

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

July 2021



Welcome

.....is such a simple word, but when you see it in action it is such a powerful and lovely concept. Like when gymmers welcome back folks who have been away for some time. No fuss, no red carpet, just a smile and continuing with the conversation that was left off many months or years before. "The SCGG spirit lives strong: Everyone warmly welcomed be they new friends or returning friends!"

[martin b](#)

Thanks to Julia for this photo of a pyramid orchid taken at Flowercroft Wood.

Ewelme

Oh the joys of the countryside, the trilling of the larks, the wind in the trees, the silence... the vibration of the road drills, the thudding of the engines, the shouts of irate lorry drivers . There were road works on the bridge at Ewelme!

To the layperson's eye it all looked like hell hemmed in by red plastic barriers. However the Gymmers were quite unfazed, unloaded their waders, picked up waterproof gloves, slashers and rakes, crashed their way through head high nettles and splashed their way into the watery channels between the watercress. As the noise of road works drowned any chance of speech they followed their leader wading upstream until at last it was possible to communicate to each other. And with a sigh of relief began (the usual) task of cutting back the burgeoning cress to allow the stream to flow fast enough to keep the water sparkling and clear.

It was a lovely day, clear blue sky and warm sunshine, the cress had grown into thick green pillows. And oh! The silence , it was amazing how quickly the road racket subsided. All in all a typically lovely Ewelme GG session. Hard work but everyone survived and cleared the channels right up to the top where the water comes in.



Mind you there always has to be one doesn't there! Someone, not mentioning any Kendals in particular, managed to try the water temperature by lying in it. Cold and muddy - not recommended for the spa experience....

Happy to say no one had a camera to hand to record how the mighty had fallen. Thanks Mike and those who heaved me upright again and apologies to Jane for dirtying her car.

Jill

The delights of a dilemma

Or a dilemmna. as one of my work colleagues used to say-which is correct? Bit of a dilemma.

But getting round to tools and back to Priest Hill on Nettlebed Common where, as usual, we are bracken pulling. I say bracken pulling but more accurately it is bracken clearing. Pulling up means any further growth is so much less than mere cutting may achieve. But when the stuff breaks off in your hand you must turn to cutting.

Now here's the dilemma.....what tool should I use?

First of all, those fancy meat hook things produced by Sally. You need a good swing for these and probably using two hands... a long time since I swung a golf club but it feels a bit like that. Here you can minimally straighten up a bit. Next, if you prefer, one of our short sickle type slashers. These cut well but you have to stoop a bit more. The advantage is if you bend your knees slightly you can cut close to the ground and achieve a neat finish. Of course, the big slashers are a favourite of mine and they perform very well with a heavy blade to cope with slightly thicker growths like small birch saplings.



A couple of other options. Loppers, probably not the best for bracken but very useful for patches of thick bramble or even blackthorn growing in and through the dense bracken patches with ground based bramble underneath. Lastly, shears and these are quite helpful . easy to handle in tight spaces and capable of even clearance at any level.

Well to solve the dilemma, my tactic is to change to a different tool to break up the morning session. Each time you pick up a new tool you pick up another burst of energy. Good eh!

Incidentally, joy of joys we are 10 strong today-goodbye limit of 6-and we have tea/coffee and cake.

Did we really live through month after month bringing our own Thermos and a Kit Kat/apple/banana?

Mike S

Thanks to Julia for this photo of Mike reclining on the pile of cut bracken probably contemplating some GG cake!

3 Oaks Community Orchard



We learned a new skill at 3 Oaks community orchard on 26th June: apple thinning. This helps the tree to put all its strength into the best fruit. It's vital for producing a good crop, and we enjoyed a task perfect for conversation. Nonetheless we deserved our coffee break, when Ronnie served chocolate/orange and lemon drizzle cakes.

Julia

Team Nettlebed verses Himalayan Balsam

Team Nettlebed are the commons volunteers, obviously here in Nettlebed. We are a small group of about six max and for the moment have not tried to recruit more due to the dreaded Covid. We meet once a week on a Sunday afternoon and try to conserve and tame various plants and "weeds".



One of our tasks throughout May to August is to eliminate Himalayan Balsam (Left). This year the plant has enjoyed the recent wet and tends to lurk amongst the nettles, thistles and brambles in various spots around the commons and on Nettlebed Estate land. If left unchecked, it will become dominant and shade out the bluebells. We think that originally various vehicles have brought it into the sawmill on the Highmoor road from whence it has spread opposite to a beautiful bluebell glade; into Deadman's Lane, an old green track going to Nuffield and joining with Grim's Ditch; and a copse in the middle of the field behind the sawmill. There are some areas where we have already eliminated it which gives us hope.

The plants fortunately are annuals, shallow rooted and therefore easy to pull out when the ground is damp. If it is dry, they become brittle, break off and without finding the base they will re-sprout at a lower level, becoming quite hard to find amongst the other lush vegetation. We have become increasingly good at identifying HB when only a couple of inches tall but that gives rise to lots of back bending in areas where it has become prolific. As it is now July we are ever watchful as it is about to flower. Although this means it is easier to spot amongst a patch of bracken and nettles, we certainly do not want it seeding! Seeds are "pinged" several feet and one plant can produce a hundred seeds. A few years ago Geoff and I were pulling it by the Highmoor road on a very wet day. It was already seeding so we were trying to contain the flower heads in bags. The problem was that cars were driving past at speed, splashing us and the plants so that they "pinged" everywhere and we ended up soaked. Amazingly that area is now just about clear but if we miss one plant.....!



Susan

Home Farm Wood



We have now opened up the area all around the pond at Home Farm Wood, but there is still a lot more rhododendron to tackle on the north side. No pirates to be seen on the pond, despite the animal skull on the bank, but there was a green algal bloom on the surface of the water. When Jane unblocked the sluice the draining water carried away the bloom, enough to attract a pair of mallards for some exploration.

Julia

The Way through the Woods at Greys Court



Last time we were at Greys Court it was all that fencing business, hard work too, trying to extract staples from ancient fence posts, clearing vast amounts of grass and briar to find barbed wire to clip and roll. Fun though.

This time-delight of delights- we are footpath clearing just up from the triangle parking at the end of Rocky Lane. A bit of a novelty as it is some time since we were tasked with this job which is very worthwhile and a great social contribution to dog walkers and ramblers alike.

Heavens above, a Thursday and there are eleven of us, almost like old times. Cake of course and coffee/tea and those lovely GG mugs. Surrounded by our parked cars, providing something to park yourself on and as ever

conversation and the concomitant conviviality and comradeship al fresco, the usual GG treat. As I say, old times.

Most of the work could be done with the small slashers nicely sharpened with a follow up, to cut close, shears trim. Lots of bracken and masses of bracken (sounds familiar).

Then just as we stood back drinking our coffee and admiring the results of our labours two walkers appeared to follow the cleared path as if pre-planned. What a pleasure that was.

But just see what it looks like when we've finished - and this is only part of it!

Michael

Dorchester

Red letter day for SCGG at Dorchester on 19th June -- our first time as a full group since the first lockdown. A dozen of us plus two local trustees cleared undergrowth from around the saplings we had planted a couple of years before at the confluence of the Thame and the Thames, and along a fence line. A big plus was the return of the traditional coffee break provided by Jill and Jane. I'm sure I heard trumpets amongst the loud birdsong!

Julia



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 01189 724228