



Houghton Hall Park

April 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 has Sprung!

It's going to be a busy April at Houghton Hall Park with lots activities for all ages.



Easter Holidays Activities

Easter Door Garland Family Workshop

Hop along with your family to the Visitor Centre and make a seasonal spring door garland for Easter with our Community Gardener. Get your hands dirty with moss, twigs and foliage in a style of your choice and decorate it with some Easter accessories!

There is a maximum of 10 spaces per session, first come first served basis, cash only.

All materials will be provided but if you have some Easter decorations to add, please feel free to bring these along.

When: Friday 12th April 10am, 12pm & 2pm

Where: Houghton Hall Visitor Centre

Cost: £3 per child

A great place to live and work.



.....returns for Easter!

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.

When: Thursday 18th April

Time: 10am-12pm (last entry 11:15am)

Cost: FREE

How to book: Just turn up on the day! The meeting point is in the visitor centre.

Spring Sketch Walk

If you love art, please join this walk to develop your skills, whatever your level, in beautiful surroundings with local wildlife artist Steve Halton. Watch the park come to life as more signs of spring become visible!

When: Sunday 14th April 11am

Where: Meet in the Visitor Centre

What do I need? Sketch pad, pens, pencils or paint and if you have one – a folding stool might be a good idea too!

Cost: £3 cash only, on the day

How do I book? You don't need to book for this activity, but should you have any questions please email: hph@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Keep Active



During the Easter Holidays Fitsteps, Yoga and Pilates will not be running and will start again on Monday 29th April.

Buggy Exercise will still take place every Wednesday, at the new time 10am.

Parkrun and Junior Parkrun are running every Saturday and Sunday at 9am.

For more information about these activities please visit our website:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/>

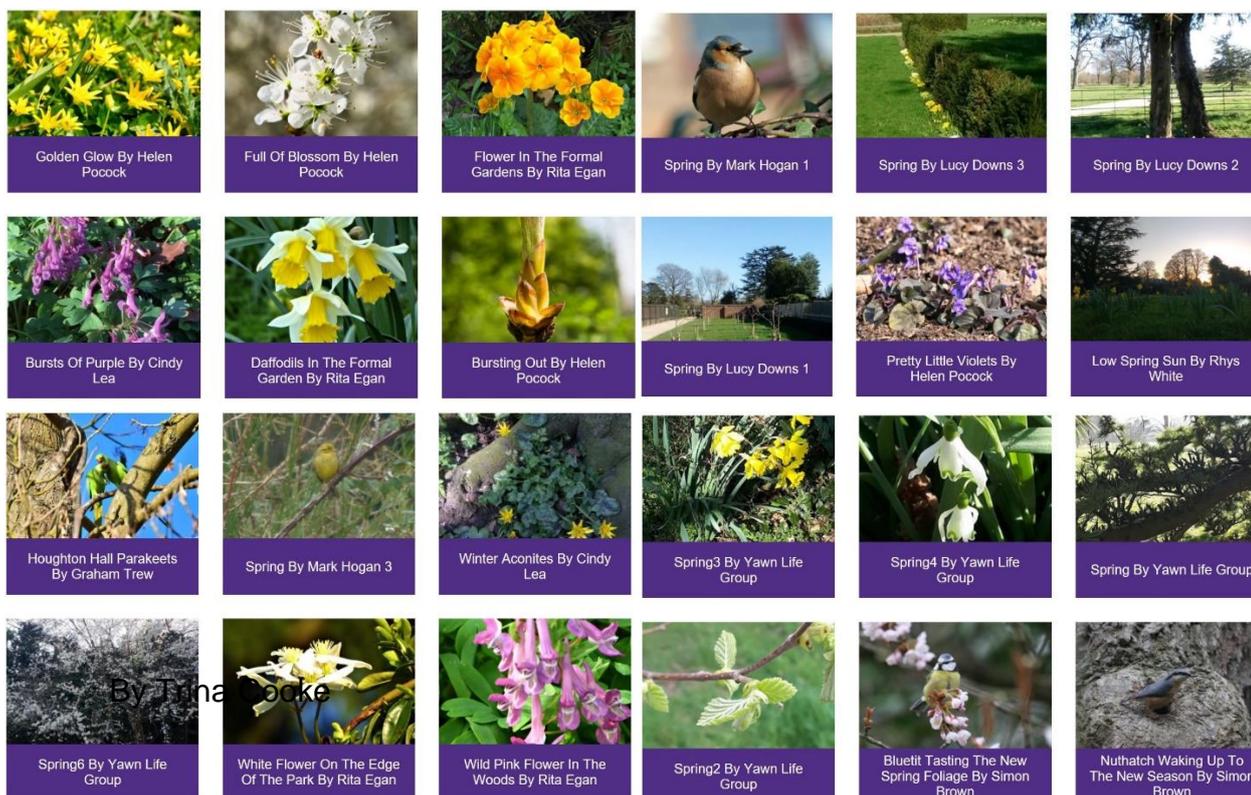
Monthly Photography Themes

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; **April's theme is: Blossom in Houghton Hall Park.** We hope you're able to capture some of beautiful flowers in the park as spring is well and truly here.

Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. The images must be taken between 1st – 30th April 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 some entries from March's theme: Spring in Houghton Hall Park. We are delighted to share these great images captured by our lovely visitors, there are some very talented people who visit 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 Formal Garden

For those of you that are regular park users you will have seen us all working away in the gardens weeding the beds. As the gardens have been planted on the old woodland footprint there is extensive celandine, nettles, ground elder and docks which are proving slow work to remove. It is worth taking the time to do this as it will improve the quality of the beds for future years. In some cases, I am having to remove whole plants and gently untangle the invasive weeds.

On a brighter note the new growth is evident on all the beds now which breaks up the barren soil of December. Ladybirds are waking up and in huge numbers already in search of aphids!

Kitchen Garden

The cabbages and broad beans have put on a huge amount of growth in this past month. I have just given them all a feed. Strong healthy plants have much better resistance to fighting off pests and disease.

The perennial herbs are bursting into life which the café will appreciate as there is nothing nicer than fresh herbs in soup.

Now the weather has warmed up we have been busy moving the rest of the strawberries. They are now all on one bed which will make it easier for picking. When they start to form flowers, we will add straw around them so the fruit does not sit on the soil and spoil.

On the other beds we have begun to remove fleeces and I'm pleased to see some of our direct sown seeds have germinated. This has helped to raise the soil temperature by a few degrees to assist with successional sowing.

The first early potatoes are now in, we will be sure to let you know when they are ready!

Job of the month

Or should I say jobs.....

Don't forget to remove the heads off the daffodils as they finish flowering. This helps put energy back into the bulb for a good show next year. Don't remove or fold over your leaves as the goodness is also needed. In a few weeks they will become straw like and come away in your hands, that is the time to tidy them up.

Keeping on top of your annual weeds will save you hours of time in the long run, a hoe is a quick and easy way of dealing with them. Another approach is to weed out 10 weeds a day!

Keep sowing in earnest now as the weather warms up, April really is the month it all starts to happen.

New developments

I am really pleased to welcome aboard some new volunteers who are making such a huge difference to the gardens. The extra pairs of hands are very welcome at this time of year. If you would like to see how you can be involved with the garden, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Jenny.osborne@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Plant of the month -Tulip

One of my favourite flowers has to be the tulip, I love all the different forms and the colours work well with so many gardens. You are sure to find one that you like with as there are around 75 wild species of tulips and 150 species in total with over 3000 varieties!



The word tulip is derived from a Persian word called delband, which means turban. It is believed that it was called this due to the turban-shaped nature of the flower. Historians now believe that this might have been a translation error as it was fashionable to wear tulips on turbans at the time.

Tulips grow from bulbs and they are part of the lily family. They are native to mountain areas which is why tulips need a period of cold dormancy, known as vernalisation. Hence, they are planted October/November and they thrive best in climates with cool springs and dry summers.

The tulip is native to central Asia, yet it was when the flower was first cultivated in Holland that it really came to prominence. From 1634 to 1637 known as "Tulip mania" when enthusiasm for the new flower started an economic frenzy. The value of tulips shot up nearly overnight, as they became the most expensive flower in the world, so expensive that they were treated as a form of currency. During this peak of tulip mania certain bulbs were selling for 10 times more than the annual income of a skilled worker and a valuable tulip bulb could change hands up to ten times in a day. Tulip mania was short-lived though and the whole economy eventually crashed.

Today, the Netherlands is still the world's main producer of commercially sold tulips producing as many as 3 billion bulbs annually, mostly for export.

A Date for Your diary

Friday 12th April I will be running a drop in family session to make Easter door garlands. This will be held at the visitors centre. Please see facebook for details

Friday 24th May We will be joining forces with Sisoë Horticultural college and having a plant sales day in the foyer of the visitors centre. More details to come next month.

Happy Sowing!

Jenny

Spring is here and I love it! *by Mark Hogan*

I think Spring is the most wonderful Season of the Year. The trees are changing colour gradually and things like Cherry Blossom make you smile as they are quite stunning. I have been watching the Magpies outside my house picking up long sticks to build their nest, in a few days time that tree will be covered with leaves so their nest will be safe and away from any predators.

If you put a time lapse camera on the trees and bushes they will all change gradually over the next few weeks. Animals will be coming out of hibernation like hedgehogs and bats so keep your eyes peeled in your gardens, you might notice the first butterflies and bees in your gardens too. I saw a peacock the other day, they are beautiful so keep your eyes out for them.

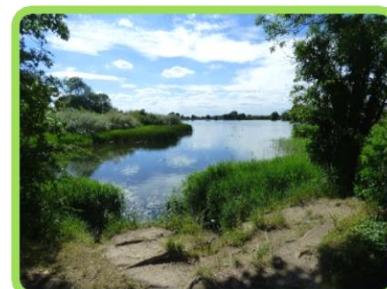
All sorts of birds are building nests, I saw a grey heron with a really long twig fly over so it can reinforce its nest. If you have a birdbox in your garden you might notice that the birds are constantly visiting them to spruce up their nests.



I constantly monitor the rare bird alert on twitter and was completely shocked when a White-Tailed Eagle was seen in the New Forest and was flying North towards Essex and even Bedfordshire. They are huge birds and have an 8ft wide wingspan. They mainly eat fish but will take a duck or young bird if they get particularly hungry. We even had a visit to Houghton Regis a few weeks ago when a Sacred Ibis, was seen which is a beautiful bird and really unusual.



If you visit a local reservoir you may see a lot of Ducks, which you might not normally see, but also the first Swallows and Swifts of the year swooping over the water catching bugs and insects as they do so. The other thing you could keep your eyes out for are the Great Crested Grebes doing a mating dance, which is amazing, they have great synchronization.



If you put bird feeders out keep doing that but if possible put out a variety of food like scones broken up for the Blackbirds, mealworm for the Robins and Sunflower hearts for the Finches like the Goldfinch and the Greenfinch.



You may have noticed that not many Red Kites are about at the moment, they are nesting too and we have some local ones nesting in this area. In about a month's time the juveniles might be flying over our houses. Red Kites have a forked tail and when the sunlight hits them you can see how red they are. The other bird you might see in the skies is a Buzzard, they have a fanned tail and usually fly around in circles and they sometimes call out to each other.

If you have seen a Bird in your garden can get a picture of it send it to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk if it is good we might even put it 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