

# Houghton Hall Park

## October 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 October and autumn is definitely in the air at the park, it's getting cooler, the leaves are changing colour and starting to fall, the seasons don't change which is quite reassuring in these unsettled times. You may notice other changes in the park this month, Eleanor our new Community Park Ranger is starting her role with us, regulars are sure to see her around the park and next month's newsletter will include an interview with her so you can find out what she has planned, it's all very exciting! We have some fabulous events this month, two for Halloween, the MonsterVillian Safari is a trail based on QR codes and we will be having a Halloween Story Trail on Halloween itself, the volunteers have been very busy making some awesome props for this. We couldn't hold the Dog Festival this year however Accolade Hounds will be having an outdoor doggy market on the 25<sup>th</sup> October with stalls to raise money for their rehoming charity. If you don't like spiders please read our volunteer Mark's nature article about them, it may just change your opinion! The kitchen and formal gardens continue to bring pleasure to so many, keep reading for all that's been going on this month. Keep enjoying the park and keep safe.



**A great place to live and work.**

# What's On

## MonsterVillain Safari

**When:** 19<sup>th</sup> September

**Time:** 10am to 6pm

**Cost:** Free!

A free and creepy (but also extremely cute) family trail of monsters is going live in Houghton Hall Park to give families a socially distanced, contactless and fun activity to do in October.

The trail to find the 10 'MonsterVillains' takes on average about 45 minutes to complete and is completely free for families and groups to take part in.

The Safari works by utilising contactless QR codes, without the need for families to download or sign up to anything. 10 vinyl window monsters, all specially created for this project have been placed around Houghton Hall Park for families to hunt down.

When families in Houghton Hall Park scan each character's unique QR code the monster will come to life in an animation on their smartphone and they'll learn their names, stories and powers. Younger children will enjoy spotting the colourful characters and older kids, and grown-up ones, will engage by hearing the stories. After finding all 10 MonsterVillains, families will be rewarded with a free eBook, a follow up adventure written especially for the trail.

This is a self-guided trail, for access to the trail and a map please visit the website below:  
[www.monstervillainsafari.com](http://www.monstervillainsafari.com)

## Outdoor Doggy Market



**When:** 25<sup>th</sup> October

**Time:** 10am to 3pm

**Cost:** Free!

Accolade Hounds will be with us on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> October with an outdoor market raising funds for their charity. Accolade Hounds is a small independent non-profit organisation that rescues and rehomes hounds in the East of England. It is run by a group of experienced volunteers who believe in homing hounds responsibly. We hope you can pop along and pick up some treats for your

four-legged friends and maybe even yourself!

**Family Event**

**Halloween Story Trail**

Witch Wanda and Wizard Wonga are in a tizz and need your help, complete the spell and earn your Halloween prize!

**Event date:** 31st October  
**Event time:** 10am to 3pm  
**Location:** Kitchen Garden

Find out more online at [www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

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## Halloween Story Trail

**When:** 31<sup>st</sup> October

**Time:** 10am to 3pm

**Cost:** Free!

Follow our story trail and learn Witch Wanda and Wizard Wonga's tale!

A self-guided story trail, you will need to download and print an activity sheet from our website (available nearer the time), bring a pencil and clipboard if you have one.

Storyboards will be placed around the kitchen/formal garden end of the park, read the story, complete the activities, cast your spell and you will receive a Halloween Activity bag as your prize!

This is a small, local event and we would not recommend travelling from long distances as our parking is limited and you may not get a space, please do not park in surrounding residential streets. If you can walk, cycle, scoot to the park please do so. Please note social distancing regulations apply, please only come in groups of six.

## Buggy Exercise

**When:** Every Wednesday

**Time:** 10am

**Cost:** £2 - book your place at:-  
[www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness](http://www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness)

Meet outside the Visitors Centre.

A fun fitness session where we enjoy a warmup around the park and then a circuit session, a great way to meet other local parents/carers and get fit along the way! Social distancing regulations apply.



# Monthly Photography Themes

**Art & Culture Event**

**great lifestyles**

**October's Photography Theme**

**Autumn at Houghton Hall Park**

We hope you have fun capturing some pictures of Autumn at Houghton Hall Park

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in October
- 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](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)
- Deadline 31st October
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at [www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

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We welcome photographers of all abilities from the age of 16 to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly themes, October's theme is: 'Autumn at Houghton Hall Park', we are looking forward to seeing the wonderful colours of Autumn in your pictures.

**IMPORTANT:** Please remember to practice social distancing when coming to the park.

Please send your submissions to [hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk). The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> October 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](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography)

There were some very cute entries for last month's theme, Dogs in Houghton Hall Park, a selection are below and all entries can be found on our website [www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography-theme](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography-theme)



Rita Egan 3



Rita Egan 4



Rita Egan 5



Beautiful Bonnie by Lorraine Johnson



Bonnie Ryker hoping for a treat By Mary



Bonnie Ryker playing Hide and seek by Lorraine Johnson



Rita Egan 1



Rita Egan 2



Also a Girls Best Friend C Mahony



Bonnie and Ryker never far apart Lorraine Johnson



Zak Denise Coates



Siobhan Stagg 3



Siobhan Stagg 2



Siobhan Stagg 1



Ryker exploring the woods Lorraine Johnson

## Nature Blog – Spiders

Words and pictures by Mark Bolan Houghton Hall Volunteer



*A female keeps watch*

As the end of October heralds 'All Hallows' when we think of all things spooky and creepy. I thought spiders would be a natural choice for this month's nature notes, as they form part of many Halloween decorations. This is also time of year when you will find lots of baby spiders emerging from their nest of tightly spun silk, often guarded by their mother.

With the exception of money spiders, which we consider to be lucky, of all the creepy crawlies, spiders are probably the most feared and maligned. Yet they are incredible creatures, habiting a diverse range of environments from wetlands to dry

deserts and play a very important role. Eating over 400 million tons of prey a year, they help keep the global ecosystem in check and stop it being overrun by pests. They even help keep your house clean by clearing up bugs and mites, some of which are too small to see. If this wasn't enough, their venom with its numbing properties can be used to produce pain relief products. Scientists are also analysing their silk for potential use in specialist products, such as bullet proof vests, as it is light weight and is twice as strong as Kevlar. So all in all they really are good guys!

There are around six hundred and fifty varieties of spiders in the UK. Yes they all bite, but only to subdue their prey, fortunately very few have fangs strong enough to penetrate human skin. Of the twelve that are capable of biting humans, only two or three have venom strong enough to cause any discomfort.

Spiders are not insects, they are air breathing arthropods as they only have two body parts, a thorax and abdomen plus eight legs. Insects have three body parts and six legs. Each of their eight legs has six joints and should a leg be lost, they are able to grow a new one. They also have special glands called spinnerets for producing their webs. Depending on the species, they have either six or eight eyes, one pair of eyes often better developed than the others. The smaller ones usually only able to distinguish between light and dark. The eyes have single lenses, unlike the multi-faceted compound eyes of most insects.

The quality of their vision varies between species, with jumping spiders doing best and able to see in colour. Like all insects with an exoskeleton in order to grow, spiders have to moult, shedding their old shell.



*A Window Lace Weaver*

**Interesting fact:** Where as human blood is red and contains iron, spider blood contains copper and is pale blue.

Cobwebs are incredible structures and extremely strong, in fact their silk is five times stronger than an equivalent mass of steel. Broadly speaking there are seven types of web. These are Orb, Sheet, Tangle, Funnel, Lace, Radial and Purse, their main purpose being to catch prey. Some spiders, usually smaller types and baby spiders, referred to as spiderlings, use their silk to move to a new location. Known as ballooning, a spider climbs to a high spot, pointing its spinnerets upwards letting out strands of silk until they are picked up either by the wind or static electricity.

Depending on conditions, flights can be of a few metres up to hundreds of kilometres. They have also been found as high as five kilometres by weather balloons. Unable to control where they going, spiders are at the mercy of the wind and mortality can be high, although spiders can survive nearly a month without food should it be a long flight.

Their silk is made of a protein and is liquid within the gland, this hardens on contact with air. Across the species there are seven different types of silk glands, each producing silk with different characteristics. Spiders can



*A Yard Spider*

mix and match the silk they produce, weaving it for specific purposes as it leaves the spinnerets. No one species has all seven varieties of gland, although most have at least three, orb web weavers have five. Webs vary from the familiar circular orb web to the messy looking tangle web and because each species make a different style of web, they can be an aid when trying to identify similar looking spiders. For such a small creature it is a time consuming job, taking between two to three hours to create a web and is something that has to be done every couple of days. When a web becomes dirty or is damaged the spider will roll it up and eat it before spinning a new one. So now you know even spiders are good at recycling! Whilst most webs are coated with a sticky substance to trap any prey that comes into contact with it, some have woolly a texture that acts like Velcro. The fine hairs on the legs of prey becoming entangled in the fuzzy strands of the web.



*The beauty of a delicate silk web*

**Interesting fact:** *Atypus Affinis* is the only British spider that makes a purse web and is related to the tarantula family. Usually found in areas with sparse ground vegetation their tubular web can extend over two feet into the ground, which they have to excavate for the purpose.

Not all spiders create a web to catch prey, some just lay in wait to catch a meal when an unsuspecting insect passes too close. Pirate spiders on the other hand, will climb onto the web of another spider pretending to be prey. Looking forward to its own meal, the unsuspecting host goes to investigate and the pirate spider grabs a snack! The aptly named spitting spider, spits silk and venom from its fangs at the same time shaking its head from side to side, in a type of scatter gun attack on its prey.

In general males are much smaller than females and have just one purpose, to supply sperm. Mating between spiders involves the male placing a packet of sperm in a receptacle near her oviduct. The female will keep the sperm, sometimes for several months, before fertilising her eggs when she is ready. Because spiders live a solitary life, a male has to go in search of a receptive female and may have to fight off other males with the same intentions. Once he has found a suitable mate, he has to make his intentions clear or he may be mistaken for a meal. Even then he has no guarantee and he will be lucky if he survives more than



*Paralysing prey and tucking into a meal*



Looking after eggs



mating with a few females in his life. Females don't always fare much better either. In some species the female, having cared and looked after her eggs, can end up as food for the emerging spiderlings.

**Interesting Fact:** Spiders can only pull their legs in using their muscles. They don't have muscles to push them back out. Instead they push them back out by pumping their blood creating hydraulic pressure. Which is why dead spiders usually have their legs pulled in tight, as their single valve heart wasn't able to push them back out.

So after reading this brief insight into the world of spiders, I hope you will look more kindly on these fascinating creatures. As I said, spiders really are good guys!

Don't have nightmares!

Until next time

Mark

Houghton Hall Park Volunteer

## What's the latest in the Gardens?

I was fortunate enough to be given a fantastic book last month called 'Walking Home' by Patrick Noble. In essence it proposes that we walk home, beside the road and beneath the vapour trails to quietly consider a new and happier way of life, which is part of the balance of ecology and climate. A society in which both work and pleasure are walking distances from everyone's door.

There was a particularly good passage in there which resonated with me:

***'It is also fortunate that the ordinary contains all that is marvellous:***

***Seasons, sights, scents and sounds'***

As gardeners I think we appreciate the world around us in finite detail, noticing the light, the bird call, the emerging shoots, the first snowdrop of the year, the sweet waft of blossom. This year especially, I think appreciation of the ordinary has been within everyone's reach.



September days have come to an end and the mornings are well and truly darker, with a cooler edge to them suggesting an extra layer is required. However, the produce is still doing really well in the kitchen garden and so many of you are enjoying the regular stall we have on Thursday mornings. It is a question that we get asked fairly regularly, 'What happens to the produce?' In a nutshell, the wonderful volunteer team get to enjoy a share for all their hard work and input. In lock down it was being distributed out to people who were in need of it. Now it is being shared with park users and local residents.





The runner beans are still doing really well, and we have picked another 7kg this week, much to all your amusement. I remember being ridiculed earlier in the summer when they weren't doing too much, I delayed planting them in the scorching heat. A very good call it would now seem!!!!



Considering the cooler weather, we have had, the aubergines have done surprisingly well outside and we have harvested a good number this year. There is something incredible about the depth of colour and the shine.



The swedes are doing rather well too and we have been slowly harvesting them this past week.

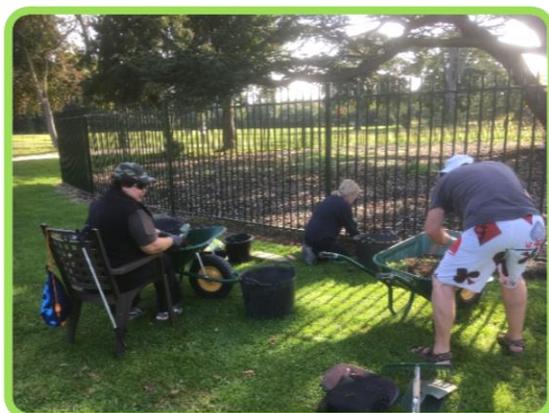
We have begun clearing the butternut squashes as they have now turned a buttery gold. In order to store well, we have washed all the skins in a diluted bleach (2 tablespoons to one gallon of water) mix to ensure they are free from bacteria.

They then need to be placed in a cool dark area, ideally these will then last for 2 -3 months.



We have also been turning our attention to two areas of the garden for next spring. The first is to create a border around the cedar tree of mixed narcissus bulbs for some additional colour.

The second area is to increase the depth of the border by the kitchen garden which will be planted up with allium and tulip bulbs. We are hoping that this new deeper border will be flowed with successional planting in purple, blue and white with pollinators at its heart in mind.



The last of the tomatoes have been harvested from the polytunnel and put aside to ripen. The beef steak tomatoes have done extremely well so will be on our list to grow again next year. One of the best varieties was Feo de Rio Gordo.

We are just experimenting with a very late crop of mange tout peas in where the cucumbers were growing. So far we have harvested two, this may be difficult to share the spoils!!



The beds are being topped with our own home made compost, leaf mould and farm yard manure. We have now planted a few salad leaves to grow throughout the winter.

This is now the time to cut back herbaceous perennials that have finished flowering, unless you are leaving the seed heads for winter interest. With the

strong winds a lot of ours have already gone over. We will now start to

mulch the beds for added moisture retention

As the wet weather approaches some of those great to do jobs have been started, a secateur organiser. My life has become complete!!

Thanks to our handy volunteers we also have some additional benches

that allow us to work under cover on our various projects, a great addition to the work area indeed.



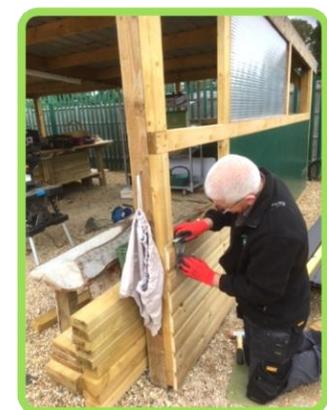
At the beginning of the month we planted out the last crop of beetroot. We grow these in modules and then plant them about a trowel length apart. Harvesting the largest one from each cluster and allowing the others to continue to grow. This

replaces the more traditional planting of one seed per station.

We hope you continue to enjoy Houghton Hall Park's gardens and the progress that the volunteers are making each month with our many projects.

**Happy gardening, stay safe**

**Jenny**





## Keep in touch

### Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

### Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

### Twitter

@BedsCountryside

### Website

[www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

### Email

[hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)



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