

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Issue 72 June 2022



Welcome

A somewhat eclectic Newsletter this quarter including typical SCGG activities such as **rotten egg fights**, **alligator riding**, **advice on poisoning**, **caterpillar eating**, **plant identification and folklore**, not to mention **cake eating**... Including Geoff's scrummy chocolate cake and Victoria sponge for our session clearing a glade by the ski slope on **Peppard Common**

I hope you all enjoy the read and thanks to everyone who has sent in words and photos - keep them coming

Martin B

Man Shed at Peppard War Memorial Hall



A Man Shed is going to be installed next spring at **Peppard War Memorial Hall** in the overgrown space at the back of their car park. SCGG cleared all the vegetation and rubble at a work session in May in preparation for the groundworks.

A Man Shed is a workshop space for men (and women!) to meet and chat while progressing their projects.

Julia



Fun, Mud and Sun by the river

We do not visit the riverside setting of **Temple Island Meadow** downstream from Henley town often but when we do it is always interesting, if as usual, it is squelchy underfoot



.... and so it was again! Wellies all round if you've remembered to bring them which yours truly had completely forgotten.

A long line of fairly mature willows had been cut previously and we were tasked with trimming out the brash and sorting the remainder into workable piles for later disposal. There was scope for more cutting back into new growths as well.



Sally produced a bit of interesting flora. This was and is **Hemlock Water Dropwort** *Oenanthe crocata* a parsley like growth and an extremely poisonous, perennial plant. According to Wild Food UK it is the most poisonous plant in the UK and most commonly found along most of our waterways. Also known as Dead Man's Fingers or Dead Tongue if ingested can cause death in a very few hours. Thanks for the tip Sally.

Mike S.

Aston Rowant

This has been a good year for **cowslips**, as for many other wildflowers. We were surrounded by them on the hillside at **Aston Rowant** as we removed low-growing scrub.



The bench installed in memory of Fred Denton was close by at the top of the field. Fred was one of SCGG's founder members, and as a salute to him three of us sat on his bench: Gill (also a founder member), Wendy (one of our newest members) and esteemed chairman Peter.



Julia

'Beached' at Greys Court

An interesting task awaited us at a recent GG session at **Greys Court**. The job was to clear as much of the timber and twigs left after a large beech tree (brought down partially by the recent high winds) had been substantially chain-sawed into sizable chunks.

This was another of those camera time-elapsed scenes which show ants removing every leaf and wood scrap from a fallen trunk. My shots show just how much can be achieved in under three hours albeit on a hot and sunny Thursday morning.

From start.....



.....to finish



Always useful when we are given the go ahead to help ourselves to some firewood. Thanks Leo. Here's my share, Robert must have left already.



Mike S

Busy Morning at Cleeve Water Meadows



Left -
Clearing the fence
line

Top Right -
Inspecting the
boardwalk for future
repair

Bottom Right -
Dryad's Saddle
Fungus found on
river bank

Ewelme Take 1

Poets have long been inspired by plants of the Ranunculus family, and the 19th-century Dorset dialect poet William Barnes paid tribute to the [River Water-crowfoot](#) in a poem which spoke of its small, fair face studding the river with white. Concerned for the plant's future, Barnes warned that it was in danger from the 'water man', who would wade the river with his deadly blade and 'slay thee even in thy bloom'.



No room for sentimentality at [Ewelme](#), where the [water-crowfoot](#) competes with the watercress, so has to be removed by SCGG with their deadly spades. The swathes of crowfoot below the bridge looked daunting when we arrived for our May session, but we

cleared most of it by the end, fortified halfway by Jill's birthday cake.

Julia



Ewelme Take 2

As usual the job was clearing. This time the water crowsfoot from the beds below the bridge. On arrival we all said – Oh how pretty it looks- before advancing ready to drag as much as we could out of the river.

Easier said than done as the little plants are deeply rooted in the gravel river bed. Somewhat easier was the young willow herb. However, skill and brute force prevailed and by the end of the usual, bright and sunny morning, the water was clear and the channels flowing faster. It is amazing how quickly the stream clears and gleams in the sunlight.

Sustenance was very welcome to keep up strength and on this Saturday we had the help of [Charlie the chocolate caterpillar](#) who sacrificed himself so that we could all carry on with the work. I wish he could have known how much we enjoyed him!

Jill



Blazing bonfire at Bishopswood



Another blazing bonfire at [Bishopswood](#), necessary to deal with vegetation which had been cut back in advance from the field margins. A lot of fly-tipped material also needed to be burned during a busy morning.

Julia

Multiple tasks at Greys and multiple tools

There is always something interesting to do at **Greys Court**. In colder times we were cutting and stacking wood from a fallen tree. We have removed old fences circling mature trees.

This Thursday was no different. Key task was to remove a gate post with a question of bollard placement (though I did not actually see these). Subsidiary but absorbing nearly everyone's efforts, was footpath clearance through the wood usual slasher and shears routine.

Leo introduced a few of us to putting stakes round a coppice stump or stool then attaching netting to prevent deer eating emerging shoots.



Leo used the **Swedish Axe** (Left) for sharpening the ends of poles, a job we usually do with a straight edge billhook (hook uppermost).



This seemed a most useful tool fit for our toolbag. Like the **Yorkshire billhook** (Right) which can also be used with two hands and available from the well known supplier Morris of Dunsford among others. I love the way traditional tools often have a county name as an appendage.



Interesting the market place for tools of Swedish origin possibly because of their rich sources of iron ore and plentiful forests. On a sheep hurdle making course at the Weald and Downland Museum we used a Swedish origin '**knurling**' **small axe** (Left) for cutting and shaping. I bought one in the shop-you never know when you might use it again!

My billhook (Below) also does a similar job but this one made by Morris of Dunsford in Devon, maker of traditional land management hand tools.



Mike S

Greys Court

A beautiful spring day at Greys Court found us marching across a field to a site where branches had come down in recent storms and some trees had been felled. The ranger explained that we needed to clear up all the smaller debris and put it in the pit which was close by.

Two brave souls descended into the pit and did a grand job stacking everything we threw at them!



But then Carol found a very hard egg in the pit. We wondered if it was one that is put under broody hens. She decided to throw it out, where it promptly landed beside me and burst open, pouring egg yolk all over the grass! I beat a hasty retreat in case it was going to be very smelly.

In amongst the long grass by the side of the pit, was a plant with very interesting leaves, which the ranger did not recognise. Sheelagh and I both used Apps on our phones to identify it. Sheelagh's App said it was [Goat's Rue](#), mine said it was [Common Milkpea](#). When I got home and looked it up, I found they are both the same, [Galega officinalis](#). It is an introduced perennial in the 16th century, which has naturalised in waste places in southern England. Clever Apps for identifying it without any flowers.



The field where we were removing branches was covered in [cowslips](#) and [dandelion clocks](#)... a wonderful sight to behold.

"There is an Alligator", announced Gill Vaughan, "Has anyone else seen it?". She was quite right and another photo opportunity arose especially with her making sure that it didn't escape!.



Certainly an eventful and very enjoyable morning.

Susan

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