

Volunteer Update March 2023



Spring has sprung, and we'd like to say a big 'Thank You' to all our volunteers for their work so far in 2023...



With LVRP's Mission *'to protect and conserve the unique landscape character of LVRP...enhance its biodiversity, cultural heritage and promote its benefit to visitors and the community'*, **LVRP Volunteers continually play a major role in delivering on all aspects of this Mission, alongside being an integral component of it, as the community at its heart. Each volunteer brings with them their own skills and qualities, knowledge and life experience, making LVRP all the richer in the process.**

A massive thank you to you all for your unique contributions.

Lock Keeper's Cottage Volunteering

2023 got off to a great start, with the opening hours up to four and a half days per week, with Derek's return to LVRP in January for volunteer duties at the Cottage. **Welcome back Derek!**

School mid-term in February saw a boon in visitor numbers, as local parents and grandparents brought the kids in to hear how people along the Lagan lived in times past. There were some shocked faces at the thought of 10 children living there – oh, and no internet!

2,032 visitors were welcomed in the **277 hours of opening from 03 Jan to 31 March.**

A big thank you to all our volunteer guides for keeping our local history and heritage alive for all our visitors young and old, old and new!



Update on Conservation Tasks: Jan - March

The LVRP Conservation Volunteer teams have been busy this quarter carrying out habitat management tasks at various sites across the Regional Park, contributing to the conservation and enhancement of our local biodiversity and natural heritage:



Above: LVRP Conservation Volunteers re-establishing access along the UKBMS butterfly survey route in Lagan Meadows in February

- 2 veteran oak haloing tasks and 1 young oak aftercare task 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 control task along the Giant's Ring Trail path to improve access for visitors, in liaison with BCC (Belfast City Council) and local landowners
- 1 meadow management task in McIlroy Park, in liaison with LCCC (Lisburn & Castlereagh Council)
- 2 scrub control tasks along the UKBMS Transect route for butterfly surveys through Lagan Meadows, in liaison with BCC and BCNI (Butterfly Conservation NI)
- 1 river clean & litter lift at Millbrook & Huguenot in Lisburn, in liaison with LCCC/DfI – the first LVRP Ranger Service 'My River' project task, with equipment funded by Live Here Love Here Marine Litter Capital Grants Scheme

Belvoir ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest)

The LVRP Conservation Volunteers were back in Belvoir for a number of tasks this quarter improving conditions for the Belvoir oaks of differing generations, with two haloing tasks around a number of the veterans, and one task caring for another group of the young oaks planted by Forest Service in winter 2020.

The latter task was the first of 2023, in which a very small team of volunteers (due to winter sicknesses!) carried out a large amount of work to give the 'Belvoir babies' breathing space and room to grow this season. Great job folks – to all the teams, big and small!



L to R: Area of young oaks before the task; volunteer Paul slashing the thicker brambles; volunteer Liz working on freeing the young oaks; end of task – room to breathe for the Belvoir babies!



L to R: LVRP Volunteers at the end of the Feb veteran oak haloing task in Belvoir;

Scrub Clearance at Giant's Ring - Henge banks and Giant's Ring Trail path

At a task apiece in January and March, the LVRP Conservation Volunteer teams continued with scrub (mainly bramble) removal from the grassland banks of the Giant's Ring - great work all round with another 3 builder bags removed on both tasks!



L to R: LVRP Volunteers removing bramble in Jan; bagging up the cuttings in Jan; volunteers at March task; brambles bagged and ready to take off site in March

In February, the LVRP volunteers were also at the Giant's Ring, though this time to improve access for visitors along the Giant's Ring Trail path, by cutting back scrub which was encroaching on the narrow path which runs from the Giant's Ring behind Edenderry Village, and meets the National Trust path, which continues down towards Minnowburn and the River Lagan. There were plenty of 'thank you's on the day from walkers using the path and much appreciation for the fact that volunteers were doing the work. Brilliant job as ever folks!



L to R: Volunteer Carol cutting back scrub on the GR Trail; volunteers Andy and Jackson working further along the path; volunteers enjoying a well-deserved tea break on the task; continuing the work along the Trail path; visitor access much improved with scrub cut back

Lagan Meadows

Before the end of February and end of scrub season, the volunteers undertook two tasks at Lagan Meadows, by request of Butterfly Conservation NI, to cut back and remove scrub at three locations to restore access for a UKBMS (Butterfly Monitoring Scheme) transect survey to be walked weekly from April-September, and also to improve habitat for butterflies, such as Cryptic Wood White, by opening up a 'ride' by through thick gorse and removing some willow, resulting in an open link between two wet meadows near Lester's Dam. Fantastic work folks!



L to R: LVRP Volunteers removing a swathe of gorse to create a ride between meadows; a patch of willow was also removed at the other end; at the end of first task at Lagan Meadows; second task, first path site – widening the path through the gorse for survey access



All pics: Second task, second path site – re-opening the survey path which had closed over with gorse and bramble!

McIlroy Park – Meadow Management

LVRP Conservation Volunteers returned to the wildflower meadow at McIlroy Park in early March to remove the overwinter border, which is left to provide some seeds for the birds and shelter for insects, when the wildflower meadow is cut and lifted in late summer/autumn. The volunteers took time to visually scan the dead standing Knapweed plants before removing, as some were still providing shelter for resting ladybirds! Great work folks!



Left to right: Ladybird snug as a bug in a Knapweed flowerhead at McIlroy; inspecting plants for sheltering insects before removal to avoid disturbance; LVRP volunteers removing the overwinter border at the meadow;; end of the task at McIlroy

River Clean/Litter task in Lisburn - LVRP Ranger Service 'My River' Project

The volunteers then rounded off with the quarter with a river clean and litter lift in Lisburn, with LVRP Ranger Service, in the first 'My River' LVRP project task, equipment for which has been funded by Live Here Love Here Marine Litter Capital Grants scheme.

The project aims to reduce litter pollution along the 11 miles of the old Lagan Navigation - both directly by removing litter from the river and surrounds, and indirectly by highlighting the issue of litter and working closely with local communities and stakeholders.

A massive thanks to our volunteers for all their work on the inaugural My River task, and to Live Here Love Here for funding the project!



L to R: LVRP Rangers launch the new canoe; volunteer Gemma trying out the new nets; volunteers and canoe working together to remove plastics and other litter from the Lagan; LVRP Volunteers and Rangers at the end of the river clean and litter lift in Lisburn

Volunteer Rangers



A massive thanks to our Volunteer Rangers: Frank for his weekly patrols at the Belfast end of LVRP– reporting back to Senior Ranger, Dan, on any issues out and about along the Towpath and surrounding areas, such as fallen branches, graffiti, pollution, access issues; **and Alec** for his weekly litter patrols at the Lisburn end. Great work guys!

Left: Volunteer Ranger, Frank

Wildlife Survey Season Kicks Off for 2023



The month of March brings 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 (UKBMS)** then commences 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 to our Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors: Muriel** (bees at Lagan Meadows), **Derek** (bees/butterflies at Belvoir Top) and **Arthur** (bees/butterflies at Belvoir/towpath) - **special thanks in 2023 to Arthur** who, with the current closure of Belvoir Bridge (which is awaiting repairs by BCC, scheduled to start in late March) is putting in extra volunteering time and effort to ensure that the bee and butterfly data for his transect can still be collected throughout the season, despite the bridge closure.



Above: Wildlife Surveyor, Arthur

Finally a big **thanks and a warm welcome to LVRP Conservation Volunteer, Andy**, who **joins the survey team** for the first time in 2023, to survey bumblebees at Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park. Good luck with the surveys folks, and fingers crossed for good survey weather this year!

Staff News



LVRP were delighted to welcome **Sean Boyle**, our new full-time **Assistant Ranger**, who joined the team at the start of February, bringing the small LVRP staff team back up to five (4 f/t, 1 p/t). Sean has great enthusiasm, practical and teamwork skills, and is great with people – making him a great asset to the Ranger Service, the wider LVRP team, and to the public he interacts with on his daily patrols and duties around the Regional Park.

Some of the LVRP Volunteer team will already have met Sean on site at the Cottage, or on a couple of the Thursday Conservation tasks, and hopefully the rest of you will get the opportunity to meet Him soon. Welcome to the team Sean!

liV Update

Work towards the completion of LVRP's **liV Self-Assessment** is currently under way, with submission scheduled for May. Our Advisor will review this and provide feedback, from which an improving practice plan can be drawn up if required, agreed with Advisor and implemented in the months leading up to **Assessment - anticipated for around November**.

It is at this stage that the Assessor will **speak to a percentage sample of LVRP Volunteers about their experiences volunteering**. Many of you have taken part in the Assessment interviews previously, but for anyone who has not – please be aware that this is an informal chat with the liV Assessor, and it is LVRP as an organisation that is being assessed, not you as volunteers!



Board Update

LVRP's **Five Year Management Plan** is currently due for renewal: the tender process to appoint a company to undertake the work is now complete. The process of drawing up and finalising the **new Five Year Management Plan** will include **consultation** with LVRP Staff, Board and Volunteers, alongside partner organisations and the public. LVRP Volunteers will be kept posted in relation to inputting into the consultation as the process progresses.



LVRP Park Events Programme 2023



Hot off the press, the printed **LVRP Events Programme** is now available from the **Lock Keeper's Visitor Centre** and other outlets, and events are also advertised on our Facebook page and website, and on poster boards around LVRP. Don't forget that **LVRP Volunteers go free to all LVRP events** – though do please book through the Park Office, so we can manage numbers. **Birdsong training workshop** (online) and **Dusk Chorus** walk are coming up in April, followed by **two walks in Belvoir Park Forest** by LVRP Board Director, local historian and author, **Dr Ben Simon**, in May.

Belfast City Council Spring Fair – Sat 22 and Sun 23 April

The **BCC Spring Fair** at Malone House is back for 2023 on **Sat 22 and Sun 23 April from 1.30 – 5.30pm**.

The LVRP team will be in attendance promoting all the Regional Park has to offer, and providing hands-on activities for kids.

The Spring Fair is a great **opportunity for LVRP Volunteers to promote the work they do** in LVRP to the general public, and/or help out with activities on the stall: **if you would like to volunteer on the LVRP stall** on the Sat or Sun (1.30 - 3.30pm or 3.30 – 5.30pm shifts), please contact the Volunteer & Visitor Officer to arrange.



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

That's all for another Quarter folks...



All the best,

Genevieve,
LVRP Volunteer & Visitor Officer