

## Seasonal Task Report: Summer, June – August

Summer is the season of the survey! The flowers are in full bloom, the trees and hedges have their leaves and the wildlife, plus the humans, are out and about! It makes it a lot easier to identify plants when their leaves and flowers are out and creatures tend to be more active and out in the open when the sun shines. It is also the time of year when we can really tackle invasive plant species: Himalayan Balsam. You will probably have seen it popping up near water courses, a tall leafy plant topped with pink flowers. This plant is a menace, so if you see it, please don't spread it!



### **Biodiversity Surveys**

*Aughrim Quarry, wildflowers: 4<sup>th</sup> June*

*Monagh Wood, legume family (pea): 9<sup>th</sup> July*

*Carnmoney Hill, wildflowers: 25<sup>th</sup> July*

*Carrs Glen, hedge and legume: 30<sup>th</sup> July*

*Ligoniel dams and park, hedge, legume and river fly: 13<sup>th</sup> Aug*

We were out on numerous sites on the Hills this summer carrying out biodiversity surveys. Surveys are an important part of conservation work as they let us know what flora and fauna are present on sites in the Hills. Obtaining this information helps to influence management programmes the BHP and landowners put in place so as to increase species numbers and maintain the land according to what is growing there. This summer we were looking for what species of wildflowers were present in the wildflower meadows at Carnmoney Hill and Aughrim Quarry. Carnmoney Hill was important as our survey indicated that the variety of different species had decreased since the last wildflower survey a year or two previous. This information allowed BHP to suggest a different management programme to help increase the diversity of species again. We carried out legume surveys in 3 different areas: Monagh Wood, Carrs Glen and Ligoniel Park. Legumes are a member of the pea family and include plants such as clovers and vetches. These plants are an important food source for many insects, including the marsh fritillary butterfly and lattice heath moth. Knowing the abundance of these plants can help us understand the populations of the butterfly and moth species. Additionally, we surveyed hedges for species abundance and gaps in Carrs Glen and Ligoniel Dams to help us build up a hedge map of the hills and know where to plant up gaps. Hedges are essential for wildlife in the hills. They act as a corridor allowing easy and safe movement for birds, bats and other

creatures, by linking the urban and fringe areas to the hills and beyond. They are also an important food source much of the year round and provide perfect nesting sites for birds. We also carried out a river fly survey at Ligoniel Dams to assess the quality of the water running through the Forth River.



### Visitor Surveys

*Cavehill: 25<sup>th</sup> June*

*Divis mountain: 23<sup>rd</sup> July*

*Ligoniel Dams: 20<sup>th</sup> Aug*

Visitor surveys are useful to the BHP to understand why people visit the hills, where they are from and which sites are the most popular. They are also an opportunity for the public to voice their views on what they enjoy and what improvements they think could be made. The information we gather can then be passed on to site managers to make decisions about site management and improvements for visitors.



### Hedge Weeding

*Ballycolin Road: 11<sup>th</sup> June*

*Carnmoney Hill: 22<sup>nd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> Aug*

Weeding hedges is necessary in summer as they can become swamped by other plants competing for light. Removing these plants gives the hedges a chance to grow well and bush up, especially when they are young or newly coppiced. Before I started my post, the volunteers lay a weed proof sheet at the base of the hedge along the Ballycolin road. This will be effective in keeping weed

growth down to give the new hedge the best chance possible at growing up strong and bushy. We also spent a good amount of time on Carnmoney Hill weeding the freshly coppiced hedge to prepare it for planting at the end of September.



### Path and Drain Maintenance

*Ligoniel Dams: 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> Aug*

With the plant growth spurts that come in the warmer summer months, the paths can often get overgrown. This makes it difficult and uninviting for visitors to walk through. The BHP Conservation volunteers come to the rescue and cut back the encroaching vegetation and over hanging branches to open up the paths and make it a more enjoyable walk! This is a really satisfying task when the paths are bad as you can really see the difference made!



## **Invasive Species Control: Balsam Bashing**

*Derriaghy Glen: 27<sup>th</sup> June*

*Glencairn: 2<sup>nd</sup> July*

*Belfast Castle: 16<sup>th</sup> July*

Himalayan Balsam, the pink flowered plant with the fun popping seed pods, what a deceptively terrible plant it is! Balsam is a highly invasive species that is often found by water courses. It is bad news for our natural environment as the plant is tall with large leaves so shades out other plants, reducing the species diversity. It also has a very shallow root system and dies back in the winter, exposing soil and river banks leaving the areas vulnerable to erosion. We keep the plants under control by pulling them out during the summer months, before they have gone to seed. This eventually exhausts the seed bank and is successful at eradicating the plant from the area. However, if there is a balsam population further upstream that we cannot control, it will keep coming back as the seeds are washed down in the water. What we can do is manage the population as high up the water source as possible so as to avoid seed being washed further on down to other water sources. We joined the Lagan Valley Regional Park volunteers at Derriaghy Glen to put a dent in the growth there. We were also up at Glencairn crawling amongst the brambles and nettles and cleared the plant entirely (as far as we could see!), NVTV also joined us for this task to find out what we get up to! We pulled a huge area of balsam at the Castle; it's such a noticeable difference when we manage to clear an entire area as it takes over so well!

