

Houghton Hall Park

June 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 June and whilst we cannot have the activities or events we had planned for this month in the park, there's still a lot going on for us to enjoy. Nature doesn't stop and the birds are having the time of their lives, no doubt you will hear them especially if you come very early to the park, Steve Halton Senior Countryside Officer for Central Bedfordshire Council has written a piece for the newsletter this month on what you can look out for and Rita Egan one of our volunteers has worked on a piece about wildflowers and pollinators. Talking of pollinators the kitchen and formal garden is a hive of activity and you may have seen the appearance of some happy little bees in the pollinator bed at the front of the kitchen garden, thank you to Carol Butler for making them and our volunteers for setting them up, Jenny (our Community Gardener) has more news of the gardens at the end of the newsletter. The social distancing regulations have eased slightly so Hayley, our Activity Officer (who is also a qualified personal trainer) has started some evening Fitness in the Park sessions for up to five people, more details on our 'What's On' pages. We are also launching an exciting Summer Activity Challenge brought to us by Future Proof Parks, keep reading to find out more!



A great place to live and work.

What's On

All the events planned for June had to be cancelled due to the COVID-19 response in the UK. The park remains open as valuable green space for the community for exercise and access to the outdoors, please abide by the social distancing rules.

Summer Activity Challenge

When: Launches Monday 15th June

Cost: Free!

Groundwork, who Houghton Hall Park have been working with as part of the Future Proof Parks project, has launched a Summer Activity challenge to keep young people engaged in enjoying and protecting their local parks and greenspaces during Covid-19.

Future Proof Parks Summer Activity Challenge is designed to help young people engage with their local park through nature, heritage, and wellbeing via a collection of 24 exciting challenges that they can do both in their local park and at home.

Due to current Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, young people are currently not able to get involved in usual Future Proof Parks activities, most of which include volunteering alongside their peers and Friends of Groups.

The Summer Activity Challenge has been designed to keep young people involved in the programme with exciting and engaging challenges, as well as encouraging more young people to get involved in the programme.

Activities are broken down into time categories – ranging from 15 minutes to over an hour – including designing posters, creating video tours and maps of the park and embarking on a heritage research project to find out more about the history of their local park. Young people are also encouraged to look after their mental health and wellbeing by exercising and looking forward to the future by writing plans for future events at the park once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

The campaign is set to run into August to give the maximum amount of flexibility for young people who want to get involved. While Future Proof Parks is only run in certain areas of the UK, this campaign allows all young people to get involved and engaged in their local park and the campaign.

We will be posting the challenges on our social media however the full list of challenges can be found here <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/fpp-news/future-proof-parks-summer-activity-challenge/>

The team at Houghton Hall Park would love to see the results of these challenges which can be sent to us at hnp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or posted on our social media with the hashtags #FPPSummerChallenge and #KicktheDust.



Fitness in the Park

When: Every Tuesday & Thursday

Time: 6.30pm

Cost: £2

Put on a few pounds in lockdown? Feeling a bit blah? Why not come to our Fitness in the Park session on a Tuesday and Thursday evening at 6.30pm?

This is a fun body weight class for all fitness levels, due to social distancing regulations there will be a maximum number of five attendees per class.

Classes cost £2 and you must book your place at www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness

Meet outside the Visitors Centre.

For further information contact hayleyclear@gmail.com

Wellbeing Event

great lifestyles

Fitness in the Park

A fun class which will involve a warmup around the park and then a body weight circuit. Due to social distancing there will be a maximum of 5 people per class.

Event date: Every Tue & Thur
Event time: 6.30pm
Cost: £2
Booking: www.bookwhen.com/clearfitness

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

Wellbeing Event

great lifestyles

Buggy Exercise at Home

A FREE class you can enjoy in your own home!

Every Wednesday at 10am

For more information contact:
hayleyclear@gmail.com

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

Buggy Exercise at Home

When: Every Wednesday

Time: 10am

Cost: Free

Buggy Exercise cannot take place in the park but fear not you can still take part at home! The class is being offered via Microsoft Teams. If you would like to take part please contact Hayley at hayleyclear@gmail.com, you don't need to have a baby, the class is open to everyone.

Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities from the age of 16 to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly themes, **June's theme is:** 'Trees at Houghton Hall Park', there are so many trees in the park so plenty of opportunity to get some fantastic photos.

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

We know that some of our regular park users cannot visit the park at the moment, if you would still like to take a picture of some trees near you please do and send it in.

Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. The images must be taken between 1st – 30th June 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

Below are the entries from May's theme: 'Wildflowers', we received some stunning entries this month, thank you to everyone who submitted a photograph.





Justyna 5



Justyna 4



Justyna 3



Comfrey Bonny Haughey



Cow parsley in the woods Helen Pocock



Campion Bonny Haughey



Justyna 2



Justyna 1



Cowslips Helen Pocock



Buttercup Bonny Haughey

Tree Spotting



As our photography theme this month is 'Trees in Houghton Hall Park' why not try to see how many different ones you can spot whilst in the park? This leaf ID sheet from the Woodland Trust should help you.



June Wildlife in the Park

By Steve Halton – Senior Countryside Officer, Central Bedfordshire Council

It is mid-June already and we are now heading into early summer. The initial explosive headiness of new life, birth and rearing youngsters in Spring is settling down to a more even tempo as our wildlife gets on with the busy job of bringing up their families.



Many of the resident birds in the Park such as Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Robins, Great Tits and Wrens are on their second, or even starting their third broods so they may well have reared 15 or so fledglings in the last few months. That is busy work and both parents are working full time finding worms, grubs, caterpillars and a whole variety of insects to keep up with the incessant demand of their youngsters, and this only increases and they grow up and get bigger. Most birds will be busy from dawn to dusk feeding their young every few minutes. Bad

weather such as strong winds, cold temperatures or heavy rain can hinder with finding food, chicks can become cold if they are not kept warm by at least one parent (which then puts more demands on the other parent) as they try to find food and keep their chicks warm.

Our migrant birds come here for the summer, usually from Africa to breed – summer in Africa is too hot and dry so, over millions of years, these birds have evolved to fly north where the summers are cooler but usually warm enough for lots of insects. Just imagine that the tiny Chiffchaff, that sings 'Chiff-chaff, Chiff-chaff' from the woods in the Park, and weighing just 8 grams can fly over 2,500 miles in just a week or so to breed here! Some Chiffchaffs overwinter in the UK due to the winters becoming warmer. The summer visitors in the Park include warblers such as Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Whitethroat and Willow Warbler and these can be heard singing until early July. These birds only have one or sometimes, if the weather is good, two broods as they are here for a much shorter time than the residents.



This can be a relatively quiet period in the wildlife world, and it is often known as the 'June gap' – many of the spring flowers and butterflies have finished and the summer species have yet to appear. So, plants such as Cowslips, Primroses and butterflies such as Orange-tips and Brimstones have finished for the year while we wait for the summer species to appear. Butterflies such as Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Ringlet are dark brown and can appear in large numbers on muggy days flying slowly

amongst the long grasslands around the Park while, in the dappled light of the wooded areas you may see the chequered dark brown and orange male Speckled Wood as it sunbaths in the sunny glades and drives away other males from his favourite 'sunny patch'.

Rabbits and Muntjac Deer are both now breeding and, if you are lucky enough, you may see the young rabbits coming out of the scrubby areas on warm evenings to nibble the grass in their families!



Wildflowers or Weeds?

By Rita Egan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer

I am a frequent visitor to Houghton Hall Park and although my main interest is butterflies I am always on the lookout for colourful flowers or interesting bugs. I am sure that as you go around the Park it probably occurs to you that many of the flowers are in fact weeds. I suppose it depends on the time and place you find them. I must stress that I am not an expert on flowers or weeds but I am going to give you a little bit of information about the flowers I posted in the May photography theme and the pollinators I look for when I am wheeling around. Let's start with the flowers.

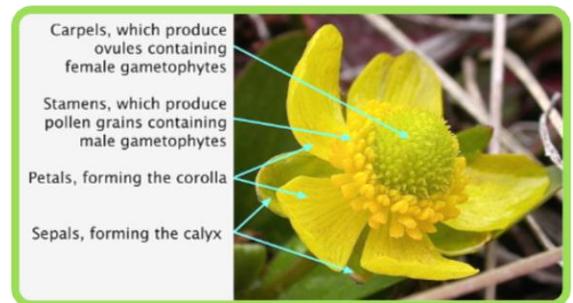


Buttercup - The first of my five is the Buttercup which can be found all around the Park. There are many species of Buttercup in the UK. By far the most common are the Creeping and Bulbous Buttercups. You can tell them apart by looking at the small, green leaf-like bits immediately beneath the petals -Bulbous Buttercup's curl away from the flower while Creeping Buttercup's do not. Here's a

good picture of the parts of the Buttercup.

To find out more about Buttercups follow this link:

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/discover-wild-plants-nature/plant-fungi-species/buttercups>



Cowslip - The second flower I posted last month was the Cowslip. They were particularly striking in the early part of May and formed a carpet of yellow in the centre of the Park. They are a cousin of the Primrose. To find out more about Cowslips visit

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/wildflowers/cowslip>



Comfrey - I am sure you will have noticed this lovely flower. There are a great many bushes of Comfrey along the Woodland Walk. They seem to thrive in the shade and actually vary in colour from purple to pink. This flower is used for fertiliser as its leaves are high in nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Read about how to make your own fertilizer here

<https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/comfrey>



Flax - The fourth of the flowers I posted is the Flax. It's sometimes called Linseed and is used for the production of cloth and oil. There are a great many Flax flowers in the Park so much so you probably pass by them and think nothing of it. They are mostly found on the northwest side of the park on the trail going past Houghton Hall. To find out more about the history and uses of Flax take a look at this website:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flax>



Stinking Iris - The last of my May flowers is a plant called the Stinking Iris. I think it's beautiful. It may have landed up on the North West side of the Park because that area is close to the gardens around Houghton Hall. But whatever its origin it's a wonderful addition to the area. It's called a Stinking Iris apparently because the leaves can give off an unpleasant "beefy" smell. There's still some around so you might be able to try this out. To find out more about the smelly flower there is more information at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iris_foetidissima

Finally I am going to talk about Pollinators. I am always interested in the bugs I find in the Park, but I have little knowledge of the critters I see. My main interest is butterflies which are plentiful in the summer. I have taken an interest in Bees and Hoverflies lately, chiefly because I have a friend with Hives. She is very helpful in identifying what I see. When I see a bee like critter in the flowers I ask myself three things. Is it a Bumblebee, a Honeybee or a Hoverfly? Once you have sorted that out the next step is to identify which ones you have seen.



Bumblebees

I took this one recently in the park you can see that Bumblebees are furry and this one is white tailed.

Honey Bees

Honey Bees are smooth and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish them from Hoverflies. Hoverflies have different markings though and are generally smaller.



Hoverflies

These were taken in the park as well, you can see that they generally have distinctive markings.



Here are some websites you can use to find out more about these pollinators:

Bees

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/05/types-of-bee-in-the-uk/>

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/about-bees/>

<http://www.honeybeecentre.com/learn-about-honeybees#.XuYqX7ySIPY>

Hoverflies

<https://www.discoverwildlife.com/how-to/identify-wildlife/how-to-identify-hoverflies/>

What's the latest in the Gardens?

Well, I can't believe we have come to the end of another month it's a busy time of year in the garden. This month we really have had some challenging weather, extremely high temperatures have meant some crops have suffered and prematurely bolted, dropping into a cooler spell just recently. Even I don't know what to wear each day!

I guess that why gardening is so dictated by instinct. Each day I keep a diary of what we plant, sow, harvest, water and jobs that are achieved. This is beneficial for future years as it builds up a profile of the rhythm of the year. Yet it cannot be used verbatim as weather conditions will dictate your plans. This can sometimes be a bit tricky in delaying planting out crops that are ready or looking to protect things that are already out. These variables are what keeps you on your toes: makes you think, and primarily makes each year stand apart from the last.



There has to be acceptance that not all crops will do well, some may exceed expectation, and some you may wonder what on earth you did wrong. You can do the same thing each year and end up with such diverse results. But isn't that part of the fun?

I am still filled with passion and excitement as the year's plans unfold, from the seed sowing, potting on, planting out, growth and then eventual harvest. Alongside the plans for the follow-on crop for that designated space. Once the season starts it carries you along with an energy that is hard to describe or quell. This time of year, I could be on site 12 hours a day and I would still find more to do!

My fellow gardeners and eager volunteers will understand that many an hour can be filled with just being. It is therapeutic and uplifting and these past few weeks of lockdown have meant more people are experiencing the joys of gardening, I hope that this new regime will continue, and you will still take time to reflect when normality resumes.

Thought I would share this poem with you as it made me chuckle!!

My Wife the Gardener

*She dug the plot on Monday –
the soil was rich and fine,
She forgot to thaw out dinner –
so we went out to dine...
She planted roses Tuesday –
she says they are a must,
They really are quite lovely
but she quite forgot to dust.
On Wednesday it was daisies –
they opened up with sun,
All whites and pinks and yellows –
but the laundry wasn't done...
The poppies came on Thursday -
a bright and cherry red,
I guess she really was engrossed –
she never made the bed...*

*It was violets on Friday –
in colours she adores,
It never bothered her at all –
all crumbs upon the floors
I hired a maid on Saturday –
my week is now complete,
My wife can garden all she wants –
the house will still be neat!
It's nearly lunchtime Sunday –
and I cannot find the maid,
Oh no! I don't believe it!
She's out there WITH THE SPADE*



One of our shared interests as a group is a love of wildlife, and this time of year we are drawn to what we can do for pollinators. The front bed in the kitchen garden has been planted to illustrate this and it is already teeming with bees and butterflies.

Some of the plants we have on here are as common as garden chives which we have allowed to flower. These are always covered in bees.

Around the kitchen garden you will see pockets of flowers to encourage the pollinators. This use of companion planting adds colour, and you can also eat the petals of these lovely marigolds!



Hayley, our Activity Officer has been a great addition in the garden by helping with a variety of jobs including harvesting lettuces for our park visitors



The bed at the front of the kitchen garden is now underway with dwarf beans, runner beans and French beans, thankfully the drop-in heat will allow them to settle in without the stress of the sun. We are also including some dwarf beans in the new planters at the back of the kitchen garden. These have started to take shape with salads, herbs and peas.



Two new areas are being filled with flowering plants that we have grown from seed. These include: Lupins, foxgloves, verbena, antrirrhums, ammi majus, cleome and asters. Always busy preparing new areas and planting crops, the courgettes and kale have gone out this week.



Don't forget there is always the ongoing task of weeding, but that is a job shared with so many hands to help!

Behind the scenes we are preparing some new produce stands, making a new cane storage area, litter picking and oh yes..... making squirrel tables!!!!





In order to be as self-sufficient as possible we are growing comfrey on site which we harvest, immerse in an old water butt and use as a liquid feed on our plants.

And so I move onto my biggest issue at the moment and it seems one of yours.....PIGEONS!!

They are becoming a harder pest to cope with as all you can do is literally cover all the crops which takes away the aesthetical look of the garden. They have destroyed rows of perfectly good lettuce over the weekend, moved onto mangetout, peas, beetroot and even tried their luck at the courgettes. It is heart-breaking to see them in such numbers descending on your crops. They just better stay away from the strawberries, please feel free to shout at them on my behalf!



Lastly.....

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish Kate, one of my first garden volunteers all the very best as she moves abroad to start a new life growing her own produce and becoming self-sufficient. She has provided us with hilarity, dedication, unusual culinary snacks and great friendship! So, on behalf of us all we thank you for all your time and energy in the park and hope you will keep in touch as life takes you in a new direction.



As ever it has been a truly remarkable month, made more enjoyable by all of you who regularly stop and have a chat and appreciate all our hard work. Thank you for being such a superb community to be part of.

Until next month

Happy Gardening, stay safe

Jenny



Houghton Hall Park

Become a friend of Houghton Hall Park

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Facebook

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Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Visitors Centre closed until further notice.

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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