

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 61 September 2019

Bracken

Pteridium aquilinum, that must be some rare plant I thought.

How wrong I was

I think the Green Gym has seen more of this than any other species this summer. Yes, of course it is our friend – bracken! We have been in close contact with it from tiny young tentative spears at Moor End Common to head high wild proliferation on Peppard and Nettlebed Commons and many places in between.

Here are a few facts about this ubiquitous plant.

It is a genus of large, coarse ferns in the family Dennstaedtiaceae. (I think I'll stick to 'bracken').

Pteridophyta are plants that have alternating generations; large plants that produce spores, and male plants that produce sex cells (smaller needless to say).

It is a native British fern, tolerant of a wide range of soils and climates. (and how!)

It is fern like producing triangular fronds divided into three

It is a very ancient plant with fossil records dating back 55 million years.

It has thick fleshy underground stems with extensive underground rhizomes. (No wonder it outwits our puny efforts and keeps coming back).

-Jill-



It isn't all eating cake, we do do lots of heavy work!

Aston Rowant

Our July session took us to Bald Hill which it isn't. It's a wild flower SSSI within the National Nature Reserve. One group cleared a post and wire fence line at one of its sides and the rest worked to dig up or lop small scrub regeneration, mostly hawthorn, while leaving the rose bushes. We used tree poppers to lock onto the stem and then lever out. A moderate breeze was ideal to keep us cool particularly when the sun came out. We enjoyed a range of butterflies with several Dark Green Fritillaries hoping about.



Steph says :-

Just a quick note to thank you and the team for your work today – really great to have tackled that challenging fencing line, and Bald Hill is looking really good – it's a good time of year to get on top of all that small hawthorn before it becomes a bigger problem!

-Tony-

Flowercroft Wood

We returned to Flowercroft Wood to open up a very overgrown area which was originally a glade. The idea was to remove all the scrub by hand, and later Andrew, the owner, would return to poison the stumps. This will encourage regeneration of the chalkland flowers. Andrew reminded us how to recognise Spindle, *Euonymus europaeus*, with its green stalks. There is quite a lot in his wood and in the area where we were working. It was originally used to make spindles for spinning wool, hence its common name. Sadly much of it had to come out although we were assured that there is plenty more!



Andrew has many rare plants including Dodder, *Cuscuta epithymum*. This is a parasite which grows on Thyme on his sunny, chalk bank. The seeds germinate in the ground as per usual, throwing up thready stems which climb, entwining themselves around their host plant, drawing nutriment from it. The flowers are in dense, round heads with each flower being small, light flesh coloured and wax-like. Soon after flowering the stems turn brown and disappear in winter. It was used medicinally. The freshly gathered threads were boiled in water with ginger and allspice producing a concoction used for urinary complaints, as well as kidney, liver and spleen diseases. It was considered to be useful for jaundice as well as sciatica.



It is quite amazing how much 15 people can achieve in a short time. We started quite late due to the long walk from Rotherfield Greys Church and finished early to enable our return on time. The walk too was interesting as the footpath passed through mown grass and then along an old green lane, which no doubt was used by drovers in days of yore.

-Susan-

Visit to Burnt Platt, Saturday 28th September 2019

Saturday dawned cloudy and drizzly but with a prospect of brighter weather by late morning.

We arrived at the Burnt Platt site in Kingwood with equipment to open up an area that would make it a suitable habitat for reptiles and invertebrates whose numbers had been in steady decline due to tree and bracken growth over several years.

We needed to cut down small and medium sized conifers and other tree saplings and do oceans of nettle pulling to create an open glade around 40 metres square that would encourage regrowth and colonization of heather and at the same time provide suitable habitats for reptiles such as grass snakes, smooth snakes and lizards.

To protect the area, we processed the cut trees and used them to start to build dead hedges to surround the area which would also keep out dogs and other wildlife that inhabit the locality.

The morning's work was very satisfying as we could clearly see the fruits of our efforts. However, more visits will be needed to fully complete the task.

A couple of photographs, (before and after) show the progress made so far.

-John Hasler and Martin Rhodes-



THE BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

There's been more stuff recently in the medical press about the benefits of physical activity as more and more information comes to light. It's now reckoned that inactivity contributes to as many deaths as smoking!

It's important to emphasise that you don't have to be "exercising" to benefit. Physical activity can mean all kinds of different things. Everything we do at the Green Gym helps. We know from the original research that being at the Green Gym regularly is as good as if not better than conventional stuff in a gym. And always better than medication.

Just 10 minutes brisk walking a day is enough to help:

- Benefits to health start at just 30 minutes of physical activity a week
- Physical activity can reduce death from all causes – much more than taking pills
- Risk of harm from moderate physical activity is small (even if the fork prongs are left the wrong way up!)

Some other points about the benefits of physical activity:

- Walking reduces your body fat more than playing sports
- Older people are much less likely to fall
- The risk of dementia, depression, some cancers, heart disease and stroke goes down by a third.
- Moderate intense physical activity for 15 minutes a day can increase your life expectancy by three years

Now doesn't that make you feel good?

-John-

Spring Wood

It is not often I show a picture of Green Gymers not actually working but here goes. We are at Spring Wood on one of our regular holly bashing sessions (makes a change from rhodi bashing though just as enjoyable) It is one of those beautiful Summer days we have enjoyed so much this year. 'Come back for a drink' says our genial hosts and clients Robert and Rebecca Bell and so we stand around on the lawn and but for our working dress it could be a manicured garden party. Drinks all round with Henry lolling back in a comfy chair. There is just something essentially Summery about the sun glinting through a cold glass of white wine. Green plastic mugs coffee and cake different but just as excellent!

-Mike S-



Heather Hide and Seek!

The title of this day's work should have been "heather hide and seek"!

Back to Nettlebed to weed the bracken out of the heather yet again. This back-breaking task is never ending. I was very disappointed to see how many brambles had regrown and were looping over to make new plants. It doesn't seem very long ago that Team Nettlebed (our very own Commons volunteer group) were up there pulling them all out. We shall have to return to get them out later on. But what a difference having GG there to remove the bracken. The heather at the far end was almost



invisible and after only half a morning's work....hey presto... there is was in all its purple glory. Thank you so much to all for their hard work on such a very hot day and also to Frankie for delicious cakes especially the apple cake.

-Susan-



Hurst Water Meadows

Saturday 7th September 2019 dawned crisp and clear at Hurst Water Meadows. 14 intrepid volunteers plus a further 3 people from the Hurst Water Meadows Conservation group (HWMCG) met near the Dorchester on Thames at the confluence of the rivers Thame and Thames charged with clearing an overgrown area that had been planted with tree saplings by the HWMCG around 3 years previously.

The area we were tackling was around 50m by 20m and looked a little daunting at 09:30 and the small trees were barely visible at the start of the morning, but this was not to last too long. Thanks to our tools which also included scythes and excellent technique we tore into the vegetation and by break time around 58% of the task had been completed.

A fine spread of cakes was a positive discouragement to us restarting as it seemed almost churlish not to sample all the wares on offer.

Eventually, post tea break, we worked steadily to complete the task which by coincidence we completed at the end of the session at precisely 12:15.

All of the cut and pulled material was stacked in large habitat piles under larger bushes and trees thus providing shelter to various fauna over the winter time.

All in all a splendid days work that we all enjoyed immensely as the photo below, taken at the end of the session, clearly shows.

-Martin-



Withymead

How lovely it was to return to Withymead as I hadn't been there for a couple of years. We were asked to clear back paths through the wooded area and then along beside the boardwalk. Green Gym built this board walk many years ago before my time and I have been coming now for over 7 years. It was very pleasant to be in the shade of the wood on such a hot day but then we were in full sun along the boardwalk. The trustee, in charge of our work, couldn't quite remember the names of 2 plants I asked her about. Both Jill Kendall and I decided to try and sort it out. The trustee thought the one with the yellow flowers was *Hypericum*. There are many varieties of this, commonly referred to as St John's Wort but not one fitted. After a good search through many flower books, I used Keble Martin's Concise British Flora in Colour to identify the plant as Yellow Loosestrife, *Lysimachia vulgaris*, which of course likes damp places. An ancient Greek physician, Pedanius Dioscorides (40-90AD) wrote about it in his encyclopaedia of herbal medicine where it was recommended for wounds and to stop nosebleeds. The smoke from burning it could keep snakes and flies at bay. Maybe that is what I need at this time of year when working in the heat! Jill was quite satisfied with my detective work. I think we were led on a bit of a wild goose chase by the trustee.

The other plant I think is Gipsywort, *Lycopus europaeus*, which again is common in rivers and ditches. It has mint-like flowers in whorls on a square stem. The leaves are very reminiscent of stinging nettle leaves and it belongs to the same family along with the nettles and mints. The juice from the Gipsywort gives a black dye which was once used for dyeing fabrics. Fortune sellers used to use the dye for their skin to make them look more like Egyptians and thus more mysterious. Medically the plant was used as an astringent and as a sedative to treat anxiety.

-Susan-



Lopper Editor: Imogen Lloyd
imogen.lloyd@dbmail.com
Tel 07557 917884

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

Enquiries- Robin- 0118 9723528