

## Snowdrop show



Not the only snowdrops one might expect at this time of year.

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

Inside you will find:

- Events look back
- Country park orienteering course
- Joe's wildlife witter
- A good season for the birds
- Get active opportunities
- Spotlight on the grey phalarope

The next edition of Wagtail will be out in autumn 2019.

## Bats, brambles and a butterfly

ON OUR ANNUAL BIG butterfly count in the rain we saw the grand total of one butterfly, a small heath.

It was raining heavily again when we built our dens, but at least it did not spoil the fun.

In early autumn we collected wild growing fruit in the country park and made some jam. One of the countryside rangers managed to leave the event with three jars of delicious bramble jam!

Our annual bat walk took place at the end of September, and this time the weather could not have been better. It was dry, clear and not too cold. That meant that we got to encounter lots of bats and, for many in the group, it was their first time seeing these amazing creatures.

It was another sunny day during the school October holiday when we had our



Autumn arts and crafts.

autumn arts and craft event. We made clay animals and painted an autumn-themed mural.

Halloween always finds us dressed up for our 'fright night' event. Fantastic costumes from everyone and great fun was had dookin' for apples and pinning the nose on the witch.

As usual our final event of the year was our Christmas wreath making. It is always a great way to finish the year.

## Country park orienteering course

THIS YEAR'S FIRST EVENT takes in our orienteering course. If you cannot make the date then why not give it a go yourself? The course is designed to be ideal for beginners and children. It is split into two locations either side of Corselet Road; Darnley Mill and the greenspace next to Parklands Meadow estate

There are twenty wooden orienteering posts, ten at each location, so you can do the whole course, or just half of it. The posts are found by following an orienteering map; there is no need for a compass or to stray far from the paths. Each post is about a metre high and painted red and white on top. They have a number on their front face and a letter on the back. The letters are filled in on a control sheet as you progress. The sheet also gives additional clues to the location of the posts.



One of the orienteering posts.

The starting point for the course is the country park entrance behind the World Buffet restaurant on Corselet Road, but you can visit the posts in any order. The whole course takes approximately one and a half hours to complete at an easy walking pace.

You can find the orienteering map and control sheet at [www.damstodarnley.org/orienteering](http://www.damstodarnley.org/orienteering)

# Spotlight

## on park wildlife

### Joe's wildlife witter

WE HAVE SEEN A FEW things to note over the last few months, the first being the abundance of brambles late last year! It was a great crop and made for lots of jars full of tasty jam for September's 'Scottish summer jammin' session' event.

This was also the case for fungi (not the jars full of fungi tastiness, just the abundance). We saw a vast array of different fungi up in the beech woodland

beyond Eilidh's Pond. This provided us with a great opportunity to brush up on our identification skills, but it was also a reminder of just how hard they can be to identify! This is why we always stress the dangers associated with foraging for mushrooms. They also seemed to peak earlier than usual, but there were still loads around for our Fungi walk in November.

Whilst clearing out some debris from Eilidh's Pond



Meadow brown butterfly.

in late summer we also encountered lots of newts, always a good sign. Hundreds of damselflies were also spotted darting round the pond and later on, laying their eggs.

Dragonfly numbers were high this year too. Sadly this was not the case for

butterflies. It was a very poor year for butterfly sightings once again. It seems only a few years ago we would count hundreds of ringlets and meadow browns over the summer. Now we are lucky if we see a few dozen of these species.

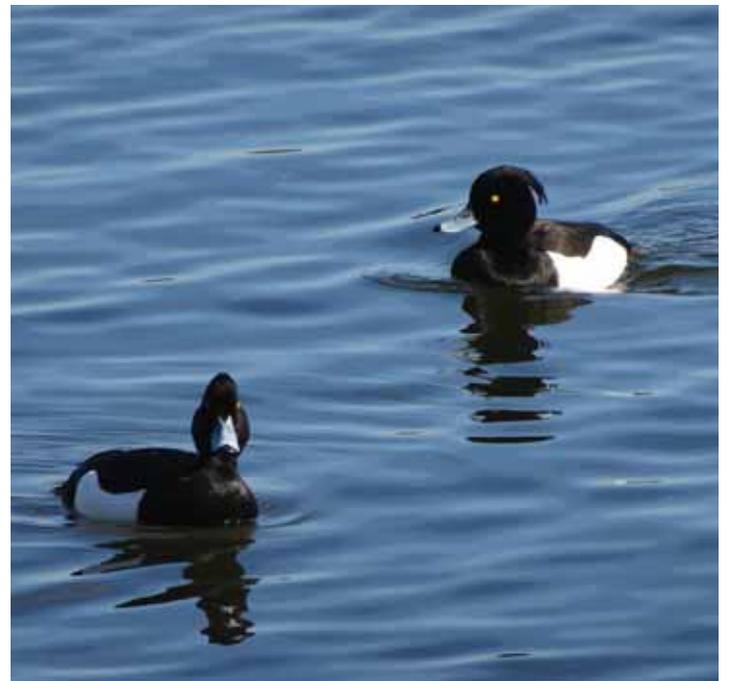
## A good season for the birds

THE BARRHEAD DAMS ARE WELL KNOWN FOR THE BIRD life they attract. Great crested grebes, lapwings, tufted ducks, coots, mute swans and mallards are some of the many species which can be found all year round.

In the summer months swallows, house martins and sand martins fly low over the water to feed. Autumn and winter is when large numbers of visitors either stop off on their migration or spend the winter feeding on our dams. Birds such as pochard, whooper swan, cormorant, goldeneye, goosander, teal, wigeon and several species of goose are a common sight from October through to March. Occasionally rarer visitors such as scaup or Mediterranean gull also turn up.

This year though has proved to be the best for a long time for summer and autumn visitors. The water level of Balgray Reservoir has been lowered by Scottish Water and the exposed mud has proved irresistible to many waders. This has resulted in sightings of species not often seen in the country park such as shelduck, pintail, little-ringed plover, knot, sanderling, dunlin and whimbrel. A group of black-tailed godwits also fed for several weeks in the autumn.

Perhaps as a result of increased visitors, we have also seen more raptors than usual. As well as a short-eared owl, peregrines have been spotted chasing waders and merlins seen pursuing large flocks of meadow pipits.



Tufted ducks – regularly seen in large numbers in the country park.

One highlight of the year occurred in September when a pectoral sandpiper visited for a few days. This was a rare visit of this North American species, but even this was trumped in mid-September by the sighting of a grey phalarope which was blown in from the Atlantic after storm Ali.

During 2018 we recorded more than 100 species of bird in the country park and, no doubt, we also missed a few others.

# Get active opportunities

WITH SPRING HOPEFULLY ON THE HORIZON, IT IS usually the time of year when we think about getting out and about a little bit more. So it is a good time to give our two regular activities a plug.

Our weekly health walk takes place all year round on a Wednesday morning. Starting at 10am, the walk takes a little under two hours. We start at the World Buffet Restaurant car park, Corselet Road, Darnley, before heading through Darnley Mill and Waulkmill Glen woodlands and up to the Barrhead dams. The walk takes in Waulkmill Glen, Littleton and Ryat Linn reservoirs before heading back.

Believe it or not our first taster walk from Darnley took place in September 2009, so we will be celebrating our tenth birthday this year! In that time we have welcomed close to 4,000 walkers.

For those of you looking for some practical volunteering activities our conservation group might be just what you are after. The group meets every second Thursday at 10am, again starting at the World Buffet car park, and we usually finish off at about 2pm with a break for



A winter walk up to Waulkmill Glen Reservoir.

lunch in-between. Practical tasks vary throughout the year depending upon what needs done, but activities can include clearing vegetation, repairing paths and creating wildlife habitats and structures. You provide the enthusiasm and we supply the tools, materials and guidance.

You can get more information about the work of the conservation group by contacting the countryside ranger. Future dates are also listed at [www.damstodarnley.org/volunteering-opportunities](http://www.damstodarnley.org/volunteering-opportunities)

## Spotlight on the grey phalarope

### Grey phalarope facts:

- **Feed off lice from the backs of whales or even walruses.**
- **Known as the red phalarope in North America due to their brightly coloured breeding plumage.**
- **The male and female roles are reversed; it is the male who incubates the eggs and raises the chicks. This allows the female to breed again with a different male.**



Grey phalarope in its breeding colours.

THE GREY PHALAROPE (*PHALAROPUS FULICARIUS*) IS an Arctic breeding wader belonging to the same family as sandpipers, snipe and the other two phalarope species. It is the only phalarope species to migrate entirely over the sea, with the others migrating over land. It spends up to 11 months of the year at sea, coming to land only to nest.

Grey phalarope breed in the high Arctic (Greenland,

Northern Siberia, Canada, Svalbard and Iceland) and migrate south to South Africa and western South America. Populations from Canada and Greenland pass the UK and Ireland and end up being recorded during autumn gales (we have Storm Ali to thank for blowing in the one spotted at Balgray Reservoir). We were very lucky as there are only around 200 records per year in the UK.

# 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.

## Dams to Darnley orienteering

Saturday 16 March, start anytime between 11am and 12.30pm

**Description:** Did you know we have an orienteering course in the country park? This is your chance to try orienteering at this easy, family event.

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

The event will be signposted from the car park.



## Easter's eggciting event

Tuesday 9 April, 1-3pm

**Description:** Why not join us for some Easter fun and games on this family event? We can decorate our eggs and even go on a chocolate egg hunt.

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



## A spring walk

Sunday 28 April, 11am-1pm

**Description:** Join the countryside ranger on this easy stroll looking for signs of springs. Maybe we will spot some bluebells or summer visiting birds. Will the snowdrops have gone? Or perhaps just come along for the walk.

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



## Newts in our nets

Saturday 18 May, 2-4pm

**Description:** Come along for a pond dip looking for newts, toads, frogs and some of the other beasties that live in our pond. Maybe you will be lucky and catch one of our water scorpions or great diving beetles.

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



## Aliens in the park

Sunday 23 June, 1-3pm

**Description:** There are quite a number of plant and animal species that have found their way to the country park, not from outer space, but from other countries. Some of them can cause problems for our own native species. On this walk we will try and discover which ones are classed as naturalised or invasive.

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



## Big butterfly count

Sunday 28 July, 2-4pm

**Description:** Take part in this 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.



## Home-made homes

Saturday 24 August, 11am-2pm

**Description:** Join in our ever popular summer shelter den building event. Bring along your lunch and have a picnic al fresco. All building materials and guidance supplied, but not the picnic! So bring one with you.

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



## KEY CHART



No booking required



Booking required



Wear suitable clothing



Bring a packed lunch

## 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](http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/dataprotection). If you wish a paper copy please let us know by contacting us at [dpo@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk](mailto: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](http://www.eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk/strategyprivacy).

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