

Wrap up for winter



Winter comes to Balgray Reservoir. Copyright www.scottishhorizons.co.uk/Keith Fergus 2011. All Rights Reserved.

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

Inside you will find:

- **Summer and autumn events look back**
- **Aurs Road closure**
- **Joe and Alyson's wildlife witter**
- **20 years of bird numbers at Balgray**
- **Balgray Reservoir boardwalk**
- **Spotlight on the northern lapwing**
- **Winter events calendar**

The next edition of Wagtail will be out in spring 2018.

Event roundup



Bugs in the bushes.

JUNE SAW US USING nets, bug pots and sheets to catch falling insects from trees and bushes. We got to see a huge range of what can be found living in the country park at our bugs & bees event. Later the same month those visitors who booked on and guided themselves round the country park's orienteering course enjoyed a picnic in the sunshine at the half way point; a perfect way to celebrate Father's Day.

Our summer shelter event saw another successful session of daring dens, cosy camps and revelatory refuges.

Fingers were at the ready on our flowers, photos and fun event when a leisurely stroll round the mill pond resulted in lots of keen eyed, snap happy folks, young and old, producing amazing colourful images. September also saw the first of our two autumn bat walks, with both events proving hugely popular as everyone got to hear and see some bats.

On our coal, chlorine and cloth walk we got to learn

about how and where Charles Tennant invented bleach back in the late 1700s.

October was busy with events. Much mess and merriment was had at our arts and craft afternoon with paints, pipe cleaners, glue and 'green men' faces.

To end on a high, we had spooky Saturday where those who dared to venture in to the woods were taken round the pond to hear terrifying tales of witches and woes amongst some cobwebby tombstones.

Aurs Road closure

A SERIES OF ESSENTIAL maintenance and inspection works will be taking place next to Balgray Reservoir during December, meaning that a section of Aurs Road will be closed for approximately three weeks.

The closure is principally to

allow ground investigations to take place along the reservoir dam. These are required to inform the development of a proposed boardwalk overlooking Balgray Reservoir. You can find more information about the boardwalk and how you can contribute to its design

overleaf. Scottish Water will also be using the road closure to remove vegetation along the reservoir embankment, maintain the Victorian water valve tower and reduce the height of hedgerows.

Aurs Road will be closed to all vehicles and cycles between its junctions at Springfield Road and Stewarton Road from 4th to 22nd December. Diversions routes will be

advertised. Property access within the extent of the closure will be permitted by the contractor, when possible in conjunction with the works. The Balgray Reservoir path will also require to be closed intermittently for a number of days at the point where it crosses Aurs Road. Notices advising of the dates will be posted on site and on the country park Facebook page.

Spotlight

on park wildlife

Joe and Alyson's wildlife witter

AS THE SEASONS CHANGE, so does the wildlife, sort of. Migratory bird species will start to appear, coming to spend their winter in warmer climes. Examples include redwings, fieldfares and whooper swans from Scandinavia and Russia. Redwings were spotted on Ryat Linn Reservoir in October and whooper swans in early November.

Some insect eating species such as swallows visit in the summer when there is plenty of food and

light for them. At this time of year they are making their way back to southern parts of Europe and Sub Saharan Africa to overwinter. Painted lady and red admiral butterflies also migrate south to secure a food supply for their caterpillars. But food availability is a key reason why so many bird and insect species migrate to overwinter in the UK – their food is often hidden under snow and ice!

Other species such as bats disappear during winter to



Whooper swans on Ryat Linn Reservoir.

hibernate. In addition to hibernating, bats also go through periods of torpor just before, and sometimes after, hibernation. Torpor is a state of decreased physiological activity where body temperature and metabolic rate reduce. This allows bats to survive during periods where food is unavailable. Often this is because it is too cold for flying insects to be out, the main food source of bats.

If you have a garden then remember about the wildlife

there too. Here are a few suggestions as to how to go about 'wilding' a garden in winter to encourage more wildlife to visit. Hang bird feeders up and restock regularly, build and put up a nest box and put out warm water for birds to have a bath. Also make sure you float a ball in any ponds to stop them from freezing over. This way any resident amphibians lurking at the bottom can get out if they want to.

20 years of bird numbers at Balgray



Coot.

THE BARRHEAD DAMS ARE well known for the birds they attract especially in winter and, as we have records going back many years, we thought it would be interesting to see how some of the birds have fared over the last 20 years or so on Balgray Reservoir.

The first thing that strikes us looking at data from two decades ago is that the numbers of some species was much greater than today. For example, in February 1996 1,141 pochard, 310 teal, 89 whooper swans, 75 goldeneye and 49 wigeon were counted along with

many other species. In the 1990s counts of more than 100 coots were also common, but recently we are seeing only one or two on Balgray Reservoir. Similarly for many years mallards numbered anywhere between 50 and 200, but there seems to be a definite downward trend in the last few years with the average count being 10. Probably the biggest loss has been lapwing. 20 years ago counts of 500 or more lapwing were common, but today if we see a flock of 50 or more we are very lucky. Tufted ducks are also down. Last year we had

a maximum count of 100 tufted ducks in August, down from a maximum of 250-300 in the early naughties.

Many species though seem to be holding up. Goldeneye and goosander numbers can vary quite a lot year to year, but in general they are broadly similar. Great crested grebes also seem to be doing ok. With the exception of one or two very large counts, the maximum number in the 90s was averaging 10. In the last 10 years the average maximum number of great crested grebes has been 11.

This is only a quick look at a few species and more in

depth analysis needs to be done. These results though are not peculiar to Balgray Reservoir, they mirror the national picture. Where species numbers are down at Balgray Reservoir they have declined nationally and where they are stable this seems to be the wider picture. Most alarming is the drop in lapwing numbers. Since the 1980s numbers have dropped by 50% or more across Britain and an astonishing 89% in Northern Ireland. Habitat loss and changes in farming practices are thought to be major factors in these losses.

Balgray Reservoir boardwalk

WORK TO DESIGN A BOARDWALK ALONGSIDE Balgray Reservoir is underway. The boardwalk proposal is part of a wider Glasgow City Region City Deal project to realign Aurs Road and create a much needed new path to and through the country park from Newton Mearns. The improvements will also deliver better path connections to Barrhead.

With funding from Sustrans Community Links and the City Deal a design team, led by landscape architects ERZ, has been appointed to progress preliminary designs for the boardwalk. The team will be working on the design of each boardwalk element, such as surfacing, handrails, signage and lighting. They will also be looking at the wider opportunities that the boardwalk could bring, for example around education, biodiversity, landscaping and play.

Community engagement will be a key part of ERZ's work. It will be essential to understand how the boardwalk will be used and ensure that it is safe and accessible to all. Between now and Spring 2018 ERZ will be gathering the views of country park visitors, local residents, groups and partners through a variety of means such as events, activities, discussions and social media. There will also be opportunities for local residents to work with a number of artists to develop ideas for distinct design elements for the boardwalk.

Further information about how you can contribute to the design of the boardwalk and connecting path links will be promoted over the coming weeks and months.



Balgray Reservoir.

Spotlight on the northern lapwing

Lapwing facts:

- **The lapwing has many local names in addition to the green plover, such as 'tieve's nacket' (Shetland), 'toppyup' (Borders) and 'lappy' (Yorkshire).**
- **Some local names were pejorative and that association still exists. The collective noun for lapwing is 'a deceit'.**
- **In the 19th century lapwing eggs were a delicacy throughout Europe and were collected in their tens of thousands in Britain.**



Northern lapwing.

THE NORTHERN LAPWING (*VANELLUS VANELLUS*), or more commonly just lapwing, is also known as a peewit because of its call or locally the green plover. It is a common sight around farmlands and in winter large flocks of lapwing can be seen when our local birds are supplemented by visitors from Europe.

Lapwings nest on the ground in little more than a scrape. This means that their eggs and chicks have to be highly camouflaged to hide them from predators. If the adult spots

a potential predator it will often fly at it or will even pretend to have a broken wing in the hope of enticing it away.

The adult lapwing is a beautiful bird when seen up close with shiny emerald green upper body and white underparts. It has orange under its tail and a black chest with a black 'mask' on a white face. A lapwing's most recognisable feature is its long, upswept crest. Sadly, as highlighted elsewhere in this edition of Wagtail, lapwing numbers have plummeted in recent years.

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.

Build a bird box

Sunday 21 January, 11am-1pm

Description: Help do your bit for the birds found in your garden and join the countryside rangers as we build some bird boxes and feeders for you to take home.

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



Winged winter wanderers of Balgray

Sunday 4 February, 11am-1pm

Description: Grab your bins and scopes and come along with the countryside rangers on a winter wander to see which birds are visiting Balgray Reservoir this year. Our four mile walk is the perfect way to work up an appetite for Sunday lunch.

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



Bird ringing

Saturday 24 February, 10am-12noon

Description: Join the countryside rangers for a big garden bird watch with a difference. Watch science happen with the Clyde Bird Ringing Group. There will be a chance to see some birds up close and maybe handle a few of them under supervision. This is a drop-in event so no booking is required.

Location: Signposted from World Buffet restaurant car park, Corselet Road, Darnley G53 7RN.



A pale blue dot

Friday 9 March, 6.30-8.30pm

Description: Carl Sagan famously described Earth as a very small pale blue dot in a vast cosmic arena. Come along and join the experts as we gaze through some astronomical telescopes at our near and not-so-near neighbours in space and learn a little more about Earth's place in it.

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



What's whittling?

Saturday 10 March, 12.30-3.30pm

Description: While away a few hours whittling something whimsical from a lowly stick and hone your safe knife skills to create a wand, a spatula or perhaps even a spoon. Spaces are 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.



Wet 'n' wild

Sunday 25 March, 1-3pm

Description: Discover the country park's wetlands on this family pond dip. See what wildlife lurks beneath the water of our ponds.

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

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.