

Volunteer Update March 2022



Spring has sprung, and we'd like to say a big 'Thank You' to all our volunteers for all their work so far in 2022.

LVRP Conservation volunteers have been busy on numerous habitat management projects throughout this last quarter; our Volunteer Ranger has been busy on patrols, checking on maintenance and access issues, and lifting litter; and our Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors have just started out the 2022 season in March, monitoring bumblebees, with butterflies to follow in April.

Heritage Guide Volunteering

Spring brings sunshine and rays of hope for welcoming back more of our LVRP volunteer team!

LVRP are currently liaising with Belfast City Council to confirm details for the re-opening of the Lock Keeper's Cottage, and hope that this will be feasible by the end of April. We'll keep volunteers posted on this once we have confirmation. Prior to re-opening the Volunteer & Visitor Officer will be in touch with Cottage Heritage Guides individually to discuss details, and any concerns you may have about returning to volunteering. Volunteers may of course choose to continue to pause their volunteering if they wish.



LVRP is also continuing to liaise with Belfast City Council regarding the actioning of ongoing maintenance issues on the Barge, and on future re-opening of the site, and will update volunteers on any developments here.

Update on Conservation Tasks: Jan - mid March

January's storms aside, our teams of LVRP Conservation Volunteers have been busy carrying out habitat management tasks at various sites across the Regional Park, on alternate Saturdays and Thursdays:



Above: One of the LVRP Conservation Volunteer teams at a halving task in Belvoir ASSI in February

- 2 young oak (whips) aftercare tasks, and 2 veteran oak halving tasks, in Belvoir ASSI, under agreement with Forest Service and NIEA
- 2 bramble clearance tasks on the species-rich grassland banks of the Giant's Ring, in liaison with HED (Historic Environment Division)
- 1 scrub clearance task along the towpath near Shaw's Bridge, in conjunction with LVRP Ranger Service, and in liaison with DfI (Department for Infrastructure)
- 1 meadow management task in Mclloy Park, in liaison with LCCC (Lisburn & Castlereagh Council)

Belvoir ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest)

There was a lot of LVRP Conservation Volunteer activity in Belvoir Forest Park through January and February on Belvoir oaks of different generations: with a couple of tasks 'halving' veteran oaks – removing scrub and saplings in a ring around these old beauties to give them more light and less competition in their old age - and a further couple of tasks clearing bramble and tall vegetation from around some baby oaks to give them a helping hand in their early years.



These Belvoir babies were planted by Forest Service two winters ago, after being propagated and grown on at their nursery, from acorns collected from the veteran oaks in Belvoir by LVRP volunteers in autumn 2016!

Left: Baby oaks at Belvoir in Jan 2022, with volunteer Carol;
Right: A group of LVRP volunteers at the Acorn collecting task in autumn 2016



It's so wonderful to think of these youngsters as the veterans of the future, alongside the other oak youngsters who have naturally regenerated in the area, and thanks to everyone for their work on the tasks,



Left to Right: Volunteers Gil and Liz cutting the felled material to form habitat piles at a halving task in Feb; Paul and Gemma at the end of another successful halving task in Jan; Carol and Karen clearing brambles and other vegetation from around the baby oaks in Jan; the volunteer group at the end of the baby oak aftercare task in February – while a veteran oak stands proud in the background.

Scrub Clearance at Giant's Ring

At a task apiece in January and February, the LVRP Conservation Volunteer teams continued with scrub (mainly bramble) removal from the grassland banks of the Giant's Ring. The task in January brought some atmospheric misty weather, though at least the brambles could still be found! Great work all round with another 3 builder bags removed on both tasks!



Left to right: Brambles in the Mist – volunteer Sally still finding the scrub at the Giant's Ring; volunteer group at the end of the misty task in Jan; different task, different weather - getting stuck into some of the dense patches by the wall in Feb, before bird nesting season; volunteer group at the end of the task in Feb with another 3 builder bags full of scrub removed from the site

Towpath near Shaw's Bridge – Gorse Removal with the Ranger Service

A Thursday task in Feb saw the volunteers assisting LVRP Ranger Service with the removal of gorse and other scrub, which had spread fairly rampantly along the riverbank upstream of Shaw's Bridge, and was obscuring views from the Towpath, of the river and the vista to Minnowburn meadows on the opposite side.



Above: Volunteers cutting the felled gorse

Gorse was thinned, the view opened up and the cut scrub was formed in habitat piles nearby.

A group of volunteers from the IWAI also assisted the Ranger Service with further scrub removal works downstream on the same day.



Above; Views of river and beyond restored

Fantastic work from everyone involved, and lovely to have the views from the Towpath opened up for all our visitors to enjoy.

Mcllroy Park – Meadow Management

LVRP Conservation Volunteers have been managing the wildflower meadow at Mcllroy Park since 2019, carrying out an annual cut and lift using Austrian scythes in Aug/Sep, whilst leaving a 1m border over winter for seeds for the birds and shelter for insects.



Left to right: The wildflower meadow overwinter border at Mcllroy Park: before, during and after; volunteer group at end of task

Come March, as the new growth starts to push through the dead standing vegetation, the volunteers return to clear the border of this dead material – removing excess nutrients and giving the new season's wildflowers the space to grow and thrive. Great work folks!

Conservation Volunteer Training – Winter Tree ID

In March, LVRP Conservation Volunteers attended an informative and really enjoyable Winter Tree ID training session, facilitated by Belfast City Council's City Cemetery Heritage Project, and expertly delivered by Karl Hamilton of Mantella Environmental.

The training took place on site at the City Cemetery and Falls Park, and gave volunteers the skills to recognise different species of trees and scrub in winter, when leaves are absent and identification becomes more challenging - relying on the finer details, such as bud arrangement and colour, and bark patterns. As woodland and scrub volunteer tasks mostly take place in autumn/winter – to avoid bird nesting season, this will be a great skill for the volunteers to have to assist them in their future tasks.

A big thank you to Orla Maguire, BCC Biodiversity Officer for arranging the session with Karl, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.



Wildlife Survey Season Kicks Off for 2022



With March comes the start of the first of the year's national Monitoring Schemes – The Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme, run by the National Biodiversity Data Centre in the Republic of Ireland and covering

the whole island. LVRP contributes data to the Scheme each year, carrying out 6 transects (survey walks) once a month from Mar-Oct, covered by both volunteers and staff.

Butterfly Conservation's national Butterfly Monitoring Scheme will soon commence in April - with 3 transects walked weekly for 26 weeks, from Apr-Sep, again by a mix of volunteers and staff.

A big thank you our Wildlife Survey Volunteers – Arthur, Derek and Muriel - for their ongoing commitment to this important monitoring work.

Park Events



LVRP are pleased to announce that 2022 brings a return to more regular programme of public events/guided walks at the Regional Park.

To date in 2022, there have been a Winter Discovery Morning, a Winter Wander, A Treasured Landscape (with Ben Simon) and an Aberdelghy Trail, with a Spring Discovery Morning, Spring Wildflower Walk and a Forage in the Forest event lined up for April.

Upcoming events can be found on our Facebook page, website and on

LVRP poster boards across the park. This year's printed programme has been given a new design layout – with a folded programme replacing the old style stapled booklet, making it easier to recycle once the year is out.

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