

Green Gym™



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 29 September 2011

Nettlebed Common

We had two visits in quick succession to Nettlebed Common. The first at the end of June was to pull up all (well most) of the Himalayan Balsam that was growing and encroaching the woods. We had cleared the area in the winter thereby removing as many tripping hazards as possible. However, we did not manage to clear all of it. Fortunately, we had a scheduled second task a week later to rake up scrub and bracken after it had been brush cut and had had a week to dry out. Several of us were diverted to the task of finishing the Himalayan Balsam clearance which was like a wall in front of us. A fortnightly revisit to pull the late flowering plants should significantly reduce the problem. Another visit to complete the job will be required. As can be seen the heather is looking spectacular so all the hard work is well rewarded.

Tony



Borocourt Wood conifer plantation

The Forestry Commission have asked us to remove the fence around a large maturing conifer plantation. The de-fencing gang were picnicking under the trees off Busgrove Lane while working in Borocourt Wood opposite. It was raining so hard that the coffee cups filled up faster than you could drink, but luckily Diane's cakes were eaten quickly enough that none were lost.



Butterflies Galore

A recent task at Moored Common was to clear some willow (for safety reasons) from under the power lines. We were very selective about what we removed so that the habitat for the purple emperor was preserved. The purple emperor imago (*Apatura iris*) is a canopy dweller and likes the large stands of oak at Moored, however the larval stage relies on the scrubby goat willow growing around the common. The best time to see the males is in the morning (in July) along the shallow lined edges of sunny rides in the woods. They take to the canopies later on in the day and fly around on high. The males tend to feed on strong smelling dung on the ground and can feed for up to an hour.

The picture below is by kind permission of Pete Eeles.



Andrew Hawkins led the butterfly walk in Flowercroft Wood on July 17th to see the silver washed fritillaries feeding on bramble flowers. Most of the fruit trees and bushes have been early this year, but there were still enough brambles flowering to see plenty of fritillaries.

On the 22nd July an impromptu census was taken on a large buddleia bush in Binfield Heath. It had been a cool night but the sun was strong by 10:00 in the morning. Surprisingly 12 species of butterfly were seen within 30 minutes: Brown Argus, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Silver Washed Fritillary, Small Skipper, Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock, Holly Blue, Small White, Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone So maybe for this year, at least, the decline in the butterfly population has not happened.

Aston Rowant

The last three sessions at Aston Rowant have concentrated on fencing off the track below the office to create a new compartment for the sheep. The first 250 metres was completed in two sessions when the weather was showery sunny and warm. The final session was where we re-aligned some intermediate posts, installed straining posts and a rabbit trap. As can be seen the hard work was completed by the female team members! Seriously though, congratulations to everyone on the effort put in and for a job well done.



Training News

The combined skills of the SCGG membership never ceases to amaze me, no matter what tasks are thrown at us we are always able to complete them in a professional and safe manner to the satisfaction of the customer. So why do we need training I hear you say.

As the Training Officer my objective is to continuously add to the skills set of our members to enable them to confidently carry out all aspects of the tasks we undertake in an enjoyable and safe manner.

To this end, over the past 18 months members have attended the following courses:

Tree Felling using Hand tools - Hedge Laying - Coppicing - Pond Management - Emergency First Aid

For two of the courses, Tree Felling & Hedge Laying, we hired in experts to carry out the training to our own specification on local sites. This proved to be a very cost effective way of doing things and was much enjoyed by all that attended.

As more training opportunities arise I will advise all members by e-mail. If you have yet to attend a course please come along they are always a lot of fun.

Eric.

John, are you sure that's what he said?



Pruning the beech hedge on Kennylands

A chance to use our new high visibility jackets while next to the road.



Keep a lookout for this beauty:



The Pasque Flower (*Pulsatilla vulgaris*) is in the buttercup family (ranunculaceae) and is strongly related to the wood anemone. It grows on chalk grassland with a preference for South facing slopes. It actually has no petals, but 6 purple sepals. Tony

Scales, Scars and Sticky red things

You see it is all to do with buds. Are they opposite each other in pairs, are they alternately spaced along the twig or do they spiral round it? Passing samples of various small saplings around the room we worked through the various questions and answers to identify the specimens of winter trees and shrubs handed to us. So here we were, 12 of us, in a training classroom of the Forestry Commission offices at Aston Cantlow near Wendover, on a one day BTCV course.

What we were using was a 'dichotomous key'. Despite the high sounding name this means a series of questions to focus on things like buds, scales, bark and such like, eliminating what it isn't and picking out what it is, using a description and picture as a further guide until you come to a final identification. This could be one or other of the 43 species of British Native Trees and Shrubs. Sounds easy but then you come to realise how much we go on leaves, form, shape and colour and these are not around in the winter.

Outside in the woods after lunch and things got tougher, lots of hybrids, buds out of sight but with lots of help from the tutor we got some of the basic types in clear focus. Lime, two types; ash, lots of those; hornbeam and beech, closely related.

A very interesting day with lots to think about and yet another dimension of our GG activity. Oh, nearly forgot, many thanks to SCGG for 'sending' me on the course. Oh, another thing. 4 people turned up from the same volunteer conservationist group in their smart minibus complete with logo and matching polo shirts. It's all about marketing and merchandising and politics these days. A green and white Landrover with personalised number plate parked by our tool shed? Mike

Where sheep may safely roam.....overcoming another of life's hurdles

Part 1 - Hurdles, their types, uses and composition

The basic hurdle:

Hurdles come in two basic types, the gate hurdle and the wattle hurdle. The making of hurdles, within the realm of woodland crafts, like hedge-laying, is generically part of fencing and enclosure. The gate hurdle is a lightweight farm gate traditionally made from sweet chestnut although ash, oak, elm, hazel and willow may also be used. The wattle hurdle, made with a dense weave, provides a windproof barrier for sheep pens and garden use. The best material for wattle hurdles is hazel. Willow withies can also be used, though not nearly as durable. The weave is from wood that is either in the round or split (riven).

The upright rods in a hurdle are called *sails* or *zales* and the end ones are *shores*. A split log flat on the ground and securely bedded down with cross braces is the *frame* with holes in which the sails are placed. When making a hurdle ideally you will have a measuring rod to ensure all the sails are the same length, a chopping block, a rough framework of hazel called the *gallows* to stand hazel rods against and a measuring frame.

Splitting and weaving rods

The splitting of hazel rods requires a lot of skill and practice. First, trim off all the side spurs. Second, insert the bill hook into the end of the rod, with the other end firm in the ground. Third, move the blade down the length of the wood using the blade as a lever bending the rod out to the right or left away from the split to avoid the blade 'running out, especially where there is a knot in the wood. You can ease the rod against a stake in the ground opening up the split all the way down.

There are many different styles of the weave with regional patterns, like hedge-laying, chiefly the Dorset and Hampshire. When you reach the end shore twist as you turn round and the rod will double back so that the end can be tucked in. This also pulls in the whole mesh, tightening it, ensuring the sails are kept upright and not pulled out of line, to the left or right. This is difficult and most of us will find the rod breaks through when we try to turn it!

My experience so far - I am lucky in that the orchard where I help out twice a week has plenty of hazel for me to practice with. Hazel is the finest coppice wood and its use and cultivation is deeply embedded in English rural life. Pollen deposits trapped in peat bogs reveal it has been used in this country for such things as laying trackways through the boggy ground of the Somerset levels 4000 years ago. Hazel cuts easily with saw or billhook, rives well, can be wound or knotted and is at its prime between 7 and 12 years old.

As we all know tools are fascinating and come in many different forms and variations with regional names. I bought myself a Hampshire Hook from a good supplier (Morris of Dunsford) by mail order and was amazed at the variety on offer, three pages on one web site. In passing, I thought it would be a good idea for our nice Training Officer to arrange a GG short tour of the Museum of English Life in Reading with perhaps a tutored tool tour, they have a lot there to look at.

My efforts so far have produced a couple of hurdles but not quite ready for the Henley Show. However I have booked myself on a 2 day course at the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum at the end of October so will be reporting on that at a later date, hopefully having overcome another of life's little hurdles. So far not many sheep need to feel penned in by me!

Mike Saunders

Toot! Toot!

A favourite pastime of Toad. Unfortunately, it is also a pastime of a few GG car drivers when they see a GG cyclist going to and from the wild wood. Its difficult enough cycling on our busy roads and trying to avoid drain covers and pot holes without being blasted by a car horn behind you. Can I politely ask GG toads to cease this practice.

Ratty

Magazine contact: Chris Ash
Chrisp.ash@btinternet.com

Tel 0118 9723520

The Green Gym

C/o Health Centre, 39 Wood Lane,

Sonning Common

Enquiries - Robin - 0118 972 3528