

## Good News

### Effective countryside management brings rewards across the county.

The “Tattie Patch”, a meadow in Teesdale is showing an abundance of new wildflowers following a period of over fifteen years of effective countryside management.

The site was originally dug to remove the copious amounts of Meadowsweet growing there, a pretty plant with scented flowers which had become coarse and dominating, reducing the potential for biodiversity.



Meadowsweet has a pretty white flower and sickly-sweet smell.

After the meadow was dug, it was reseeded by both Parks and Countryside staff and volunteers with wildflowers as part of the Heart of Teesdale Landscape Project which ran from 2010 to 2016.

Since then, year on year, the meadow has continued to be cut and raked leading to the abundance of wildflowers we see there today. Wildflower meadows of this quality are vital for wildlife, providing valuable food sources and homes for invertebrates, birds, bats, rodents, and small mammals.

The progression of the site shows how funding, perseverance and hard work really pays off!



‘Tattie Patch’ wildflower meadow thriving.

Similar hard work for the benefit of wildflowers is currently well underway at our country parks of Waldridge Fell and Pow Hill. We are thrilled to have welcomed Andrew and his Dale’s Pony Charlie to undertake bracken rolling on both of these sites recently. Bracken rolling helps control the plant’s spread and dominance by damaging and weakening it. This is vital to the biodiversity

of heathland, moorland, and grassland habitats by allowing native plants and wildflowers to thrive. Great partnership working for the benefit of the countryside. Thank you Andrew and Charlie!



**Bracken Rolling has taken place at Pow Hill and Waldridge Fell.**

Over at Pity Me Carrs Local Nature Reserve staff and volunteers have been working to reduce the spread of bracken and other vegetation by manually cutting back. Clearance work here has opened up a variety of plants including the site's heather which had become smothered by other species. Heather provides wonderful nectar rich flowers that support valuable invertebrates such as butterflies and bees. It now has room to breathe at Pity Me, greatly strengthening its chances of survival.



**Heather at Pity Me Carrs.**

We look forward to seeing the positive impact of this effective management of our sites over the coming years, just as we have done with our 'Tattie Patch' meadow.

## **Durham Brass Festival bring musical magic to Wharton Park!**

We are thrilled to have once again hosted a series of popular events at Wharton Park this summer as part of the International Brass Festival.

On 6 July we danced our socks off in amphitheatre as we once again hosted Party in the Park. Despite some very wet weather, over 1000 people attended to experience the phenomenal performances from live bands visiting from around the world. Everyone was clearly getting into the spirit of the festival making it a real blast! What a fantastic night!



**Visitors enjoyed Party in the Park at Wharton Park.**

Party in the Park was followed by a series of brass concerts taking place every Sunday. Local bands played in our amphitheatre while visitors arrived to listen, relax in the great outdoors, and enjoy their picnics. Over 600 people came to see us throughout the series of concerts, making this summer's brass success as wonderful as ever!



**Summer Brass Concerts**  
**Wharton Park**  
**Trimdon Brass**  
Sunday 18 August, 1pm to 3pm

**brass**  
Durham

[brassfestival.co.uk](http://brassfestival.co.uk) **FREE to attend**

#DurhamBRASS     

Just one of the local brass band events that took place this summer at Wharton Park.

## The Rifles help improve access to Waldridge Fell.

In July, a group of eight members of the Rifles joined us at Waldridge Fell to facilitate our staff in works to improve visitor access.

The group were quick to get stuck in - repairing a bridge, improving fencing, and undertaking target hardening measures to deter prohibited off-road vehicles. They also carried out a variety of cutting back tasks to make paths more accessible to users.

Emma, our site Ranger for Waldridge Fell was thrilled with the work undertaken:

“It was fantastic getting all of those jobs sorted as most of the areas worked on were very difficult to access. It was an absolutely brilliant day! I was so impressed with how quickly the group worked and the huge amount of tasks we got completed.”

A huge thank you goes out to The Rifles for all their help. It was lovely to be able to work together and we are thrilled that those involved have shown a lot of enthusiasm to join our team again this winter.



The Rifles supported access improvement works at Waldridge Fell.

## Roman Fun for Love Parks Week!

This July, in celebration of Love Parks week our Programming Team hosted an event to promote Hardwick Park's unique Roman history.

Families visited the park's tower area to be shown how to have a go at our Roman game on the Love Exploring App to learn more about the 32-hectare Romano-British rural settlement that once existed in East Park. They then ventured through the underpass to start their quest! On their return they received a fun sticker and had their photos taken as successful Roman adventurers!

They also had the opportunity to meet Roman re-enactors who helped show them what clothes the Roman's would have worn and what objects they would have used. They also brought the history of the era to life with fun storytelling. Visitors were then given the opportunity to look at and handle replica objects, try Roman writing on wax tablets, and create themed crafts including decorating a sword and helmet, and sculpting their own pinch pots.

We had so much fun with the 100+ children and their families who came along to see us for the event. We hope they enjoyed the activities as much as we did!



Roman Event at Hardwick Park this July.

## Summer Holiday Clubs Inspire the younger generation.

This summer saw a very successful holiday programme delivered at Hardwick Park. Designed for 5–11-year-olds our 'Hardwick Holiday Club' was sold out, with children enjoying environmental games, and minibeast adventures, learning survival skills, enjoying pirate themed fun, and developing outdoor art techniques. Feedback from the sessions has been incredibly positive with many children keen to return next year:

“My little girl did all 5 days and has already asked to return next year. She loved the art archery and making a tie dye t-shirt’

“Eleanor had a fantastic time and loved telling me about her day at camp. She really enjoyed making new friends and would definitely do further camps at Hardwick Park.”

“Penelope said 'making friends, free play and pond fishing were here favourite things. Gabrielle said she loved the treasure hunt on

pirate day, picnic lunches and playing in the woods. Both girls want to come again”



Children enjoyed Hardwick Holiday Club.

For older children, those aged 11-16 years, a brand-new club was developed at the park this summer. This allowed both new people and previous Holiday Club attendees to return and engage in more involved activities to enhance their skills and bring positive change. The club, entitled ‘Hardwick Conservation Champions’ allowed the young people involved to investigate the park’s eco-systems, learn about plants and animals by setting a wildlife corridor, try moth trapping and recording, and take part in minibeast hunting and exploration quizzes. They also developed their practical skills by creating music makers and a water wall for the under 5’s, building a composter and bat boxes, and installing a new path around the recently updated West End Wildlife Pond.



Young people developed their countryside knowledge and skills as they became ‘Hardwick Conservation Champions.’

## National Grid volunteering at Blackhall Rocks.

The underlying geology at Blackhall Rocks Local Nature Reserve is Magnesian Limestone, meaning the site is teeming with rich Magnesian Limestone Grassland, a rare and vitally important habitat where wildflowers thrive, alongside invertebrates, birds, and small mammals.

At the end of August, we were thrilled to welcome volunteers from the National Grid on what was a lovely sunny day, to support an important fencing task at Blackhall. They did a fantastic job, putting in over 50 posts!

The new fencing will help contain the site's Belted Galloway Cattle which are currently grazing the grassland as part of a rotational conservation management programme.

With the new fencing in place and plenty of knapweed and yellow-rattle seed heads spotted, the cattle can now return and continue their important work in maintaining the wildflowers on site.

Thanks so much to all the corporate volunteers who have supported our work recently. It was lovely to hear that from their successful day, the team from the National Grid are keen to return sometime soon, and we look forward to welcoming them!

"I just wanted to say a huge thank you for organising the volunteering activity yesterday. I've received some great feedback from the group who thoroughly enjoyed the day. People were particularly impressed by your extensive botany knowledge and your cheerful attitude. At no point did anyone feel bored/ un-useful and that was largely due to your engagement throughout the day. I'm looking forward to working with you in the near future."

- Billy Duncan, National Grid.



National Grid Volunteers have undertaken fencing at Blackhall Rocks.

## Birthday party bookings doing well at Hardwick Park.

Our children's birthday party packages continue to go from strength to strength at Hardwick Park with enquiries flying in over recent months!

Word of mouth/recommendations for our parties is the most effective form of marketing, with many parents making bookings having heard wonderful things about parties in the park, or previously attended one for a classmate.

We are thrilled that our party offer is performing so well, especially as it has recently been updated to keep it fresh and exciting for our visitors!



Hardwick Park's birthday parties continue to grow.

## Adders Up at Pow Hill Country Park!

Our Rangers have teamed up with Durham Wildlife Trust this summer to support exciting new research into the genetic diversity and connectivity of adder populations across the North Pennines.

'Adders Up' is a special National Lottery and DEFRA funded project, being led by the North Pennines National Landscape in collaboration with Newcastle University.

Adders are characterised by small, fragmented populations with studies indicating widespread decline. One study has indicated that small adder populations could become extinct by 2032 if current rates of decline continue unabated. Small populations are more susceptible to inbreeding depression and genetic drift, resulting in a reduction in genetic diversity and a decrease in fitness. This in turn reduces a species' adaptive potential and increases its risk of extinction.

The new important research being carried out across the region will help identify populations most in need of genetic rescue and help prioritise conservation action.

Trained researchers have been working with our staff to collect DNA samples which involves taking three or four small scale clippings from the ventral (belly scales) of the snake. This is not painful or harmful to the adder and is akin to trimming your fingernails!



Adder DNA samples being taken at Pow Hill Country Park.

## Hardwick volunteers make their mark!

A huge thank you goes out to our Hardwick Park volunteers this summer for their tireless commitment, enthusiasm, and hard work in supporting the park's Assistant Rangers week on week.

Attending every Wednesday the volunteer team, spends hours litter picking, making improvements to our shrub beds and undertaking cutting back and other vegetation management tasks. Absolute superstars!



Volunteers undertake tasks every Wednesday at Hardwick Park.

## Education provision soars during summer term!

The Summer Term is always a very busy time for facilitated school visits and this year is no exception as we have welcomed 3,767 children across our parks.

Our facilitated workshop offer is varied offering a wide range of choices that help enhance a school's curriculum, get children into our parks, and ensure engagement with the natural world. The most popular options chosen by teachers this term were: Team Challenge, The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Summer in Bloom, Pirates, Bog Baby and Mini Beast Explorers. Regardless of workshop theme, all sessions are designed to help little visitors learn more about their environment, use the outdoors in a positive way and understand the huge part nature plays in our lives. The reviews of our sessions say much more than we ever can, with some hugely positive comments that have been wonderful to receive:

"I had the absolute joy of accompanying Frederick Nattress reception pupils on their trip today. Rachel was our guide and entertainer, and I cannot thank or recommend her enough. Inspirational, educational, and very animated."

"The experience energised the children and really helped engage them in their learning. It did this across the curriculum with improvements in English, Science and Geography. It has helped the children learn expected behaviours in shared outdoor spaces and developed their respect for nature."

"One of the best parts of the day was the workshop. Melissa led two fantastic sessions with our children. She really is a credit to your organisation - helpful, understanding of the additional needs of some of our children and fantastic at getting the class involved and interested. Yet again we had a thoroughly enjoyable day that the children have gained so much from. Thank you"



**3,767 pupils have attended facilitated school visits this summer term in our parks.**

## Rangers report great year for orchids.

A plentiful number of orchids have been found across our Parks and Countryside Estate this year.

There are over 45 species of orchid in the UK, but they are not always the easiest species of wildflower to spot! They occur in a variety of habitats but have tiny seeds which need just the



right conditions to germinate. The summer is the best time to spot orchids in full bloom, when they truly become one of the most beautiful flowers to see in the countryside.

Staff have spotted many orchids across our sites this year, and these have included the Common Spotted Orchid, Bee Orchid, and Frog Orchid. Just wonderful!



A variety of orchids have been spotted across the Parks and Countryside Estate this summer.

## New Boardwalk and Interpretation for Low Newton Junction.

A huge thank you goes out to the various funders who have supported recent improvement works at Low Newton Junction Local Nature Reserve, including Durham Woodland Revival and Northumbrian Water. Back in March we were able to report that significant work had been undertaken by the team to help the site's wetlands, including the opening up of ponds with coppicing and other vegetation clearance works.

Recent months have seen the final

improvements made on site as a part of this project. These have included the rebuilding of one of the boardwalks on site, as well as the design, production, and installation of a brand-new interpretation board.

Both staff and volunteers have been involved in construction work on the site's boardwalk, replacing timber boards and greatly enhancing visitor access around one of the site's major routes.

The interpretation board has been developed by the Service to provide a useful map of the site as well as introductory information about the importance of its species rich grassland, woodland habitats, and wetlands, as well as its significance as a home to rare and protected Great Crested Newts.



A new boardwalk and interpretation board have been installed at Low Newton Junction.

## Service supports summer fun and food programme.

Durham County Council's fun and food programmes support children and young people aged 5-16 years who are in receipt of benefits related free school meals. The programme provides enriching holiday activities combined

with healthy food.

Parks and Countryside have had a wonderful time supporting 'Food and Food' families with two projects this summer. The first was a new addition to Wharton Park's summer programme entitled 'Active Fridays' and was delivered in partnership with LK Health and Wellbeing. This saw a host of families, most of which would not otherwise have accessed our sessions, join in with a range of sporting activities each Friday on our MUGA and putting green. Each child also received a healthy lunch box as part of their day.



Children and young people enjoyed 'Active Fridays' at Wharton Park.

The second project delivered by the team was over in Shotton Colliery, this time in conjunction with Shotton Community Partnership. Under 11s worked with our Community Officer and Rangers to develop their understanding of the countryside and its importance through games, nature walks, crafts, shelter building, and

coastal exploring.

They undertook a number of trips around the county as part of their experience – the highlight being their Seaham trip where they managed to spot dolphins not far from the shore! Here they learned about the Turning the Tide Project which demonstrates how you can make a positive difference to the area where you live for the benefit of people and wildlife.



Children from Shotton Community Partnership enjoyed activities as part of 'Fun and Food'.

## Service helps community support butterfly conservation.

This summer we have worked hard to raise the profile of Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count with a series of public events to explore butterfly friendly habitats, count butterflies and find out more about them.

The activities engaged the public in conservation efforts by getting them involved in

sampling and recording butterflies for the national count which ran from 18 July to 10 August.

Citizen Science projects of this nature help us learn how the natural world is coping with changes to habitats and climate, focusing conservation efforts where they are needed the most.

Events took place at Broompark Picnic Area, Waldridge Fell Country Park and Low Newton Junction Nature Reserve and we were thrilled to see so many people come along to help.

Species spotted included: Small Skipper, Green Veined White, Peacock, Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Holly Blue, Red Admiral and much more besides!



Our community events have supported Butterfly Conservation's Big Butterfly Count.

## Staff skills sharing brings team building benefits.

Two team building days have taken place between our Education Staff and Assistant

Ranger Team.

Valuable for skill sharing, updating, and relationship building, the days were a huge success. For education session development staff learned new ways to light fires, and develop their skills in knot tying and bird and moth ID.

Staff also worked together on a series of practical tasks including raising the height of the outdoor learning shelter at Hardwick Park and constructing other valuable additions to the outdoor learning space - including a new water wall and revamped wobbly bridge.

Clearance work was undertaken to help vehicles access the area more effectively for the regular transporting of materials, while trees were also coppiced around Hardwick's Education Pond to help improve water quality.

The staff have commented on how great it was to work together to learn new skills while also getting some good jobs done!



Staff enjoy a skills sharing and team building day.