

Houghton Hall Park

June 2024 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.



Wow we are now halfway through the year and the park is looking wonderful with all the wildflowers blooming, the weather has been unsettled to say the least but we managed to avoid the showers in the May half term for the most part. Fairy Tara and her friends were back in the formal gardens for two shows, along with Moonbeam the unicorn for a meet and greet. Crafting fun was had in the visitors centre where everything fairy was made, it was great to see the children's fairy wings at the show, thank you to our volunteers Yvonne and Pat for coordinating the



workshop. The Stick Man trail was out in the park on the Friday and Aaron from A Children's Story entertained us with storytelling of The Gruffalo and Stick Man, the children who attended the free sessions were enthralled and especially liked the game 'Gruffalo says', Aaron will be back for Classics in the Park telling woodland stories with fun and games. We have lots

planned for the summer holidays, more details can be found in our 'What's On' pages.

Thank you to everyone who has donated bras to our bra bank, we have collected 544 and now have enough to send to Against Breast Cancer! The bin is still in the foyer for your donations. Thank you to our volunteer Nicolla for organising and coordinating this for us.



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Classics in the Park

When: Sunday 23rd June

Time: 10am to 3pm

Cost: £5 to enter vehicle, FREE to the public

In just over a week our third Classics in the Park event will take place on Sunday 23rd June, set in our beautiful park it's a day not to be missed, especially if you love classic cars. In addition to the cars there will be:-

- A selection of craft and produce stalls
- Our popular FREE Stick Man trail
- FREE Wonders of the Woodland Story telling
- Professor Diamond's Punch and Judy Show plus flea circus
- (weather permitting)
- Swing Dance MK will be showing us their moves
- Singing by Jazz the 2 of Us



If you would like to show your vehicle entry costs £5 per vehicle, there will be trophies for the winners of each category and rosettes for the runners up. More information on how to enter can be found on our website <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/classics-in-the-park-2024>

Wonders of the Woodland Storytelling

When: Sunday 23rd June

Time: 12.30pm to 3pm

Cost: FREE!

Join Aaron from 'A Children's Story' at our 'Classics in the Park' event for FREE Wonders of the Woodland storytelling, interactive nature & woodland storytelling, featuring wonderful puppetry, fun for all the family!

Storytelling will take place at 12.30pm, 1.30pm and 2.30pm.

Our FREE Stick Man trail will also be taking place around the park.

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/stick-man-trail-classics>



Open Air Theatre

We have three open air theatre productions for you to enjoy this summer holidays!

The Secret Garden

When: Monday 22nd July

Time: 6.30pm to 8.45pm

Cost: £5 per adult £3 per child

Join Mary, Colin and Dickon as they tell you the story of their favourite place in the world - The Secret Garden. A brand new re-imagining of the classic Frances Hodgson Burnett book brought to you by The Plandits. Suitable for anyone aged 6+ who loves literature and the great outdoors, this heartfelt, energetic show is full of original music, puppetry, interaction and laughs. As the three characters discover the transforming power of being active, the magic of nature and the joy of play, we're sure you'll leave this performance with a renewed enthusiasm for the world around you!



Robin Hood

When: Wednesday 31st July

Time: 2pm

Cost: £2 per adult £4 per child

This musical show is full of audience interaction, physical comedy and truly touching moments. The hilarious characters, fast-paced plotting and brilliant songs will have the audience singing all the way home. The outdoor setting instantly transports you to the world of Sherwood Forest. Suitable for the whole family.



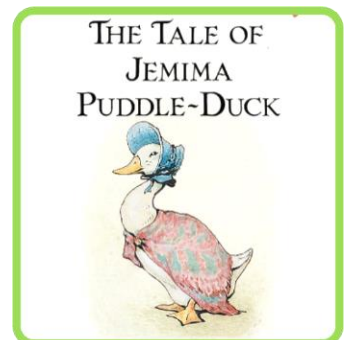
Jemima Puddle Duck

When: Tuesday 27th August

Time: 11am & 1.30pm

Cost: £6 per child adult no charge

Prevented from hatching her eggs at the farm, foolish Jemima goes in search of a nesting place in the forest and soon she meets a charming 'gentleman' who offers her the perfect nesting place in his wood-shed. But why is his wood-shed full of feathers and why is he asking her to collect the herbs for roast duck? Back at the farm, the Collie-dog, Kep, puts two and two together, but will he be in time to rescue Jemima from her fate?



For further information and to book please visit our website:

houghtonhallpark.org/events/events

The Animal Games Trail

When: Starting 22nd July

Cost: Free!

Meet team GB at the Animal Games, see them in action, complete your own mini-challenges, learn about local sporting heroes and win a prize!

The trail is an experience where players visit and collect 10 sporting stickers, each with a unique QR code to scan. They then use augmented reality to see the animal sporting champions and can take selfies with them in AR.

Once they've collected all 10 stamps, they'll be rewarded with a free story ebook and be able to take selfies with digital prize badges 'pinned' to themselves.

For more info visit our website:-

houghtonhallpark.org/events/the-animal-games



Olympic Sports Have a Go

When: Friday 26th July

Time: 11am to 3pm

Cost: £3-£7 per child

Are you ready to have a go at some Olympic sports this summer holidays? On Friday 26th July, to coincide with the opening ceremony of the Olympic games, we will have some sports in the park you may have never done before!

Will you take on the Climbing Wall? Standing 7.5 metres high, are you brave enough?

Try your aim with Soft Archery, a fun way to get an introduction into this target sport.

The third sport you can try is Aeroball, an unusual but fun (and exhausting) combination of volleyball and basketball with lots of jumping around.

For more info visit our website:-

houghtonhallpark.org/events/olympic-sports-have-a-go



Monthly Photography Themes

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

June's theme is: 'Wildflowers in Houghton Hall Park', there are many to be found in the meadow! Please send your submissions to:- hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

The images must be taken between 1st – 30th June 2024 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

May's theme was 'Dogs', thank you to everyone who submitted photos this month, they really made us smile! All submissions can be found on our website www.houghtonhallpark.org

Art & Culture Event

Central Bedfordshire **great lifestyles**

June's Photography Theme

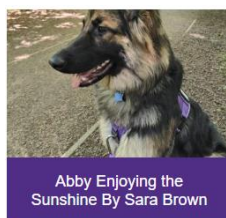
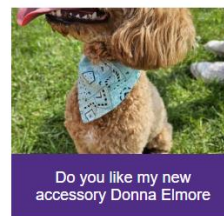
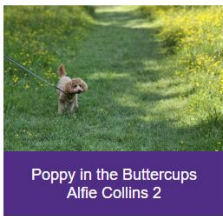
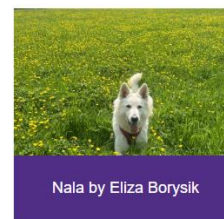
'Wildflowers' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in June
- 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
- Deadline 30th June
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED



Café Chat

Hello everyone!

Is it just me or has this month dragged, but I am glad we have had some beautiful weather!

This month's special is a California Club it's a tiger loaf sandwich filled with pastrami, mozzarella, coleslaw and gherkins! You can enjoy this toasted or cold. We also have a new selection of iced teas and lemonades too!

We would just like to say thank you for keeping us super busy with the Dog show this year and we hope you liked the new food additions, let us know if you would like to see these again at future events!

We have had some lovely feedback, and 5 star reviews this month so thank you and we hope to see this carry on for the rest of the year.

Coming up we have Classics in the Park which is exciting and Hayley the Activity Officer has some other lovely things planned for children too.

Mia,

Café Manager

Houghton Hall Park Café

What's happening in the gardens?

May was "catch up" month after a cold, damp start to the spring. Suddenly the gardens have come to life, and we are surrounded by flowers and lush growth. The spike in temperatures during May confused a few plants, for example the onions and garlic started flowering, so sadly we lost some of them. However, everything else has flourished in the sunshine and put on lots of growth, it definitely feels like mid spring.

We have been busy sowing, planting, and weeding the kitchen garden and formal garden beds. Because spring was so late it is a race to get everything in the ground, as well as the constant battle with our pests such as slugs, snails, pigeons, and squirrels. I've had lots of chats with visitors about slugs and snails and how to keep them at bay. Our brassica bed is still very empty as we've had so many baby plants eaten. I've resorted to thick layers of woodchip and sheep's wool to try and keep the slugs at bay. Our plants look very smart in their woolly jumpers! The woodchip seems to be doing the trick and fingers crossed we will succeed with a third planting of seedlings.



Our shop is closed for a few weeks in June whilst we catch up with gardening jobs. We aim to be open at the end of the month when strawberries come into season. We will hopefully have our first crop of early potatoes then too.

Our volunteers have been working hard to keep the site looking wonderful as well as continuing to



create lovely displays in the kitchen gardens. They are starting to create a children's area in the corner of the gardens. It is a lovely shady spot with benches and a raised bed for growing vegetables. It is great to see it being used by families and we plan to run some family gardening activities from it over the summer.

Half term saw the kitchen and formal gardens overrun with tiny fairies as we hosted storytelling and a show and a real unicorn in the garden produce shed.

Thank you to our volunteers with all their help with this and the gorgeous fairy display on the flower beds.

May was a busy month and thank you to all our customers who supported us by buying our bedding plants. We have sold out but will be growing them again next year!

During May we were supported by a brilliant taskforce of volunteers from Whitbread, they helped with building habitats in the park, cutting hedges and helping to keep our paths weed free. We have also been helped by the sixth formers at Weatherfield School. They helped us with some of the heavy jobs such as creating woodchip paths and tidying the site. A huge thank you to all of them they have made a real difference. We will miss the sixth form students and wish them all well in the future.

I've had lots of interest in volunteering and just want to remind readers that we offer a drop-in session on Wednesday mornings from 9.30 – 12.30. We have regulars and people who can offer just a morning a month, every little helps! Please phone or email me to arrange.

In the meantime, it's heads down as we battle the weeds and work towards growing lots of fruit and vegetables.

See you in the park.

Sue

Community Park Ranger/sue.atherton@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Community Park Ranger Update

Greetings from the park in what is a colder than usual June, May was very wet and it seems that this month is going the same way. With all the rain growth in the park has gone crazy, last year I had to clear pathways of growth in the middle of July but it looks like I'll be doing that much earlier this time round. The saplings that were planted with the help of volunteers back in March have been in competition for light from the surrounding undergrowth, the Hogweed and Comfrey being the contenders has been cut back three times already. It may seem a bit harsh cutting down plants that would if left alone flourish but if they were left to grow, they would overtake and smother the new young trees blocking out all light. However, once they have established themselves there won't be any need to cut back the undergrowth and a natural order will take over where the trees will dictate what happens below them.

The meadow fields, as you will have noticed are providing a vital source of nectar and pollen for all sorts of pollinators with the flowers that are



waving around in the wind. As I'm sure most people will know it's not just bees that pollinate, various flies play their part too though they may not be so obvious and easy to see. In my last newsletter I mentioned how the yellow fields of Cowslip were replaced by the yellow of Buttercups, now we have yellow from a native to Europe plant Rough Hawksbeard or *Crepis biennis* for those that like a bit of Latin. It's a very noticeable plant that can grow up to 120cm, have about 10 heads per plant with each head having up to 100 daisy like ray florets. You may have also noticed the pale blue/purplish flower heads of another tall 100cm wildflower in the park the Meadow



Cranesbill, *Geranium pratense*, a very hardy plant that can survive up to -20 C in the mountains of central Asia where it originated although it is now very common in most of Europe.

On a completely different note, many people have asked me what happened to the wooden bench in the southwest corner of the park that overlooks the meadow and Houghton Hall, unfortunately it was falling apart and becoming a bit of a hazard but rest assured a new one has been ordered and will replace the old one so people can relax and enjoy the vista once again as soon as possible.

Take care of yourselves until the July newsletter.

Neil

Community Park Ranger.

Neil.Forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Nature Notes



Completely unfazed that I'm only a few feet away

Some sightings in my garden have been both amusing and unusual this past month. As I've mentioned before I go out and feed the birds early every morning. Then I sit and watch them as I drink my coffee. I don't have any pets of my own, but do get neighbours cats visit, so keep a wary eye they stay away from the bird feeding area. A week ago, whilst watching the birds in the apple tree, I saw a large shape creeping amongst the branches. Assuming it was a cat I jumped up ready to bang on the window, when the head of a fox poked out through the foliage, feathers sticking out of its mouth. Now I knew they could climb, and they are

extremely agile, as I've often seen them on the roof of my workshop. But I have never seen one climb a tree before. I was concerned that having found an easy food supply it would make a habit of taking birds coming to the feeders. Fortunately, this incident hasn't been repeated and the only damage since has been to the lawn at the end of the garden where they regularly dig for worms.



Sniffing the air

I was replanting some planters last week and found a fresh egg buried in the old compost. This is typical

fox behaviour as they cache surplus food for another time. I put it to one side and the next day only the shell was left. But interestingly later in the evening, a vixen came into the garden and sniffed at the empty shell, before pawing at the newly planted planter, so I assume she had remembered planting the egg days before.

Amongst the various foods I put out each morning are calci worms. These are high in calcium and have a slightly higher fat content than meal worms. I just throw them on the patio and earlier in the week the parent magpies were teaching their three chicks to peck at them. The youngest chick sat in this sea of these worms flapping its wings, begging to be fed. One parent stood in



It's busy at feeding time

front of it, noisily pecking at the ground trying to get it to feed itself. It reminded me of trying to get our children to eat when they were babies.

Another sight I have never seen before was a magpie plucking pieces from petunia flowers and throwing them down for the rest of the family to eat. By the way, magpies are interesting for children to watch at this time of year, as they display obvious signs of teaching their young. They are also extremely vocal whilst they get the young birds to perform different tasks.

Finally, in case you missed it, on a recent episode of Springwatch, Chris Packham explained something that has puzzled entomologists for centuries. The reason why moths are drawn to light. Referring to a paper from the Institute of Environment at Florida International University, Chris explained that it's not so much that they are drawn to it, more they become trapped by bright lights. It's not just moths, many



School time for magpies

flying insects need to know which way is up and which is down. Remember these insects can move in any direction in a three-dimensional space. Honeybees for instance, have three of their five eyes dedicated to orientation. As the brightest thing tends to be the sky, even at night when it is illuminated by the moon, they take this to be up and fly accordingly. Carrying out experiments filming moths in slow motion as they flew around bright lights. Chris explained in more detail, but in simple terms, it was discovered they always turned keeping their backs towards the light, as they assume this to be up. As a result, the moths fly round and round the light, unable to escape, as there was nothing brighter to pull them away. Another example of how inadvertently with our brightly lit towns and cities, modern living is having a detrimental effect on wildlife.

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens



A Mullein caterpillar spotted in the garden

Keep in touch

Facebook

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@BedsCountryside

Website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Email

hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Current Opening Times

Mon – Fri 9am to 4.30pm

Sat – Sun 8am to 5pm



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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