



National Trust

Autumn Winter 2019
Northern Ireland

Near you



Audrey and her family at Crom, their special place

Special places make us happy

Whether it's Divis and the Black Mountain, Portstewart Strand or Mount Stewart, having a meaningful place in your life has a significant impact on wellbeing.

New research recently commissioned by us with Walnut Unlimited reveals that people with a special place in their lives, be it where they got engaged, a place they escape to for contemplation, or somewhere they go to remember a loved one, report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction than those without a place of importance.

These benefits also extend beyond the visit, influencing general wellbeing in day-to-day life.

Those with a special place are more likely to give both their time (63%) and money (63%) compared to those without a special place (55% and 53% respectively). The findings also revealed that having a special place impacts levels of loneliness, with almost half (49%) of those without a special place stating they often feel

lonely, compared to 45% of people with a connection to a place.

Better still, those with special places record higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, stronger relationships with one another, and better physical activity and awareness of emotions when compared to those without a special place.

82% of people feel it is likely that their special place will always be there, and

if it were to disappear or change, 69% say it would affect them in a negative way. This emphasises the important role conservation charities like us have in protecting special places forever, for everyone, and ensuring everyone can feel the benefits these places have to offer both now and in the future.

Thank you for being a member and helping us look after the special places that matter to us all.

Celebrating the seasons

We've lots of fun things planned for Halloween half-term and the Christmas season at our special places. From Country Fairs, to Father Christmas, here's a taste of what's coming up over the next few months...

Autumn is about embracing seasonal change and enjoying all that it brings. We celebrate autumn and traditional harvest throughout the month of October at Springhill and every Sunday in October is Apple Sunday at Ardross – a great opportunity to sample the local bramley apple, taste local cider and enjoy music and entertainment in the farmyard.

Come Halloween it's time to put on your best fancy dress and join the ghosts and ghouls for a day of frightful fun. Carve a pumpkin, explore haunted houses and enchanted gardens and make memories to treasure forever. Popular favourites Ghosts and Gourds at Rowallane Garden (19–20 October) and Pumpkinfest at Castle Ward (26–27 October) return and

you'll find spooky tours, pumpkins and scary scavenger hunts at Florence Court, The Argory and Downhill Demesne.

As we move into November all thoughts turn to Christmas as we turn on the festive cheer and the twinkling lights. Winter is about family traditions – old and new and we've got lots of opportunities for days out with family and friends. For gift shopping don't miss the Yuletide Market at Rowallane Garden (7–8 December) and The Argory Christmas Fair (30 November–1 December). There are Christmas carol concerts at Mussenden Temple, Castle Coole and Castle Ward and of course Father Christmas will be making special appearances at Mount Stewart, The Argory and Hezlett House.

For more details of seasonal activities at our places please visit our website or pick up a copy of our What's On Guide for autumn/winter at your local property.



Autumn harvest

Festive cheer



Frightful fun





In the picture

Dr Bob Brown OBE
Regional Chairman

Back in the 80's, fresh from research in Jamaica, I was delighted to be offered the post of 'warden' – that's what we were called in those days – of the Trust's Strangford Lough Wildlife Scheme, caring for the wildlife of about 150 miles of shore, some 50 islands, and bits of seabed. Our 'rangers' (today's term) continue to this day, with much the same objective: to care for the internationally important wildlife, and where appropriate provide access to the wildlife and scenery.

Then, through Enterprise Neptune, we were leading the way with Strangford Lough, Giant's Causeway, and many other cliff, dune and heathland acquisitions. As for the marine life below the waves? In those days it was largely unseen, mostly uncared for, and subject to a plethora of highly damaging fisheries.

But things were changing. We raised issues like damage from trawling and dredging in Strangford Lough. Improved access to our coasts and the marine aquarium in Portaferry showed our wealth of sea life. EU Directives required member states to implement measures for water quality, protection of marine habitats and species. These all raised awareness of our maritime heritage whilst documentaries by a certain Sir David Attenborough had massive impact too. Government and everyone else couldn't ignore the issues any more.

These days, the context is improved, though no less challenging. The range of locally protected sites has increased almost tenfold in the last eight years. Individual species are protected – not just the popular ones like seabirds, dolphins, seals and basking sharks, but sea grasses, sponges and a whole host of other submarine creepy crawlies. For our part, the Trust now manages about 22% of our coast for nature, seascape and people – a precious asset.

So are our coasts and seas safe for the future? No. Most seabed sites are still in very poor condition, and will need management to allow species and habitats to recover. Pressures on our coast from development, access and recreation are increasing dramatically. Government has its own challenges, like resolving conflicts of interest where the same department has the responsibility to support projects like aquaculture, whilst wrestling with obligations to protect affected sites.

Our coasts are changing, with rising sea levels, rising temperatures, increases in storminess and erosion, and impacts on wildlife. The Trust has played a key role in acting as a catalyst, pulling government, NGOs and communities together to address these issues. It's becoming ever more urgent as science upgrades the climate and sea level predictions. Yet the processes of taking co-ordinated action to plan for these events and resolve the pressures and conflicts seem to proceed at snail's pace, and it's all too easy to shift the blame on to the lack of a Northern Ireland Assembly.

So come on folks! Northern Ireland has some of the richest marine life in NW Europe, surrounding coasts of legendary drama. Most of us live within a bus ride of this treasure. There's much to do, and future generations will judge us harshly if we don't take action now, before it's too late.

Our four big ambitions for coast

After years of campaigning it is fantastic to see public recognition and engagement in the plight of our coast and seas, and the acknowledgment of the implications that sea level rises, rising temperatures and habitat decline are having.

A huge difficulty has been that most of the damage has been unseen, a case of out of sight, out of mind. Now images and knowledge are being shared and highlighted more widely, and the implications of the degradation of this habitat and associated species is being better understood.

In Northern Ireland, we have been working with key partners to bring to fruition the key elements of our four key asks to move Northern Ireland's coastal management to a better place.

We need to:

1. *Study it:* we have huge gaps in our knowledge and data about the changes in our coast and sea. In order to make the right decisions for its future we need more data and for the current data to be gathered in one place and properly monitored.

2. *Think long term:* the development and implementation of shoreline plans which protect the whole of the coast is needed. Just one wrong decision or intervention can change how the whole coastline works and create problems for communities in another part of the coast.

3. *Work with nature:* coastal 'defence' isn't always the answer, in some cases we may need to let part of the coast go in order to protect other areas, this needs strategic and long term planning across the coastal councils.

4. *Modernise the thinking:* NI's coastal policy framework needs to be updated; we are the only part of the UK that doesn't have legislation which manages the coastal environment.



Working with others to deliver these four ambitions will enable us to build in much needed resilience for our coast, one of our most important habitats, and to pass on a sustainable coastal management system to future generations. Your support in helping this happen is crucial, whether through your membership, your time or engaging with your local politicians. It all counts and will be part of our collective legacy for the future.

Heather McLachlan
Regional Director

Hidden gems by the sea



Thousands of people every year flock to the golden sands of Portstewart Strand and Murlough National Nature Reserve, but if you're looking for a quieter place to dip your toe in the water you should discover one of these lesser known beauty spots...



Ballyquintin and Barhall

At the southern tip of the Ards Peninsula, surrounded by the Irish Sea and Strangford Lough, Ballyquintin is a bird watcher's dream, attracting migratory birds, waders and wildfowl. Look out for farmland birds such as lapwing, yellowhammer, tree sparrow and skylark; and seals and porpoises offshore. Take a moment to enjoy the views in every direction, including the Mourne, Isle of Man and Mull of Galloway.



Kearney and Knockinelder

On the Irish Sea coast off the Ards Peninsula, a long narrow road through green drumlins takes you to the charming village of Kearney and the sandy beach of Knockinelder. A path leading from this historic, listed 18th-century former fishing village leads to attractive coastal walks to the north and south. Along the way you'll see interesting shingle and strandline flora, such as the rare yellow-horned poppy and oyster plant, and abundant wintering and breeding shorebirds.



Ballymacormick Point and Orlock

Escape from the crowds along shingle beaches, rocky islets and coves on the final section of the recently upgraded Ulster Way and North Down Coastal Path, with views across Belfast Lough. Be sure to visit The Cockle Island Seabird Centre (April-July) to watch breeding seabirds including a large tern colony.



Portmuck and Skernaghan Point

Portmuck sits on a wonderful stretch of coastline on the Islandmagee peninsula offering spectacular views over Muck Island and across to Scotland. Skernaghan Point is further north towards Brown's Bay. Some of Northern Ireland's largest colonies of cliff-nesting seabirds including kittiwakes, guillemots, razorbills and fulmars can be seen here. Follow the trail past the 'Rocking Stone' at Skernaghan Point for wonderful views.





Going to GIANT efforts to tackle marine litter

The conservation ranger team at the North Coast have continued to go to giant efforts to look after Northern Ireland's only World Heritage Site.

To date we have now completed three litter picks at sea, a project which is coordinated by National Trust staff and supported by local volunteers and marine businesses to reach bays which are

inaccessible by land around the Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site.

The large scale clean-up now involves two boats, the Causeway Lass fishing boat and Aquaholics diving boat, as well as jet skiers, paddle-boarders or surfers and coastering swimmers to gather and swim the rubbish out of these small bays.

Local ranger Christie Greer coordinated the first litter pick at sea in 2018 after the conservation team had growing concerns over the increasing amounts of litter gathering on the remote beaches, noticeable from the cliff top paths enjoyed by many tourists close to the iconic Giant's Causeway.

Our rangers conduct daily litter picks on land, but in their commitment to maintaining special places that matter to local people, the team thought of a proactive, innovative way to tackle rising volumes of marine pollution in a bid

to protect the natural habitats and the incredible variety of wildlife in the area.

This year ITV were keen to capture an exclusive piece for national news and learn exactly what it takes to be a National Trust ranger taking care of the coastline. Also, the National Geographic personally led by Dr Cliff Henry, Area Ranger filmed along the cliff path to capture a land perspective of the operation which will contribute towards their series 'Europe from Above'.

Did you know?

We have already eliminated plastic from our disposable cups and cutlery, instead choosing plant based biodegradable products as part of our commitment to phase out selling single use plastics at our places by 2022.

Portstewart Strand pioneers a single use plastic free future

Back in February, we asked two local primary schools, Portstewart Primary School and St Colum's Primary School, to fill eco bricks (a plastic bottle filled with everyday single use plastic items to make a solid block) and return them to school. We then collected the bricks and took them to the local high school, where the talented pupils created two amazing sculptures using the bricks.

The sculptures were revealed on Portstewart Strand on Saturday 8 June, World Oceans Day when we officially launched the 'Portstewart Strand (single use) Plastic Free' campaign. We invited all the school children involved to the unveiling of the eco brick sculptures and despite the rain, lots of families turned up to celebrate with us.

We then embarked on a litter pick of the beach and all the children enthusiastically took part. This project aims to highlight the plastic pollution in our oceans and is a campaign we hope to grow over the next couple of years. We will be engaging with the local community to find ways to become more responsible with our use of plastic. Watch this space for new developments.

Litter pick in numbers

A total of 2,672 pieces of rubbish were fished from the waters including:

- 1,231 plastic bottles
- 501 pieces of rope
- 28 shoes
- 9 tyres
- 18 sports balls

Members have a critical role to play

In a recent Near You we announced the exciting development that members can now pre-book tickets online for Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge and enjoy a free-of-charge visit at a time that suits you.

The timed ticketing system was introduced in 2017 following unprecedented growth of visitors to this exhilarating rope bridge experience.

Operations Manager Matthew McMullan has reached out for members' support in making the system work. He said, 'Timed ticketing has been a massive success at Carrick-a-Rede, with reduced waiting times for visitors, improved visitor flow and improved experiences for all. The introduction of online booking has meant we have much less traffic congestion on site, which is beneficial for everyone, including our residential neighbours.'

'We have had emerging issues with members booking multiple time slots and, as a result, reducing availability to other visitors. These unused tickets are resulting in revenue loss for the charity and disappointed visitors.'

'We would kindly ask members to only book tickets which are required and, should any members find they no longer need tickets booked online, to contact the site as soon as possible so those tickets can be released to other visitors. We would really appreciate members' support with this.'

Members can secure tickets online for an hour time slot to cross the bridge via carrickarede.tickets.com

Should you no longer need your booked tickets, the Carrick-a-Rede Booking Office can be contacted by email on carrick-a-rede@nationaltrust.org.uk or by phone on: 028 2073 3335.

Thank you for your understanding.



Why we need to turn the tide on coastal management

We manage over 108 miles of coastline in Northern Ireland (almost 22%) and play an important role in providing access to the coastline and protecting it for future generations to enjoy. Our role for coast extends beyond the stretches that we manage and into working with central and local government, partners, communities and universities with the goal of better long term management of the coast for nature and for people.

With climate change, sea levels are rising and storminess increasing, and so our island's coastal environments are changing. The challenges this brings are by no means unique to Northern Ireland, but what is different here is that we lag behind the rest of the UK in our

understanding of coastal change locally and how we plan to live well with coastal change long into the future.

Our coastal officer, Fiona Bryant explains more: 'As a society, we need to better understand coastal change and put in place sustainable plans to allow current and future generations to live with coastal change. Without an understanding of the impacts, and long term planning, decisions about the use of the coast are made in a vacuum and current and future infrastructure at the coast may be at risk.'

'There is an urgent need for long term coastal planning, better understanding of coastal erosion through scientific monitoring, and

policy and legislation that promote solutions that work with nature. Unfortunately in Northern Ireland our current understanding of coastal behaviour is piecemeal and patchy.'

As part of our work advocating for better policies and legislation locally for coastal change, our team recently attended a new Coastal Forum, a group set up by central government to help coordinate across departments and with local councils and planners on issues of coastal change. We are pleased to hear that much momentum has built around this issue and look forward to working with partners and government to ensure we get better understanding and planning for coast over the long term.

Ards Peninsula Community and Coast

The coast is a big part of many people's lives in Northern Ireland. Most people live within 35 miles of the sea. With this closeness to the coast, it is not surprising to find that 74% of people here see visiting the coast as important to their quality of life (NT YouGov poll, 2015). Indeed, in the same poll, 84% agreed that being by the coast really makes them feel alive.

On the Ards Peninsula, we have had the pleasure of working alongside a very active group who advocate for a well looked after coast. Called the Ards Peninsula Coastal

Erosion Group (APCEG), the group has been meeting for the past five years and has been a really strong voice for better management from government. One of the driving forces behind this group was Eric Rainey who was Chairman up until last year. It was with great sadness that we learned that Eric passed away in May. Prior to his retirement, Eric had worked for the National Trust on Strangford Lough for many years. He brought tremendous passion and enthusiasm to his work, which combined with his expert knowledge and optimism ensured that he made a lasting

contribution to our conservation cause. He will be sorely missed. We are committed to continuing to work alongside the APCEG which was so close to Eric's heart, and with Ards and North Down Borough Council which is also committed to ensuring better coastal management around the peninsula and within Strangford Lough. In the coming year we will be working to bring forward a model of shoreline management planning in this area, to test how this might help officials and elected representatives to make sound, long term decisions about developments and management at the coast.



Connecting communities on Divis

Connecting communities on Divis and the Black Mountain

Since October 2018, we have been involved in OF/BY/FOR ALL, a global initiative to support organisations to become more inclusive and engaged with communities. We are lucky to be the only Northern Ireland project taking part with Divis and the Black Mountain.

In January, we were very excited to meet the other project partners at a conference in Santa Cruz, California. It was an amazing opportunity to learn from and share ideas with other groups from around the world.

Back in Belfast, we have begun talking to local youth and community groups about their connection to Divis and the Black Mountain. We have been learning about the different ways and reasons people use the mountain, and the barriers that make it harder for some people to access. We have also been learning about initiatives already taking place and listening to local stories and ideas for the future.

Together with local groups, we have started developing new opportunities for people to

enjoy this wild space on their doorstep and be more involved in making a difference to its future.

In April, we enjoyed hosting a group of fifty young people from West Belfast on the mountain for an evening of activities with the rangers. 'Go Wild on the Mountain' family day took place a few weeks later as part of 'Féile na cGloigini Gorma' (Festival of the Bluebells) a wellbeing festival organised by local youth and community groups. We had mucky fun pond dipping and bug hunting, scything like our ancestors and learning about the mountain's rich wildlife and heritage. We also used creative tools to gather feedback and learn more about people's experiences of the mountain.

We are looking forward to continuing these community conversations and partnerships over the coming months to explore how we can work together to look after the mountain and ensure it is a place that everyone can feel welcome.



Home Ground Live air official launch of new Demesne Walks

We officially launched the new section of trails at Mount Stewart on Wednesday 8 May in front of thousands of viewers of BBC NI's Home Ground Live series. Jon Kerr, General Manager at Mount Stewart officially cut the ribbon, overseen by presenter Gavin Andrews.

The new section of trails are known as the Demesne Walks and are the most extensive network of historic rides opened to date on the estate. Starting from Mount Stewart reception, it is a challenging four mile loop mainly through woodlands in the north-west part of the Demesne. The majority of woodlands on the estate are leased and

managed by Forest Service. This will be the first opportunity for the public to explore this part of the Demesne which was in private ownership until it was acquired by the Trust in 2014. The historic rides were created by the family for horse riding.

The new trail provides a great opportunity to spot a wide range of wildlife such as the iconic red squirrel and buzzards mewing overhead. In spring, the woodlands are ablaze with carpets of wild flowers such as primrose and bluebell. We hope you enjoy exploring it over the coming seasons.

Volunteers receive a Royal thank you



HRH The Prince of Wales at Castle Coole

as a volunteer for 19 years, carrying out historical research on the property. Thomas Maguire and Lizzie Hogg have volunteered in the house at Castle Coole for over eight years, welcoming visitors and developing the Queen Anne Tour. Outdoors, Ian Thompson has volunteered with the Castle Coole ranger team for five years, taking care of the 400 acres of woodland and parkland.

National Trust volunteers from further afield in Fermanagh were also recognised: Jules Caithness, who founded, and regularly volunteers in, the National Lottery Heritage-Funded Florence Court Kitchen Garden, and Bert Robinson, who has given his time to all of the National Trust places and spaces in Fermanagh, supporting the running of the saw mill at Florence Court and the restoration of the 100 year old cot at Crom.

Across Northern Ireland over 3,000 incredible volunteers give us over 150,000 hours of their time each year. We simply couldn't take care of all of the places and spaces in our care without their help. If you would like to be involved, please visit nationaltrust.org.uk/find-an-opportunity



Longest serving Castle Coole volunteers Thomas, Joan and Lizzie

In May we were delighted to welcome our President, HRH The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall to Castle Coole in Fermanagh.

The Royal couple joined 1,000 invited guests and dignitaries as part of the Secretary of State's garden party. This was the first time Their Royal Highnesses had visited the property although the estate has played host to various members of the Royal Family over the years.

At this special event, Their Royal Highnesses recognised some of our longest serving volunteers in Fermanagh, who cumulatively, have given us an amazing 60 years of their time!

Invited volunteers included Joan Hill, who spent many years working as a tour guide at Castle Coole, before retiring and returning



Landmark study to examine sustainable tourism

The Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede property group has launched a major, industry-defining sustainability study to better understand the impact on and opportunities for the local community of increased visitor numbers to the Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede.

Heather McLachlan, Regional Director of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, said, 'Last year visitor numbers to the Giant's Causeway and Carrick-a-Rede reached over 1.5million and with the continued fast paced growth of tourism to Northern Ireland these numbers are expected to increase. A collaborative approach is critical to understanding how visitor numbers are impacting on the local community. It is only by deepening our understanding of our sites and how and why people interact with them, that we as a conservation charity can ensure that they are well cared for, for generations to come.'

'We are really excited about this study. As far as we are aware, this is the first time a World Heritage Site has undertaken a

project of this scale which will focus on examining physical spaces, the environment, how visitors feel about their visits to these places and how we can work as good neighbours. The difference to what has been done before is that we are examining all of these factors at one time and collating the data, sharing it with the local community and asking them to actively participate in creating a sustainable future for the site.'

We are now approaching the end of the first quarter of the study which took place over a 12-18 month period and saw the Trust work in partnership with ARUP, a renowned international firm of designers and technical experts who examined the physical, environmental and visitor experience aspects of the sites. Tourism and community experts, Cillian Murphy and Matt Scrimgeour will lead on the socio-cultural lens of the project and will act as the voice of the community into the project. Look out for study updates in future issues of Near You and online at [Facebook.com/sustainabilitystudy](https://www.facebook.com/sustainabilitystudy).



Farming for the future on the North Coast

We have been looking at all the land we own on the North Coast, how we manage it and what each field delivers for nature, farming and the environment.

Some of our land is already in great shape with a diverse variety of plant and animal species living there. But there is a fantastic opportunity to do more in areas that are not as rich in flora and fauna. In an effort to improve habitats where we can, we planted two hectares of new native woodland trees near Ballintoy and Carrick-a-Rede in spring. More trees will be planted as we identify the best areas for new woodland.

We have also planted 400 metres of new native species hedge, with many more to be planted over the next few years. These hedges are extra wide (four metres) to ensure they provide good spaces for mammals and birds to find shelter and nest and are all full of flowering trees to support our insects.

We are also trialling a new approach to our farmland fields by sowing eight hectares of species diverse herb pastures. It's hoped these pastures will provide good grazing for the cattle and plenty of flowers for

our pollinators. Because some of the herb species are deep rooted they help to improve soil structure, drainage and absorb more carbon from the atmosphere. If the trial proves successful our plan is to adopt this approach to all of our farmland.

We will be working with our farm tenants, entering long term arrangements with them and introducing new grazing techniques with different livestock. We hope to use native breeds of cattle to graze as they are better at foraging and are happy to eat all the plants that grow rather than just selecting the sweetest grasses.

We also plan to harvest local grass and plant species from species rich grasslands close to our sites to sow into our fields, focusing particularly on plants that are rare and at risk, ensuring we help their survival in the future.

We will need support and help from volunteers and the local communities close to our sites to help us achieve this ambitious programme. If you are interested in finding our more, please contact our North Coast office on 028 7084 8728.



Sea buckthorn removal at Murlough NNR

You may have spotted the orange of the sea buckthorn berries as a bright spot along the Murlough coastline in early winter, but did you know that the plant is in fact an extremely invasive, non-native species. At Murlough National Nature Reserve, we're nearly three years into a project to remove almost ten hectares of the intruder.

Sea buckthorn has long been used in traditional medicine for its anti-oxidant rich fruit, and the plant is often used as an anti-desertification device due to its expansive root system. The roots hold tight to their surroundings which is why it was introduced to Murlough in the 1890s as a dune stabiliser.

Since then, the buckthorn has spread voraciously across the reserve. The plant disrupts the natural ebb and flow of the sand dunes which means that when large portions of the 6,000 year old dunes are washed away during storms, sheer cliffs held by the root system are left behind. The native plants can't survive under the dark thicket of thorns, leaving only sycamore to develop.

Partially funded by NIEA, our rangers, volunteers and contractors have spent the past two years removing seven hectares of buckthorn from the most vulnerable parts of the reserve including the shore and important yellow dune areas.

Speaking on the progress of the project, Conservation Lead Ranger, Patrick said, 'After the initial phase of the work, we're starting to see the results which have been exactly what we hoped. The natural dune formation is returning which means the dunes are reacting and recovering naturally from storms, and we're seeing recovery of strandline vegetation which couldn't have survived under the buckthorn.'

Native coastal plants like bladder campion, sea beet and scurvy grass have all started to take hold in the cleared areas. The next phase of the project will involve monitoring and treating regrowth, and removal of the inland buckthorn.

Find out more about our work on our website at nationaltrust.org.uk/murlough.



New wildlife pond at Bishop's Gate

Back in the autumn of 2018, a digger was at Downhill Demesne to help with path re-surfacing work and we took the opportunity to ask for a little assistance with another project – creating a pond.

With a little direction we managed to scrape out an existing depression in the Bishop's Gate Bog Garden which had become overgrown with a very invasive weed (wood sedge). Practically overnight the depression filled with water (thanks to our typical Northern Irish weather) and showed the first signs of being wildlife-friendly by welcoming a pair of Mallard ducks!

Since then, our wonderful volunteers have helped to plant around the edges and deepen the pond a little more, donning their wellies to shovel silt and sediment to create side banks for wildlife and marginal plants.

We are still in the early stages of pond 'development' in that we aim to create a more natural shape and perhaps go a little deeper still.

Creatures of all kinds now visit the pond including pond skaters, water beetles, blackbirds and collared doves that regularly come to drink here. This is a very enjoyable ongoing project and we are excited to welcome our next guests. Do come and see the pond on your next visit.



Queen Bee cake wins top award

We're thrilled that Trish Prosser the Food and Beverage Manager at Mount Stewart scooped first prize for most Inspiring Local Recipe for her Honey & Pineapple Cake at the Trust's Food and Beverage Awards.

The Honey and Pineapple Cake recipe was inspired by Theresa, Marchioness of Londonderry and her life in Ireland during the latter half of the nineteenth century. As a distinguished society hostess and influencer of her times, she was very much the 'Queen Bee' of society. The cake is made with the honey from the endangered black bees that are living and being protected at Mount Stewart. Try a delicious slice for yourself in the Mount Stewart tea-room and let us know what you think!



Sustainable shopping

In April 2018 we announced our commitment to phasing out selling single use plastics at our places by 2022. As a result we have introduced a whole new range of sustainable products into our shops including metal straws, reusable food wrapping that you can wash and reuse and reusable coffee cups. We'd love to know what you think of them. Get in touch with us at @NationalTrustNI on Facebook or Twitter.



Exciting times ahead for Springhill

Springhill is currently in the feasibility stage of a major project to re-service the house. The project is all about preserving this historic building over the next 25 years and beyond by repairing and replacing the external and internal fabric of the building, improving the services within the house and also ensuring that the house is safe and meets the latest building standards. To get this right we need to understand both the history and context of the building and also its detailed condition.

Alongside the re-servicing work that is required, we are exploring ways in which we can refresh the presentation of Springhill, and have been carrying out investigations into its interior decoration history and research into the collection so that we can better understand its significance.

This house holds the keys to so many personal stories through its remarkable library, portraits and treasured objects, and we want to ensure that this rich history can be shared with visitors even more evocatively and memorably. We aim to open rooms which have so far not been available for visitors to explore and these will help give greater insight into the life of the Lenox-Conyngham family at Springhill.

In the first half of 2020 we will be presenting the plan for a substantial multi-million project for Springhill and look to secure the funding to start the building work in the spring of 2021. We anticipate that this work will take at least 24 months with the house being closed for a period of this time. Keep an eye on our website and future editions of Near You for project updates.



Get ready for a food adventure at Castle Ward

Castle Ward is excited to start a season of harvest with new foodie adventures this autumn and winter. We've joined forces with Indie Fude and Slow Food NI to make Castle Ward a destination for all things local and tasty.

Like many large stately homes, estates like Castle Ward were once the epitome of sustainable living, growing most of their food on site in the walled garden and orchards, grinding flour for bread in the water powered cornmill, and rearing animals in the farmyard. Building on this important history, we're working with Indie Fude on a number of upcoming supper clubs and more to support the work of local food producers. Johnny McDowell of Indie Fude looks forward

to the partnership: 'Laura and I cannot wait to delve further into the heritage of Castle Ward and embrace its rich foodie history. Indie Fude, partnered with Slow Food NI, are the perfect team to bring artisan Irish produce into the spotlight - and provide some really fun and engaging experiences.'

This year we're also introducing for sale and use in our tea-rooms, our own Castle Ward Dexter beef. The herd, owned by local farmer Alan Laughlin, graze on our species rich fields on the estate - no food miles involved!

Find out more about our supper clubs, foraging walks and workshops on our website at nationaltrust.org.uk/castle-ward



New activities programme for young teenagers now recruiting

The team at the Giant's Causeway have partnered with Causeway Adventures and The Coast Office, Portballintrae to provide an exciting free new project for local young people, called 'Knowing Your Home - A Sense of Place'.

The six month programme is a unique opportunity for young teenagers residing in the Causeway Coast and Glen's area to follow an adventurous path of activities, skill learning and mentoring led by environmental, conservation and outdoor activity practitioners. On completion, young people taking part will have the opportunity to achieve an accredited John Muir Award.

Meeting once a week at The Coast Office, Portballintrae Harbour, the group learn practical conservation skills and more about their local and natural history of the beautiful north Antrim coast. Activities include sailing, rowing, kayaking, archery,

wildlife identification, navigation and basic bush craft across different National Trust locations on the Causeway Coast.

We recently held a celebration event to mark the completion of the pilot programme, which saw nine young people (pictured) successfully receive their John Muir Certificates and we are now recruiting for the next series, to commence in autumn 2019.

If you are interested in learning more about the programme or would like to secure a place, please contact Jim Allen, Causeway Adventures on 078 7651 6032 or call into The Coast Office, Portballintrae Harbour and ask for Paul.

Alternatively you can secure a place via the Giant's Causeway Booking Office on 028 2073 3419 or email northcoastbookings@nationaltrust.org.uk.



Protecting the breeding terns of Strangford Lough

Strangford Lough is internationally important for its breeding tern colonies and our staff have played an important role in the monitoring of the numbers of terns nesting on the Lough annually since the late 1960's. Three species of terns arrive each summer to nest on islands within the Lough: Sandwich, Arctic and Common tern.

While numbers do fluctuate naturally from year to year, in recent times we have become increasingly concerned about both the decline in number of breeding pairs and young fledging. We were aware of a range of factors that may be causing this, but needed hard evidence if we were to do something about it.

In 2018 we appointed an external consultant to carry out intense monitoring of key breeding tern colonies on Strangford Lough. The overall results were shocking for productivity, with Sandwich tern only raising 0.23 chicks per breeding pair and common tern raising 0.14 chicks per pair. The results for Arctic tern were even more alarming with virtually no young raised at all. Although terns are relatively long-lived birds and can withstand several years of poor breeding, continuous years of

low productivity are unsustainable and breeding populations eventually decline.

As part of the intense monitoring, wildlife surveillance cameras were placed on all the key tern colonies. Images from these cameras confirmed that otter were the main culprit taking eggs, chicks and adult terns, with large gulls also proving to be a major predator. The storm on 14 June 2018 was also a major cause of breeding failure as strong winds and high tides combined to flood many nests.

The results of our monitoring work are published in the NI Seabird Report 2018. We also gave a presentation on our findings at the British Trust for Ornithology NI conference.

This year we are continuing with the intense monitoring programme. To deter otter predation we have installed electric fencing and sonic deterrents on some of the key tern colonies as a trial, after obtaining consent from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. We hope to see an improvement in nesting numbers this summer and will keep you updated in a future issue of Near You.



Meanwhile, in the Mourne...

Since the launch of the Mourne path project in January, our two Mourne rangers have been learning as much as possible about implementing a sustainable path system before setting our plans in stone - preferably Mourne granite.

From spending a week in an off-grid bothy in the Lake District, to scaling the peak of Goatfell in Arran, the team have been learning best practice from experts across the UK and beyond to ensure a successful project. Patrick Lynch, Conservation Lead Ranger at Murlough explains the need for knowledge gathering: 'This collaborative working approach means we can develop a better understanding of the needs of the Mourne, and share it with other land owners and stakeholders. Our plan is evolving as we discover just how passionate people are about the Mourne. We can't just replicate a system that has worked elsewhere; we're developing our own upland path guidelines that will then become a useful touchpoint for other projects.'

We've been able to share the knowledge learned with other ranger teams and

colleagues in Mourne Heritage Trust, and we'll be welcoming the National Trust Lake District rangers in September to learn a stone pitching technique.

Although busy working on the paths in the mountain, the rangers have been able to appreciate their surroundings, 'While we've been up working on the paths we've spotted an Irish hare at the summit of Donard, lots of common lizards and even a red grouse', mentioned Katie, one of our Mourne rangers. 'We've also been getting to know the 'regulars' and it's helped us get a better understanding of who is using the mountain and why.'

Supporting the rangers is a hardy team of over 30 mountain volunteers who you may have spotted on a walk. As the winter nears, we'll be working further down the mountain so stop, say hi and find out how you can support the project by volunteering or donating to help us with vital tools and equipment.

Keep up with the rangers on their Twitter account @NTMourne, and donate via nationaltrust.org.uk/themourne



Keeping the art of blacksmithing alive at Patterson's Spade Mill

In our care since 1991, Patterson's Spade Mill is the last working water-driven spade mill in daily use in the British Isles.

The Patterson family have been making spades here for generations and visitors who come today enjoy a tour that takes them back in time as they watch a block of steel be transformed into a spade of the highest quality through heat and the skill of a blacksmith.

Resident blacksmith James McCullough started as a volunteer at Patterson's Spade Mill where his interest in the traditional skill of blacksmithing developed into a fiery passion. With the support of the National Trust, James became an apprentice blacksmith under the expert training of Colin Dawson our resident blacksmith who worked at Patterson's for over 25 years before retiring this year. Now a qualified blacksmith and spade maker, James is running workshops of his own under the name 'Patterson's Forge, Hammer and Tongs', and is hoping to ignite a similar fire for blacksmithing in others.

The forge offers day, evening and weekend courses which are available for individuals, groups, team building days and parties. Classes are designed for all abilities and everyone is welcome. Discounts are available for groups.

For details visit nationaltrust.org.uk/pattersons-spade-mill

Meet the blacksmith: James McCullough

When and how did you get into blacksmithing?

I acquired a brain injury after an accident at work in 2005. After the accident I was faced with the prospect of having no job and no income. I found this very frustrating because in my own mind I was capable of all these things, and I still wanted to do them.

In 2008, I was referred to the Cedar Brain Injury team who encouraged me to get qualifications while trying out different work placements. During this time I started to volunteer with the National Trust at Patterson's Spade Mill and this was the beginning of a new chapter for me. As my confidence grew, I started working for the

National Trust as a tour guide. In 2015, I became an apprentice in spade making and blacksmithing. It fired me up inside in more ways than one, driving my passion further.

What do you enjoy most about it?

I enjoy teaching people. There is something special about watching people hammer and forge something that's useful or meaningful to them. Patterson's Forge has been up and running from March 2019. I teach people the art of forging. They learn how to heat metal, and make anything from a hanging basket to knives.

Blacksmithing also fuels my creativity. When I get the forge lit, and the hammer in my hand, who knows what I'm going to make? The endless possibilities drive my passion for the art of blacksmithing.

Why is it important that blacksmithing is kept alive for future generations to enjoy?

If it wasn't for organisations like the National Trust keeping places like Patterson's Spade Mill alive we could have lost a lot of valuable knowledge. Blacksmithing goes far beyond just forming metal into shapes with a hammer. You need organisational skills, physics, good time management, a range of tools and a great deal of pride in your work. There is job satisfaction in mastering the processes, and in seeing the fruit of your own hand. The look and feel of hand forged iron pleases both the eye of the beholder and the soul of the creator. I am passionate about teaching these skills to future generations.

Why do you think it's valuable for people?

I feel that sites like Patterson's Spade Mill provide a valuable window into the lives of those who have come before us. Learning about, and appreciating how people used to live is an important part of our culture. The National Trust's ongoing work to promote and protect sites like Patterson's Spade Mill make it possible for people to access experiences that they may not have otherwise.



Artificial Sunshine, here to stay!

The Argyry's neon light installation 'Artificial Sunshine', by contemporary local artist Kevin Killen, has received much acclaim since it was installed in the West Hall in April 2018.

The light was commissioned to temporarily replace the chandelier which has hung in the West Hall since the house was built in 1824.

The chandelier was converted to Acetylene gas in 1906 and was removed from The Argyry in April 2018 to receive conservation treatment from metal conservator Rupert Harris in his London studio. It will return to The Argyry in November and will be reinstated in its rightful place in the West Hall, raising the question, what will happen to Artificial Sunshine?

Following its success, the property has made the exciting decision to retain the neon light installation. 'We want to continue to celebrate Mr Bond's legacy of collecting

contemporary art,' explains General Manager Gemma Elliott. 'This winter, the neon artwork will be redesigned and will go on long term display in the servants' stairs, alongside other pieces of Mr Bond's own private collection, for visitors to enjoy for decades to come.'

A new outdoor children's trail 'Follow the Flow' has also been launched to highlight the technologies used on the estate down through the centuries and the essential role water had to play. Children will enjoy discovering how a donkey helped to operate the pump that piped water from the river into the house. They'll learn how the bowstring design of Bond's Bridge provided easy access to the estate – plus much more!

Visit The Argyry's website and National Trust Mid Ulster Facebook page for more information around the exciting activities we have to offer themed around Artificial Sunshine.



Hedgerow restoration and how you can help

There is no place in rural Northern Ireland without hedgerows. They guide our daily car journeys and provide shelter on rainy walks. They transcribe into territorial boundaries, defining what's ours and what belongs to neighbours.

Good hedgerow keeps livestock where it should be, ensuring privacy and protecting gardens from strong wind. On exposed land a hedgerow will reduce wind erosion and provide shelter for animals – both domesticated and wild. For many people a hedgerow is not just a row of tangled bushes, but an extension of a carefully managed back garden.

It is not uncommon to see hedge made from beech, Leyland cypress or laurel which grow reasonably fast and provide the privacy and boundary lines needed in suburban areas. They stay green most of the year and can be 'tamed' by clipping them into straight forms. Unfortunately, they have poor value for wildlife.

For a healthy, natural countryside we encourage the planting of thorny hedges where possible. The most common in Northern Ireland are the ones that contain

hawthorn or gorse. For variation you can add blackthorn, holly, hazel or dog rose. For longer boundaries it is good to consider planting single standard trees like oak at the end of a hedge. This will not only provide habitat for a greater number of animals, but in the long term it can provide a source of timber.

Every winter our rangers and volunteers restore a number of hedgerows on the Ards Peninsula. This is done by planting gaps with native species and 'laying' old trees, while promoting the traditional way of managing boundaries. It's a vital part of the land management work we do and volunteers are always welcome.

Have a go at hedgelaying

If you'd like to learn more about the traditional skill of hedgelaying join us on 1 February 2020 at the village of Kearney for a hands-on session from 10am-3pm.

Please book in advance by calling 028 4278 7769.