

# Green Gym



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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### Cleeve Water Meadows - 10th March 2022

It was a glorious sunny morning and warm for the time of year. How lovely to return to Green Gym at Cleeve Water Meadow after a break because of Covid.

Charlotte had plenty of jobs as usual to keep us all well occupied. I chose to start on the clearance of fallen branches in the Loddon Lily area ( *Leucojum aestivum* ). The extremely strong gales of a few weeks ago had knocked out many weak branches and shorter twigs. A little group of us soon made the Lily area spick and span including removing some brambles.

The lilies obviously appreciated our efforts as they seemed to start flowering in front of our eyes. Everything seems to be

coming out earlier as the winter hasn't been very cold at all. Charlotte wasn't sure how much earlier they were but my Francis Rose Wild Flower Key 1991 edition suggests they normally flower between April and May. Therefore the 10th March does seem a little early.

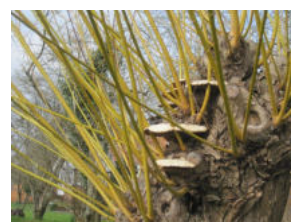


Whilst we were enjoying our jobs in the sun, the first Brimstone butterfly kept fluttering by. Was it the same one we kept seeing? I think it was a male as they are brighter yellow than the females. I have seen a report on my Facebook Wild Flower group that lots of people saw their first one on Thursday too. I guess it was such a warm day over much of England which encouraged them to venture out. The adult hibernates in ivy and other evergreens. The larva feeds on alder buckthorn, a woodland shrub, and purging buckthorn, which prefers chalk downland. Brimstones are always the first butterfly to appear, a sure sign that spring is here.



"Have you seen the bug hotels being built at the far end?" said one Green Gymmer, who had joined our group to help with laying wood chippings to mark the path. Some of us couldn't resist a walk to inspect what was being built and take a few photos. Apparently the gymmers had learnt this technique recently at Withymead nature reserve. We hope that Charlotte will be pleased with their efforts and that lots of bugs will be encouraged to set up home.

Lastly, as we were packing up to go, the beautiful willow was spotted with the new shoots growing through last autumn's bracket fungus, near where we have our refreshments I think it is crack willow, *Salix fragilis*.



Susan

## Mill Farm in the Rain-and did it rain!

New year, new site. Today we are at Mill Farm somewhere in the back hinterland of Mapledurham and it's our first visit. Guided by a whole succession of the usual GG waymarks like some erstwhile car treasure hunt, something like a dozen of us found our way (when you start to see grass in the middle of a narrow road you know you are going 'remote') to where we were due to work. It was an interesting site where a number of historical artefacts are stored in a nearby barn and where many items of building and construction nature are also kept in the open.



Our tasks were to clear the outer boundaries of the rectangular open storage area with plenty of room for not one but two glorious bonfires.

Extra care was needed when moving to the edges of the area to get access to the hedge owing to various items providing potential hazards. However, all went well with the usual GG tread lightly experience of watching where we put our feet on uneven ground.

A very enjoyable morning

despite the heavy continuous rain and what joy an actual indoor toilet and "wait for it" a great indoor mess room for our coffee break, tables, comfy chairs. Marvellous.

**Mike S**

## Ewelme February 2022

Here we were again, another aquatic morning. The words mud and silt were heard as was watercress clearance - yes it was Ewelme time.

We also seem to be able to remark on how lovely the site looks in the sunshine, how the water gleams clear and sparkling. That is until we get in and start our task of clearing away the dead cress, crowsfoot weed and mud. Then in the twinkling of an eye it all turns brown and dense as half a dozen spades dig into the fading cress.

Still it's all for a good reason as the beds will be replanted with new watercress, and I can confidently say that by June it will be brilliant green and flourishing once again and be a real sight for visitors to the centre. (I can also confidently say that by next autumn it will all need to be done again!!)

It is always a real team activity, not just people messing about in the water. Where would they be without the hard efforts of those barrowing the weed and mud down the bund, across the bridge and across the grass to build up a compost heap? Everyone mucks in and has a go at everything.

Those who come regularly to Ewelme really love the site even if at the end of the morning people can be heard to be saying, 'I think I might sit and watch telly this afternoon'.



**Jill K**



## Peppard War Memorial Hall

The Green Gym enjoyed a productive session at Peppard War Memorial Hall in late January when we were joined by five people from Johnson Matthey as part of their day working in the community. A large area at the end of the overflow car park was partially cleared and much of the debris was added to an adjacent fire. The work included felling a tree (two JM volunteers were shown how to drop it safely) and removing a large bush.

Once the site is cleared it is to be used for a men's hut. (we are not sure yet exactly what the men are going to do in there!)

Another group cleared the path around the old bowls green and transported the resultant moss and leaves round to the fire. A third group worked round the back of the Hall clearing and levelling a place for a new toilet. (Apparently regulations do not allow a group in the back section of the Hall to use the same lavatories as a group in the front).



John

## Mistletoe Tree at Cleeve



Looking up into the 'mistletoe tree' was an awesome experience as we collected during our March session the branches blown down by Eunice. No wonder the ancients regarded mistletoe as a mystical substance.

Building a loose habitat pile from the fallen branches, we noticed that the leaves and remaining berries on the fallen mistletoe had been stripped by opportunistic browsers (deer?). Its ripe berries, although toxic to humans, are attractive to birds, which disseminate the seeds by wiping their sticky beaks on the branches.

Young mistletoe flowers were already visible on the lower branches of the tree. Unlike many

plants which are both male and female, mistletoe is in a group of plants that are dioecious, i.e. the plants are either male or female.

In the past mistletoe was used medicinally to treat nervous disorders, especially epilepsy. The leaves and young twigs were collected just before the berries formed, then dried and made into a tincture.

Mistletoe is a hemi (partial) parasite which attaches to a tree via suckers and absorbs some water and nutrients from its host plant. However, it also produces some of its own food via photosynthesis in its green leaves. Small host trees can be damaged if they are burdened with too many bunches, but the magnificent tree at Cleeve looks very sturdy.



Julia



## Charlotte's water meadow at Cleeve.

Another rather special site the Green Gym works at is Charlotte's water meadow at Cleeve.. There is always lots to do as this water meadow is always growing and changing. On the February 10th visit, there was a big task clearing up after coppicing of the Willow trees. Much of the wood had been chipped to be used on squelchy paths which surrounded a great mass of young Loddon Lilies.

One group was busy cutting trees up to be used for logs and firewood and transporting them up to the house.

Some of the cut willow was used to provide Some very upmarket habitat piles. First a rectangular framework of posts was cut and pointed, then brushwood was laid longways, next posts were cut to lay across the pile, followed by more brushwood and so on. At the same time willow branches were woven through the posts to give stability. The final pile was very solid and impressive and we hope lots of small creatures and insects will make their home there.

At the same time a group of Gymmers was using more of the cut wood to repair the stockade fence that edges the field path by the river

Yet after all that there was still a huge pile of wood to be dealt with- something for next time..?

Jill K



Editor's note: This photo of the new habitat pile was taken after the recent rain - the habitat now has a moat, which should thwart unwanted intruders...

Glad to say the water has now receded and the habitat is now **demoted** !!!

## Withymead January 2022



Building Habitat piles. This design by Pete (Withymead Warden) has proved very popular and are now used at Charlotte's, and maybe more sites in the future.

Moving old compost and ashes from the burning area and spreading it across the site.

## St Mary's Church Streatley

Once again, we return to the churchyard at St Mary's Church Streatley just across the river from Goring, with further hedge trimming and wheelbarrow movement.



But John the churchwarden and our host has some other tasks for us. First the numerous iris plants are proving to be an invasive species. These were growing on graves and under the trees and needed to be uprooted and carted away. A bit more difficult than we thought without forks but fortunately being shallow rooted and mainly under dead leaves not too much of a chore with spades and a bit of leverage.

Next and most critical, clearing overgrown turf around grave furniture-if that's the right word-and this became a bit like graveyard archaeology. Various inscriptions were revealed, names, dates and details. This is good community work for the sake of churchyard appearance, for local history research, for a national survey of graveyard monuments - a really important conservation service. Presumably judging by comments from passers-by a huge number of commissions may well now come our way!



A key job was filling in a grave where there had been a considerable landfall. This meant clearing the turf surround, backfilling the material upside down and pressing firmly down before adding more good top soil to finish off to a reasonable level.

The result can be seen, more room for a neater finish off maybe but a creditable job in the time we had.

There is no end to the variety of jobs we undertake, always something a bit different in a different setting. Always something satisfying to work at and enjoy doing it.

In this 'sort of' post-pandemic time we have had a regular turnout of 12-14 members for both sessions which speaks well for the delights of a burgeoning Sonning Common Green Gym!

**Mike S**



## Nettlebed Common

At the end of February the Green Gym were back at Nettlebed Common with a good turn out. This time we were working on the northern edge of the recreation field. Our task was to rake up the brambles and other vegetation cut by Rod d'Ayala along the edge of the cricket field and to move the rakings across the ditch to deposit them on top of the dead hedge further up the bank. We raked up all the cut material with time left over to start cutting more.

Clearing the bank up the slope to the dead hedge revealed bluebells starting to come through, foxgloves, an overwintering male brimstone butterfly, broad buckler-fern and, most importantly, our leader for the day, Sally Rankin, saw two common lizards, one possibly pregnant with young.



Six cricket balls also turned up which we left by the cricket pavilion.



Alan P

## Bonfires at Bishopswood

Last meeting of 2021 and we are at Bishopswood with the almost usual two bonfires. Always an attractive prospect for Green Gym fire-raisers. There is something about feeding a fire that some of us find very satisfying. With small gardens there are not many opportunities for such 'fun' activities back home. Trevor had collected a good deal of material on the two sites giving us a good start.



Coupled with this delightful pastime was the equally attractive task of ivy stripping. This was on the far side of the playing fields continuing from the point we had reached on a previous visit.

Ivy stripping is a wonderful bit of GGery, very enjoyable. You insert the crowbar tip and ease the ivy away from the trunk, it comes away neatly like peeling wet wallpaper. Some of it is dead and dry coming away with a crackle. Soon there is a mass of material to be

pitchforked onto the fire. More crackle and hiss. More onomatopoei.. onomatopoei.. onomatopoeia noises (knew it was there somewhere).



What a great morning experience, pack it up in Christmas paper and some pink ribbon and you could sell it anywhere!

Mike S

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