

Houghton Hall Park

April 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.

April is the month that things seem to get busier in the park, our activities and events programme starts in earnest, this year we kicked things off with a Dragon Egg Trail, 250 children took part in the trail over two days, they were also thoroughly entertained by Olaf the dragon on the first day. Our dragon egg and mobile workshop on the second day also proved very popular with 50 children getting crafty. We are putting the finishing touches to what we have planned for the May half term, more will be revealed in the May newsletter.



Our next event is the Dog Festival on Sunday 12th May, can everybody send us positive weather vibes, we had to cancel last year due to a heat wave and we're really hoping this unsettled weather clears soon! Accolade Hounds will be hosting the dog show for us again, keep an eye on our website and social media to find out what classes we will be having this year. We have a number of stalls

booked which anyone with a dog will love. Rock Steady Flyball will also be back giving demonstrations and letting you have a go. Your dogs can also have a try on our agility trail.

We are now offering period products in the ladies and accessible toilet of the Visitor's Centre, all products are free! The number of UK women and girls who menstruate who are struggling to afford period products has risen with the cost of living, no one should be without these products so we are pleased we can offer this. The scheme is initially for three months and is funded by the park, we hope we will be able to continue to offer it after this time, if you would like to donate any products to us please contact us at hhp@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or had them into the café.



A great place to live and work.

What's On

Dog Festival

When: Sunday 12th May

Time: 10am to 4pm

Cost: Free to attend £2 per class for dog show

Our popular Dog Festival is back for another year, Accolade Hounds will be hosting the fun dog show and doggy dash, there will be two show rings, one for small dogs and one for big dogs, classes cost £2 per dog and are payable in cash on the day.



Rock Steady Fly ball are back with us showing you why dogs love flyball and letting you have a go!

You can also try out our **FREE** dog agility trail!

As always there will be a number of doggy stalls at the event, if you would like to find out more about having a stall and to book click the link below:

<https://www.houghtonhallpark.org/events/dog-festival-2024>

Buggy Fitness

When: Every Wednesday (term time)

Time: 10am

Cost: Free!

Buggy Fitness is back for 2024! 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!

To book your space go to:-

<https://www.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.

April's theme is: 'Buds & Blossom 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 – 30th April 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

March's theme was 'Signs of Spring', thank you to everyone who submitted photos this month, they really capture all the changes taking place in the park.

Art & Culture Event

great lifestyles

April's Photography Theme

'Buds and Blossom' at Houghton Hall Park

We look forward to seeing what you capture:

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

Find out more online at www.houghtonhallpark.org

LOTTERY FUNDED



Cindy Lea Resting Bee



Cindy Lea New Leaves



Cindy Lea Leaves Unfurling



Cindy Lea Blackthorn



Cindy Lea Aconite



Carla Astley Hollie



Nicolette Kapp 5



Nicolette Kapp 4



Nicolette Kapp 3



Nicolette Kapp 2



Nicolette Kapp 1

Elizabeth Mellor Blackthorn
on Rabbit Lane

Café Chat

Hello again everyone,

Can we just talk about how lovely it has been to see so many of you enjoying the sun over the Easter holidays and we have been loving seeing you guys enjoy all the trails and activities too!

This was the first month that our members of staff have run any trail/events at the Café, and thank you to Katie who organised the two trails over the half term which lots of you seemed to love! It was the classic Xplorer trail which always goes down a treat, this is a free activity, and we would definitely love to run it more often for all of you to enjoy.

Our Special this month is a Spicy Chicken Ciabatta Melt this contains chicken, mozzarella cheese, chilli cheese and green jalapeños - this one is for the spice lovers!

Coming up next month we have the Dog Festival, we will be bringing something very interesting and exciting to this event so keep your eyes and ears peeled!

As always, we love to hear your feedback and suggestions for us and the park so keep them coming.

Speak to you next month!

Mia,

Café Manager

Houghton Hall Park Café

Community Park Ranger Update

The months are flying by, April already, the parkland in general is bursting into life, the meadow field is a sea of yellow as the Cowslip dominates the landscape, they are native to the UK and like chalky soils so



being in a chalky area we have a good few of them. You probably aren't surprised to hear they are a member of the Primrose family as they look very much like a Primrose and also the Oxslip. Cowslips were traditionally picked on May Day for garlands but also for other celebrations, like weddings etc. The plant was traditionally used to treat sleeping problems as it is said to have a sedative quality, as well as the flowers being used to help treat coughs. Cowslip leaves are used in Spanish cooking and have a slightly citrusy flavour. The flowers are traditionally used to flavour English country wines. Cowslips are important for wildlife as their flowers are an early source of nectar for various insects including bees, beetles and butterflies such as the brimstone. Cowslip is also a food plant for the Duke of Burgundy butterfly.

Apart from the very visible Cowslips there are plenty of other wild flowers popping their heads up, Bluebells have established themselves now in the woodlands as well as Field speedwell, a small blue flower on the edges of fields near trees, another small bluish/purple flowered plant is the Ground Ivy found more in the woodlands. There is a good amount of Lesser spearwort around the edges of the woodland, this plant has a yellow flower with five petals and long Spear shaped "lanceolate" leaves and a member of the Buttercup family. Hidden among some Hazel in the southern wooded area of the park I saw one solitary Wood Forget-Me-Not, not easy to see as the flowers are quite small and a pale blue colour.



One of the most advanced and quick to grow it's leaves trees in the park is the Horse-Chestnut tree. The picture here is one of the line of Horse-Chestnut trees in the western woodland that leads from Houghton Hall southwards, although these trees are in their latter stages of life they still put on a good display for their age, they can live up to 300 years and grow to 40 metres high. The "Horse" connection with this tree has a few explanations, apart from its Latin or scientific name *Aesculus hippocastanum* the "hippo" part is from the Greek word meaning Horse. Another connection is where last year's leaf stalk falls a scar is left on the branch that looks very much like a horse shoe shape with holes in it where nails would be. The fruit of this tree, which has provided endless hours of fun for kids, the conker has been ground down and given to horses to help fight chest

infections. The flowers provide a rich source of nectar and pollen for insects, bees and caterpillars which in turn attracts Blue tits. Back in the day, when false legs were made from wood this tree was used as it has a light and fairly strong wood. Plenty of facts for you to amaze your friends with.

The park this time of year for me is quite exciting, all the new life bursting out from everywhere puts a smile on my face, despite what may be happening in the world. We have a Sunday conservation group that helps keep the park in such good condition with a variety of tasks which anyone is welcome to join. With the weather improving it's a few hours of activity where we can enjoy the park and do something beneficial at the same time. If you are interested in joining us please feel free to contact me.

Until next month,

Neil - Community Park Ranger, neil.forder@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

What's happening in the gardens?

Spring is with us and in just a week everything has come to life in the Kitchen gardens and park. Finally! Neil (The Park Ranger) and I are trying not to mention the weather too much in our newsletters ... it's very hard!

In the kitchen gardens, our volunteers have put up a new fruit cage and we are busy stocking it with gooseberries, jostaberries, redcurrants, white currants, blackcurrants and raspberries. Along with our strawberries and rhubarb are now able to grow a wide range of fruits to sell through our shop which is very exciting. Thank you to the Friends of Houghton Hall Park who paid for this. We're all looking forward to a summer of crumbles and jam. What could be better?



Our shop will be open from May on Thursday mornings selling plants and seasonal vegetables. Look out for the signs in the park.



We have also been busy planting potatoes and our first broad bean plants. Back in the greenhouse we have been sowing like mad trying to get ahead of the growing season, it means we can harvest vegetables earlier in the summer. Our growing season is short so it's always a challenge to grow as much as possible across the summer. We also try and stagger the harvests, so we're not overwhelmed by one vegetable at any one time. Germination is taking off as the temperatures rise and the greenhouse and polytunnel are feeling hot when the sun comes out.

To support wildlife one of our aims is to grow as many different varieties as possible, this gives our pollinators and insects lots of food choices and will hopefully attract lots of different wildlife.

We will be selling bedding plants from early/mid May onwards. These can be ordered from us in advance (more information to follow). We will also have our plant stall at the Dog Show on Sunday May 12th. Bedding plants include: Petunias, Cosmos, Busy Lizzie, Lobelia, Hardy fuschias, Dianthus, Begonias, Pansies, Pelargoniums and Gazanias.



We will also be selling a wide range of tomato plants, strawberry plants and other vegetable seedlings for your garden or grow bags. All profits from our sales will go to the Friends of Houghton Hall Park group, who in turn support the park and gardens. Finally thank you to our wonderful volunteers who have had a busy month fundraising for the park, they created another wonderful Easter display in our kitchen garden. It's always a team effort, they have a magic shed at the back of the yard which seems to house lots of props for their displays. Special mention to Carol who can do things with an empty yoghurt pot that most of us can't imagine, she is about to have a bionic knee fitted and we all wish her luck with this and hope she comes back soon.

Finally, please continue to enquire about volunteering in the park. We have a new group of volunteers helping out on Wednesday mornings and there are still spaces available. Over the next few months, we will be hosting schools, scout groups, community groups and companies, all of whom will be helping us look after the park and gardens. We are supporting the town with its entry into East of England in Bloom. This is the first time Houghton Regis has entered and we are proud to be taking in part.

See you in the park

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

Nature Notes



I go out into the garden every morning between 6.30 and 7.00 to top up the bird feeders.

The amount of seed I have to put out varies with the weather. At this time of year there are more insects available, but if it's raining the birds spend more time on the feeders. I also put out a mix of lard, peanut butter and porridge which the starlings love, some mornings they are already waiting in the apple tree for me to fill up the wood block with the mix.

Whilst I'm in the garden, I check my bee hives to see how many bees are laying dead on the landing board. This may seem an odd thing to do, but it gives me an indication on how the bees are performing.

Once the queen starts laying after the overwintering period, worker bees only live for six weeks. They spend the first three weeks in the hive before venturing out on flights to gather pollen, nectar and water. Over their final three weeks a bee will fly around a total of 500 miles on foraging trips after which their wing

muscles will start to fail and they die of sheer exhaustion. Bees are incredibly clean creatures, so aware of their imminent end, dying bees will leave the hive. Any that die inside will be dragged outside by younger bees. So, if I see dead bees on the landing board, I know the queen has been laying for more than six weeks and the hive is growing.

As both days and nights have become warmer, my bees have been more active and the colonies are building fast. I'm hoping I will be able to open the hives up at some point over the next week and

add a super to each. Super boxes are shallower than the brood box, where the queen lays her eggs, and contain eleven frames where the bees will build cells to store honey. This also gives the bees more space as the colony grows.

In both my own pond and the one in the kitchen garden the tadpoles are growing and I'm keeping an eye out for signs their rear legs starting to grow. I have also been surprised at how many are surviving. Usually, I would have expected many to have been predated by birds. In my pond the tadpoles are mostly in an area away from the edge, from where the birds can gain easy access, protected by emerging plants. But at the gardens this isn't the case and I can only presume that heavy rainfall maintaining the depth of water has been their saviour from predators.

Until next time

Mark

Volunteer at Houghton Hall Park and Gardens



Keep in touch

Facebook

HoughtonHallPark

Instagram

HoughtonHallPark

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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