

Look forward to the colours of summer



Azure damselfly.

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

Inside you will find:

- Events look back
- 2020 Events Calendar
- Joe's wildlife witter
- Volunteer opportunities
- BioBlitz
- Spotlight on summer visitors

From bats to banshees



Mushrooms from our November walk.

EVERY AUGUST WE HAVE our den building event and, this year again, everyone had great fun building their shelters.

Next we had a countryside ranger led walk on a lovely autumn day examining the industrial history of the country park including the mining, the Barrhead dams and the Darnley bleachfields. This industry has left its mark on the country park as we see it today.

Late September means our bat walk and this year was the best yet. On a warm, still evening we saw and heard bats by the dozen. In fact more bats than we had ever

before seen on a walk.

This year our Halloween event was a joint effort along with our colleagues from the Whitelee Windfarm countryside ranger service. A big thanks to them, and also to the actors from the Carrick800 Theatre Group who put on a very scary performance around the pond at Darnley Mill. Everyone went home thoroughly frightened!

There were mushrooms a plenty on our fungi walk in November and, as usual, our year ended with our Christmas wreath making event. Our wreaths are made from natural materials and they get better every year.

2020 Events Calendar

OUR NEW EVENTS calendar has just been completed for 2020. As ever there is a real mixture of activities, with 14 events spread throughout the year. So hopefully you will find at least one date that sparks your interest.

Most of our regular events make a return, including an Easter egg hunt, pond dipping, butterfly count, bat walk, den building, Halloween goings on and Christmas wreath making.

You will need to set your alarm early for our dawn chorus walk in May, but if you fancy a much longer lie in you can always join us in March for an evening bug hunt in the dark.

Our calendar is circulated to local libraries, whilst details of all our events are also listed on the country park website. All our events are free, but you need to book places on most by contacting the countryside ranger service by phone or email, details are on the back page.



Spotlight

on park wildlife

Joe's wildlife witter

IN LATE SUMMER AND early autumn the country park saw an influx of painted lady butterflies. This was part of a once-in-a-decade UK wide wildlife phenomenon, a painted lady 'summer' which sees millions arrive en masse. After several poor years for butterflies, 2019 saw sightings rise for a number of species such as ringlets, red admirals and, of course, painted ladies. Moths also seemed to do well, with nearly every ragwort plant hosting dozens of cinnabar moth caterpillars.

Another success is the tree bumblebee. We first recorded it in the country park in 2018 yet they seemed to be everywhere last summer. Whilst on the subject of bees, in September a large sycamore tree fell over near the curling pond leaving a broken, two metre high stump still standing. To my surprise the inside of the tree was covered in honeycomb from honeybees.

Another insect that suddenly seemed to make an appearance was the



Common sexton beetle (*Nicrophorus vespilloides*).

common sexton beetle. These fabulous black and orange beetles will be everywhere in the country park, but are not often seen, so it was exciting to come across several over the summer. This is a 'burying beetle': these beetles are the undertakers of the animal world, burying dead animals, such as mice and small birds. The female beetle lays her eggs on, or beside, the buried body and

the resulting larvae eat the rotting corpse. The beetles' antennae are equipped with receptors that are able to detect rotting bodies from metres, even kilometres, away.

One final thought. The winter has, on the whole, been mild and I wonder if that is why we have not seen any whooper swans so far. We normally have a few wintering on the Barrhead dams.

Dams to Darnley volunteers

CONSERVING THE ENVIRONMENT CAN START LOCALLY with you. You do not need to have previous experience or environmental knowledge to do your bit. Anyone can volunteer! So why not join us on our fortnightly volunteer days? Volunteering gives you the opportunity to do some of the more practical work that it takes to maintain and enhance the country park. It also helps to keep you fit and gets you outdoors, whilst learning a few skills and meeting new people.

Volunteer activities vary depending on the time of year and what needs done. Previous volunteer days have included pond digging, tree planting, painting, litter picking, woodland management and path improvements. It makes a huge difference to have extra sets of helping hands to get a job done and it also makes it a lot more fun.

In spring and summer this year there will also be opportunities for volunteers to take part in wildlife surveying for wild flowers, butterflies, bumblebees, frogs and toads. Surveying is important as it builds up information on what is in the country park and helps direct future habitat improvements for the benefit of plants and animals.

Why not turn up and give it a go? We meet every second Thursday at 10am at the World Buffet restaurant



Volunteers carrying out path repairs.

car park, off Nitshill Road, Darnley and finish around 2pm. As we are out over lunch bring a snack along, wear old clothes and dress for the outdoors. All equipment is provided for volunteers and full guidance and instructions are given.

Volunteer day dates are listed in the country park website, just click on the activities and volunteering tabs. Alternatively, if you would like information on dates or have any questions contact the countryside ranger service. Website and contact details are on the back page.

BioBlitz

ONE OF OUR EVENTS IN JUNE THIS YEAR IS A BIOBLITZ at the Darnley Mill end of the country park. A BioBlitz is an event that aims to find and identify as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time: in this case Darnley Mill between 11am and 3pm on 21st June.

At a BioBlitz, scientists, families, volunteers and other community members work together to get a snapshot of an area's biodiversity. This is a great example of Citizen Science, where non-specialists help scientists gather data which can then be used and analysed.

At our event we will be pond dipping to study the invertebrates in the water, sweep netting to catch and identify the invertebrates in the grass and bushes and surveying for different plant and bird species. As much species information will be collated as possible in the time. The data is of great importance to us. Put simply, if we do not know what species are present, how can we protect them or improve their habitat? Data also helps us to identify what is missing, what species we should expect to be there but are not.

So why not drop in on the day and help us out and also have some fun.



Try your hand at pond dipping on our BioBlitz event.

Spotlight summer visitors

Facts about our summer visitors:

- **Male whitethroats build several nests from which the female chooses the best.**
- **Swifts only ever land when nesting. They spend almost all their lives flying.**
- **Some birds such as blackcaps and chiffchaffs are beginning to overwinter. It is thought that this is a result of a combination of global warming and garden feeders.**



Whitethroat

IN THE SPRING, AS OUR WINTER VISITORS HEAD BACK NORTH, a new influx from the south begins. The most obvious and noisiest migrants are the hirundines (swallows, sand and house martins), warblers and swifts, although these are by no means the only summer visitors.

Generally our visitors arrive at different times throughout the spring months. Here in the country park the first to arrive is usually the chiffchaff with its onomatopoeic call. They can usually be heard by the end of March. Sand martins are always the first of the hirundines to appear, and they normally arrive in the first week of April along with blackcaps and willow warblers.

By the middle of April house martins and swallows turn up along with whitethroats and sedge warblers. By the end of the month all the migrants are usually here bar one. The last to arrive are the swifts, they wait until May before appearing. They are also one of the first to leave, with some birds departing as early as July.

The most famous summer visitor is probably the cuckoo, arriving in the UK in late March. Unfortunately the cuckoo can only very occasionally be heard in the country park as it passes through.

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.

Bug hunting in the dark

Thursday 19 March, 6.45-8.15pm

Description: Ever wondered what comes out at night when the sun goes down? Here is your chance to see some night-time creepy-crawlies when we turn over a few logs in the dark.

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



How do you like your eggs?

Wednesday 8 April, 1-3pm

Description: How will you decorate your eggs? Why not join us for some Easter fun and games on this family event?

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



Dawn chorus

Sunday 3 May, 5-7am

Description: Join the countryside ranger for International Dawn Chorus Day. An early rise in return for a free concert from some of the most amazing singers in the natural world.

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



Fabulous frogs, terrific toads

Sunday 17 May, 2-4pm

Description: Spend an afternoon doing the countryside ranger's favourite pastime; pond dipping in one of our many ponds.

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



Bioblitz

Sunday 21 June, 11am-3pm

Description: Join the countryside ranger and other experts as we try to name and record as many different species as we can in Dams to Darnley Local Nature Reserve. Have a go at pond dipping, bird watching, bug hunting or other surveys.

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



Big butterfly count

Sunday 26 July, 2-4pm

Description: Take part in the annual national survey led by Butterfly Conservation as we try to count as many butterflies as possible. Or simply come along to learn a bit more about these fascinating insects.

Location: Meet at Parkmanor Green, off Parkhouse Road, Parklands Meadow G53 7ZE.



KEY CHART



No booking required



Booking required



Wear suitable clothing



Bring a torch



Bring binoculars

Join our mailing list or contact the countryside ranger

If you would like to be added to the mailing list for Wagtail and our annual events calendar please contact us by phone or email with your details.

Data Protection Act 2018

The information you supply to us will be used by East Renfrewshire Council to contact you with respect to Dams to Darnley Country Park. We may also use your information to verify your identity where required, contact you by post, email or telephone and to maintain our records. You can find out more about how we handle this information and your rights in respect of it by going to www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/dataprotection. If you wish a paper copy please let us know by contacting us at dpo@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk or by telephone at 0141 577 3001. You can also see a copy of our Privacy Notice at www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/strategyprivacy.

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