

Houghton Hall Park

December 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.

It's December and while it may feel a bit different this year we have been hard at work in the park trying to bring you some festive cheer. Our festive wreath kits were a huge success, the first of our activities you could purchase online, see the fantastic results later on in the newsletter. The

volunteers have been hard at work helping with the kits and also creating these fabulous stick people which will be available for you to take home for a small donation to local charities on Monday 21st December in the kitchen garden 10am to 1pm. We have over a hundred and each outfit has been lovingly made by our volunteers, the stick people are currently on display in the kitchen garden, we hope they make you smile. The 'Christmas Spirit Trail' for children is starting on Saturday 12th December, using a map, find the Christmas spirit characters around the park to discover where all the Christmas spirit has gone.

Eleanor our Community Ranger has written her first piece for the newsletter this month, find out what she's been up to and Mark our volunteer has written a very interesting article on 'Citizen Science' along with creating some colouring sheets for the kids, not forgetting the monthly report from Jenny our Community Gardener. We hope you enjoy reading the newsletter and wish you a Merry Christmas and a healthy and Happy New Year.



A great place to live and work.

Festive Wreath Making at Home

We couldn't hold our popular festive wreath and table decorating workshops this year due to COVID-19 restrictions but that wasn't going to stop us, with our new online booking system in place we had the opportunity to sell wreath making kits online. With a massive help from our volunteers who helped cut foliage from the park and put together individual bags with instructions, decorations and oasis we managed to sell over 170 kits! The kits ranged from a basic traditional wreath to more decorative deluxe ones, we also filmed easy to follow video instructions with Jenny our Community Gardener so everyone knew what to do. The kits were purchased online and we had four 'click & collect' mornings where customers could pick them up in the park. The feedback we have received back from this has been wonderful and the photos sent in show that we have some very talented people in the community!



What's On

Spirit of Christmas Trail

When: 12th – 24th December

Time: All day

Cost: Free!

Join us for a spirited family day out this Christmas time! 10 'Christmas Spirits' have been spotted in these parts and it's your job to find them! Families in Houghton Hall Park are invited to take part in this free trail.

Start the trail by going to

www.ChristmasSpiritTrail.com and finding the first character. Learn the names and stories of all 10 jolly characters and then read a free Christmas adventure with a free eBook.

To take part simply visit the website:

<https://highstreetsafari.com/locations/houghton>



Children's Christmas Craft Activity

When: On sale from Friday 11th December

Collection: Monday 21st December 10am to 1pm Kitchen Garden

Cost: £7.50

If you are looking for something to do with the children over the Christmas holidays we have created a decorative Christmas Tree kit for £7.50. The kit includes, oasis, foliage, tin, 11 different decorations to make and instructions on how to make it. Along with the tree kit you will also have a craft pack which includes four other other craft activities: candy cane bead decoration, snowman scratch art, Christmas colour in glider & Christmas elf jump up. Purchase on the website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/childrens-decorative-christmas-tree-kit>

Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday

Time: 10am

Cost: £2 - book your place at

www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness

A fun fitness session where we enjoy a warm-up around the park and then a circuit session, a great way to meet other local parents/carers and get fit along the way!



Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture Event

great lifestyles

December's Photography Theme
"Winter Skies" at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture for "Winter Skies" at Houghton Hall Park

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in December
- 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 31st December
- 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. December's theme is: 'Winter Skies' at Houghton Hall Park', we look forward to seeing what you can capture.

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 – 31st December 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, 'Little Details' in Houghton Hall Park, a selection are below and all entries can be found on our website

www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography-theme



Ruth Jenkins 3



Ruth Jenkins 4



Ruth Jenkins 1



Roots and Leaves Rita Egan



Morning Dew 2 Rita Egan



Morning Dew Rita Egan



Ruth Jenkins 2



Seeds2 Rita Egan



Seeds Rita Egan



Criss Cross Bark Cindy Lee



Fantastic Fungi Cindy Lee



Look its in the Sky Cindy Lee



Tiny Ivy Cindy Lee

Community Ranger Update



Through the next few winter months there will be lots of work going on in the park: bramble clearance, coppicing, tree checking and much more!

We've started strong this month with the bramble clearance with the help of a few new volunteers! We have started to clear some large patches of bramble in the west woodland that had started to encroach over the path. This makes the path more accessible and allows people to move past each other more easily. Whilst clearing the brambles I noticed some trees that have been planted that the bramble has grown over, so we shall try and rescue them as well!

Opposite the now clear bramble patch were some trees that had been planted a couple of years ago. We have started to clear between them and will do some checks on them to see how they are growing.

Before



After

Coppicing

I have started to do some coppicing on site to get the hazel into a coppice rotation. Coppicing is the periodic cutting back of trees to stimulate growth. There are several different types of tree that can be coppiced: Hazel, ash, sweet chestnut, oak, sycamore and willow.

At Houghton Hall Park we have a lot of Hazel and some ash which all will need coppicing at some point. There are several benefits to coppicing hazel. Coppicing extends the life of the tree

and in some cases means trees can last for hundreds of years. It also increases biodiversity. By opening up the canopy more light can get to the floor encouraging a range of different flora and fauna to grow. A by-product of coppicing is the material that you get. This material can be used in several ways from being used for making handles on baskets, hurdle fencing, firewood, poles for growing vegetables up such as beans or sweet peas and for things such as dead hedges.

Coppicing takes place towards the end of winter or early spring. You start by cutting each stem down to about 3 inches off the ground, then you process the stems by cutting off the smaller branches, one straight strong stem will be left that can be used in a number of different ways. The next step is to finish the base stool. This means cutting the stumps at angles to allow the water to run off the stump rather than collect in it which would rot the stump, you do this by creating a dome like shape.



Usable material from coppicing



Coppiced hazel stool

If you would like to get involved with volunteering in the park, please feel free to email me at: Eleanor.Evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

**Merry Christmas and a happy new year! Stay safe,
Eleanor**

Nature Notes

Words and Pictures by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park volunteer

Well here we are the end of another year and what a year it has been. As we come out of the second lockdown perhaps it is time to look on the bright side and reflect on some of the positives from 2020. Perhaps the biggest plus for the environment has to be the reduction of the carbon footprint. Emissions from traffic are one of the major sources of pollutants and with fewer people travelling these have been significantly lower, which can't be a bad thing. Garden wildlife has benefited from the growing popularity in gardening and growing interest in nature. The numbers taking regular walks has increased which is a health benefit, at the same time discovering what is on their own doorstep. So many have said they were enjoying their first visit to the park and gardens, despite living locally for years, as they were normally at work. So, with fingers crossed let's hope as we move into 2021 we can look forward to a brighter year.

This month I thought I'd start my notes with something a little different, because of lockdown it is no surprise so many people have been looking for a way or a reason to get out and about so are looking for volunteering opportunities. Perhaps one option to consider that's also a little out of the ordinary, is Citizen Science.

Various projects are available throughout the year, it can be fun to do and involve the whole family. Recently I was on a webinar, where Chris Packham spoke of the immense benefits of these schemes, as it gives scientists much more localised information than would otherwise be available to them. If you think this is something you might be interested in, then the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology has a range of projects looking for volunteer participation. This is an independent not for profit organisation and was formed in 2000 with the merger of four natural environment research institutes covering terrestrial and freshwater ecology. Scientists from these institutes have monitored and modelled environmental change for over fifty years. To whet your appetite, I have picked out a couple of nature based projects worth considering:



Citizen science should be fun for all the family

The National Plant Monitoring Scheme is a partnership of the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI), the Biological Records Centre (within the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology), Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and Plantlife. The scheme is looking for volunteers to help scientists with an annual stock take of the UK's wild plants and their habitats. The surveys of wildflowers and their habitats will provide evidence of which widespread plants are increasing or declining, as well as indicating the changing state of valued habitats such as grassland, fenland and even road verges.

Pollinating Monitoring Scheme (PoMS) is the only scheme in the world generating systematic data on the abundance of bees, hoverflies and other flower-visiting insects at a national scale (currently across England, Wales and Scotland). Its two types of survey aim to establish how insect pollinator populations are changing across Great Britain. Volunteers are sought for both surveys.



A good habitat for pollinators

If you do decide to offer your help, there are some **free mobile apps** available that allow volunteers to quickly access information 'on-the-go'. Using GPS and camera technology embedded in smart phones, these apps allow citizen scientist volunteers to collect verifiable records in the field. For more details and information on other projects check out their website www.ceh.ac.uk

If you cannot get out and about then there are other organisations that have citizen science projects that require volunteers working online from home. One of which is the Natural History Museum. The museum's library and archives section are looking for help making data from hand written documents and drawings more widely available. Help is also needed in analysing photographs of the museums bird species as part of their Project Plumage study.

Their website for more information on these and other projects:

www.nhm.ac.uk>takepart>citizenscience



Some wildflowers to look out for

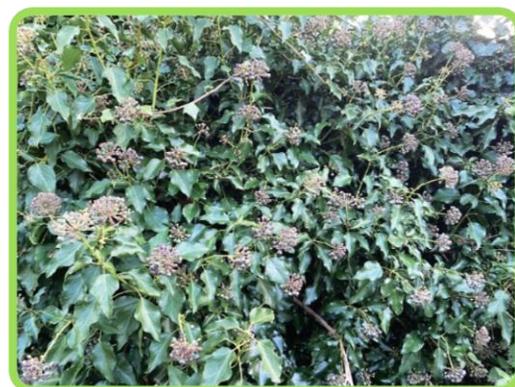


Take part in the Pollinator Count

If you have spent the summer encouraging wildlife into your garden, then it's time to think about the challenges they face to survive winter. The nights are getting very cold with frosty mornings and the days are much shorter now, so there is less time available for foraging. The ground becomes frozen and the availability and amount of available food is dwindling. All this when they need to maintain their fat and protein levels to stay in good health and keep warm. Putting food out will give them a much needed helping hand. Knowing where they can find a regular source of food, helps them save energy. To give you an idea of how much they need, small birds need to eat up to a third of their body weight every day. Putting out left over scraps is fine, especially foods with high fat and protein content such as cheese and unsalted bacon. A little stale bread is ok, but it can fill them up quickly and doesn't provide the range of nutrients and fat content they need. Instead I break it up and lightly toast it under the grill, then grind it into crumbs and put it on the bird table with other things, such as raisins, meal worms, suet and seeds. This way they get a varied meal. I also include it when I make my own fat cake. These I make using lard, putting a half inch layer in old butter pots and freezing until needed. Don't forget to make sure your wildlife has

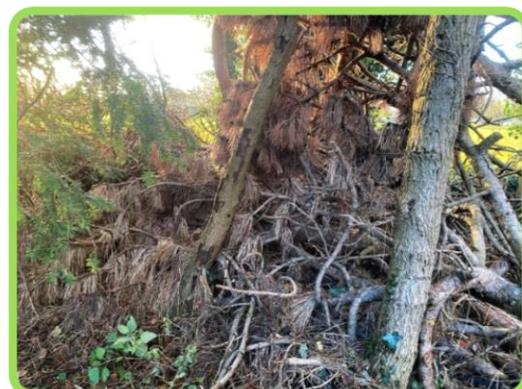
access to clean water. Apart from drinking, birds despite the cold still need to take the occasional splash. A shallow area of my pond is still in regular use as bath. You may need to change the water first thing in the morning and again later on if it becomes frozen. Talking of ponds, if yours becomes frozen you will need to make a hole in the ice to release any harmful gasses that can build up. Please don't be tempted to bash a hole in the ice as you will cause a shock wave harming any wildlife in the water. Instead place a saucepan of hot water on the surface and allow it to gently melt through the frozen surface.

If like me, you want to garden for wildlife then growing shrubs that have lots of berries is a great source of food. Now is a good time to buy shrubs and trees. As this time of year they are available bare rooted they are much cheaper and no plastic pot means you also help save the planet. When you're looking at flower and veg seed for next year, why not include a packet of teasel seeds? If you want the botanical name it is *Dipsacus fullonum*. The heads are full of seeds during late autumn and loved by finches. Even ivy which flowers in the winter is a great source of nectar for insects which in turn feed the birds. A wall or fence with a dense covering of ivy also a safe place for birds to spend the night protected from the bitter winter winds. I once forgot to take down a hanging basket in an open porch and was rewarded when a wren dug out a small hole in the compost, making it a cosy night time roost.



Ivy is great for lots of wildlife

Thankfully there are a couple of things to avoid doing at this time of year. Firstly, if you have one don't disturb your compost pile. These are warm and favoured hibernating places for all sorts of creatures such as frogs, toads, slow worms, mice and hedgehogs. Don't clear away piles of leaves either as they also provide a haven in the cold. As I mentioned mice perhaps you don't relish having these in your garden, but just remember they are around for a reason and part of the wildlife food chain.



A great safe-haven for wintering wildlife

Have a happy and safe Christmas and a let's hope a better 2021.

Until next time,

Mark, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer

What's the latest in the Gardens?

November was upon us and a mixture of all-weather types, but this last week has felt very cold and damp with fog that has lasted most of the day. My volunteers have turned out dressed for any occasion and we have continued the mulching and cutting back. That pile of mulch is still pretty big!!

Unfortunately, due to the amount of rain we have had it doesn't do the beds any good to walk on them as it causes soil compaction.



Around half of the beds are now weeded and dressed for winter. Leaf collecting is underway and stacked in our stillage for leaf mould next year. At least this job keeps us warm!!

We have also been busy redefining grass edges and extending them in certain areas of the formal garden.

The bulbs are beginning to shoot through around the cedar tree which is a super sight to see.

Our volunteer Harry has completed the painting of the old Houghton Hall Park sign and is looking lovely by the path in the formal garden. Our next step will be to create a bed and plant under it.

Kitchen garden

There is still an abundance of crops in the kitchen garden which are being enjoyed by the volunteers.

This month all the garlic, onions and broad beans have been sown, and beginning to shoot with vigour.



The spring cabbage is growing but the slugs are determined to have their share! We have recently invested in a walk-in tunnel which will protect the brassicas from pigeons and butterflies. This will make life easier as only a dedicated few are prepared to crawl on hands and knees for weeding and harvesting!

We will continue to mulch the beds in the next few weeks as crops are harvested. This will stop soil erosion and leaching of nutrients. We have cut our crops at the base of the plant so that roots are left to rot into the ground to minimise soil

disturbance. This helps to increase fertility and bacteria within the soil. As we acquire wood chip the paths will be replenished on the beds meaning easier access in wetter conditions, reducing the water loss, reducing weeds and feeding the soil. It is like decorating as there is a fresh contrast between the woodchip and the soil and a great feeling of satisfaction knowing we are ready for the spring!





A very simple solution to getting our mulch onto the beds, a new ramp, another ten minute project for Dave! How I wish we'd made this little thing a bit sooner. Some of the best ideas are the simplest.

So, we begin to formalise our sowing plans and ideas for the season ahead and my goodness me we do have some ideas in mind! The great thing about a big team is we are never short of an idea here, somebody is always thinking!!!

Seeds that have been pre-ordered are beginning to arrive in regular packages now, it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas.....



Tidying up the beds

It is also the time to remove all the canes and structures and wash them thoroughly before being stored in the dry for winter. Bamboo canes if looked after should provide you with two seasons and if they do break can always be sawn for shorter support stakes and finally make great material for bug houses.



The fun we have!

What have the volunteers been busy making for months now in preparation for a Christmas display? Why stickmen of course!!!!!!



For the past four months volunteers have been busy making 'outfits, hats, gloves and scarves' for these little wooden sticks. A huge effort and homeworking has gone into collecting the hazel, cutting them into points, making faces, and finally decorating them.



On Monday 21st December we will be having a little Christmas stall in the kitchen garden and we will be selling these off for charitable donations which will then be used for buying food for local charities. You will also be able to buy some fresh arrangements and various crafty bits.



Silsoe Horticultural centre will also be harvesting some vegetables which we will be putting out for sale. So, pop down to see us and support a wonderful cause and you can see one of our many individually customised sticks!

What else?

Volunteers have also been instrumental in helping to make all the holly wreath packs for click and collect which was run over two weekends. Unfortunately, I was not able to run classes from the Visitor centre this year so we decided to join you virtually by a video demonstration and some good old fashioned paper ones. The results have been amazing, and 170 kits were collected. This would not have been possible without the dedication and enthusiasm of volunteers who have been busy for many hours collecting foliage, bunching and selecting it, wiring up cinnamon sticks at home and painting twig bunches, plus the hours of sorting out the different designs into bags. A HUGE effort and one that has been appreciated enormously judging by the great comments on Facebook.



So as a thank you for all their efforts they got to have a go too, and here are their results.....



December is normally the month when things start to become quieter, but I feel that the last few weeks have galloped at incredible pace. We have truly had a mixture of jobs this month to tackle and you never quite know what tangent we are going off at next.

On behalf of myself and all the volunteers we would like to thank you for all your positivity, engagement and for using the park on a regular basis. This year has been incredibly difficult to navigate but from my perspective it has been achieved with good humour and friendship.

May you all have a peaceful christmas, and we will turn the corner into a new year filled with a little more hope.

Happy Gardening, stay safe

Jenny

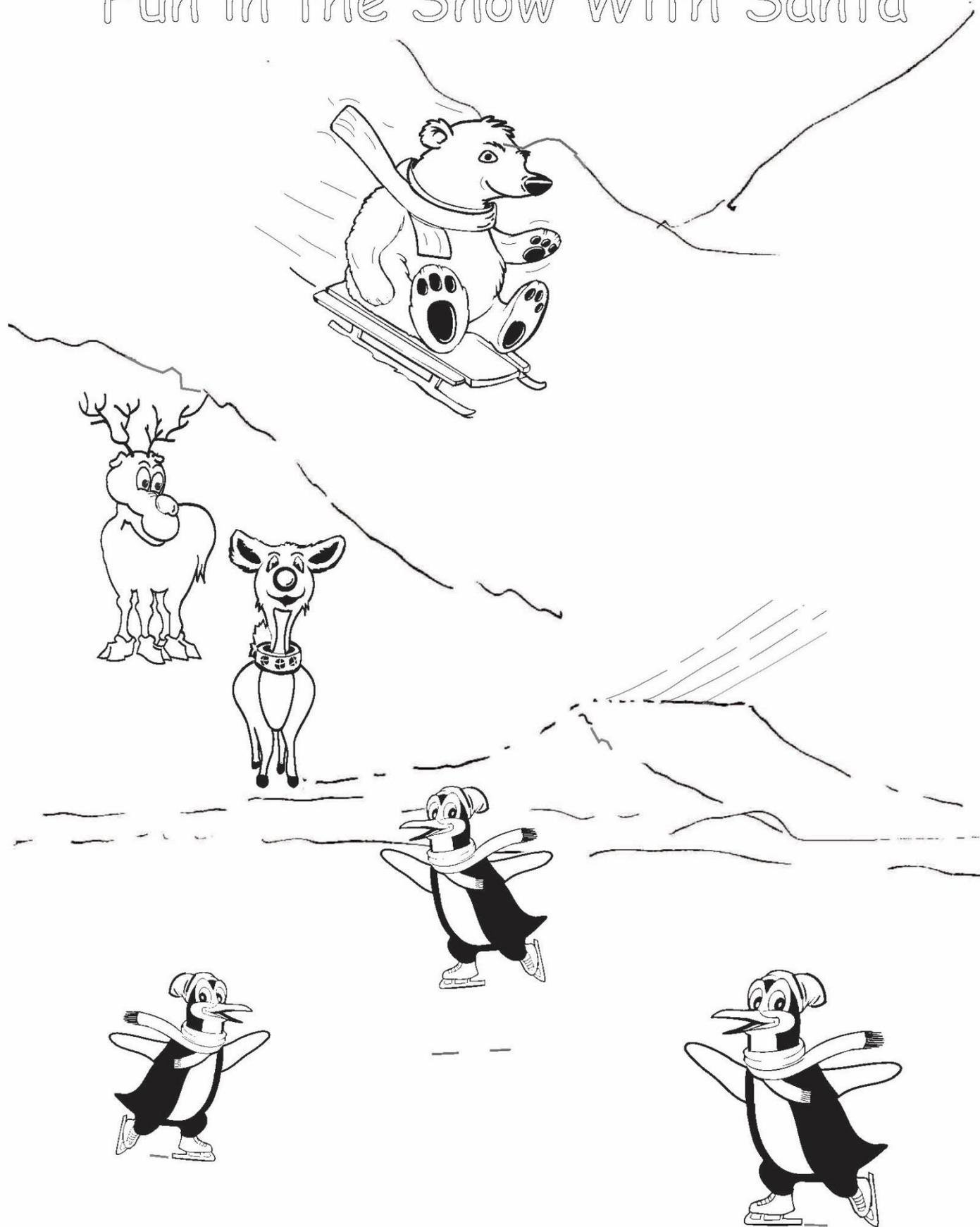
Christmas Colouring Pages

Designed by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer

Merry Christmas



Fun in the Snow With Santa







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