

Houghton Hall Park

August 2021 Newsletter

The Houghton Hall Park Renaissance and Renewal Project is being managed by Central Bedfordshire Council in partnership with Houghton Regis Town Council and is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund.

It's been a busy month for activities going on in the park, but before we get on to that we found out this week that we have won another award, the Living Countryside Award for Connecting People to the Countryside!

Comments from the judges: 'The volunteer group brings together a host of varied members of the community. The produce and flowers that are sold provide healthy and sustainable options for the community, and all the profits from sales are ploughed back into the project. This is a holistic way to engage with nature and help with the issues of mental health, food poverty and healthy choices at the same time. The work that the volunteers produce is also a draw for the public, who often visit the park just to see the latest display. The garden is managed using sustainable methods and uses recycled items where possible.'

Judges Highlight: The commitment and creativity of the volunteers and staff that worked as a team to create this wonderful community garden.

As part of our award CPRE have put together a wonderful video showing all the work that goes on in the kitchen and formal gardens, take a look using the following link:

<https://youtu.be/nByHwVmOmVU>

We are so proud of the park community that has been developed over the last three years and we are now seeing the fantastic results!



The countryside charity
Bedfordshire

A great place to live and work.

What's On

We've seen lots of activities taking place in the park over the last few weeks including our new summer holiday programme. At the end of July we welcomed Vintage Open Air Cinema showing Grease and Dirty Dancing on consecutive nights, the weather was perfect and the park provided a stunning setting, we hope to welcome the cinema back next year.



The park held its first Tasty Creative Market in July, local crafts and produce were on display with over thirteen stalls, the day was incredibly hot however the stallholders were pleased at the end of the afternoon therefore we have decided to have two more markets on August 15th (this Sunday!) and September 26th, please come along and support our local crafters.



Our summer holiday activities are well under way, Eleanor our Community Park Ranger has been running three different activities, mini beast hunting, a magical nature adventure and make your own pop bottle rocket, these have proved very popular and we are almost sold out for the three weeks we are holding them. This picture of the pop bottle rocket launch sent in by Bonny Haughey is awesome! The mini beast hunting has also been a hit with lots of different minibeasts being found each session.



The Treasure Island trail was on in the park last week, it was great to see lots of children with their treasure maps looking for the treasure that the pirates had left behind. The interactive pirate experience we held in conjunction with the trail was very popular, we'd like to say a huge thank you to local Darren Woodhouse (and his dad!) from the BBB Group who created the show for us with two weeks notice when the original

panto we booked cancelled on us very last minute! Darren and his team will also be bringing Kidzone to us on Sunday 15th and Thursday 19th August.



Don't forget tickets for the Arbor the Tree show on Friday August 27th are still for sale on the website, it's going to be a brilliant day, you can also take part in our new wildlife rubbing trail, make badges and the volunteers also have a few tree based activities up their sleeve!

More details about the events going on in the park are on the following pages or you can find out more and book online at <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/events>

Central Bedfordshire
great lifestyles

Art & Culture Event

Tasty Creative Market

Tasty creative is a cross between a craft fair and farmers market, we will have a number of stalls showcasing local crafts and produce.

Pitches are still available priced at £12.50 and bookable on our website

Please come along and support our local crafters

Event dates: Sunday 15th August
Sunday 26th September
Event time: 10am to 3pm



Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

Central Bedfordshire
great lifestyles

Family Event

KIDZONE

Schools out and it's time for the children to have some fun!
Book your space at Kidzone and enjoy:-

- Crazy golf
- Nerf Wars
- Interactive play table
- Circus Skills
- Giant connect 4 & Jenga
- Fete games
- Cookie decorating
- Deckchairs for the adults to relax!

Sit back and relax for an hour while our fun experts entertain!

Cost: £5 per hr booking essential
Event date: Sunday 15th August & Thursday 19th August
Event time: 10am to 5pm



Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

Central Bedfordshire
great lifestyles

Nature Event

Arbor the Tree Show

Plus make your own bird feeder workshop!

Part Man. Part Tree.
17 feet tall. Meet Arbor.

Arbor tells the story of a tree pushed from his home and his fight to preserve his future. A free sapling to plant at home with every booking.

All children's tickets include entry into our new nature trail and badge making workshop

There will be fun and games from our volunteers too!

Event date: Friday 27th August
Show time: 11.30am & 1pm
Cost: £5 per person bookable on our website
Workshop time: 1.45pm
Cost: £3 per child bookable on our website



Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

Central Bedfordshire
great lifestyles

Family Event

Bepuzzled Treasure Trail

Join us for a super family day out this summer!

Take part in a globe-trotting voyage, solve a mystery and find the lost treasure.

Hidden around these parts are 10 steamtabulous vehicles to find.

Simply scan the QR codes to collect digital stamps, learn the story and take selfies.

Includes a free ebook!

Event date: 26th July to 26th August
Cost: Free!



Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

Monthly Photography Themes

Art&Culture
Event

Central Bedfordshire
great
lifestyles

 **August's Photography Theme**

'Trees' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in August
- Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 31st August
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED



We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme. August's theme is: 'Trees at Houghton Hall Park'. We thought this would be an ideal theme as we have an abundance of trees in the park, we are also celebrating trees on Friday 27th August, when Arbor the tree puppet will be in the park, Arbor is as tall as a giraffe! Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

The images must be taken between 1st – 31st August 2021 and each person can submit up to 5 entries. We will not accept any overly photoshopped images that do not represent the reality of the subject in the photo. Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms, notice boards around the visitor centre and in our monthly newsletter.

Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work:

www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography

We received these two great entries of mini beasts in the park for July's theme, if you've been to the park in recent weeks you may have seen lots of grasshoppers hopping about, come down on a hot day and the chirping almost makes you feel like you're abroad!



Slimy Slug by Carol Butler



Grasshopper by Chloe and Myla (age 6) Pearson

Community Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.



Well the year seems to be flying by, July already!

This month has flown by with a lot of prep for upcoming events in the summer holidays such as a pirate trail, fairy wands, and mini beasts as well as pop bottle rockets! (Thank you to those who donated their old pop bottles.)

I moved a tree off the path that someone reported. The tree in question was a dead elm that was covered in ivy and due to the weight of the ivy it fell down. If you come across something in the park that's not right feel free to let me know. You can email me on:

Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



The monthly volunteer session this month was a mini beast hunt to see what we have on site. It was one of the hottest days of the month, so we took breaks in the shade and shortened the day. We found lots of different mini beasts with the list being about 30 species long including hundreds of grasshoppers! (They have even made their way into the visitor centre!)

As we head into August there will be lots of events on so have a fantastic summer and enjoy the weather!

If you would like to come along to a volunteer session then please feel free to email me: Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Have a great month!

Stay safe- Eleanor



Nature Notes

Words and photographs by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.



A couple of weeks ago I was asked how you get rid of ants in a lawn. I know this is a problem for so many people, so I thought it would be a good topic for this month's nature notes. Before delving into possible extermination methods, it's worth looking at ants in more detail. As they say, 'you need to understand your enemy!'

Ants are incredible insects and believe it or not, are related to bees and wasps. They are one of the strongest creatures on the planet and can lift upwards of twenty times their own body weight in their mandibles. That's like a human lifting a large car in their teeth! They are social creatures and form a key component of the eco system. Apart from being a food source themselves, for instance they form a big part of the diet of green woodpeckers. This is worth noting if you want to attract them into your garden. Although seemingly to be randomly pecking in the grass, they are actually driving their specially adapted, long sticky tongues into nests to collect ants. Despite their reputation ants are more of a nuisance and perform vital role and do a lot of good by circulating nutrients as they break down and move soil. They also disperse seeds, pollinate plants and eat some harmful insects. From a gardener's point of view though, their worst trait is probably their habit of protecting aphids against attack from other insects, as they farm them for their sweet secretions known as honeydew.

Worldwide there are roughly 13,000 species of ant, of which we have 30 types in England, although in most gardens you are only likely to encounter a few of these. Our most common species is the yellow meadow ant, which as the name suggests prefers a grassy area. As they live and forage underground, you may only see them by disturbing their nest which shows on the surface as a fairly tidy small dome shape. Numbers of these ants in a nest can be huge, and once they exceed 250,000 will also have multiple queens laying eggs.

The ant you will probably see the most is the common black ant, *Lasius Niger*, because in their search for food scavenge above ground, often coming into the house. Void of a stinger these ants can't sting, so even if you encounter them whilst sitting on your lawn, you are quite safe.

There is another species of black ant, *Formica Fusa*, and can be distinguished from their common cousins by their yellow legs. These tend to live in rotting trees or under rocks, so it is unlikely you will find them in your lawn.



Ant pupae the third stage of development

There are four stages in the development of an ant. It starts with the egg usually laid by the queen. In some species, female worker ants may lay eggs, but usually in a practice known as 'worker policing', these eggs are eaten by non-fertile workers, so only the eggs of a queen will be allowed to develop. These are not the brown papery 'eggs' you see when you disturb a nest, these are in fact the pupae the third stage in the life cycle. The second stage is the larvae, which is maggot like and in a young nest, will be fed by the queen. Once a nest has become established feeding duties will generally be taken over by worker ants. Worker ants are all female, male ants don't do any work in a colony. The male ants only purpose is to mate with the queen, after which they will die. The larvae will go through several moults before it will spin a cocoon around itself. In this pupal stage it will undergo a metamorphism, emerging as an ant. Initially they are white in colour gradually darkening, depending on species, to its final colour.

Flying ants occur when a colony reaches its optimum size and a new nest site is needed for expansion. The larger ones are new queens and those around half their size are the male, who will mate on the wing with the queen. After mating the queen drops to the ground, sheds her

wings and burrows into the ground to start laying her eggs. For several weeks she will not eat, relying on fat reserves and her now redundant flight muscles, until she has produced enough female workers to establish the new colony. A queen will never mate again and can live up to thirty years, laying eggs fertilised by sperm from mating on that initial flight. The male lives only for around a week. Female workers ants live for about three months, usually killed by sheer exhaustion.

So, knowing what a tough life it is being an ant, are you sure you still want to get rid of them?

To be honest it isn't that easy, firstly there are so many of them in a colony, without digging up your lawn you'll never eradicate them all. The eggs laid by the queen are

so small there will always be some left in the soil and it's more than likely there will be more than one nest in a lawn, on top of all that, they are incredibly tough and are masters of overcoming adversity. They are prepared to die for the greater good of the colony. For instance, have you noticed how they will form a huge group hug to cross water?

The best method to avoid ants in your lawn is prevention. Ants like well-draining undisturbed soil, and prefer longer grass as it provides good shelter from both predators and bad weather. With this in mind, mowing your lawn regularly and giving it an occasional raking or spiking should cause enough disturbance to deter them. Don't let the edges grow too long or allow plants in the borders flop over the grass and clear up any leaf litter.

You can also use nematodes, but this will only be successful if you do it in conjunction with the mowing regime.

Nematodes are microscopic organisms which you add to water and put on the lawn using a watering can fitted with a spray bar or rose with largish holes. The ants will move away from treated areas but will return in



Prospective queen ants with their wings



Long grass will encourage ants to take up residence

time if the conditions they prefer remain, this is why it is important to keep up with the mowing and regular disturbance, but there is an added bonus, in that you will also have fewer weeds as the regular mowing will kill most of them off.

Interesting Ant Facts:- Queen ants are not in charge of the colony, female workers decide what work is required in a colony and organise themselves. Work is generally divided up based on experience, older ants doing the more complex jobs, although older ants will carry out menial tasks if it's required.

Ants communicate through a language of chemical smells. The largest ant in the world is the Asian Weaver ant, which can grow to around two inches long and is capable of lifting a hundred times its own body weight. The most painful sting in the world is from that of the Bullet ant. The venom contains a neurotoxin which attacks the nerves and muscle fibre. The pain can last for days and is likened to that of a gunshot, which is how the ant gets its name.

In the kitchen garden the planting around the pond is filling out nicely, so we can look forward a good display next year. The dragonflies and damsel flies have been very busy and several spotted laying eggs, a good sign the wildlife is beginning to move in. The pond is already popular with both birds and squirrels who are regularly seen having a drink. If you are visiting the gardens look for the new arrival lurking in the water. A not so dangerous crocodile is about, just a bit of fun for the children to look out for.



Plants are filling the gaps around the pond



A bit of fun for the children!

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener

I always think that by the time we get to August it seems a little easier and the pace slows a bit. This year things have been a little behind due to the cold spell at the start of the year.....



So, courgettes are arriving in plentiful supply this month, yellow, green, and striped and are looking lovely as they climb up the hazel structure. There are squash called trombochini and urchi kuri which are developing tiny fruits. It becomes quite a mammoth task tying them in everyday as they seem to grow as you look at them.



Courgettes are incredibly productive for 4 weeks and they begin to tail off and the leaves often become covered in powdery mildew. To combat this, we are removing crossing leaves more frequently to aid ventilation and irrigating overhead to help delay the spread. We have also staggered the sowing so different plants will become into peak production whilst others fade out. Here's hoping anyway!

Wed did the same with our dwarf beans and have just removed a section to make room for a successional sowing. These were planted 6 weeks later and will hopefully allow us to elongate the season.



The purple bean called tepee is great for being able to find the beans amongst all the dark green foliage! However, when you cook them they go green anyway, so I tell the children they are magic beans!!

This month has seen a mixture of weather conditions and has certainly not been kind to our cut flower bed; wind and rain do not bode well for beautiful blooms!

Our volunteers have been busy painting the most beautiful images onto jam jars and filling these with cut flowers for you to take away and enjoy. We try to have these for sale 3 times a week so keep your eyes out for them at the front of the kitchen garden.

I recently had a nasty encounter with a parsnip! I bet you are reading this and wondering if that was right. Indeed, it was, a parsnip that has given me such a nasty, painful burn that I wanted to share it with you so that you don't ever make the same mistake.

Parsnips are in the same family as giant hogweed which is much more commonly known however the burn is a reaction between the plants sap and your skin. The reaction is triggered by sunlight.

I came in on a Monday morning to find we had had some vandalism and parsnips had been pulled out of the bed. I collected the leaves and damage up and carried them over my arm to put into the compost bin. I then went about my day watering, setting up jobs for the day and never gave it another thought. The next day my skin was red like a heat rash and by day 3 had come out in huge blisters and swollen up.



I have copied an extract from the internet, but please note in hot weather take great care with the foliage of parsnips, carrots, and fennel.

[Learn more about wild parsnip burns, including symptoms, treatment, and prevention.](#)

What exactly is phytophotodermatitis?

Phytophotodermatitis is a skin reaction caused by a substance found in many plants, including wild parsnip. This substance is called furanocoumarin, or furocoumarins.

Furanocoumarin causes your skin to be extra sensitive to ultraviolet (UV) light. When the sap from the leaves and stems of these plants gets on your skin, and your skin is then exposed to sunlight, an inflammatory reaction takes place.

Other plants that may cause phytophotodermatitis:-

- Carrot
- Celery
- Fennel
- Fig
- Giant hogweed
- Lime
- Mustard
- Wild Dill
- Wild Parsley

Symptoms of wild parsnip burns

About 24 hours after getting wild parsnip sap on your skin and being exposed to sunlight, you'll begin to experience symptoms.

Symptoms start with an intense local burning sensation, followed by a red rash. Over the next couple of days, the rash may get worse — sometimes with severe blistering.

Some people may not recall any redness or blistering. Instead, you may see irregular patches on the skin, sometimes as linear streaks, a random cluster of small spots, or even fingerprint-sized spots.

After about 3 days, the symptoms start to get better. Eventually, like after a bad sunburn, the burned skin cells die and flake off.

As symptoms improve, the rash may appear lighter or darker. Discoloration and sensitivity to sunlight in the affected areas can remain for up to 2 years.

The wildlife pond at the back of the kitchen garden is starting to establish nicely with dragonflies now a regular occurrence. The birds are also enjoying having this water source in the hot weather!

I know we have got temporary fencing around it but we will have this sorted as soon as we are able so that you will be able to get a little closer.

Not everything has done so well this year, the cauliflowers have been a little temperamental as they dislike heat waves and frost. This generally applies to vegetables that are typically cool season grown so cabbages, broccoli fennel, pak choi etc.

A bolting cabbage head will start to split open from the centre as that is where the flower emerges from. Bolting cauliflower and broccoli will be visible on the head, a cauliflower will not have a tight head, it will start to spread out.

Broccoli is the head of tiny flowers before they open, when the broccoli is bolting the head is often stunted, tiny and flowers will start to open.

Examples of bolting plants



Cauliflower bolting



Broccoli bolting



Flowering Bok Choi

What can you do to prevent it?

- Practice Succession Sowing: Don't sow your vegetables all at once, sow new seeds every week or two, so you can increase your harvests regardless of the weather fluctuation. I grow crops every week for 6 weeks in the spring and autumn. Vegetables that are younger are less likely to bolt than older ones which is why this method works so well.
- Use Season Extenders: to add a couple of weeks to your spring gardening. This provides a longer window to allow the spring greens to grow a good size before the heatwave.
- Varieties: Grow a mix of cool-season and bolt-resistant varieties so you have options and variety for changing weather patterns (spring can be unpredictable, some years it's cool, other years it's too hot!).
- Soil Health: Make sure your soil nutrients are plentiful and have been restored so that your spring veggies can grow fast before the heatwave sets in!

Bolting is a common problem for all gardeners. With these tips and along with some patience and perseverance, you'd expect a good crop to follow. Good luck!

This year we are experimenting with multi sown clusters of leeks, rather than one per hole we are trialling 3-5, we will let you know how it goes!



And lastly, but most importantly a huge well done to all my volunteers on winning a CPRE award in the category 'Connecting people and countryside' – Winner: Houghton Hall Kitchen Garden!

'The volunteer group brings together a host of varied members of the community. The produce and flowers that are sold provide healthy and sustainable options for the community, and all the profits from sales are ploughed back into the project. This is a holistic way to engage with nature and help with the issues of mental health, food poverty and healthy choices at the same time. The work that the volunteers produce is also a draw for the public, who often visit the park just to see the latest display.'

The garden is managed using sustainable methods and uses recycled items where possible'



And here's a bit of behind the scenes silliness.....



As we approach August bank holiday it is hard to believe that the summer is behind us, but there is so much more produce still to come. Maybe we are in for a mild autumn!

Until next time, enjoy your garden

Jenny and all the volunteers

Plant of the month – Dahlia

Dahlias come in a range of flower shapes, from small tight balls to lily-like blooms the size of dinner plates and bloom from July to October. Dahlias hail from central America – they were brought to Europe by the Spanish, along with potatoes and tomatoes, initially for eating.

Dahlias like plenty of sunshine, a fertile, moist but well-drained soil, and a sunny, sheltered spot. The taller varieties need staking. Dahlias make brilliant and prolific cut flowers – the more you cut them, the more flowers they produce. Most dahlias are not attractive to pollinators so, when planting include some single-flowered varieties if you can – these are popular with bees and butterflies. Dahlias are tender and need protection in Winter. In Autumn, dig up the tubers and overwinter them in a frost-free place, such as a greenhouse or a shed. Bring them back into growth in early April, then plant out in the garden from May onwards.



*Irene Copperwheat
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer*



Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Sat 9am to 5pm

Become a volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

Thinking of giving something back to your local community? Then get in touch with us to see what you can do to get involved. Here are some ideas below:

- Observational Surveys
- Community engagement
- Weeding and clearing
- Cleaning
- Watering
- Growing food and encourage healthy eating
- Teach younger generations (if you have a skill or qualification, let us know!)
- Become a community leader
- Support other volunteers
- Contribute to the annual park events calendar
- Volunteering assistant at events running at the park
- Curate local history talks at visitor centre
- Habitat enhancement work in the woodland and meadow

There are many opportunities to take part. If you would like to volunteer and join the Volunteers of Houghton Hall Park, please email

hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Central
Bedfordshire
Council



LOTTERY FUNDED