



Summer has arrived in full glory with temperatures high and plenty of sunshine. It has been a busy spring with lots of events most of which we could not undertake without the help of our volunteers.

We can never thank you enough!

Celebrating 50 Years

On the 21st May many of you devoted your labour and time to help run the biggest event of the year, our 50th Anniversary Celebration. A summary report has been posted on

Volunteers were busy on the 21st putting up marquees, manning the cottage and barge, manning our LVRP stand, making coffee for stall holders and enchanting children with story-telling in our tepee. Visitors, staff and volunteers were able to enjoy our classical music duo, the falconry display, the pet farm, drumming sessions, biodiversity stalls, craft activity, face painting, canoeing opportunity, green woodworking and willow crafts. All in all it was a very successful day with over 2,000 visitors to the site. A summary newsletter of the event can be found on our website.

We hope to continue with our aim of expanding our events programme and hold 50 events throughout the year to celebrate this special anniversary.

Lock Keeper's Cottage garden blooms again

In May, Belfast City Council donated plants for our flower beds which we quickly planted. I think everyone agrees that the beds are looking very colourful and the iris and ox-eye daisies which died off during the winter months provided a great show again this year. Thank you to our volunteers who regularly get to work with a hoe and garden fork and keep the flowerbeds looking smart.



Weekend opening

We are continuing to open the cottage and the barge to visitors on the last weekend of the month. For the past few months, with our key safe installed and instructions on setting alarms, our Heritage Guides have been opening the Industry Lighter and Cottage with no staff present. This is a great step forward and allows access to the barge and cottage for a greater number of hours, enabling more members of the public to enjoy and learn about the Lagan Navigation and our industrial past.

Updates on Conservation Tasks

On April Fool's Day the Conservation Volunteers visited Derriaghy Glen and removed yet more Laurel. With the continual removal of laurel and Himalayan balsam over the last few years Derriaghy Glen has been transformed and it will be interesting to see our native plants taking over again.

After a well-earned break over the Easter period, at the end of April our volunteers returned to remove young elders and willow from the wetland area in Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park. If not removed the trees would eventually transform the area to woodland and the habitat for wetland species including frogs and newts would disappear.

On the 13th May, Belfast City Council provided training on the invasive Spanish bluebell. We started with tea and scones in Malone House and a presentation by Karl Hamilton after which we went into the woods to identify and remove this invasive plant. All in all a lovely way to spend a morning.

At the end of May our task was to remove the vegetation from the wall around the Neolithic Giant's Ring site. The wall was built in 1841 by Lord Dungannon and is designated as a scheduled monument. The Historic Environment Division of the Department of Environment are guardians of the site and have recently produced a Conservation Management Plan this includes protection and maintenance of the wall.

Finally, for both tasks taking place in June it was off to Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park to attack the dreaded Himalayan balsam. A huge area was cleared of this invasive plant allowing room for native plants to grow.

For the next three months the Saturday conservation programme is as follows:
(As usual confirmation will be emailed prior to task days).

Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors

Bat Conservation Ireland have been in touch asking us to dust off our bat detectors and torches for the 2017 All Ireland Daubenton's Bat Waterways Survey. Details will be sent to volunteers in July and if anyone would like to be involved their name can be added to the survey rota for this year. Surveying takes place over two nights in August when we walk a transect along the Lagan. Daubenton bats feed on insects coming off the water and it is exciting to see them and to pick up their echolocation over the river at night.

Butterfly, bee, squirrel and the BTO bird surveys are underway.

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Task</u> | <u>Venue</u> | <u>Meeting place</u> | <u>Member of staff</u> |
|-------------|---|---------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 8.7.2017 | Balsam pulling | STLD | Lower car park | Dan |
| 22.7.2017 | Vegetation removal and site restoration | Giant's Ring | Giant's Ring car park | Andy |
| 5.8.2017 | Vegetation removal and site restoration | Giant's Ring | Giant's Ring car park | Anne |
| 19.8.2017 | Vegetation Management/ Control | Belvoir | To be advised | |
| 2.9.2017 | To be confirmed | | | |
| 16.9.2017 | To be confirmed | | | |
| 30.9.2017 | Volunteer outing | To be advised | To be advised | All staff |

Wildlife

We have had lots of sightings of kingfishers this year and Andy was able to get some great photographs of kingfishers in the barge area. Did you know that female kingfishers have red on their lower beak or mandible while male kingfisher's beaks are all black. A good way to remember is to think of the females having lipstick on.

Swallows have been nesting in the former driving range across the river from the Lagan Valley Regional Park visitor centre. They can be seen taking insects off the river in the vicinity downstream and upstream of the Red Bridge.

This year giant hogweed is growing in abundance along the river banks. If the sap from this plant gets on to human skin and is then exposed to the sun it will cause severe blisters that will scar. Lagan Valley Regional Park staff are forwarding reports of this plant to the relevant land owners. Chemical injection into the stem is the preferred way to eradicate this plant. Giant hogweed can grow to 3 to 5 metres high and 1.5 metres wide. It flowers between June and September producing several thousand seeds per plant.



Lagan Valley Regional Park Limited Board

A new chairperson is to be elected at the Board meeting scheduled on the 29th June 2017. Don't forget, the volunteer representatives on the Board are Jackson Tinto who is Vice Chair and Frank Jordan.

Staff update

Our Assistant Ranger, Nichola Smyth is currently on long term sick leave and I am sure you will join us in wishing her well. In the meantime our Volunteer Ranger, Derek Wilson, has been employed through an agency and is proving to be a great help.

Programme of Events

Our Programme of Events is underway and we have a broad selection of events to cater for a variety of interests. Call the office to book – 02890 491922

Forthcoming events in July are:

20th July – Secret Garden

20th July – The Buzz about Bees

29th July – The Beauty of Butterflies

Also in July is Rose Week, hosted by Belfast City Council in Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park, from Monday 17th July to Sunday 23rd July.

Check out our Events Programme for all the events taking place throughout the year.



The Big Bag Pack

Some of you will remember that last year we had a stand in the foyer at Tesco, Newtownbreda, with the chief aim of raising awareness of the Park. This year on the 2nd June we organised a bag pack, both to promote the Park and to raise funds. A big thank you to all those volunteers who spent a Friday afternoon helping Tesco customers to pack their groceries. A good time was had by all and we raised a total of £327.

Feedback

Don't forget to provide us with feedback. We are always interested to know of any issues, questions or suggestions you may have.

Pride of Place Awards

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council have nominated the Lagan Valley Regional Park Conservation Volunteers for a Pride of Place Award. Watch this space!

Volunteer uniforms

If any of our volunteers don't yet have a body warmer or one of our tee-shirts please let the staff know and we will make sure you are supplied with these items.