

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Issue 80 June 2024

Julia's Scrapbook "Spring 2024"



Cleaning dormouse boxes at Aston Rowant in February.



Bishopswood: We made short work of the piles of brash to be burned at Bishopswood in February, helped by energetic volunteers from Johnson Matthey.



A pile of scalplings spread over the very muddy path leading west from the bridge at Ewelme in April.



Being coached in the technique for encouraging quince trees to produce more fruit at the Henley Community Orchard in March.



Plenty of brambles to clear from a path on one side of the copse at Rokeby Recreation Ground in March.



Home Farm Wood in May: Victoria sponge filled with jam and cream together with a lime and fennel cake, both baked by Carol, were much appreciated when we paused for coffee.

Julia

1934: A Remarkable Year for an Extraordinary Soul

On a typical Saturday at Peppard Common, one might expect the usual bramble-pulling affair. Yet, amidst the glade clearing and the shy bluebells peeking through, an unusual sight caught my eye—a **broad buckler fern**, or so I believe (Sally, correct me if I'm wrong!). More surprising was the **wild raspberry bush**, already boasting tiny clusters of fruit—an unexpected delight.



Fork, Trowel, and 90: A Cake Fit for a GG Jill

However, our gathering today transcends the routine conservation efforts. We're here to honour the remarkable Jill Kendall, a cherished member of the GG, as she ascends to the grand age of 90. Who could fathom such a milestone? The cake itself, a confectionery masterpiece by Sandra, narrates the tale with '90s' elegantly embossed across its glossy expanse, adorned with a miniature fork and trowel so lifelike, one might be fooled at first glance.



Bonnie & Clyde's Year: Jill Shares Her Story

Jill regaled us with anecdotes from 1934, the year of her arrival into this world—a time marked by the notorious escapades of Bonnie and Clyde. A cursory delve into that year's notable births reveals illustrious names such as Yuri Gagarin, Shirley MacLaine, Barry Humphries, and Richard Briers. Jill, you're indeed in stellar company!

High on the Hill, Not Quite on the Slope

Post-cake festivities saw us capturing group photographs atop the ski slope, the remnants of cake crumbs evidence of the joyous feasting. One can't help but muse over the missed opportunity for a dramatic photograph—Jill, perched in her chair, amidst the work site. Perhaps a tad risky, but what a memorable image it would have made. Maybe next time?



“Beneath the April Sun: Two Saturdays of Conservation”

Over two consecutive Saturdays in mid-April, I had the pleasure of leading two engaging outdoor sessions. The first took place at Peppard School Field, followed by a session at Hurst Water Meadow the subsequent week. The delightful sunny weather graced both occasions, adding to the enjoyment of our activities.

At Peppard School Field:

Our focus was on the peripheral areas of the field. We began our day by clearing away scrub and various unwanted perennials from a grassy embankment along the site's eastern edge. This effort not only continued but also completed a project initiated last year. A central section of the embankment was left untouched, with brambles intact, to serve as a sanctuary for small mammals, invertebrates, and nesting birds.



Post-coffee break, we divided into smaller groups to tackle a variety of tasks. One team revealed and tidied a set of logs arranged in a whimsical circle, humorously suggesting that Snow White might have had upwards of a dozen dwarves. Meanwhile, other groups addressed the encroaching hedge line near the road, which involved selective tree removal and scrub reduction.



By the end of the morning, it was evident that our collective efforts had significantly transformed the landscape, and we eagerly anticipate our return in a year's time to further this work.

At Hurst Water Meadow:



A week later, the SCGG team descended upon Hurst Water Meadow for a tree planting endeavour. Situated between the car park and the River Thames is a pathway parallel to the River Thame. Our task was to plant several hundred saplings along this trail, adjacent to the field. Fortuitously, the Wallingford Green Gym had initiated this project the previous week, providing us with a planting blueprint to emulate. We diligently dug slits for the saplings—a surprisingly arduous task—planted the whips, secured them

with bamboo stakes and protectors, and watered them using a technique reminiscent of ancient Egyptian irrigation practices.

Our efficiency was such that we completed the assignment just as the midday bells of Dorchester Abbey chimed. Interestingly, we prepared more planting sites than we had saplings for, leaving a ready task for future volunteers.

Reflections:

Photographs from each session capture the essence of our labour and camaraderie. I extend my gratitude, alongside that of our clients, to all the volunteers who dedicated their time and effort to these two sessions.



Adventures at Cleeve Water Meadow: A Tale of Wildlife, Flooding, and Community

The Green Gym team embarked on two memorable visits to **Cleeve** this quarter. Our mission? To assist Charlotte in managing this precious site for wildlife. But nature had other plans—**flooding** had transformed the meadow, limiting the work area. But Charlotte, a master of turning lemons into lemonade, wasn't fazed. Welly boots firmly in place, we embarked on days of wildlife-conservation tasks.



On the **first visit**, the morning sun greeted us as we arrived at Cleeve Water Meadow. The ground squelched beneath our boots, evidence of recent floods. Debris lay scattered—a chaotic aftermath of nature's fury. But Charlotte, with her keen eye for opportunity, had found us plenty of work.

Habitat Building: In a secluded corner, we constructed a habitat pile using logs and brash. As we worked, a pair of mallard ducks observed from a safe distance. Perhaps wondering if this new structure would make a suitable nesting site.

Hazel Coppicing: The rhythmic sound of saws echoed through the meadow, as the team coppiced hazel, rejuvenating the shrubs and creating cosy nooks for wildlife.

Loddon Lilies: Amid the mud and chaos, a delicate beauty emerged—the white Loddon lilies. These signature flowers of the site stood tall, their petals pristine against the muddy backdrop.



Muddy Boots and Grateful

Hearts: As the session drew to a close, we faced the inevitable: cleaning of boots and tools. Mud-splattered but content, we left, knowing we'd made a difference.

The **second visit** dawned bright and promising. The meadow had dried somewhat, but still wet underfoot as new challenges awaited us.

Dead Hedge Revival: We returned to the small dead hedge we had created earlier, clearing invasive docks and nettles. The hedge, now visible, will harbour insects and small mammals. And perhaps, just perhaps, will attract Little Owls seeking a tasty snack.

Woodland Wildflowers: Charlotte has plans to transform a nearby wooded corner into a haven for woodland wildflowers. So we worked tirelessly, removing more docks and nettles. In their place, seeds and primulas were planted.



martinB

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