

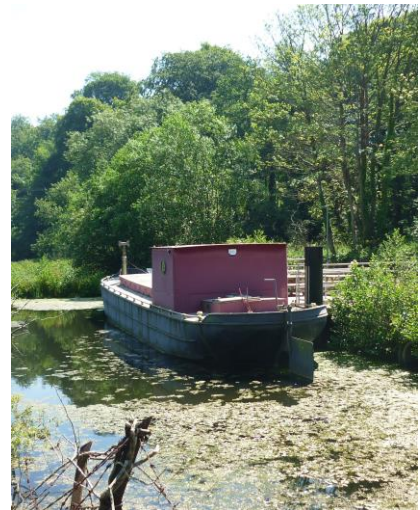
Volunteer Update September 2019



A big thank you to all our volunteers for their continuing support throughout the summer months: for welcoming and engaging our visitors; for caring for and conserving our habitats; for surveying our wildlife in a range of national recording schemes. Autumn is now upon us, with foraging delights and the beauty of nature's changing colours.

Visitor Numbers

Thanks to our dedicated Heritage Guides we welcomed **2,958** visitors to the Lock Keeper's Cottage in this quarter up to 24th September. This included our usual weekend openings and a European Heritage Open Day in September. The Industry Barge welcomed **1,501** visitors over the same period. Indeed, despite only opening on one day of EHOD, **cottage visitor figures are up 17.5%** on the same period last year. Visitors to the Barge this quarter fell minimally (1.5%) from last year's figure of 1,524. Thank you all for your dedication and enthusiasm, for keeping our local heritage alive, engaging, and relevant to our visitors (new and returning, through the busy days and the quiet days alike).



Holiday Closures

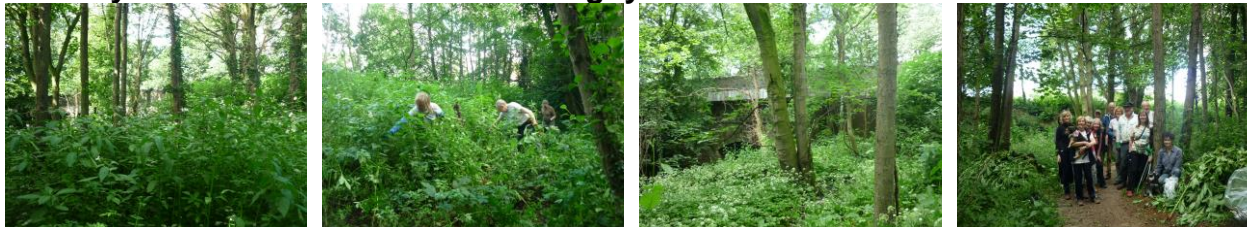
There are no holiday closures this coming quarter until the Christmas break, when it is **anticipated that the Cottage and Barge will be closed from Monday 23 December to Wednesday 1 January inclusive**. This will be confirmed nearer the time.

The **Barge will also be closed on Tuesday 26 November** to facilitate the Investing in Volunteers reaccreditation assessment day (See **Investing in Volunteers Update** below).

Update on Conservation Tasks

Our Saturday Conservation Volunteers have been busy this quarter with a variety of tasks across the Regional Park.

Himalayan Balsam Removal 1 – Derriaghy Glen



For the first task of July, the volunteers were back at LCCC's Derriaghy Glen to continue with removing the non-native invasive Himalayan balsam from the site, removing large swathes throughout the site. With a persistent seed bank, this is an annual effort: however with each year, there have been huge improvements in the accessible areas.

Himalayan Balsam Removal 2 – Drumbridge



Providing holiday cover for the Volunteer & Visitor Officer, Park Manager, Andy, got out with the Saturday Conservation group for the second task in July, to tackle another swathe of Himalayan balsam bashing along the canal on DfI land at Drumbridge.

Ad hoc litter lifts were carried out also on both balsam tasks – sprucing up the sites as litter was exposed during the vegetation removal, including the remains of a rusty mattress which had been dumped at Derriaghy. Thanks for all your hard work folks!

Scything Training with the National Trust at Minnowburn



On the first task day of August (and another weekday session in September), the Saturday Conservation Volunteers and LVRP staff attended Scything Training sessions at Minnowburn kindly facilitated by Colin Barrett, the National Trust Ranger there, in preparation for grassland management tasks across the Regional Park. The training covered all aspects of using an Austrian scythe: how to set the scythe up to fit the user and ensure a good cutting technique; sharpening and peening the blade; mowing techniques in the field; health and safety considerations; and the advantages and pleasure of using traditional tools and techniques to manage grassland habitat. Massive thanks to Colin for imparting his knowledge, skills and experience, not to mention his infectious passion for the subject. Everyone who attended – both staff and volunteers - took away new skills and enjoyed the experience immensely.

Meadow Management at Mcllroy Park



The second task in August saw the first set of newly trained volunteers putting their scything skills to use to cut the lower wildflower meadow at Mcllroy Park in Drumbo. The mown vegetation was then removed, using rakes and drag bags, to lower nutrients in the meadow, allowing wildflowers to return next season, and discouraging the growth of vigorous grasses and rank vegetation such as nettles and docks. Greater plant diversity allows our pollinators and other invertebrates to flourish, and this in turn provides food for birds, mammals and amphibians. Indeed the meadow was chirping with grasshoppers on a site visit prior to the task, and we came across several frogs during the task – demonstrating another benefit to using traditional tools, as a frog may not have escaped a strimmer or other machinery. The pace and pattern of scything allowed for the frog to be carefully corralled into longer surrounding vegetation.

September: a new month, a new meadow and more newly trained mowers!



The first task of September saw our magnificent mowers back at Mcllroy Park to cut and remove the vegetation from the wildflower meadow at the entrance to the site. This task was a sure-fire test of their newly acquired scything skills as the vegetation was much taller and denser than on the previous site: indeed it was anticipated that it would probably take two tasks to complete the cut and lift, leaving a 1m strip around the perimeter for wildlife cover and seed for birds over winter. The volunteers did a fantastic job on the first task, getting through over half of the meadow, and a second task is planned for 28 September to complete the work.

And finally, on the scything front...



Our Park Manager, Andy Bridge, really got into the historical scything spirit on the September training session at Minnowburn, looking like he had just stepped out of a sepia tone photograph from the hey days of scything! Apparently, his technique wasn't too bad either!

The **provisional schedule for Saturday Conservation tasks** for the upcoming quarter is outlined below. Please note that these may be subject to change, though as usual confirmation will be emailed prior to task days.

Date	Task	Venue	Meeting place
12 Oct	Woodland Management	Belvoir Oak Wood	Belvoir Drive Car Park
26 Oct	Woodland Management	TBC	TBC
9 Nov	Meadow Management	Clement Wilson	Clement Wilson
23 Nov	Meadow Management	Clement Wilson	Clement Wilson
7 Dec	TBC	TBC	TBC

Volunteer Rangers



Volunteer Ranger **Gary**, who joined us out of a personal desire to assist with tackling the increasing graffiti problem in the Regional Park, has been doing an absolutely fantastic job removing graffiti from benches, signs and other surfaces on the Towpath, and at other sites across the Park. Gary puts in a huge amount of volunteer effort each week, and has clocked up over 80 volunteer hours since he joined us at the end of June! Many thanks to Gary for the difference he is making and for his dauntless enthusiasm.

A big thank you is also due to **Traci** who joined us as a Volunteer Ranger in June, whilst completing her environmental Masters at QUB. Traci assisted the Ranger Service with vegetation clearance at Lock 3 and along the Towpath, and also volunteered on the Daubenton's bat survey, before securing full time employment with an environmental consultancy. Thank you and farewell also to Volunteer Ranger and QUB Masters student, **Steph**, who has moved back home to England on completion of her studies. We wish both of them the very best in their future careers.

Wildlife Surveyors

Wildlife survey season is nearly drawing to a close for another year. Many thanks to our Volunteer Surveyors for their contributions this year, contributing vital data to numerous nationwide monitoring schemes. Ten volunteers took part in the **All-Ireland Daubenton's Bat Waterway Survey** in August, covering six transects along the Lagan, with data submitted to Bat Conservation Ireland; four volunteers surveyed transects monthly (from March to Oct) for the **Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme**, with data submitted to the National Biodiversity Data Centre; and one volunteer and one member of staff covered three **UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme** transects weekly (from April to Sept) with data submitted to Butterfly Conservation.



Other volunteer news...

Investing in Volunteers Update



As you will be aware, LVRP are in the process of being assessed by **Volunteer Now** for the renewal of the **Investing in Volunteers Standard**, which sets a benchmark across **9 indicators and 46 practices** which organisations involving volunteers must meet to be awarded this national quality standard.

Our Assessor has just been appointed and our Assessment day will be on **Tuesday 26 November**. As many of you will know from previous experience of the process, the Assessor will interview a percentage of staff, Board members and volunteers – the latter ranging across all volunteer roles and length of volunteer service – about the volunteering programme at LVRP. This year this will amount to 2 staff, 1 Director and 7 volunteers, who will be chosen randomly and anonymously by the assessor to be invited to interview. A Reserve list will also be drawn up and an interview schedule produced for the assessment day. Please do not be worried about the formality of the term 'interview' – it is really a fairly short, informal chat, answering a few questions about your experience of volunteering with LVRP. And remember that it is the organisation that is being assessed not the volunteers! More detail will be sent out as it becomes available, but I would ask that you put the date in your diary in the meantime.

Another Date for your diary...

While you've got your diaries out, please make a note that this year's **Volunteer Pre-Christmas Get-Together** will be on **Saturday 14 December**.

We hope that as many of you as possible can join us (and each other) to get together for a catch-up, toast the festive season, enjoy a few nibbles, and get competitive over those Christmas Quiz questions!



Volunteer Outings



This year's **Volunteer 'Thank You' Days** took place in August, with 14 of our **Heritage Guides** accepting the invitation to **Mossley Mill in Newtownabbey** on the 30th, for a tour of the Museum at the Mill, followed by lunch in a reception room with a beautiful original vaulted ceiling. After lunch there was time for a relaxing stroll through the grounds and the adjoining Newtownabbey Way, before boarding the bus back to the Lock Keeper's.

The following day saw 13 of our **Conservation Volunteers, Volunteer Rangers and Wildlife Surveyors**, take up the invitation to a day out at **Cave Hill**, with a guided walk and talk from **Cormac Hamill of the Cave Hill Conservation Campaign**, including tasting the deliciously cold and fresh water from the Volunteers' Well, followed by lunch at Belfast Castle.

For those of you who were unable to attend the events, we would like to extend our thanks again here for all that you do for the Park, and hope that you can join us on future events.

Annual Report

The **Annual Report for 2018-19** is undergoing final corrections and should be available from **mid to late October**. A small number of hard copies will be available from the Park Office and an electronic copy will be uploaded to the website once available

Upcoming events - Annual events programme

Details of this quarter's annual events programme are outlined below.

Further details can be obtained from our printed programme, available from the Visitor Centre and other outlets, on our website and Facebook page, or by telephoning the Office on 028 9049 1922. Please note that events **must be booked** as spaces are limited.

Events are **free for our volunteers**, though donations are always welcome.

So why not come along to one of our upcoming events, or promote them to your family and friends – there is something there to interest everyone!



LVRP Autumn Events: Oct – Dec 2019

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Location</i>
Fri 4 Oct	Autumn Discovery Morning	Belvoir Park Forest car park
Sat 5 Oct	Fungal Foray	Shaw's Bridge car park
Sat 26 Oct	Ghostly Goings On	Drumbridge car park
Sat 16 Nov	Secrets of the Stone Age	Minnowburn car park
Sun 8 Dec	Holly Hike	LVRP Visitor Centre

For more information and bookings, please contact the Park Office on 028 9049 1922 or email admin@laganvalley.co.uk

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 T-shirts, please let the staff know and we will make sure