

Houghton Hall Park

May 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.

Marching into May!

We can't believe it's May already! There's lots going on this month to suit all ages.

What's On



Plant Sale

When: Friday 24th May 11am-2pm

Where: Houghton Hall Visitor Centre

Jenny our Community Gardener, and her team of volunteers, will be selling a huge variety of plants. She will also be on hand if you have any gardening questions. Come and grab a bargain!

Beginners Bird Song Stroll – Families Welcome!

Join us for an early morning spring walk with Senior Countryside Officer Steve Halton. On the walk we will be learning to identify birds from their call and song. Last year we identified over thirty birds!

When: Saturday 25th May 8am-9.30am

Where: Houghton Hall Visitor Centre

Cost: £3 per adult £1 per child

Booking required: please email hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk to secure your space



A great place to live and work.

Heritage Open Day Discover the History of Houghton Hall Park



This is a FREE activity for all the family to enjoy.

Free storytelling sessions for children

Real WW2 glider plane on site (weather dependent)

Find out about the Heritage Society's new picture archive on the web!



Bring an old photo of the town/park & the Heritage Society will scan them for input to the online archive

Become a member of the Houghton Regis Heritage Society

When: Saturday 25th May

Time: 1pm – 3pm

Cost: FREE

Forest School

New to Houghton Hall Park this month Branch Out Forest School is holding two taster events, if these prove popular they will be running regular Forest School sessions in the park.

Activities will include den building, outdoor painting, forest music, games, minibeast hunting and much more!

For ages 5-12 (under 5's must be accompanied by a guardian)

When: Sunday 26th & Tuesday 28th May

Session Times: 10.30am to 13.30pm and 14.00pm to 17.00pm

Cost: £4 per hour (minimum 3 hrs)

Further Info & Booking: tel 07706753260 or email branchoutforestschool@gmail.com



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 19th May 10am-3pm**, continue comfrey and hogweed control, a cut and clear of these vigorous species present in the meadows to slow their spread and allow other meadow species to re-establish. 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!

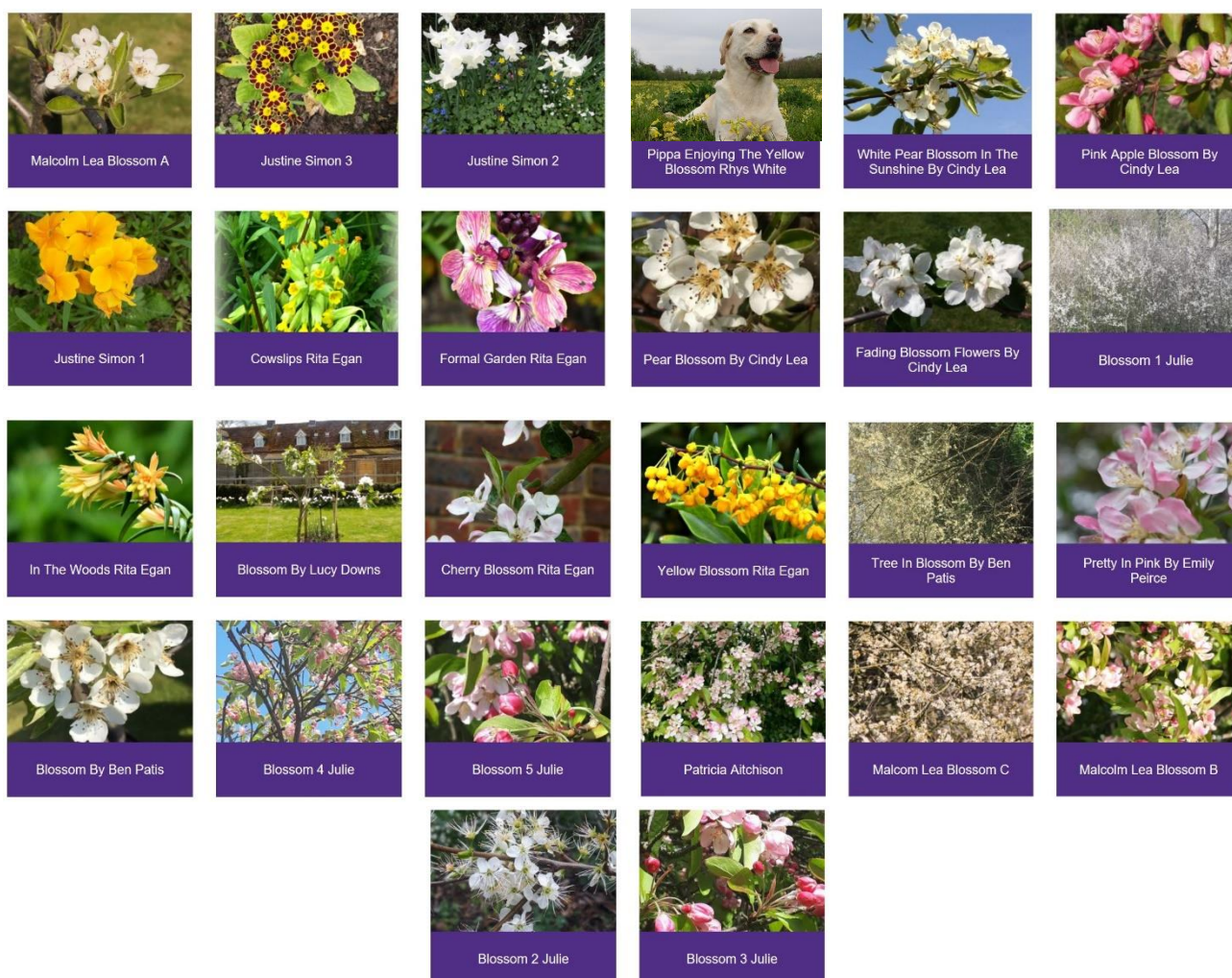
Monthly Photography Themes

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!

We welcome photographers of all abilities and ages to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly themes; **May's theme is: Silhouettes in Houghton Hall Park.** We hope we have a lot of sunshine in May and you're able to capture some amazing silhouettes, we can't wait to see what you come up with!

Please send your submissions to hnp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. The images must be taken between 1st – 31st May 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.

Below are the entries from April's theme: Blossom in Houghton Hall Park. We are delighted to share these great images captured by our lovely visitors, and what a wonderful variety of blossom we have in the park!



Please see our website for the full terms & conditions before you submit your work:
http://houghtonhallpark.org/assets/documents/Photography_Theme_TCs-1.pdf

What's the latest in the gardens?

Formal Garden

It's all looking green and lovely, buds are about to burst on the Iris, peonies are flowering, and the bees are about in earnest. The beautiful weather has indeed brought a new level of energy to the gardens. However, a wave of cold weather is about to be upon us so don't be deceived just yet. This is the month you could be too eager with your summer bedding only to lose it all on a cold night. Harden off your tender plants by putting them out in the day but be sure to bring them back in at the first sign of frost.

Keep on top of your weeding and reinstate your grass edges, they always give you a smart and sharp edge to your borders.

Now is also the time to consider putting stakes in to support your tall perennials. Although it may seem a little premature you will find that the plants grow through them and will end up with a more natural effect in the long run.

The daffodils have started to come out opposite the kitchen garden, and I have had a lot of positive comments about them. The variety is 'Thalia' and they are providing a great show as you walk into the park.



Kitchen Garden

Things are coming along at a really fast pace now. We have just sown our second lot of parsnips, beetroot, carrots and radish as well as new trays of herbs and lettuces. This will provide us with successional crops over the next few months.

Our first early potatoes are pushing through and have had the first earthing up of soil to encourage more potatoes and to protect from blight. My new apprentice has helped plant and care for our potatoes and is looking forward to sampling the first crop!

The strawberries are beginning to show flowers so I for one hope the frosts stay away.

We have 14 varieties of tomatoes growing and they are about to be potted up to the next size pot. Some of these will be on sale at our plant sales day at the end of the month.



Earthing up potatoes



Tomatoes Growing

Job of the month

Sowing and potting on will keep you very busy this month, don't forget to water well on the dry days. Ensure you harden off plants well before putting them into the garden as they will indeed sulk if you don't!

A good little tip to encourage them to get off to a speedy start is to incorporate a little of the garden soil into your potting compost. This means that our own gardens microbes are already working with your new plant and it will establish itself much quicker when planted out.

In order to make our own natural feeds I have kindly used the comfrey which was being cut down by the Greensands Trust. This has now been steeped in water and will be used as a feed to all our plants. It is so useful as its tap root goes down a few metres reaching trace elements which are invaluable to plant growth.

Comfrey has the three major nutrients plus high levels of calcium, which can be very beneficial if harvested and made into comfrey tea for plants. This nutrient-rich food is applied as a liquid soil drench or as a foliar spray. The composted leaves yield a rich deep greenish-brown liquid.



How to Make Comfrey Tea

This makes a ready to use liquid feed

Take a 100 litre barrel with a lid or water butt and fill nearly to the top. Put six or seven kilograms of comfrey leaves, wilted for a day and roughly chopped if you have time, into a hessian sack or, if you don't have a sack, ladies tights or even an old pillow case.



Press the sack into the water to get the air out and then place the lid on the butt and leave for two weeks in warm weather, possibly four weeks in cold weather.

*Be warned, the liquid stinks like raw sewage as the comfrey decomposes. If you leave the lid off the surface will soon be covered in flies. Whilst it may be logical to have the barrel near the greenhouse, because of the smell I would suggest as far away from the house (and other peoples houses) as possible. This can be bottled and then diluted for use at a rate of **10ml per litre (1:100)**.*

Plant of the month

Cerithe

What is Cerithe? In addition to its other names, Cerithe is also known as honeywort and it is highly attractive to bees. The plant is an herb related to borage, but the foliage is not as thickly haired. Instead, Cerithe has thick greenish-grey foliage with softly rounded edges. New leaves are marbled with white, which disappears after the leaves mature.

The flowers are tiny and insignificant but are covered by colourful bracts. The bracts deepen into a bluer hue as night time temperatures cool. During the day they are a lighter purple tone. These herbs grow 2 to 4 feet tall and are perfect in beds, borders and pots.

Plant outside in April in a well-drained site, full to partial sun and moderate water

Once you have an established plant, self-seeding ensures a ready supply of plants every year.

Pop down to the kitchen garden to see our beautiful patch and watch the bees buzzing around it



A Date for Your diary.....

Friday 24th May We will be joining forces with Sisoe Horticultural college and having a plant sales day in the foyer of the visitors centre.

Happy Sowing!

Jenny

Spring is finally here *by Mark Hogan*

Well Spring is here and all the Birds have started nesting, you may even see a few little fluff balls in your gardens over the next few weeks. They are amazingly industrious with their nest building. I saw something the other day that I have never seen before a pair of Magpies are building a nest in a tree just outside my Mums garden and they keep coming into the garden to get twigs and bits of suet fat balls to hold the nest together, it is high up in a tree and well hidden from predators.



I went on an interesting walk on the 26th April to Rutland Water, it is one of England's biggest lakes and is abundant with wildlife. I went to see a pair of nesting Ospreys near Manton Bay on the South Side of the Lake. We parked the car and then walked along an interesting pathway via a couple of Hides until we arrived at the main Viewing Site for the Ospreys. The hide was very well designed, it had seating and then a big window so that people in wheelchairs and children could see the Ospreys too. The nest was on the other side of the lake to us about 200 yards away so difficult to get a decent picture but they do have a CCTV set up on the nest so you can see them a little closer up. The female MAYA was incubating the eggs and her

partner Number 33 was sitting on a post about 12 feet away guarding her from predators and other Ospreys that may try and steal the nest. I thought they had only a few Ospreys but I later found out that they actually had 25 of them in the area at the moment because they stop over at Rutland on their way back to Scotland to a new small group in North Wales, which is great to see. We then went on to the nest hide and had an even better view.

We are really lucky in this area to have some great places to see Wildlife, even at Houghton Hall Park you can see an occasional Bullfinch, Stonechat and I even saw a Fox run across the fields in front of me during the day.

I know you may have heard a lot of people on TV saying we need to help nature, well you can do that in your own gardens, leave a piece of garden, do not touch it at all, let it grow wild, leave the nettles and flowers to grow naturally or throw a packet of Wildflower seeds on and a little soil and leave them to grow. You will be surprised what you get in your gardens, butterflies like Orange Tips, Commas and Peacocks, Birds like Robins and Blackbirds who can eat the insects and even a wandering Hedgehog or Fox. Give it a try and let me know how you get on and if you get a good picture send it to us and we will put it in the next Newsletter.



There are other ways of enticing wildlife and insects into your garden like an insect house or plants like Lavender and Buddleia which attract bees and insects to them. I love sharing my experiences with you and would love to hear about yours. You may have been on a walk and seen a bird you may never have seen before, share that experience with us, we would love to hear about it.

If you've seen a bird in your garden or at Houghton Hall Park and you're not sure what it is, get in touch with us and we will identify it for you. If you can get a picture 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 - 17:30pm

Saturday and Sunday

9:00am - 17:30pm



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