

Houghton Hall Park

April 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.

April has arrived and with it a feeling of change, spring is in the air, new buds and life are appearing in the park which brings with it a sense of optimism. In March we created some free kits for children to make their

mum or carer some flowers for Mother's Day, they were very well received, the children did a great job. Emily Miles aged 8 sent in a picture with her fabulous creation!

Our Easter Egg trail took place Easter weekend and it was great to see so many families taking part and the children's faces when they received their prize at the end!

Our lives may have changed over the last twelve months but the nature in the park keeps doing its thing and provides an escape when needed. With that in mind, and in conjunction with Mental Health Awareness Week in May, we have arranged for a free Forest Bathing session in the park, never heard of Forest Bathing? Nicola Scholfield who will be leading the session has written an article all about it on the next page.

There are also updates from Jenny our Community Gardener and Eleanor our Community Ranger, they have been very busy over the last few weeks, as always Mark, our Volunteer, has written a fantastic article about encouraging wildlife into your garden and not forgetting Plant of the Month by our volunteer Irene.



A great place to live and work.

What's On

An Introduction to Forest Bathing

When: Saturday 15th May 9am, free!

As part of mental health awareness week in May we will be offering you the chance to experience Forest Bathing with Nicola Schofield, here she tells us what it is all about.

Have you ever noticed that walking in the park can lift your mood? If so, then you're not alone.

There's now plenty of evidence that spending time in nature can help boost our mental wellbeing – as well as helping us unwind, benefits of being in nature can include help with insomnia, anxiety and depression. Studies suggest that spending just two hours a week with nature can help us feel happier and healthier.

It seems fitting then that the theme for Mental Health Awareness Week this year is Nature. To mark the week, 10th to 16th May, I'll be running a free guided walk to encourage people to tune into and relax in the natural surroundings of Houghton Hall Park. The walk will introduce elements of forest bathing, or Shinrin-yoku.



Shinrin-yoku is a practice from Japan that translates from Japanese as “forest bathing” or “forest shower”, where participants are guided on a gentle walk with activities to help them slow down and immerse their senses in the natural world (so no swimming costume needed!).

In the 1980s, the Japanese government started a programme to encourage people to walk in Shinrin-yoku forests, and also began to study the impacts of these walks on participants. These studies showed some clear benefits from forest bathing - reductions in blood pressure, lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and improvements in concentration and memory.

There's now lots more evidence that being in nature can have a positive impact on our wellbeing. Recent studies from the UK suggest that just taking a moment to notice good things in nature can help us feel connected to the natural world and lift our spirits. These can be simple things; being aware of the hum of pollinators, watching a spider weaving its web, noticing the movement of the trees, appreciating the intricate beauty of a flower or enjoying the feel of the breeze against our skin.

I've experienced on a personal level how connecting to nature supports my mental wellbeing, and my visits to local parks and woodlands became incredibly important to me during lockdown as a way to relax and unwind. I would wander, allowing my attention to be drawn to what was going on around me in nature. As I did this, I began to feel a sense of calm as my attention shifted from the chatter in my mind to the sights, scents and sounds surrounding me.

During this time, I also continued on a path to help others feel the benefit of a connection to nature and am currently studying for an international forest therapy guide diploma. I'm looking forward to sharing this with you on a free guided introduction to forest bathing during Mental Health Awareness Week. Spaces are strictly limited, so please book on by clicking the link below, <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/an-introduction-to-forest-bathing>

Nicola Schofield



Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday 10am

Cost: £2 payable in cash on the day

Where: Meet outside the Visitors Centre

A fun fitness session where we enjoy a warmup around the park and then a circuit session, a great way to meet other local parents/carers and get fit along the way! Social distancing regulations apply. Book on at www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness



Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture Event

Central Bedfordshire great lifestyles

April's Photography Theme

'Buds and Blossom' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in April
- 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 April
- 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. April's theme is: 'Buds and Blossom at Houghton Hall Park. Spring is certainly making its presence felt in the park and we are sure you'll be able to capture it.

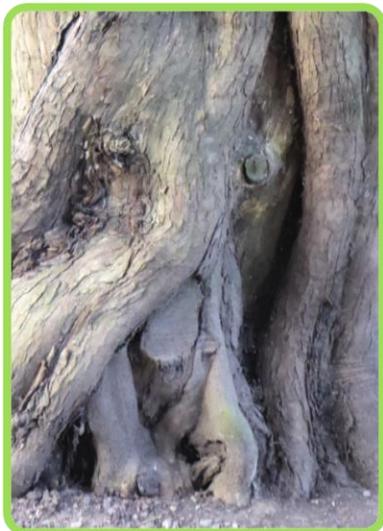
IMPORTANT: Please remember to practice social distancing when coming to the park. Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

The images must be taken between 1st – 30th April 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 pictures of 'Faces in nature' in the park, for last month's theme, you had to use your imagination a bit with this one but you didn't let us down, a selection of photos are below and you can find them all on our website.



By Rita Egan



By Ruth Jenkins



By Rita Egan



Fluttering Eyes - By Cindy Lea



Whooo gives a hoot? -By Cindy Lea



Double Vision - By Cindy Lea



Is that a bear? - By Cindy Lea



By Rita Egan



Deer's head with antlers - By Carol Butler

Community Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

Well March flew by didn't it? Spring finally feels like it's here!

This month has been a lot of finishing off. The final bits of coppicing were done at the start of the month. With the help of some volunteers we managed to gather and collect all the bits that have been coppiced over the last few months and transported them to the garden for Jenny to use to grow vegetables up.

A few early cowslips have made their appearance this month in the meadow. Between the 1920's and the 1980s cowslips were in a massive decline due to the reduction in wildflower meadows. Thankfully they seem to be having a come back with numbers increasing every year!

Did you know the name cowslip comes from the word cow slop, as they were originally associated with cow poo!



After strimming an area of nettles that was starting to encroach onto the path and raking off the material I stumbled across a common frog, during this time of year common frogs will spend a lot of time breeding with the females laying frog spawn. Have you seen any frog spawn this year?



Nature Notes

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

Build it and they will come is the usual mantra you hear from naturalists, in answer to how do I attract wildlife to my garden. But is this advice strictly accurate?

The other day I was asked by someone, why no frogs had come to a small two year old pond they had built in their back garden. I asked what the rest of the garden was like and it transpired that it was neat and tidy with shrubs and a regularly cut lawn. This was the most likely reason the frogs hadn't made an appearance.



Frogs like damp areas

Just for a moment imagine your perfect house, with all the latest mod cons available. Now where would you like your perfect house, perhaps you'd like it by the sea, or in the countryside with wonderful views of rolling green hills. Either way it seems idyllic. Now imagine your perfect home placed in the middle of a bland desert, no shops, schools or other facilities needed for modern living for miles. It might be the perfect house, but not where you would want to live. It's the

same for wildlife, so you can understand the problem.

Frogs and toads don't live in ponds they can spend more of their lives out of water as in it. As long as they have cool damp areas available, they will only need a pond for spawning and for the tadpoles to develop. The overall environment has to be in place for them to make an appearance. The habitat the questioner had provided, didn't give the perfect place frogs need for the majority of their lives. In fact from a frogs' point of view the garden in question seemed a pretty hostile desert. No long grass to hide in and stay cool. Nowhere to overwinter and no piles of logs that encouraged slugs and insects for food. Plus if the neighbouring gardens are similar, it would be like having to cross the Sahara in order to breed, as far as a frog is concerned.

In a previous garden I didn't have a pond, neither did my neighbours, but I had lots of frogs. In fact I always had to check to make sure it was clear of frogs before cutting an area of the lawn. This was particularly the case in early summer when there were lots of froglets crawling through the blades of grass in search of tiny insects. I'd leave areas of long grass especially for them as they helped keep the slug population down in return.

To attract specific wildlife to your garden, you need to understand what they need. Looking at the life cycle of frogs will provide some clues. Frogs don't always fully hibernate in winter time, although they are mostly inactive during this time. They will occasionally emerge for short periods, during warmer breaks in the weather. They spend most of the winter under piles of logs, stones, or in compost heaps and sometimes at the bottom of ponds where they burrow into the silt, because the temperature is slightly higher and more stable, than at the surface. Maturing to breeding age at around two to three years, in early spring they will head to the nearest pond to breed. Male frogs croak to attract females, who may be mobbed by the males in their compulsion to mate. The black tadpoles start to hatch from the frogspawn at around two to four weeks depending on the water temperature. They eat algae and water fleas and slowly develop faint patches of gold and brown. The tadpoles of toads remain black, which is a way to distinguish the difference between the two types. At roughly sixteen weeks they start to grow their hind legs. The front legs then follow, at



Perfect habitat for frogs to move from one area to another

which point they gradually absorb their tails, to become miniature frogs known as froglets. The small frogs will begin to leave the pond in search of food. This is when their diet changes and they become carnivorous, eating slugs, worms, beetles and other insects. They hunt mostly at night when the temperatures are lower and a lot of their food source is active. Although they spend most of their time away from ponds, they are aquatic creatures so need moisture and to stay cool, as they can dehydrate quite quickly.

So how do you create the perfect environment if you want to attract frogs?

Firstly a couple of things that will deter them, if you have fish in your pond you won't get frogs, as the fish will soon make a meal of the tadpoles and if they survive long enough, the froglets too. Unless you have a sizable pond then it is unlikely you will get frogs breeding if newts have arrived before them, as like fish, newts will predate the tadpoles. Any frog friendly pond will need areas around the edge to provide both shade and shelter. Longish grasses and overhanging foliage are ideal, as are marginal and floating plants, any algae will provide food for tadpoles. Build your pond to provide a variety of water depths, this will allow you to have plants that have differing requirements, frogs also like shallow areas at the pond edges. Any pond also needs a shallow slope to allow easy access in and out of the water, not just for the frogs, but for any wildlife that may inadvertently fall in. You won't need a pump as frogs prefer still water.

By the way, we have started construction of a wildlife pond at the back of the kitchen garden so



Excavation of pond in the kitchen garden showing different levels



Logs will be placed near pond edge to provide shelter

I've included pictures of hole that has been dug, ready for the underlay and liner to be fitted. As we continue with construction I will update you with pictures and news. Spring and summer are the perfect time to build a nature pond as it will give time for the plants to establish and the pond to find its balance.

Piles of logs and stones, particularly in damp shady areas of the garden, will provide places for frogs to shelter from predators and stay cool during the heat of the day. Plants such as Fatsia Japonica which have larger leaves are particularly useful for cool shade and with logs and stones underneath make a perfect habitat. Leave areas of long grass where frogs can move around your garden undetected, this will also provide a level of protection from predators. Better still why not sow some wild flower seeds instead, not only will it look pretty, whilst doing the same job as long grass, but it will also attract a wide range of insects for food.

If you can let nature help keep bugs and pests down, rather than use chemicals. By creating a diverse habitat you will provide both the home and the food for wildlife and in return they will maintain a perfect balance of nature in your garden. Frogs can breathe through areas of their skin as well as through their mouths and nostrils and chemicals can cause them serious harm. Besides if you kill everything with sprays

and pellets you are also removing their food.

Just one last thing, please don't be tempted to hurry things along by moving frogs or their spawn from other ponds. You may inadvertently introduce viruses and diseases to your pond, many of which are fatal to frogs.

So yes, if you build it they will come, but only if you provide the complete habitat for their needs.

Until next time,

Mark

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener



There are more organisms in one tablespoon of healthy soil.....than there are people on *Earth*

I read this recently and thought I would share this interesting fact, as I am always talking to you about looking after your soil, reducing your cultivation and eliminating chemicals. The result after three years of such practices; we now have crumbly workable soil, very few weeds, and a soil teeming with life. Why would you destroy this structure by digging?

The pleasure in growing produce ultimately comes from growing and harvesting so the less time spent on weeding has simply got to be a bonus.

Every week now we will be planting out more and more of our early sowings as they head from greenhouse to cold frames and then into the ground.

Below you can see one of the first crops of the year to go in is mange tout. Unfortunately, in a caged frame as the pigeons will otherwise shred them in a matter of hours. This has been the sad realisation of late that our produce is vulnerable to pigeons and squirrels, so every crop needs adequate protection. Not quite the image I had envisaged but a necessity all the same.



With that in mind, we have been busy making new frames for the salad planters. These have been weeded, replenished with soil and are already to go as soon as the plants are big enough to transplant.



It has also meant that we have made a new brassica cage for the bed. There was a slight problem though that the netting wasn't quite big enough..... Help was on hand from Mum and Dad!!



The final result...



We now have our netting fastened and secure, we are just working on the door frame. The mesh we have used is called enviromesh and it will stop flea beetle getting in and eating our brassica leaves. This will also keep the butterflies out so reduce the amount of caterpillar damage. The downside of this it means the natural predators that will eat our bad infestations of slugs aren't able to access the tunnel. I have just applied some nematodes in the form of *nemaslug* which is an organic, safe and natural way of combating slug numbers. These microscopic worms have been

watered into the beds and their primary target is to hunt down slugs to stop them feeding. I have not had to resort to these before but slug damage last year was high and it has reached a point I needed to manage the numbers.

Please see the link attached for more information

<https://www.nematodesdirect.co.uk/>

We are continuing to make good progress cutting back last years herbaceous perennials and weeding the borders. The grass has had its first cut of the year and we have begun to edge the grass again. I have been gently reminded by my volunteers we are making great headway considering it is still only MARCH!!!!



With the recent high winds, it has been more noticeable as to how much damage we have suffered in the kitchen garden. I am hoping to overcome this by the recent planting of a mixed native hedge. This will provide nesting birds with a protective habitat and food source over time.

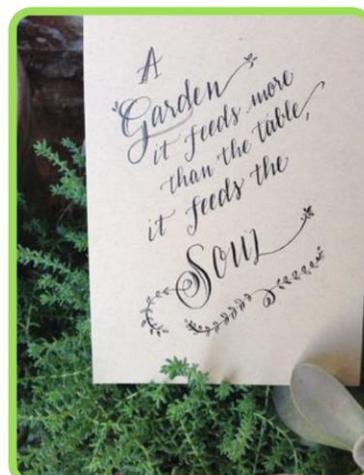
The strawberry bed has had its colossal overhaul for the year, the old leaves cut back, re mulched with compost, paths weeded and runners removed. The plants have then been fed and new bark added to make tidy, clean paths. I think everyone has been involved with this particular job as it is quite work intensive. Well worth the effort when you taste them, as they are simply delicious, *Malling centenary*, *Elegance* and *Malwina* are our varieties.



Easter has arrived!

Volunteers have been busy gluing, cutting, sewing and painting at home to make you an Easter bed at the front gates. It has been well received and I hope that if you have any little children that you will help make the chicken a bigger nest by collecting sticks from around the park!!





Preparation is underway to create a fruit cage for Bed 2. This means we have might stand a chance at actually harvesting some gooseberries his year! This bed is home to our long standing perennial crops such as rhubarb, asparagus, sage and currants.

This has been an incredible month of progress and it was hard to decide what should make it into the newsletter. The daffodils are in full colour around the cedar tree and with the prospect of brighter, longer nights ahead, lockdown lifting things are looking up!

Happy Gardening, stay safe

Jenny

Plant of the Month - Daffodils



Daffodils are some of the first flowers we see in springtime and are an indicator that winter is over. Also known as 'Lent Lilies' as they tend to bloom between Ash Wednesday and Easter therefore, they are seen to represent rebirth and new beginnings. Daffodil is the common name for the Narcissus plant and it is said this is because they commonly grow on the banks of streams and rivers where, Narcissus, from Greek Mythology perished.

Daffodils are the National Flower of Wales and worn each year on St. David's Day, they are grown commercially in Wales where an alkaloid is extracted for use in Alzheimer's medication.

They will grow in any soil, in sun or part shade. There are several different flower styles, including trumpets, doubles, split-cups, large-cups, miniature and jonquils - Daffodils which have more than one bloom per stem. The bulbs are poisonous to animals.

*Irene Copperwheat
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer*



Keep in touch

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@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 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 hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



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