

### Investing in Volunteers Accreditation



We would like to thank Cllr Brian Bloomfield MBE, the Mayor of Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council for hosting a mayoral reception for Lagan Valley Regional Park to receive the accreditation for Investing in Volunteers. It was a great evening and it was wonderful to see so many of you come along to support the occasion. Special thanks to Jackson, Genevieve, Sally, Gemma and Gary for coming up and speaking about your volunteer experiences; it really makes us 'a park with people at its heart.'

Special thanks to Sandra Adair, the director of Volunteer Now, Cllr Tim Morrow, the Chair of Leisure and Community Services and Jenny Palmer MLA, the outgoing Chair of Lagan Valley Regional Park.

The 'Investing in Volunteers' accreditation is a standard of excellence that few organisations achieve and having this accreditation not only shows that we operate at a high standard, but also means that others look to us and it greatly enhances our reputation.

### Annual Volunteer Visits



This year our two visits were to Castle Espie, for our Conservation Volunteer Group and to Downpatrick Gaol, for our Heritage Guides. These visits are primarily a way of us saying a big thank you to all of our volunteers and acknowledging the hard work and time you all give to the Park, but also it gives us all a chance to see how similar organisations operate, giving us all a fresh perspective on how we work. The visit to Castle Espie very nearly had to be abandoned by the weather (coming in through the back window of the minibus!) but was a very enjoyable and informative visit with many of us planning to go back in October/November to see the arrival of the Brent geese.



The trip to Downpatrick Goal gave us all a fascinating look into the history of the Goal from what can only be described, as a very knowledgeable and informative guide who took us back to a time of transportations to Australia and a time when we had moral leaders with enough social conscience to make hanging methods more humane!



### **Volunteer Rangers**

Our Volunteer Rangers have been working away on several projects including hedge maintenance, the cottage orchard and a school boat project at Ashgrove Primary School. Whilst we are sad to see two of our Volunteer Rangers go, we are delighted they are now in full time employment in this field. Good luck to Melanie in her post with the National Trust at Castle Ward and Mark in his new post as a warden at Hillsborough Castle.

### **Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors**

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in our wildlife surveys through the summer months. We have completed our butterfly surveys, bat surveys and are continuing the squirrel surveys. New surveys started this year for wildfowl and bumblebees. Two wildfowl BTO surveys have been completed for the whole towpath with data that hopefully can be continued so that we can keep an eye on any trends. We had an overwhelming number of people who wanted to get involved in the bumblebee transects. Nichola has by now managed to familiarise most of you with the transects so we can hit the ground running in spring next year.

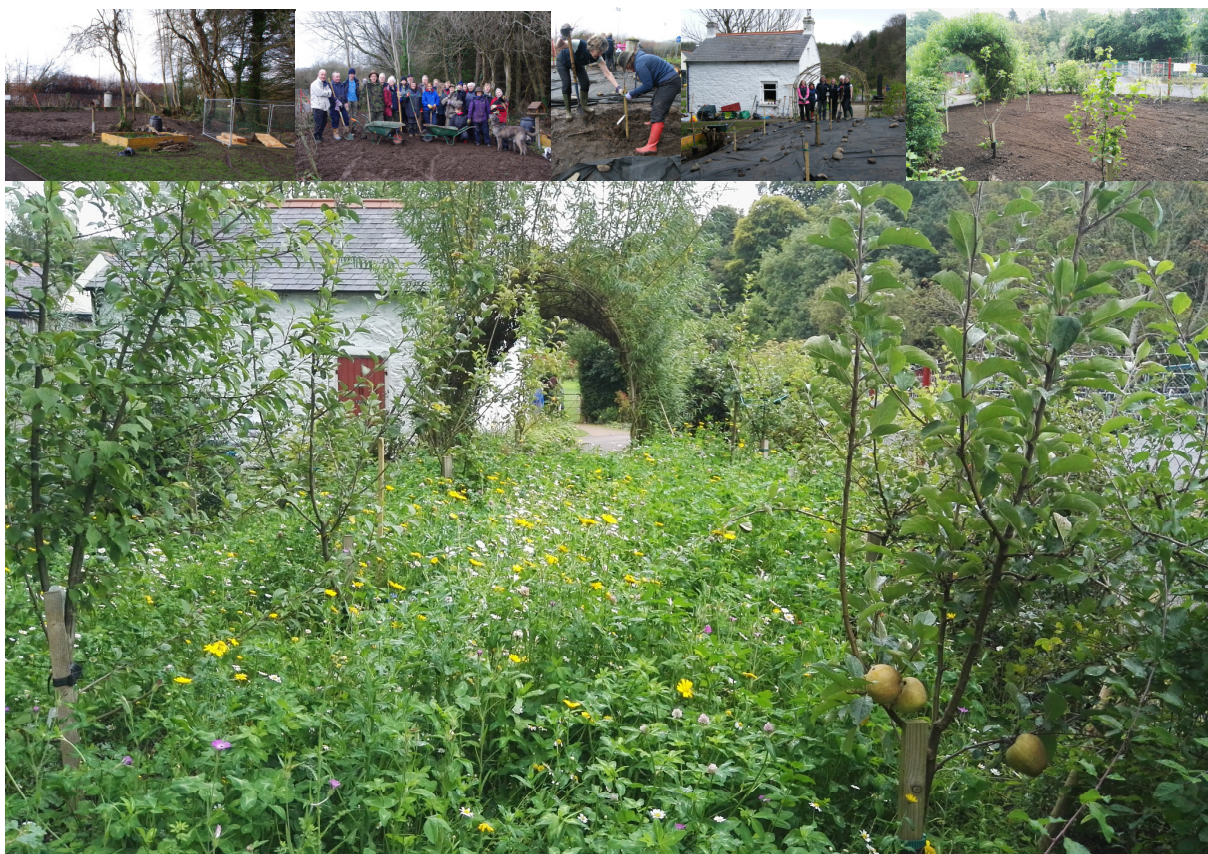
**Invasive plants** – During these summer months, Sinéad has been working tirelessly surveying for our three key invasive plant species: Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and the dreaded giant hogweed. This is the first complete survey we have been able to carry out since 2006 so the comparative data will be most informative. The Regional Park is currently drafting its next 5 year management plan and as such this data will be vital in setting our targets for our alien invasive species action plan and stresses the need to survey more often.





## Saturday Programme

Special thanks to all those who rolled up their sleeves and were involved with the conservation area at the Lock Keeper's Cottage. As you can see from the images the garden was started from scratch. First the area had to be cleared back in October 2014, then prepared, planned and planted. The various stages of the work can be seen in the images and the tremendous work of the volunteers in developing the iconic willow arch sculpture, resonating with the arches of the canal, planting the orchard with its connection to the historical use of the adjacent land for fruit growing and the integrated wildflower area that has bloomed for the first time this year attracting a wide variety of butterflies, moths, bumblebees and even some interesting spiders!



The next three months program looks like this: (but as usual Anne will email out confirmations prior to task days)

<u>Date</u>	<u>Task</u>	<u>Venue</u>	<u>Meeting place</u>	<u>Member of staff</u>
<b>1.10.2016</b>	Collection of acorns and aftercare of Belvoir oaks	Belvoir Park Forest	Belvoir Park Forest Car Park	Dan
<b>15.10.2016</b>	Laurel removal	Derriaghy Glen	Yew Tree Walk	Andy
<b>29.10.2016</b>	Laurel removal	Derriaghy Glen	Yew Tree Walk	Dan
<b>12.11.2016</b>	Scrub/brier clearance	Millbrook and Huguenot Park	Lagan Valley Island Lisburn	Anne
<b>26.11.2016</b>	Scrub/brier clearance	Millbrook and Huguenot Park	Lagan Valley Island Lisburn	Andy
<b>17.12.2016</b>	Christmas event	To be advised	To be advised	All Staff

## Management Plan 2017 - 2022

The Regional Park is currently developing its next 5 year management plan and many of you will have been asked for your input to the consultation process. If this has not reached you, just go to our website and on the front page you can download a consultation questionnaire and return to the address indicated.

## Annual Report 2015/16

The new annual report has just been completed hopefully in time for the board meeting and AGM. There are lots of information about volunteering achievements and a special in depth look at the numbers of people coming to the Visitor Centre, Lock Keeper's Cottage and Industry Lighter.

## Stall at Tesco's

Last week we had an information stall at Tesco's foyer. A big thank you to all who helped out at that and for Anne for organizing it. We raised a little money, but most importantly raised awareness of the Regional Park locally and promoted our branding.



## Belvoir Oak – an old character from a forest long gone



We have nominated the Belvoir Oak as the tree of the year for Northern Ireland and would urge you all to vote and to tell all your friends to vote. Just go to the Woodland Trust's Website scroll down to tree of the year, click on more info and choose Northern Ireland from the list on the left. If we win we can get a small tree care package that would enable us to produce an information leaflet about this historic tree.