



WATLINGTON HILL

In January 2007 a long term project on Watlington Hill was launched as part of the celebration of 1000 years of Oxfordshire. The Green Gym were to work with the National Trust and the aim was to clear and open up an ancient trackway up the side of the hill. The current pathway is encroaching on the precious chalk grassland SSI. 100 year old yews completely blocked the old road. The Green Gym's task has been to cut down, cut up and dispose of the yew branches chain sawed by Jerry Page the NT warden.. At every session the work descended farther down the hill and more of the sunken way was revealed and it was enormously satisfying to see the progress being made, even if it did mean an ever longer climb back up to the car park!!

The work involved much lopping, sawing and dragging and naturally some really spectacular bonfires.

But it was really heartening to see new flowers and plants growing on patches that had been bare and dead under the shadow of the yews and to see butterflies coming back

Finally in May 2008 the last branches were placed on the fire and a ribbon cutting ceremony opened the trackway. Tired legs and shoulders were quite forgotten in the euphoria of a long term job well and truly done.

As a result of all this hard work Julia Booker is going to enter the project for the Chiltern Conservation awards 2008.

SNIPPETS

Sonning Common Primary School May 10

Dear Tony

Just a note to say thank you and all your accomplices at Green Gym for the fantastic help you gave us in Saturday. I hope you will enjoy watching the library bed develop. I bought the remaining shrubs this a.m. and a nice hose to encourage Mr Butler to water the beds!

Please pass on my thanks to all your green gym friends.

Kind regards Lone Stacey

SCPARENTS ASSOCIATION

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BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT!!

A few years ago a bone scan revealed my bone density was on the slippery slope to osteoporosis. My coeliac condition meant I had not been absorbing the minerals necessary to keep the bones strong before I was put on a gluten free diet. I stepped up to Green Gym twice a week and started calcium supplements.

A follow up scan last week showed my bones are now back to normal - nay they are the bones of a woman 10 years younger! Contrary to former wisdom, it is possible for bones to recover their density through load bearing exercise. So I've proved it: the Green Gym really is good for you!!

Julia Booker.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

A quote from a letter from the Lord Mayor of Oxford to our own Freddy Beesley

"Oxford City Council together with the Oxford Rotary Club annually awards Certificates of Honour to people who have served the City with distinction...I am delighted to say that you have been chosen to receive this award in recognition of the voluntary work you have undertaken with Full Circle in supporting young children at Donnington Community Centre".

Freddy has been doing this valuable and worthwhile work every week for the past year and we would like to congratulate him on this award. Green Gym members are truly the salt of the earth.

Aston Rowant update:

Fred Denton's memorial seat is now resplendent with brass plaque, overlooking the south-west side of Bald Hill in a sheltered sunny spot.



Not far from the seat a few butterfly orchids have just started flowering (end of May)



The recent activities have centred around the replacement of the fence on the north-west facing side of Bald Hill. We spent a damp but pleasant day trying not to trample the early purple orchids which were flowering in profusion (mid May).



Chris

Ash



A reminder of the glorious blue bells and a lovely sunny day working in Flowercroft Wood.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

The final celebration of our 10th anniversary for GG members

ABARBEQUE

to be held at Jules Thomson's house Shepherds Green

on SAT 19 July at 12.30

Offers of help to Diane Gordon



ROBIN ENJOYING THE VIEW FROM BALD HILL ASTON ROWANT Tony Chandler



Nettlebed Common

Work continued on the far site in early May to scrap away the tufted grasses to allow the heather seeds to start growing and over the last four years, this has been a remarkable success story with heather regenerating from the seed bank. On our return at the end of the session, we took the opportunity to visit the Priest Hill site. In the autumn, it is a lovely soft shade of pink heather flowers but in the spring the blue bells provide a dramatically different look.

Tony Chandler

LAVENDER'S BLUE DILLY, DILLY

But it wasn't on this occasion. It was a fine sunny morning, the Kennylands Field looked green and lush - especially round the lavender hedge which was invisible behind a jungle of grass. Obviously a hands and knees job.

Everyone set to with a will to clear the encroaching couch grass. Amazingly there were still quite a lot of plants still struggling to survive. This was a challenge green gymmers couldn't resist. Let's see if we can clear all the weed away by coffee said someone. That was too much to achieve but by eleven's more than half the surviving plants were revealed, the final corner was turned and the end came in sight.

Different approaches to the job could be observed, varying from the full sitting position, legs extended; through the low hands and knees, noses in the lavender pose; to the leaning over holding aching back position. Finally the task was done and then the older amongst us realised that age had caught up as it was very hard straightening knees locked in one position and forcing open fingers stiffened by tugging at the grass stems.



REED PULLING

The newly self-managing Bicester Green Gym had enjoyed our 10th birthday joint scrub bash at Aston Rowant so much that they invited us for a return match on their home ground at Bure Park. Only three of us - Christine, Robin and myself - were able to make it but we were cordially greeted for a session of reed pulling.

Reeds had covered a balancing pond so the stream feeding it could hardly run through. Together we cleared a metre wide channel at the pond's edge, battling with boot-sucking mud. The Bicester group was envious of our waders and are considering investing some - there are plenty of reeds to pull!!

The session ended with a picnic lunch and a tour of the Park to see the results of their work over the past two years. More power to their elbow!!!

Julia Booker

AGM 2008

A well attended meeting heard the Chairman give praise for another successful year, with particular mention of the tenth anniversary events. There was a vigorous discussion of the new BTCV manual which ran into criticism but it was agreed to give them £150 to be used to support new Green Gyms.

All the officers were re-elected for another year.

However once straightened painfully to the vertical it was most satisfying to see so many lavender plants blowing in the wind, hopefully ready to thrive and flower in a few months.

Jill Kendal

VISITORS

The group recently had a couple of visitors from organisations we are closely allied with - viz; BTCV and the Nettlebed and District Commons.

Jenni Hignett has recently been appointed as Project Officer for the Commons and has been good enough to write the following piece about her new job. Asked for a photo she was very modest and preferred to give us the following picture.



The Nettlebed and District Commons are eight separate commons that stretch from Nettlebed to Peppard. They cover 227ha (560 acres) and contain important areas for wildlife, including heathland, ancient woodland and a vast network of woodland ponds. Heathland is one of the rarest habitats in Oxfordshire, which makes the long term protection of the heathland areas on Nettlebed, Peppard and Kingwood Common so important. These areas support important species such as heathers, dwarf gorse, common lizards, badgers, white admiral and purple emperor butterflies.

The Commons Project is a partnership between five local conservation organisations, and funding from different sources has been found to cover two years of running costs. The project has four main aims;

Investigate sustainable management practices to be implemented across all the commons, with a particular focus on the protection and expansion of existing heathland areas.

Consult with local residents and other users of the commons to find the best option/s for expanding the heathland areas. This process will focus on King-Kingwood Common.

Source appropriate funding and resources to carry out management works.

Encourage increased use of the commons by local residents.

Many of you will know me already from Aston Rowant NNR, and I have popped along to recent Green Gym sessions on Nettlebed and Kingwood Common. Strangely, I seemed to arrive around coffee and cake time, what a coincidence!! Hopefully, you will now know a little more about the project, and what we intend to achieve over the next two years and beyond. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of the Sonning Common Green Gym for their continuing hard work on all the commons – without your input they would not look as fantastic as they do.

On our last session working at Watlington Hill we were joined by Jane Craven who is the BTCV Thames and Chilterns (North) Community Project Officer. She is new to the area and wanted to make the acquaintance of Sonning Common Green Gym. her job is to keep an eye on all BTCV and related projects in this area and to offer her help and advice if needed..



She chose a beautiful day when the Hill was looking its best but definitely not easy to work with our usual bonfires. We all flagged with the heat but she was indefatigable and even declared she had really enjoyed herself and hoped she would be back another time.

Yes please Jane!

FUTURE PLANS

The Green Gym always enjoys a new site and a new challenge. In this past quarter there was a new task cutting back the ivy on the trees adjoining the Rotherfield greys to Henley road as they could be a danger to road users. There was also a new site at Temple Island Meadows which looks to be ongoing.

In the next quarter there is an invitation to join the Abingdon Green Gym working on Cothill Fen. There is also some work to do at Benson by the river and there has been a request from Sally Rankin to go and do some hayraking on Mill Meadows.

BADGEMORE

Work at the school has progressed steadily. There is now a splendid gate giving access to the garden up to the fence and at the last session there was much progress with the shelter by the fence. At the next session it is proposed to have the pupils of Badgemore involved with weaving the walls of the shelter.

By the end of the day the framework was finished and the roof fixed ready for the woven walls.



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Green Gym[®]



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

No 16 Jun 2008

ADONISBLUEBUTTERFLY/*lysandrabellargus*

I recently met some of your group of "Green Gymnasts" as they were scrub clearing on an important Adonis Blue butterfly site. After we chatted about the Adonis over coffee and delicious Simnel cake and while we cleared some more scrub off the hillside I was asked to write a few words about the butterfly we had been trying to help.

If you are out on the chalk hills of the Southern Chilterns or the Berkshire Downs in May/June or Aug/Sept you may be fortunate and see the flash of brilliant blue of the Adonis Blue butterfly. There are other blue butterflies but the male Adonis, with a wingspan of only about 33mm, is the most vivid in colour; sorry ladies but the females are much duller being a grey-brown. Both males and females have black and white chequered edges to their wings which is different to other blue butterflies, that is with the exception of the Chalkhill Blues.



To breed, the needs of the

- a) Warm south facing chalk hillside
- b) Horseshoe Vetch *hippocrepis*
- c) Attendance by *Myrmica*

When the eggs hatch the caterpillars and after the first moult begin to tend the ants. The ants, in return for the caterpillars, eventually taking them to their nests where it is time for the caterpillars to pupate and emerge as adult butterflies.

Conservation of the Adonis Blue relies on maintaining short vegetation, containing plants of horseshoe vetch, on steep south facing chalk hillsides so the sun can warm the chalk to enable the ants to stay active over the long period required to care for the Adonis in its larval form.

Adonis are very specific:

with short turf.

comosa on which the eggs are laid.
sabuletiants.

Ants feed on the horseshoe vetch and secrete a honey and sing to attract the butterflies, tend and protect the underground into their nests until

Maureen Cross *Adonis Champion, Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation March 2008*

GATE CAPERS

It was a cold and frosty morning but a hardy group of Green Gymmers gathered behind Julia Booker's house, ready to put in a gate where the public footpath crosses her field replacing a wobbly stile.



Tony Chandler organised everyone into groups, each with a task. One group was fitting the gate furniture and hinges; and another had the task of removing the

stile - a few well placed kicks soon saw to that - then digging the holes into which to fit the gate post. As ever the ground was hard and stony but everyone took turns with crowbar, spade and the eccentrically named shoveholer.

And when it got too deep naturally what should one do but get right down



to taking out the earth the old fashioned way, by hand.

Once the post was securely rammed in

the hinges were fixed and the gate hung. However this was by no means the end as the other post had to be fixed; the ground was just as hard and stony and by now the cold was creeping in to tired bones. Now the moment of truth - was it in just the right place to enable the clever two way gate catch to function? It took delicate adjustment, followed by hitting with a hammer before it was all finished and was swinging perfectly.



Job well done!!