

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 62 December 2019

Season's Greetings To All Sonning Common Green Gymers and all our site owners. A very Happy New Year.

Imogen Lloyd



Our Lopper editor has done us proud by producing loppers 54 to 61 and in particular while off area. She has spent a lot of time in Yorkshire wilding and bird monitoring but now is spreading her wings and migrating to the north island of New Zealand for five months. She paid us a farewell visit to Cleeve and could not stop larking about and pretending to be a tree creeper!

At Greys Court she was presented with a GG mug and parting words from our chairman, John Hasler.

Bon Voyage

Big Butterfly Count 2019 Ewelme

Between 19th July and 11th August 113,502 people across the UK spent 15 minutes counting and identifying butterflies in a single spot and then sending the results to Butterfly Conservation. An identification chart was provided for participants with 19 of the commonest butterflies pictured on it. Some of us at Ewelme on August 3rd agreed to sacrifice

part of our coffee break to participate in this "Big Butterfly Count." The challenge was to get the butterflies to stay still long enough for them to be correctly identified.

During our 15 minutes, standing just below the bridge at Ewelme we counted 11 Small Tortoiseshells, 1 Meadow Browns, 3 Large Whites, 1 Small White and 2 Red Admirals. The climax came when one remarkably cooperative butterfly landed on my chart so that not even I could fail to observe its naval superiority.

Mike Macleod

Watlington Hill

What a pleasure to return to Watlington Hill, the first time since Jerry has left about 18 months ago. The task of the morning was to remove all the raked heaps of mowings to the undergrowth. The weather forecast was for rain but fortunately we were in a low damp cloud to start with, so no views until we were due to walk back. The rain didn't come down seriously until we were back at the car park.

The task was what I refer to as "a Rumpelstiltskin job", in other words one that is unending and unlikely to be finished that day! Rumpelstiltskin was set to spin straw into gold for the princess in exchange for her first-born child, and as soon as he finished one roomful he was put into a room with a much larger pile of straw, just in case you can't remember your fairy tales!

My photo shows a triple heap to remove and even with 3 of us working together it took ages. How satisfying to eventually get to the earth underneath. A large number of us had ventured out and we were augmented by several NT volunteers, who usually work at Coombe Hill above Aylesbury, but there was still some left to move after our time was up!

Susan Byers



South Stoke Recreation Ground

On Saturday 19th October we visited South Stoke Recreation Ground once more. On other occasions we have lopped and trimmed this time we dug and raked, stretched and tied. The task was to dig a long trench close to the railway fence then insert chicken wire to deter burrowing rabbits. Or was it rabbit wire to deter burrowing chickens, I forget.

The required stretch was the whole of one side of the field really requiring at least one more visit. However, on a lovely bright morning we completed one large coil of wire and numerous black and white ties to keep the wire close to the railway fence.

The soft earth provided a wonderful bed for planting a host of daffodil bulbs kindly provided by Tony. Many thanks Tony, a great addition.

Of course, *mea culpa*, I forget I was cake monitor. Luckily for me I knew the shop had a goodly supply, so that was readily sorted. And I really look forward to seeing those daffs coming on they will make a lovely show.

Mike Sanders



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!)

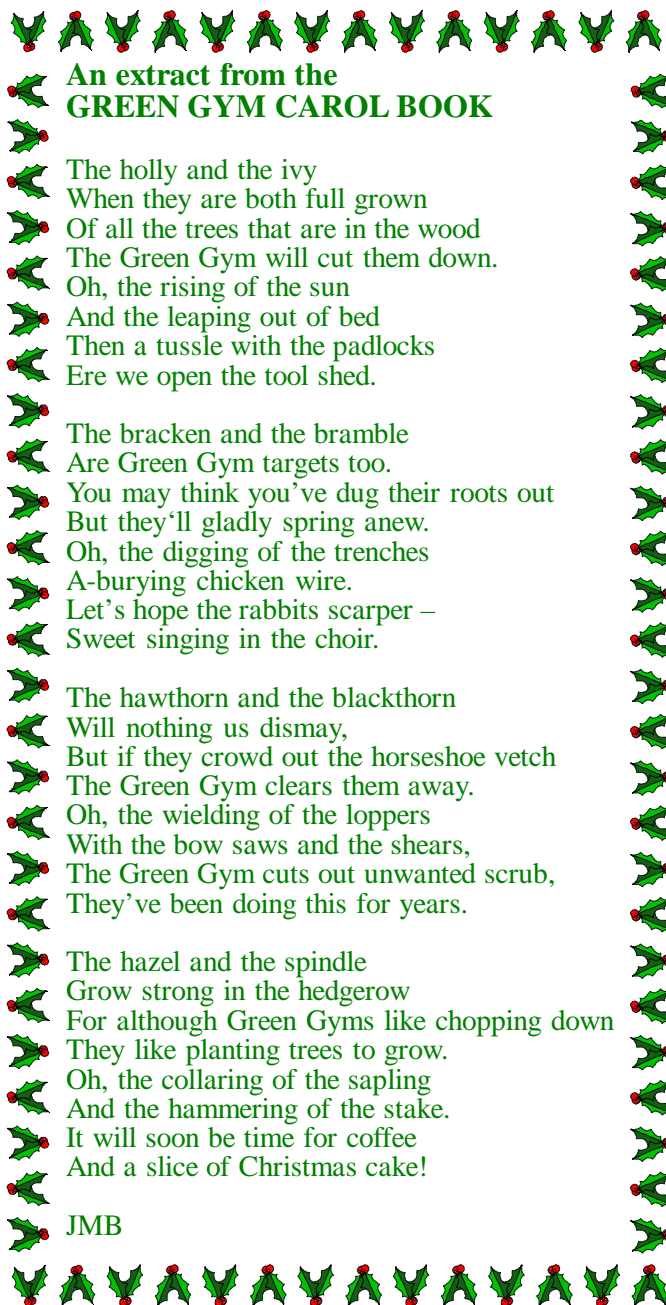
It is fern like producing triangular fronds divided into three

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 Kendal





An extract from the GREEN GYM CAROL BOOK

The holly and the ivy
When they are both full grown
Of all the trees that are in the wood
The Green Gym will cut them down.
Oh, the rising of the sun
And the leaping out of bed
Then a tussle with the padlocks
Ere we open the tool shed.

The bracken and the bramble
Are Green Gym targets too.
You may think you've dug their roots out
But they'll gladly spring anew.
Oh, the digging of the trenches
A-burying chicken wire.
Let's hope the rabbits scarper –
Sweet singing in the choir.

The hawthorn and the blackthorn
Will nothing us dismay,
But if they crowd out the horseshoe vetch
The Green Gym clears them away.
Oh, the wielding of the loppers
With the bow saws and the shears,
The Green Gym cuts out unwanted scrub,
They've been doing this for years.

The hazel and the spindle
Grow strong in the hedgerow
For although Green Gyms like chopping down
They like planting trees to grow.
Oh, the collaring of the sapling
And the hammering of the stake.
It will soon be time for coffee
And a slice of Christmas cake!

JMB

Thank You

Hi Brian and (John), many thanks to your team for outstanding efforts in unbelievable conditions on Saturday morning. We slimmed down the programme slightly but mainly managed to clear all the cut bush craft.

Please pass on the clubs thanks to your team. See you on the 28th December.

Trevor Back Facilities Manager (Bishopswood)

Thank you

Here's a belated thank you for you and your team's superb efforts on Saturday. We got so much done before coffee - after which I thought we'd do a little more of the hedge - but blow me, we only completed it.

It looks great too.

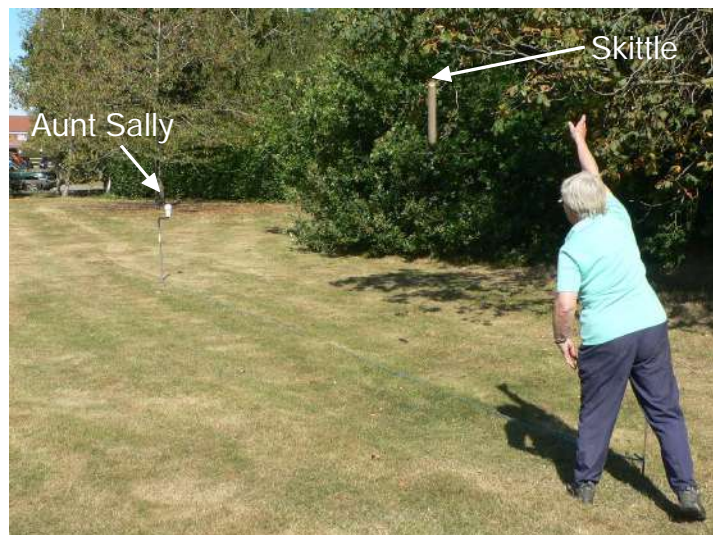
All the best,

Mike Southon (Hurst Water Meadow)

Kennylands Millennium Green

Along with the usual tasks of hay raking the wild flower area and cutting the field side beech hedge, there were several smaller jobs to do including some early blackthorn clearance. We also like to do some scraping of turf in the wild flower area but the ground was too hard and dry. This at least left us some time for more Aunt Sally practise.

Tony



Jill Kendal launches a skittle at Aunt Sally

Greys Court

Back to greys Court on a reasonably sunny day, somehow I seem to have been avoiding the worst of October's rain on GG days!

We were working in the Bluebell Wood removing laurels. Some of the smaller ones even pulled out complete with their roots which was most satisfying if a little hard on the back when they were proving to be stubborn. The area had become quite overgrown with brambles as well but Leo {NT ranger} was going to get them mown. I would have been happy to pull them out too plus their roots but laurels were the more important task. Both plants shade the ground but the laurel is much worse for the bluebells to flourish. Beside Leo's truck was a beautiful Parasol mushroom, amazing that no-one trod on it. Then looking round the wood it was plain to see that it was Parasol mushroom day...no end of them in amongst the brambles.

Susan Byers



Cleeve Water Meadow

We were blessed with another dry day to work at Cleeve Water Meadow. It was such a pleasure to welcome Imogen back from her bird monitoring "up North". The lovely thing about being at Cleeve



is that there is always a great variety of jobs which need doing. I chose to rake up the cut area and start wheel-barrowing it to the fire site. In amongst the



rushes was a beautiful snail which I have identified as *Cepaea nemoralis* or Brown Lipped Snail. There is a similar one which is White Lipped, but the photo quite clearly shows the brown stripe at the end. Imogen found a frog which will be our common frog, *Rana temporaria*. Lots of work was accomplished especially by a very hard working Imogen.

Susan Byers

Streatley Churchyard

The day didn't look too promising. The sky was dark and overcast when we set off and the Swan hotel next door had banned everyone except their patrons from parking. So we decided to use the Cleeve Court Drive car park and walk down to the back gate of the church. What's more heavy rain was forecast.



But the morning turned out surprisingly well. We had the job of trimming back the churchyard boundary hedge and small trees along the lane which involved loppers, saws and shears. There was also quite a lot of pole saw work taking down some of the high branches.

Coffee and cake was served in the Morrell Room



opened specially for us next door – another reason for coming back in the future!. As the Swan hotel had stopped us from having bonfires there was the problem of disposing of the debris which on previous occasions had had to be stacked at the end of the churchyard. This time we had the use of 10 large bags which we filled to the brim for removal next week.

We completed all the work by 12 o'clock and the rain remained light. A very satisfactory morning! We'll be back.

John Hasler

Aston Rowant

October

Just a quick note to thank you and the team for your work last week on Linky down – the difference is really noticeable and it's great to get on top of hawthorn when its little and easy to deal with!

Steph (Aston Rowant)

November Spud Roast

This took place on Thursday 21st November. We revisited a work place a short walk from the office, where we had worked two years ago when the scrub was much higher. The weather was dull and misty in the distance with a cold wind. We followed on from a corporate effort and the team were soon busy clearing



bramble and dogwood regeneration, carting the cuttings either by fork, bag, or tarpaulin to the fire which Brian had got going.

After coffee break the spuds, neatly wrapped in foil by Steph, were placed on ash raked to one side of the fire and covered with more ash to form an “oven”. Burning continued until midday when the fire was allowed to die down, the spuds raked out of the fire, and the table set for a queen.

An excellent day's work rewarded by a spud roast. Julia did her Berry non-alcoholic wine and John gave a toast to the Sonning Common Green Gym.

Well done everyone.

Tony



Hurst Water Meadow

A misty morning with drizzle in the air greeted around 10 members at the trust's car park today where we were met by 6 or 7 members of the Water Meadow conservation group who outlined the 2 tasks for the morning.



Pre coffee break we walked from the car park down to the confluence of the rivers Thame and Thames where we had cleared vegetation from the river banks on our last visit. The ground underfoot was squelchy and the 2 rivers were quite high with the Thames in particular in considerable flow.



This time, however, we were to plant around 200 bare rooted trees supplied free by the Ovo energy company as part of a carbon offsetting scheme. We had hawthorn, blackthorn, willow and dogwood to plant and the object was to produce mini wooded areas adjacent to the river bank whilst leaving a pathway down the centre of the peninsular. Each tree was lovingly planted, staked and protected with a plastic spiral and it took us around 1 hour to accomplish all of this.

We returned to the car park for the coffee break that included a good selection of cakes to replace the energy used up in the previous hour. Some people replaced a lot more energy than others!



For the second hour we were to trim a hedge down that separated the car park from the pathway that leads to the river. This hedge was a little unruly and the object was to cut it to around chest height whilst at the same time weaving any whippy stems into the hedge to form a living hedge. We managed to trim and weave around 50 metres of hedge before we called it a day. This was lucky as the sky which had progressively darkened during the morning opened and it started to rain.

Hopefully on our next visit in around 5 or 6 months we will see the fruits of our labour, with the newly planted trees becoming established and starting to grow. However they will be at the mercy of both the weather and the river conditions and some may perish. Such is the circle of life.

Martin Rhodes

Nettlebed Common

My heart sank...we were asked to work in the wetland area on Nettlebed Commons. It wasn't where we were going that was the problem, but the job of digging out pendulous sedge that I really don't enjoy! It is the most incredible hard work as the ground is wet and marshy and so, so sticky. One does tend to end up thoroughly covered in this sticky mud including all over ones face and hair. In case you can't remember, Robert's helpful rhyme is: "*Sedges have edges, rushes are round, grasses are hollow right down to the ground*". There are plenty of sedges to



remove from this rather beautiful, quiet area and we were blessed with reasonable weather too. I opted to pull out brambles and worked quite close to Eric and Jonathan who were both slaving away at the sedges whilst making squelching noises with their boots and forks as they dug. We stacked the sedges with their roots upwards in the hopes that they would dry out enough not to re-root. As light relief, there were quite a lot of



fungi to spot and photograph. A big thank you to all those who managed to get out the dreaded sedges, you deserve a medal each!

Susan Byers

Tartary Wood

On the last Thursday in November we arrived at a new site on the Nettlebed Estate. The Estate covers a large area adjacent to the village of Nettlebed which originally included Joyce Grove. The house is now the Sue Ryder Home, which was purchased along with the land in 1903 by Robert Fleming. His descendants are still involved with looking after the Estate today and it was Jessie Grimond, the granddaughter of Peter



Fleming and Celia Johnson who asked the Green Gym for help.

Tartary is a nice piece of woodland with a public footpath running through it. But it has become overgrown with



bramble and our job was to start clearing the bramble to make way for the bluebells, something we've done in three other local woods. For once it wasn't raining and 19 of us had a great morning with slashers and loppers clearing a large area at the north west entrance. With the cuttings we started erecting a dead hedge along the western boundary.

John Hasler

Oh that is brilliant! And I like the atmospheric action shot. Thank you so much. We are so grateful as it's been a growing sadness that the brambles have increasingly moved in, and the bluebells out, each year.

I'll hope to join you when you return in March.

All our thanks,

Jessie Grimond (Nettlebed Estates)



Rokeby Recreation Ground

After what seems like ten years, we made a return to Rokeby Recreation Ground where we had planted a hedge all those years ago. The hedge has grown and so has a lot of other stuff so we were working away clearing non hedge re-growth and higher overhead branches. This has exposed the hedge which is doing well. Robert removed three trailer loads of cuttings so Dianne can have a bonfire. There is more to do and talk of hedge laying on our next visit.

Tony



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