

Houghton Hall Park

February 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.



The snowdrops have appeared in the West woodland and Yew Avenue which can only mean one thing, it's February! The photography theme this month has to be snowdrops, why not take some photos with the children if you are visiting us this half term? Get snapping and send your fabulous photos to hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

Talking of half term we have some great activities planned, on Wednesday 15th come along to the Visitors Centre and make birdfeeders or why not take part in the Stick Man trail on Thursday 16th? More details about these events can be found in our What's on pages.

Are you or do you know someone aged between 13 and 18 who wants to gain new skills and experience in conservation, horticulture, event management and site maintenance? Do you want to gain work experience to put on your CV, on your university application, or for you DofE volunteering? Come along and join Houghton Hall Park's Youth Ranger Programme, Running every other Wednesday 4:30-6:30 from the 1st March to 25th October (22 weeks of volunteering.) For more information visit our website <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/volunteer#youth-ranger-programme>



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Birdfeeder Workshops

When: Wednesday 15th February

Time: From 10am

Cost: £1 to £4

Have you got birds in your garden? Do they seem to be hungry and not able to get food? You want to help? Why not come along to Houghton Hall Park's bird feeder workshops run by our Community Park Ranger Eleanor in half term?

We have two activities on offer which will suit all age groups:

Pinecone Bird Feeder - drop-in session

£1 per child

10am to 12pm

Suitable for age 3 upwards with adult supervision

This session is on a first come first served basis and will run for two hours (20 min max to make the birdfeeder), payment can be made by cash or card.

Willow Bird Feeder Workshop

£4 per child

1pm to 2pm

2.30pm to 3.30pm

Learn how to weave your very own bird feeder and then stuff it with food that the birds will love!

This event is for children aged 7* and over (due to the dexterity needed to be able to bend and weave the willow. Younger children are welcome but will need a lot of help from a grownup.)

Please let us know if you have any nut allergies as we will be using a variety of seeds and nuts to stuff the feeders. (We can make adjustments we just need to know!)

* Children will need help and must be accompanied by an adult



Stick Man Trail

When: Thursday 16th February

Time: 11am to 2pm

Cost: Free!

We're branching out! Come down and visit our fun-filled activity trail featuring popular picture book character Stick Man. The self-guided trail is aimed at encouraging children aged 3-7 to get outdoors and explore the natural world and find out how things grow. If you want to 'twig' how much fun the trails can be, then visit us 11am to 2pm.



There will be a limited amount of free Stick Man Badges and Certificates in the Visitors Centre foyer, please come and find us once you have completed the trail. There will also be Stick Man Keyrings and soft toys for sale.

Please walk, scoot, or cycle to the park if you can, our parking is limited, overflow parking is available at Moore Crescent LU5 5GZ (five min walk to the park) just drive up to the barrier and it will open.

Warm Space

When: Every Tuesday

Time: 9am to 4pm

Cost: Free!

The Lime Room at Houghton Hall Park Visitors Centre will be available each Tuesday 9am-4pm through the winter months as part of the network of Warm Spaces across Central Bedfordshire. Everyone is welcome. No need to book. Free Wi-fi, three hours free parking, and toilets are available (including accessible toilet and baby change) - and a selection of hot beverages will be available to anyone using the warm space with huge thanks to Really Awesome Coffee.



For more information on Warm Spaces and other locations near to you, please follow the link below.

<https://bit.ly/3XwGCNc>

Buggy Exercise



When: Every Wednesday during term time

Time: 10am outside the Visitors Centre

Cost: £2

This is the perfect class if you have a baby, would like to meet other parents and get fit in the process! The park is a great sensory experience for your baby, just getting out in the fresh air and nature is proven to boost your mood and increase energy.

The class starts with a gentle jog/walk/stretch around the park followed by a circuit and sometimes boxing which is a great stress reliever!

To book on visit our website: <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/buggy-exercise>

Parkrun & Junior Parkrun



When: Parkrun every Saturday and Junior Parkrun every Sunday

Time: 9am

Cost: Free!

A free, weekly, timed 5k/2k walk/jog/run at 9am every Saturday & Sunday. Open to all ages and abilities. Organised entirely by volunteers. Friendly and fun.

If you would like to take part but have not run before you will need to register at www.parkrun.org.uk



WEEKEND POP-UP CRAFT/PRODUCE STALLS IN THE FOYER

18th February	Paul Adams - Books & Resin Craft Gifts
19th February	Karen Sharratt - Jewellery & money boxes
25th February	Karen Stephens - Doggy Crafts & Treats

Stalls cost £10 per day, if you are interested in having a stall please visit www.houghtonhallpark.org/events

Monthly Photography Themes

Art & Culture
Event

Central Bedfordshire
great
lifestyles

 **February's Photography Theme**

'Snowdrops' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in February our website, social media platforms and in our monthly newsletter
- Send them to us at: hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk
- Deadline 28th February
- Full terms & conditions at our website



Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED

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

December's theme is: 'Festive Fun at Houghton Hall Park', with the snowy weather we've had this is the perfect theme this month! Please send your submissions to hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

The images must be taken between 1st – 28th February 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

Last month's theme was 'Black & White' which was a very popular theme, thank you to everyone who submitted.



Jade Siklodi



Gill Kuspert 2



Gill Kuspert 3



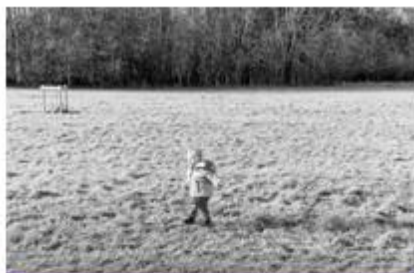
Gill Kuspert 4



Gill Kuspert 1



Chev Eva 3



Chev Eva 2



Chev Eva 1



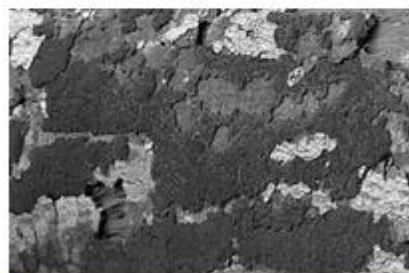
Ruth Jenkins 3



Ruth Jenkins 2



Ruth Jenkins 1



Rita Egan 4



Rita Egan 5



Rita Egan 3



Rita Egan 2



Rita Egan 1



Nicola Wright 5



Nicola Wright 4



Nicola Wright 3



Nicola Wright 2



Nicola Wright 1



Martine C 3



Martine C 2



Martine C 1



Maxine C 5



Maxine C 4

Community Park Ranger Update

By Eleanor Evans, Community Park Ranger

Well what a month of hard work January has been. This month has been coppicing, coppicing and a bit more coppicing. During the week on a Thursday the volunteers have been coppicing, clearing up the woodland and providing plenty of material for den building. As one of the volunteers Anne said 'Coppicing is so exhilarating' if that's not great feedback about coppicing is then I don't know what is!



January's Sunday volunteer session kicked 2023 off to a fantastic start! You've guessed it we were coppicing and finally finished off a very large coppice stool that had been worked on by various groups of volunteers (spanning several Sunday volunteer days and several schools), it took a long time but it was definitely worth the effort!



To finish off this coppice stool we'll cut it down low with a chainsaw, allowing the stump to regrow, in about 10-12 years time it will be ready to coppice again!

If you would like to get involved with our Sunday volunteer session please feel free to email me: Eleanor.evans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Nature Notes

Words by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.

One of our most iconic garden birds is the blackbird, *Turdus merula*, members of the thrush family. Its vibrant song is one of the easiest to identify even though it covers a wide range of notes. They are good mimics, often adding sounds they have heard into their repertoire. Some years ago, one in my garden copied the sound of the phone ringing. Blackbirds are inhabitants of both gardens, woodland and countryside with well over five million breeding pairs in the UK. But as with many bird species this wasn't always the case. For twenty years from the 1970's they were in steep decline, ending up on the at-risk register. Fortunately, from the mid 1990's their numbers have increased to today's steady levels.



A male blackbird in listening mode.

Male blackbirds will start marking their territory, which can be as small as half an acre, in their first year. This is important if they are to attract a mate and once established they will defend it against other blackbirds. Territory selection starts from late autumn and early spring through to July, although they will search for food outside their protected area. After July and the mating season, they become more relaxed about maintaining their territory allowing other birds to encroach their space.



A male blackbird showing its distinct yellow beak and eye ring.

It's easy to distinguish between male and female birds as males are black with a yellow beak and a yellow ring around their eyes. The females are brown sometimes with lighter flecks and have a brown beak, they also lack the yellow eye surround. The beginning of the breeding season is weather dependent but can start up to two weeks earlier in gardens than in woodland. In a good year a breeding pair will attempt three broods, but a dry summer can curtail breeding. Food is the main issue as dry weather reduces the caterpillar numbers, the main diet fed to chicks.



A female blackbird



A young female

Females build the nest and choose its location, generally this will be low down with ample protective vegetative cover. Although they are not adverse to using outbuildings or even building on the ground, which is handy for the fledging chicks as they leave the nest unable to fly.

Garden blackbirds will lay three or sometimes four eggs, whilst those in the countryside will lay up to five. Despite the lower number of eggs, birds fledging in gardens fare much better than their country cousins. Even so only 30% – 40% of nests will produce fledglings, with half the failures

occurring between March and June. Only the female sits on the eggs which hatch in 13 – 14 days. Both parents will feed the chicks which fledge 13 – 14 days later. If disturbed chicks can leave the nest in nine days without a problem. They tend to stay fairly close to the nest site as they learn to fly and will be mostly under the care of the male, whilst the female prepares for the next brood. At three weeks the chicks will be independent and leave the protection of their parents who don't have to force them to move on. The chicks can look very much like thrushes until their adult feathers come through. Some blackbirds, more commonly males, are prone to albinism developing white feathers. These birds are not only shunned by their own kind, but are more vulnerable to predators.



Some blackbirds develop white feathers.

If you want blackbirds in your garden there are a few things you do. Water is important and blackbirds love to bathe, so a shallow bowl of clean water would provide for this. Food is a critical requirement during the breeding season, March to July. I put out meal worms all year round, these you can soak, if you want to, providing extra moisture. You could also plant cabbage plants if you have room. Plants in the brassica family attract cabbage white butterflies, who will lay their eggs, providing the caterpillars the birds need to feed their chicks. Although it may seem counter intuitive to grow sacrificial plants, you get the benefit of seeing butterflies whilst helping your feathered friends.

Until next time.

Mark

What's the latest in the Gardens?

By Sue Beard, Community Gardener



After a busy December we returned to the gardens with an excitement for the seasons ahead.

So far this year most of the ground in both the formal and Kitchen Garden has been frozen which has slightly hindered our preparation for Spring 2023. But we have kept ourselves busy with a multitude of jobs.

After the severe freezing temperatures in December which got to minus 12 we have been amazed how the plants have survived! It really does show the wonder of nature, how it has coped with extremes of highs of 40 in the Summer and lows of minus 12 in the winter.



Time has been spent rotating and preparing the beds for the growing season, designs for the herb and cut flower beds and choosing the seeds to grow.

This month we have been pleased to see the contractors fill in the dip outside of the Kitchen Garden which makes walking the path much easier.

Spring bulbs are slowly starting to push through the ground ready for a beautiful display as the days slowly warm up and the periods of daylight are longer.

In January we were pleased to play host to our friends from Silsoe Horticultural Centre who came to have a look at our fruit cages.

The Safer Neighbourhood Team also joined us to talk about Community Safety Issues and the work they carry out in the community.

It's always busy in the gardens as the volunteers work hard to ensure everywhere looks tidy and weed free!



Another delivery of compost has arrived recently ready to re mulch the beds, always a long and tough task to transport it in wheelbarrows onto the various beds in both the Kitchen and formal gardens.



As we head so quickly towards February time is now of the essence to start sowing the early seeds and ensure all plans are in place for the year ahead.

It is without doubt thanks to our great team of volunteers that all the varied and essential tasks get completed each week.

Until next Time,

Happy Gardening!



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

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



Central Bedfordshire Council



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