

Houghton Hall Park

March 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.

Welcome to our March newsletter and we can say there is a feeling of optimism and hope in the air. Spring is on it's way and so is the gradual easing of the COVID-19 restrictions. With that in mind we are holding some Easter Activities in the park, all within the current restrictions, read our 'What's on' pages to find out more. We will also be selling Easter garland and table centre kits to make at home as these proved to be very popular at Christmas, all designed and created by the Houghton Hall Park team and volunteers.

We received some really lovely photos of the snowdrops in the park for February's photography theme, a selection can be found in the newsletter but if you'd like to see them all then please visit our website, we have a really talented bunch of photographers who visit the park.



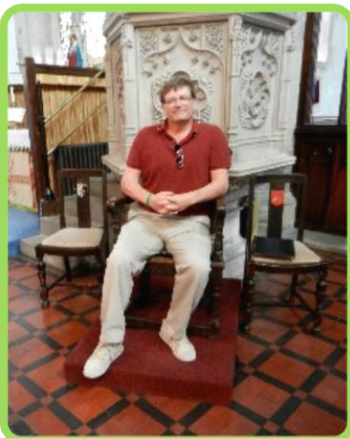
By Bruno Viscogliosi

Also this month read about the new oak tree on the Cedar lawn, catch up with what Jenny our Community Gardener and Eleanor our Park Ranger have been up to, Mark our volunteer has written a very interesting article about how we can protect wildlife in our gardens and there is also a piece about the discovery of a skeleton in the woodland, it's all going on in Houghton Hall park!

A great place to live and work.

A new tree arrives in Houghton Hall Park

By David Hill, Houghton Regis Heritage Society



A memorial oak tree (*Quercus robur*, English or Common Oak) has been planted on the Cedar Lawn near to the Formal Garden. It is in memory of Robert Brandreth-Gibbs who passed last year in Canada. Robert was a direct descendant of the Brandreth lineage, who have a long association with Houghton Regis going back to the 17th Century.

Robert came to Houghton Regis from Canada with his family in 2014. At the invitation of the Houghton Regis Heritage Society he visited Houghton Hall, the park, church and other parts of the town. Following discussions between David Hill (Chair of the Society) and Robert's

widow, it was agreed that an oak tree would be a fitting tribute to him. Chamberlain Holdings plc, the current owner of Houghton Hall, came forward and offered to

donate the tree. On the 15th of February, with the help of the new Park Ranger Eleanor, the Community Gardener Jenny, park volunteer Mark together with David, Roger and Allan from the society, the tree was planted.



Members of the Houghton Regis Heritage Society have designed an information board about the Brandreth's time in Houghton Regis. The board shows

the Brandreth Family Tree together with their history. The board will be placed in the surrounding area and there will be a ceremony around the tree at a later date.



Children's Nature Challenge

We received a very interesting email a couple of weeks ago from Aga who along with her sons made a very interesting discovery in the park. They found a complete skeleton of a fox in the east woodland! Her boys wanted to take it home, she couldn't agree for obvious reasons however she decided to let them take the skull and make a real, scientific project out of it. Her son, Janusz (age 7) created a presentation and shared it with his school, it was so brilliant we thought we'd share it with you!



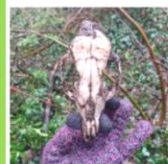
SKELETON AS FOUND



lower jaw



skull - bottom



skull - top



paw with claws and skin

SKULL AFTER INITIAL WASH

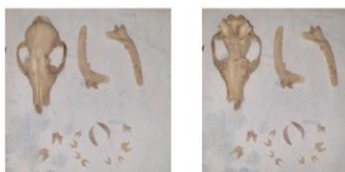


CLEANING - FIRST STEP

Because the bones still have a bit of soft tissues (skin, fat) attached we need to remove them. One of the ways to do it at home is to use biological washing powder. It has enzymes – little particles that "eat" organic matter. Keeping our specimens in warm water with bio powder should allow us to clean the bones within a few days. We keep it in our garage as this process is quite smelly!



AFTER CLEANING IN BIO POWDER



We can see a huge difference before and after. It is much cleaner, all remaining soft tissues have been removed and bones are visibly whiter. But we can see unfortunately they are also more fragile. After taking bones from the solution they had to be carefully cleaned so that no more enzymes were left on their surface. Using small brush and pipe cleaners was enough to remove anything that was left in the bones cavities.

Our next step is to leave the bones in the hydrogen peroxide for a day – it should bleach them a bit for better look and disinfect (clean from germs) them further.

AFTER HYDROGEN PEROXIDE

In the morning we could clearly see the result of chemical decomposition. In our container we saw lots of little bubbles! This is the oxygen from oxygen peroxide.



The bath worked brilliantly. The bones are visibly whiter. Unfortunately also more fragile. Now they have to dry up.

FINAL STEP

As a final step we needed to glue in the teeth that fell out in the process. It was fun! Nearly like jigsaw puzzle but knowing these are the real bones we are dealing with here. Using simple clear Elmer's glue we were able to glue the teeth back to their places.

It was amazing project! Finished successfully. Now the skull is on display in my room reminding me of everything that I have learn. Even my mum says it was worth it!



What's On

Mr Finniebaker's Easter Factory Trail

When: 29th March to 11th April

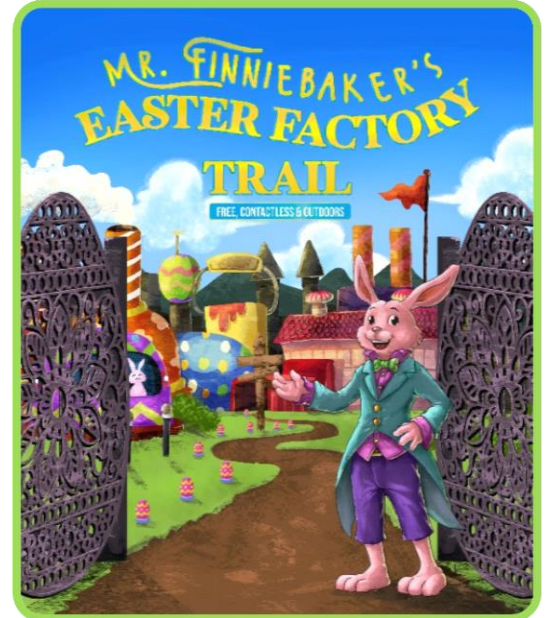
Cost: Free!

Join us for a super family day out this Easter!

Contactless and free!

10 of the Easter Bunny's woodland co-workers have been spotted in these parts and it's your job to find them! Families in Houghton Hall Park are invited to take part in this fantastic, free trail.

Start the trail by going to www.easterfactorytrail.com and finding the first character. Learn the names and stories of all 10 characters and then create your own, free e-book. As you stop at each character you'll be directed to take a 'scene selfie' if you wish to. This means taking selfies with instructions like 'look amazed' or 'look curious'. Once you've done all 10 you'll be able to create your own, personalised 'selfie storybook' with your selfies as part of the story – a lovely keepsake to remember your day out.



To take part simply:

1. Visit the website to see the trail map
2. Hunt down the woodland factory workers
3. Scan their QR codes with your smartphone, learn their names and jobs and take your 'scene selfie'.
4. When you've found them all, upload your selfies and create your free Easter Factory Storybook – with you as the stars!

The trail is on over the Easter Holidays so you have plenty of time to find all the characters.

Our parking is limited so if you can walk, scoot or cycle to the park please do so to avoid the disappointment of not getting a space!

Please adhere to all current social distancing regulations whilst in the park and taking part in the event.

There's more!.....Houghton Hall Park Easter Egg Trail

In addition to our free trail on Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th April there will be ten eggs hidden around the park, follow the map to find them, draw the pattern of each egg on a sheet and then come back to the Visitors Centre to claim your prize. This trail will cost £1.75 per person and will need to be prebooked at specific time slots on our website. Tickets on sale from Saturday 20th March.



Easter Garlands at Home

After the success of our Christmas wreath making at home we are pleased to offer a selection of Easter kits for you to purchase online to make at home. The kits have been designed and created by Jenny Osborne our Community Gardener and have been put together by our volunteers and the Houghton Hall Park Team.

Each kit will include everything you need to make your creation, including foliage from the park, decorations and written instructions.

Collection of the kits will take place on the following dates, you must choose when you are coming to collect at time of booking:

Friday 26th March 10am until 12pm

Saturday 27th March 10am until 12pm

The kits will go on sale on the website on Saturday 13th March, visit our website to see what we will have available <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/easter-garlands-at-home>



Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture Event

great lifestyles

March's Photography Theme

'Faces in Nature' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in March
- 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 March
- 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. March's theme is: 'Faces in Nature' at Houghton Hall Park. Park user Alan Heustice took the picture of the tree on the poster which is in the park, the face doesn't have to be on the ground, as the smiley face of the birds in flight shows. You could also get the kids involved, get them to create a face from nature found in the park.

IMPORTANT: Please remember to practice social distancing when coming to the park. Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.



The images must be taken between 1st – 31st March 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

Thank you to everyone for sending in their photographs of the snowdrops in the park, for last month's theme, this was a very popular and you can see why from these stunning photos.



Community Ranger Update

Well February went quickly didn't it! This month in the park I have been doing some more coppicing of hazel. I am gathering it to be used in the garden for some of Jenny's grand plans. For world book day in conjunction with the Stickman trail I presented a video about how to make homemade paper, if you'd like to watch it go to the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBnIN3yKyaY>



Digging the hole



Finally in!



Honey bee

In the middle of the month we planted an oak tree in the Cedar Lawn. The original plan was for the delivery company to transport the tree to the planting site. However, after unloading the tree we realised that the vehicle that the tree company were using was far too big and couldn't fit down the path past the bins and other park furniture. Luckily Jenny had borrowed a pallet truck which we managed to get the

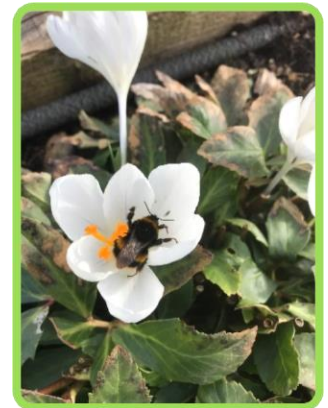
tree onto. It was then just a case of getting the tree down past the Kitchen garden, through the formal garden and onto the cedar lawn. Due to the rain the ground was very wet and the pallet truck got stuck. With the quick thinking of the volunteers we used a couple of different boards to put the pallet truck onto moving them as we moved the truck. It was a long process but eventually we managed to get the tree into the hole, and it looks great!

Due to a change in farming practices, loss of habitat, climate change and new diseases bees are unfortunately under threat and as one of the biggest pollinators we desperately need them. I spotted my first bee of the year this month and in fact spotted two! One being a honeybee and the other being a Queen Bombus Pratorum (early bumblebee.) There are things you can do to help bees such as: planting native flowers and creating bug hotels or leaving logs and bricks that solitary bees can use as resting places.

With bees around it finally feels like spring is on its way!



Getting the tree on site was harder than first thought!



Early bumblebee

If you would like to get involved with volunteering in the park or have any questions or suggestions, please feel free to email me on:

eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Stay safe!

Eleanor

Nature Notes

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

You are probably unaware of it, but March 3rd is World Wildlife Day. The United Nations declared the date at its convention in 2013 so it is a relatively new event. The concept behind the day, is to celebrate and raise awareness of the world's wild animals and plants. The date was chosen as it was on this date, that the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora was signed back in 1973.

Each year a new theme is chosen to highlight a specific topic. This year it is **"Forests and Livelihoods: Sustaining People and Planet"** The idea is that you do one thing to conserve and support forest communities and forest wildlife. Now you may be wondering what you can do under this topic, but anything you can do for nature is a step in the right direction.

March heralds the spring equinox which is a busy time for nature. Birds are nesting and all kinds of wildlife is waking up from hibernation. With that in mind here are a couple of projects for you to try.



On the hunt for nectar and pollinate another

It's not just bees that pollinate flowers, butterflies, moths and many other insects are vital pollinators too. One such group of insects are hoverflies. Usually resembling wasps they are in fact true fly's in the same group as houseflies.

There are approximately two hundred and sixty species of hoverfly in the UK covering a diverse range of needs and habitats. Some are considered pests, but it's generally the larvae where they are mostly a problem. A couple of common ones are the carrot root fly whose larvae attack the roots of

both carrot and parsnips. A different problem is caused by the larvae of the celery fly which is a leaf miner and burrows inside the leaves. On the other hand there are some good guys whose larvae rank with ladybirds and lacewings in feasting on greenfly. The majority lay eggs on leaves so the emerging larvae are near to their food source, but the Drone hoverfly larvae develop in water. As they are one of the good guys and excellent pollinators, to help them there is a very simple project you set up in your garden and build a hoverfly lagoon.

All you need is a dish of water with some green vegetation in it to rot down. Choose a location where it won't be disturbed and sink your dish into the ground to keep it from being tipped over. Fill it with rainwater if you can rather than tap water, then add grass clippings and other green matter which will slowly rot down. Keep an eye on it and don't let it dry out. Gradually insects will be attracted to it and if you are in luck, you will see a rat-tailed maggot which is the larvae of the Drone hoverfly. The so-called tail is in fact an expendable breathing tube.

Another insect you can help is the Earwig. It may not rank too highly as a favourite insect but despite it being an omnivore it is a great predator of other nasty insects including greenfly. Those emerging from hibernation now are generally female as the males don't generally survive winter. The females will lay their eggs in a chamber in the soil and care for them and the young until they



Flies come in all sorts of guises



A hoverfly lagoon

are big enough to support themselves. Earwigs like dry crevices to spend the night so building a simple earwig hotel will help them. All you need is a small flowerpot filled with straw or dry grass. Make up several and place them in trees and bushes upside down so they can climb up into them. You can also put them on sticks around the flower borders.



A simple earwig hotel

Birds will begin to build nests soon and start raising the next generation, so is a busy time for them. Putting out a variety of food will give them a helping hand as they won't have to expend additional energy foraging for it. Place food in different places around the garden and if you can try doing it at the same time each day. After a while you will find birds will note that you are the source of food and become less fearful. I have a pair of blackbirds that sit and wait while I put out suet pellets and meal worms. On occasion they have tapped on the window to make sure I haven't forgotten them. Robins too can become very tame and will feed from your hand if given time and patience.



A bee probes the florets on a thistle

A great project to do with children is planting a small patch of wild flowers that will bring in a wide range of pollinators later in the year. You can even grow a patch in a pot if you don't have a garden. Many seed companies do special packets of seeds made up to attract different groups of pollinating insects.



A fly negotiating a thistle

There are so many things you can do to help nature and if everybody did just one thing the overall difference would be enormous.

If you would like to learn more about how to make your garden more wildlife friendly, then Dave Goulson Professor of Biology at Sussex University has an excellent book 'The Garden Jungle'. He also has a YouTube channel that's well worth following. He is passionate about bees and founded the Bumblebee Conservation Trust.

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

What's the latest in the Gardens?

So, the warmer weather has truly arrived, and it is amazing how much better and brighter we are all feeling. The first of the daffodils are bursting into colour. Spring is delivering itself in its full glory! Volunteers are working so hard to make up for the lost days of wet weather at the beginning of the year.

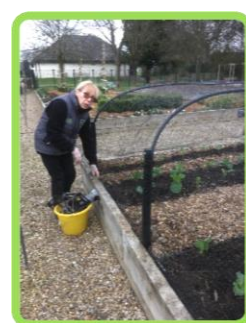
The drier weather has allowed us to make some progress with dressing the beds for the upcoming season and they are beginning to look much tidier. It will be possible to do some direct sowing of carrots and parsnips this week which is a good sign we are well on our way to beginning the new growing season.



Continuing with our no dig philosophy we are removing any spent crops by cutting plants to the ground or twisting the plants to reduce the amount of soil disturbance. We are then top dressing the growing areas with soil made from recycled green waste. The

paths are freshened with bark chippings which help feed the soil by providing important soil bacteria which are the equivalent to yeast in bread making. The more soil is protected and covered the less erosion from the elements and the better the planting area. The woodchip paths also provide a clear route across the beds and make it easier to work on in inclement weather.

Charles Dowding who champions 'No dig' remarked that after the heavy snow fell the beds which had not been dug melted the snow much quicker than those that had been tilled. Interesting to think that the earth worms and underground life were indeed helping to warm the soil.



Early sowings of tomatoes, aubergine, cucumber, lettuce, spinach, kale, cabbages, beetroot, peas, mangetout an array of flowers and wide range of herbs are all germinating and some even pricked out into bigger modules. We are lucky to be using the heated facilities of Silsoe horticultural centre. This is to our advantage as we are ahead by several weeks as it would be impossible to consider these at this time of year.



Last year I experimented with planting tomatoes into their final position from 7cm pot instead of the gradual potting up into a pot size of 1litre. The results were amazing as they appeared to produce more fruit earlier and the plants seemed to grow much stronger. This is partly why I have begun the tomatoes a few weeks earlier this year.

Last year we suffered with blight due to the damp summer weather conditions, so I am going to reduce my varieties outside to a limited few and keep the others for polytunnel growing instead, where it is easier to regulate the conditions.



The pruning is now complete on our apple trees, and they are looking much better for it. These apple trees are all local varieties, below I have listed some of the varieties we have. Apple trees have different pollinating groups (according to when they flower) and it is important that an apple tree is close by in a group that sits either side of it. Alternatively, a crab apple can pollinate any apple tree. It is important that a transfer of pollen happens from a different tree as most apple trees are

sterile and unable to self-pollinate.

It is very cathartic to have a clean and tidy up for the new growing season. The polytunnel has been scrubbed clean to allow optimum light levels in for the seedlings, but also to extend the life of the plastic therefore reducing degradation.



One of the first jobs of the veg gardening year is forcing and chitting potatoes. Chitting potatoes means sprouting the potato tuber. This means that the eyes on the potatoes are positioned facing upright, in a light, cool but frost-free place at about 10C. I put half my seed potatoes for chitting in Light is important so don't put them in a cupboard or dark shed.

I use seed trays or egg boxes to hold them upright and well space.

There is still much controversy over to chit or not, but results show slightly advanced and heavier harvests by doing this process. If you have the time and space, you may prefer to plant them straight out.



We have been busy having a sort out of our yard and relocating compost bays! Quite a feat....Never let it be said that a bit of snow will stop us getting our pond underway. We are hoping for much warmer days ahead to continue with this project. Building, making,

repairing, moving.....there's still so many things on that list of mine!!!

Last but not least there have been some amazing homeworking going on in preparation for the easter displays for the beds. Not long to wait now!!!

Happy Gardening, stay safe

Jenny





Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

The Visitors Centre, café and toilets closed until further notice.

Become a friend of Houghton Hall Park

Thinking of joining the Friends of Houghton Hall Park? 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 Friends of Houghton Hall Park, please email hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



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LOTTERY FUNDED