

# Houghton Hall Park

## September 2020 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.



As September came upon us we received the wonderful news that we had won our first Anglia in Bloom award for 'Best Planting on a Theme'. The competition was virtual this year so we submitted photographs and a description of the kitchen garden themed beds which were the Storytellers Garden, Pollinator and Dig for Victory. The beds were created by Jenny (Community Gardener), our volunteers and also



local schools so a real joint community effort, we are so proud the judges saw all the hard work that went into these beds, planning is now happening for next year! For details of all the other winners go to [www.angliainbloom.co.uk](http://www.angliainbloom.co.uk)

**A great place to live and work.**

# Fairy Folk Trail

The Fairy Folk Trail took place the last week of August and it was a great success. The trail originated from an idea by our Activity Officer Hayley who then approached Men in Sheds in Dunstable ([www.meninsheds.org.uk](http://www.meninsheds.org.uk)) and asked them if they would be interested in taking the project on designing and building the doors. They readily agreed and came up with ten designs



which they then created in wood. The doors looked fantastic however we have an expert crafter Carol in our volunteer group and she thought she could go one stage further and really bring the doors to life. We decided to base the trail on nature and the environment with each fairy themed to a door for example Connie the Countryside Fairy, Marley the Meadow Pixie and Parker the Poo Pixie! Hayley came



up with the poems and activity trail with some help on the poems from Mark, another volunteer and Jenny our Community Gardener, Carol then took these ideas and let her imagination run wild, we're sure you'll agree the results were amazing!

The trail was on for a week as it was the summer holidays and to ensure park users could spread out for social distancing. To ensure every precaution was taken to prevent COVID-19 the trail sheets were available to download in two versions one for the phone and one you could print. We were also pleased to see the doors stayed where they should and didn't go walkabout!

Even though the Visitors Centre is not open at the moment the Houghton Hall Park Team are at the park regularly and we were delighted to see lots of families enjoying the trail, we were also pleased to see your photos and hear your feedback.



Laura Kavanagh's baby girl enjoyed finding all the doors.



Cerys and her carer Kerry had a lovely time searching for the fairies, she added a fairy dust sound every time they found a door to support the sensory experience.

# What's On

## Houghton Regis Hullabaloo

**When:** 19<sup>th</sup> September

**Time:** 10am to 6pm

**Cost:** Free!

Houghton Regis Hullabaloo 2020 is GOING AHEAD!  
WOOOO HOO!

It's been a tricky one to get off the ground this year, but at last we now know it's all happening!

In a change to previous years, events will be limited to tickets holders only and yes it will be Health and Safety-tastic! BUT it will still be **FREE** and jammed packed full of shows, workshops and even a community picnic! (socially distanced of course)

Places are STRICTLY limited. BOOK NOW!

<https://fullhouse.org.uk/what-we-do/festivals/houghton-regis-hullabaloo/>

## Buggy Exercise & Fitness in the Park

Buggy Exercise is on every Wednesday at 10 am and Fitness in the Park Tuesday and Thursday at 6.30pm, both classes cost £2 and run by our Activity Officer Hayley.



These are fun classes for all fitness levels, social distancing regulations are in place throughout the class.

You must book your place at:-

[www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness](http://www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness)

Meet outside the Visitors Centre.

For further information contact  
hayleyclear@gmail.com



## Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities from the age of 16 to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly themes, **September's theme is:** 'Dogs at Houghton Hall Park', we know you love walking your dogs in the park so we are expecting a lot of photographs for this theme!

**IMPORTANT:** Please remember to practice social distancing when coming to the park.

Please send your submissions to [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk). The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 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](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography)

There were some stunning entries for last month's theme, Picture Perfect in Houghton Hall Park, a selection are below and all entries can be found on our website [www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography-theme](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography-theme)



By Justyna Tarnacka

Art & Culture  
**Event**

Central Bedfordshire  
**great**  
lifestyles

**September's  
Photography Theme**

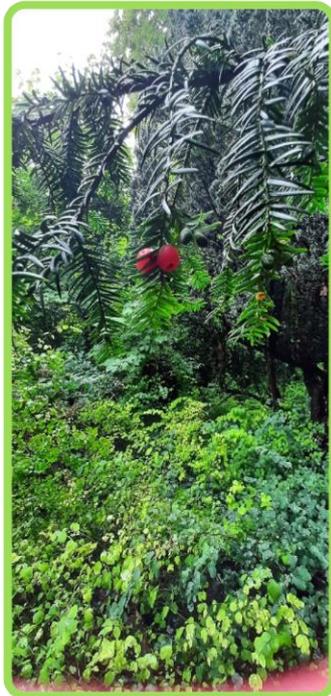
Dogs at Houghton Hall Park

We hope you have fun capturing some pictures of Dogs at Houghton Hall Park

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in September
- 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](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)
- Deadline 30th September
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at [www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

LOTTERY FUNDED



By Amie McKill



By Ruth Jenkins

## Nature Blog – Pond Life

*Words and photographs by Mark Bolan Houghton Hall Park Volunteer*

As summer comes to an end, I have been reflecting on the benefits my pond has brought me, both in providing a calm area of the garden to relax and unwind, plus a haven for wildlife.



*A partly submerged log provides an additional exit point.*

utilised the root ball, complete with soil, from one tree, as all the nooks and crannies will provide a home for all sorts of bugs. Branches and twigs have been placed to secure the soil around the edges giving a more natural look. One branch extends out into the water giving an additional exit point, an essential element for any pond. Due to Covid, getting hold of plants was difficult as most suppliers were operating with fewer staff. Thankfully a friend who was cleaning his pond, gave me some material to get me started. But with long extended delivery times it was a six week wait, before my first small delivery arrived and I could start planting in earnest.



*A common ruddy dart takes a rest*

I garden with wildlife in mind and my aim was to build a wildlife pond that looked as natural as possible, as if it had been there a long time. Once dug and lined, it was filled with collected rainwater and rainfall has kept it topped up. Although once I had to reduce the water level after several days of heavy rain. I was fortunate to have the trunks from three very old apple trees that had all but died. All three were placed to look as if they have been left where they had fallen. The water disappears about two feet under the arch of one to give the impression a small stream is feeding into the pond. These gnarled trunks have several holes in them where branches once existed and fissures in the bark. These will provide great homes for wildlife to shelter and hibernate in the winter. I have also



*A view of the shallow area*

Considering I only dug it four months ago, and it's still not fully finished, the number of insect species that have arrived has been truly amazing. The pond isn't stocked with fish as they would decimate the wildlife I'm trying to encourage. All manner of flying insects come to drink, some expertly landing on the water surface, others making use of the plants in the water. Honey bees often congregate on various areas of damp soil. Then there are the numerous birds that come to drink and bathe in the shallow area. Water beetles, pond skaters and water boatmen all appeared very soon after filling the pond, then a newt arrived. But what I hadn't anticipated was the arrival of dragon and damsel flies. These have been

prolific, varied and a joy to watch flying back and forth above the water. As soon as there is a bit of warmth from sunshine they turn up to explore. Over the last few weeks I've been watching them lay eggs. A Southern Hawker choosing the soft damp soil at the margin to deposit a batch and an Emperor injecting eggs into a decomposing reed leaf just below the surface. Hopefully it won't be long before I will be able to watch the nymphs scurry around looking for a meal.



*A male Azure Damselfly*



*A wasp climbs through the watercress in search of a drink*

Bio diversity is an important part of any habitat and one to be encouraged for a good healthy garden. Providing a natural food source for predatory insects will help maintain plants in good condition, without resorting to chemical methods. Dragon flies are voracious feeders and can help control garden pests. Water is an essential part of life and if you have room for



*A pond skater finds a meal*

even a small area of water I would highly encourage you to include a pond in your garden. It doesn't have to be anything more than a large tub sunk into the ground. Like me you may well be surprised at what extra wildlife arrives. I certainly feel that the dragonflies, by choosing to lay eggs in and around my pond, has been a kind of endorsement that I am going in the right direction with my gardening with wildlife in mind ethos.

Until the next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Gardens

## What's the latest in the Gardens?

As I am writing this month's update, I am looking out the window at torrential rain. An hour ago, the sky was blue, and you needed sunglasses on. What a mixed month of weather, really hard to plan



jobs and keep plants looking their best! This damp weather has awoken the slugs from their slumber, they are eating anything and everything now. As we have netted so much against the pigeons, the birds now can't get in to eat the slugs. We are on a cycle that just goes around and around!!

However, I have been looking into products that we can use without causing any harm to the environment, or the wildlife. The product I am trialling is called GRAZERS

I have attached some information underneath from their website which I found quite interesting:

<https://www.grazers.co.uk/product/gardeners/grazers-g2-concentrate-1-litre/>

### Using Grazers product to keep plants free from damage

#### How Grazers works

When applied to green photosynthesising leaves and stems, the calcium-based, environmentally safe **Grazers** products work by creating a 'plant-mediated effect' that dissuades the pests from eating these plants.

The indigenous pests then seek other nearby food sources instead and so leave our plants to thrive, helped in their growth by the calcium nutrient in the products.

Therefore **Grazers** benefits not only our plants, which in effect are 'helped to help themselves', but also predators of the plant pests, thereby keeping the natural wildlife food chain in place, so enhancing the environment.

#### Grazers' Environmental Philosophy

From the outset, Grazers has always sought to produce a product range that was totally safe to nature, not just to humans, their crops and their pets, but to all wildlife.

Importantly this wildlife needs to include the very pests that the products are seeking to keep away from the plants, as they play an important part in natural food chains.

So, by applying the Grazers products we are in effect 'helping our plants to help themselves', giving them the strength to flourish. At the same time, we are also leaving their pests healthy for consumption by their own natural predators, such as the birds, hedgehogs, frogs, toads etc.

In turn the safer environment attracts more wildlife to the area, which will eat yet more pests.

Just to reiterate, our products DO NOT KILL, anything!

## Tomato Blight

It was expected in all the wet weather and we have finally had it. Speaking to some of you in the park we are not alone.

This has been a difficult year for growing produce here at Houghton Hall kitchen garden. Like so many of the home gardeners that visit us at the gardens, we have experienced so many challenges with pests and diseases. With such changeable weather, hot, cold and particularly damp, one of our biggest issues has been blight on the outdoor tomatoes. With a view to having a 'Tomato Day' event at the gardens, we grew many of the heritage varieties that do not have resistance to blight.



Unfortunately, Covid 19 put pay to the event, but we stayed committed to the varieties we had sown, knowing we would have to keep a watchful eye on the plants. Even the planting out was delayed due to a cold snap. It is so disheartening to watch so much hard work and nurturing of young plants, fall victim to this infection.

Blight is a serious disease which is caused by a fungus-like organism affecting both fruit and foliage. It is more prevalent in damp humid conditions with the spores being spread on the wind. The early signs are a rotting and wilting of the leaves which shrivel and turn brown. Brown patches start to appear on the developing fruit, whilst the more mature tomatoes decay very quickly. You may see brown lesions showing on the stems. There is no cure for the disease, but its progress can be slowed down by picking off affected leaves, this will not eradicate the problem, but may buy some time to pick at least some of the crop.



At the gardens we adhere to organic principals so do not use chemicals and there are no fungicides available for home gardeners either. Once the infection has taken hold remove the plant carefully to avoid the spores becoming airborne. Together with the debris on the ground bag everything and either burn it or dispose of it in the waste bin. Do not add it to your compost as it is unlikely there will be enough heat to kill off all the spores.

One point to note is like so many organisms, the one responsible for blight, *Phytophthora*, (from Greek φυτόν (phytón), "plant" and φθορά (phthorá), "destruction"; "the plant-destroyer") is a genus of plant-damaging oomycetes (water moulds), whose member species are capable of causing enormous economic losses on crops worldwide, as well as environmental damage in natural ecosystems. These moulds are constantly evolving, this means many of the resistant tomato varieties can fall victim given similar weather conditions we've experienced this year. So, if your tomatoes have suffered, you were not alone and there is always next season. Just remember to apply good housekeeping methods and do not cross contaminate tools, gloves and wash canes thoroughly for the following seasons use.

## Wire Worm

You may remember that we spoke about an increase in wire worm activity within the soil and we planted some cut potatoes in half in the hope that they would gravitate to them and we could remove them from the soil. This worked with mixed results, but was more effective the longer they were in. We did find that it attracted the slugs which meant they finally left the runner beans alone!!



The late sowing of courgettes and the cutting back of the old ones...

Did it pay off?



The picture on the left shows a huge amount of new bright green growth and an increased productivity of new courgettes.

The later sown courgette (right) have produced strong healthy plants which have given us several courgettes already.



What is looking good now



Spring onion



Aubergine



Peppers



Peppers



Kale



Calabrese



Celeriac



Beetroot



Celery



Brussel sprouts



Cleome



Zinnias



Sedum



Runner Beans

## Produce days

We have been having a few produce days again in the kitchen garden, mainly on Thursdays when the weather has been feasible. In order to provide a greater range some of this has come from Silsoe Horticultural Centre. There has been a good array of fruit, flowers and vegetables and it has been nice to see so much support for this locally.

The volunteers have enjoyed picking, preparing and putting this out for you to enjoy.



Let's hope that September sees us in with some dry weather so we can do some cutting back, tidying and weeding in the next few weeks without having to dive for shelter!

The cooler weather reminds us how quickly the seasons change. This week the autumn planting onion sets, and garlic arrived. That really brought home the fact that we are now looking to the year ahead once more, even though we still have a bountiful amount of produce to harvest.

September will mark two years in my role at Houghton hall park and where did that go!!!!

*Happy Gardening, stay safe*

*Jenny*





## Keep in touch

### Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

### Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

### Twitter

@BedsCountryside

### Website

[www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

### Email

[hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@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 [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)



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