

Houghton Hall Park

July 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.



We are halfway through July and the team are being kept very busy with the day to day running of the park. We had our Classics in the Park event on Sunday 23rd July and it feels like it was the best yet. Thank you to all the vehicle owners who attended, we had a great selection this year including a fire engine and police car! Professor Diamond's Punch and Judy show was a hit with the young and old, storyteller Aaron also kept the children entertained. The sun shone and the day would not have been complete without Jazz the Two of us singing and Swing Dance UK dancing.

It's the start of the summer holidays next week and we have a number of activities planned to keep the children entertained, find out all the details in our 'What's On' pages.

The park had some special visitors last week, the Anglia in Bloom judges were in town judging Houghton Regis as a whole, they are back in the park on 22nd July judging the 'Historic Parks & Gardens' category so we are busy preparing for this to ensure the park looks the best it can be, you may see Sue and the volunteers trying to get the weeds under control in the formal gardens and Neil attacking the brambles by the cedar lawn this week, show your support if you see them.

Our crafty volunteers have created a wonderful display in the kitchen gardens celebrating the Olympics which start on 26th July, the level of detail is outstanding, we hope you (and the judges) think so too!



A great place to live and work.

What's On

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

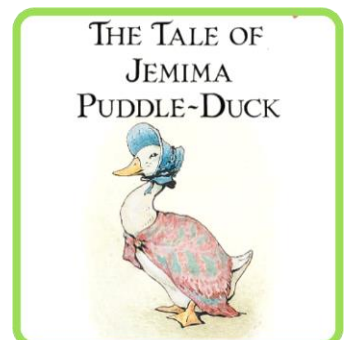
Time: 11am & 1.30pm

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



Minibeast Hunting

When: 24th July 7th & 21st August

Time: 10am

Cost: £6.50

Come and collect a mini beast hunting kit and have two hours to see what you can find!

Your kit will include:-

- An instruction sheet
- Sweep Net
- Bug tray
- ID bug pots
- FSC ID chart
- HHCC- Houghton Hall Creature Catcher
- Tick sheet to take home
- ID sheet to take home

One kit is suitable for three children, all children must be accompanied by an adult, this is a self led activity and the kits must be returned at the end of the session, spaces are limited so book now!

houghtonhallpark.org/events/mini-beast-hunting

Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday

Time: 10am – 11am meet outside the Visitors Centre

Cost: Free!

All levels welcome, the sessions consist of a warm-up around the park and then an exercise circuit, older siblings are allowed in the class however they need to be in a pushchair or be able to run around the park.

New parents can get social, get fit and make new friends whilst most importantly - having fun!

Book in advance, using the following link: -

houghtonhallpark.org/events/buggy-fitness



Monthly Photography Themes

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

July's theme is: 'The Formal Gardens at 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 – 31st July 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

June's theme was 'Wildflowers', thank you to Lisa Basham who submitted photos this month, what wonderful shots! All submissions can be found on our website

www.houghtonhallpark.org

Art & Culture
Event

Central Bedfordshire
great
lifestyles



July's Photography Theme

'The Formal Gardens' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in July
- 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 31st July
- Full terms & conditions at our website





Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org



LOTTERY FUNDED



What's happening in the gardens?

It's summer! Well, it's July anyway and we're into a different type of gardening as we start to harvest our produce. It was great to see a queue of customers for our strawberries a few weeks ago!

We are beginning to harvest our potato patch, so far, we've lifted giant First Early potatoes and we'll be harvesting salad Charlotte potatoes over the next few weeks. The spuds have thrived in the rain and by the time we get to the King Edwards I'm sure we will be lifting footballs out of the ground.



June started with a heatwave and finished on a rainy note. Like everyone, it's difficult to know how to dress for it, layers in the morning and then de-layering in the afternoon when the sun comes out! The warm, humid conditions have meant lots of slugs and snails, I hope the birds are thriving on them! We keep replanting our brassicas, even up to yesterday we were planting swede seedlings. Hopefully some will survive the onslaught of pests! To try and keep a balanced perspective on pests I try not to get too worked up about the onslaught of pigeons, squirrels and caterpillars that enjoy eating in the kitchen gardens. This week we've had peculiar webs of Noble Saw Fly caterpillars hanging from our pear trees. They sit in hammocks above your head wriggling away in groups of 10. I hope the birds discover them soon!

It is lovely to welcome so many visitors to the kitchen gardens and we hope more families will visit over the summer holidays. We love answering your questions and explaining what we do so please continue to stop us for a chat. Our shop run by our volunteers will be open on Thursday mornings from 9.30 am until we sell out. Over the next few weeks, we will be selling potatoes, beetroot, beans, carrots, courgettes and more to come. Our cut flower bed is beginning to take shape and we hope to be selling hand tied bouquets in August.

A big thank you to our volunteers as the gardens are currently being scrutinised by judges from East Anglia in Bloom. They visited us last Monday and met our volunteers and had a tour of the gardens. They will be back to look at the park and wider gardens later in July. Our volunteers have been amazing working hard to keep not just the flower beds but also the paths and shrubberies tidy.



Finally, a thank you to our volunteers and in particular Mark who has worked hard to install our irrigation across the kitchen gardens. It has made a real difference and saved hours of watering.

See you in the park,

Sue

Community Gardener

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Community Park Ranger Update

Hello from the park. July is with us already, the year is flying by, it seems to me anyway. Although the fauna of the park changes at an apparently slower rate the flora is changing rapidly, since the last newsletter in June there are a lot more plants to be seen if you look closely. The meadow area of the park has at least 10 new plants that can be seen, the plants that were growing a month or two ago have been crowded out now that the taller plants have well and truly established themselves blocking out the light and competing for nutrients. I have a conservation group who go out on some Sundays doing various tasks throughout the park, the last two outings we have been recording the plants growing in the meadow area to document what grows there throughout its season with the aim of comparing it to the recordings we will make next year to see what changes, if any, can be seen. Below is a sample of some of the plants that can be seen now. I will include a picture and a little bit of info about each plant but there is a lot more to find out if you are that way inclined.



Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*)

Lady's Bedstraw is a small plant growing up to about 30 cm but in the park at the moment it's only about 15 – 20 cm. It has very small yellow flowers and as the name suggests it was used in the past to stuff mattresses because of its pleasant aroma and flea repellent chemical properties. This plant likes chalk downlands, so our meadow is ideal for its widespread growth.

Perforate St. John's – wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

St. John's – wort has bright yellow, star shaped flowers with tiny black dots scattered randomly. It can grow up to 80 cm but in our meadow, it is a bit shorter. Its leaves have what appear to be holes all over them hence its name Perforate but they are actually colourless glands that give off a foxy smell. The stems have a blood red sap that comes out which is another connection to its name of St. John referring to his bloody murder. It is a very good plant for treating burns, you may see ointments in chemists with Hypericum in their ingredients.



Dark Mullein (*Verbascum nigrum*)

Dark Mullein is another bright yellow plant in the meadow growing up to 150cm. This plant is easy to spot as it stands up taller than most other plants around it. The flowers form along the upper ends of the stem. A plant that is commonly used medicinally, the oil from the plant has been used to treat eczema and the presence of saponins breaks down mucus making it a good treatment for respiratory conditions.

Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*)

Common Knapweed, also known as Black Knapweed, is a tall thistle like plant that can grow up to 100cm. It is a plant that butterflies love, including common blues, marbled whites and meadow browns, it also provides food for birds, so it is a very welcome plant in our park. It is a very tough, hardy plant that is considered invasive in North America. This plant, like many, has been used medicinally for a good variety of ailments. It was once used to identify the man destined for eligible young women, they would pluck all the rays of flowers and put it in their blouse, when the man for them was nearby the flowers would start growing again. I expect to see the meadow full of young women now cutting the heads off...good thing that it is so hardy!



Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*)

Field Scabious, also known as Gipsy Rose is another plant that likes our chalky soil meadowland and you can see it pretty much everywhere in our meadow growing up to 80cm. As its name suggests it was once used to treat scabies and other skin conditions including the bubonic plague. Moths use this plant as a foodplant.

Musk Mallow (*Malva moschata*)

Musk Mallow is a plant that looks very similar to the Meadow Cranesbill that can be seen in the meadow but is slightly paler in appearance and can grow up to 100cm tall. Again, the clues are in the name as to its characteristics, as you can guess it has a musky aroma. Medicinally it has been used for many treatments, the plant contains flavonoids and tannins that have anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant effects.



Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*)

Queen Anne's Lace is a tall plant in our meadow growing up to 120cm tall, in appearance it is very similar to Hogweed amongst others. Its name, some say, is connected to when Queen Anne II was making a Lace bonnet she pricked her finger dripping a spot of blood in the middle of the white flowers. It is in the same family as the carrot as you can see from its Latin name *carota*.

Wild Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)

Wild Oregano is a colourful striking plant that Dean, one of our Sunday Conservation volunteers discovered in the meadow. It was a hidden among all the other plants growing in the meadow and is, as far as I know one of just a few patches in the meadow. Everyone knows it for it's culinary uses and it is also used for making essential oils which are used for many conditions.



Nipplewort (*Lapsana communis*)

Nipplewort is another yellow flowering plant that can grow up to 120cm tall. It has thin, needle like leaves on the upper plant and wider leaves towards the base and a daisy like, flowering head. Its name comes from its soothing, healing properties that was often used by breast feeding mothers. The leaves can be used to add a bit of heat to make pesto, it's Latin name, Lapsana, means Charlock or wild mustard.

Wild plants are a particular interest of mine and it goes without saying, but I'll say it anyway, although I have included the uses for these plants, it is not advisable to go munching or cooking up medicines unless you are 100% sure of what you are doing. The Queen Anne's lace looks very much like Hogweed which is poisonous, and the sap of that plant will burn your skin. On that note of caution, I will bid you farewell until August which will be here before we know it.

Thanks

Neil

Community Park Ranger

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Nature Notes

Despite the recent weather indicating otherwise, it's officially summer and nature is in full swing. Wildlife



A Starling Angel

has been in abundance this past month and I have taken a lot of photographs. The numerous birds in my garden arriving with their second and third broods has been a welcome sight. It's encouraging to see how successful they have been. As I was watching the starlings feeding the other morning, the sunlight was illuminating them from behind and as it shone through their outstretched wings, it struck me how angel like they appeared.

A couple of weeks ago the noise of bees buzzing alerted me to a swarm. At first, I thought mine had taken flight, but amazingly it was a swarm arriving at my small apiary.

They eventually settled on the landing board of an empty hive and started to move in. This is quite a rare occurrence, it's more usual for bees to find crevices and holes in the natural surroundings. Judging by the markings they seem to be Carniolan honeybees and it crossed my mind if they had originated from a swarm from this same hive I lost last year. I will never know, but they seem happy and are doing well.

As Dragonflies and Damselflies have been about in great numbers recently, I thought they should be the main topic of this month's article.



A Broad Bodied Chaser

They are some of the most ancient insects which have been around for over 300 million years. Along with their close relatives' damselflies, Dragonflies belong to the order Odonata and play an important role in nature. Fossilized specimens show that some early dragonflies had wind spans of around 2 feet (60cm.), which would have looked spectacular. Even though modern dragonflies are more modest in size, they are still impressive with their amazing colours.



Four Spot Chaser

Their bodies are divided into three parts: the head, thorax, and abdomen. The head is dominated by two massive compound eyes, giving them nearly 360-degree vision. These eyes are incredibly complex, with some species having up to 30,000 individual facets per eye. This amazing vision helps them spot even the slightest movement. The

thorax is where their two pairs of wings attach. Unlike most insects, dragonflies can move each wing independently, giving them the ability to hover, fly backwards, and make quick changes in direction, which make them formidable aerial hunters. Some species can fly at speeds up to 30 miles per hour.

Dragonflies start their lives in water. Females lay their eggs in or near water, and these hatch into aquatic larvae known as nymphs, which are quite ugly and nothing like the beautiful insects they will eventually become. At this stage of their development, they live underwater, preying on tadpoles, small fish, and other aquatic insects. They have extendable jaws that can shoot out to catch prey with



The bee swarm arriving, the noise was incredible



Bees start moving into a hive.



A Blue Tailed Damselfly

impressive speed. After a year or more of growth, they undergo a remarkable metamorphosis. They crawl out of the water and shed their skin one final time, emerging as fully formed adult dragonfly.

Dragonflies are essential to their ecosystems. As nymphs, they help control populations of aquatic pests. As adults, they eat vast quantities of insects, including mosquitoes, helping to keep these populations in check. Dragonflies themselves are prey for birds, frogs, and larger insects, making them key players in the food chain. They are also indicators of environmental health. Because they are sensitive to changes in water quality, a healthy dragonfly population often means clean, unpolluted water. Despite their resilience, dragonflies face threats from habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. Wetland drainage and water pollution reduce the habitats available for their nymphs to thrive. Conservation efforts focus on protecting wetlands and ensuring clean waterways. Raising public awareness about the importance of dragonflies can also help support conservation initiatives. By protecting their habitats and recognizing their importance, we can ensure that these amazing creatures continue to thrive in our skies for generations to come.



Southern Hawker, the eyes forming a large part of its head.

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

Café Chat

Even though we have had some awful days of rain this month equally we have had some lovely sunny days like the day of Classics in the Park. Just a quick thank you for keeping us and our vans super busy for Classics in the Park and we hope you had a wonderful day if you did come!

This month we have continued on our last special of the California Club and we have brought out two new ones which are a Cuban Sandwich with is filled with Pulled Pork, Ham, Mozzarella, Pickles and Mustard, this can be served in a baguette too. We also have a Pulled Pork Panini which is BBQ marinated Pulled Pork in a Ciabatta Panini toasted with mozzarella cheese.

Coming up we have some fun events in the park this summer holidays and we would love to see you all enjoying those!

Mia,

Café Manager

Houghton Hall Park Café

Keep in touch

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Twitter

@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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