

## Highly sprung



A carpet of wood anemones.

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

Inside you will find:

- **Winter events look back**
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The next edition of Wagtail will be out in summer 2017.

### From bones to bows

OUR WINTER EVENTS programme began with the ever popular Halloween 'spooky Saturday'. This year we made skeletons from piles of glow-in-the-dark 'bones'. You might still find one that we missed!

John Parker from Glasgow City Council countryside ranger service led November's fungi walk. He regaled us with folklore and science before treating us to some fresh wild mushroom soup.

We had great fun dissecting owl pellets on our 'paws and poo' event and looking at the bones of voles and shrews through our field microscopes. Everyone was surprised by just how many bones a single pellet could contain.

December's first event was an evening walk at dusk in the hope that we



Christmas wreaths.

might spot some nocturnal creatures. Sadly the weather let us down and there were no owls or foxes around.

The most popular event every year (we are half-full for this year's already) is our Christmas wreath making and 2016 was no exception. There must have been a lot of doors in the area over Christmas with beautiful home-made wreaths.

Our first event of 2017 was a lovely walk around the dams on a sunny but cold afternoon.

### Whitelee Windfarm events

AT WAGTAIL WE ARE ALWAYS keen to promote the work of our friends at Whitelee Windfarm countryside ranger service. The Whitelee events programme is almost ready and this year a few of the most popular events have been brought back. Nineteen events will be taking place, including Warble AM; which will involve a short hike into the windfarm to decipher the bird song and name the species, a mini beast hunt, spoon carving and so much more!

The regular Whitelee stroller striders group for parents and babies continues to go from strength to strength, meeting every Tuesday morning at 10am at the Whitelee visitors' centre. The group then head out for a brisk walk, with the little ones tucked up warm and cosy in their buggies or carriers. The route covers around four miles on good paths and is not too strenuous. The walk finishes by around 12 noon, just in time for a hot drink in the café.

The boggy beasts club is also back, and with a new theme too. This year they will be focussing on the history of Whitelee and of Scotland. They will be re-enacting a historical battle, using pottery 'skills' to make some medieval clay pots, learning about ancient symbols and at the end of it all hosting their very own 'boggy' highland games!

If this all sounds good then you can find out more by grabbing an event leaflet from the Whitelee visitor's centre or check it out at [www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/whitelee](http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/whitelee). Come along to as many events as you want! For event updates and photos, as well as news and developments from Whitelee, visit the webpage or follow the countryside rangers on Facebook.



Whitelee windfarm.

# Spotlight

## on park wildlife

### Joe's wildlife witter

IN AMONGST OUR resident gulls at Balgray Reservoir we have had some rarer winter visitors; with yellow-legged, glaucous and Mediterranean gulls all dropping by. You need to have an expert eye to be able to distinguishing them from each other. Staying at Balgray, another winter visitor we have been seeing regularly are scaup. These are mainly marine ducks but can move inland in winter. We also had an amazing

count of over 200 snipe amongst the reed beds of Littleton Reservoir, along with a few rarer jack snipe. The snipe number probably includes winter migrants from Northern Europe, as well as our resident birds. Jack snipe are purely winter visitors. Finally, there have been plenty of sightings locally of colourful visiting waxwings, but sadly no reports of any at Dams to Darnley. If anyone has seen any in the country park could you let me know.



Lesser celandine.

Our resident roe deer have been much more visible over winter. It is not so easy for them to hide because of the lack of leaves on the trees.

Already by the first week in February snowdrops and butterbur were beginning to appear in Dams to Darnley and they will be followed

soon by lesser celandine and colts-foot. Grey herons, which can be seen throughout the country park, are one of the first birds to lay their eggs, often by the middle of March. They will begin to repair their nests or build new ones as early as February; a sure sign of spring.

# Spotlight on bird ringing

## Bird ringing facts

- There are more than **2,600 bird ringers in UK and Ireland.**
- **More than 900,000 birds are ringed in Britain and Ireland every year.**
- **Ringling has been carried out in Britain for over 100 years.**



A newly ringed great tit.

RECENTLY THE CLYDE BIRD RINGING GROUP SPENT A MORNING IN THE COUNTRY park catching and ringing birds. Lots of small tits were successfully caught, but why do the ringers do it? Firstly, it is important to know that catching birds in any way or being in possession of a live wild bird is a criminal offence. Bird ringers are licensed, normally by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and will carry their permit with them when working. Ringing is carried out to enable conservationists to get a better understanding of the survival rates of birds and also of their movements. Ultimately, these factors influence population sizes over time and by gaining a better understanding of them scientists hope to be able to reverse the decline in numbers of many species. Before the birds are ringed they are normally caught in a mist net; a very fine net used for birds or bats. The caught birds are then measured and weighed before being ringed. The ring itself is a small, lightweight uniquely numbered metal ring attached to the bird's leg. It does not harm the bird in any way. All the information gathered is then sent to the BTO for analysis. We hope to invite the ringers back to the country park in the future.



## 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 Glasgow 'Environmental Task Force' on

**0300 343 7027**

or East Renfrewshire 'Ring and Report' on

**0800 013 0076**

# Patterton prisoner of war camp

MANY OF YOU WILL KNOW THAT THERE WAS A prisoner of war camp on the western edge of what is now the country park at Patterton, just off Stewarton Road. Today the site is associated with Whitecraigs Nursing Home and the Deacongrange housing estate, but it also extended to the adjacent Walden Woods.

We know a bit about the history of the camp; it featured in one of the early editions of Wagtail. It is thought that Patterton was originally a British military camp, but it was Italian prisoners who were first housed there from May 1944. The Italians made way for German prisoners who arrived in June 1945, after the Second World War had ended in Europe.



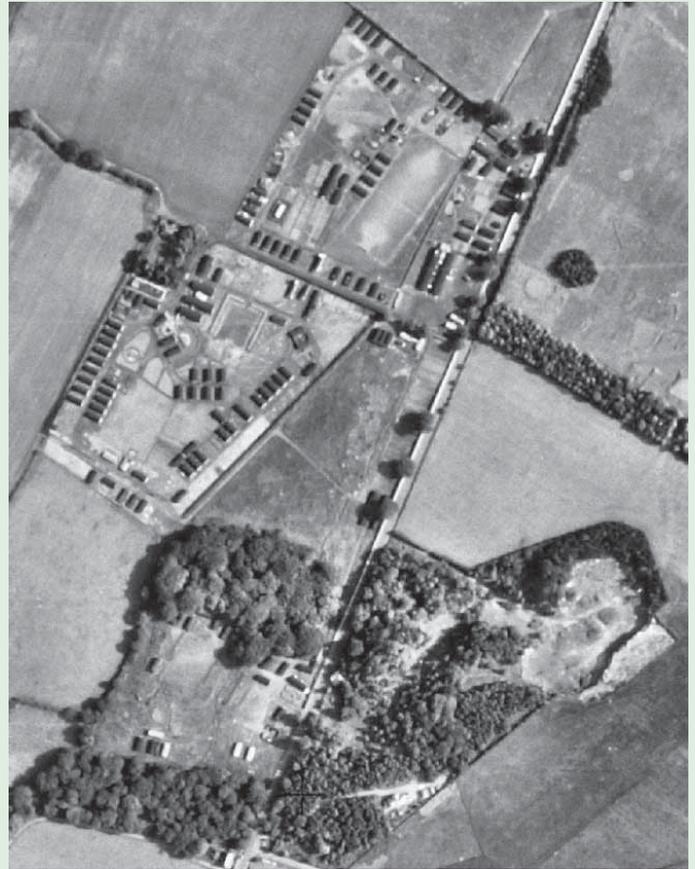
Image of Patterton camp (1945).

Research by Mearns History Group ([www.mearnshistory.org.uk](http://www.mearnshistory.org.uk)) now gives us a detailed insight into what life was like at the camp for German prisoners of war, largely thanks to a report on a Red Cross visit dated 17 November 1945.

On the day of the visit there were 535 prisoners, the vast majority of which were from the army. But there were also prisoners from the air force and navy. Prisoners were housed in 26 dormitories, all of which had electric lighting and were heated by stoves.

The report went into considerable detail in terms of the prisoner's accommodation across the site. Counting the dormitories there were 59 huts including classrooms, theatre, infirmary, chapel, canteen, showers, toilets, kitchen with bakery, stores and workshops. More surprisingly the camp also contained an artist's workshop and hairdressers.

The men appear to have had plenty to occupy their time. Most worked in one of the workshops, for which they were paid a small wage. In terms of recreation there was a football pitch, a small library and a weekly film show. The camp had a theatre company with a dozen actors and a choir with 30 to 35 members. But there was no orchestra at the camp, probably because the only instrument at the time of the visit seems to have been a solitary violin. Educational classes were also organised with courses in



Aerial photograph of Patterton camp (1946).

English, German, arithmetic, mathematics, natural science, accountancy and shorthand. The men's spiritual needs were the responsibility of a protestant camp chaplain, with a service being led every Sunday. A local priest also visited the camp every Sunday to celebrate mass.

The last German prisoner left in 1947 and from then until 1949 the camp housed Polish soldiers who had chosen to remain in Scotland after the war. In its final years the camp was used to house homeless Glasgow residents. The majority of the buildings were removed by the late 1950s.

But it is very possible that one very visible reminder of the Patterton camp remains to this day. Although not mentioned in the Red Cross report aerial photography taken at the time suggests that there may have been gardens and allotments at the camp. If you take a walk along the country park paths within Walden Woods (just west of Stewarton Road) make sure you look out for the mature apple tree which looks about 70 years old!



Patterton apple tree.

# 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.

## Wood whittling for beginners

Saturday 18 March, 12noon - 3pm

**Description:** Always fancied carving your own utensils? If so join us on this basic introduction to whittling. Spaces will be limited so book early to avoid disappointment. All tools and materials will be provided.

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



## Hitchhikers and invaders

Sunday 9 April, 1 - 3pm

**Description:** Many plant and animal species are non-native to Scotland but have found their way to the country park. Join the countryside rangers as we discover a few incomers and find out which ones are classed as naturalised or invasive.

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



## Easter parade

Wednesday 12 April, 12.30 - 2.30pm

**Description:** Easter fun and games in the country park. Decorate some eggs and join in the Easter egg hunt with the countryside rangers.

**Location:** Meet at Patterton overflow car park, OPPOSITE side of Stewarton Road from Patterton Train Station, Newton Mearns, G77 6NR.



## Up with the birds

Saturday 6 May, 6 - 8am

**Description:** Join the countryside rangers for this walk to hear the amazing sounds of the dawn chorus.

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



## KEY CHART



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](mailto:d2d@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk)

**Tel:** 0141 577 4053/54

**Web:** [www.damstodarnley.org](http://www.damstodarnley.org)



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