

Whitelee Countryside ranger Service – 2016 News Stories

Fireworks Free Nights

7-11-17

The number of people setting off or attempting to set off fireworks at the windfarm has declined dramatically which is great news but better than that, promoting the nights of the 3rd - 5th November at Whitelee as a place to bring pets who hate fireworks has been hugely popular! 2017 was the first year the rangers were on patrol over the Guy Fawkes nights to stop fireworks at the windfarm and during those nights they noticed a number of dog owners bringing their pets to escape the constant thunder of fireworks within towns and cities - so this year they promoted the site with this idea in mind.

The Friday and Saturday nights were reasonably busy - but Sunday the 5th seen the car parks of the visitor centre absolutely packed with cars bringing pets to the windfarm. There were cars with cats on laps managing to relax, as were their owners over soup or a sandwich brought from home, but outside there were dog owners walking their stressed pets around the visitor centre as well as those armed with torches making use of the windfarm tracks. There was also a real community spirit in the night air as dog owners chatted with the rangers and one another, sadly trading stories of how many sedatives they'd had to feed their dogs, but also saying how happy they and their pets were to get away from the worst of the fireworks by coming to the windfarm...and what a great idea it was to promote the area for this purpose.

There were loads of much happier dogs enjoying a walk and on Guy Fawkes night and the rangers estimate there were between 150 - 200 people with their dogs throughout the night which is fantastic. There was also a dramatic decline in people coming to set off fireworks from previous years and those that did try were quickly approached by the rangers and once it was explained to them about the dogs as well as the fact fireworks are not permitted in the windfarm, they were happy to stop.

All in all the fireworks free nights were a roaring success and the rangers will look to build on this in 2018 by running the nights again and looking to develop them further, maybe with some activities to do.

Access Restrictions - Ardochrig/Cleughearn Plantation

17-10-17

There will be localised access restrictions in place for vegetation clearance work at Ardochrig/Cleughearn plantation starting on Tuesday 24th October and lasting 4 days. An alternate route is in place. Please see the 'Access restrictions' page for more information.

Fireworks Not Permitted At Whitelee

16-10-17

Guy Fawkes/Fireworks night can be a great time to get the family out in the evening, around the bonfire and enjoying the fireworks display. Fireworks should not however be brought and set off at Whitelee and we would encourage anyone wishing to enjoy fireworks night to go to an organised event. These are safer - and the fireworks display is generally much better.

Fireworks are not permitted at the windfarm for a number of reasons, the main one being that fireworks have the potential to set alight the 'peatbog' that the windfarm is built on, causing damage not only to the bog and its wildlife but also potentially the infrastructure built upon it for the windfarm. Peatbog fires can smolder underground, up to 15 meters below ground level, and have been known to burn underground for weeks, months, years and even decades - flaring up when conditions are right and setting the surface alight.

In addition to this the windfarm contains livestock and wildlife that can become distressed by fireworks, with potential to then injure themselves.

For the above reasons the windfarm has a zero tolerance approach to fireworks and members of the public are requested not to bring them to the windfarm. The countryside rangers will be patrolling the site from the 3rd to the 5th of November and anyone found attempting to set off fireworks will be required to leave the site as it is illegal to set off fireworks in a public place or on private land (not owned by the person).

Sheep Worrying And Keeping Yourself And Your Dog Safe

2-10-17

A few weeks ago there was an unfortunate sheep worrying incident at Lochgoin Farm that resulted in the death of a lamb. Luckily for the dog involved the owner paid the compensation for the loss of the lamb and the dog was able to leave site but it highlights a serious issue - farmers who find dogs worrying or harming their sheep are legally entitled to shoot the dog and recover any losses from the owner! This would be disastrous not only for the farmer but obviously the dog and its owners and in the case concerned, the owner did not expect their dog to act the way it did.

If you walk your dog at Whitelee or any area where livestock are present - do you know your dogs temperament? If not then do not risk their lives and livestock and keep them on the lead when near livestock and always keep your dog in sight.

Run The Blades 2017

15-9-17

Almost a year in the planning and all over in 2 short days, Run The Blades 2017 was the largest event to take place at Whitelee windfarm and cemented the event in the running calendar with this its third year.

599 runners took to the tracks around the windfarm, pounding the ground with 305 10K runners on Friday 21st and 294 21K and 50K runners on Saturday 22nd. Friday's weather was 'almost' ideal for running with mild temperatures but a freshening wind - as you'd expect on a windfarm. Chris Walsh won the 10k event in a time of 37 minutes 49 seconds but even more impressive is that Chris has now won all 3 race distances, taking first place in the inaugural 50K in 2015 followed by the 21K in 2016 and the 10K this time. The fastest lady was Janine Dickie coming in shortly after in 45 minutes 57 seconds.

Saturday saw lower winds than the previous evening and pleasant temperatures again but this was punctuated with showers and low cloud, adding to the atmosphere. The weather didn't slow the pace however and Kieran Cooper came in with a time of 1 hour 21 minutes 38 seconds for the half marathon followed by Susan MacRitchie as the first lady in 1 hour 32 minutes 16 seconds.

The final runners of the day were the endurance 50K group of 75, with Owain Williams crossing the line in a time of 4 hours 7 minutes 18 seconds. The fastest lady was Emma Roberts in 4 hours 35 minutes and 17 seconds.

Exhilarated runners seemed to love the routes and unique setting amongst the turbines and are already talking about the 2018 event!

For all the results see: <http://www.breakingstrain.co.uk/run-the-blades/>

50K - 75 runners

Winner: Owain Williams in 4:07:18

Fastest woman: Emma Roberts in 4:35:17

Half Marathon - 219 runners

Winner: Kieran Cooper 1:21:38

Fastest woman: Susan MacRitchie 1:32:16

10K - 305 runners

Chris Walsh 0:37:49

Fastest woman: Janine Dickie 0:45:57

Turbine 109 Maintenance

24-8-17

Work using heavy lift cranes will be taking place at turbine 109 near Corse Hill this week. The work is expected to take place from Thursday 24th till Sunday 27th August but is weather dependent and may take longer. Local exclusions for health and safety will be in place - please do not enter the restricted area. A diversion is in place.

Quarry Blast

16-8-17

Please note there will be quarry blasting taking place in the windfarm today, Wednesday 16th August, at one of the quarries close to High Alderstocks and that will result in local access restrictions between 8am and 4pm.

The quarry is at: NS607452.

Blasting is scheduled for ~12noon.

B764 Moor Road Closure 31-7-17 to 4-8-17

27-7-17

Please be advised that from Monday 31st July until Friday 4th August there will be a road closure in place on the B764 outside the Windfarm (operational) entrance.

This is to re-surface the portion of road just within the East Ayrshire boundary (towards Kilmarnock), going towards the M77 on-ramp. We have been advised that there will be no through road for local traffic and no traffic control in place... and that no vehicles will be allowed to pass through! ...

The diversion route that will be in place will take you further up the A77 or M77, then along the A726 to the roundabout for Eaglesham, and then the reverse for the end of day route. Anyone coming from Glasgow should leave at the Eaglesham Junction (junction 5) and not junction 6.'

Lochgoin Covenanters Museum

5-7-17

We are pleased to say that the Lochgoin Covenanters Museum is open once again. There has been no official grand opening after the protracted refurbishment period but the good news is it's open, upgraded and still free to visit. The door is generally open during the day but if not then just knock at the farm to be let in. This great little museum is packed full of local history about the Covenanters and is well worth a visit.

Whitelee II Access Restrictions: 6th - 11th June

5-6-17

There will be localised restrictions at two turbine locations in the Whitelee II extension. Please see the details below and look for advisory signage if in the area. The restrictions will only affect the localised area to the turbine and the wider extension area can still be used.

Turbine 141 - the road will be closed at the junction towards T141 and immediately after, but before Turbine 142 from Tuesday 6th - Thursday 8th June.

Turbine 148 - the road will be closed at the junction towards T148 at the spine road and immediately after T148 from Friday 9th - Sunday 11th June.

Summer Is Here!

11-5-17

Summer has well and truly arrived at Whitelee with the return of the sites summer visitors - in the past few weeks Curlews (*Numenius arquata*), House Martins (*Delichon urbica*) and Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) have all returned from their wintering grounds and bumblebees, hoverflies and butterflies have hatched in numbers. Meadow Pipits (*Anthus pratensis*) and Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) are filling the air with their sweet songs - a real herald of summer!

The rangers have installed a wildlife noticeboard at their cabin where you will find information on the weeks best wildlife sightings and where to see them so if you're interested in wildlife, remember to have a look at the board before heading out into site.

Hearing Dogs For Deaf People Event

11-5-17

Sunday 7th saw Hearing Dogs for Deaf People run a fabulous charity event from turbine 53 with over 100 participants, and their dogs of course. The sun was shining and 2 guided walks took place to raise funds for the charity with dogs and owners happily exploring the windfarm during a fun filled day. There was every breed of dog imaginable present and all getting along nicely as well as demonstrations by a hearing dog and hilarity provided via the WCRS dog agility course. All the dogs and visitors left site having raised funds for a worthwhile charity while enjoying the walk in the glorious weather - we hope to see lots of them returning to enjoy the access opportunities the site provides for dog walkers.

Amphibian Amore

10-4-16

What a great night of spying on Whitelee's amphibians! On Sunday evening a group of 11, plus 3 rangers headed out into the evening gloom to check on some of the myriad of ponds in the windfarm for amphibians. It wasn't long before the rangers netted a handsome male Palmate newt (*Triturus helveticus*) and Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*). The Palmate Newt was in his full glorious breeding condition - brightly coloured and covered in dark spots, along with it's diagnostic tail filament. The frog was a small individual, possibly returning to the breeding pond for the first time, or having overwintered there. After walking onto the next pond the group were amazed at the number of frog tadpoles and spawn clumps found with literally thousands of very young tadpoles wriggling into life. Shortly after another male Palmate Newt popped up to the surface of the pond repeatedly showing off before descending again - providing a real treat for the group.

On the way back to the visitor centre the group stopped at the first ponds again to hunt some large Great Diving Beetles (*Dytiscus marginalis*) that the rangers had spotted on a recce a few nights previously and it wasn't long before one showed itself. This voracious predator wasn't the monster seen before but was still around 1 inch in length so no lightweight! All in all a great night was had by all.

Turbine 71 Work Ongoing

29-3-17

Work on replacing the main bearing at turbine 71 is now complete and the access restrictions in the area have been lifted. See the 'Access restrictions' page for more information.

Access Restrictions 24th - 26th March

24-3-17

Please note there will be various access restrictions in place this weekend - please look at the 'Access Restrictions' page for more information.

Spring Has Sprung At Whitelee

20-3-17

Spring has arrived early at Whitelee with signs aplenty - frogs and frog spawn have been seen at ponds, Curlews (*Numenius arquata*) have returned to breed, Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) and Meadow Pipets (*Anthus pratensis*) are singing high in the sky and the first wildflowers are coming into bloom.

Colt's-foot (*Tussilago farfara*), an early spring flowerer is a common sight along tracksides at Whitelee and is easily spotted being one of the first herbs to come out at the windfarm. Spotted by its attractive dandelion type yellow flower head this plant is unusual in that the flowers appear long before the leaves, earning it the early name of 'sons before fathers'.

The plant has a number of uses, not just brightening up tracksides at the windfarm and providing nectar for invertebrates such as hoverflies - fresh flowers can be eaten raw as part of a tasty and aromatic salad (washed first of course!) or dried and added to pancakes or fritters, and for bushcraft enthusiasts, before the introduction of matches, the felt-like covering of the plant was wrapped in a rag and dipped in a solution of saltpetre to create what was considered to be excellent tinder for firelighting. The leaves have even been added to stews and salads but it must be said, they're rather bitter! The plants leaves have also been dried in the past and used as a substitute for tobacco and it even has medicinal properties as it contains chemicals that are anti-inflammatory and antitussive (used for cough prevention and treatment). As if that wasn't enough, the whole plant - leaves and flowers, fresh or dried, can be used to make a tasty herbal tea as well.

Watch out for this lovely little plant appearing all along tracksides in the coming months with its bright yellow flowers - shortly followed by its distinctive hoof shaped leaves, from where it gets its common name.

New Path Creation

20-3-17

The rangers have been working with the Whitelee Access Project Officer (Nick Prower) to prepare for the creation of a new multi-use path leading from the Whitelee II extension area, past Laigh Hapton farm and onto the East Ayrshire paths. Work so far has focused on felling forestry trees before the bird breeding season, using the timber and brash generated to create a mat on top of which the new path will be constructed. Check back here for updates on when the path will be finished.

MTB Tree Planting

20-3-17

Work began on planting up areas of the Whitelee mountainbike trails with a mixture of native tree species last week, ably assisted by a John Muir Trust Award group from Parkhill Secondary School in Glasgow.

As part of plans to continue developing the mountainbike facility at Whitelee the countryside rangers started planting a mixture of Silver (*Betula pendula*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) and Aspen (*Populus tremula*) last week. Approximately 1100 trees will be planted in total adding character to the trails and making them

more challenging to ride, but also adding new habitat to the northern end of the site in the form of mixed native woodland.

The star of the show is the beautiful Aspen; a fast growing but short lived native broadleaf species of tree. The saplings used for the planting come from the genetic stock of Scottish Aspen and their inclusion contributes to the conservation of this lovely tree. The 'tremula' part of its scientific name indicates one of its interesting qualities - its leaves shake, quake, quiver and tremble in the wind thanks to having winged leaf stems that help them flutter, and provide a nice easily seen identification feature.

Aspen can reproduce via seed but this is uncommon in Scotland for unknown reasons so their main method of reproducing is vegetative, with new suckers, or 'ramets' growing off the roots of mature tree. The numbers of new shoots produced in this way can be prolific, especially after major disturbance such as fire, with ~70,000 clones of the parent tree appearing per hectare.

Look out for these growing up in the site in the coming years.

Whitelee Extension Restrictions

20-3-17

The access restrictions within the Whitelee II extension have now been lifted.

13-3-17

Please note the Whitelee extension is currently closed for public access due to on-going site works. Members of the public are requested not to enter the area for health and safety reasons until work is completed. Advisory notices are in place at entry points to the extension area and visitors are requested to follow the access advice.

Work is anticipated to be completed by the end of the week. Please check back here for updates.

Scottish Endurance Riding Club Event

27-2-17

The Scottish Endurance Riding club (Glasgow Branch) were back at Whitelee windfarm for another endurance ride on Sunday 19th February and was another successful day! All horses and riders got round the course without a hitch and got back safe and sound, albeit a little wet and cold. There were four routes organised; a 10km taster, 17km, 21km and a 25km courses. There is a grading system that is used in competitions where the horse and rider must work together to maintain a certain pace, and in doing so they can train and work on different qualifications which will allow the rider to be a part of more difficult and testing events.

The event began at Ardochrig, the most Eastern point in the windfarm, and the location of the grid connection where the electricity from the windfarm feeds onto the national grid. From here the horses rode a taster route to get the rider and horse comfortable with the conditions and to get the correct pace for the race. After this they made their way out past Corse Hill, down into one of the forestry areas and then back up towards Ardochrig. The other route went further into site and around Drumduff hill. The weather on the day was cloudy, suitably windy (for a windfarm) and with

some powdery rain... the wet stuff. The event team had a large amount of coffee and hot chocolate to stave off the worst of it, and no one caught pneumonia!

There were double the number of entries since the last event in October with a total of 35 riders and 10 helpers along with 27 vehicles to transport the horses. Ranging from small horse boxes to enormous "lorries", fully equipped with shower, kitchen, toilet and a place to sleep... and space for a horse. The Rangers had a fantastic day watching the horses do what horses do and had a great laugh with the riders and helpers. WCRS are already looking forward to hosting the event again in April and are hoping that the weather this time will be a little brighter. We also want to thank the Riding club for using Whitelee as a place to host their events and hope that it is something that can continue as we continue to work at making Whitelee a popular place to horse ride.

2017 Event Guide

23-2-17

The 2017 WCRS events guide is on its way to the printers and will be available from the windfarm as well as local libraries very soon but in the meantime, if you cannot wait, you can download a copy from this page.

MTB Works - Access Restrictions

13-2-17

Over the next few weeks the mountain bike tracks will be receiving some much needed maintenance that will result in closures of parts of the facility.

The tracks are now 3 years old and have been consistently used throughout the year, which has resulted in some areas becoming eroded and weathered, exposing the stone and areas of geogrid.

Starting from the 13th of February a local contractor will be carrying out resurfacing work over ~80% of the inner track and a few sections of the outer. A new 'berm' will be built in the eastern most section, culverts will be placed in areas where water flows over the surface of the track during times of wet weather, and some additional berm maintenance in the western part of the outer track will also take place. Work will progress over the next few weeks and during this time most sections of the trails will remain open however some localised closures will be necessary so we ask that visitors keep an eye out for restrictions and closure notices showing where tracks may be closed. Work areas will change from week to week so visitors should check on here or our 'access restrictions' page for updates before travelling.

If you have any questions or for more information please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Whitelee Ranger Service.

Run The Blades 2017

13-2-17

Run The Blades returns in 2017 with another opportunity for participants to run in 10K, half marathon and 50K races through the windfarm. The 2016 event was hugely successful with 370 people taking to the windfarm tracks for a spectacular day of running - and thankfully the weather

was much kinder! Advance tickets for the 2017 event, which takes place on the 21st and 22nd of July, are on sale now from Breaking Strain Events.

Dunwan Horse Trek Route

13-2-17

The rangers have created a new off-track horse trekking route that loops around the eastern end of Dunwan Hill. The route takes riders out on a ~6km circular route over farmland and moor while circling Dunwan Hill and providing some wonderful views to Dunwan reservoir. For more information and details of this and other routes for horse riders, as well as our free leaflet for horse riders, please see the horse riding page on here or contact the Whitelee Rangers.

2017 Events Programme

13-2-17

Our new 2017 events programme will be out soon and has a mixture of old family favourites as well as some new and exciting activities/events. The booklet will be available in libraries in East Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire and East Ayrshire as well as via the website here and from the windfarm itself. Also returning will be our popular kids 'Boggy Beasties' summer club.

Book quickly as popular events fill up fast.