

Houghton Hall Park

November 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.

Another new month and another new set of restrictions on our lives but the park continues to be here for your enjoyment and wellbeing.

We would like to thank everyone who attended our half term events last month, the MonsterVillain trail had over four hundred families sign up with the national average being 68, our park users really do love a trail!

There are many things to enjoy this month, our photography theme 'Little Details' in Houghton Hall Park wants you to find the joy in the small things, there is an abundance in the park if you look closely.

The Remembrance Day display is now out in the kitchen garden, have a look if you get the chance it really is quite poignant. We have exciting news on how you can make a festive wreath at home this year, find out more in our 'What's on' pages. Mark, our volunteer, has also created some quizzes to keep us entertained during this lockdown.

The Houghton Hall Park team of three grew to four this month with our new Community Park Ranger Eleanor Evans starting her new role, read on to find out more about what she will be up to in the park over the coming months.



A great place to live and work.

Meet the Team

October saw a new member of the Houghton Hall Park team join us, Eleanor Evans is our new Community Park Ranger and we thought it would be good for you to find out a bit about her and what she's going to be up to in the park.

Have you worked in a park before?

I previously worked in a park in Coventry called Ryton Pools Country Park. It was previously a quarry, then landfill and then a park. I worked there at first as an apprentice and then picked up a role as an Assistant Ranger. My role at the park consisted of tasks such as daily maintenance of the site, conservation from small annual and regular tasks to large-scale one-off projects to kid's activities and school groups.

Briefly describe your role in the park

My role in the park is to maintain the parkland and encourage a wider biodiversity through conservation tasks, encourage local people to volunteer within the park and ensure that the park is around for the community to use for years to come.



What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

I am most looking forward to getting to know the public and hopefully get more people involved in the park. Be it creating new areas within the park or improving the existing infrastructure.

How can our park users help to look after the park?

Park users can help look after the park by picking up litter, reporting any issues they have found or notice in the park, and by letting me know any ideas they have for the park. If you have any ideas or notice any issues you can email me: Eleanor.Evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Why are you so happy in your photo?

The big smile on my face was because it was the last of 5,500 hedgerow trees to plant in my previous role and we managed it in 4 weeks!

What's On

Festive Wreath Making at Home

When: On sale from Saturday 14th November

As we are not able to do in person wreath workshops this year we are giving you the opportunity to purchase a kit to make a home, we have a variety of designs, each kit will include ribbons, wreath base, decorations, foliage & written instructions (maybe even a video tutorial!) for you to be able to create your design.

Wreaths will be available to purchase from our website on the following page from Saturday 14th November:

www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/wreaths-at-home



Collection will take place from the visitor centre foyer on specific dates which you can choose at time of booking.



Tots go wild in Wellies

When: Every Tuesday

Time: 10am & 11am

Cost: Free!

Wrap up warm and put on your wellies and join sing-a-long Su for creative walks at Houghton Hall Park. Created for walking toddlers aged 1 to 4 years and their grown-ups, the outdoor adventure will combine stories, singing and movement.

Book on at <https://bit.ly/2GN0UiN>

Bedfordshire Day

When: Saturday 28th November

Whilst we are restricted in what we can do this year the flag will still be flying over the park!



Buggy Exercise

Buggy Exercise cannot take place due the new lockdown regulations, but we will hopefully be back on Wednesday 9th December 10am, book on at www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness

Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture Event

great lifestyles

November's Photography Theme
'Little Details' at Houghton Hall Park

We hope you take joy in capturing some photos of 'Little Details' at Houghton Hall Park

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in November
- 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 30th November
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

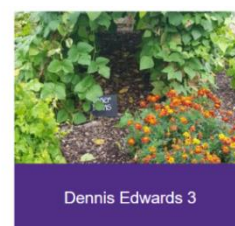
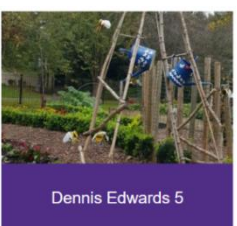
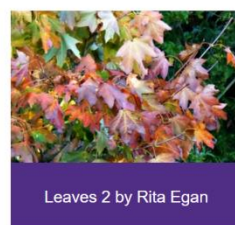
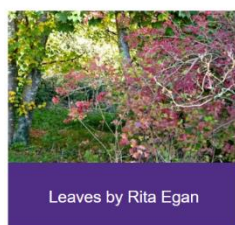
We welcome photographers of all abilities from the age of 16 to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme. November's theme is: 'Little Details' at Houghton Hall Park, we hope you can find some joy in the smaller details of the park you could capture things such as spider webs, moss and fungi let's see the beauty in the things we sometimes overlook.

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 – 30th November 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

There were some stunning entries for last month's theme, Autumn in Houghton Hall Park, a selection are below and all entries can be found on our website www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography-theme



Nature Blog – Squirrels

Words and pictures by Mark Bolan Houghton Hall Park Volunteer



Eating sunflower seeds

With their acrobatic antics on bird feeders, their grey fluffy tails constantly twitching as they pause to listen and check for danger. The cute way they sit up and hold food in their front paws, rotating it as they nibble away. Grey squirrels it seems, have won a place in our hearts. Unlike red squirrels which predominantly spend most of their time in trees, grey squirrels spend a lot of time on the ground so are easily seen.

They are diurnal, having peaks of activity, usually early morning and later in the afternoon. Being omnivores they are masters of

survival, having a wide ranging diet, including seeds, birds eggs, fruit and you may be surprised to learn fungi. Neither are they adverse to predate fledgling birds. In addition they have a sweet tooth and are known to be especially fond of custard creams. (Well who isn't!) They are not particularly territorial and often seen in groups, happily sharing feeding grounds, especially when food is abundant. Although as they get older they do display signs of dominance, more so amongst males than females. This has helped their success since being introduced from North America in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

Just in case you are wondering, since 1937 it has been illegal to keep squirrels as pets and you cannot release one into the wild. This time of year they are busy burying seeds and nuts that will see them through the winter. It is thought that they don't remember exact spots of these caches of food, tending to rely on their superb sense of smell to hone in on precise locations. Sometimes they will pretend to bury food to confuse rivals who might dig up their stash.

Their eyesight is excellent, with good focusing power across the whole of their wide angle vision. Their eyes are dichromatic meaning they see in two colour in blue and green. Red objects appearing to them a yellow green colour, similar in many respects to people who have red green colour blindness. So are unable to distinguish reds mixed amongst green, for example red poppies in green fields. The cells that gather light in their eyes, have a two tier system, so in low light at dusk and at night they will see mostly in black and white. Although their night vision isn't anywhere as good as nocturnal animals such as foxes and wood mice, who have a much higher density of light gathering sensors. Their eyes also contain a pale yellow pigment which helps protect them from harmful ultra violet rays and reduces glare in bright light. It's almost like having built in sunglasses, which is pretty cool.

As you would expect from a wild animal, their hearing isn't too shabby either and is approximately two and a half times more acute than a humans. Despite this they are not very good at detecting



Making the most of abundance



Oops I've slipped off!



Chewing the head off a large sunflower

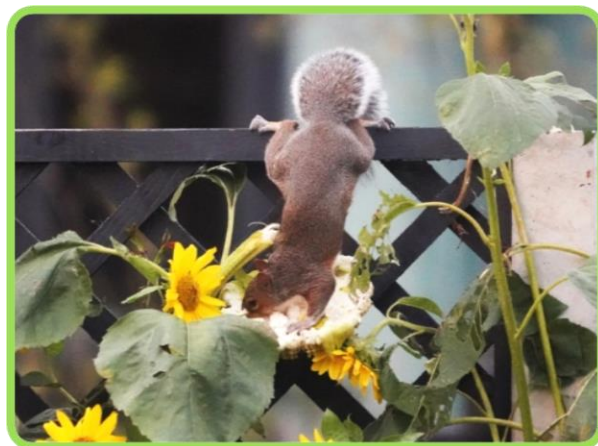
enabling them to distinguish small differences in weight. This helps them identify between good and poor seed kernels within thick shells.

the source of a sound. Tests have shown that the direction of a sound has to move at least 30 degrees before they notice any change. They do however have hairs which are highly sensitive to movement. Known as vibrissae these hairs are thicker than that of their body fur. Typically, like other animals they have sensitive whiskers, these are arranged in five rows either side of their nose. The ones nearest the nose the shortest, each row growing slightly longer, with those furthest from the nose, approximately 7cm long. In addition, they have vibrissae interspersed amongst their belly hair, around their eyes, chin and at the base of their tail. They also have these sensitive hairs on their wrists and elbows, something unique to squirrels. They have a good sense of touch

Squirrel's tails play a greater role than you might expect. Apart from being important for balance, squirrels use their tail to control their temperature. It can be used as a blanket in cold weather or a sun shade when it's hot. In addition, because the tail of a squirrel has a large surface area to volume ratio, it loses heat rapidly. At the base of the tail there is a network of blood vessels which can be used to regulate their temperature. During hot weather they can bypass this network of vessels, passing blood directly to the tail, thereby radiating heat out of their body. In cold spells warm blood from the heart passes through these blood vessels, in doing so warming colder blood from the tail, before it returns back to the body, so reducing heat loss.

With all that gnawing you would think their teeth would wear out, but their teeth don't stop growing, so growth is kept in check by continuous use. Unfortunately, if they lose a tooth it won't grow back.

Squirrels can mate at around ten to twelve months, usually only raising one small litter. Mature females will have up to two litters a year. A typical litter is usually between three to four, babies referred to as kittens. Gestation is around forty-four days with lactation up to ten weeks. The young are reliant on their mother's milk for at least eight weeks, moving onto solids by the time they are ten weeks old.



Stripping the back from a sunflower

Home for a squirrel is called a drey, which they build from twigs which they cut live from trees with leaves attached. To keep them water tight they line them with leaves, as many as twenty to thirty layers thick. A drey may also include a bedding of chewed up bark. Sometimes they will make use of hollows in trees rather than build a drey. They do not hibernate as such, although during cold spells they will spend extended periods lasting several days, cosy in their drey.



All mine!

As with other wild animals, squirrels have their predators and because they spend so much time on the ground, greys have to be very wary. Apart from domestic cats and dogs, in the wild badgers, foxes, mink, stoats and weasels will all make a meal of squirrel. Pine martens are being introduced to areas with high populations of red squirrels to control the greys, which easily out compete the reds. Some owls and other raptors like peregrine falcons, goshawks and buzzards are known to predate them too.

So apart from the colour of their coats what is the difference between a grey and red squirrel and why is it they don't seem able to live in harmony with each other?

Although grey squirrels have red colouring in their coats which at certain times can give them the appearance of being red, greys do not have the tufted ears which all red squirrels have. Weighing in between 400-600 grams greys are roughly twice the weight of a red. Greys also carry Parapoxvirus known as squirrel pox, to which they are immune, this virus is usually fatal to the red squirrels that catch it. As mentioned earlier, greys are an introduced species and they tend to forage in groups on the ground. Greys will eat food stuffs well before it is fully ripe, often clearing an area of food before the reds can forage for it. Reds are a native species, spending their time in the tree canopy. Here they can escape onto lighter branches not strong enough to support their predators. They have also evolved eat food as it ripens.

The overall result is that the numbers of native reds has dropped dramatically, from several million to an estimated 150,000 animals. Reds are now a protected species and are now only found in small areas of the United Kingdom, including around 3,500 on The Isle of Wight, and Kielder forest home to roughly another 25,000. There are areas of the Lake District, Northumberland and Anglesey with small populations. There are also significant areas of forest in Scotland with red squirrels. Greys on the other hand have been so successful, being non-native are considered a pest, with numbers across the UK estimated to be as high as five million.



How am I going to get this home?

One thing both species have in common though, they are excellent swimmers. By the way, did you know black squirrels have been spotted in the park? These are not a different species, but greys born with a genetic anomaly giving them a black coat.

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park.

What's the latest in the Gardens?



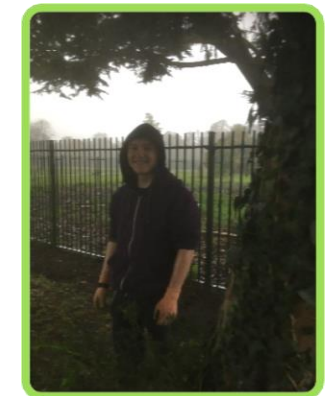
MULCHING, mulching and more mulching!!

That is the theme of the months ahead. This wonderful pile of recycled green garden waste will be added to the formal garden beds over the next few weeks. So why do we do it?

It is done for many reasons but mainly to feed the ground by encouraging beneficial soil organisms, retains moisture in the soil which reduces the

need for watering. It suppresses weeds and above all gives a neat and tidy finish to the garden.

We will work our way through the garden weeding and cutting back before we add between 3 -5 inches of this decomposed matter to the beds.



Bulb planting GALORE!!!

Through every type of rain, and there has been a bit, my volunteers have turned out in force to help plant over 9,000 bulbs around the cedar tree. It has taken an almighty group effort to achieve this but this week we saw the last few go in the ground. We are hoping this will be a superb splash of colour next year. It has been one of the biggest tasks we have undertaken as a group.

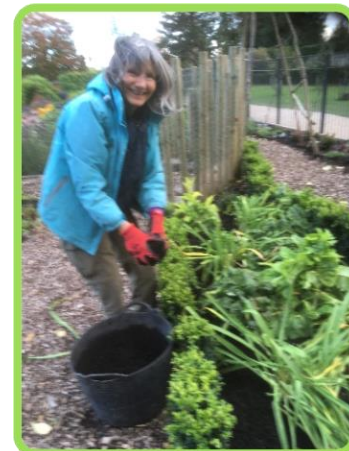
Next week we will be planting the tulips and alliums, thank goodness we have all had some practice!!



Our wildlife pond has had its first wave of construction with the pond dipping platform installed. Not too much to dip in at the moment although we may not need a liner if the rain continues. This will add a focus to the kitchen garden and hopefully encourage natural predators like frogs and toads who in turn will eat our slugs!



Clearing of beds and having a good weed as we prepare for our Remembrance bed. We have also added some pansy's, cineraria and skimmia and underplanted with bulbs for a tremendous wave of colour next year. Those clouds were really that dark and yes we did get very wet on this day too!



NO DIG Charles Dowding

Earlier this month I was fortunate to be offered a place on a no dig course in Somerset with Charles Dowding. Some of you may recognise the name as I have mentioned that our garden runs on practices encouraged by his method of gardening.

He has had great influence on how I took the garden forward at HHP, and it also underpins the ethos of letting nature work with us

In essence it practices:

- Minimal soil disturbance
- Adding of organic matter
- Importance of getting the most produce out of a space
- Re -thinking about traditional practices such as:
 - Double digging
 - Raised beds
 - Fertiliser



So, what is NO DIG?

It is as it says, by dispelling the old myths of heavy soil cultivation and instead adopting an easier method of gardening. New beds are formed by Suppressing weeds on a weedy patch by use of cardboard and simply topping with a few inches of organic matter

Principles are: SPEED EASE PRODUCTIVITY

- In essence start a bed and plant on the same day
- Benefits of no dig: Less weeds, soil has an open structure so doesn't stick to boots, walk on beds without worrying about soil compaction
- Use less compost as carbon is not lost from digging, increasing mycelium threads and soil fertility. Soil organisms work quicker so the plants are able to find food from the soil sooner

How does this relate to our garden?

- Once a year we add organic matter
- Do not dig it or fork it in: simply layer to about 6". Yearly additions added at around 2"
- A new patch benefits from cardboard and soil/compost then polythene (excluding light is key)
- This starves roots and they die, meanwhile the compost is feeding the soil (like a sour dough starter)
- Fewer slugs as nowhere to hide; theories show that soil cultivation create compaction. There is then a build-up of anaerobic fermentation thus, attracting slugs
- Using bark on paths helps to feed soil life.
- Increase feeding of soil from composts – increases soil organisms – it is the excretions of these organisms that feed the plants



Before: a weedy field



After: with no dig methods applied

Apart from meeting a man I very much respect in the gardening world, I shared my two days with like-minded people. All were passionate about food production and wanted to take their knowledge further. Some were on the cusp of starting market gardens; others had been furloughed and wanted to gain more knowledge. Whatever the reason for attending there was a unity and enthusiasm that made the weekend a far more valuable experience. I feel we can say the same about the volunteers at HHP. Individually everybody has so much to offer but when brought together gardening becomes inclusive and far more enjoyable.

If you are interested in Charles Dowding's methods or would like to find out more please visit his website www.charlesdowding.co.uk

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Last, but not least, we had a Halloween event that was supported by our volunteer team, who made props and helped set up and take down on the day. Unfortunately, the weather wasn't on our side. However, we still managed to have a laugh despite the wind and gales of Saturday!



I can't believe another month has flown by so quickly, but we still have so many things to do, especially leaf raking!

I hope through these next 4 weeks with new lock down restrictions in place you are able to get out and about in our beautiful countryside and enjoy the wonderful colours and light that are part of these autumnal days.

Happy Gardening, stay safe
Jenny

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Fun for Lockdown

No prizes just a bit of fun

Can you follow the clues to unjumble the words

Wag Rie	A hair piece for your ears _____
Lugs	A mollusc that eats your plants _____
Rat Bib	A furry animal called Peter _____
Nando Deli	A yellow flowered weed _____
Nails	A mollusc with a shell _____
Love	A small rodent _____
Went	A semi aquatic reptile _____
Drabb Lick	You might find 24 in a pie _____
Lite But	Small bird _____
Hog Press Rap	Jumping insect _____
Myself Lad	A flying insect, maybe a lady distress _____
Tally Weir	A pretty water flower _____
Sir Ped	This creature might make you scream _____
Let Tub Fry	This insect very pretty at stage four _____
One Figs Lard	No flames from these insects _____
Eel Bet	Black hard shell insect _____
Sow Wail	It's what you do when you drink, A bird _____
Gone Dug	Elongate bottom dwelling fish _____
Rent Bit	A bird with booming voice _____
Game Pi	A black and white bird _____
Shrek Tiara	A type of butterfly _____
Shut Throgs	A singing bird _____

Fun for Lockdown

No prizes just a bit of fun

Can you find fifteen words hidden in the grid below
and discover which of the sixteen in the list is missing
Words run in a straight line, up & down, diagonally, backwards and forwards

BUTTERFLY
MOTH
BIRD
SPIDER
SWEETPEA
FLOWER
BEAN
FISH
SNAIL
SPADE
APPLE
HERB
POND
HOE
SEED
SLUG

O	G	J	E	A	D	E	E	S	Y
Q	U	C	L	B	R	E	H	L	A
R	L	S	P	H	S	I	F	D	K
E	S	P	P	O	A	R	H	S	R
W	T	A	A	E	E	G	V	E	D
O	D	D	H	T	O	M	D	R	N
L	R	E	T	X	L	I	A	A	O
F	I	U	G	T	P	A	E	D	P
A	B	A	B	S	A	B	S	F	Z
Z	A	E	P	T	E	E	W	S	A

What is it?

Read the four riddles and work out what each vegetable it is

Strong green vine growing
Large and bright red fruit hanging
Expectation sublime

Yet despite my name
I am not an Olympian
Neither can you knot

Behold pretty flowers
Before pods protect treasure
Edible green seeds

Edible green leaves
Above a dark purple ball
Claret coloured juice

ANSWERS

Can you follow the clues to unjumble the words

Wag Rie	A hair piece for your ears _____	Earwig
Lugs	A mollusc that eats your plants _____	Slug
Rat Bib	A furry animal called Peter _____	Rabbit
Nando Deli	A yellow flowered weed _____	Dandelion
Nails	A mollusc with a shell _____	Snail
Love	A small rodent _____	Vole
Went	A semi aquatic reptile _____	Newt
Drabb Lick	You might find 24 in a pie _____	Blackbird
Lite But	Small bird _____	Blue Tit
Hog Press Rap	Jumping insect _____	Grass Hopper
Myself Lad	A flying insect, maybe a lady in distress	Damselfly
Tally Weir	A pretty water flower _____	Water lily
Sir Ped	This creature might make you scream _____	Spider
Let Tub Fry	This insect very pretty at stage four _____	Butterfly
One Figs Lard	No flames from these insects _____	Dragonflies
Eel Bet	Black hard shell insect _____	Beetle
Sow Wall	It's what you do when you drink, A bird	Swallow
Gone Dug	Elongate bottom dwelling fish _____	Gudgeon
Rent Bit	A bird with booming voice _____	Bittern
Game Pi	A black and white bird _____	Magpie
Shrek Tiara	A type of butterfly _____	Hairstreak
Shut Throgs	A singing bird _____	Song Thrush

ANSWERS

Can you find fifteen words hidden in the grid below
and discover which one is missing

BUTTERFLY
MOTH
BIRD
SPIDER
SWEETPEA
FLOWER
BEAN
FISH
SNAIL IS MISSING
SPADE
APPLE
HERB
POND
HOE
SEED
SLUG

O	G	J	E	A	D	E	E	S	Y
Q	U	C	L	B	R	E	H	L	A
R	L	S	P	H	S	I	F	D	K
E	S	P	P	O	A	R	H	S	R
W	T	A	A	E	E	G	V	E	D
O	D	D	H	T	O	M	D	R	N
L	R	E	T	X	L	I	A	A	O
F	I	U	G	T	P	A	E	D	P
A	B	A	B	S	A	B	S	F	Z
Z	A	E	P	T	E	E	W	S	A

What is it?

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TOMATO

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Neither can you knot

RUNNER OR STRING BEAN

Behold pretty flowers
Before pods protect treasure
Edible green seeds

PEA

Edible green leaves
Above a dark purple ball
Claret coloured juice

BEETROOT



Keep in touch

Facebook

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Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

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



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LOTTERY FUNDED