



National Trust

Spring Newsletter 2019  
Northern Ireland

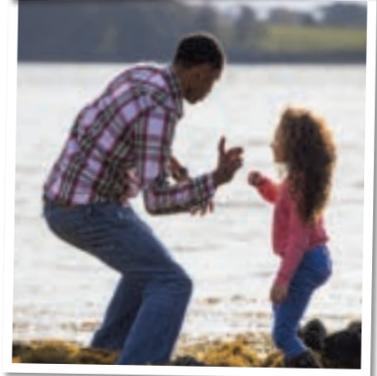
# Near you



Discarded banana skins which will take a month to decompose



Our rangers spend a lot of time picking up litter



## Taking action for the environment

Throughout our landscapes, in our rivers and loughs, along our coast and in our countryside, human activities have been pushing species to the edge and putting natural resources under unsustainable pressure. Securing nature's recovery is possible, but it will require ambition and long-term commitment from government and wider society.

We believe a healthy natural environment is the foundation of society's health, wellbeing and prosperity, and want to see new legislation for the environment throughout the UK.

A new and strong Environment Bill will be essential if the UK and its devolved countries are to become world leaders in looking after the environment for the long term.

With Brexit day approaching, we must ensure that in replacing EU laws, government sets ambitious direction and commitments to put nature first. Heather McLachlan, Regional Director for Northern Ireland said: 'A strong legal basis for the recovery of nature is particularly important in NI where there is no independent regulator for the environment – unlike the rest of the UK where Environment Agencies are separated from government departments.'

## Keeping the Mournes magical

Immortalised in song, known internationally and voted the nation's top walking destination, the Mournes are a special place for many. But have you ever considered that even a mountain needs looking after?

Based at Murlough National Nature Reserve, our team of four rangers and volunteers take care of around 1,400 acres of upland heath on the iconic Slieve Donard (Northern Ireland's highest peak at 850m) and adjoining Slieve Commedagh. Occurring at elevations over 750m, it is this heathland which makes the Eastern Mournes so special and designates them as an Area of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation, recognising their importance on a European scale.

As public interest in health, wellbeing and nature has grown, more and more people are treading the Mourne paths to enjoy a range of activities, from peak walking challenges to

bouldering. We estimate around 60,000 people a year walk the Glen River path to ascend Slieve Donard and our counters suggest that well over 100,000 people walk the other mountain paths in our care annually. As more people discover the natural beauty of the Mournes, more pressure is being put on the paths and surrounding vegetation, leading to erosion and damage of the priority habitat.

An increase in visitors also means an increase in rubbish – and lots of it! Most seasoned hikers know to respect the 'leave no trace' motto, but unfortunately some visitors don't follow this line of thought as Area Ranger Patrick Lynch explains: 'We collect several bags of rubbish from the Mournes each month, and the problem has grown in recent years. During the particularly good weather last summer the mountain was swamped with litter, and we were even finding discarded sleeping bags, tents, and scattered litter from one-time-only camping trips. I estimate we spend 56 hours a month just collecting rubbish, time which we could be spending on vital conservation and restoration work.'

'We'd like to see visitors take their rubbish home, including items you might not have even considered to be litter', Patrick continues. 'The number of orange and banana peels our rangers discover has been on the rise. You might think these foodstuffs are fine to discard, but it can take up to six months for an orange peel to decompose and one month for a banana. The process takes even longer when left on an exposed mountain top. The skins can also have a detrimental effect on local wildlife whose regular diet doesn't include tropical fruits.'

We already care for the Mournes through controlled grazing, regular habitat assessments, path maintenance, and projects with partners, such as rebuilding the Mourne Wall. To address increased visitor pressure, we've recently begun a project to improve the 2.5km of paths, reducing erosion and protecting this fragile and rare habitat.

The project is estimated to take two years with a budget of around £240,000. It should mean that visitors will have a more comfortable walk

along better paths, as well as helping the local flora and fauna to thrive.

In early 2019 we will recruit our first Mountain Rangers to lead the project and spend their days on the mountain – not your average day job. They'll be driving the project, repairing and creating new paths and monitoring erosion.

'It's always a treat when our small team gets to spend time working on what we affectionately call 'The Mountain', adds Patrick, 'but it's not an easy job. Some areas are inaccessible by vehicle and weather conditions can be challenging, but we believe, as custodians, it's both a privilege and a responsibility to look after the Mournes. The Donard paths project will ensure that future visitors and rare habitat and wildlife can continue to thrive, side by side.'

As members visiting the Mournes you can support the project by keeping to the designated paths and taking your rubbish home with you. Together we can care for this special place, ensuring future generations can enjoy the magic of the Mournes for years to come.

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The secret's out at Castle Ward





## In the picture

**Dr Bob Brown OBE**  
Regional Chairman

Is there anyone out there who doesn't live in the environment? If so, please get in touch – I'd be interested to meet them!

The rest of us do live in the environment, with its air, waters, foods, soils, nature and landscapes. So why do we hear "environment or the economy?" as though we have to choose between conservation and peoples' interests? It's not an either/or – the reality is that we're not just dependent on the environment, we're part of it.

Resolving these false dilemmas and offering ways in which people can reconnect with nature is at the heart of the National Trust's 'Land, Outdoors and Nature' programme. This recognises that everywhere in the UK, and certainly in Northern Ireland, nature is in trouble. However, with 174km (22%) of our coast, and about 12,000 ha (1% of Northern Ireland's landmass) in its care, the Trust has both an opportunity and a responsibility to play our part in giving nature and the environment a helping hand.

We have made significant progress already; examples include restoring dune grassland at Grangemore alongside the Bann estuary, wildflower meadow creation underway at Minnowburn and the removal of scrub and invasive species using the EU based agri-environment scheme. Training too, for staff and volunteers, and participation in the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, supporting bees and other insects on sites like Crom and Cushendun.

We are also committed to working in partnership with others to champion better and easier access to our countryside. This is really important: Northern Ireland sorely lacks the networks of paths and rights of way that folk in Britain and Europe take for granted, so we have an even greater role to play here, and will be working hard to increase our network of trails and outdoor opportunities.

This brings me back to the relationship between people and their environment. Recent decades have seen a gradual distancing of people from nature, in part due to the lure of technological entertainment indoors, the lack of opportunities, and the pressure of modern life.

So we have to reconnect. The title of our work 'Land, Outdoors and Nature' is well chosen. 'Outdoors' means us, experiencing the buzz of a summertime meadow, watching for the first snowdrops, hearing the dawn chorus. Getting really connected! It brings benefits in our physical well-being, our state of mind, our social contacts, and our love of our inherited landscapes. And to our economy.

By restoring nature, we're restoring people.

*Bob Brown*



## Restoring nature...securing our future health and wellbeing

We have all seen and heard the research that says nature is good for us, but many of us don't make the connection of how or why that actually is.

At a very basic level nature provides all those important things that mean that we can live well; clean air, clean water, fertile and productive soils. It is often down to how the land around us is managed that dictates whether or not it is giving us what we need. Each and every one of us depends on the quality of nature and the land around us.

So what has that got to do with the National Trust? As the single largest private landowner beyond government in Northern Ireland, we have a huge responsibility and role to play in the security of Northern Ireland's natural environment and the health and wellbeing of our community here. We manage that land through a very capable and expert ranger and countryside team, as well as working in partnership with some 100 tenant farmers to keep this land in as good a condition as possible.

Apart from direct land management, a large part of our work is focused on ensuring nature and land management here is given the priority, policy support and funding it needs. The

uncertainties of Brexit have not been helping. We have been, and will continue to work closely with the farming community here to find ways of making whatever deal we get work for nature and farming. This is because we believe that farmers and farming are at the heart of how we will restore nature for everyone's benefit.

Your support is crucial in enabling us to do this and all the other conservation work; whether you visit, buy a tea-towel, make a donation or volunteer your time, it all enables us to fulfil this commitment. On behalf of my team a huge thank you!

Managing land for nature is a big part of what National Trust do. Restoring nature is not 'a nice to do', it's a 'must do'. Fixing nature is not something we can do overnight; it will take years to mend and for nature to thrive. My commitment to you is that we will make the best use of our resources to do just that and stand up for nature, therefore standing up for the future health and wellbeing of all of us.

*J McEneaney*

**Heather McLachlan**  
Regional Director



## Red squirrel goes to Belfast Zoo

In October we transferred a male red under licence to Belfast Zoo where he'll provide fresh genes for the breeding program accompanying the existing females. The Ards Peninsula will then receive back new squirrels at some point this year and others will go for reintroduction to sites across Northern Ireland, all improving the genetic diversity of the remaining fragmented populations.

Success continues at Mount Stewart and the Ards Peninsula with red squirrel numbers continuing to rise. Additional locations are also being recolonised by our native red squirrels as they expand, following strategic monitoring, invasive species control, and longer-term

habitat restoration by our ranger and volunteer teams.

We are by no means out of the woods as proved by the 'August Tide' in 2018 where a significant number of non-native grey squirrels pushed through the buffer zones, leading to extensive incursions at the majority of red squirrel population locations as far as Portaferry.

After 17 months in the clear this showed how extremely vulnerable the area is to displacement and worst-case scenario, a squirrel pox outbreak. It certainly highlights the efforts of the teams to protect the reds; and thanks to the support of private landowners and public sighting reports, the teams are able to act swiftly.



## Wild success at Ploughman's Hill meadow

Last year, as part of our commitment to make our native-friendly spaces bigger and more connected, we took the bold decision to turn a 14-acre field at Ploughman's Hill within Mount Stewart Demesne into one of the largest wildflower meadows in Northern Ireland.

Wildflower meadows are some of our most important and diverse habitats, but unfortunately they have rapidly disappeared from our landscape over the past 60 years, owing to land-use intensification.

The field was formerly used for growing potatoes and cereal. Last May it was carefully prepared and sown with a native flora mix containing 21 species of wild flowers and seven species of grasses.

Despite a very dry summer, the field was transformed into a wash of colour during August with poppies, cornflowers, campion, and corn marigolds to the fore. The rich variety of plant life also attracted an

abundance of pollinators including many species of bees, butterflies and moths.

In early October the field was mowed and the crop scattered so that seeds would fall and once grazed will be trampled into the ground for germination next year. The remaining crop was baled and used as winter feeding for livestock, thus potentially spreading the wild flowers to other parts of the estate. It is also planned to create further small pockets of wildflower meadows across the estate this year.

We have been overwhelmed by the positive response to the meadow from our visitors, many of whom remember wildflower meadows from their childhoods. We have received visits from local farmers, housing associations, and schools, all of which are interested in replicating what we have done on parts of their own land – a real lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.



## New micro moth discovery at Giant's Causeway

A tiny 5mm rare moth that can camouflage itself to protect it from predators has been discovered in Northern Ireland for the first time.

The white-speckled smoke micro moth (*Narycia duplicella*) is a fairly common species throughout England and Wales, extending to Northern Scotland, but has never before been recorded in Ireland.

Dr Cliff Henry, area ranger for the North Coast, discovered the moth nestled into the wall of his office at Innisfree Farm, next door to the Giant's Causeway, in October.

He says: 'Few other insects can match moths for disguise. I only spotted it when a speck of green on a clean part of the wall caught my eye. When I took a closer I look I realised the speck was

moving! It's incredible to think that this moth will have travelled 15 miles or more across the sea from Scotland to arrive here before breeding.'

Dr Cliff sought second opinions from experts in Belfast and England, who through microscopic investigation and sharing photographs were able to confirm its identity. The siting will now be fed into the global database via CEDaR (Centre for Environmental Data Recording), which helps us get a picture of how all wildlife is doing.

Dr Cliff concluded: 'As the UK's largest conservation charity, restoring and looking after nature is at the heart of everything we do. So this is a very exciting discovery for us, and we'll be keeping a close eye on these micro moths to ensure that they thrive in what is a new habitat for them.'



## Alien invader at Portstewart Strand

Over the winter months you may have seen heavy machinery at work in the dunes at Portstewart Strand. This was part of a project to part-remove sea buckthorn, a non-native coastal shrub that threatens the native wildlife in the dunes.

The site has been declared an Area of Special Scientific Interest owing to the rare and fragile habitats and wildlife that it supports, and the biggest danger this unique eco-system faces is the highly invasive shrub, sea buckthorn.

A true alien invader, sea buckthorn is characterised by dense thorny branches and sometimes striking orange berries. If left unmanaged it will readily colonise the sand dunes, threatening the survival of the rare plants (such as the seaside centaury and bee and frog orchids) and 18 recorded species of butterfly that live here.

The buckthorn control project was carried out in partnership with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)

who funded the scheme, and covered approximately 3.5 hectares (8.6 acres) of dunes, including some lands within the golf course. Clearance areas were specifically selected to minimise disturbance to any wintering/feeding birds, including a roost site for herons which was not cleared. Every care was also taken to ensure cut branches were disposed of on site by controlled burning on the freshly cleared areas, protecting any existing grassland sites.

Ongoing shrub management will include light chemical spraying of any root re-growth and cattle grazing to keep the dune grassland closely cropped, allowing specialist dune flowers, butterflies and moths to flourish.

Another advantage of this clearance work is that it has opened more areas of the dunes for trails that provide very special views of the Bann Estuary, still the Strand's best-kept secret.



## Forest School Leaders project gets underway

Thanks to the generous legacy left to us by Mr Roland Bleakley, a fantastic new environmental learning programme has begun at Mount Stewart and will run for at least the next five years.

Working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Forest School Association, staff and volunteers will gain their accreditation as Forest School Leaders. They will use their new skills to engage participants in the beautiful surroundings of Mount Stewart Demesne and provide active and fun learning opportunities around biodiversity and the

challenges we face in maintaining our varied habitats.

The focus will be on how we can all play our part in creating, looking after and valuing a healthy and beautiful natural environment. Over six weekly visits, participants will develop knowledge of the natural world in their area and skills such as safe tool use and fire lighting which they will use to help us improve the condition of priority habitats. We will seek to inspire and support our learners to deepen their connection with nature and to apply their new skills and knowledge to looking after their own places, as well as helping to look after ours.

## News in brief

### Pay and display at Murlough NNR

At Murlough National Nature Reserve we've introduced new pay and display machines in our car-parks, meaning as members, you can support us all year round. Not only will the machines support our conservation work at the nature reserve, they'll also help us get a better idea of how many visitors are visiting each year.

As members, you'll always park for free – simply scan your membership card using the machine to receive your free parking ticket. Every time you scan your card, we receive £2.50. All the money collected goes towards our conservation projects like vital restoration to the boardwalk and the five year sea buckthorn removal project – so get scanning!

### New facilities at Derrymore

Planning permission for new public toilet facilities in Derrymore House has been granted and works to have these installed are expected to begin early in 2019. Following completion of the works there will be both mixed use and accessible toilets provided, enhancing the visitor experience at this popular estate.

### 10 years of renewables

In September we celebrated 10 years of renewables in Northern Ireland. During that time we have successfully removed the largest three oil users in the region including the largest oil user in the Trust. We have removed oil from all mansions and have successfully completed 26 projects, eliminating the environmental risk of stored oil by removing around 23 oil tanks across 12 properties. Northern Ireland is currently the second highest region in terms of % renewables with over 35% of our energy now coming from renewables and more exciting projects in the pipeline.



## BBC'S Home Ground to broadcast live from Mount Stewart

Home Ground, BBC Northern Ireland's leading rural affairs magazine series, will be broadcast live from Mount Stewart for three special episodes in May 2019.

For the first time, the programme's producers have been commissioned to create a live series and they have selected Mount Stewart as the host venue.

The series will air live on BBC One in the prime time slot of 7-8pm, replacing the One Show, during the first week in May. The Home Ground Live team will be broadcasting from Mount Stewart and the shores of Strangford Lough on Monday 6,

Wednesday 8 and Friday 10 May 2019, and we're throwing open the gates of the estate and inviting visitors to come and watch.

It will be a fantastic opportunity to share with a large Northern Ireland audience the important spring conservation work our rangers and gardeners do, from planting bulbs to taking care of the wildlife waking up from winter hibernation.

There will be lots of opportunities for visitors to get involved, and we'll have a programme of music and entertainment around the live broadcasts, so do come along and join us. Keep an eye on our website for more information.



## Historic trail to reopen at Mount Stewart

The ranger team at Mount Stewart has been hard at work over the past eight months working on the next phase of walking trails, focusing on the north-west section of the Demesne.

A new three-and-a-half-mile trail will open to the public this spring, offering visitors the opportunity to wander through a wooded landscape full of wildlife such as red squirrels, and carpets of native woodland flowers, such as primrose. The path is part of a historic network of trails that were in private ownership up to 2014 and were primarily used by the Stewart family for horse riding.

The new trail is accessed off the Ploughman's Hill Walk and forms part of a network of 11 miles of trails open to the public at Mount Stewart. We plan to launch the latest phase of trails at the start of May and there will be a series of exciting events at Mount Stewart to coincide with this. Please check our website for details nearer the time.



Our Director-General Hilary McGrady pictured at Crom



## Hilary hosts member event at Crom

Our Director-General Hilary McGrady hosted an audience with local members and supporters in Fermanagh at the end of September. Hilary, who is from Northern Ireland, chose the magnificent Crom Estate as the venue for this event, naming it one of her favourite places in the National Trust.

Around 45 members and supporters joined Hilary and members of the team in Fermanagh to hear from her about becoming Director-General, and the influence of her Northern Irish roots on that journey.

During the intimate morning event, she shared why Crom, with its harmony of

parkland, woodland, water and historic buildings, has been such an important place in her past, and how it inspires her vision for the future of our special places.

General Manager Jim Chestnutt delivered an inspiring talk on the restoration and conservation work that took place across the Fermanagh portfolio in 2018 and laid out his exciting plans for the next few years.

To see why Hilary loves Crom and explore its tranquil beauty for yourself, why not experience an unforgettable stay in one of our seven holiday cottages. For availability and booking search National Trust Holidays online.



## Charley the Cheetah gets new spots

If you've ever explored the gardens at Mount Stewart you're bound to have come across the animals of The Ark in the Italian gardens.

The Ark Club, formed by Edith, Lady Londonderry in 1915, was a safe haven for her and her friends during the war. In later years it evolved into a sort of secret society (by invitation only) bringing together people from all walks of life including politicians, writers, artists and soldiers to give them a chance to escape and have fun. The name sparked the idea of having an animal alter ego for every member of the club. Edith's husband, the 7th Marquess of Londonderry became 'Charley the Cheetah', Winston Churchill was 'Winnie the Warlock', and Lord Alistair

Sutherland-Leveson-Gower was 'Ali the Alligator'.

The nicknames were immortalised at Mount Stewart in the form of Thomas Beattie's concrete creations, representing members in the form of statues, who were all brought together by the Ark, which is staged front and centre among its most prevalent members.

Exposed to weather extremes in the garden, Charley's condition had seriously deteriorated, but thanks to a generous donation of £4,500 we have been able to have an exact replica of Charley cast and installed at Mount Stewart.

Cliveden Conservation undertook the work at their English studio, casting

a new Charley the Cheetah from the mould from which he was originally created. The process involved several steps including building an armature (a framework on which the sculpture is moulded), casting, securing the cheetah to a base, and fitting his tail. Visitors will be able to see Charley back in the garden at Mount Stewart in the spring.

As a conservation charity we depend on generous donations from our supporters to fulfil our conservation objectives. This project was only possible thanks to the generosity of one such member.

If you would like more information on our conservation work and how a gift from you can help, please contact [wendy.elliott@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:wendy.elliott@nationaltrust.org.uk).

## Polishing up our conservation skills

We are delighted to welcome two new conservation advisors to Northern Ireland in spring 2019. The first visit will be by furniture conservation advisor John Wynn Griffiths, and the second by paper conservation advisor Nicola Walker. During their visits John and Nicola will take a whistle-stop tour of each of our mansion houses to see our collections in context and meet with house staff and volunteers to learn more about our large and unique collections. We will use the opportunity

to hold a training day for all regional staff, upskilling them in best practice on caring for wooden floors and book handling. The advisors will also have an opportunity to understand any issues first hand.

These visits are a vital part of 'looking after what we have got', and the expertise and advice given on these trips helps inform our regional preventive and remedial conservation work programme.



## 18th-century Frizzell's Cottage restoration complete

In summer 2017 we embarked on a restoration project to completely refurbish Frizzell's Cottage, a grade B1 listed building located at the entrance to Adress House in County Armagh.

The cottage passed to the Trust in 1996 but was last lived in during the 1980's when two elderly sisters of the name Frizzell resided there.

Time had not been kind to this mud-walled thatch; overgrown with vegetation, scorched by fire damage and boarded up with metal grills, the building had fallen into a state of disrepair, resulting in it being added to the 'at risk' register for listed buildings in Northern Ireland.

Thanks to a legacy gift, we secured the funds to begin the important

work of restoring the property to a livable-in condition, securing its survival for many years to come.

The project took 18 months to complete, and we worked in conjunction with Chris McCollum, Heritage Building Surveyor, and Robert Weir, builder, to restore this hidden gem using traditional techniques and materials, such as mud-brick and thatch.

Many of the mud-bricks at Frizzell's needed to be replaced, and we were delighted to welcome a team of staff and volunteers on site who mixed clay with straw and water (using their feet!), before putting the mixture into moulds to make the new bricks.

Other conservation works to restore the cottage included roof timber repairs

followed by re-thatching; lime render; new sash windows, doors and floors; and a new extension to side and rear.

Every care has been taken to maintain the several notable 'vernacular' features surviving within Frizzell's Cottage that reflect the period style of the region; for example the brace beam across the central bay and the jamb wall with spy hole.

The result is a beautiful building that respects the character and tradition of the original design, while incorporating modern-day comforts to create a unique two-bedroom property. For more information on renting this period property please call 028 9751 0721.



## Castle Ward celebrates the remarkable life of Mary Ward

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the sad death of Mary Ward. Married to Henry Ward who later became 5th Viscount Bangor, Mary was an extraordinary woman from an extraordinary family. Born in 1827 in County Offaly, she spent a great deal of time with her relatives, the Earl and Countess of Rosse at Birr Castle and watched in 1849 the building of Leviathan, then the largest reflecting telescope in the world.

Mary met with outstanding astronomers and engineers and developed her childhood interest in natural history. In her late 20s she published an innovative book on how to use a microscope to reveal the wonders of the natural world, and went on to write and illustrate several more books.

A devoted mother of 11 children (six of whom reached adulthood), and loving wife of the gentle and supportive Henry, Mary and her family often visited Castle

Ward. Her personal album includes drawings she made of her family and of Castle Ward, as well as many other fascinating documents and photographs. This album, as well as her own microscope, can still be seen at Castle Ward and will be central to a display about her life and family which you can experience at Castle Ward this season.

Mary's death at the young age of 42 was one of the world's first accidents involving a road-based steam-powered vehicle, which had been built by her engineering cousins at Birr. The anniversary of her passing is an opportunity to celebrate her life and to ensure that her contribution to scientific learning is appreciated and treasured.

Watch out for events and activities at Castle Ward based on the natural world and astronomy; come and see Mary's beautiful, delicate and precise watercolours and drawings, and share the ups and downs of her remarkable life.



Staff at the annual ranger conference pictured outside Glenmona House, Cushendun

## Supporting our champions of nature conservation

Kevin Duncan, regional ranger champion for Northern Ireland reveals how our rangers are being equipped with the skills needed to deliver our ambition to restore a healthy, beautiful, natural environment...

Rangers play a vital role on the front line of nature conservation; connecting to local communities and visitors and meeting challenging targets within our 'Land, Outdoors and Nature' strategy.

We need to ensure we support our rangers in their roles, developing their skill base so they have the necessary tools, knowledge and confidence to fuel new ways of thinking and challenge the status quo.

Last year I organised our annual Ranger Conference in the idyllic village of Cushendun, placing skills development and sharing of best practice at the heart of the itinerary.

One of our Belfast rangers Colin Barret led practical training sessions in the use of scything, encouraging regeneration of this traditional method of grassland management. We had practical sessions on foraging as a method to engage people with the natural environment and to inspire further participation. We also carried out grassland and butterfly species monitoring surveys.

Across the year our rangers also participated in regional plant identification courses and wildlife bioblitzes to improve their field skills. Training has also been provided in the use of Geographical Information Systems to aid the delivery of our Land Outdoors and Nature ambitions.

Moving forward, I believe building capacity within our rangers, by providing more opportunities for continued personal development, will help ensure we keep pace of the many challenges ahead and deliver on our ambitions for nature and people.



Roberta Rea pictured with the staff at Springhill

## 25 years caring for Springhill

Roberta Rea has been working with the Trust as a Conservation Assistant in Springhill for 25 years. Here she shares some memories from her time to date with her Springhill 'family'...

### Why did you decide to work in conservation?

Ever since I was a little girl I helped out at home. I enjoyed house work. It was second nature for me what with growing up around my extended family. I would look out for my elderly neighbours and help them with their housework, even if it was just making a bed or cleaning a floor. I could feel my neighbours' gratitude and I felt the value of a day's work.

### What led you to working for the National Trust?

I left my job as a sterilising surgical aid for the NHS in the 80s to start a family. Once my kids were old enough, myself and a friend decided

to apply for two Conservation Assistant posts at Springhill House. A mere stone's throw from the village I lived in and grew up in as a child. The rest, as they say, is history. We were offered the part-time posts and I've been looking after Springhill House and its contents ever since.

### What have been the highlights of your career to date?

I've met and worked with some wonderful people at Springhill. I've made friendships that I will hold forever. One of my favourite memories would be of travelling to London with the Trust to attend a service with the Queen Mother celebrating Octavia Hill. I also met celebrity chef Jenny

Bristow who came to Springhill for two days during the summer to demonstrate her recipes for the public. The smell of the baking was phenomenal. It was a wonderful event and one I'll never forget. The people that work here day in day out are like family to me, and Springhill has always felt like home.

### What's your favourite National Trust place and why?

Springhill, of course. I know everyone, and as I drive up the oak and beech-tree-lined avenue to start my shift I am always welcomed like a long-lost relative. It's the feel of home. It's beautiful.

## Introducing People's Landscapes

In 2019, the National Trust will be launching a new programming theme to celebrate the great outdoors and our connection to it, following the success of the Women & Power programme this year and Prejudice & Pride in 2017.

Originally inspired by the bicentenary of Peterloo in Manchester, the People's Landscape programme will encourage us to look deeper at our landscapes, beyond the 'green and pleasant land', to reveal the hidden histories the land has witnessed and uncover the stories beneath our feet.

Ingrid Samuels, Historic Environment Director for the Trust, describes the programme: 'The People's Landscapes provides an exciting opportunity to reveal hidden histories. No landscape across England, Wales or Northern Ireland has been untouched by

humans, and, though our open spaces are appreciated for their beauty every day, their deeper stories often remain undiscovered. The programme will invite you to understand how our landscapes have been shaped and how they in turn have shaped both local communities and our larger national histories.'

Locally, we will be exploring and uncovering landscapes, and encouraging everyone to come and interact with some of the many places that we care for across Northern Ireland. The landscape has played an important role in some of the most dramatic moments of our heritage and shaped our communities and lives. The People's Landscape will offer a programme of exciting activities and special events to connect us with our history and landscape. Keep an eye on our website for details as the programme develops throughout the year.



## Time for tea at Rowallane Garden

Rowallane Garden is creating an exciting new feature seating area outside the café for visitors to enjoy. The current outside entertaining space consists of a simple paved area that does little to reflect the character and Spirit of Place of the house and gardens.

Inspired by a photograph from the 1920's showing the south-west aspect of the house and the remains of a wooden structure, the new Tea Garden will feature an enclosed sheltered environment where visitors can relax and enjoy refreshments against the ever-changing backdrop of the magnificent gardens.

A simple wooden pergola set against the house will entice you outside where

climbers, herbs, herbaceous plants, bulbs, and small shrubs will provide scent and colour all year round. A new pathed area will be added featuring a Celtic cross design similar to that seen in the paths in the Cross Garden which sits within the Walled Garden.

As a final flourish, four historic Flambeau-style sandstone urns, currently in storage, will be repaired and installed into the new Tea Garden.

The garden team will begin work on the landscaping in spring, with volunteers from Patterson's Spade Mill making and fitting the metal edging required to create the new boundaries and ensuring the project is a real group effort by the Belfast team.



## 'Everything flows' again at Florence Court

Following a restoration project, the much-loved water feature in the Walled Garden at Florence Court has been repaired.

Dating back to the early 19th century, the water feature required extensive conservation work to repair weather damage to the rim and several large cracks in the bowl at a cost of £3,000 raised through the support of our

members and supporters. Notably inscribed in the water feature in Greek, are the words 'Ta Pánta Rheí', which means everything flows, and we're delighted that water is once again flowing through the feature.

The Kitchen Garden restoration project continues at pace with the support of our volunteers and funding from Heritage Lottery Fund.

# Growing opportunities at Florence Court

In Florence Court, County Fermanagh, we are currently working on an exciting Heritage Lottery Funded project to reinstate our Kitchen Garden to its 1930's full working order.



## Booking online for Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge now live

In 2016 Carrick-a-Rede welcomed the highest number of visitors ever to this exhilarating rope bridge experience. The following year we implemented a timed ticketing system to ensure an excellent visitor experience, while also protecting our ongoing conservation work here.

To make planning your visit even easier, visitors and members are now able to purchase tickets online for an hour time slot to cross the bridge up to four months in advance via [carrickaredetickets.com](http://carrickaredetickets.com)

Once you book, you will receive an e-ticket reference number, which you will be asked to produce at reception to receive your souvenir ticket before crossing the bridge. There is no time limit on how long you spend exploring the island. Please remember that although members can cross the bridge for free, you do still need to book a timed ticket but you will not be charged.

In Florence Court, County Fermanagh, we are currently working on an exciting Heritage Lottery Funded project to restore our Kitchen Garden to its 1930's character and atmosphere.

Our project, which will see the reinstatement of two glasshouses on their historic footprint, will provide local communities and volunteers with more compelling reasons to get involved at Florence Court and explore their heritage. In addition to their historic uses (one as a Vinery for grapes, and the other a Peach House for peaches, nectarines and similar tender fruits), the reinstated glasshouses will allow for plant

propagation and community use; helping us to move, teach and inspire wider audiences, so there are exciting times ahead.

Under the guidance of the Lead Gardener, David Corscadden, a dedicated team of volunteers continue to help revive the Kitchen Garden and over the past number of years have made it an interesting place where rare, heritage and common vegetables and soft fruits, and colourful herbaceous flower borders have provided visitors with great enjoyment and reasons to return.

During 2018 our volunteers ran a pilot 'Have a Go' programme of activities

for our visitors including bee hotel making, flower arranging, apple pressing, an archaeology dig, and jam-making session. The 'Have a Go' programme brought new energy and focus to the Kitchen Garden and we will continue to run similar activities in the project's next phase; in addition to exploring new ways for local communities to use and enjoy this beautiful space. The glasshouses will be installed between 2019/20 and we look forward to being able to provide a sheltered learning space for volunteers, students and community groups to use, particularly during the wetter months of the year.

If you are interested in a volunteering role at Florence Court or indeed any of our places, please visit our website or speak to a member of staff at your local property.



## Costumes and characters at Springhill

During 2019, Springhill's costume museum will tell the story of the eight mistresses of Springhill House. The collection will be refreshed with new costumes and accessories along with some old favourites, including costumes that belonged to the Lenox-Conyngham family themselves. The earliest pieces on display will date from the 1740s, telling the story of the family, the house and the estate up until 1957 when the house was transferred to the National Trust.

The exhibition is a wonderful opportunity to learn something more about the often unsung heroines of our country estates. Come and find out about the women of Springhill and see

the fashions of their day. From Anne Upton of Castle Upton, who was the first mistress of the house in 1690, to Anne Peacock, society beauty and friend of Jonathan Swift, through to the beloved Jane Hamilton who died giving birth to her firstborn child, Laura Arbuthnot and her thirteen children and lastly Mina Lowry, published author and final mistress of Springhill until her death aged 94. Their lives, their work, their passions and the mark they have each left on Springhill House make for a fascinating story that is well worth a visit.

The new collection will be on show from February when Springhill House will reopen again during the weekends.



## Larger-than-life nature at Murlough NNR

Over the past few months we've added a new play area at Murlough National Nature Reserve. Along with opportunities to climb, balance, and jump you'll also find some larger-than-life animals who call Murlough home. If you don't manage to spot harbour seals, rabbits, common lizards, or one of the many butterflies while out on the reserve, you'll be sure to find them in the play area in the form of wooden sculptures by local artist Ivan McNally. Look out for the lyrics of the iconic Percy French song 'The Mountains of Mourne'!

Lots of visitors (and staff) have been enjoying the new play area so far. We're planning on adding some exciting new additions soon, so there'll be more to discover on your next visit.



## Slaughterhouse shop opens at Castle Ward

Castle Ward is well known for its part in the development of screen tourism in Northern Ireland as a location for the pilot and first series of *Game of Thrones*. Our historic farmyard was transformed into Winterfell, the seat of the Stark family and many of our visitors enjoy seeing the real-life #GoT Territory.

In autumn we introduced a retail experience that *Game of Thrones* fans will love. Located in the aptly named 'Slaughterhouse' building in our farmyard, visitors can find the shop beside the original filming location, just a few steps from Strangford Lough. Inside you'll find stock from jewellery designer Lucy Jane Sylvester who has created items worn by Sansa in the hit show, as well as specialist pieces from local makers like hand carved wooden bowls and home-made food products.

There's also plenty of HBO *Game of Thrones* merchandise, so you're only one shopping trip away from showing your allegiance to House Stark with your morning tankard of coffee. The shop stocks the full range of novels by George RR Martin for anyone who has yet to get Throne-fever. From dragon-egg candles, to cuddly direwolves and wooden swords used by the Stark children, you'll find the perfect gift for any GoT fan.

One of our own staff, the talented artist Charlene Rooney, has created a bespoke print of the farmyard which has been reproduced in a range of items. Her hand-made porcelain baubles with copper fittings featuring the print have been a particular hit. The exclusive print is also available framed or unframed. Next time you visit, show your friends (and enemies) that 'the North remembers' and take home a little piece of Winterfell.



# The secret's out at Castle Ward

The Secret Shore Nature Trail at Castle Ward is the worst-kept secret in County Down – mostly because we kept telling everyone about it! In autumn 2018 we completed works on the trail, turning the linear path into a loop, meaning much more to explore.



Edel and Robin who helped create the trail

Almost entirely designed and created by volunteers, this circular trail of nature adventures is the perfect place to discover and play in the great outdoors. Take the path alongside Strangford Lough to discover a different world amongst the trees.

Rangers and volunteers worked on the trail throughout the year, building balance beams, doors for hedgehog houses, and even a boat! The creative team faced many challenges along the way, including storms and even vandalism, but their hard work has paid off with lots of visitors discovering the secrets for themselves.

Geoff Magill, Volunteer and Community Engagement Officer at Castle Ward spoke to Lead Ranger, Paul Livingstone, as well as Edel Trainor and Robin Kilpatrick, two of

the volunteers who helped to build the trail, to find out more:

#### Where did the idea for the Secret Shore Nature Trail come from?

Edel: Paul came up with a 'nature trail' type idea as opposed to a 'natural play area/park' as we wanted to offer something different.

#### How did volunteers assist in the delivery of the project?

Paul: Without the input from our volunteer rangers, I seriously doubt if the ranger team would have been able to complete the project. I would guess we received around 500 hours of volunteer support on the project, which was incredible.

#### How long has the project taken?

Edel: As we mainly volunteer at weekends it has taken just over two

years to complete from start to finish and there will always be ongoing maintenance required owing to its natural setting and materials.

#### Do you have a favourite bit, and why?

Edel: My favourite bit is the 'Window on the Water'. I built the window into the wall on a rather cold January and February, and it is good to see the wall restored as it had been previously damaged by a tree falling into it.

Robin: I think the new adventure area is my favourite as it provides a number of activities in the one location with the musical logs, a noughts and crosses game, balance beam and a swing.

#### What do you hope the Secret Shore Nature Trail will offer our visitors?

Edel: I hope it encourages more robust play where children have to think more

about where they are moving and what they are looking at. Also that it develops inquisitiveness in children by getting them interested in the natural and historical features we have incorporated into the trails. Most of all I hope they have fun exploring it.

Robin: The trails offer people of all ages an opportunity to experience nature at its best. To be able to climb over logs, see bugs and insects, spot birds and seals, and have fun adventures, all in a natural and safe environment.

Paul: The intention is to provide a focal point for the kids (and adults), to get down, dirty and close to nature in an environment that is fun and educational at the same time, and I think this has been achieved with huge amounts of positive feedback to date.

Next time you visit the estate, make sure to head to the Secret Shore Nature Trail to play noughts and crosses, defend your own castle, sail the high seas or build a wolf's den. You'll discover a few friendly creatures along the way – don't forget to pass on the secret!



## Striving to become Of, By and For All the community

Divis and the Black Mountain has been selected, along with 20 other civic and cultural organisations around the world, to take part in the first wave of OF/BY/ FOR ALL.

This new initiative has been created by Nina Simon of Santa Cruz Museum in California, who believes passionately that organisations work best with local communities when they are Of them (reflective of the local population in all its diversity), By them (with opportunities to get really involved in shaping what the organisation does), and For All (welcoming and relevant to different groups).

The support of this programme provides us with a valuable opportunity to develop deeper partnerships with communities in the neighbourhoods around Divis and the Black Mountain. There are high levels of social and economic deprivation in many areas of North and West Belfast, and the highest suicide rate in the UK, with painful legacies of the Troubles and continued division.

Many community organisations are working hard to improve the quality of life of people living there, but face huge challenges and often limited resources.

Divis and the Black Mountain rises above these neighbourhoods, providing an open space where local people can escape their daily pressures, embrace the natural environment, and meet neighbouring communities in a neutral space.

We are keen to explore with local communities how we can work together to protect the mountain, with its rich archaeological landscape and wildlife, increase access from neighbouring areas, and enhance the benefits for local people, in particular in relation to health and wellbeing.

We also hope that the Of By and For All programme will help us understand the impact of working in this way, so that we can enhance our work with local communities in other areas across Northern Ireland.



## The extraordinary Billy Thompson

He's just celebrated his 80th birthday but that isn't going to stop Billy Thompson from devoting five days a week to volunteering with our Belfast ranger team...

A keen walker, Billy Thompson enjoyed visiting many National Trust places in his time, and as he neared retirement at the age of 65, he decided to see how he could get involved with looking after the sites that had given him so much enjoyment over the years.

'I discovered the recently formed National Trust Belfast group and I liked the idea of joining a team that were embarking on a number of exciting projects to improve these places and bring them to the attention of people in Northern Ireland,' Billy explains.

'Since joining as a volunteer 15 years ago I've had the opportunity to be involved in a wide variety of jobs and projects. Grass cutting with my favourite mower; litter collection, scything, woodland management, and creating and maintaining new trails. I'm also known for gathering firewood. The ranger base is heated with a log burner and I've always been the guy that keeps her lit,' he laughs.

'I've also made some great friends,' Billy adds. 'We're a tightly knit group in the Belfast ranger team and we've had some great craic over the years. I'm also still a pretty fit guy for a man who just celebrated his 80th birthday and I think the work in the great outdoors has had something to do with that.'

'Volunteering with the Trust has been great for me,' he continues. 'I love it, that's why I've been volunteering five days a week with the team here for the past 15 years and hope to continue to do so. The great thing is you can volunteer as little or as often as you like and you will be greatly appreciated. The changes we've made over the years – planting woodlands, creating meadows, adding new trails, opening allotments, these are all things I have been a part of, and it fills me with pride when I see people enjoying them.'

If you are interested in volunteering with us, call into your nearest property where a member of the team will be happy to help, or visit our website.



## Ulster Gardens Scheme plans exciting year ahead

After a successful season of Garden Openings in 2018, the Ulster Gardens Scheme Committee is in the process of drawing up its programme for 2019. Full details will appear in the summer edition of 'Near You'.

## New paths added to the Giant's Ring trail at Minnowburn

The popular Giant's Ring trail at Minnowburn has recently benefited from a much needed upgrade with 200 metres of new paths being added in the Sandpit field. This latest addition to the Minnowburn trail network allows walkers to stay off the local country roads and remain within the field where they are safe from traffic.

The Giant's Ring trail, verging on the River Lagan, takes walkers through meadows, woodlands and farmland all rich with the sounds and smells of nature. Terrace Hill garden, with its viewpoint looking over the Lagan Valley, is a real highlight, as is the impressive ancient earthwork that gives the trail its name.

## Easter holidays



### Mount Stewart

13-28 April

#### Easter at Mount Stewart

Have fun on our trails, get mucky making seed bombs or join one of our family friendly garden tours.

11am-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Castle Ward

15-28 April

#### Easter at Castle Ward

Explore the Secret Shore Nature Trail or get creative with the spring themed activities. Why not make a day of it and bring along a picnic, visit the farmyard animals and relax by the shores of Strangford Lough.

12noon-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Downhill Demesne

15-28 April

#### Easter at Downhill

Events for all ages spread across Downhill/Hezlett House and Porstewart Strand to include sand sculpting, sensory tree trail, walks and talks with our rangers and gardener and a selection of the '50 things to do before you're 11¾'.

10am-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### The Argory

15-28 April

#### Easter at The Argory

Hop over to The Argory this Easter and go wild in the play park, enjoy Easter crafts and games in the courtyard and take part in our nature trail.

11am-5pm

Normal Admission Members Free



### Springhill

15-28 April

#### Easter at Springhill

Put a spring into your step this Easter at Springhill! Discover new spring flowers in the meadows. Enjoy springtime activities and have lots of fun in the natural play areas.

11am-5pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Rowallane Garden

18-26 April

#### Fun in the Garden

Challenge your loved ones to an egg and spoon race at the front of the house. Get involved in fun Easter crafting in the barn. Pick up a nature wristband and head off on an exploration around the garden to spot nature bursting into life.

10am-6pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Address

19-28 April

#### Easter at Address

Bounce over to Address this Easter, say hello to the friendly farmyard animals and enjoy springtime adventures.

11am-5pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Florence Court

22 April

#### Easter Monday Family Fun Day

Easter fun for all the family, with Cadbury Easter Egg Hunts, music and much more.

11am-5pm

Normal Admission Members Free



## Nature and wildlife

### Downhill Demesne

23-24 February

#### Snowdrop Walks

Join our ranger for a leisurely stroll around our gardens at Bishop's Gate and see the carpets of snowdrops in all their beauty

Meet at Bishop's Gate Lodge

2-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Cushendun

1 March

#### Beach Clean

Join our ranger team on a litter pick to help keep our beach beautiful.

Meet at Cushendun beach

Booking Advisable

Contact 028 7084 8728

10am-12noon

No Charge Donations Welcome

### Portstewart Strand

2 March

#### Conservation Farming Talk and Walk

Discover why we use grazing animals at our places to help deliver our conservation management plans. Our ranger will talk about the type of livestock used, the benefits they bring and the challenges of having them on the dunes and beach.

Booking Essential

Contact 028 7083 6396

2-4pm

No Charge Donations Welcome



Cushendun beach clean

### Murlough NNR

9 March

#### Winter's Gone, What's Next for the Rangers

Join the ranger team for a walk and talk to find out what they do over the winter months and what's next on the calendar.

Meet at Keel Point concrete standing

Booking Essential

Contact 028 4375 1467

10.30am-12.30pm

No Charge Donations Welcome

### Murlough NNR

6 April

#### Jo's Walks - Beach Combing

Join Jo, Murlough's first warden and naturalist for another of her fantastic walks and talks. We'll be discovering the secrets of the shore and searching for treasures brought in by the waves.

Meet at Keel Point concrete standing

Booking Essential

Contact 028 4375 1467

No Charge Donations Welcome

## Festivals, music and the arts

### Mount Stewart

9-10 March

#### World Book Weekend

Do you like jumping in muddy puddles like Peppa Pig or do you have adventures like The Famous Five? We would love to hear all about your favourite stories and characters at our World Book Day Weekend. Come dressed up and join the fun.

11am-3pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### National Trust Northern Ireland (excluding Fermanagh)

9 March

#### Free Open Day

Bring a friend to enjoy free admission at a number of National Trust places today. Come and meet our staff and volunteers, and learn more about the amazing places we look after. (Please note Fermanagh places free open weekend is 2-3 March)

For further details visit [nationaltrust.org.uk/ni](http://nationaltrust.org.uk/ni)

### Hezlett House

17 March

#### Leprechaun Hunt

Help us to find the Leprechauns that have escaped from their homes in Bishop's Gate. Enjoy traditional Saint Patrick's Day crafts and activities.

12noon-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### The Argory

6 April

#### Good Food Market

Come along to taste and buy a range of locally sourced produce. The historic courtyard will come to life with a cookery demonstration, guided estate tours, music and more.

11am-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Mount Stewart

7 April

#### Pet Nose Day

This award-winning charity event returns as part of Pet Month and celebrates our four legged friends. Bring along your dog and be entertained by agility and training demonstrations.

11am-3pm

Normal Admission Members Free

## Ranger walk and talks

### Rowallane Garden

Throughout February

#### Snowdrop Strolls

Snowdrops are one of the first signs of life in the garden after the long winter months. Join us for a self-guided tour around the garden and take in the remarkable Galanthus (AKA snowdrops).

10am-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

Donations Welcome

### The Argory and Springhill

2-24 February (Saturday and Sunday only)

#### Snowdrop Walks

Come and see our wonderful displays of snowdrops planted over the years by our estate staff and volunteers. Enjoy this spectacle at your leisure with our self-guided walk then relax in the coffee shop for a warm drink or a tasty bite. Snowdrop plants also available to buy.

11am-5pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Crom

16 February

#### Give Nature a Home: Bird Box Day

Come along and learn how to create your own bird box, just in time for the upcoming nesting season as we care for our beloved birds. Learn how to build your own bird box from scratch and make your very own bird feeders to take home.

Meet at Education Centre

£5 per bird box to cover material costs

2-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free



Snowdrop walks at The Argory

### Springhill

16-17 February

#### Nest Fest

Help us rejuvenate Springhill's bird boxes, learn how to build your own nest and make some bird feeders to take home.

On Sunday our staff and volunteers will demonstrate how to make a bird box and hand-made boxes will be available to buy.

11am-5pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Rowallane Garden

March

#### Spring Sensory Walk

Pick up a copy of our 'Spring Sensory Stroll' and discover ways to explore and interact with our garden. Our experienced gardening team have selected the path and picked locations to showcase key points of sensory interest during this time of renewal and change.

10am-6pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Mount Stewart

23 March

#### Spring Walk

Enjoy a three mile walk through the rolling countryside of the Demesne and discover the wealth of wildlife, history and stunning landscape of this unique estate. Suitable for children aged 8 years plus with accompanying adult. Stout walking boots required. Well behaved dogs on leads only.

Meet at Mount Stewart reception

Booking Essential

Contact 028 4278 8387

10am-1pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Glenoe Waterfall

13 April

#### The Geology of Glenoe

Come for a journey through time as we look at the fascinating and diverse geology of this beautiful glen.

Meet at disused quarry car park, Waterfall Road, Glenoe

1-4pm

No Charge Donations Welcome

## Gardening



Join our gardener for a bulbs and buds talk at Downhill Demesne

### Downhill Demesne

16 March

#### Bulbs and Buds

Join our knowledgeable gardener and explore the beginning of spring on the estate. Get some tips to take home all the while enjoying the beautiful surroundings of Bishop's Gate.

Meet at Bishop's Gate

Booking Essential

Contact 028 7084 8728

2-4pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Springhill

30 March

#### Allotment Open Day

Fancy seeing what goes on behind the big wall at Springhill? Hear more from our community allotment holders and learn some top tips on how to grow your own.

11am-3pm

Normal Admission Members Free

### Rowallane Garden

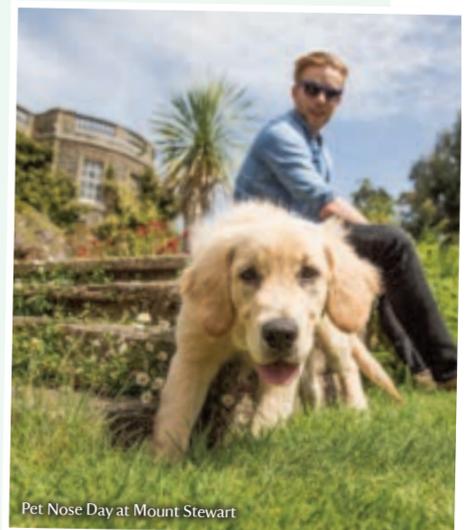
30 March

#### Flower Pressing Session

Learn about the techniques of flower pressing. Our gardeners will show you how and why it's important to press flowers, and share a few tips on how to speed up the process.

11am-12noon

Normal Admission Members Free



Pet Nose Day at Mount Stewart

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Alternative formats: telephone 028 9751 0721 or email [ni.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:ni.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk)

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