

Volunteer Update March 2017



A big thank you to all our volunteers for their continued dedication throughout the winter months but at last spring is with us, the sun is shining and the wild flowers are starting to bloom.



Celebrating 50 Years

Lagan Valley Regional Park was established 50 years ago and we plan to expand our events programme and hold 50 events throughout the year to celebrate this special anniversary.



Lock Keeper's Cottage gets a seasonal make-over

The Lock Keeper's Cottage once again has had a seasonal make-over and the Heritage Guides can welcome visitors with a wonderful display of Easter eggs, bunnies, hot cross buns and a basket of chicks. Thank you to our volunteers who produced the Easter display for all our visitors to enjoy.

This year our volunteers opened the cottage and barge on St. Patrick's Day and around 90 visitors took the opportunity to call in and chat to the Heritage Guides and learn a little of the local history.

In April we are hoping to get a supply of herbaceous plants for the cottage garden. We would be grateful for help from any of you who are gardeners to transfer a rather boring patch into an array of colour.

Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors

Our Wildlife Surveyors are about to get busy as this is the time of year when most of our wildlife surveys kick off. Butterflies, bees, bats and wildfowl are all about to be counted with the data going to CEDaR. CEDaR is the centre for environmental data and recording and its core aims and objectives are to collate the biodiversity data needed to implement the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy. Recording biodiversity can help monitor species over time, measure impacts of change and is crucial for forming legislation.

Weekend opening

We are continuing to open the cottage and the barge to visitors on the last weekend of the month. This has proved popular with visitors to the site with over 250 people visiting on the first weekend opening of the year.

Updates on Conservation Tasks

Despite a few wet Saturdays we managed to carry out a lot of conservation work throughout the winter months. Winter is a good time of year to cut back scrub when there is no nest building taking place.

We kicked off the New Year in 2017 with a session of woodland management in Mcllroy Park where a lot of undergrowth was cleared from a woodland area and coppicing of hazel trees was carried out.

Following a hedge-laying, one-day course in November 2016, in Lagan Meadows, a further session was planned for late January. Most volunteers taking part received a second level hedge-laying accreditation. If you are taking a walk in Lagan Meadows don't forget to check out the newly laid hedge and look for new growth and the hedge returning to life. Hedges are mainly installed as stock-proof field boundaries but they also create a wonderful wildlife corridor and a source of food and shelter for birds, small mammals and invertebrates.

Early February saw some planting of tree whips by our volunteers at the edge Belvoir Park Forest. A task involving meadow management, followed on the 18th February when scrub was cleared from land at the end of Sharman Drive to make way for planting of a wildflower meadow later in the year.

On the 4th March Conservation Volunteers returned to clear scrub and continue with the coppicing of hazel, in Mcllroy Park, opening up the woodland area and the final task in March saw the volunteers planting whips in empty spaces along the hedgerow bordering the towpath.



The next three months Saturday conservation programme looks like this: (but as usual confirmation will be emailed prior to task days).

<u>Date</u>	<u>Task</u>	<u>Venue</u>	<u>Meeting place</u>	<u>Member of staff</u>
1.4.2017	Laurel Removal	Derriaghy Glen	Yew Tree Walk	Dan
15.4.2017	EASTER HOLIDAY	-	-	-
29.4.2017	Wetland Management	To be advised	To be advised	Andy
13.5.2017	Wetland Management	To be advised	To be advised	Anne
27.5.2017	Site restoration	Giant's Ring	Giant's Ring car park	Dan
10.6.2017	Balsam Pulling	To be advised	To be advised	Anne
24.6.2017	Balsam Pulling	To be advised	To be advised	Andy

Wildlife

In April listen out for the calls of swifts as they circle overhead on their return from Africa. Swifts live on the wing only landing to breed and rear their young.



Another bird to watch out for is our new arrival, the great spotted woodpecker. One of our volunteers was able to get a snap of one of these birds in Belvoir Park Forest.

We recently heard that there are signs of red squirrel in Hydebank woods. It is encouraging to know that our little native friend is surviving not too far away.

Management Plan 2017 - 2022

The Lagan Valley Regional Park Five Year Management Plan is now in final draft form and will be finalised in the near future.

Chair Person and Directors

Since the resignation of our Chair, Jenny Palmer, who became an MLA in May 2016, The Park has not had a Chairperson in place, and we were also short of directors, however, following some advertising we have had some interest in these positions and it is hoped that the Board will appoint new Directors and a Chairperson at the Board meeting in March. The volunteer representatives on the Board are Jackson Tinto who is Vice Chair and Frank Jordan.

Programme of Events

Our Programme of Events is underway and we have a broad selection of events to cater for a variety of interests. Call the office to book – 02890 491922

Forthcoming events in April are:

7th April - Dusk Chorus

8th April - Dawn Chorus

22nd April – Spring Wildflower Walk

29th April – Forage in the Forest

This year the Belfast City Council Spring Fair will be held at Malone House on Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th April 2017 from 1.30pm to 5.30pm. We may be looking for a few extra hands to help man our stand on those days and we will be in touch closer to the time but whether or not you are helping out this event is a great afternoon out so put the date in your diaries. The daffodil display is outstanding.

Some of you will remember that last year we had a stand in the foyer at Tesco, Newtownbreda, with the chief aim of raising awareness of the Park. This year on the 2nd June Tesco has agreed to our having a bag pack to enable us to raise funds for the Park. We hope some of you will be able to provide an hour or two to help out. Further details will be sent closer to the time.

Feedback

Don't forget to provide us with feedback. We are always interested to know of any issues, questions or suggestions you may have.

Volunteer uniforms

If any of our volunteers don't yet have a body warmer or one of our tee-shirts please let the staff know and we will make sure you are supplied with these items.

Congratulations are due to our Senior Ranger, Dan, on the birth of his second son, Eli. Eli was born on the 12th March weighing 8lbs 6ozs.

We would also like to congratulate Genevieve who has been volunteering with us for 6 years. Genevieve recently passed her driving test and is completing a Nature Skills Traineeship with the Ulster Wildlife Trust. On the 22nd April Genevieve, who has an extensive knowledge of wildflowers, will be leading our Spring Wild Flower walk.