

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

November 2020

Welcome



It has certainly been an "up and down" year or judging by this photo sent in by Michael a "left and right" year.

As always, thanks to everyone for the wonderful words and photos they sent in. The response was so good that a few articles did not fit into this edition but they are already included in the upcoming Christmas edition. Where has the year gone!

Thanks to the committee for their quick reaction to this new Lockdown, adjusting schedules etc. Hopefully things will be back to the "new normal" in December and volunteering can restart.

--martin b--

Waiting for something to pop up and then three come along at once!

Aston Rowant is a wonderful site to work at whatever the weather. The views are outstanding and to me something to gaze at all morning. Of course, looking out towards Oxford A E Housman's 'blue remembered hills' certainly comes to mind though you really need to be out in the Vale of Aylesbury looking back to the Chiltern ridge to get the full picture. Or walking The Swan's Way of course.

So here we are scrub bashing which I always enjoy though the up and down carting hawthorn waste to the fire is a mite chest heaving. Tussocky wet grass makes it slippery too. Question- why is the fire so far down the hill. Answer- because that's where the old bonfire site is.



Now comes The Popper. The AR team provides us with three fantastic garish yellow and black jobs. You plonk the tool so that it grips a low lying hawthorn bush, tighten the hold on the stem and lever back on to the base plate. Mirabile dictu. The whole thing comes away root as well ready to be tossed on the collection pile.

Now how satisfying is that. And you don't even have to pay for the pleasure. I think Peter Taylor could go on all day. Except for the rain coming in of course.

--Mike Saunders--

Cleeve Water Meadows

How wonderful it was to return to GG after all this time. The organisers have done a grand job getting everything up and running for us all.



I had my first session on a glorious, hot and sunny day in September, at Cleeve Water Meadow. Our group of 6 were clearing around the old bonfire site closest to the house and along that first fence line. I have done that several times before but the day was pleasant and it was wonderful to see old friends after such a long time. The morning sped fast. Photos include: The [congested fence line with some hard at work](#); [Peter pondering the teasel](#); and some [greater bindweed seeds](#) (I always weed this out at home and hadn't realised how attractive the seed pods are!)

--Susan--

Return to Parson's Wood

I've always enjoyed our sessions in Parsons Wood. Like Spring Wood the task is clear-cut with a single focus: "cut and clear". Then "cut and clear" some more. Small shoots with shears. Thicker bits with loppers. Thicker still with pruning saw. Trees with bow saw. Roots, if you feel up to it, mattock and spade. Then step back and admire what you have cleared compared to the dense mass of what still awaits you.

We have now cleared most of the L-shaped portion of Parsons Wood that has been our regular beat. This time we are in the top 'tongue' by the large house overlooking the wood. We cleared new shooting growth of holly from stumps or roots coming through since our last visit as well as extra small tree size growth this side of the boundary posts.



[Left](#): Mostly clear now, just the odd tree size holly to come down to be snipped and then wheelbarrowed away.

[Right](#): I liked this 'snake that had crept along the ground then met an immovable object and decided to climb over it. [But 'is it art?'](#)



We had squalls of rain then shafts of sunlight streaming through the beechwoods then rain again. Is there no end to the pleasure of being out with GG trying to forget Lockdown?

--Mike Saunders--

A Common Frog....



... found, appropriately, on a common - [Nettlebed Common](#), during the working party on 17th of October to remove Pendulous Sedge and Willow saplings.

This was the first frog we have seen all summer, perhaps confirmation of their vulnerability to hot, dry summers and habitat loss. Happily, during the coffee break Sally gave us a quick tour of the numerous ponds in the swamp area of the common which provides ideal habitat for frogs and other aquatics - without a housing developer in sight! Long may that be the case...
--Sheelagh and Chris--

A BIT OF A WASHOUT

Arriving at [Bishopswood](#) in dry but dull weather it was delightful to see a large number of eager young footballers on the pitches –accompanied by less eager but faithful parents.

We duly picked up our tools and made off to drag, cut and burn some of Trevor's big piles of brushwood. Sadly the fire had to be abandoned due to smoke drifting across the football pitches but we set about piling and dragging wood for burning another time. However the sky darkened up and first a few raindrops descended - absolutely nothing to deter Green Gymmers, but eventually we had to admit that it was more of a downpour than a scud. Above us on the football grounds training and matches continued, the young players still dashing about but finally there was a general exodus. One had sympathy for those devoted parental followers.



(Photo by Jenny)

We bravely consumed our coffee ([left](#)) but realised that we were, in fact drenched and everything – coats gloves and tools were dripping so finally acknowledged that 'there comes a time' and retreated to the shed. But we had stacked and cut quite a pile for Trevor to tackle

I think that possibly this was my wettest ever at green Gym, which is saying something; or was it? There was a day at Park Wood, one session at Nettlebed, a time at Parsons Wood.....? But we will be back!
--Jill K--

Lurking Below Peppard Common



Did you ever realise what lurks below the calm surface of the common? This fierce denizen of the underworld was dug up by Peter Taylor giving him rather a shock. Luckily it turned out not to be malevolent just an example of the strength of brambles. It had forced its root right through a flint in its determination to live and grow. No wonder we have a never ending job to eradicate them and to hold back their advance once they have made a

foothold. If it wasn't for the way they overcome all who stand in their path one would wish them good luck

They are a great food source for lots of insects and animals and, let's face it, blackberry and apple pie takes a lot of beating.
--Jill--

Peppard Common



Another Thursday and the rain keeps off as two groups return to Peppard Common. Once again-to my great delight-my group are on bracken and bramble clearance. Hopefully, this will allow the heather to break through over the glades.

With the recent wet weather the ground is fairly moist so the bracken comes smoothly out and slashing or lopping is not needed. The bramble which is very pervasive is a bit more difficult so maybe shears here close to the root.

We carefully avoid the dwarf gorse ([Far Left](#)) growing close to the ground as it is comparatively rare. A bit back breaking over a morning but so good when you see the huge area just 6 people can clear.

--Mike Saunders--

Peppard Common

A reasonably dry morning after a very wet night at Peppard Common saw five of us, led by Sally, clear bracken, bramble and saplings from one of the heather glades. Jill and I had a detour to get there from Nettlebed as the road was shut through Highmoor due to resurfacing. We drove through Nuffield and Stoke Row before turning south and passed the old Grouse and Claret. Almost there, when we were stopped by a herd of deer crossing the road one by one. A beautiful sight but difficult to see how many more might pop out of the wood!

Plenty of bracken to tug out, though interestingly Sally pointed out that pulling it over the years has made a difference to its height. She reckoned when they first started removing, it grew about 5-6 feet high. Most of the bracken was round about a couple of feet or so. There weren't as many brambles as I have had to deal with on Nettlebed Commons but they came out easily where they had looped over. Such clever plants in the number of ways they keep reproducing: underground shoots, looping over, and of course by seed too.



Sally found a few [harebells](#) still in flower and I found two interesting fungi...not so easy to identify though! The white one is a [common puffball](#) or Devil's Snuffbox or Wolf Farts, *Lycoperdon perlatum*. It is edible when fresh but not particularly tasty on its own. The bracket fungus, which was sprouting out of a rotting tree trunk, is probably [Turkey Tail](#), *Trametes versicolor*. It is used in traditional

Chinese medicine and is supposed to boost the immune system and have anti-carcinogenic properties but this has not been proved scientifically.

--Susan--

Lopper Editor: Martin Barrett
mdb.scgg@gmail.com

The Sonning Common Green Gym
c/o Health Centre, 39 Wood Lane,
Sonning Common

Enquires: Martin Rhodes 0118 972 2448