

Houghton Hall Park

September 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.

September is here and what a busy month it's been already! We had the Dog Festival on Sunday 12th which was, in a word, brilliant, more about that on the following pages. The Dog Festival may be over but we have lots coming up for the rest of the month, Houghton Regis Hullabaloo is on Saturday the 18th and Sunday the 19th September, the park will be hosting a show and workshops, find out more on our 'What's On' pages, our Tasty Creative Market is back on Sunday 26th with the most stalls we've ever had, Tots in Wellies will be starting again on 21st September and Buggy Exercise continues each Wednesday.

Eleanor our Community Ranger has been undertaking wild flower surveys this month with our volunteers, find out what they found and what else she has been up to in her monthly update.

You may have noticed an abundance of spiders about, I certainly have, Mark, our volunteer, has written a very interesting nature article about them this month, have a read, if you don't like them this may change your mind!

The kitchen and formal gardens continue to flourish thanks to our volunteer team and Jenny, they have used a new method to grow a type of squash this year with fabulous results, Jenny explains more in her monthly write up.

The weather is looking promising over the next couple of days, take advantage of it and come to the park before we get those darker mornings and evenings in a few weeks!



A great place to live and work.

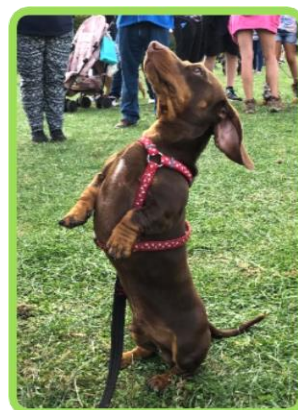
A Pawsome Time at the Dog Festival

Sunday 12th September saw the Dog Festival take place, the weather was perfect and it felt like the entire dog population of Houghton Regis was in the park, the team had never seen so many dogs all in one place!

This year we had two rings for the fun dog show, one for small dogs, one for large and this worked really well, there were ten classes and each one was full. As well as the dog show we had dog agility demonstrations and 'have a go' by Emma Sims, flyball demos and 'have a go' by Rock Steady flyball, a dog behaviour demo by Lisa at Dolittles Animal Training and Behaviour and not forgetting numerous doggy stalls so you could treat your fur babies.

A big thank you to everyone who made it a great day, especially Accolade Hounds who ran the dog show for us, Really Awesome Coffee for sponsoring the prizes and last but not least our volunteers who helped out on the day.

Lots of photographs were taken, here's a few to make you smile!





What's On

Hullabaloo



When: Saturday 18th & Sunday 19th September

Houghton Regis Hullabaloo is a free festival which celebrates art and performance in Houghton Regis. Everything you will see as part of Hullabaloo has been put together by Full House Theatre in partnership with community youth arts project Houghton Regis Art Town.

The park will be hosting 'The Lion Inside' show on Saturday, no need to book, just turn up, shows at 11.30am, 2pm & 4.30pm! There are also numerous workshops throughout the

weekend, take a look at www.fullhouse.org.uk/hullabaloo to find out how to book on!

Tasty Creative Market

When: Sunday 26th September

Time: 10am to 3pm

We have twenty local produce and craft stalls booked in for September's market, our biggest yet! Please come along and show your support.



Tots Go Wild in Wellies



When: Starting Tuesday 21st September

Time: 10am & 11am

Wrap up warm and put on your wellies for creative walks at Houghton Hall Park. Created for toddlers aged 1 to 4 years – and their grown-ups – the outdoor adventure will combine stories, singing and movement. The session is 30 minutes long and will begin from a meeting point in front of the visitors centre. Book your space at <https://fullhouse.org.uk>

Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday (term time)

Time: 10am

Cost: £2 bookable at www.houghtonhallpark.org

Meet outside the Visitors Centre for a warmup around the park then an exercise circuit, a fun class, all fitness levels welcome!



Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our

monthly theme. September's theme is: 'Dogs at Houghton Hall Park', the Dog Festival took place in the park last weekend so there should be lots of dog photos to send in, if you didn't make the festival but walk your dog in the park please do send in a photo, we'd love to see them. Please send your submissions to hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

The images must be taken between 1st – 30th September 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

Art & Culture Event

September's Photography Theme

'Dogs' at Houghton Hall Park

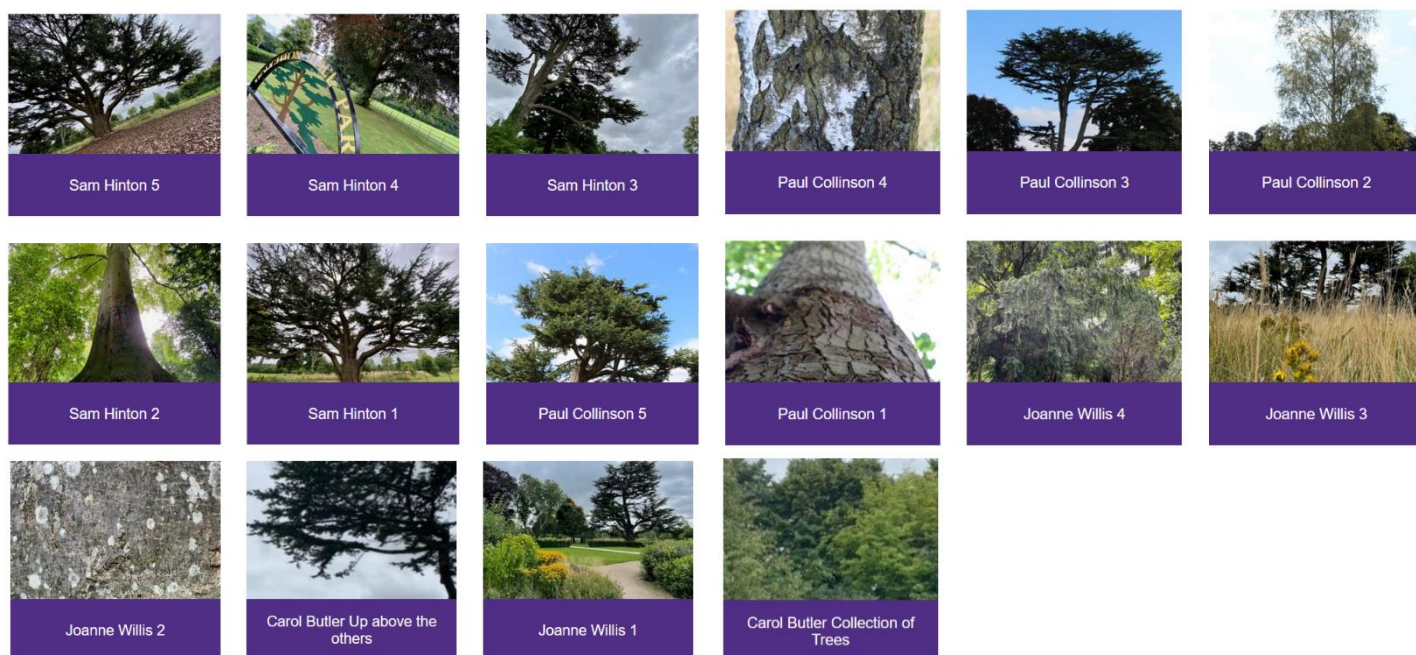
We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in September
- Some images will be featured on our website, social media platforms and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 30th September
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

August's theme was 'Trees in Houghton Hall Park' thank you to everyone who sent us in their photos, there are certainly plenty of trees in the park, as these pictures illustrate, to see them in their full glory visit our website www.houghtonhallpark.org



Community Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

August has flown by and so has the summer!

This month I have been running holiday events such as making magic wands, pop bottle rockets and minibeast hunting.

The sessions were really well attended and people seemed to enjoy themselves be it going on nature walks and collecting magical things to help decorate their wands or trying to make their rockets as aerodynamic as possible to see how far they can launch, we had some cool trick shots, some loop the loops and one even got me on the head! The mini beast kits to see what mini beasts you could find around the park were very popular, we had a lot of grasshoppers so many in the park that they started making their way inside the visitor centre.



The monthly volunteer session for August was a wildflower survey in the meadow to see what we could find. The volunteers were fantastic as always and we are making a good start at finding out what we have onsite and what we need to improve on!



If you would like to get involved with volunteering please feel free to email me at:
Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Enjoy the nice weather while it lasts and stay safe!

Eleanor x

Wild flower survey– August 2021

Name of flower

- 1 Wild carrot
- 2 Common Yarrow
- 3 Cow Parsley
- 4 Daisy
- 5 Common thistle
- 6 Creeping thistle
- 7 Field Scabious
- 8 Burdock
- 9 Willow herb– fireweed
- 10 Meadow cranes bill
- 11 Common knap weed
- 12 birds foot trefoil
- 13 Ragwort
- 14 Smooth sow thistle
- 15 Goats beard
- 16 Saint Johns Wart
- 17 Pineapple Weed
- 18 Great Plantain
- 19 Ribwort Plantain
- 20 White Clover
- 21 Dandelion
- 22 Red campion
- 23 Great mullein



Nature Notes

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

The summer has been a mixed bag nature wise in my garden this year, some good, some not so great. But as all things in life, sometimes you have to take the rough with the smooth.

I don't know about you, but recently I seem to have walked into a lot of cobwebs stretched across pathways, fortunately it doesn't bother me, the main culprit seems to be *Araneus diadematus*, the garden spider. This time of year they are busy mating and seem to be everywhere in my garden. Although they can vary in colour between light and dark brown, they all have one thing in common, a cross shaped pattern of white spots on their abdomen which makes them easy to identify. At an average size of 15mm females are twice the size of males. They are active between late spring when the



Laying out radial threads



A garden spider starts making a web

spiderlings hatch and autumn time when they mate. Once mated the female will lay her eggs and encase them in a cocoon of silk. These she will protect until she dies in late autumn. They spin the very recognisable orb web by setting out radial threads linked with a spiral of silk to catch flying insects, their main food source. They wait patiently at the centre of this web for some unsuspecting insect to get trapped. Once movement is detected, they will dash out and subdue the struggling insect by wrapping it with sticky silk, before dispatching it with a venomous bite. It's really is amazing how overnight they build such beautiful structures, sometimes spanning several feet. But why do they have to choose to build them across pathways for me to walk into.

Slugs and snails are great creatures for clearing up all sorts of rotting vegetation. But some are not so choosy in their choice of meal, making them the gardener's number one enemy. This year in



On the prowl for a meal

my garden their numbers seem to have exploded and I have lost quite a few seedlings to their night time activity. Snails in particular have taken a liking to eating sunflowers and have felled several large plants, leaving noticeable gaps in the flower border. Although I was none too happy, I'm not keen on killing anything, believing everything is there for a purpose. By eradicating one

species you can create an imbalance in the natural order. I certainly don't use chemical controls in the garden either. Poisoning slugs will also kill anything that eats them, so could harm the hedgehogs, birds and frogs I'm trying to attract to my garden. One solution is bran, slugs and snails love the stuff, so will gorge themselves on it to the point they become so bloated they are unable to retreat to their daytime hideaways. This leaves them vulnerable to their predators, who will be able to eat them without harm to themselves.



All in a night's work for a slug



A snail slides over the edge of a pot



Bulrush need careful management in a pond

Last weekend I spent time tidying up my wildlife pond. It was a worthwhile exercise as I found a wide range of dragonfly and damselfly larvae. There were several frogs as well, which I was pleased about. I had heard their croaking on several occasions, but not seen them as the planting around the pond is quite dense in places. This is intentional to provide damp places to attract frogs and newts. Some of the plants I grow in the pond need to be managed to stop them taking over. I put them in knowing this would be the case but consider it well worth the effort to have plants I like. Plants such as bulrush look great, but they are thugs and would quickly monopolise the pond if given free reign, these spread rapidly via their thick roots, which are incredibly strong. Because of this I grow them in ordinary flower pots to restrict them, rather than the more usual mesh type used in pond planting. As it is, these pots become very distorted, such is the strength of the roots and have to be cut away when I repot. Watercress is another plant that I have to keep in check and pull out handfuls on a regular basis. Overall growing plants in a pond is no different to growing plants in the rest of the garden, you just manage the space to get the effect you're trying to create and attract as wide a diversity of wildlife as you can so any trapped insects and larvae can return to the water, I leave the removed vegetation at the edge of the water for a couple of days before it goes on the compost heap.

I was given a bee hotel a few years ago that has remained unoccupied until this year. I noticed a couple of plants nearby had the tell-tale signs of crisp semi-circular holes in the edges of their



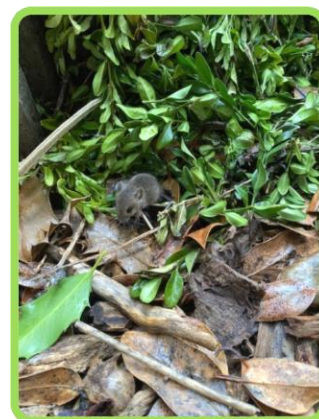
Bulrush need careful management in a pond

leaves. On checking it I was pleased to see the holes in the hotel had been plugged, at last I now have leaf cutter bees in the garden. I'm sure having a pond has helped, as I have often seen them taking a drink from the damp soil at the water margins. Within the tubes of the bee hotel, the female bee will manipulate the leaf piece into a thimble like structure, then deposit nectar and pollen into it, before laying a single egg. The process will be repeated until the tube is filled and finally plugged with a piece of leaf, typically she will lay around 20 eggs. The plant from which the pieces of leaf are taken isn't harmed so I'm more than happy to accommodate the arrival of these solitary insects in my garden, especially as they are also excellent pollinators.



Holes plugged in my bee hotel

Finally, we found a small field vole wandering totally bewildered in the kitchen gardens which we moved to a safe place. Normally these cute creatures live in long grass creating pathways amongst the roots, so it was a long way from home, its diet consists almost exclusively of grass stems and leaves and its cheek teeth have to grow continuously to keep pace with the constant wear. As voles moult rather than hibernate, let's hope it can build itself up in plenty of time for winter.



Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener



So, they did reach the top! It seemed like they were never going to grow but they have got the idea now. These super squashes are an Italian variety called Tromboncino. Either eaten young like a courgette or allow to develop to around 3ft in length and cure the skins like a squash. Either way they will bring a smile to your face!

Facts

Tromboncino squash, botanically classified as *Cucurbita moschata*, is an Italian heirloom variety that grows on robust climbing vines that can reach over 4 meters in length and is a member of the pumpkin/gourd family. Tromboncino squash is one of the few winter squashes that can also be harvested as summer squash. It can be consumed fresh when young and has a sweet and mild flavour, or it can

be left to mature on the vine and consumed when it turns golden, very much like the flavour of butternut squash. Tromboncino squash is an excellent source of potassium, calcium, iron, zinc, and omega-3 fatty acids. It also contains antioxidants such as vitamins A and C.



Applications

Tromboncino squash is best suited for both raw and cooked applications such as steaming, grilling, sautéing, baking and roasting. The squash can be sliced raw and served in green salads or layered in sandwiches. It can also be used to stuff ravioli or made into gnocchi, bread, fritters, casseroles, cakes, soups, and stews. Tromboncino squash pairs well with citrus, tomatoes, garlic, basil, oregano, meats such as sausage, poultry, or beef, Italian cheeses such as parmesan, risotto, and mozzarella, goat cheese, beets, rice, barley, polenta, pasta, and other summer vegetables like eggplant. As a summer squash, it will keep up to a week when stored whole in the refrigerator. As a winter squash, it can be stored whole for 1-3 months in a cool, dry, and dark place.



Ethnic/Cultural Info

Tromboncino squash is an heirloom vegetable, which means it is an open-pollinated, old-time variety that has been passed down for generations through seed preservation rather than being a created hybrid from varying varieties. Italian households value the Tromboncino squash for its abundant harvest and flavours, and they commonly use the squash to make gnocchi and pasta or sauté it with olive oil and garlic as a stand-alone side dish.

Geography/History

Squash is native to Central and South America, but it was spread across the world via explorers and trade routes. Tromboncino squash is originally from Liguria, a coastal region of northwest Italy that is known for its coastline, rolling hills, and mild climate.



Last month I spoke about how we were elongating the season by staggering the planting, so here are the results of some of those later plantings. If the weather says warm these courgettes could be productive until the end of October which would not be the case with the ones sown back in May.

The multi sown beetroot has now started to establish and we are picking the young leaves to include in our salad bags



Later sown courgettes



Multi sown later beetroot

The kitchen garden is just starting to produce the first swede of the year (a), the beautiful foliage from peacock kale (b), multi sown leeks (c) and basil allowed to flower to encourage beneficial insects (d)



a



b



c



d

We have now begun pruning the espalier apples to allow sunlight in for ripening. Yes, that right sunlight, I believe we may still get some this month!!



A few issues.....



This is my third year looking at our poor pear tree, every year it has been affected by rust on the leaves. These are bright orange on one side and harbour fruiting spores from the fungal infection. These appear end of summer and beginning of autumn. Fortunately, it is only cosmetic but if it is severe, it can weaken the tree. The spores are not destroyed in composting so remove leaves and dispose of them in your green waste



Our gooseberry plants have been attacked by gooseberry saw fly. Fortunately, we were able to get a good crop before they were stripped bare.

The common gooseberry sawfly is the most frequently found of the gooseberry sawflies. It can have three generations a year, with the larvae active in late April to

June, July, and August to September. The female sawflies lay eggs on the underside of leaves, low down in the centre of the bush, so the young larvae go unnoticed until they have eaten their way upwards and outwards, devouring the leaves as they go. Defoliated plants are weakened and may produce a poor crop the following year. When the larvae are fully fed, they go into the soil, where they spin silk cocoons and pupate.



Hedge cutting



We have completed the hedge cutting of box and yew around the kitchen garden. It is important that this is done on a cloudy day and if possible, when a good drop of rain is due to settle the plants. Cutting them in extreme sunlight scorches the leaves and can severely shock the plant and sometimes even kill it.

Considering we are now in September we are pleased with the squash that we still have to pick from. Currently cropping French and runner beans, courgettes (sometimes marrows!) squash, 4 different types of Kale, swede, cauliflowers, cabbages, tomatoes, cucumbers, chillies, celery, kohlrabi, salad, spinach, and carrots!



Beans galore!!



First suedes of the year

If we get the little bit of late summer sun hopefully crops will take us easily into October.



Bunching Flowers



Getting ready for a trail



Getting ahead for Christmas

The spring cabbage were sown mid-August and will be finding their way onto the beds very soon, this followed by autumn sown garlic and onions takes us into the new season at a galloping pace.

Cutting back and tidying up will be high on the list for the next few weeks

Until next time, enjoy your garden

Jenny and all the volunteers

Plant of the month – Sedum



Sedums are succulent plants with fleshy leaves and flat, nectar-rich flowerheads that are loved by bees and other pollinators. Easy to grow, these sun-loving perennials are a striking feature in late summer. The flowers, which range from white, yellow, pink and red, are tiny and star-like. As they sit so close to each other, a broad, gently domed head is formed that allow butterflies and bees to feed.

The flower stems carry equally attractive leaves adding much to the plant, especially if they come in red shades. Fat and succulent, the leaves look as though they are filled with water. This is because they are designed to live in arid parts of the world, and although this makes Sedums ideal for dry gardens, they are just happy in any soil as long as it is not permanently wet. The one thing they do command, however, is as much sun as possible.

Irene Copperwheat
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer



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@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



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LOTTERY FUNDED