

Bottoms up for winter



Mute swans enjoy a dip in the icy country park water.

Welcome to our eighteenth edition of Wagtail, the newsletter and events calendar for Dams to Darnley Country Park. Inside you will find:

- **Autumn events look back**
- **How you can help**
- **History feature on Lord Darnley**
- **What are yew?**
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The next edition of Wagtail will be out in spring 2013.

Autumn adventures

ON OUR 'BIG WALK' WE made our way back to the country park all the way from Glennifer Braes. The sun did not shine but at least it stayed dry – perfect walking weather.

In September we had the first of our 'bat and moth' nights. Even though it rained a little we saw lots of bats flying and heard them feeding using our detectors. The moth traps were on and shining brightly, but they only attracted one moth.

On a spooky Saturday night ghouls took over the

country park for 'haunted Halloween'. There were lots of games and scary stories. We even had some real life blood suckers (midges)!

Our second bat night had to be rescheduled because of the cold weather. This meant that we were a bit late for the bats and we again only caught one moth. We did hear a couple of distant bats and Scott Donaldson from Butterfly Conservation had kindly brought along a caterpillar and a couple of pupae to show everyone.



Ghoulish goings on in the country park.

How you can help

REGULAR COUNTRY PARK visitors, particularly to the Darnley side, will hopefully have noticed fewer instances of antisocial behaviour than in past years. The presence of the countryside rangers and the increasing number of people visiting the country park has definitely helped.

Sadly though, there are still reports of antisocial crimes. These reports relate to people using quad bikes or off-road motorbikes, lighting fires that could endanger visitors or property and occasionally using air rifles. It is illegal to use any motorised vehicle off-road within the country park, including quad bikes or off-road motorbikes, without lawful authority. Worryingly the countryside rangers have even seen people, including children, on off-road motorbikes at speed without helmets.



Help rid the country park of antisocial crimes.

It is also against the law to have any loaded air weapon in the country park without lawful authority or reasonable excuse.

If you witness any antisocial crimes in progress within the country park do not approach. It is best to phone the police as soon as possible. **To report a crime contact the police on 0141 532 2000.**

You can still contact the countryside rangers to report other antisocial problems, such as fly-tipping and graffiti.

Spotlight on park history

THE EARLS OF DARNLEY were Stewarts and descended from the second son of Alexander Stewart, fourth High Steward of Scotland. The title of High Steward was first bestowed in the twelfth century to Walter Fitzalan; the family name Stewart being adapted from this in the early thirteenth century.

In 1356, Robert Stewart, High Steward of Scotland, granted the barony of Darnley to Sir John Stewart.

Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, was born in 1545. In 1565 he married Mary

Queen of Scots. Although there is little to link the couple to the Darnley area, other than the legend of the 'Darnley Sycamore', it is believed that they spent some of their time on the Darnley estate lands, possibly staying in the now lost Darnley estate house or at Crookston Castle.

Soon after the marriage it became evident, even to Mary, that Lord Darnley was shallow, arrogant and prone to drunkenness. As the husband of Mary, Darnley was also determined to have more royal authority than

Lord Darnley

he possessed. His demands angered many nobles and even Mary herself.

On the night of 9 February 1567 Darnley had been ill and was resting at a house chosen by Mary in Kirk o' Fields, near Edinburgh. At some point during the night a huge explosion demolished the residence. Darnley's body was found in a courtyard. It appears he survived the explosion but was suffocated with his own shirt.

The Earl of Bothwell and Mary were suspected of being involved in the



murder. They had become close before Darnley's death and were married only months later. Although Bothwell is the chief suspect, for many people the mystery of who killed Darnley remains unsolved.

What are yew?



Hawthorn berries.

IN WINTER IT CAN BE difficult to identify trees without their foliage, but looking at their bark, crown shape, surrounding habitat and left over fruit or their containers can be a giveaway. The most popular way to tell trees apart is by looking at their buds and twigs. Here are a few clues to help you identify some common country park trees.

Ash trees have pale grey twigs with black cone shaped buds. The buds are arranged in opposite pairs, apart from the one at the tip of the twig,

which is also flattened and much bigger than the rest.

Beech trees do not always lose all of their leaves, so look out for dead rusty brown foliage hanging on. The twigs are slender and have approximately 2cm long, slim buds. These long buds come to a spiky point.

The buds of the horse chestnut tree are large and covered in a sticky residue in March time. The buds grow in opposite pairs along a dark brown twig.

All three species of lime tree found in the UK have

glossy red twigs. The twigs grow in a distinctive zig-zag shape with the buds growing alternately. Each individual bud has two scales, with one being bigger than the other.

Each oak tree twig has a cluster of buds growing towards the tip. These compactly grouped buds form tightly clustered leaves in the summer months.

These are just a few clues to get you started. There are many identification keys available online. Check out www.naturedetectives.org.uk for a great pictorial guide.



REPORT ANY PROBLEMS

Report any antisocial crimes in progress to the police on 0141 532 2000.

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.

Why am I a SSSI?

HIDDEN AWAY IN WAULKMILL GLEN IS A REAL country park gem. It is not a rare plant or tree and do not go looking for a spectacular bird or mammal. It is the rocks themselves that are the rarity here, so much so that they have the highest level of protection in law, being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by the Scottish Ministers.

What makes the rocks so special? Around 320 million years ago, during the geological time known as the Carboniferous period, Scotland was in the tropics. During this time the rocks within the glen were laid down in a shallow tropical sea. Over several million years the sea level changed and periodically flooded the surrounding low lying land. This happened several times creating a cycle of deposits which, over millions of years, produced a series of rocks. The rocks in the sequence are coal, limestone, mudstone and sandstone and are exposed along the course of the Brock Burn which cuts through the glen.

The SSSI designation means that the rocks are protected and cannot be damaged in any way. The rocks are not easy to spot but there are one or two places in the lower glen where outcrops can be seen from the opposite bank



Waulkmill Glen rocks!

of the burn. Great care must be taken as the sides of the glen are muddy and steep and there are no paths. The rocks were mined for hundreds of years in other areas of the country park, but because of the steep topography the ones within the glen survived largely intact. Today Waulkmill Glen, along with neighbouring Rouken Glen Park, remain the best places in Scotland to see these special rocks.



Conkers. Picture courtesy of FreeDigitalPhotos.net (Paul).

Spotlight on the horse chestnut tree

MANY OF YOU WILL HAVE noticed there has been a severe dearth of conkers this year. The Scottish Conker Championship even had to

be cancelled! The lack of conkers is thought to be due to a number of reasons.

The horse chestnut tree has become threatened by the

Horse chestnut facts

- The name 'horse chestnut' is thought to have originated from the belief that eating the fruit cured horses of chest complaints, despite it being poisonous to them.
- Deer are able to break down the toxins in conkers and eat them safely.
- The flower of the horse chestnut is the symbol of Kiev, capital of Ukraine.
- The multiple flowers form a spike up to 20cm in height in May. These flower spikes are sometimes called chandeliers due to their shape.

leaf-mining moth (*Cameraria ohridella*). This moth was discovered in Macedonia in 1984 and has made its way to the UK. The larvae eat the leaves causing them to brown and fall. But the leaf-mining moth has only just reached the Scottish borders.

Throughout Scotland it is more likely that the weather has led to a conker shortage. Because we have not had a warm summer conkers have not had a chance to ripen and those that have grown are smaller than usual.

Additionally the wet weather has led to an increase in moulds, fungi and mildews which are making trees less productive than usual.

Now a common tree across Britain, the horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) was introduced from southern Europe in the late sixteenth century. It is an easily recognisable broadleaved, deciduous tree found in many parks and gardens.

See page two for some tree identification tips.

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.

Lose your Christmas spirit

Sunday 20 January, 11am – 1pm

Description: Join the countryside rangers for this post-Christmas walk to shed the festive puddings and turkey.

Location: Meet at the World Buffet restaurant car park (formerly the Ashoka), Corselet Road, off Nitshill Road, Darnley.



Goldeneye

Sunday 17 February, 10am – 12.30pm

Description: Nothing to do with James Bond but a walk to identify some of our winter birds, including goldeneyes. Look out for the whooper swans as well.

Location: Meet at Balgray Reservoir car park, Balgraystone Road, off Springfield Road, Barrhead.



Star trekking

Friday 1 March, 7 – 9pm

Description: Join the countryside rangers and an expert from Glasgow University to learn a little about the night sky. Have a closer look through a telescope and do some star spotting. Can you see the rings of Saturn or the moons around Jupiter or the little green men on Mars?

Location: Meet at Balgray Reservoir car park, Balgraystone Road, off Springfield Road, Barrhead.



Warming woodland

Saturday 16 March, 1 – 3pm

Description: Join the countryside rangers for a walk in the country park to look for the first signs of spring and evidence of how the warmer weather affects wildlife. As it is Climate Week we will look at climate change and global warming as well!

Location: Meet at the World Buffet restaurant car park (formerly the Ashoka), Corselet Road, off Nitshill Road, Darnley.



Egghead

Friday 5 April, 2 – 4pm

Description: Come along to your country park and take part in some Easter fun and games on this family event. There will be egg decorating and an egg hunt as well!

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



Spring clean

Sunday 7 April, 1 – 4pm

Description: Get your country park gleaming with some spring cleaning! Join the countryside rangers and your community to do some litter picking. All equipment will be provided.

Location: Meet at the World Buffet restaurant car park (formerly the Ashoka), Corselet Road, off Nitshill Road, Darnley.



KEY CHART



Booking required



Bring a torch



Bring binoculars if you have them



No booking required



Wear suitable clothing

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.