



Volunteer Update March 2016

To all our volunteers, a big thank you for the hard work and dedication you have put into the Park and its projects. It would be quite literally true to say we simply couldn't do many of these additional projects without your help. The Regional Park and the visitor experience is greatly enriched by your hard work and dedication.

Investing in Volunteers Accreditation

Our assessment day was on Wed 24th Feb. A big thank you to all volunteers who made themselves available and came in for the assessment, both those who were interviewed and those who came in as reserves in case someone didn't turn up. Raquel, our assessor, expressed her thanks to us all for our warm welcome and hospitality, she was impressed with everyone's enthusiasm and had a very enjoyable day. We expect to hear back from Volunteer Now by the end of March in terms of the local report and evaluation, then the report gets forwarded to a UK panel with recommendations. We should have some idea if we have achieved the accreditation sometime in May.

Volunteer Heritage Guides

A special thank you to all our Heritage Guides, the winter can be a bit on the quiet side and I know it can be a lonely posting without the regular flow of public through the cottage and the barge. Belfast City Council ran an article on the site in the edition of City Matters before Christmas and we are liaising with them on a bigger feature for a future edition which might help raise the profile. We have also taken on board the feedback regarding signage to show the public that the barge is open and the Council are in principle happy to work with us on this. I would also like to extend a special welcome to our new heritage guides, it's great to see new faces and I hope you enjoy your volunteering experience with us.

Weekend opening

We are back on track opening the lighter and cottage on the last weekend of each month and at present still need to fill one or two gaps. Once we have consistent cover we will consider pushing into more weekends and are considering a suggested option of a volunteer position to cover weekends and act in a supportive role. As with many other things we need to get competent at walking before we can run and have built up our programme gradually, largely supported by yourselves and your enthusiasm.

Volunteer Rangers

We would like to congratulate the four volunteer rangers who completed the spraying course and the NVQ earlier this year. We will be carrying out invasive control measures during the course of the year and hope to have a real impact on the three key invasive species found in the Lagan Valley, especially Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed. The third, Himalayan Balsam, we continue to tackle through pulling during scheduled tasks. This makes a great contribution not just to control of these invasive species but also in spreading the word about their detrimental impact on local flora and fauna. For those volunteer rangers who are out and about we would like to thank you for your help and now that we have the promise of brighter, longer days there is a feel of excitement among the hedgerows as new life starts to emerge.

Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors

With the spring upon us we are gearing up for the seasonal wildlife surveys. Dan is preparing for the four butterfly transects we carry out, and this year we hope to add bumble bees to our inventory. Nichola is looking into this as the transects start in April. Both butterflies and bees are important pollinators, but with recent concern over the decline of many of our bee species we hope to contribute to the national database by carrying out some bee transects here in the Lagan Valley.

Saturday Programme

We always welcome suggestions for tasks, but please understand that any new task must be approved by landowners and meet our strategic requirements. Anne, Dan and myself will continue to rotate working with the Saturday Volunteer group and whilst it may appear that there is a different task leader each time, we do liaise and plan the tasks between the three of us. The Saturday Conservation Volunteer schedule for the next three months is as below – as usual tasks may sometimes change but we'll keep you updated.

Note: We are running two training evens on April 2nd and May 14th – these will both run to 3pm and we will provide lunch at both. If you have to get away early come along anyway and make the most of the morning session.

2 nd April 2016	Wetland Plant Training	Industry Lighter	Hockey Pitches Car Park	Dan
16 th April 2016	Wetland Management	STLD	Lower Stables Car Park	Anne
30 th April 2016	Wetland Management	STLD	Lower Stables Car Park	Andy
	Pond-life & Invertebrate Training			
14 th May 2016		Minnowurn Pond	Minnowburn Car Park	Dan
28 th May 2016	Path Clearance	Laganlands East	Embankment	Anne
11 th June 2016	Balsam Pulling	National Trust	Minnowburn Car Park	Andy
25 th June 2016	Balsam Pulling	Derriaghy Glen	Yew Tree Walk	Dan

Feedback

We welcome your feedback, whether it be about your experiences volunteering or any aspect of the Regional Park. Some of your suggestions have already been taken on board and developed such as donation boxes and weekend opening. Do bear in mind though, that the park operates on a skeleton staff with constant cuts to our annual budget, and our resources, so we may not be able to implement all suggestions. Feedback can be emailed, posted in our suggestion box or communicated to either your Board volunteer representatives (Jackson Tinto or Frank Jordan) or a staff member.

Tee shirts

We have been busy designing tee shirts for volunteers in the summer months and have made the decision to make them available to all our volunteers. We have sample sizes in the office (S, M, L, XL and 2LX) and will bring a supply with us on the Saturday tasks so you can try and see what size suits. Can I just ask that you sign off on the list so that we keep a record of where they have all gone?