

Houghton Hall Park

February 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.

XPLORER ...is back!

Join our fun, family challenge on **Wednesday 13th February** between 10am – 12pm (last entry 11:30am). This is a FREE activity for all the family to enjoy. Explore the park, find the markers, complete the challenge and have fun together. The meeting point for the activity is in the foyer at Houghton Hall Park Visitor Centre, Park Road North, Houghton Regis, LU5 5FU. Parking is free for up to 3 hours, but parking spaces are limited so please arrive with plenty of time. For further information about the activity please visit www.xplorer.org.uk.



A great place to live and work.

Monthly Photography Themes

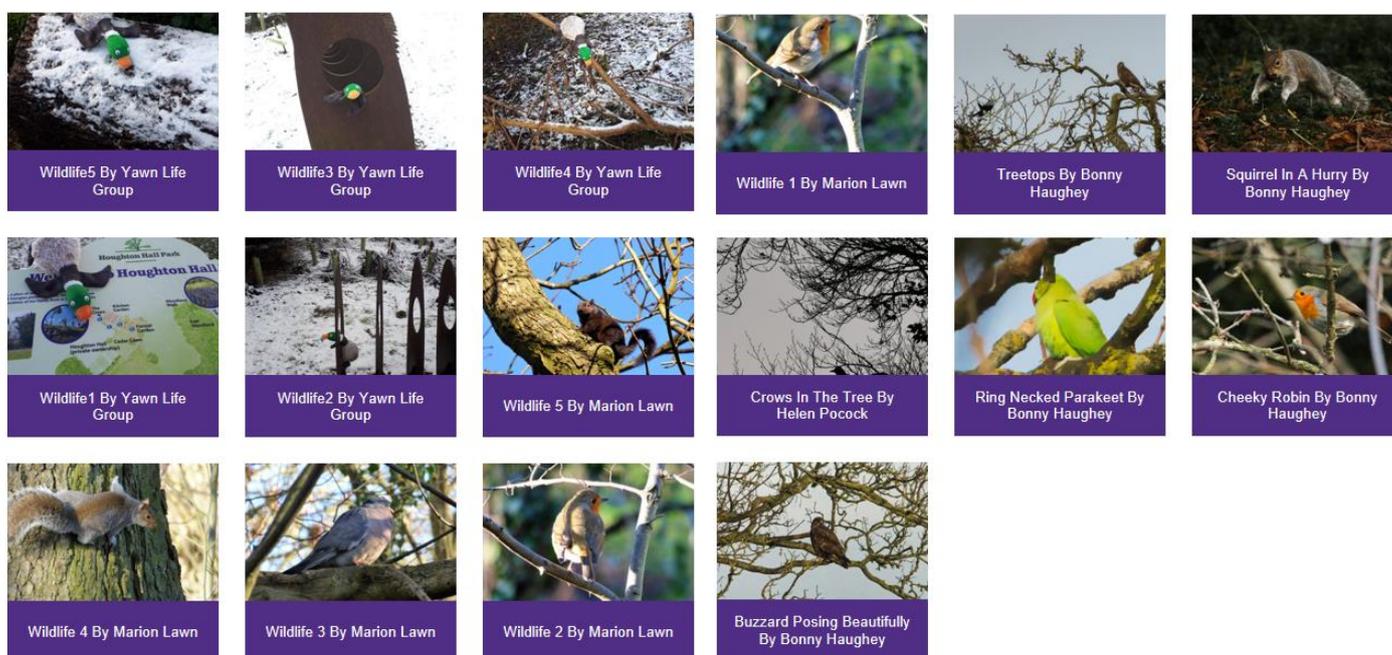
We welcome photographers of all abilities and ages to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly themes; **February's theme is: Frost in Houghton Hall Park.** We hope you wrap up warm and have fun capturing some of the twinkly frost in all areas of the park.

Please send your submissions to hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. The images must be taken between 1st – 28th February 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.

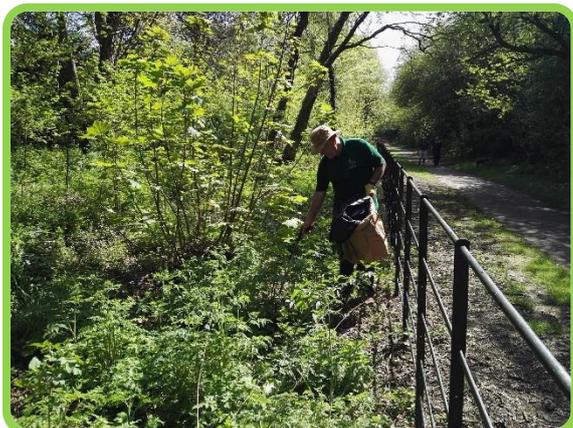
Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work:

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

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



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 February 10am-3pm, is our park wide litter pick!** Help us to make a positive difference to the park by assisting in carrying out a thorough and satisfying cleanse of the park, removing any litter because it poses a threat to wildlife and spoils our enjoyment of the 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!

What's the latest in the gardens?



Formal Garden

We are continuing to tidy the formal garden on dry days, but it is still very wet underfoot. The polyanthus is taking quite well along the hedge edge and some have even started to flower. Roll on the warmer weather! You can also see the small green points of the daffodils just emerging now as well.

Kitchen Garden

We have been busy putting down bark paths onto some of the beds, so we will be able to walk on them without getting quite so muddy come the spring. We are also

utilising some of our own composted waste to improve organic matter on the beds. This will help the plants retain some moisture during the summer months. The strawberry plants have established well from their move in the Autumn and will hopefully give us a bumper crop. The first sown broad beans have needed some support from the strong winds, so we have added some canes to make a framework. We have also been thinking ahead to the runner beans and have dug some trenches which we have then filled with shredded paper and organic material which will break down in the next few months.



Job of the month

In order for each bed to be as productive as possible, I have been busy drawing up plans for each of the beds in the kitchen garden. This will help us to know how much to grow and which varieties. Go through your seeds at home and look at what you might like to grow for the year ahead. Try something different!

Plant of the month

Snowdrops are beginning to push through the ground now encouraging us through winter and into spring. The latin name for snow drop is *Galanthus* which means milk flower. They contain a natural anti – freeze so even if they collapse in freezing weather they recover once the temperatures rise.

Vegetable of the month

If you are able to warm up the soil you may be able to sow some early peas next month, but these are often eaten by pigeons and mice! Potatoes will need chitting at the beginning of the month ready for planting in March. This means laying them out (often in an egg tray) so that the tiny eyes start to shoot. You don't want to put them into the dark as they will produce long spindly growth. I have just bought ours, we have a nice selection: Maris Bard, red Duke of York, British Queen and Wilja. Even if you don't have a lot of room for a main crop, it may be nice to consider a few new potatoes as the taste is very different to what you can buy. If you are short on space, try a potato bag or an old tub.

New developments

In walled kitchen gardens there would often be an area dedicated to growing cut flowers which would be used in the house. I have left one bed aside for this very purpose that we may be able to provide our local community with bunches of fresh cut flowers. Last year I started the bed off with some sweet Williams which I grow from seed. These are a biennial meaning that they get sown in one season and flower the next. We also have some daffodils, tulips, cerinthe and *Alchemilla mollis* growing. Watch how this exciting new bed develops over the year.



Happy Gardening, Jenny

The wildlife of January by Mark Hogan



The month of January has less hours of daylight until the 31st March when the clocks go forward 1 hour, heralding the season of Spring, where over the next few weeks you might notice more leaves on the trees, more bird song and hopefully the days beginning to get a little warmer. Until then, just enjoy all the wildlife you might get in your garden. A Mistle Thrush singing on the tree tops, hundreds of starlings in murmurations in the sky just before dusk. This does happen in a lot of places in the UK this time of year, so you keep your eyes open.

If you go out for a walk at a reservoir or along the river or canal, you might notice different types of ducks to the usual Mallard, Ducks like Pochard, Tufted Ducks, Wigeon and even a Heron or Cormorant looking for a fish dinner. On the fields or open country, you might see flocks of Redwings and Fieldfare gathered together or if you have a fruit tree or Juniper in your garden, they might come in to feed on the berries.

At the end of January, the RSPB held their annual BIG GARDEN BIRDWATCH on 26th - 28th January, where they welcome people of all ages and areas of the country to do a survey of the birds that they have in their gardens at this time of year. If you did take part, then great! All the information is gathered to see how the birds are doing. For example, it has been found that the numbers of Long Tailed Tits and Goldfinches have gone up over the last 5 years whereas the numbers of Starlings and Thrush have gone down remarkably.



The wonderful thing about nature is - you never know what might arrive in this area from abroad, I was fortunate enough to recently hear about a bird called a WAXWING which had been seen in Hertford. So, I set off with my binoculars and camera hoping to see this particular bird. It is a winter visitor and will soon go home to Scandinavia where it spends the rest of the year. I arrived at about 11am and there was no sign of them, there were lots of people standing around in the cold hoping to see them. There was a Juniper tree, a fruit they particularly like and

after half an hour - in they flew, 12 of them. They landed on a nearby Oak tree and then flew together to the Juniper tree, grabbed some berries and then flew back to the Oak to eat them. There was a Mistle Thrush about who kept spooking them. They did this continually for about 20 minutes. I'm so pleased to have captured a picture of one eating a berry, which you can see here >>



So, we all have to think about what sort of food we throw out into our gardens and what birds it might attract; if you throw out old scone crumbs or fruit cake, you might see a Song Thrush, Blackbird or even Fieldfare or Redwing. I personally have 3 feeders up, one with nuts, one with sunflower hearts which attracts Goldfinches and Chaffinches and also Suet Balls which attract Long Tailed Tits and occasionally a passing Woodpecker.

The only problem with putting out this food is that it may attract a certain bird which just swoops in and grabs a poor unfortunate bird, this is a Sparrowhawk. It tends to get the majority of its food by surging into the garden at high speed and grabbing a bird in literally seconds. Contrary to anyone else telling you, Red Kites do not eat garden birds, they tend to eat Carrion like road kill. We are quite lucky to have so many in this area and they are delightful to watch as they float on the thermals above our homes. If you're lucky, the sunlight might hit them, and you will see how red they are - it is worth looking out for.

If you have seen a bird in your garden and you're not sure what it is, get in touch with us by emailing us a description and we will try to identify it for you. If you get a picture of it too, please send it to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and we may 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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LOTTERY FUNDED