

Spring is blooming here!



A sea of snowdrops.

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

Inside you will find:

- Winter events look back
- Country park update
- Wildlife witter
- Digging in the dirt
- Horse hacking
- Spotlight on snowberry
- Spring events calendar

The next edition of Wagtail will be out in summer 2015.

What a winter

IT WAS A SOAKING 'spooky Saturday' but lots of fearless ghosts and ghouls came out for a woodland walk with scary stories.

We had lots of organisations along to our 'eco fair' including RSPB, Open Air Laboratories Network, Hesslehead Wildlife Rescue, Butterfly Conservation, Glasgow University Centre for Open Studies, Glasgow Museums, Cats Protection and Rouken Glen Park.

Our 'beautiful baskets' truly were! It was a lovely day and everyone made a willow basket to take home.

'Christmas crafts' involved more willow weaving, this time into wreaths decorated with pine, holly, ivy and berries.

To welcome in the New Year we walked from Darnley Mill to Balgray Reservoir and back



The beginnings of a beautiful basket.

discussing country park developments and priorities. It was really like 'walking in a winter wonderland' as the weather changed from sunshine to hail to blizzards and back again.

In February we fought through the sleet and wind and flocked to Balgray Reservoir to spot wintering visiting birds and our residents. Even in the terrible conditions we saw 13 different species including dipper, goosander, buzzard and great crested grebe.

Country park update

VISITORS TO WAULKMILL Glen Reservoir are likely to have seen work being undertaken to the historic octagonal tower forms part of the reservoir's Victorian infrastructure; the valves that it contains are used to control the water level. The draw-down tower, along with the reservoir itself, its associated sluice and regulating house, is a Category A listed structure under the list of important buildings drawn up by Historic Scotland.

Following an inspection to assess the structural condition of the tower, undertaken on

behalf of Scottish Water, it became clear that a number of repairs were needed. In particular missing stone roof slabs required to be replaced. The metal roof trusses also needed replacing.

Because of the tower's historic status Scottish Water were required to secure listed building consent from East Renfrewshire Council to allow the works to be undertaken. Importantly this sought to ensure that missing roof slabs would be replaced using stone matching the existing ones.

The works are anticipated to be completed later in 2015.



Waulkmill Glen Reservoir draw-down tower.

Spotlight on park wildlife

Eilidh & Joe's wildlife witter

THERE IS STILL A GREAT deal of wildlife to be spotted over winter in the country park. Dippers, tufted ducks and great crested grebes are all regularly seen, in addition to our resident kingfishers. Since the start of the year whooper swans have been in and around the dams. These winter visitors

are escaping the bitter Arctic weather at this time of year. Large flocks of both Canada geese and goosanders have also been spotted and a male stonechat was seen hanging around the car park at Balgray Reservoir.

Notably our local bird recorder spotted a yellow-legged gull amongst the



Stonechat.

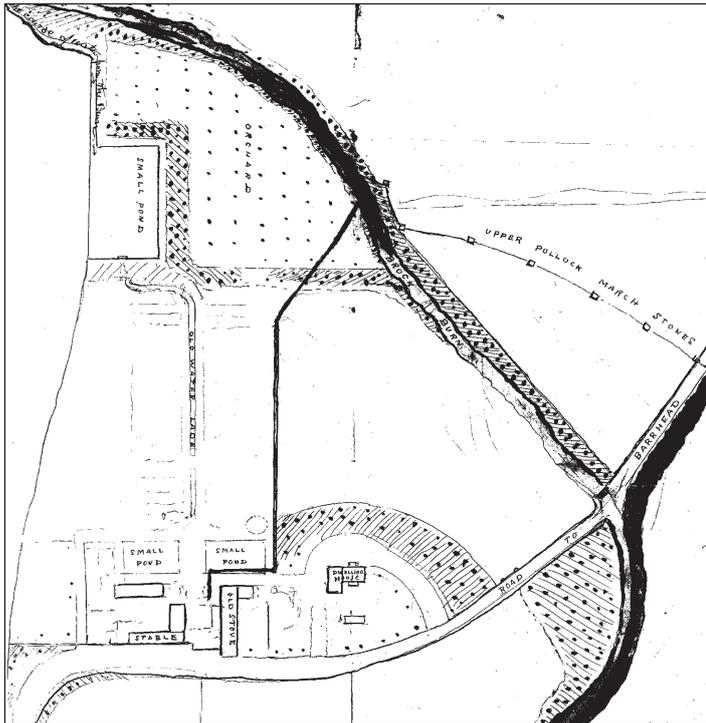
many other gulls on Balgray Reservoir. This bird is more commonly found around the Mediterranean and is difficult to tell apart from our herring gull.

Our resident herons have been busy repairing their nests since January. Herons are one of the first birds to lay eggs, often as early

as January.

We always look forward to the first snowdrops appearing and this year we saw our earliest ones on 5 February. Another flower that was out in February was winter aconite, a lovely small yellow flower of the woodland floor. This is the first time we have spotted winter aconite in the country park. It was seen in amongst snowdrops at the site of the former Darnley House. We believe that this is no coincidence, as Darnley House had large, formal gardens. Neither snowdrops nor winter aconite are native plants, but were often planted in gardens of large houses particularly in the Victorian & Edwardian era.

Digging in the dirt



Darnley House, as drawn from memory in 1863.

WE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN clearing snowberry from the country park with our volunteers (see the article on the next page). The snowberry was growing on the site of the old Darnley House and associated buildings. There is no visible trace of the house but some of the out-building remains can still be seen along the

path we call 'the avenue'. The house was originally a residence for the manager of the Darnley Bleachfields, which were bought by Charles Tennant around 1785. It was Tennant and Charles Macintosh (he of the waterproof raincoat) who invented bleaching powder here at Darnley. This transformed the process

of bleaching cloth; what before could take months now took days. Tennant expanded the house and it was further extended by a new owner in 1819. The whole site included workers houses, a laundry, boiling houses, starchworks, pigsties and later byres and stables. When the bleachworks were sold again in 1840 the buildings became a small country estate.

Whilst removing the snowberry many interesting finds started to turn up. Pieces of drains and possibly gutters were found. Bricks which appeared to be in situ and seemed to be a possible courtyard or floor were seen in a few places. We also found a few beautiful blue glazed tiles and, best of all, a pair of ladies leather shoes. These shoes had double tongues and eyelets for laces or ribbons. They were also decorated with beading. We think they were possibly late Victorian in age. We have handed the finds into the Glasgow Museum Resource Centre in Nitshill and will keep you updated on what they say.



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**

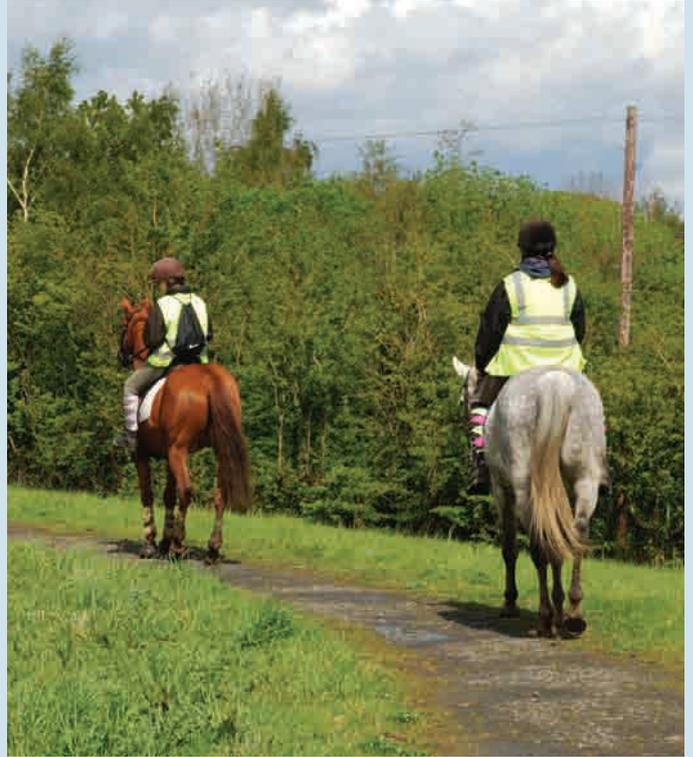
Outwith office hours call 'Clean Glasgow' on **0800 027 7027** or East Renfrewshire 'Ring and Report' on **0800 013 0076**

Horse hacking

ON THE 12 APRIL THE BRITISH HORSE SOCIETY (BHS) and the countryside rangers are holding an event to promote the country park to horse riders. There will be a short (3.5km) and a long (12.5km) self-guided route that riders can take their horses on. The routes encompass beautiful green space and also take in the industrial heritage of the country park, namely the Barrhead dams and viaduct.

The ride is a fundraiser for the BHS Faith, Hope and Charity campaign. The campaign funds the rescue, rehabilitation and education of ponies that have been let down by people so that they can go on to lead productive healthy lives. Entries are priced at £20 per rider with an additional £10 raised in sponsorship to be paid on the day. To register or for more details please contact the countryside ranger service, details can be found on the back page.

If you do not have a horse you can come along on the day and meet some of these majestic creatures, together with their riders. You can also find out more about the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the country park.



Riders enjoying the country park.

Spotlight on snowberry

Snowberry facts

- **In the late nineteenth century snowberry was widely planted as cover for game-birds.**
- **The berries are poisonous to humans if eaten in large quantities (so we do not recommend it).**
- **The leaves are a food plant of the deaths-head hawk-moth caterpillar.**



Chipping the snowberry.

OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS YOU MAY HAVE noticed the country park volunteers tirelessly digging out snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) in the area of the old Darnley House. Snowberry, a member of the honeysuckle family, is a non-native plant brought to the UK from western North America as a garden shrub in 1817.

Today it is a popular garden plant with small white/pink bell shaped flowers in summer followed by distinctive white berries in autumn. Snowberry is now widely naturalised across Great Britain and northern Europe. It spreads by steady vigorous suckering, forming

a dense thicket under which no other plants will grow. It is important to remove this non-native plant to conserve a more varied habitat for our native plants, which include beautiful bluebells and wild garlic.

We are controlling snowberry in the best way possible. Volunteers have been cutting and digging out vast stands of the plant. These cuttings have been chipped to stop any suckering and the countryside rangers will then use herbicide to treat any re-growth in summer. Hopefully, this means next year we will have a more diverse and colourful carpet of wildflowers.

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.

Easter funday

Thursday 9 April, 1– 3pm



Description: Egg decorating, egg-stical course, nest building and much, much more. There will be fun and games for all the family and maybe even a chocolate egg or two!

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

Horsing around

Sunday 12 April, 10am – 4pm



Description: The British Horse Society is coming to introduce riders to the country park. Bring your horse for a hack and a self-led ride on our multi-use paths in the beautiful countryside. Our just come along and meet these amazing animals. *This is a BHS fundraising event. See the article on the previous page for details, including entrance fee.

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

Bed time bugs

Tuesday 14 April, 7.30 – 9.30pm



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

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

The early bird...

Sunday 26 April, 5 – 7am



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

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

Picture this

Saturday 9 May, 10am – 12.30pm



Description: A day in May, walking around the country park photographing its wonderful wildlife, terrific trees and limitless landscapes. If you do not have a camera of your own you can borrow one from the countryside rangers, just ask when booking.

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

Frogs and snails and stickleback tales

Saturday 30 May, 1 – 3pm



Description: Discover the country park's wonderful wetlands on this fun filled family pond dip. Take a closer look at some of the beasties that live in our ponds.

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

Treasure hunt

Saturday 13 June, 10am – 1pm



Description: Remember Aneka Rice and her helicopter? Well, we have neither, but join us anyway as we follow clues and a map to solve our very own treasure hunt puzzle.

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

Damsels in distress

Sunday 28 June, 1 – 3pm



Description: Did you know that we have at least five species of damselfly and several species of dragonfly in the country park? Join us to find out more!

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

KEY CHART



Booking required



Wear suitable clothing



Bring binoculars



Bring torch



Bring camera

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.