council	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	2
Cllr Anne-Marie Beattie	Castlereagh Borough Council	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	1
Ald Tom Ekin	Belfast City Council	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	1
Ald Ruth Patterson	Belfast City Council	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	0
Dermot Hughes	CNCC	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	2
Jim Jackson	CNCC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	4
Craig Somerville	National Trust	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Rosaleen Hughes	Public (Community/Recreation)	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	3
Jackson Tinto	Public (Volunteering/Natural Heritage)	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	3
Frank Jordan	Public (Volunteering)	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	2
David Scott	Public (Natural Heritage)	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	4
Fred Hammond	Public (Built Heritage/Recreation)	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	1
Michael McSorley	Public (Volunteering/Community)	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	4
Elvira Tulip	Public (Community)	✗	✓	✓	Retired -	Retired -	4
Mags McGarvey	Public (Natural Heritage)	✗		Retired			0
Annette O'Donal	Public (Rural Enterprise and Business)	✗		Retired			0

Chair's Report

I was delighted to serve my second year as the Chair of Lagan Valley Regional Park. Over the course of the year the small team of four staff have undertaken a significant workload under what has been an uncertain year. The volunteer input and support is truly amazing, the added value this brings to the park and all its partners is important not just financially but in building connections with the local community in the area. I commend everyone involved for their time and service.

The year has been a year of uncertainty as the councils prepare for coming merger and reshuffling of the councils. Much work has been going on in the background as the shadow councils worked hard to ensure a smooth transition for employees and the communities they serve. I have worked closely with the Park Manager in ensuring that the Regional Park has continued support from both of the new councils in the next financial year.

As well as the uncertainty surrounding the council mergers, the Regional Park faced grave concerns over central government funding towards the end of the year. Whilst I am writing this looking back from a Regional Park in a position of relative security, this was by no means certain as the year drew to an end. And I would like to commend all our supporters and the strong lobbying that was done on our behalf by our volunteers, our supporters in the community and the park staff and colleagues across Northern Ireland.

As well as the 31 public event that the Regional Park ran this year including walks, talks and tours the Park has supported and helped facilitate many other events, taking talks out to clubs and organisations and supporting activities such as 10k runs and charity walks. Through the work of the staff and volunteers a wider audience has been engaged with; and it is hoped that those people will continue to visit this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is still astonishing to see the figures featured in this report on of visitors to the Park and especially the

towpath receiving over 1.4 Million visitors for the past two year.

Volunteers are a key part to any organisation or community and within Lagan Valley Regional Park they are an essential part. It was fantastic to see 732 days recorded from the volunteer sector and I have the greatest respect for all who get involved. It was especially rewarding to see one of our youngest volunteers Eamonn receiving the Judges special award at the Brighter Belfast Awards; Eamonn contributed 158 hours to supporting the Ranger Service this year.

A little reminder of our high standard of our volunteering was when four representative volunteers went over to Buckingham Palace in June to attend the ceremony for the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the award was presented last year by the Lord Lieutenant of County Down and was a 'crowning' moment for all concerned within Lagan Valley Regional Park.

I would like to finish by thanking the staff, volunteers and fellow Board members of Lagan Valley Regional Park for all their work, support and commitment over the past year.



Jenny Palmer

Councillor Jenny Palmer
Lisburn City Council

We can feel proud of the progress the Park has made over the last year and I am confident further progress will be made in the future.



Manager's Report

Preparing for change would be the words that would best sum up the past year with the Regional Park. The biggest change we have had to prepare for is the Review of Public Administration and how the changes to the council areas will affect the Park.

The portents of change is on the one hand unsettling whilst we are all affected by things beyond our control but at the same time challenges inspire innovation and opportunity. The Regional Park has had a long and close relationship with the councils and there is every indication that this will continue into the future as the Park moves into an era where its geographical area is split almost evenly between the two new councils of Belfast City Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.

One of the changes we were not anticipating was the notice from the Department of the Environment that massive budget slashes would mean an end to a whole range of grants including the Natural Heritage Grant Programme which has formed a major part of the Regional Parks funding for decades.

Hard work and much lobbying both individually and collectively has helped demonstrate the importance and value in supporting eNGO's like ourselves who help protect Northern

Ireland's special and protected areas.

The Minister of the Environment was able to divert some of the funding raised through the carrier bag levy to eNGO's like ourselves via a new grant that was set up for next year only. Lagan Valley Regional Park as well as all the other eNGO's face uncertainty and are collectively seeking commitment from the government to continue supporting us in protecting Northern Ireland's environment into the future.

The remaining parts of the Laganscape project have been completed this year, the most prominent being new signage, and a 10 year post project maintenance plan was agreed with HLF, which will enable us to keep many initiatives started through Northern Ireland's first Landscape Partnership Scheme, thriving.

We look forward to maintaining the positive changes that this has brought to the Regional Park. A massive thank you goes out to all our volunteers, their level of support and dedication has been outstanding, amounting to a whopping 732 volunteer days.

This year has seen the ranks of our Volunteer Heritage Guides swell as new volunteers come on board to open the Industry lighter to the public.

As usual, all of our team have supported and helped to develop one of the most exciting events programmes to date and we continue to provide a wide range of services; working with interest groups, schools and Scouts to name but a few.

Our Ranger Service continues to provide a valuable public service, dealing with enquiries about the region and providing assistance with a wide range of

incidents. This year our

Ranger Service has been supported by 9 Volunteer Rangers, who have offered their help throughout various times of the year.

I would like to acknowledge our core funders, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Belfast City Council, Lisburn City Council, Castlereagh Borough Council

and Department of Culture Arts and Leisure. I would also like to thank our numerous partners who support the Park in so many other ways. The success of the Park depends on this support and partnership.



Lagan Valley Regional Park

The River Lagan and its surrounding valley landscapes are renowned for their natural beauty.

At the heart of the Lagan Valley are the River Lagan and canal systems that form the main access and wildlife corridor bridging two of Northern Ireland's population centres. This unique area, typified by its rolling landscapes, ornamental parklands and farmland, was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty under the first round of designations in 1965.

Shortly thereafter, due largely to concerns of development pressure, the Lagan Valley Regional Park was established as one of three unique semi-urban designations in the UK at that time. The Lagan Valley Regional Park covers an area of 4,200 acres and extends 11 miles along both sides of the River Lagan between Stranmillis, Belfast and Union Locks, Lisburn.



Lagan Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

An AONB is a precious landscape where the distinctive character and natural beauty are so outstanding that it is in the Nation's interest to safeguard it (NAAONB, 2003). The Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order 1985 sets out the main purposes of an AONB:

- To conserve or enhance the natural beauty or amenities of the area.
- To conserve wildlife, historic objects or natural phenomena within the area
- To promote enjoyment by the public
- To provide or maintain public access to the area

These form the ethos of the Lagan Valley Regional Park's Mission.

Our Vision

“ A Park that offers a thriving, diverse and valued riverside heritage that welcomes exploration, learning and enjoyment whilst ensuring a sustainable environment for all. ”



To focus our work over the next 10 years the Regional Park has developed a strategic vision. This is available for distribution from our office and clearly defines our six key focus areas of Biodiversity, Visitors, Community, Landscape, Heritage and Health & Recreation.



Our Aims

- To conserve and manage the biodiversity in the Regional Park
- Support and facilitate ongoing research and education about the area's biodiversity and heritage
- Encourage the involvement of the community and to develop volunteering in the Regional Park
- Maintain and enhance the landscape quality of the Regional Park for the benefit of all
- Proactively conserve and manage the cultural and built heritage of the Regional Park
- Promote the benefits of green open spaces, within the area, for health and wellbeing
- Support appropriate recreation activities, events and the development of sustainable tourism for the benefit of the region
- Increase public awareness of the natural and cultural heritage throughout the region

Partnership

Good partnerships are essential to the governance and management of the Regional Park. Working with our partners we have realized all of the goals laid out in the management plan for this year and, given the spectrum of varying aims and visions of our partners, it is thanks to the coordinated effort of our partners that we have achieved so much. In addition to the funding partners there are a number of other bodies and organisations with which the Lagan Valley Regional Park works.

The Rivers' Agency is responsible for work along the river system and they provide services such as grass cutting along the towpath in close association with DCAL. Forest Service manages Belvoir Park Forest and the National Trust manages the Minnowburn and Terrace Hill sites.

Our partners

Funding

Working together in partnership means that all partners benefit from a much greater value for their contribution as it is matched by others who contribute to the pot. The idea of synergy where the creation of a whole that is greater than the simple sum of its parts dates back to the ancient Greece, but it is being recognised and valued more today in modern business models (paper by F. Akdemir et al at the 25th Institute Project Management World Congress).

- Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)
- Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL)
- Belfast City Council
- Lisburn City Council
- Castlereagh Borough Council

Our management partners

Working together in partnership means that the benefits far outweigh individual organisations working alone.

- Forest Service
- The National Trust
- Council for Nature Conservation and Countryside (CNCC)
- Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT)
- Rivers' Agency
- The Lagan Canal Trust
- Butterfly Conservation NI
- Transport NI



Changes to the Councils

This year is the last year that the Regional Park will be split among the three councils of Castlereagh, Lisburn and Belfast. Castlereagh Borough Council will merge with Lisburn City Council and the next financial year will see the Regional Park split between two councils; the new Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) and Belfast City Council. For LCCC the changes will be substantial and a considerable amount of land from the old Castlereagh Council will move into LCCC, whilst for BCC the changes are to be smaller.

The adoption of BMAP

In addition to the changes to the local authority boundaries, the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan was adopted this year which will bring about changes to the boundary of the Regional Park with a large inclusion between the M1 motorway and the Hillhall Road. There are one or two other minor changes but when we combine the effects of both the changes to the local authorities and the adoption of BMAP it will mean that the Regional Park will be close to an even split between LCCC and BCC.

Carol Braithwaite

'The volunteers are all great to be with and we have enjoyable tasks. The staff plan tasks to suit our abilities and you are never bored.'

Changing Partnerships

The Regional Park has had a close working relationship with Castlereagh Borough Council and has for many years been administered through the council through a service level agreement. We would like to express our gratitude to all those who have worked with us and supported us during this longstanding partnership with the Council. In many ways it will be sad to see the end of this partnership, but we all look forward to developing close ties and working with the new local authorities of LCCC and BCC respectively.



The Arrival of the Barge



This year saw the much awaited arrival of the restored 'Industry'. The barge was craned in on 18th Aug and it spent some time undergoing fitting on site until the official launch on the 13th November 2014. In addition the access to the site and to the barge have been tidied up and improved. Whilst it has been popularly termed 'the barge', the Industry is in fact a lighter, the name given to vessels that would have hauled goods along the Lagan Navigation.

The Industry has been fitted out in keeping with how it would have looked when it was in use, however the main cargo area has been converted into a comfortable usable space with a range of interpretation for old and young alike. The barge is a fantastic asset and a perfect addition to the site.



Gordon Fullerton

'I volunteer for the outdoor exercise, the satisfaction of seeing a task completed and being with other people. Oh and the coffee and biscuits!'

The Lock Keeper's Site

The Lock Keeper's site has been a remarkably successful hub for visitors and tourists. Now this exceptional heritage site has a whole range of restored features from the heyday of the Lagan Navigation. This is the only site in Northern Ireland where visitors can see a Lock Keeper's cottage, a fully functioning restored lock with traditional humped-back stone bridge and a restored lighter in the tranquil setting of the Lagan Valley Regional Park.



The Lock Keeper's Cottage

At the Lock Keeper's Cottage you can expect a cosy welcome to a piece of Northern Ireland's living history. This is where the Lock Keeper and his family lived and looked after the lock. Join our Heritage Guides for a remarkable snap shot of life on the Lagan Navigation. The cottage is open most weekdays and occasional weekends.

The 3rd Lock

Known as McCleave's Lock, the third lock was restored in 2008. Where possible, the original stonework was kept during the restoration process with new stone being added where necessary. The lock gates had to be specially constructed to old plans from the Lagan Navigation, making it a fully functioning restored lock.

The Industry Barge

Barges on the Lagan Navigation were called 'lighters' and the Industry was built in 1920 by Portadown Foundry. Used on the canal for part of its early life to transport a range of goods on the Lagan Navigation, much of its latter days were spent as a sand barge on Lough Neagh.

The Industry will be open to visitors to look around and our Volunteer Heritage Guides will be on hand to provide more information and try to answer any questions visitors to the site may have.



Events

Every year the Regional Park runs an exciting and extensive series of events aimed at getting people involved in the Regional Park's local heritage, its landscapes and its biodiversity or just to get out and about with good company and a healthy walk. This year we reached over two thousand people, many of which were recorded at our wilderness day.



Month	Event	Time	Meeting Place	Attended
April	Dawn Chorus	1100	Ramada Plaza	22
April	Spring Fair	Sat and Sun	Malone House	
April	Foraging Glorious Garlic	1100	Belvoir Activity Centre	13
May	Spring Discovery Morning	1100	Shaw's Bridge	19
June	Family Pond Dip	1100	Minnowburn	20+11
June	Stone Age Solstice	12-5	Giant Ring	647
June	Summer Wildflower Wonder	1100	Knightsbridge	18
July	Secret Garden	7pm	STLD	54
July	World of Butterflies and Moths	7pm	LKC	20
July	World of Butterflies and Moths	10am	LKC	20
Aug	Summer Discovery Morning	11am	LKC	21
Aug	Wilderness Day	11-4	LKC	800
Aug	Bat Walk	9pm	LKC	25
Aug	Bus along the Lagan	10.30am	Lockview	13
Sept	Autumn & Winter Talk Series	7pm	LKC	14
Sept	European Heritage Open Days	11-4	LKC	
Sept	European Heritage Open Days	11-4	LKC	
Sept	Go wild in the woods	12-2pm	LKC woods	14
Sept	Go wild in the woods	2-4pm	LKC woods	14
Oct	Autumn Discovery Morning	11am	Shaw's Bridge	15
Oct	Autumn and Winter talk	7pm	LKC	17
Oct	Remarkable trees Minnowburn	11am	Minnowburn	16
Oct	Fungal Foray	11am	Shaw's Bridge	41
Nov	Autumn and Winter talk	7pm	LKC	32
Nov	Secrets of the Stone Age	11am	LKC	19
Dec	Autumn and Winter talk	7pm	LKC	36
Feb	Winter Discovery Morning	11am	Barnetts Demesne	21
Feb	Industry Along the Lagan	11am	Lagan Valley Island	16
March	In the Valley of the Giants	11am	Shaw's Bridge	17
April	Dawn Chorus	5.30am	Ramada Plaza	32
April	Forage in the Forest	11am	Industry Barge	20
				2027

Lagan Valley Regional Park: the most pop

The towpath is the spine of Lagan Valley Regional Park and links two of Northern Ireland's largest population centres. It is a quality section of the Ulster Way, it is a 'quality medium distance walk' under walk NI and it is part of the national cycle network.

The past two years have seen user numbers in excess of 1.4 million along the towpath, but if we look at the bigger picture and see what is going on throughout the Park, it is evident that total use is much greater. We have gathered data from several of our partners who record users through their own areas and the overall picture is impressive, but even with these statistics there are still some areas that are not fully being realised or captured. All the figures relate to the 2014 calendar year unless stated otherwise.

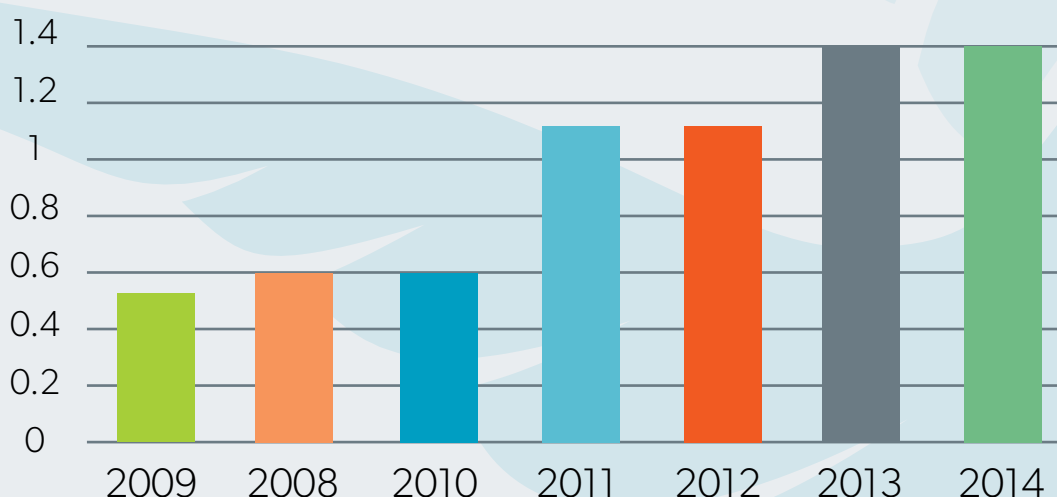
Thank you to all our partners for providing statistics for your area.

Jo Fullerton

'I volunteer to do different things; meeting other people, being outside, a chance to see wildlife and get 'off the beaten track' and something to talk about at the dinner table!'

Towpath user data over the past seven years

The bar graph shows the towpath user counts over several years. The vertical axis are user numbers in millions. The first three entries for 2008, 2009 and 2010 were unable to get full data sets for the year, so much of the data is missing. The first full data set was retrieved in 2011 and the past three bars are taken with new counters replacing the old counters in 2012

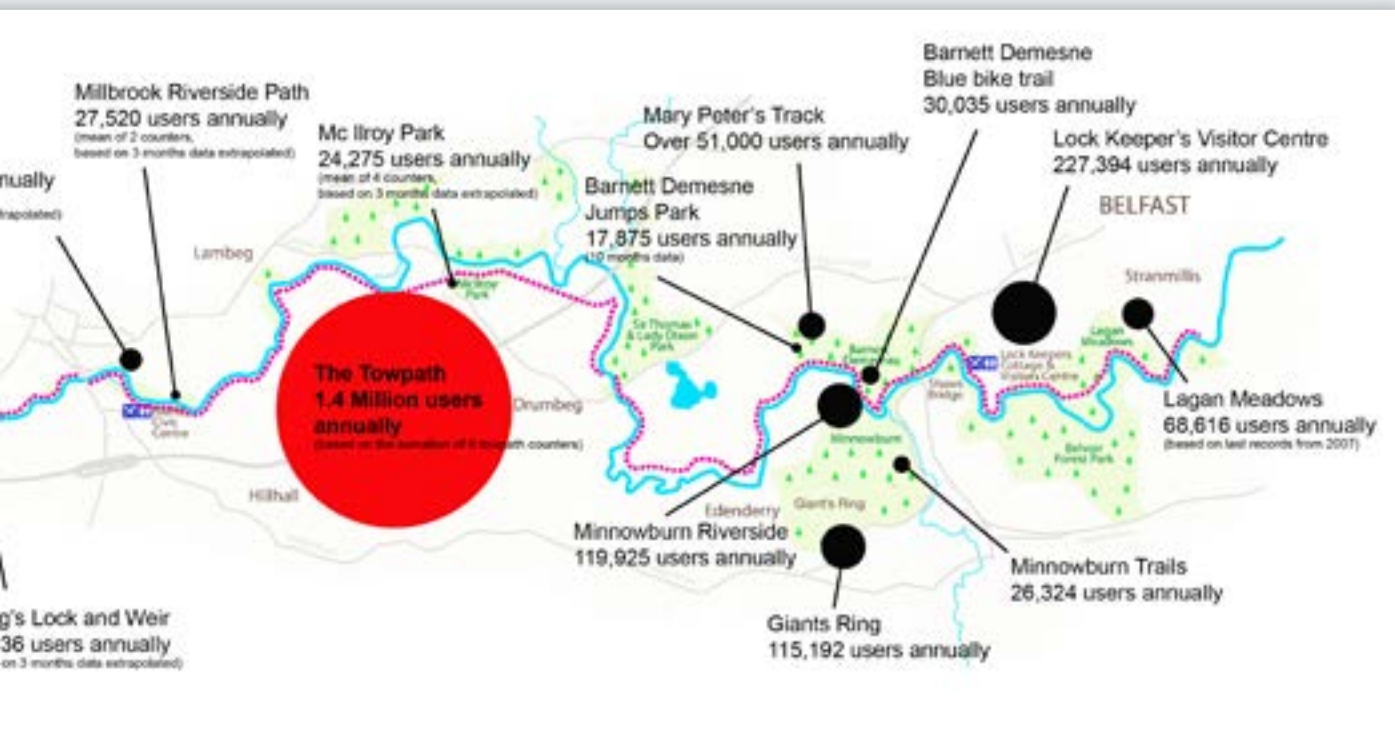


Castle Gardens
46,440 users annually
(mean of 5 counters,
based on 3 months data)

LISBURN
Sprucefield
Union Locks
40,000 users annually
(based on 3 months data extrapolated)
Hog
21,1
(based



ular outdoor attraction in Northern Ireland



The Ranger Service

Effectively, whilst out patrolling in the Park the ranger is a mobile interpretation point for members of the community and visitors alike.

The Ranger Service informs and educates visitors through direct public contact and through promotion at public events and fairs. This year we also had a stall at the careers fair at St George's Market and our Senior Ranger developed strong ties with our colleagues in the South of Ireland, presenting at the cross border tourism conference promoting the Regional Park to a wider audience and showcasing our management of visitors through our partnerships.

The Ranger Service works closely with authorities such as the Police and the Environment Agency on issues such as wildlife incidents and disturbances in the Park.

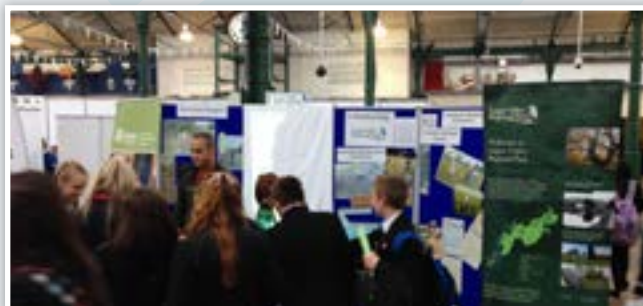
What we do

- Over 370 bags of litter collected
- Over 1100 public enquiries dealt with
- 4 public information stands
- 42 km of paths and trails patrolled weekly (that's over 2000km annually!)
- Reported 64 incidents to partner organisations
- 31 public events delivered; promoting biodiversity, heritage, health and the Regional Park
- Carrying out and facilitating survey work and transects for butterflies, badgers, otters, squirrels and bats
- Delivering additional events for outside organisations and groups

Volunteer Rangers

As well as our two staff rangers, you may well also meet one of our volunteer rangers whilst out and about in the Park. Our Ranger Service has been supported and greatly enhanced by the help of nine volunteer rangers who have given some of their time throughout various times of the year. We would like to extend a big thank you to Eamonn, Frank, Michael, Connor, Alec, Ronnie, Paul, Melanie and Genevieve who have collectively contributed 582 hours of their time and continue to provide valuable support to our ranger service carrying out patrols, conservation work and monitoring.

Whilst we were sad to see Michael leave this year, we were delighted that he has gone into full time work and hope that some of the 'upskilling' he received whilst volunteering in the Park helps him in his future endeavours.





Volunteer	Tasks	Hours	Volunteer Days
Frank	Assist ranger service	182	36.4
Conor	Assist ranger service	14	2.8
Alec	Assist ranger service	51	10.2
Melanie	Assist ranger service	72	14.4
Ronnie	Assist ranger service	174	34.8
Paul	Assist ranger service	15	3
Genevieve	Assist ranger service	35	7
Michael	Assist ranger service	55	11
Eamonn	Assist ranger service	158	31.6
		756	151.2

Gordon Fullerton

'I volunteer for the outdoor exercise, the satisfaction of seeing a task completed and being with other people. Oh and the coffee and biscuits!'

Public Interface

The Park Office is prominently positioned on the towpath at the Visitor Centre with the key attractions of the Lock Keeper's Cottage, the Industry lighter, the lock and the café. The office is a primary interface for the public in dealing with enquiries and providing information and education. This year the Park Office dealt with over 1100 general queries.

These contacts may be in person, via email or by phone and account for around 40% of admin time. We also received enquires about volunteering, student projects and placements, planning, site security, directions, wildlife and heritage to name a few.

All of these queries require some form of follow up; whether it is site visits, investigation or contacting a relevant organisation. These range from reports and queries about wildlife and heritage, directions, access issues and recreation to complaints about litter, dog fouling, toilets, maintenance, fallen trees and vandalism.

This valuable service and the vast experience and expertise that our staff have developed over the year means that we are dealing with complaints and enquiries that would otherwise have to be fielded by the councils, DCAL or the Environment Agency and is one of the many ways of delivering cost effective services through partnership.



Liz Riddell

'Don't mind what I do, I love it all...Give something back'

Awards



The Regional Park organises a river clean up each year which involves several partner organisations and a range of events throughout the year.

The Regional Park's 'My River' Initiative was the winner of the Coca-Cola Coast Care Awards 2014 inland waterway group awards. Recognizing groups for their excellence and innovation in a range of projects that promote sustainable clean environment. Our youngest volunteer ranger Eamonn, has also been very prominent in the award and was a finalist in the same awards for Young Environmentalist of the year.

The tables were turned at the Brighter Belfast Environmental Awards with the Regional Park coming in as a finalist in the category for Nature Conservation for our clean river initiative that included three clean up events, canvassing, river sampling, volunteer ranger's, survey work and working in partnership with other organisations to enhance the river environment of the Lagan Valley. Eamonn stole the limelight at these awards by being awarded the Special Judges Award!



Some of the clean-up work we do

A massive joint effort partnering with the Belfast Hills Partnership to clean up the Colin Glen River, one of the tributaries that flows into the Lagan, and a corporate partnership clean up event with Coca-Cola and Sainsbury's.



The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

We were all so delighted to receive this prestigious award last year and this year saw four of our volunteers go over to Buckingham Palace to meet the queen. Jackson, Frank, Gemma and Lisa put on their very best, 'meet the Queen clothes' and went over for a memorable day and represented all of our volunteers at the award ceremony.



Every other Saturday a group of around 15 dedicated, enthusiastic and hardy individuals meet up somewhere in the Regional Park to volunteer on a conservation based task.

The line graph illustrates the monthly volunteer count for the Saturday Conservation Volunteer Group over a five-year period. The data shows a high degree of variability, with monthly counts ranging from approximately 4 to 28. There are several peaks, notably in late 2010 and late 2015, and a significant low point in early 2011. The overall trend is relatively stable, with no clear long-term increase or decrease in the number of volunteers.

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2010	18	10	20	14	14	12	20	14	7	15	16	14
2011	14	21	16	14	19	27	15	23	4	20	17	11
2012	17	13	18	12	13	12	19	20	14	13	18	14
2013	21	10	12	18	13	7	10	13	21	7	17	16
2014	19	16	15	14	10	13	14	19	12	17	14	18
2015	8	15	21	19	11	14	23	10	23	10	23	10

Jackson Tinto

'The craic's 90'



The hedge laying project at Lagan Meadows was probably the first time we had been given the chance to get at a 'real' hedge after all the practice we'd done in Lagan Lands East on some pretty ropey hedges. The first task was based around training, new to some, but 'old hat' to others.

With hedging as with many things we operate a buddy system, where someone with experience who is confident enough to lay the hedge buddy's up with one or two others who are new to the task.

The guys who were doing the training in Lagan Meadows were a class act and were even able to finish the hedge off with a stylish willow weave on the top. The pictures show the training and the first 400m or so of layed hedge, then the tidied hedge when we came back in the summer for some after care.



The wetland at Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park had originally been scraped out in 2008 and provides important wetland habitat for most of the year being able to retain occasional flood water and rain. It has the ability to become dryer during one or two months of the summer but has gradually started to clog up with self-seeded alder and willow. Our job was to get in there and clear out the encroaching scrub. Although as most will testify scrub is perhaps an understatement, many of the young trees had become well rooted and getting some of them out was tough and arduous. As you can see from the pictures we are all hard at it, the final day was a bit wet for the triumphant group photo at the end and of course the best part of the day is always the craic around tea.



The tasks around the Lock Keeper's Site came out of a Challenge Fund project started the year before, but has seen us going back to maintain the hedges, clear around the young whips and carry out maintenance on the orchard and willow archway that leads into it. Replacing fences with hedges is a great way to provide marginal habitat for a range of wildlife that would have not been able to live there were it just a fence and the orchard and featured arch is a link to our heritage when the nearby grounds of Clement Wilson Park used to grow fruit trees for preserving at the local bottling and canning factory.





As can be seen in the table the contribution to conservation throughout the Regional Park is extensive and considerable with a grand total of 865 hours donated collectively by our Saturday Conservation Group. The bottom line is that with the support of just this one volunteer group the Regional Park is able to achieve so much more than it could without the volunteer sector. This means all of our partner organisations benefit, not just from work carried out on the ground, but from the community involvement, the knock on educational effect of volunteers talking about the work they do with family and friends helping to spread the word about the importance of this area, the importance of biodiversity and our local heritage. A big thank you to all our volunteers.

Month	Task	Site	Volunteers	Hours
April	Tree Planting and Garden	LVRP and Cottage Site	9	22.5
April	River Clean Up	Jubilee Park	13	32.5
May	River Clean Up	Colin Glen	13	32.5
May	Group outing Ballinderry River Trust	Training	14	35
June	Balsam Pulling	Drumbridge	20	50
June	Balsam Pulling	Drumbridge	13	32.5
July	Path maintenance	Giant's Ring Paths	18	45
Aug	Wilderness day help and support	Lock Keeper's Site	15	37.5
Aug	Laurel and Rhododendron clearance	Deriaghy Glen	14	35
Sept	Scrub clearance and path maintenance	Minnowburn woodland	19	47.5
Sept	Laurel removal	Deriaghy Glen	7	17.5
Oct	Joint Nat Trust, path and garden maintenance	Minnowbur woodland	9	22.5
Oct	Laurel and Rhododendron clearance	Derriaghy	11	27.5
Nov	Laurel and Rhododendron clearance	Deriaghy Glen	16	40
Nov	Hedge Laying	Lagan Meadows	11	27.5
Nov	Hedge planting	LVRP and Cottage Site	14	35
Dec	Christmas event	Industry Barge	23	57.5
Jan	Pond Clearance	Belvoir Pond	20	50
Jan	Path Maintenance	Eel Weir	11	27.5
Feb	Laurel removal	Clement Wilson Park	13	32.5
Feb	Tree Planting with the National Trust	Ballylesson	17	42.5
Mar	Seed Collection Training	Industry Barge	21	52.5
Mar	Tree Planting	Industry Barge	25	62.5
			346	865



Pine Martens

An all-Ireland Pine Marten survey through David Tosh at Quercus was carried out this year with the support of our wonderful volunteers. The project recorded data of Pine Martens through motion sensitive cameras and feeder boxes, some locations were in the regional park and somewhere in other areas of Northern Ireland and in volunteer's gardens. A training event was held earlier in the year and many of our volunteers have got involved independently. Two cameras were set up in Minnowburn and Eel Weir from which has been downloaded and forwarded to David for analysis. Our volunteers have recorded Pine Martens in Bangor, Cultra and Ballynahinch. As well as recordings of Pine Martens our volunteers recorded some strange nocturnal goings on, including a young badger climbing a tree to get to the feeder boxes!



BBC Filming for Riverland with Darryl Grimason

The BBC ran three programmes exploring life in, on and around three of Northern Ireland's major rivers. Filming took place in August for the episode focusing on the River Lagan. Darryl spoke to Dr Robert Rosell who was responsible for bringing wild Salmon back to the river Lagan, and went on to explore the connection between the river and people, the old canal system and some of the local industry and mills. Our Assistant Ranger, Nichola and some of our volunteer rangers had their debut TV appearance tackling one of our most endemic invasive species, Himalayan Balsam. All in all it showed the picturesque and tranquil side of the Regional Park, an asset Northern Ireland can be proud of.

Barbara Johnston

'I am retired and I now have time to give something back to the community. Volunteering for Lagan Valley Regional Park is great.'

Belvoir ASSI

Belvoir Park Forest and some of the surrounding area has this year been designated an Area of Special Scientific Interest. The area is predominantly land that is under the management of the Forest Service, but also includes lands owned by the Housing Executive, The Woodland Trust and Boys brigade at the front and lands owned by Belfast City Council in Moorelands meadow. The designation is based on mature woodland, communities of insects, fauna and fungi.

Sadly the area was found to have the plant pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum* present on the larch trees there and an extensive area had to be felled urgently. Whilst this has somewhat changed the landscape of Belvoir Park Forest, the Forest Service are working looking at regeneration options over the next few years. The Forest Service worked very closely with the Environment Agency during the felling to develop and implement plans to minimise risks to veteran trees in the forest.



The Saturday Conservation Volunteers ...continued

Wildlife in the Lagan Valley

Lagan Valley Regional Park Rangers play a key role in protecting the numerous species of wildlife in the Park. We would like to say a big thank you to all of our Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors. Species that are surveyed include, badgers, bats, otters, butterflies, squirrels and recently the elusive pine marten has been added to the list. Many of our events focus on our furry and feathered friends creating opportunities to educate the general public on the importance of conservation of the ecosystems, habitats and landscapes in the Park and creating a safe environment for wildlife to thrive.



New Signage

...a makeover for the parks interpretation

The final project from the Heritage Lottery Funded Lagscape project was the delivery of new signage. The amount of funding set aside for this project had been estimated at the very start of the project in 2006 and once the review of signage in the Regional Park had been completed by MWA the overall cost of completion was higher than anticipated. The Lagscape committee had made the decision to invest in signage that would be of a high quality and would weather well and last far into the future.



A New Logo

As part of the design element of signage a decision was made to refresh our logo. This decision was not taken lightly and agreeing to the final version was not an easy journey. We did finally arrive at a new logo that met with close to full consensus.

Design

One of the main design elements was the need to integrate and reduce signage clutter throughout the Regional Park.



To these ends many of the panels and posts were carefully considered to bring together the need for clear simple maps for the users with key trails and locations, the inclusion of message boards for posters, integrating the QR codes of the Heritage Audio Trail into the signs and the integration of advisory messages for users.

The response from the users of the park has been very positive and public perception has been so good that we were asked to present at a Canal and River Trust England and Wales 'Getting it on the Map' conference showcasing our signage and heritage trail to the wider UK audience. Indeed it will now feature on their web based guidance and development pack.





REGIONAL PARK



LAGAN VALLEY

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