



A massive thank you to all LVRP volunteers for your hard work and continuing support throughout 2022. From welcoming thousands of visitor back to the Lock Keeper's Cottage, to surveying butterflies, bats and bees for nationwide monitoring scheme; from litter lifts and patrols assisting the Ranger Service, to practical conservation of our local natural habitats, you are at the core of all that we do in the Regional Park.

We would like to wish all the LVRP volunteer team, along with your families and friends, a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2023.

A Message from our Chair



Dear Fellow LVRP volunteers

As this is the last Volunteer Newsletter this year, and as Chair of the Lagan Valley Regional Park Board, I wanted to take the opportunity to place on record a special thanks for your support and hard work throughout the year. It is always appreciated, never taken for granted.

I was lucky enough to join some of you at the (very difficult!) Christmas Quiz recently and it was great to hear how passionate you feel about the Park.

Your views are really important to the Board and we look forward to hearing more of them in 2023 as we review our management plan and set out our future ambition. This type of strategic planning is one part of the governance role that the Board delivers.

We're delighted that Gemma Daly has joined the Board this year to represent the 'voice of volunteers' after Andrew Halliday stood down after six years of dedicated service.

Gemma joins other volunteer public directors, Councillors from Lisburn & Castlereagh and Belfast City Councils and representatives from other stakeholder groups including the National Trust, to make up the Board and governance committees which support Andy and his team to run the Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Lagan Valley Regional Park remains the most visited outdoor site in Northern Ireland and a very special place for all of us. I will certainly be using the festive break to enjoy some walks in its beautiful surroundings. I hope you will too.

Wishing you and your families a very happy Christmas, and looking forward to seeing you in the Park sometime soon.

Sara

A Message from the Park Manager

It was great to see a good number of you at the Volunteer Christmas Get-Together on Saturday - and for those who couldn't make it, I hope to see you soon.



It's been wonderful to see the Lock Keeper's Cottage door open again, with volunteers welcoming people in as I walk past. I was even coaxed out of my sedentary office life to join you in wildlife surveys and conservation tasks once or twice, and it reminds me why I got into this field. I miss doing all the practical stuff and really appreciate all the time and effort you put in to support and enhance the work of the Park. It makes us all feel part of something bigger.

I would like to wish you and yours a very warm and cosy Christmas and look forward to seeing you in the year ahead.

Andy

Lock Keeper's Cottage and Heritage Guide Update



Having more of the LVRP volunteer team back on site, particularly with the re-opening of the Lock Keeper's Cottage, has certainly been one of the highlights of the year for us, and for the many visitors who have crossed the cottage threshold since the doors re-opened in mid-May.

Up to December, a total of **3,916 visitors** have been welcomed to the Cottage by LVRP Heritage Guide volunteers during the **440.5 hours** of opening that they have facilitated since re-opening.

A huge thank you to our small team of Cottage guides for enabling our local communities, and visitors from much further afield, to engage with the local history of the Lagan, and enjoy a friendly chat by the fire.

A big thank you also to our **Barge Heritage Guides**, who remain steadfastly committed to returning to welcoming visitors to the Industry Barge, when it is possible to do so.

Update on Conservation Tasks: Nov – Dec



Above: One of the LVRP Conservation Volunteer teams at a bramble clearance task at the Giant's Ring in December

In the final months of 2022, as throughout the year on alternate Saturdays and Thursdays, our teams of LVRP Conservation Volunteers have been busy carrying out habitat management tasks at several sites across the Regional Park:

- 2 grassland management tasks, in partnership with Belfast City Council, on the BCC grassland site at Sharman Road
- 2 bramble clearance tasks on the species-rich grassland banks of the Giant's Ring, in liaison with HED (Historic Environment Division)
- 1 young oak aftercare task in Belvoir ASSI, under agreement with Forest Service and NIEA
- 2 oak 'haloing' tasks in Belvoir ASSI, under agreement with Forest Service and NIEA

Great work all round folks!

Grassland Management – Sharman Road

To improve the biodiversity value of the semi-natural grassland at Sharman Road, the LVRP Conservation Volunteer teams have been carrying out meadow management tasks over the autumn, with a further two tasks on site in November, cutting and lifting the grassland with traditional scythes to reduce nutrient input, alongside digging out the more competitive rank species such as docks and thistles, before raking and removing to a green skip provided by Belfast City Council. Thanks for all your hard work folks!



L to R: Cutting with traditional scythes; at Sharman Thursday group with the tools of the trade; raking up the cut material to be bagged up and pulled to green skip; Saturday group at end of task at Sharman

Bramble Clearance - Giant's Ring

Six more builder bags of brambles were removed from the Giant's Ring banks, on two tasks in November/December. Alongside being important for grassland habitat conservation, the volunteer work on site will also help to conserve the archaeology of this State Care Monument, which is in the care of the Department for Communities Historic Environment Division (HED). Brilliant job folks!



L to R: Volunteers tackling a thicker stand of bramble at the Giant's Ring; volunteer group at end of November task; December task continuing the work on the banks; volunteer group at end of December task

Belvoir ASSI (Area of Special Scientific Interest) – Oak Haloing

As part of the habitat management plans for Belvoir ASSI (drawn up by LVRP in partnership with NIEA and under license from the Forest Service), scrub removal from around the ancient and veteran oaks is being carried out in a process known as ‘oak haloing’. Two more haloing tasks were carried out in December, with the volunteers removing smaller trees and scrub with hand tools, and also assisting in the cutting up of larger fells carried out by LVRP staff with chainsaws. Thanks folks – fantastic work!



L to R: Volunteers removing smaller scrub and trees around a veteran oak in Belvoir; haloing; volunteer team in Belvoir on first Dec task; volunteers breaking down larger felled holly, giving more light to a veteran oak; second Dec task in Belvoir, and the last task of 2022!

Volunteer Rangers and Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors

Thank
you

A massive thank you to our **Volunteer Rangers**, Alec and Frank, for their assistance to the Ranger Service in Nov/Dec, and throughout 2022 - for patrolling, litter lifting, and the reporting on to the Senior Ranger of any issues out and about in LVRP. Great job folks!

A huge thanks also to our **butterfly and bumblebee surveyors** -

Arthur, Derek and Muriel - for completing the final stages of the survey season in recent months, with the uploading of the all-important data to Butterfly Conservation and the National Biodiversity Data Centre, and indeed to **all LVRP survey volunteers** for their continued commitment through another survey season. Well done everyone!

Volunteer Christmas Get-Together



LVRP were delighted to be finally able to host a **Volunteer Christmas Get-Together** again on 17 December this year, after two years absence during the pandemic.

There was a great turnout for the event at the Crowne Plaza, with representatives from all four LVRP volunteer roles – Conservation Volunteers, Cottage & Barge Heritage Guides, Volunteer Rangers and Volunteer Wildlife Surveyors.

Events like these give LVRP staff and the Chair of the Board an additional opportunity to thank LVRP volunteers in person for their work in, commitment to, and passion for the Regional Park.

After tea and coffee and a chance to chat and catch-up with each other, the volunteers enjoyed the customary **LVRP Christmas Quiz**, hosted by LVRP Senior Ranger, Dan, with much competition ensuing amongst the teams, before ‘The Bargees’ raced home to victory. The event was then rounded off with a lovely buffet lunch.



Unfortunately due to seasonal colds and bugs, and diary clashes in what is always a busy time of year for folk, many LVRP volunteers were unable to make it along on the day: we were really sorry you had to miss the event and look forward to seeing you all soon in 2023.

Other News – Staff

A new **LVRP assistant Ranger** has now been selected and is currently completing the necessary HR processes/working notice. We hope they will be in post sometime in January, and will introduce them to all the LVRP volunteer team once they start with us.

Annual Report

The **Annual Report for 2021-22** is now available to view on our website on the Publications page. A small number of paper copies will be available on request.

Investing in Volunteers



The LVRP Volunteer & Visitor Officer has been busy undertaking background work over the last few months in preparation for progressing the application for the **third renewal** of the **Investing in Volunteers** Standard with Volunteer Now in the New Year, and will be in touch with all volunteers as the process rolls out through 2023.

Volunteer Feedback

We are always keen to get input and **feedback from our volunteers** – please get in touch with any issues, questions or suggestions you may have at: volunteering@laganvalley.co.uk

At the end of this newsletter, and nearing the end of what has thankfully been more of a return to normality after the previous two years, it just remains to wish all of you, your family and friends, the very best for the Christmas holidays, and for the coming New Year.



May 2023 to kind to you all!

All the best

Genevieve
Volunteer & Visitor Officer, LVRP