

Winter watch



Windblown winter tree above Balgray Reservoir.

Welcome to our thirtieth edition of Wagtail, the newsletter and events calendar for Dams to Darnley Country Park.

Inside you will find:

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The next edition of Wagtail will be out in spring 2016.

Howie, honey and history

NEW COUNTRYSIDE ranger Howie Pitman led his first event in August. We spent 'a couple of hours with the flowers' and Howie even provided honey and oatcakes for everyone. As well as finding some beautiful wild flowers we learnt a bit about the folklore associated with them.

Into September and fortunately it was dry as we built our dens using natural materials. Bear Grylls would have been proud.

The country park has a fascinating industrial past going back a few hundred years and on our 'who do you think we are?' event the countryside rangers told the group the story of Dams to Darnley.

Our annual bat walk in October was held at Balgray Reservoir for the first time. We weren't sure how many



Darnley Mill den building bonanza.

bats we would see, but as it turned out there were loads flying over the paths, so we were treated to great views of these small mammals.

There were many messy hands on our 'crafter-noon' event as the children made green men faces with clay and natural objects they had collected.

Finally, our annual Halloween event was once again spookily successful. The costumes get scarier every year!

Plugging the gaps

DURING WINTER THE countryside rangers often use some of their time focusing on improving the country park's many miles of hedgerows. The dormant winter period, when plants shut down and stop growing, is the time of year to plant bare-rooted trees and hedgerow shrubs. The developing Barrhead South green network has become a recent focus of their hedgerow enhancement efforts.

As highlighted in the last edition of Wagtail, the green network is a key element to be integrated within the new Barrhead South residential development. Along with new paths and play space, biodiversity and landscape improvements will be important components of the green network. The existing lines of hedgerows provide an important landscape framework for the green



Country park hedgerows.

network and a focus for future enhancements. But the countryside rangers have already started work! With the help of a band of volunteers from Barrhead High School around 50 new hawthorn and blackthorn shrubs were planted to fill in gaps along one of the hedgerows. The countryside rangers plan to continue their efforts, with the help of volunteers, over the coming months.

Spotlight

on park wildlife

Joe and Howie's wildlife witter

AFTER A VERY WET summer, autumn finally had some drier weather. For the second year in a row butterfly numbers seem to be down, although some red admirals have been seen flying even into November.

In October the ground around the Darnley Mill area

was alive with hundreds, possibly thousands, of froglets and toadlets, each one trying to find somewhere damp to spend the winter months.

Flocks of birds also start to be seen around the country park at this time of year. So far we have had large flocks



Michaelmas daisy.

of goldfinches, particularly around the Barrhead dams. Recent reports suggest that goldfinch numbers are up across the country. Fieldfares and redwings, winter thrushes from Scandinavia, started arriving in the country park towards the end of October. Keep an

eye out too for the whooper swans which will be arriving soon as well.

The new pond we built, and named after Howie's predecessor Eilidh, has been a great success. This autumn saw lots of dragonflies skimming over the surface of the water. The smaller dragonflies were common darters, which are a regular enough sight, but we also had large dragonflies. These were common hawkers, which seemed to be laying eggs in Eilidh's pond.

A last splash of colour was provided by the Michaelmas daisies; one of the last flowers to bloom in the year. Their purple flowers are a joy in the late autumn.

Spotlight

New ponds at Balgray Reservoir

EVERYONE WHO IS FAMILIAR WITH THE COUNTRY park will know that we already have a plethora of ponds at the northern (Darnley) end, whilst the southern end of Dams to Darnley is dominated by the Scottish Water reservoirs. So why are the countryside ranger service creating new ponds around Balgray Reservoir, when there is clearly no shortage of freshwater? The answer in a word: fish! Fish, found in all four of the country park's reservoirs, munch their way through invertebrates and tadpoles alike. So if we want a wide range of aquatic life (including frogs and newts) at the Barrhead end of the country park we need new ponds.

We have been doing pretty well in our mission so far, thanks to the sterling work of various volunteer groups. Back in August a group of engineers from Scottish Water dug out and lined the first pond. We plan to create an even larger one in the coming months using volunteers from the same source, as well as a smaller one with a group of S5/6 students from Barrhead High, working towards their Duke of Edinburgh award.

With the increase in recreational activity which will result from the planned wake park at Balgray Reservoir we are also keen to undertake additional habitat creation and enhancement work across all of the Barrhead dams, by way of mitigation.

In the future it is hoped that the new ponds will be hotbeds of invertebrate and amphibian activity. It is also hoped that they will not only be good for wildlife, but for 'school life' too: a convenient destination for environmental education trips.



Scottish Water volunteers at Balgray Reservoir.

REPORT ANY PROBLEMS



Report any antisocial crimes in progress to the police on **101**

Other antisocial problems such as fly-tipping or graffiti should be reported to the countryside ranger service on **0141 577 4053/54**

Outwith office hours call 'Clean Glasgow' on **0800 027 7027**

or East Renfrewshire 'Ring and Report' on **0800 013 0076**

Local Nature Reserve path improvements

PLANS ARE PROGRESSING TO IMPROVE THE PATHS within Darnley Local Nature Reserve (between Corselet Road and Southpark Village). The paths have been in place for over ten years and many of them now get pretty muddy in wet weather. The work will involve resurfacing the



Darnley Mill paths.

existing paths to raise their height a little, together with new drainage. This will help to keep the path surface drier. A short path section also needs redirected away from the burn as the water is eroding the bank. The work aims to repair what is already there; the character of the reserve will be retained. Routes will remain unchanged, whilst the paths will only be widened a little to take them back to their original width, before vegetation started to encroach.

The Local Nature Reserve is a popular spot for local residents and a focus of community activities delivered by the countryside ranger service. Weekly health walks use the path network, whilst our busy environmental education programme focuses upon the mosaic of habitats surrounding it, with school groups benefiting from regular countryside ranger led activities. Our volunteer group also focus their activities within the reserve, whilst the majority of events promoted through the annual calendar also take place there. It is hoped that the proposed work will bring benefits to many people and groups who use the reserve.

Dependent upon securing funding, it is hoped that the improvements can take place early in 2016 and be completed for the start of spring.

Spotlight on the common toad

Common toad facts

- **Toads have warty skin, but they don't give us warts.**
- **Toads spend most of their lives on dry land and only return to the water to mate and spawn.**
- **Unlike frogs, toads do not lay their eggs in dense clusters, but in thin strings wrapped around aquatic plants.**

DURING A RECENT VISIT TO THE COUNTRY PARK BY Crookfur Primary School our budding naturalists unearthed all sorts of mini-beasts. From the countless legs of millipedes to the solitary slimy 'foot' of the slugs and snails, there was a great deal of variation and interest in all species found. But it was a considerably larger and much wartier creature that was the real star of the show: the common toad (*Lupo lupu*).

This much maligned amphibian favours the dark and damp recesses of the country park, remaining largely hidden by day. At night it comes out to hunt, preying on the very same creatures that the school children found, in preparation for hibernation. One easy way to tell toads and frogs apart is that toads crawl slowly and cannot jump their way out of trouble, unlike frogs.



Common toad.

For centuries we have been equally fascinated and repelled by the humble toad. Just look at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and you will see that they were considered an essential component of a witch's brew. They even have poison glands on their backs! But this poison is simply to make them unpalatable to any would be attackers.

So, we should really embrace toads (though make sure you wear gloves) as they help rid our gardens of plant-munching pests.

Dams to Darnley Country Park Events calendar

- All events are FREE.
- Booking is required for some events.
- All children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Reservoir recce

Saturday 23 January, 10am – 12noon

Description: Start the year as you mean to go on with an energising stroll around the southern end of the country park. This walk will cover approximately four miles at a steady pace.

Location: Meet at the Balgray Reservoir car park, Balgraystone Road, off Springfield Road, Barrhead G77 6PG.



The Birds of Balgray

Sunday 21 February, 1 – 3pm

Description: Bring your binoculars and telescopes and join the countryside rangers on this walk to spot flocks of our winter visiting birds on Balgray Reservoir.

Location: Meet at the Balgray Reservoir car park, Balgraystone Road, off Springfield Road, Barrhead, G77 6PG.



Bird box bonanza

Sunday 6 March, 11am – 1pm

Description: Do your bit for our garden birds by building them a home. All tools and materials will be provided.

Location: Meet at the World Buffet restaurant car park, Corselet Road, Darnley G53 7RN.



Easter eggcitement

Saturday 19 March, 12 – 2pm

Description: Come along and join the countryside rangers for an array of Easter fun and games for all the family and maybe even a chocolate egg or two!

Location: Meet at the World Buffet restaurant car park, Corselet Road, Darnley, G53 7RN.



KEY CHART



Booking required



No booking required



Wear suitable clothing



Bring binoculars if you have them

Join our mailing list or contact the countryside rangers

The Dams to Darnley countryside rangers are planning a series of events throughout the year. If you would like to be sent information on upcoming events and all the latest news join our mailing list.

Name _____

Email Address _____

Address _____

Telephone No _____

To join our mailing list post or email your details to the address below.

This information will be treated as confidential and used only for the purpose stated. If you do not wish your details to be held on computer tick this box

Email: d2d@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk

Tel: 0141 577 4053/54

Web: www.damstodarnley.org



Post: Dams to Darnley Country Park, East Renfrewshire Council, Environment Department, Thornliebank Depot, 190 Carnwadric Road, Thornliebank, East Renfrewshire G46 8HR.