

Houghton Hall Park

October 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.

We are in October the month when it really begins to feel like autumn has arrived, well usually! The last few weeks we have been enjoying somewhat warmer weather than normal, Neil our Ranger has noticed how the park's flora and fauna is somewhat confused by it, read more in his monthly update. Sue, our gardener, has also noted this in her update, the tomato plants are still going!

Halloween and half term are coming up and we have created a fantastic Halloween Potion Trail for the kids on Sunday 29th October, read more about it in our 'What's On Pages'.

Talking of Halloween, it may be tempting to leave your used pumpkins in the woodland of the park for the wildlife to enjoy, whilst well meaning, we would ask you not to do this as the Woodland Trust and Forestry England have warned that the fruit can lead to a series of problems for creatures - including hedgehogs, foxes,

badgers and birds and spread

disease. Pumpkins are not

natural to the woodland and while some wildlife may enjoy a tasty snack it can make others, such as hedgehogs, very poorly. Pumpkin flesh also has a detrimental effect on woodland soils, plants and fungi. Why not turn your pumpkin into soup or even into a birdfeeder?



Do you know what this insect is? Find out in Mark, our volunteers, nature notes this month, you may be surprised with what you find out!

A great place to live and work.

What's On



Pop-Up Stalls

We like to offer local crafters an opportunity to showcase their products in the Visitors Centre foyer on a Saturday/Sunday, stalls cost £10 per day. There is still availability for November and December, which is a perfect time to sell for Christmas. You can find out more information, check availability and book on our website

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/pop-up>



Halloween Potion Trail

When: Sunday 29th October

Time: 11am to 3pm

Cost: £6 per child

Houghton, the witches cat, is on a mission to find the missing recipe for his mistresses' magic potion which has been jumbled up by the naughty Halloween ghost. With the aid of your magical spy glasses help him

decipher the recipe then come back to the Visitors Centre to claim your prize and make your own potion! The trail is suitable for age 3 up, tickets must be booked in advance on our website, no refunds will be given unless we cancel the event.

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/halloween-potion-trail>



Christmas Wreath Making

We've had a few enquiries as to what we will be doing in the way of wreath making this year, this year we will have a deluxe wreath workshop, Christmas medley workshop and festive wreath kits to make at home. Head to our website to find out all the details.

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/events>

Buggy Exercise

When: Every Wednesday

Time: 10am to 11am

Cost: Now free!



Every Wednesday (meet outside the Visitors Centre), 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 have 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! For more information contact us at hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or book on at <https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/buggy-exercise>

Monthly Photography Themes

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

October's theme is: 'Cobwebs 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 – 31st October 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 and Claire Denton for sending in their wonderful photographs for September's theme of 'Leaves'.

Art & Culture
Event

Central Bedfordshire
great
lifestyles

October's Photography Theme

'Cobwebs' in Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

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

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

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Showing their Autumn Colours by Carol Butler



Wind Torn Branch with Leaves by Carol Butler



Late Woodland Leaves by Claire Denton

Nature Notes

Words by Mark Bolan, Houghton Hall Park Volunteer.



A European hornet

As many of you will know I keep bees and one insect we have particularly been on the alert for is the Asian hornet. Whilst they are not prolific in the UK, the number of confirmed sightings is on the increase. So far vigilance has kept us safe, and all known sightings have been investigated and the nests and hornets have been destroyed. There have been seventy-two sightings since 2016 when they were first spotted at three locations in Somerset. Why all the fuss? The answer is that of those sightings, there have been forty-nine this year alone. Now generally I'm not an advocate of

killing any creature, but when you see the devastation these invasive insects can cause, I can't see we have a choice.

In 2004 the Asian hornet (*Vespa Velutina*) was accidentally imported into the southwest of France. They very quickly spread and by 2022 were endemic in most of Europe, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Jersey also has a population of them. These hornets are very aggressive predators of native insects, including honeybees, and could easily decimate a hive. The biodiversity across some regions of France have been completely altered since their arrival.



The face of an Asian hornet



The face of a European hornet

The annual life cycle of the Asian hornet explains how they can spread so rapidly. In spring following hibernation, the queen will emerge from her over wintering shelter and look for a sugary food source to build up her energy levels. Then she will construct a small nest and begin laying eggs to produce the beginnings of a workforce. As the colony grows the nest is either enlarged or they will move to a new location and build a new nest. Over summer the population will grow to an average of around six-thousand insects.

Between July and November, they are looking out for insects, feeding off the protein rich thorax. Honeybees returning to the hive are easy prey, which is why beekeepers keep a wary eye out, especially if there has been a local sighting.

During autumn the hornet focus changes, to produce as many as three hundred and fifty new queens along with male hornets for mating. Although not all of these will successfully mate or survive winter. Mated new queens leave the nest in search of suitable places to over winter. The old queen will then die along with any hornets still in the nest. New queens surviving to the following spring, will then begin the process all over again.

Despite their fearsome reputation Asian hornets are smaller than the more common European hornet (*Vespa cabro*). The colouration is also different, the European hornet is more like a wasp having a yellow abdomen with black stripes and a yellow face and dark legs. Asian hornets are black with only the fourth segment yellow, they also have yellow legs and orange faces. They should be reported as soon as possible and there is a free app called Asian Hornet Watch, available for iPhone and android devices. You can also send any pictures through the app to the National Bee Unit. Any images will help identify the species, so inspectors aren't sent out, if you aren't sure which type of hornet you have seen. The concern is such, that they don't mind if it does turn out to be a European hornet.

Until next time.

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens.

Community Park Ranger Update

Autumn is upon us as you can see from these pictures of the changing colours of leaves from the Oak and European Hornbeam,



it does seem though that it is a late autumn this year with the temperatures we've been having. Although it's always nice to have a bit of sunshine it causes a bit of confusion among the wildflowers, plants and animals in the park, they don't know if they are coming or going. Fireweed, or Rosebay Willowherb if you prefer, is beginning to flower again, this plant is visible in October but to see new flowers forming is a bit unusual. The yellow flowers of the common Toadflax can still to be seen in patches in the meadowland up until November usually, as is the case also for White Deadnettle but I have a feeling that we will see these plants a good deal longer than is normal.



After doing extensive surveying of the trees, it struck me how much Ivy there is in the park even though I have been removing some myself and it was a Sunday activity last year when I was a volunteer myself. This plant can completely cover a tree taking nutrients, water and light that the tree needs, although there are some who would argue that as Ivy has its own shallower root system it isn't such a problem. It does, without doubt, cover the trees' leaves if left to grow so photosynthesis is not so easy, trees do photosynthesise by light on their bark too so in the winter months it can supplement its food reserves, if the bark is covered then this process wouldn't happen. The added weight to the tree can cause limbs to fall and even make the whole tree fall in high winds.



Apart from general tree maintenance I will cover many aspects of conservation in the woodland, meadowland and the wider park in general and make it a biodiverse park attracting many animals by creating an environment that would welcome them and protect them. October is the month to see Tawny owls, they are widespread throughout the UK where there are broadleaf trees, they are the most common species of owl in the UK, it is estimated that there are about 50,000 pairs although they are on the amber list as a species of conservation concern. If you go for a walk just after dusk you may be lucky enough to see one...or at least hear one. I had heard about the black squirrels in the park but hadn't seen any until last week, I've since seen

five. Originally from America, they are mostly to be found in Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, Woburn is where the first wild Black Squirrels were spotted after escaping from a private collection in 1912.

The monthly Sunday conservation group activities continue, volunteers are welcome to join in for as long as they want from 10am – 2pm, October's is on Sunday 15th. I will also start Thursday afternoon sessions for those that can't make Sundays. If you are interested in volunteering with me, please send an email to the address below.

Neil Forder,
Community Park Ranger.
Neil.Forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

What's happening in the gardens?



It's October but the sun continues to shine and yesterday I was gardening in a t-shirt and shorts. As I write we're enjoying a proper Indian summer with golden sunshine and a warm breeze. Only the low sun in the sky and the dark mornings are a clue to the time of year.

In the kitchen gardens the vegetables have decided to start growing again and our courgettes are back on form producing merrily. Our kale, broccoli and

leeks are doing really well, and we continue to sell out at our kiosk, Thursday mornings start early as we harvest from 8.30 am and aim to get the kiosk stocked and open before 10 am. From then on, the queues begin, our shop volunteers do a great job of selling our produce but at the same time making time for a good chat with everyone. We often disappoint our local office workers who come in their lunch break by selling out before 1, next year we will trial ordering in advance to see if we can help them buy some of our produce.



Currently we have a polytunnel full of green tomatoes and are trying to decide how long to hold onto them. I expect gardeners everywhere are having the same dilemma! Just to make the decision difficult the plants are slowly producing one ripe tomato a day so it seems harsh to discard them just yet! It's also a sad moment when the tomato plants end up on the compost heap, the proper end of summer!

Our volunteers have been busy this month learning new skills and creating new areas of interest in the kitchen gardens. Last week we took part in a flower arranging course run by former Houghton Hall community gardener Jenny Osborne who had us making bouquets and Halloween arrangements. Our volunteers are keen to take these skills and ideas further, so watch out for hand tied bouquets and table top arrangements being sold at the kiosk on a Thursday morning.



Our volunteers have also been busy creating a proper Children's area in the far corner of the kitchen gardens. So far, we have turfed the area and we will be building planters and seating. A large, raised bed with seating is in place so children can sit and plant vegetable seeds. The area will be suitable for primary age school children and we hope local schools and Beaver groups will find it useful next spring. Watch this space for more information. I've attached some photographs of the area and the team laying the turf.

We continue to attract lots of visitors and new volunteers to the project. We don't mind how little you know about gardening, we can teach and also our volunteers find their niche getting involved in other projects such as running the shop or making displays.

The rest of the month will be spent looking after our vegetables and helping the plants look good for as long as possible! Volunteering is not just about digging, we also organize trips and workshops to help us create new ideas and meet a wider circle of gardeners.

So once again, thank you to our hard working, loyal volunteers and to all our supporters out there who buy our produce, or sometimes just stop and admire the gardens. We very much appreciate it and feel very proud of what we do.

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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