

# Houghton Hall Park

## August 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 was supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund.



Look at these gorgeous giant sunflowers that are now sunning themselves in the Kitchen Garden, they are part of our flower patch which is looking blooming lovely! Our volunteers cut the flowers regularly and arrange them into stunning bunches placed in hand decorated vases for sale in the produce hut. They also go into our donations to the food bank, which have started again this week, everyone deserves a lovely bunch of flowers now and then!

You may have noticed something else occurring in the the Kitchen Gardens over the last couple of weeks, barriers have appeared and holes have been dug, we have a mystery on our hands, read Sue's garden update for all the interesting details and a plea for your help!

Park Ranger Neil has been continuing to log what plants can be found in the park, this month his article focuses on the woodland, there's an amazing array to be found if you look closely.

We are halfway through the summer holidays and we have our final open air theatre show on August 27<sup>th</sup>, tickets are still available for both Jemima Puddle Duck Shows. There is also space on our Mini Beast Hunting Activity on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> August. To find out more have a read of our 'What's On' pages. Is there any activity you'd like to see in the park, email us your suggestions at:-

[hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk).



**A great place to live and work.**

## What's On

### Open Air Theatre

## Jemima Puddle Duck

**When:** Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> August

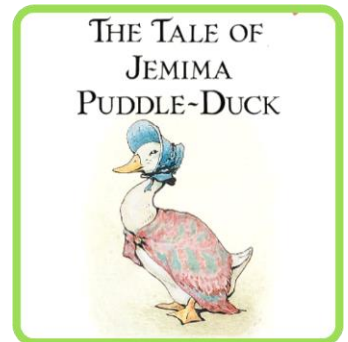
**Time:** 11am & 1.30pm

**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](http://houghtonhallpark.org/events/events)



## The Animal Games Trail

**When:** Starting 22<sup>nd</sup> 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](http://houghtonhallpark.org/events/the-animal-games)



## Minibeast Hunting

**When:** 21<sup>st</sup> 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](http://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](http://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.

August's theme is: 'Light and Shade at Houghton Hall Park', there's certainly a lot of light about at the moment which can create incredible shadows, we can't wait to see what you capture!

Please send your submissions to:-  
[hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

The images must be taken between 1<sup>st</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> August 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](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org/photography)

July's theme was 'The Formal Gardens', sadly we didn't receive any submissions, if you can think of any themes for future months, please email us your suggestions.

**Art & Culture Event**

Central Bedfordshire  
**great lifestyles**

**August's Photography Theme**

'Light and Shade' at Houghton Hall Park

Consider how you can capture light creatively, e.g. shadows, sun shining from behind a cloud, light coming through gaps or leaves in the woodland areas.

- Up to 5 entries per person
- Images must be taken in August
- 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:  
[hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hbp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)
- Deadline 31<sup>st</sup> August
- Full terms & conditions at our website

Find out more online at [www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

LOTTERY FUNDED

## What's happening in the gardens?



Phew, temperatures have finally risen and at the time of writing are too hot for comfort! The kitchen garden is thriving in the sunshine and harvest time is here.

We have been making the most of the warm days and enjoying the harvest of beans, beetroot, potatoes and of course courgettes. The courgettes have gone rogue this week turning themselves into marrows in just a couple of days. We are thrilled with our bean harvest and are harvesting lots of climbing French beans, delicious! This week we will be harvesting the first of the tomatoes. It feels like it has been weeks of watching green tomatoes do absolutely nothing. However, they are finally turning, so we hope to be selling a variety of tomatoes over the next few weeks from our shop. They include, Chocolate Cherry, Sungold, Tigerella and the delicious Sugar Plum.

August is harvesting month and time to enjoy the plants in all their glory. Our cutting flower bed is full of sunflowers, dahlias, rudbeckias and chrysanthemums. The yellows and oranges really stand out in the August sunshine and our extremely tall Giant Sunflowers are as big as dinner plates. With all this comes bees, butterflies and other insects. We have noticed a drop in wasps this year, but there are lots of hoverflies. Hoverflies are excellent pollinators and very useful in the garden. As the weather warms up there do seem to be more insects every day so hopefully there is some recovery after the cold, wet spring.



Our shop is up and running every Thursday morning and a big thank you to our volunteers for all their help running all aspects of this. We enjoy meeting our customers and thank you for your loyal support of the shop. The shop is open from 9.30/10 am and closes when we sell out, which can be as early as 12/1 pm. The income from the shop goes to the Friends of Houghton Hall and is spent on keeping the kitchen gardens and wider park looking good and new projects such as the fruit cages.



Some of you may have been wondering why parts of the kitchen garden are cordoned off. We have discovered that there are tunnels running underneath the gardens which need further investigation. We carried out some excavations and found a collapsed tunnel close the wall between the formal gardens and the kitchen gardens. Neil was on hand with his metal detector to see if there was anything of value down there! We found old bricks, lots of wet chalk and some old metal items. The hole had been partly dug out before, so we found an old packet of McCoys beef flavour crisps (no longer made!) Sadly, no Anglo Saxon hoards!

Thank you to David Hill of Houghton Regis Heritage Society and others who have provided maps and information about the history of the kitchen gardens. We know there were ponds close and possibly what we are uncovering is an old drainage system running under the gardens, which could have been connected to a well or the nearby stream. However, there is more to find out and we welcome information from anyone who knows when the ponds were drained or anything about our mystery tunnels. We will be excavating again to find out more.

See you in the park.

Sue

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

## Community Park Ranger Update

August already would you believe? The days are flying by, and plants are coming and going almost weekly especially in the meadow. As I'm sure you will remember, in last month's newsletter I outlined a selection of plants that were, at the time, growing in the meadow area of Houghton Hall Park, in this enthralling newsletter I will delight you with what is growing in the wooded areas, both east and west. The wildflowers in the meadow are quite easy to find, if they are flowering then the colours stand out, but it takes a bit more searching to see plants that are growing in the darker, less accessible woodland areas.

### **Buddleia (*Buddleia davidii*)**

Buddleia is also known as the 'butterfly bush', because believe it or not it is a big hit with the Butterflies, and Moths too as it goes, it has a very rich source of nectar that they can't resist. Originally from China this plant has become naturalised throughout most of the UK. The familiar drooping purple bloom can be seen from June to October. Quite a tall plant up to 4m high so an easy one to spot. The best place to see it in our park is towards the southern end of the west woodland.



### **Great Hairy Willowherb, (*Epilobium hirsutum*)**



Great Hairy Willowherb is a large herb that likes damp ground, such as wet grasslands, ditches, riversides and woodland clearings. It is the woodland clearing areas of the park where it can mostly be seen, where the meadowland meets the woodland along the western side of the park. Deep pink flowers appear on the top of hairy stems that can reach as much as 2m high and can be seen from July to August. Its fluffy seeds are spread easily by the wind.

Great Willowherb is also sometimes known as 'Codlins-and-cream'. Codlins are actually cooking apples, so this name may well have come from the rosy pink flowers with their creamy centres. It would often lose its "hairy" reference in its name if you were to look it up but in my opinion, it should always be included in the name as the second part of its scientific name suggests hairiness. Although some people consider this plant a weed to be rid of, it can be used as a natural dye, producing a bright pink or purple colour when the flowers are boiled with an alkaline substance such as lye. Its fibrous stems have also been used to make baskets, mats, and other woven items.

### **Enchanters Nightshade, (*Circaea lutetiana*)**

The name sounds like something from Harry Potter, in fact the Latin name *Circaea* relates to Circe, an enchantress sometimes depicted as the Greek goddess of magic, who was known for her knowledge of herbs. There's not a great deal of it in the park, I have only managed to find one small patch in the west woodland because it prefers darker less trodden parts. It can grow up to 70cm but what I saw was probably only half of that. The picture above on the left-hand side is how it appears when you stumble across it, not that



amazing but if you look closer the flowers are quite beautiful. Enchanter's nightshade is a hairy plant that is a member of the willowherb family, rather than being related to deadly nightshade. The clusters of tiny, pinky-white flowers can be seen from June to August. Enchanter's nightshade can spread through rhizomes, which are creeping, root-like stems that move through the soil. It also has very tiny, spikey seeds that attach themselves to passing animals.

### **Wood Avens, (*Geum urbanum*)**

Wood Avens, also known as Herb Bennet, can be seen in a good few locations in the park along the pathways of the woodlands growing up to 50cm tall. Small, yellow flowers appear on thin stems from May to August and are a good source of nectar and is a food plant for caterpillars. The spikey seed heads with red hooks can latch on to any passing animals, your dog could well have helped the spread of this plant. It's thought that the common name 'herb bennet' came from the medieval Latin 'herba benedicta' meaning 'the blessed herb' because the plant was widely used in herbal medicine at this time.



### **Lords and Ladies, (*Arum maculatum*)**

You may remember this plant from a previous newsletter. This picture shows how it is now in the park, the bright red berries can be seen poking up in the undergrowth around the edges of the wooded area. Leave this one alone though, the berries are poisonous.



### **Snowberry, (*Symphoricarpos albus*)**



A very attractive and seasonal shrub related to the Honeysuckle. The Snowberry shrub grows to a height of about 160cm, it has dark green foliage and white snowball like berries that normally start to show in autumn, but I have seen them for the last three weeks or so. The berries attract bees and birds to the park so a good one to have for a healthy environment. This plant is often used in landscaping as an ornamental hedging.

### **Burdock, (*Arctium lappa*)**

Most people would have heard of Dandelion and Burdock wine, the roots of the Burdock would be used together with Dandelion during fermentation. Burdock was originally a type of light mead but over the years has evolved into the carbonated soft drink commercially available today. There is quite a bit of this plant around the edges of the woodland, growing to 150cm the purple, thistle-like heads stand out when it is flowering normally July – September but its cycle has sped up this year and most of the leaves are dying off. It's spikey, sticky heads often attach themselves to our clothing as we walk through the park, for this reason, it has many other common names such as 'Sticklebacks', 'Sticky



Jack' and 'Sticky Bobs'. The flower heads form the basis of the traditional 'Burry Man' parade in Edinburgh - dressed head to toe in burs, as he walks about the town.

### **Wood Forget-me- not, (*Myosotis sylvatica*)**

Wood forget-me-not has hairy stems and narrow, oval leaves. Clusters of five-petaled, azure-blue flowers, growing to 30cm from April to June with white or orange centres but it is still flowering now around the edges of the wooded areas as it like partial shade. This is a very popular plant in many people's gardens. The genus name, *Myosotis*, comes from two Greek words, *mys*, meaning 'mouse,' and *ous*, meaning 'ear', to refer to the shape of the flower petal, which has a rounded shape with a rounded notch in the center.



### **Fireweed, (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*)**



Fireweed grows well in our park alongside the Great Hairy Willowherb on the edges of the western woodland, it is actually in the same family as Willowherb and is also another tall plant.

All parts of the fireweed are considered edible, the buds and flowers make a beautiful garnish and can also be used to make fireweed jelly, which is delicious apparently. The young leaves are often used raw in salads or can be sautéed with other greens in a stir fry.

The shoots also take heat well and can be sautéed in olive oil. Just sprinkle them with some sea salt and a splash of balsamic vinegar before serving.

As I pointed out in the last newsletter, don't pick or eat any plants unless you are absolutely sure of what you are doing.

That's all for now until September, there will still be lots growing, some late comers and some that have moved into their vegetative phase, once the flowers have died.

Thanks,

Neil

Community Park Ranger

Neil.Forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



## Nature Notes



There has been a lot of talk recently on how few wasps and butterflies have been seen recently which got me thinking about insects and prompted this month's topic. One probable reason is spring was cold and wet and everything was late getting going. Crops and plants at the gardens took ages to become established, which was why we had virtually nothing to sell in June. My bees too were very late producing, and the main honey crop is just peeking now, when I should be treating for verova mite and thinking about preparing the hives for winter.

At the gardens we practice a system known as *permaculture*. The idea behind the principle is to work with nature, rather than impose a desired regime on the soil. The term permaculture was coined by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in 1978 as a reaction to what was seen as industrialisation of agriculture; with the heavy use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers. A small part of the permaculture concept is 'no dig.' Which is great if you're not an enthusiastic gardener or don't have lots of spare time. One reason for not digging is microorganisms and bugs that live in the ground all perform valuable jobs in creating a healthy soil and perfect growing conditions. These organisms have preferences as to where they like to live within the soil structure. If we disturb the soil by digging and turning, it would be like taking a block of flats, giving it a good shake and replacing it upside down. You will notice on the raised beds, we have narrow pathways between the growing spaces so as not to compress the soil. The growing spaces are mulched each year to feed and top up the soil leaving the natural organisms to do their work.



Insects more often or not are regarded as pests, and we kill them because they look ugly or we think them harmful. But they play a vital role within the ecosystem and general balance of nature. They are an essential part of the food chain, including amphibians, and help maintain the health and habitats of other species. They aid decomposition and composting, distribute nutrients and aerate the soil. Many of them are also pollinators.

Here are a few of the more common insects we hate but have useful benefits. Slugs and snails might be the bane of gardeners, but they help clean up the environment by eating dying vegetation and even animal poo! They are a valuable food source for things like birds, foxes and badgers and some predate other slugs. A good reason not to kill them or poison them with slug pellets. Wasps are major predators too. The wasps that tend to bother us at BBQ's and picnics are usually male wasps that have been ejected from the nest later in summer. Like male



bees their sole purpose is to mate with the queen, so as not to be a drain on food reserves for winter, the drones are forced out of the nest. They become hungry and are drawn by the smell of our food. Eventually they will die of cold or starvation. Ants aerate the soil and help breakdown vegetation; they also provide a meal for many other creatures. Spiders are both predators and prey and a favourite food of robins.



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All in all, whether we consider them good or bad, bugs, insects and creepy crawly things all have a place within the ecosystem and are ultimately essential for human life. So, think of ways to work with nature rather than fight it head on. Use physical barriers, sacrificial plants or companion planting techniques etc. We can't just preserve the pretty insects like butterflies.



Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park

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## Café Chat

Hello everyone, what lovely weather we have had this month!

I just want to take the time to say thank you for keeping us busy during these hot few weeks, we have loved seeing you all enjoying the theatre, activities and the online games!

We have continued our California Club sandwich over to this month as it has been a firm favourite for all and we also still have our summer coolers and iced drinks available.

My supervisor Emma made some little free seed packets for our suggestion table a few weeks back and it was fair to say everyone loved them, would this be something you would like to see again?

Until next month,

Café Manager, Mia.

Mia,

Café Manager

Houghton Hall Park Café

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## Keep in touch

### Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

### Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

### Twitter

@BedsCountryside

### Website

[www.houghtonhallpark.org](http://www.houghtonhallpark.org)

### Email

[hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

## Current Opening Times

Mon – Fri 9am to 5pm

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](mailto:hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)



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