

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Issue 85 September 2025

Cress Oddity: Life on Mars Meets Ewelme



After a Friday night of *Rebel Rebel* revelry, decked out in red jackets and Bowie tees, I wasn't sure I'd make it to Ewelme. But like *The Man Who Sold the World*, I showed up—only to be greeted by Cressgate. In over twenty years of ecological escapades, I've never seen the channels so wildly overgrown. And we were only there a month ago! It was as if Changes had swept through in secret.

But fear not—eight brave *Heroes* stepped up, glam in spirit if not in spandex. Armed with wheelbarrows and determination, carved *Ziggy Stardust*-worthy zigzag channels through the aquatic jungle, hauling barrow loads of rebellious cress like it was *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*. The rain teased us like *Starman* peeking through the clouds, but never took the stage.

And then—magic. As if summoned by *Sound and Vision*, a mother duck and her five ducklings glided down our freshly liberated stream. A *Golden Years* moment. Nature's encore. A perfect *Ashes to Ashes* ending to our labours.

Gill



Cressgate



Ziggy Stadust Channels

Henley Community Orchard, 21st June



What a fantastic morning we had at the Orchard. The intense heat had given way to an overcast sky and it was pleasantly warm as we listened to Nick and watched as he demonstrated the art of thinning apples to ensure large fruits with no blemishes. Before we act we must identify the lane of trees to be attacked and choose a partner, to work one on each side. Apples in a cluster - no good. Better one

or two perfect specimens so get out the snippers and take action. That branch hanging down with the weight of apples could break if not prudently thinned. If branches are too high to reach then Nick has the ladder. At coffee time we sat down and Nick enthused about what he considers to be the best job in the world, resulting in plenty of tasty, commercially viable fruits. We look forward to our next visit in September when we should be able to taste, literally, some of the fruits of our labours.

Jane

The Stubborn Post at Hill Farm

During our recent visits to the Hill Farm Site at Aston Rowant, led by Tony, our team has been working to clear hedge lines and replace gates and rails. On our third trip, we faced the final gate post. We were all quietly confident that the post would be cooperative, especially since we had already replaced the others and had Henry from the Aston Rowant team assisting us.



However, we were confronted with the most stubborn, obstinate, and unyielding piece of wood we had ever encountered.

We started by trying to dig down beside it, then attempted to lever it out. Finally, Henry attached a chain and used a car jack, but the post wouldn't budge. The top of the post eventually broke off, leaving a broken piece still firmly stuck in the ground.

With no other options, we dug a very deep hole next to it. The post finally gave in, and we were able to get it out. The new post was installed, the massive hole was filled in, and the new gate was fitted.

Afterward, we had to repair part of the stockade. Luckily, Tony had some screws in his car, which allowed us to cut and join the old rails to create a sheep-proof enclosure.

We ended up finishing well after our normal time, so a big thank you to the dedicated team that stayed until the very end!

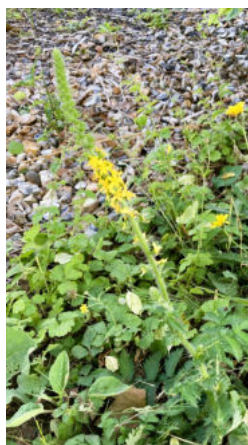
Peter

Beyond the Brambles: Hidden Nature at Dunsden Churchyard

In June, our main task at Dunsden Churchyard was clearing invading brambles. Carol, Lyn, Henri, and Jane used mini-mattocks to clear a large area, while Charlie worked on the opposite side. Brian created a bonfire from the cleared brush.



Wildflowers surprisingly thrive in the harsh carpark.



Agrimony, also known as fairy's wand or Aaron's rod, was believed to have magical associations.



Scarlet pimpernels, thought to cure madness and melancholy, were open during our visit (8 am to 3 pm).



Biting stonecrop, a succulent, grows on shingle and walls. Superstition says planting it on roofs wards off thunderstorms.



We found a spindle **ermine moth web** on a hedge. Butterfly Conservation UK states these webs and caterpillars are harmless, despite their sometimes enormous appearance.

Julia

Taking a Seat by the Watercress



The shady place by the bridge now has a couple of benches from which to contemplate the watercress beds, thanks to Peter Keel and Martin's careful construction work aided by Robert. While they dug post holes at **Ewelme** in August, others including Jane and Carol were clearing back the usual summer rampant growth each side of the footpath. At the end of the session we all got together to try out the new benches.

Julia

When a Two-Man Saw Needs a Third

Edward and Geoff needed a two-handed saw to get through the tough trunk of a long-dead elm, helped by the extra weight of Dave, at **Flowercroft Wood** in August. We tackled several dead trees which had fallen across the rides and over the fence along the access road.

Julia



Peppard Wood - "Fence Down, Pliers Found"

The deer fence at Peppard Wood was no longer effective, so the Woodland Trust asked us to remove it, leaving the outer boundary intact. Overgrown scrub made the task tricky, but we cleared it and clipped the damaged netting from posts. The unusable sections were folded and flattened. By midday, over half was dismantled—just one more session to go.

A pair of fencing pliers went missing, prompting Carol and her husband to search the woods. After a fruitless sweep, they met in the middle—only for Carol to find the pliers between her feet. Crisis averted, no sin bin needed!



Julia



This beautiful Common Spotted Orchid along was spotted while working at Aston Rowant by **Alison**

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