

Volunteer Update October 2022



Autumn is now with us, with its show of seasonal fruits, conkers and acorns, colourful leaves, and assorted fungi. Changeable weather marks the season, though volunteer activities at LVRP continue always - come rain, wind or shine!

A massive thank you to everyone in the LVRP volunteer team for your continued involvement with the Regional Park over the summer and autumn to date – whether back actively volunteering out on patrol for the Ranger Service; welcoming visitors back to the Lock Keeper's Cottage; surveying in national wildlife monitoring schemes for butterflies, bumblebees and Daubenton's bats; or managing our local habitats for biodiversity on weekly conservation tasks – or for simply remaining committed to LVRP until you are ready/able to return to volunteering.

Thank You!

Lock Keeper's Cottage

It has been fantastic to have the Lock Keeper's Cottage open again in 2022 after 2 years' closure during the pandemic, and the enthusiasm of our small team of volunteer Heritage Guides is stronger than ever! Visitors, old and new, have been loving hearing the stories of George Kilpatrick – the last Lock Keeper at Lock 3 – and his family's life in the cottage in the latter years of the Lagan Navigation.

221.25 hours volunteered through July to October have allowed **2,081 visitors** across the threshold to learn about local heritage, and enjoy the warm welcome of our knowledgeable volunteers and the cosy open fire: **a big thank you to all our Heritage Guides!**



Update on Conservation Tasks: Jul - Oct

Throughout the summer and early autumn, 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 volunteer group, next to a veteran oak in Belvoir ASSI, on a haloing task in October

- 2 Himalayan balsam pulling tasks at Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park, in liaison with BCC
- 2 bramble clearance tasks on the species-rich grassland banks of the Giant's Ring, in liaison with HED (Historic Environment Division)
- 7 meadow management tasks: 2 in Belvoir ASSI, in liaison with DAERA; 1 at Clement Wilson/Lock Keeper's and 3 at Sharman Road Open Space, in liaison with BCC; and 1 at McIlroy Park, in liaison with LCCC
- 1 oak haloing task in Belvoir ASSI, in liaison with DAERA

Invasive Species Control

July saw the LVRP Conservation Volunteers continuing with 'balsam season' at STLD for a further 2 Himalayan balsam control tasks, focussing on the area beyond the Stables, between the main path towards the meadows and the river.



L to R: Volunteers removing low-growing balsam from between the native wildflowers and grasses at STLD in July; volunteer group at the end of a morning's balsam pulling task; volunteers carrying out FIT counts – counting pollinators – at the training session in STLD.

As one of the task days fell on **National Meadows Day** (Sat 2 July), it was also the perfect opportunity to head up to the meadows at STLD for some in-house training on carrying out **FIT (Flower Insect Timed) Counts**. These 10 minute citizen science surveys are part of the **Pollinator Monitoring Scheme (PoMS)** - a nationwide scheme aiming to gather data on a wide range of pollinating insects visiting particular flowers - and can be easily carried out anytime on a dry, mild day between April and September, on a walk in the Regional Park, in your garden, or anywhere else you happen to be with suitable flowers and 10 minutes to spare!



If any other volunteers are interested in learning more about FIT Counts for the 2023 season, please contact the LVRP Volunteer & Visitor Officer by emailing: volunteering@laganvalley.co.uk

Scrub Clearance

A task apiece in July and August saw the volunteers back at a very sun-scorched Giant's Ring, to remove more bramble and scattered scrub - self-seeded trees and gorse - from the species-rich grassland banks of the henge.

The heatwave in August forced a slightly earlier than usual finish to the second task, as even our ever-enthusiastic volunteers were beginning to wilt in the intense heat!



L to R: Volunteers bramble clearing in July; group at end of July Task; volunteers in the heat in August at the GR; end of a very hot task!

Further grassland scrub control work was also undertaken in August by the LVRP volunteers at Clement Wilson meadows, removing Aspen suckers, and at the Pollinator Patch at the Lock Keeper's, removing Blackthorn suckers.

Meadow Management – Cutting and lifting

In the absence of grazing animals, meadows/species-rich grasslands need cutting and lifting each year to maintain and enhance their biodiversity value. LVRP Conservation Volunteers look after a number of sites in this respect within the Regional Park.

And it is all heavy work – enjoyable, but hard work none the less - so, many thanks again to our volunteers for their 'blood (*only a minor cut once!*), sweat, and (*thankfully, no*) tears'!

At the meadow in Belvoir ASSI, the cut was carried out by staff with machinery (using a power scythe), then raked, lifted into builder bags ('drag bags') and removed off site to a suitable area, by the teams of volunteers, over 2 tasks in late August/early September.



Top L to R: LVRP staff cutting with the power scythe; second raking task; first raking task; Bottom L to R: a lot of raking; a lot of lifting; and a lot of pulling!

On the remainder of the sites, volunteers undertook both the cut (using traditional scythes), and the lift (raking and removing the cuttings in drag bags).

The Pollinator Patch at the Lock Keeper's



L to R: LVRP Volunteers scything the pollinator patch at the Lock Keeper's in September; the patch after cutting and before raking

Sharman Road Open Space



L to R: Sections of grassland at beginning of each task; volunteers during the scythe and lift tasks; volunteer groups at end of tasks 1 and 2. Bottom R: shows the full extent of the Sharman Road site which was cut by the volunteers in September

McIlroy Park (front Wildflower meadow) – Task in October



L to R: the front wildflower meadow at McIlroy Park; volunteers scything then meadow at McIlroy; LVRP volunteer group at end of task:

Scything Refresher Training at the City Cemetery

Again this year, thanks to Belfast City Council's City Cemetery Heritage Project, the Conservation Volunteers were able to avail of refresher training in September with Neil Foulkes of the Scything Association of Britain and Ireland, to brush up on technique and enhance their scything skills.



An enjoyable and informative day was had by all, and the tips on technique taken from the day have made all the difference on the recent scything tasks. Great job folks!

Woodland Management – Veteran Oak Haloing

The final task in October was at Belvoir ASSI, carrying out some oak 'haloing' tasks around some of the veteran oaks, including cutting up and moving a felled tree next to the oldest oak.



Haloing involves removing young trees and scrub that are, or will grow into the crown of the veterans, to improve conditions for these hugely important veterans – reducing competition and letting in more light. Habitat piles are created from the felled and cut up material.

Fantastic work all round folks!

Welcome back Frank! Volunteer Ranger and Heritage Guide



LVRP are delighted to have Frank back with us as a Volunteer Ranger, out on patrol for the Ranger Service on Monday and Friday - reporting back any issues such as access problems or fly tipping, clearing minor obstructions on the towpath, and engaging with the public. Frank has been involved with LVRP for many years, having previously volunteered as a Volunteer Ranger (along with his son Eamonn) from 2011 to 2017, and has always stayed in touch since then.

Having previously volunteered for occasional cover at the Lock Keeper's Cottage in the past, Frank is also back covering a shift as a Heritage Guide in the Lock Keeper's Cottage on Mondays.

Wildlife Surveys – Thanks to all our Volunteer Surveyors



In August, 6 transects in LVRP were again surveyed for the annual **All-Ireland Daubenton's Bat Waterways Monitoring Scheme**, a nationwide scheme with Bat Conservation Ireland which records activity of Daubenton's bats on waterways across the island of Ireland.

Many thanks to Wildlife Survey Volunteers Carol, Liz, Sally, Traci, Seanin, Lorna, Gemma, Derek and Jackson for their work on the survey for the 2022 season.

The end of October marked the end of the **Bumblebee Monitoring Scheme** season, which runs from March to October each year, with volunteers carrying out one survey walk per month on their transect to record bumblebees along the route, and uploading data back to the National Biodiversity Data Centre in Waterford, who coordinate the scheme. Many thanks to Muriel, Arthur and Derek for completing their bee surveys again this year.

Arthur and Derek also walk the same transects weekly from March to September surveying for the **UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme**, recording butterflies along the route, with data fed back to Butterfly Conservation NI, so a big thank you for all your work on this too.

Date for your Diary – Volunteer Christmas Get-Together!



To say a big thank you to all of the LVRP volunteer team, we would like to invite you all to a **Volunteer Christmas Get-Together** event on **Sat 17 December** from **10.30am – 1.30pm** at the Crowne Plaza (Ramada) Hotel.

There will be tea/coffee and shortbread on arrival, followed by the traditional Christmas quiz, and a buffet lunch. An email will be sent out for RSVP.

Investing in Volunteers (IiV) - Third Renewal Application



As many of you will be aware, LVRP have held the **Investing in Volunteers** standard since 2012, with successful renewals in 2016, and again in 2020.

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for good practice in volunteer management, and achieving the standard demonstrates how much LVRP values volunteers, and promotes confidence in our ability to provide a high quality volunteer experience. We are now due to begin applying for our third renewal.

At the start of the application process, we will need to provide Volunteer Now with a full list of our volunteers - a percentage of whom they will interview at the assessment stage in 2023 - so we will need to confirm as soon as possible with all currently inactive volunteers, if you plan to return to volunteering in the future, or not. This is also important in allowing us to plan for future volunteer recruitment, while allowing space for those who may still wish to return

Staff Update

The recruitment process for a new **LVRP Assistant Ranger** is progressing, with prospective candidates now being shortlisted for interview. We will keep you all posted and introduce our new colleague when they join the team.

Board Update

The **Annual Report** for 2021/22 is currently out with the designer and should be available on our website in mid-December. A limited number of hard copies will be available on request.

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

