

# Green Gym<sup>®</sup>



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

**full of little cuttings.**

Number 56 June 2018

### Cleeve Water Meadow

We spent two consecutive Thursdays at Cleeve Water Meadow, fortunately both days were dry and sunny. The main task was to build up the stockade where it had suffered winter and flooding damage. One group cleared the vegetation alongside the tow path whilst new stakes were collected and shaped ready before infilling with willow whips. We also checked one section of the meadow for flood debris as several pieces of fallen tree branches had been dropped there by the floodwater. The Lodden lilies were flowering well and one area required stinging nettle weeding. On the second visit, the stockade was finished further along the tow path, whilst another group cleared vegetation from the path towards the river and then laid bark chipping to improve it. We were very pleased to welcome back Greg, who came with new carer Charlie. They soon got the hang of wheeling the chippings for the path. Then it was more nettle weeding. As it had rained the day before, the roots were coming out of the ground in wonderful long lengths...a very satisfying job as long as you didn't get stung! And on both sessions, Brian had wonderful bonfires, which was a great help in clearing for Charlotte.

-Susan-



While working alongside the stockade we saw several orange tip butterflies, a sure sign spring was on the way. They like to lay their eggs on garlic mustard in hedgerows and on cuckoo flower, which grows in damp places like Cleeve WM. The female, which doesn't have the orange tips but is green on the underside, lays her eggs under the leaves. When they hatch, the caterpillars are cannibalistic and it is thought that a single cuckoo flower plant can only sustain one larvae. Brimstone butterflies were also about, no doubt passing through in their search for buckthorn, the food plant for their larvae.

-Julia-

Brimstone  
butterfly



Orange  
tip butterfly



## Cleeve Water Meadow Report

Des Sussex from Natural England visited Cleeve Water Meadow recently, this site is managed under a Higher Level Stewardship scheme with their guidance. Des was very pleased with the progress and glad to see the Loddon Lillies spreading so well and also the stands of Meadowsweet, Angelica, Valerian, Meadow Rue and Yellow Loosestrife. He was also impressed with the 'fen' type vegetation in the third of the meadow nearest the river including Great Pond Sedge, the Common Reed and the Reed Sweet Grass. He advised that we continue to manage the 'weed' species during the summer by working in high priority small areas and where the docks are numerous stop them seeding. Des also liked the areas of open water in the channel where we spotted some toad tadpoles and the stockade which provides good cover for wildlife.

-Charlotte-

## Saga Magazine interview

Keith and I were interviewed over the telephone recently by a Saga Magazine journalist for an article about Green Gyms. They were preparing a 2-page spread focusing on SCGG as a 'typical' Green Gym. Of course we are far too young to qualify for Saga, but Keith and I gave of our best a couple of days before the photo shoot at Aston Rowant. Saga's photographer wanted to take pictures of the group at work, so Mick Venters lined up for us some appropriate tasks: fence renewal and scrub clearance.



The Reserve was looking particularly lovely in glorious spring sunshine, but the photographer set up his camera in a dark corner under a hawthorn. Keith and I were posed there each side of a stock fence, faces lit by four arc-lights on tall stands. The rest of the gang had to look busy on the fence behind us but in the sunshine. Each time they slacked the photographer roared and we giggled, thereby creating the composition he sought. After coffee he took a group photo in front of Mick's Landrover and some action pictures of drivalls and monkey strainers.

It will be interesting to see how SCGG comes across in the article when published. Will it spawn an influx of new volunteers?

-Julia-



## Aston Rowant

When it comes to clearing a fence line and uprooting small scrub, we are past masters at it. Despite some rain in the wind, the tasks were completed, all the cut scrub was burnt including that which needed to be dragged down the hill to the fire site after a team of tree popper users had cleared a large area of the field.

-Tony-



Park Wood Nuffield, one of our sites has recently been used for filming. The owners, Nuffield College Oxford, charged the film company £800. The bursar of the College decided that the money should be donated to the Sonning Common Green Gym in recognition of the "fantastic and hugely beneficial work that we have done there"

We have been asked to go back when convenient to continue our clearance of the holly etc.

Praise indeed.

-Brian-



### Peppard Common

Surprise visitors at the end of coffee, Chris and Sheelagh came to bid farewell yet again as they start off on another year's adventure Down Under. Today we were clearing bramble and saplings from close to the heather. Our finds included Amber jelly fungus, *Excidia recisa* and a very curled-up millipede, which eventually decided to show us how long he was. A good mornings work was achieved.

-Susan-



### Valley Road Chalk Bank

The Green Gym tackles almost any site, brambles, undergrowth water mud, but I reckon the Valley Road one takes some beating. Replacing steps on a gradient of at least one in three and cutting back brambles and rampant growth on a similar slope are quite a challenge but one energetically taken on by a select band of Gymmers. The job was not helped by finding the wrong poles had been supplied; but this was but a small hiccup. Old steps were excavated and earth scraped away, new risers put in place and held in place by small uprights banged in and the whole backfilled --- Oh, and it was very hot and humid. The coffee break was an interesting exercise in horizontal logistics. Two steps were flattened and cake and drink were supplied on two levels; and workers managed to stagger up and down the steep path to pick up coffee and /or cake. (Thank you Freddy for much appreciated sustenance). And finally there was a variety act put on by Jill as she tripped, staggered and fell, only to rise again still holding her full mug of coffee with a flourish.

In spite of all hazards, as usual, a great job was completed to the satisfaction of all concerned.

-Jill-

### A visit to Hounslow Heath Green Gym

A small contingent from SCGG went to visit Hounslow Heath Green Gym for a work session one hot Tuesday in May. We were there to give some encouragement from old hands as they had recently become self-managing. Hounslow Heath is their only site but it is vast and provides a variety of habitats including woodland, ponds, reed beds, meadows and of course heathland.

Our task was cutting out gorse, broom and birch saplings from the heather, but without digging up the roots as this would enrich the soil too much for heather to thrive. At the break hot drinks and a selection fruit were provided, greatly appreciated despite our subversive mention of home-made cakes.

Alison, Robert and I enjoyed getting to know the HHGG volunteers, although conversation was frequently drowned out by planes taking off from Heathrow directly over our heads. Luckily for HHGG most of their sessions are undisturbed this way, depending on wind direction.

-Julia-



### Flowercroft Wood

On a lovely sunny day, those of us who parked at Rotherfield Greys Church had a very muddy walk to reach the most idyllic wood in the middle of nowhere. It was so peaceful, just the odd helicopter but no road traffic sounds. This was my first visit although GG have been coming for some years. It is privately owned and the owner was there with some of his family members helping too. Except for a small group who were struggling with removal of a half-fallen tree, we were lopping off the tree saplings and



applying poison to the stumps on a chalk bank. This is facing the sun and full of chalkland flowers and butterflies in the Summer. It is always great to learn something new and we were shown the different saplings and I now know how to recognise Spindle in its juvenile state. It is very green and quite square. Originally spindle was used to make spindles for spinning wool, hence its name. I was also shown Spurge Laurel for the first time. I think it is an indicator of ancient woodland. We were invited to go back in the Summer to see the bank in bloom, I reckon it is definitely worth doing.

-Susan-

### Your editor's adventures- the bracing Bempton Cliffs

It's scary to think I have been up in Yorkshire for over two months already. The fog when I first arrived made me doubt there were any cliffs or birds at all, but it made for a great reveal when it cleared, sheer cliffs and surprisingly only a handful of birds. It was a very slow start to the season, with poor weather the birds were slow coming back onto the cliffs and were several weeks late laying eggs. But we are now in full swing of things, with the cliffs brimming with birds, and many chicks hatching at the moment. I monitor seabird productivity, I have about 400 nests which I watch to check for eggs and chicks, including gannets, razorbills, guillemots, herring gulls and kittiwakes.

It is a fantastic place to work, although still really quite cold on most days. I am often sitting still for 6-7 hours so the six layers including thermals are needed in 30mph winds, even in June! While I am usually found staring down my telescope, I am often interrupted by the continual question: 'Are there any puffins?' by the stream of visitors. They are the star of the show and all people want to see.



Mid-May with six layers on...



### Moorend Common

A morning re-coppicing some trees along the footpath and around the middle Common to let more light in and dry them up.

-Ian-



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