

Houghton Hall Park

November 2023 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.



During October we had some lovely events on in the park, to mark the season we held harvest and Halloween wreath making workshops, everyone who attended had a great time and created fantastically unique wreaths or table centres.

On Sunday 29th October our Halloween Potion Trail took place, over 130 children and their families enjoyed a trail around the park using spy glasses then came back to the Visitors Centre to make a magic potion with the help of our volunteers. It was a wet start but a bit of rain was not going to stop everyone taking part, we were very impressed with the fancy dress this year! Thank you to all our volunteers who helped out on the day.



Now we are halfway through November everyone is busy with preparations for our Christmas events, did you know that our volunteers along with our Park Ranger and Gardener cut the majority of the foliage for our festive wreaths from the park? They will be starting to do this next week, it takes a huge effort and cannot be done too early, once cut they will then spend a morning packaging the foliage for our make at home kits, our workshops are sold out but we do have a number of kits still available, find out how to order on our 'what's on' pages, where you will also find information our children's Christmas activities.

A great place to live and work.

What's On

Friends of Houghton Hall Park Christmas Craft Stall

When: Friday 1st December
Time: 10am onwards

Our volunteers will be having a pop-up Christmas craft stall on Friday 1st December in the foyer of the visitor's centre. They have been hard at work creating many wonderful crafted items which will make perfect Christmas gifts, please pop in and have a look if you happen to be in the park, all funds raised go to the Friends of Houghton Hall Park.



Festive Wreath Making at Home



When: Collection 1st & 2nd December at the Visitors Centre
Time: 10.30am to 11.30am
Cost: £22

Our ever-popular festive wreath kits will be available to purchase again this year! Enjoy making a festive wreath in the comfort of your own home at a day/time that suits you, why not make a day of it with some friends? Grab the mince pies and mulled wine and get creative! For more information and to book click the link below:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/festive-wreaths-make-at-home>

Christmas at Crumble Cottage

When: Thursday 21st and Friday 22nd December
Time: 10am to 3pm
Cost: FREE storytelling and trail, £5 for the Christmas Pudding Bauble workshop

Join Tiny T's Theatre at the Visitors Centre for some festive cheer on the 21st & 22nd December with storytelling, crafts and games based on the book 'Christmas at Crumble Cottage' written and illustrated by Stephen Yorke. There will be FREE storytelling of extracts from the book at 10am and 12noon in the café followed by a Christmas pudding bauble workshop plus Christmas games at 10.30am and 12.30pm costing £5 per child.

For more information and to book the workshop please click the link below:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/christmas-at-crumble-cottage>



Monthly Photography Themes

We welcome photographers of all abilities to get creative, use your imagination and enter our monthly theme.

November's theme is: 'Little Details at Houghton Hall Park', we can't wait to see what you capture for this one, please send your submissions to:-

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

The images must be taken between 1st – 30th November 2023 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

Thank you to Carol Butler for sending in her spooky photographs for October's theme of 'Cobwebs'.

Art & Culture
Event

Central Bedfordshire
great
lifestyles



November's Photography Theme

'Little Details' in Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in November
- Some images will be shown on our website, social media platforms and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at:
hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 30th November
- Full terms & conditions at our website





Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org




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Nature Notes

With their silent flight and nocturnal habit, bats seem to bring shivers to many people. If you are one of them, then perhaps this month's article maybe best read in broad daylight!

We are lucky in the UK to have eighteen species of bat, barring one, all are known to be breeding. You must feel sorry for the one that isn't, the Greater Mouse Eared Bat was declared extinct in 1990 but a single individual was found hibernating in the south of England in 2002 and as far as I know is still alone. As they can live up to thirty years, the poor thing has been solitary for most of its life.

Bats begin to hibernate during November, living on body fat built up during late summer. Some may emerge as early as February during warm periods for food and water, although it is usually between late April and early May before they start to become fully active. Males roost in small groups together, whilst females find suitable sights to form maternity colonies. Single pups are born from June feeding on their mother's milk. Growth rates vary between species, but at around three weeks the babies start learning to fly and can often be found on the ground. From six



weeks they can catch insects and feed themselves. During August maternity colonies disperse and the females move to mating roosts attracted by special calls from the males. Mating takes place during September before the drive to build up body fat to see them through winter.



Bats are the only true flying mammal and are more agile in the air than many bird species. They fly mostly in a straight line, achieving speeds up to twenty miles an hour, unless they locate prey, when they will quickly change direction to catch it. Using echo location, they are able to catch two insects a second and may eat around three thousand insects a night. You may not know that apart from controlling insect populations, bats are pollinators too. Worldwide

there are over three hundred food plants reliant on bats for pollination. They pick up large amounts of pollen on their faces and fur as they drink nectar, pollinating plants such as banana, mango, dates and cocoa. In the UK they also pollinate plants such as golden rod, honeysuckle, nicotiana and many others.

Bat species account for nearly a third of mammals and live in a wide range of habitats, from open farmland to woodlands and wet areas. They are top predators of nocturnal insects and are sensitive to habitat changes. For this reason, they are seen as a good indicator of the general health of habitat and wildlife in this country.

All bat species are heavily protected in the UK and it is illegal to disturb them, their roosts, breeding or hibernation sites. It is also illegal to possess live or dead bats or any parts of them, with penalties ranging from six months imprisonment to unlimited fines. Should they take up residence in your property and they are causing concern, for advice on what to do, contact the National Bat Helpline on **0345 1300 228**



Until next time.

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens.

Community Park Ranger Update

Greetings from a rapidly changing colour scheme in the park as the leaves turn yellow then fall and look more seasonal for this time of year. Although the cold season does seem to be a bit later establishing itself this year it is without doubt changing as you can see by the yellow coloured European Linden and Narrow Leaved Ash tree leaves carpeting the ground in the western woodland of the park.

As the leaves fall they are beginning to build up on some sections of the pathways around the park so I will be getting the leaf rake out to keep them clear, they look beautiful in my opinion but when wet can be slippery so tread carefully whether you are walking your dog, jogging or just taking in the scenery.

As the temperature drops there is more need for small mammals to seek shelter so I have been busy making more microhabitat log piles for them to get cozy in, you may have noticed some of them dotted around in the woodland throughout the park. Hopefully these shelters will attract Hedgehogs, I remember seeing quite a few of them in and around Houghton Regis when I was young but they are becoming harder to see these days, in fact they have suffered a 47% decline in numbers in the last 16 years. They have, since July 2020, been put on the Red list for British Mammals. The list consists of animals that are considered in danger of extinction based on decline in numbers amongst other criteria. The causes are the usual reasons many mammals are becoming endangered, increased agriculture, habitat fragmentation in urban areas and continuing loss of suitable environments. I will consider introducing them to the park if it is feasible, being nocturnal the dog owners who use the park won't be a problem for them.

The Houghton Hall Park Sunday Conservation volunteers have been busy in the park, our last outing was to remove some Ivy from the trees, something that we will have to revisit on many occasions to keep up with the growth of the Ivy. In the picture you can see two of the volunteers in action removing the Ivy from a couple of trees.



Our Sunday conservation groups will be carrying out various project and tasks throughout the changing seasons in aim to make the park a more healthy and biodiverse park, as mentioned before, habitat fragmentation, in our case, is where a

previously vast and wide area of woodland is broken up into smaller pockets of woodland, it does open it up for people to walk around and brings people into contact with nature which is obviously a good thing but it's not the best way to go for a future that our children and their children need. A balance needs to be struck where people can explore and learn from our surroundings without causing it to be harmed. With this in mind we will be planting more trees and have a 50 year plan in place that will help with biodiversity while maintaining the community contact with the park, no need to be concerned about a lack of walkways, there will be plenty of them, even in 50 years time.

If anyone is interested in joining our Sunday conservation group please contact me on neil.forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Neil

Neil Forder, Community Park Ranger.



What's happening in the gardens?

October started warm and sunny but now the clocks have changed it does feel very dark and the low sun is really shortening the days. In between heavy bouts of rain we are busy mulching our beds with new compost. It is very satisfying and will give the flower beds in the formal gardens a real face lift, as well as feed and protect the plants and shrubs over the next year. It's also extremely heavy as the pile in the carpark has been soaked most days so we are all developing fantastic muscles as we wheelbarrow it onto the beds!

The formal gardens have changed over the years and many of the plants have spread themselves over each other. It is survival of the fittest as the growing conditions are tough! The wind blows through the gardens together with periods of drought, pests (winged variety) and lots of heavy rain. This means certain plants can take over and dominate the flower beds. A great winter job is splitting plants and giving them some space to grow strongly again. Splitting plants reinvigorates them as well as creating a new plant which you will see in our plant sale next year.



It is great to see people sitting on benches chatting in the formal gardens and as we improve them over the next few months, I hope you will see a difference and want to stop there. Our box hedges have made a good recovery from the summer box moth caterpillar infestation and have started to fill out again. We will do our best to protect them next year and hope that we can manage the situation which is affecting box plants everywhere.



Our hardworking volunteers continue to turn up in all weather conditions and help with keeping the kitchen gardens and formal gardens looking fantastic. Thank you to the team for creating the beautiful display for Remembrance Sunday, they are now busy creating handmade Christmas decorations and we will be selling them from the shop in the Kitchen gardens on Thursday mornings. We have a selection of vegetables, kale, parsnips, herbs, broccoli, collard greens and some plants. It's a limited selection but a very healthy one! We are also selling locally collected honey which would also make a great Christmas gift for someone.

The team will be selling their Christmas crafts on Friday 1st December from the Visitor Centre from 10am onwards until we sell out, so please come and see us!

Always keen to find out more about gardening we enjoyed a visit to Ascott house before it closed at the end of October. The Head Gardener, Ian Blayney showed us around and it was fascinating to look behind the scenes and see the historical greenhouses and the old kitchen gardens. We could only marvel at the scale of the gardens with its huge trees and towering topiary. We hope to work with Ian and the team next year as he takes on the restoration of the kitchen garden and look forward to sharing our skills with him and his team.



Keep warm and see you in the park!

Sue Atherton
Community Gardener
Sue.atherton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

Twitter

@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Sun 9am to 4pm



Become a volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

Thinking of giving something back to your local community? 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 Volunteers of Houghton Hall Park, please email hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



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