

Houghton Hall Park

November 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.



The last few weeks have gone by so quickly, half term and the activities we had in the park, seem like a lifetime ago. The free Xplorer event was extremely popular, over three hundred people attended in the two hours it was on! We also enjoyed our first Halloween evening event which was a resounding success, the weather held out and we welcomed 150 families who took part in a trail, some games and met the Houghton Hall Park witch for their prize, a huge thank you to all our volunteers who helped out, we couldn't do this size of event without them. The volunteers have also been busy making the

remembrance display in the kitchen gardens, there is more about this in Jenny's update but suffice to say it becomes more beautiful and poignant each year.

We can now look forward to Christmas! On Sunday 5th December we have real reindeer visiting the park, you can also take your picture on Santa's sleigh, all free! There will be festive stalls, a reindeer trail and grotto, please pop along, you may find that Christmas present for the person that's really hard to buy for! The Spirit of Christmas light show, that had to be postponed last year, is back on the 17th & 18th December, tickets are still available on our website and more information about our events can be found on the following pages of this newsletter.

The meadow has also gone through some changes over the last couple of weeks, find out why in Eleanor, our Community Park Ranger's, update this month along with what the volunteers have been getting up to in her monthly conservation task.

Jenny, our Community Gardener, has news on what's happening in the gardens now we are into the colder months and Mark our volunteer has written a very interesting article about nature being there if you look for it. We hope you have a great few weeks and keep enjoying the park!

A great place to live and work.

What's On

Christmas at Houghton Hall Park



When: Sunday 5th December

Time: 10am to 3pm

Cost: £4 per child for the reindeer trail and grotto

Yes you read it right, we are going to have real reindeer in the park on Sunday 5th December! Come along to see them and sit in Santa's sleigh for a photo, all completely free!

To make the afternoon complete we will also have some festive outside stalls for

those unique handcrafted Christmas purchases, stalls cost £15 to book and you can do this using the link below.

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/christmas-at-houghton-hall-park>

The Spirit of Christmas

When: 17th & 18th December

Time: 5pm to 8pm

Cost: £5 per person (under 2s free)

Join us on an adventure this Christmas as we wind our way through Houghton Hall Park's formal & kitchen gardens meeting some quirky characters along the way.

A story of love, magic & excitement with a little sprinkling of mischief brought to life through illuminations, special effects and live actors.

Think glitter balls, light tunnels, bubbles, musical fountains, actors, magic, lights and so much more! The show will appeal to all members of the family and is also SEND friendly.

To find out more and book go to:-

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/the-spirit-of-christmas>



Pop-Up Tasty Creative



When: Saturdays and Sundays from now until mid December

Over the next few weeks we will be having a pop-up craft/produce stall in the foyer of the Visitors Centre on a Saturday and Sunday, these will change each day and each week, so far we have card makers, wax melts, fans, jewellery and brownies to name a few booked on! We will announce on our facebook and instagram pages each week who will be there. Please do pop along and take a look, there will be some wonderful ideas for Christmas presents over the coming weeks!

Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday (term time)

Time: 10am

Cost: £2 bookable at www.houghtonhallpark.org

Meet outside the Visitors Centre for a warmup around the park then an exercise circuit, a fun class, all fitness levels welcome!



Tots go Wild in Wellies

When: Every Tuesday (term time)

Time: 10am

Created for toddlers aged 1 to 4 years – and their grown-ups – the outdoor adventure will combine stories, singing and movement.

Find out more and book your space at:-

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/art-town-tots-go-wild-in-wellies-tickets-123186814077>



Your Views on the Park

As you may know the regeneration of Houghton Hall Park has taken place thanks to Heritage Lottery/Parks for People funding, the lottery project will be coming to an end in 2022 and an evaluation is currently taking place to see if we have met the original aims, if you are a park user we would love you to take part in a survey to let us know your thoughts, you can find the survey using the link below:

<https://s.surveypal.com/3viCKzBAf>

Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture Event

Central Bedfordshire
great lifestyles

November's Photography Theme

'November Sunshine' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- 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

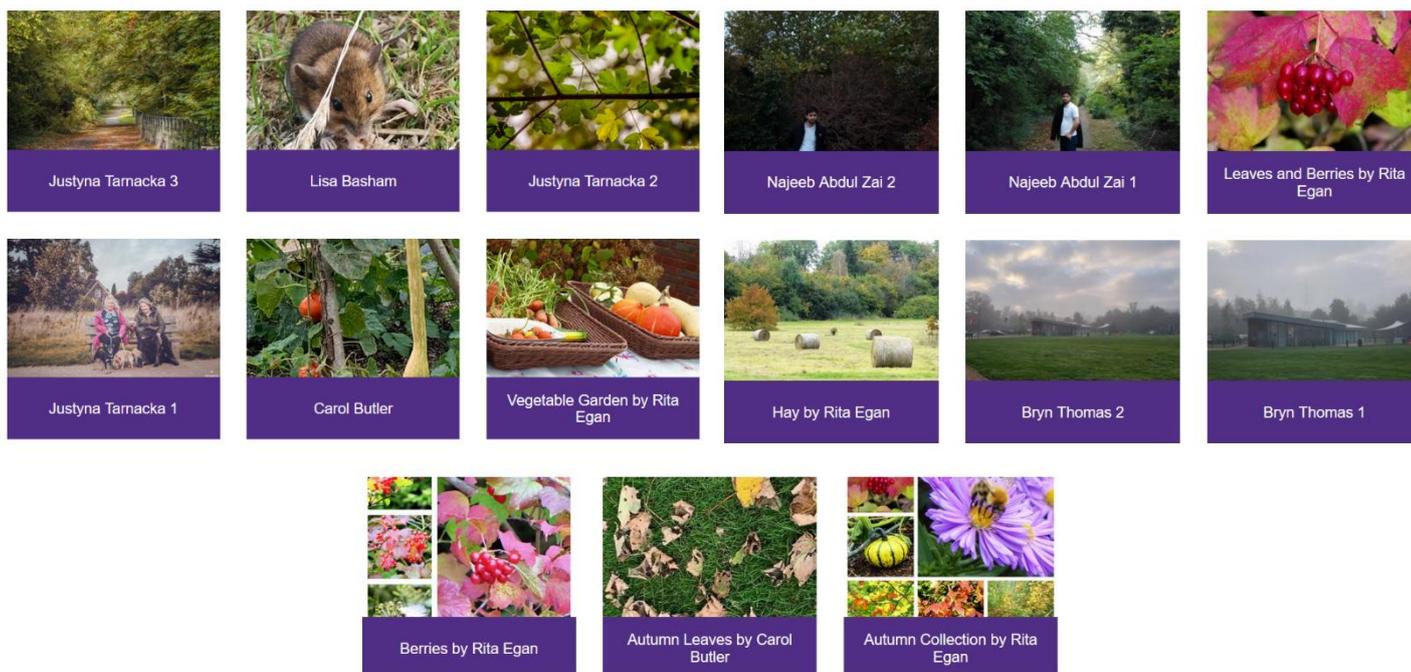
LOTTERY FUNDED

We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme. October's theme is: 'Autumn at Houghton Hall Park' and it certainly feels like autumn in the park at the moment. Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

The images must be taken between 1st – 30th November 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

October's theme was 'Autumn in Houghton Hall Park' thank you to everyone who sent us in their photos, they really encapsulate autumn in the park.



Community Ranger Update

Words and photographs by Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger.

Well we are well and truly into Autumn now and it feels like the weather is finally aligning with the seasons!

October has been a busy month. With half term events such as bird feeder weaving, our spooktacular evening on the 31st, coppicing and the meadow cut it has been go, go, go.

Now that October has started so has the conservation season! From October to March we can proceed with jobs such as hedge cutting, tree trimming and tree planting. This meant that this month's volunteer session was coppicing! A fantastic group of volunteers came along and absolutely smashed it! Great team work from the group and some good laughs as well, some of the hazel has now been coppiced meaning the material is available for use around the park but for the meantime can be used for den building!

Coppicing is where you take hazel and cut it so that it is just an inch or so above the ground. The hazel will then grow back from the stump. This extends the life of the tree and means we have a usable source of timber.



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During half term I ran a willow bird feeder making session. This involved learning how to do some willow weaving. Then using lard and bird seed we filled up the bird feeders. These will help the birds as we head into winter and as food gets harder to find.



You may have noticed the bales in the meadow, after finally getting a break in the weather our contractors were able to get onto site to cut the meadow. They then came back and baled it and once the ground dries out a little they take it away to be recycled, it will be used for animal bedding or in compost, although in the meantime we can enjoy the change of view.



If you would like to get involved and volunteer at Houghton Hall Park feel free to email me at: Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Have a fantastic November, as we head into slightly colder times keep warm and stay safe!

Many thanks

Eleanor

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Nature Notes

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

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

The latest news is at last the railings are being installed around the pond in the kitchen garden, so it shouldn't be too long before the temporary barriers can be taken away and the pond area will look less like a half finished project and more an integral part of the garden. The next phase will be to have gates made to give access to the platform. The planted area in front of the pond is going to be enlarged by taking over some of the grassed area, this will give increased cover for the frogs. Many of the visitors to the gardens don't realise that frogs don't spend all their time in the water, only using it to mate and spawn, so increasing the flora habitat will encourage more frogs to this area. As I mentioned last month, we have already seen frogs amongst the plants around the pond and hope they will make use of the hibernaculum at the end of the pond to overwinter.



A male goshawk, not a usual visitor to gardens.

One regular question we get asked is, 'are there any fish in the pond'? The answer is no as fish would eat the eggs and larvae of the wildlife we are trying to encourage eventually dominating the water to the exclusion of everything else.

I had a very unusual visitor to my own garden last week in the form of a male goshawk. I regularly have red kites come down to take meat scraps I put on my workshop roof. But when I saw this bird flash past the

window, although I couldn't immediately identify it, I knew it wasn't the kite. It was only when it flew back and momentarily landed on a trellis fence I could recognise it from its distinctive barred chest feathers. Similar in appearance to sparrow hawks, at around 60cm these are much bigger and roughly twice the size. Goshawks are not common visitors to gardens, so it was quite an exciting, albeit a fleeting moment.



A sparrow hawk is similar in appearance but roughly half the size of a goshawk.

Elephants in the park!

Each month I think about what aspects of nature I will base my article on and I'm often inspired by conversations I have with the many visitors to the park. This was the case recently when I was talking to someone who said. 'I've just walked through the park and not seen any wildlife, perhaps you need to introduce some!' I was somewhat surprised as that day I had already seen a Jay, Red kite, magpies, pigeons, squirrels and a frog. That's apart from the countless insects and invertebrates, such as ladybirds and beetles. Having mentioned some of my sightings, tongue in cheek I asked if they were expecting to see elephants, because if so, they would be very disappointed. Neither did I think there were any plans to introduce them any time soon.



An Ichneumon wasp, not just another insect

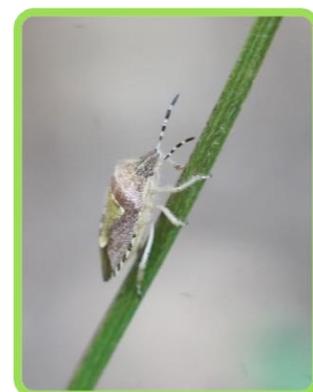


A peacock butterfly soaks up the warmth of the sun



Lurking in the grass, so look down low for wildlife.

You see, I think sometimes we get so used to seeing some birds and mammals, that we stop seeing them as wildlife. We become blind to these creatures, because as we see them everywhere, they become part of our daily lives. We only get excited by the first sighting of a butterfly in summer, or a moth with beautiful markings we have never seen before. Have we become so used to living in a disposable world, where it is all too easy to say 'I'll just get another whatever it is,' to replace something that has a new look or model? This is despite what you have still has a useful life and purpose. So, has some of our more familiar wildlife become part of this disposable world where there are so many of them they are just part of the scenery? For instance, there are roughly around five and a half million breeding pairs of wood pigeon in the United Kingdom and that



Wildlife is there if you look for it



Just another pigeon?

doesn't include all the feral pigeons. So, every time you go outdoors you are bound to see one. Do you see them as part of our diverse wildlife or do you only notice them when they become a nuisance?

The big problem is, if these common birds and animals are blending into the background of our consciousness, we won't actually notice them until they are no longer there. As they say when it's gone it's gone and with wildlife it's not as if you can go back and make another one. Wildlife is all around us, so next time you're out walking, don't look for elephants, take notice and appreciate the wonderful wildlife that is actually there.

Until next time

Mark Bolan

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park & Gardens

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Jenny Osborne, Community Gardener



Our volunteers have once again designed a beautiful tribute for our parks Remembrance display.

As ever a lot of work has gone on for weeks producing this year's poppy display. Each one has been drawn, hand cut and painted 3 times to provide a wonderful display along the fence line of the kitchen garden, it is nice that we can create our own tribute for this occasion.



Cutting back and mulching, it's a bit like groundhog day!

Elsewhere in the garden we are on one big push to clear up, cut back and mulch the beds ready for winter. It has been a huge task on both sides of the wall to reinstate order to the garden, not easy with this lot, they are unruly!!!!



Progress with the pond and some new neighbours

It has been lovely to see the temporary fencing come down and some new railings installed around the pond. These are recycled so are being cut and positioned by the 'men that can'! This should make viewing easier and provide a nicer edge to the pond. We have decided to extend the

planting to create more impact and provide a larger habitat. In the time I have been at the garden I have never seen a frog but we have found five this month, so it is incredible how quickly they have found their way in. Although you are not likely to include a pond of this size in your garden at home, I think it reinforces the point that providing the right habitat will encourage the natural predators into your garden. The slugs have been in high numbers this year so hopefully we will begin to get on top of them with the help of our new friends.



Strawberry patch renewal

This rather labour-intensive job was on the cards for next year but we decided to tackle it earlier as the weather was on our side and it gave us a chance to reduce the size of our huge patch.



The plants had gone a little crazy so by replanting we were able to halve them and increase planting distances. It seems every year when the strawberries ripen the heavens open, so fingers crossed for a dry harvesting patch next year. We have also decided to sacrifice a row after every 3



sections to dedicate it to a pollinating strip. I became acutely aware of how farmers must feel when they are contemplating the loss of yield over the importance of providing beneficial insects with a food source. This is likely to result in a few kilos less of produce but the impact to the environment even on this incredibly small scale is huge. By adding these three strips into the mix



will help the pollination of the flowers so we may even see a bumper crop. We will keep you posted!

The new spacings are 75cm for a bed and 45cm for a path which provides us with a little more manoeuvring room when it comes to picking. The beds have been heavily mulched and the paths top dressed with wood chip. You may see a few string lines around, I am a sucker for a straight line!

Once the strawberries were all out we began our transplanting of spring cabbages and kale/mustard salads.

These will be netted to stop the pigeons pecking but equally to stop the increasing squirrels uprooting the plants.

In order to get ahead for the next season, we begin planting in September before light levels drop away too much. Hopefully these will put on some growth before the winter, they will then remain dormant and begin a good growth spurt in the spring.



Elsewhere in the garden we continue to remove spent crops and harvest, although we are now down to carrots, leeks, kohlrabi, cabbage, salad and kale.

Removal of crops and a thin layer of mulch is preparing the beds for next year. We have moved a few tonnes of soil these past few months



So, what became of the golden egg, well it became a spider of course!



As the month progresses, we will be turning our attention to making up the holly wreath packs for orders which went online at the end of last month. The volunteers have been very busy making all sorts of delightful gifts to sell at our Christmas stall at the visitor centre.

So, enjoy the changing seasons and we look forward to seeing you around the park.

Jenny and all the volunteers

Plant of the month – Viburnum–‘Dawn’



Viburnum x bodnantense ‘Dawn’ is a fantastic winter-flowering shrub, bearing densely packed clusters of rose, pink or blush white, sweetly scented blooms, on bare stems. It’s perfect for growing in the front garden or near an entrance or walk, where its fragrant, pretty blooms can be best appreciated. Dense clusters of fragrant, dark pink flowers on bare stems from November to March and toothed, dark green leaves. This upright, deciduous shrub is perfect for perfuming winter gardens. This shrub is deciduous so it will lose all its leaves in autumn, then fresh new foliage appears again each spring. To fully appreciate the

deliciously scented flowers plant in a moist, well-drained border close to an entrance or path in sun or partial shade. Holds the RHS award of Garden Merit

Irene Copperwheat
Houghton Hall Park Volunteer

Keep in touch

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Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Sun 9am to 5pm



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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