

# Green Gym



## "THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

### Sonning Common

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### Tribute to Len Saunders

Len was a big fan of the Green Gym. I'd been pounding his ear about it for some years, but he was too busy working on his Stonehenge book to find time to join. When it was nearing completion he needed a break from the computer, so turned up to his first Green Gym session (in 2005) with his usual enquiring eye.

As a very active person in his eighties he enjoyed the physical work and fitted right into the friendly atmosphere. A top engineering manager in his working life, he approved of the way we organise our sessions, making useful suggestions from his experience. This was always done with a twinkle, and his droll remarks would spur the group to complete a task, especially when the working method wasn't entirely clear. Setting in gateposts was one job he found intriguing, coming out with all sorts of 'helpful hints' when others took over the digging!

Len was a great advertisement for the Green Gym. Without him giving them lifts several members of our group couldn't have made it to our work sessions. He threw himself into nature conservation with a will, and we shall all miss him at the Green Gym - Julia ..... To read Len's work on Stonehenge go to - <http://www.stonehenge-info.org/>

Len was lovely to work with, always ready for a laugh and a joke, enthusiastic with a sort of dry humour and a ready sociability that made him such a lovely member of our team. I remember him as always there with a quiet caustic and humorous remark easy to talk to and a super personality - Mike

The thing I enjoyed most about Len was his dry sense of humour. He would sidle up to you with a twinkle and pass some comment on some aspect of the work, not always complimentary!. His most notable contribution in recent times was jointly with me attempting to fix hinges

and catches to a gate; by the time we had finished it looked more like a piece of gruyere cheese. He will be sorely missed - John

He was a lovely chap & will be missed by all who knew him - Jules

Everyone in the group echoes these sentiments.



### Tree Felling Course: In early March, 7 SCGG members were trained in

the techniques for tree-felling using hand tools. The day long course, both theoretical and practical was given on Kingwood Common by Cliff Osborne a BTCV approved trainer. We all learned to cut trees to fall slowly or quickly and with a twist if necessary and to use ropes to ensure safety. We all failed the "throwing the rope over a high branch" test.





## Site Focus: Moorend Common SSSI

### Panorama of South Common: Home to a large population of orchids



Geological origins of Moorend Common: ..... The soft upper chalk of the Chilterns was formed as a sea bed in the Cretaceous period around 100 million years ago, when the 'Berks, Bucks, Oxon' region was a few degrees north of the equator. In the Palaeocene, 65 million years ago the Reading and Lambeth clay beds were deposited; followed by the London clay beds in the Eocene 50 million years ago. During the last 100 million years continental drift and tilt, climate and sea level changes, glaciations and erosion have all subsequently affected the detailed geology of the area. Moorend common is unique in this area of the Chilterns because both the Reading beds and the London clay remain on top of the chalk. This gives rise to an area of wet acid grassland which supports a different flora and fauna to the surrounding areas of well drained chalk grassland. Although the area is relatively flat the impermeable clay gives rise to wet marshy conditions all year round with several permanently running streams crossing North and South Commons.

The Commons SSSI is bordered by three other SSSI's: Frieth Meadows, Moor Common and Moor Copse (all overseen by Natural England). Moor Copse is where three of the permanent streams converge and boasts one of the largest swill holes in the country, where the water finally breaks through the clay to the underlying chalk and vanishes underground.

In the 1900's Moorend Common was mostly open grassland with a few trees and some scrub and was actively used by the locals, hence grazing kept the invasive plants down. Like most commons the habitat has changed dramatically post war and the oaks, willows and birches have taken over their favourite habitats. This has happened to such an extent that 5 years ago, of the 22 hectares of common land less than 10% was open grassland. The last two years has seen considerable clearance on Middle and South commons with more to follow over the whole area. The clearance activities disturb the seed bank trapped in the soil and has already led to the re-appearance of species apparently 'lost' to the Common.

One of the targets in the management plan is to encourage visitors of all ages and capabilities. To achieve this, the intention is provide circular footpath walks, which take in the various habitats and which can be used for pleasure and education. A lot of work has already been carried out on South Common, and now the focus is turning to Middle Common.

The orchids on South Common are spectacular with Common Spotted-orchid, Hybrid Marsh-orchid, Heath Spotted-orchid, and Southern Marsh-orchid. Nearby Frieth Meadows SSSI also records the presence of the Green Winged Orchid.

One of my favourites is the diminutive Lousewort.

#### *Pedicularis sylvatica*

The Latin word '*pediculus*' means 'louse' and the common name Lousewort was given to this little plant originally as it was thought that it gave lice to livestock grazing on it. Subsequently it has been found to carry snails and possibly the liver-fluke larvae may be introduced to stock this way. It is a hemi-parasitic plant which feeds on minerals and water from other plants. The plant is also known as Dwarf Red Rattle.



*Dactylorhiza x grandis*

Hybrid marsh orchid -

Which is a Common Spotted-orchid and Southern Marsh-orchid hybrid .

On possibly the hottest day of the year so far a select party enjoyed working in the beautiful surroundings of Moor End Common laying down a path across what is in winter a fearfully wet and boggy area. Ironically, because of the May drought the path was bone dry although as the workers found the wetness was not far below the surface as the posts disappeared suspiciously easily into the ground. Boards were laid on edge to mark the boundary of the path and then filled in with wood chippings that were the by product of tree felling to open up the common. This common is an SSSI and has received some funding from Natural England to open up the glades that will encourage some of the rare plants that grow there. As well the trustees want to encourage use by the community and the path will help to encourage people to walk and enjoy the site. In spite of the heat and the small group a great deal was achieved which was well received by passers by.



#### Trivia Corner

It takes five men and two 'monkeys' to **Green Gym safety at work:** stretch a fence .....



Photo from Sheelagh

Keith holding loppers in the approved style, Christine making sure no-one treads on the fork, Robert ensuring the tree stays upright, Eric supervising, Nick checking quality and Robin doing the digging!





**Greys Court:** On a sunny day, luckily sheltered from the cold wind, we started the planting of a new apple orchard under the watchful eyes of Rachel and Jane. The trees were a mixture of traditional old varieties and a few newer (only 30 years old) varieties. The planting was complicated by the need to make the protection both rabbit and deer-proof. »»»



On Bank Holiday Monday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> Angi and Nick visited Grey's Court: "We spent much time in the grounds and were most impressed by the wood in which the Green Gym had spent several sessions during the last two years tidying up the laurel bushes, and especially clearing the considerable covering of brambles. The carpet of bluebells which had emerged was absolutely superb and covered a vast area of the wood. Many of the visitors were very impressed by the profusion of flowers and a queue even formed on the path while everybody took photographs.

We then walked on to the orchard to check on the fourteen apple trees which had been kindly donated by the Women's Institute. We were pleased to see that these trees all looked in good condition and that there was plenty of blossom on them. It was obviously a good idea of Rachel's to protect them so carefully from animals and human vandals!

Finally we visited the Ice-House, and even there where we had spent time last year hoeing and digging out nettle roots, it was possible for people to walk around it without getting stung!".

Rachel tells us that the bluebells attracted BBC TV and Radio to visit.



Photo from Keith and Val

Magazine contact: Chris Ash [chrisp.ash@btinternet.com](mailto:chrisp.ash@btinternet.com)

Tel 0118 9471044 The Green Gym

C/o Health Centre, 39 Wood Lane, Sonning Common

Enquiries - Robin - 0118 972 3528

## \*\*\*\*\* \*\* GREEN GYM TREASURE HUNT \*\*

Come to a Treasure Hunt (with a tea party picnic afterwards) on Sunday August 15. Meeting place Mill Lane car Park Henley: commencing between 1.30 and 2.30pm .

Please bring all your friends and relations and make up groups.

The Hunt will involve a 2 ½ miles walk (approx) round Henley streets spotting the answers to clues and should take about 1 ½ hours (young people's sharp eyes are most useful !).

Very small treasure for the winners!!!

Bring your own food, drink and picnic gear for tea party afterwards (weather permitting).

Hope to see lots of people there.

Enquiries Jill Kendal 0118 972 2201

**The Reading Golf Club** hedge laying sessions were finalised for the winter season with a large turn-out completing the work on time with help from the Club "green" staff. We have now completed a total length of 55 metres.

