



As we head towards summer, it's great to see the pollinator patch at the Lock Keeper's in full bloom and teeming with insect life – likewise the Cottage border and garden have been buzzing. The big highlight of the last quarter without doubt has been to be able to welcome back some of our Heritage Guide volunteers, and hence visitors, to the Lock Keeper's Cottage, after over 2 years closure due to the pandemic.

Fingers crossed for some more settled weather in the summer months - for the pollinators, and our visitors and volunteers alike!

A big thank you to the full LVRP volunteer team for their work over this last quarter – whether this be visitor guiding at the Cottage, carrying out habitat management tasks on partner sites across the Regional Park, monitoring pollinators on transect walks, or carrying out patrols, lifting litter and assisting the Ranger Service.

LVRP remain ever grateful also for the continued commitment of those volunteers who have not yet returned to volunteering, but plan to do so in the future.

Thank You!

Lock Keeper's Cottage Re-opening

After a long hiatus since mid-March 2020, when the world went into lockdown, the cottage door was enthusiastically re-opened to visitors on 10 May, thanks to a small team of volunteers, who facilitate the sharing of the history of this quaint little house, and associated local history from the heydays of the Lagan Navigation.

Opening hours vary week to week depending on volunteer availability, and days of opening are currently Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, though will extend as and when feasible. The reception from volunteers and visitors alike to the re-opening has been brilliant, and **790 visitors** have crossed the threshold in the **89.5 hours** opened from 10 May until 24 June.

Opening hours for visitors are advertised weekly on LVRP's Facebook page and website, and on signage on the Cottage door.



Update on Conservation Tasks: Late Mar - Jun

Throughout the last quarter, our teams of LVRP Conservation Volunteers have been busy as ever carrying out habitat management tasks at various sites across the Regional Park, on alternate Saturdays and Thursdays:



LVRP Conservation volunteers, Jackson and Paul, pulling balsam at Lock 6 at Drumbridge in late May

- 2 bramble clearance tasks on the species-rich grassland banks of the Giant's Ring, in liaison with HED (Historic Environment Division)
- 3 litter lift and river clean tasks, in conjunction with LVRP Ranger Service, and in liaison with LCCC, the Woodland Trust and DfI (Department for Infrastructure): 1 downstream of the Civic Centre in Lisburn; 1 at Old Warren woodland and Becky's Hogg's in Lisburn; and 1 at Drumbridge
- 4 Himalayan balsam pulling tasks: 1 at Drumbridge canal cut and Lock 6, in liaison with DfI (Department for Infrastructure); 1 at Derriaghy Glen in liaison with LCCC; and 2 at Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park, in liaison with BCC

Scrub Clearance at Giant's Ring



At a task apiece in March and April, the LVRP Conservation Volunteer teams continued with removal of scattered bramble from the grassland banks of the Giant's Ring, avoiding any thicker areas, which had potential for use by nesting birds. Great work all round with another 5 builder bags removed across both tasks!

The weather wasn't half bad either – with blue skies all round on both days!



River Cleans and Litter Lifts – in conjunction with LVRP Ranger Service

LVRP Conservation Volunteers joined forces with LVRP Ranger Service with the park canoe, for a number of tasks over this last quarter, removing rubbish from the Lagan at a number of sites - improving the river habitat for wildlife, local communities and park visitors. Litter lifts of adjoining sites were carried out alongside the river based clean-ups.

Lisburn – Upstream of Civic Centre

Late March: Items pulled from the river included: sofa, chair, table, bedside cabinet, pushchair, 2 bicycles, ironing board, clothes horse, random bits of wood/metal, multiple footballs and a shoe, not to mention the usual glass and plastic bottles and general litter! Litter lifts were carried out on the paths on both sides of the river also.

10 bags of miscellaneous rubbish were removed from the river/site, alongside the bulkier items.



Drumbridge

The river clean and litter lift at Drumbridge in April resulted in: a quantity of fallen wood hauled ashore from below the bridge, cut up and left as a habitat pile: 7 bags of litter removed - litter collected from the river/detritus pulled from bankside trees by the Rangers in the canoe, and litter picked by the volunteers in the neighbouring lands/paths: alongside a traffic cone, a road sign, some pallet wood, and a child's scooter.



Old Warren and Becky Hogg's

May's task at Old Warren woodland in Lisburn and the towpath nearby, yielded 11 bags of rubbish, including abandoned sleeping kit – pillow, sleeping bag, tent, tarp, plus a broken Wendy house and random scrap metal, whilst the Rangers in the canoe cleared litter from the river along the stretch from Becky Hogg's to Piper's Quay on the same day.



Fantastic work all round folks!

Invasive Species Control - Himalayan balsam removal

By the end of May the LVRP Conservation Volunteers were into 'balsam season', removing the non-native invasive species, Himalayan balsam from a number of sites across the Regional Park.

Drumbridge

At the tail end of May, the volunteers were at Drumbridge, removing balsam from the canal cut at the bottom of Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park, and at Lock 6 nearby. They were delighted to see how little balsam was in the cut this year – after many years work at the site, and a particularly productive task there in 2021.



Derriaghy Glen

It was then off to Derriaghy Glen Linear Park in June, for a balsam removal task, focusing on the more scattered areas of balsam there, ahead of further planned site works by LCCC Parks & Amenities.



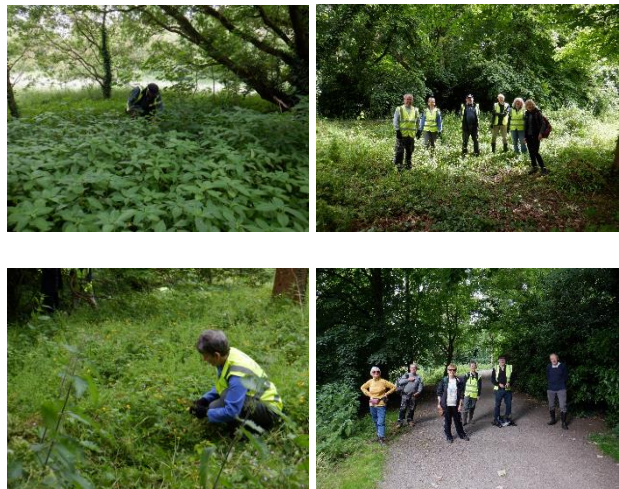
A litter lift was also carried out on site by volunteer Billy, with 2 bags of litter removed. A big thanks to Billy for the litter pick, and to everyone else for the balsam pulling!

Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park

June was rounded up with 2 more balsam tasks, this time at STLD – focussing on the area beyond the Stables, between the main path towards the meadows and the river.

As with the previous sites, this is an area that LVRP Volunteers have worked on for many years, as balsam is unfortunately an ongoing task year on year, given the persistent seed bank.

In some areas the balsam is taller and forms a 'monoculture' – allowing the pulling of it to be 'fast and furious': in others the work has to be carried out in a much more delicate manner, removing smaller plants from in between a variety of other species, all whilst trying not to squash the surrounding vegetation in the process! Along with the main work area, the volunteers also pulled a patch of balsam at the meeting point at the Lower Stables car park on the second task! Great work folks!



Conservation Volunteer Training – Wildflower ID

In May, LVRP Conservation Volunteers took up the opportunity of another fantastic ID training session facilitated by Belfast City Council's City Cemetery Heritage Project, and delivered by Karl Hamilton of Mantella Environmental. This time the session was on grassland flora - giving volunteers the skills to identify various species of wildflowers and grasses. There was much excitement on encountering a beautiful Elephant hawkmoth along the way too!



Above: LVRP Volunteer Wildflower ID training at City Cemetery; Right: Elephant hawkmoth



Pollinator Notes

Changeable weather

The changeable weather has been fairly challenging over the last few months for our weekly Butterfly (**UKBMS**), and monthly **All-Ireland Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme**, Survey Volunteers to get the conditions required to survey - as it must be dry and not too windy, and either 13°C with 60 % sunshine or 17°C – so it's often a case of squeezing in surveys at the first opportunity!

Thanks to everyone involved for running out to catch those opportunities and gather this important data.

Unfortunately, changing weather patterns don't bode well for our pollinators either...



UKBMS - 3 transects are walked weekly in LVRP each year to collect data

Did you know...?

Data gathered nationally by volunteers on the UKBMS, and on the Butterflies for the New Millennium recording scheme, has shown that, shockingly, **50% of UK butterflies are now listed as Threatened or Near Threatened** - with change of land use (loss of habitat) and climate change being the main contributors to these declines.



Above: Bumblebee on Meadow cranesbill in the Cottage garden – always choose pollinator friendly plants when gardening when you can

Pit Stops for Pollinators

Creating 'pit stops for pollinators' – creating suitable habitat/growing suitable plants in parks, gardens, window boxes/pots, and community spaces is a great way to take positive action for our struggling pollinators, and it's wonderful to watch 'the buzz' created in these spaces. Indeed, LVRP's mini meadow/pollinator patch at the Lock Keeper's has been attracting all sorts of insect life, as has the Cottage garden.



L to R: LVRP Pollinator patch/mini meadow at the Lock Keeper's; Common carder bumblebee on Red clover; Dung fly on Oxeye daisy; Azure damselfly are also utilising this rich meadow habitat, along with numerous other types of hoverflies, other flies, beetles and bugs

Bat Survey Season



(Image – Bat Conservation Ireland)

In the coming weeks, LVRP should be receiving this year's **All-Ireland Daubenton's Bat Waterway Survey** packs from Aideen Kane at Bat Conservation Ireland - the new survey coordinator - who takes over this year from Tina Aughney, who had coordinated the scheme since its outset in 2006.

Tina, whom many of you will have met at training sessions in the past, continues to work with BCI, coordinating the Brown Long-eared Bat Roost Monitoring survey, and also still volunteers on the Daubenton's survey.

LVRP Bat Survey volunteers will be contacted, and teams coordinated, over the coming month, in preparation for the start of this year's survey season in August, when transects will again be carried out along 6 stretches of the Lagan – at Stranmillis, the Lock Keeper's, Shaw's Bridge, Edenderry, Ballyskeagh and Hilden.

Board Update



Two new Directors have just been appointed to the Board at its June meeting, including long-term LVRP Conservation Volunteer/Bat Survey Volunteer, Gemma Daly (pictured) who joins to represent volunteer interests at Board level, replacing Andy Halliday, who stood down in 2021.

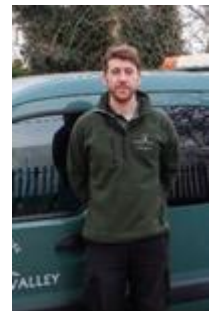
Gemma is joined by Chi Ting Yip, who brings legal expertise to the Board, and replaces Jim Jackson, who recently retired after 11 years service.

LVRP would like to thank Jim for all his work down the years, and extends a warm welcome to the new Directors.

Staff Update

LVRP Assistant Ranger, Aaron Lavery, will be moving on to pastures new in July, as he has secured a job as a Ranger with the National Trust (Belfast) – so he'll not be moving too far away!

We will be sad to see him go, extend to him our thanks for all his hard work at the Regional Park over the last 8 months, and wish him all the very best in his new role, and for the future.



LVRP Events



Since the return of a more regular events programme at LVRP in 2022, bookings have been going very well, with a few events attracting a long reserve list on top of being fully booked, which is fantastic.

Upcoming events for July and August include 'Secret Garden' and 'Bumblebee and Butterfly Safari' at Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon, 'Summer Discovery Morning' at Belvoir and 'A Tree Trail' at Glenmore.

Keep an eye on our Facebook, website and poster boards for more info, or pick up an Events Programme from the Lock Keeper's Visitor Centre.

Volunteer Feedback

We are always keen to get input and feedback from our volunteers – please get in touch with us with any issues, questions or suggestions you may have.

Contact: email – volunteering@laganvalley.co.uk

