



Houghton Hall Park

March 2019 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.



Spring Heritage Walk

Led by the Houghton Regis Heritage Society, please join us for a beginner's walk around the park, learning about the heritage of Houghton Hall and the area. Please meet us in the visitor centre on Wednesday 27th March at 2pm for this free walk! There is no need to book onto this, if you have any questions at all, please contact us at hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

Volunteer at the park this month

Take part in valuable conservation work at Houghton Hall Park with the Greensand Trust one Sunday a month! This month, on **Sunday 17th March 10am-3pm**, is West Woodland Management. The aim is to reduce the populations of Box, Snowberry and self-set trees in the Western Woodland to increase light to the woodland floor and promote wildflowers. The snowdrops are looking amazing, partly due to all the hard work the volunteers have done in the past opening up the woodland floor for them, this work shall continue at this month's task. The meeting point will be in the visitor centre car park. If you would like to come along, please email: hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk to let us know. This is open to everyone so please join us, we hope to see you there!

A great place to live and work.

Snowdrops

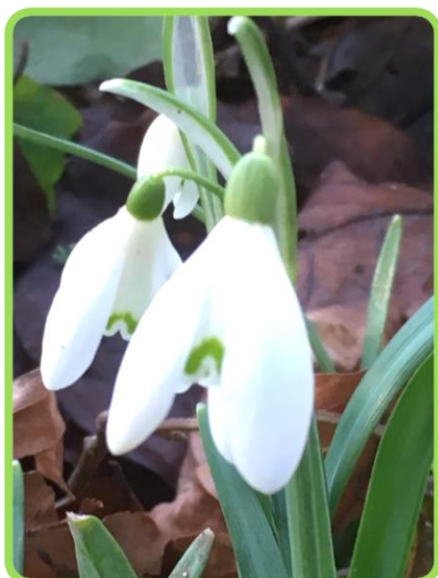
Talking of how well the volunteers have done encouraging the growth of snowdrops in the western woodlands, we are so pleased to share with you some lovely visitor photos that were sent in February:



By Joanna Varney



By Penny Vince



By Trina Cooke



By Penny Vince



By Lucy Downs

If you ever take images in the park, even if they're not for our monthly photography themes, we would still love to see them and feature them in our newsletter so please don't forget to show us your snaps from your visit to the park!

Monthly Photography Themes

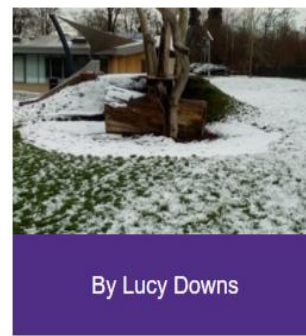
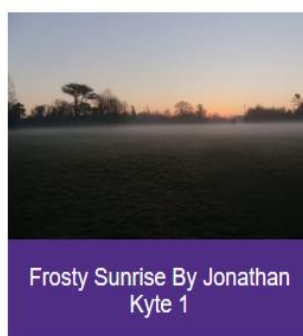
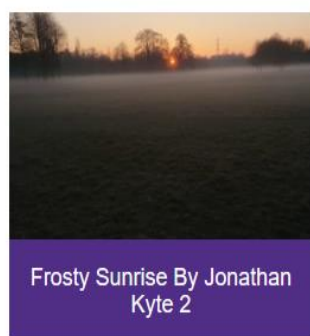
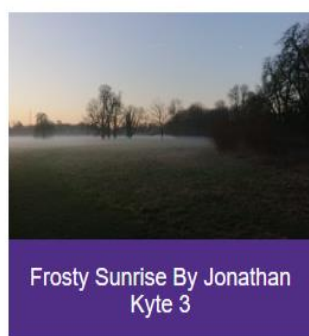
We welcome photographers of all abilities and ages to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly themes; **March's theme is: Spring in Houghton Hall Park.** We hope you're able to capture some of the new life in the park as our days become warmer.

Please send your submissions to hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. The images must be taken between 1st – 31st March 2019 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:

http://houghtonhallpark.org/assets/documents/Photography_Theme_TCs-1.pdf

Below are some entries from February's theme: Frost in Houghton Hall Park. We are so delighted to share these great images captured in Houghton Hall Park by our lovely visitors:



What's the latest in the gardens?

Formal Garden

Wow, what has happened to our typical winter weather, we are having a mini heat wave. Our plants (and us) are very confused! New shoots are pushing through the soil now, followed closely by the weeds, and my goodness there are a lot out there. You may have noticed that we have been mulching the beds with manure and a soil improver. This is to help keep the weeds down and to keep the moisture in. The spring bedding that we put under the yew hedges is now in full flower and adding great colour to the borders. With all the extra care and work being put into these borders, it is always appreciated when you keep dogs to the paths in these areas as a lot of damage is occurring to the new growth.

Kitchen Garden



Silsoe Horticultural students

Well what a difference a month makes, we have started sowing carrots, parsnips, radish, shallots directly into the ground. With weather as warm as this, we will have a crop in no time. By teaming up with Silsoe Horticultural College, it has enabled us to sow some tender crops undercover to gain a head start for the year. This means we have tomatoes, chillies, peppers, lettuce, beetroot, rocket, salad, cauliflower, Brussel sprouts all coming along nicely. The potatoes are chiting well and it won't be many weeks before they will be planted. Today saw the emergence of the rhubarb shoots, so things are well and truly waking up!

Job of the month

Start your sowings with earnest if you have somewhere frost free to begin germination. It is possible to direct sow peas, but you may need to protect them from mice and pigeons who love the young tender shoots. I have covered some of the beds with fleece for a few weeks to warm the soil by a few degrees, this means the seeds will get off to a flying start when they are sown. This is also the time to start a lot of annual flowers such as marigolds, asters and sweet peas. If the weeds have begun to germinate, keep on top of them by hoeing them off, this stops them turning into a much larger job in a few weeks.

Plant of the month - Daffodil



For me, this must be the daffodil. Their glorious heads nodding with their bright yellow hues in the cold mornings.

You might hear daffodils called by their Latin name *Narcissus*. This originated from a Greek myth about a handsome young man named Narcissus. He was given his great beauty by the gods, with the condition that he never looked at a reflection of himself. Eventually, he couldn't resist and gazed at himself in a shimmering lake. The gods turned him into a daffodil for his vanity. The first record of cultivated daffodils was around 200 or 300 B.C. They were widely grown for their ornamental value by the ancient Greeks and Romans

but fell out of favour over time. It's said that around 1629, a group of Englishmen reintroduced daffodils to the gardening world. Daffodils have had many uses throughout history. Ancient Greeks farmed and dried daffodils to use as a disinfectant. Daffodils remained in use well into Victorian times, when a paste made from powdered daffodil roots and roasted barley was applied to heal warts and scabs. They were also believed to magically protect an area from malignant forces and help clear negativity. In medieval times, women used yellow dye from the flowers to tint their hair and eyebrows. And in the Middle East they thought the sap was used as a cure for baldness! Never again will you look at the daffodil with such indifference!

New developments



Preparation of fairy tale bed

For those of you that walk past daily you will have seen some exciting developments occurring, especially on the front bed. The image to the left is in the early stages of layout, but it is due to become a children's fairy tale story bed! Instead of growing vegetables in straight lines, I am hoping to show our young gardeners that vegetables can be fun. They will work their way around the bed discovering 'Jack and the bean stalk', 'Cinderella', 'The enormous turnip', 'The scarecrow's wedding', 'Peter rabbits garden' and more to come! If any of you have any props or ideas, please contact me as I would love to have your involvement. Coffee

and Craft are kindly joining forces with us to bring their creativity to Houghton Hall Park. We wait with great anticipation for their ideas! If you are passing by the kitchen garden, please stop by and see what we are up to. We would love to show you around. In the meantime, enjoy your garden and all the pleasures it brings.

Happy Sowing!

Jenny



My new volunteers!

Spring is nearly upon US by Mark Hogan



Did you all take part in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch? I did, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I did the survey in my Mum's garden in Houghton Regis, so over an hour we saw many different birds - Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Black Caps, Blackbirds, a Goldcrest and even 2 Red Kites flying overhead. What did you see? If you saw something and would like to share this with us, then please let us know! It is nice to know what other people have seen in their gardens and to share that with everyone else.



Over the next few weeks you may notice a change in all the trees, flowers and hedges. With the onset of Spring everything comes alive, you may not even notice it until you look up and suddenly all the trees are full of leaves and cherry blossom suddenly appears on trees that were bare a couple of weeks ago. It is my favourite time of the year. You see the spring lambs in the fields and the birds start nesting and feeding their young.

You may also see the appearance of Hedgehogs from their winter hibernation and also the appearance of bats flying around in the dusk and night time skies. If you're lucky you might see birds doing their mating dances, some birds like the Great Crested Grebes are very beautiful. You might also see more than one robin in a garden, they seem to do this only in the mating season, where they become friendly to each other.

The Birds of Prey like Red Kites, Buzzards and Kestrels will be building their nests and looking for sticks and twigs to reinforce them to keep their young chicks safe. We can help them by leaving any twigs and branches that we have cut back or chopped down in our gardens, so they can pick them up and take them away. We can also help animals like Hedgehogs by leaving part of our gardens untouched, so that slugs and beetles can move in and that will leave our Hedgehogs a natural food to eat and flourish. This area might also help to encourage butterflies, moths and insects and create an area that your children or grandchildren can watch and learn about new things like a Six Burnet Moth, the only moth that can be seen in daylight hours, it has a black body and red wings and is very pretty. When it lands it has black wings and red dots, hence the name.



A very rare bird was seen in Houghton Regis the other day, near the Thorn Turn off a Glossy Ibis. It has been seen around the Woodside Link roads as well, so keep your eye out for it. It does seem that new birds are being seen all over the country, like the Waxwings from Scandinavia who were seen on bushes all over Bedfordshire and Egrets which are now being seen on rivers and reservoirs all over the country.

I think the most wonderful bird in our skies at the moment, is the Red Kite. I have seen them all over the place, even over the Bedford Square Shopping Centre and parts of Parkside and surrounding areas. They were introduced to a site behind Luton Airport in the late 90s and have bred and adapted well to the area and the numbers are now increasing. They are a similar size to a Buzzard but where a Buzzard has a fan tail and flies around in circles, Red Kites float on the thermals and have a forked tail. They also look amazing when the sunlight hits their backs and you can see why they are called Red Kites. Contrary to what people say, they will not attack cats or pets, they mainly eat roadkill, carrion and the odd mouse or vole.

You may also notice that Grey Herons will be looking for food this time of year as they are starting to nest and they will build their nests in the next few months. They like fish, so if you have a pond - put netting over them, either that or put rocks around the pond so that the Herons cannot stand over the pond and help themselves to your fish.



I did hear a funny story last year about a lady and her family. Her son came downstairs and said "Mum, I have a bird in my bedroom". So the Mum ran upstairs thinking it must be a Sparrow or Starling. She opened the door and saw a young Grey Heron sitting on the bed. She was so shocked because even though it was young, it was quite big. She grabbed some towels and gently picked it up, took it outside and released it.

If you have seen a bird in your garden and you're not sure what it is, get in touch with us and we will identify it for you. If you get a picture, please send it to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and we might even put it up in the Visitor Centre or in next month's newsletter.

Written and Photography by Mark Hogan

Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Monday to Friday

10:00am - 15:30pm

Saturday and Sunday

9:00am - 16:00pm



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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