

Withymead

On a damp November day we ventured to the nearly overflowing Thames to tackle a variety of tasks from clearing willows in a soon to be flooded area, clearing invading dogwood and burning the arisings to re-connecting the Thames to the lower part of the garden. Keith and Dorothy have identified that the Loddon Lillies in the lower part of the garden were weakening due to lack of permanent water (not a situation encountered too much this summer and autumn). The water level where a large population of the Lillies grow was measured at 45cm below the present river level. Obviously previous attempts, using small diameter plastic pipes, to connect the boatyard inlet to the garden had either failed or become blocked. The task for the day was to dig a wide trench from the garden to the path by the inlet and then another deep trench across the path to carry a 50mm diameter pipe across to the inlet. If this proved successful then a 200mm pipe could be considered as a future permanent solution. Several people got stuck in clearing willows from the soon to be flooded area and also dug the wide trench to the path edge. The other gang dug the narrow deep trench to lay the pipe. Needless to say there were many obstructions from tree roots. In addition below those we discovered an old metal conduit running parallel to the inlet and a metre away a large diameter twisted wire that looked like an earth connecting wire. The most likely explanation is that these ran from the boatyard down to the bank of the Thames to a charging point for the electric boats that were used.



Binfield Heath

The pond in Binfield Heath has become very overgrown and choked with weed and the adjacent Keep's Lane was also heavily overgrown, discouraging walkers from using it. Our tasks were to clear out some of the pond to let in light and encourage regeneration (without removing all the successional species and clear as much of the footpath as possible. Keep's Lane used to be a cart track/ road linking Binfield Heath to the Henley - Reading road. It has not been used for vehicles for many years and although the Binfield Heath end is open as a footpath the lower end has not been used for years and is overgrown and blocked in many places (it is worth reading the story of the disasters on Keep's lane on the signboard by the pond). A team of 5 attacked the pond supervised by Robert and the rest of us cleared the path. About a third of the pond was cleared of reeds and weed and is now starting to clear of the stirred-up clay. The footpath is now open from Binfield Heath down to the spur which leads to the back of Orwell's.



Aston Rowant

For the last 3 months we have been clearing the sunken way which borders the M40 at the bottom of Beacon Hill. The purpose is to remove the bramble, hawthorne and other invasive scrub to encourage the growth of food plants for butterflies. The sunken way has a south facing bank and is ideal habitat for horseshoe vetch and hence the blue butterflies. Working on the steep banks was a challenge at times but we managed to safely clear them all as well as coppicing a large willow and buckthorns which should re-generate. The final session there was coincident with the autumn fruit and berry production of the guelder rose, briony, wild roses, elder and buckthorn so everyone enjoyed the mellow fruitfulness in the sun.



Nettlebed Common

A new sign has been installed on Nettlebed Common of which Priest Hill is a geological SSSI. The sign explains why this is so going back to the time when Nettlebed was under the Thames!



Peppard Common

Despite the temperature below zero at the start, 14 ggers raked the ski slope of the cut material, completed the job on time and received due accolade from their skiing leader.



Celebrate ! 15 years of Green Gym

The Green Gym concept will be 15 years old in March 2013. It was started in Sonning Common by Dr William Bird and has mushroomed ever since. We plan to celebrate this possibly in early April as Easter is very early next year. You will be informed when plans are finalised.

Kennylands Heros

Despite the prospect of a wet and miserable morning a dozen of us turned out to complete the blackthorn, bramble, and bracken clearance which this time was threatening the west path. A big thanks to all who did an excellent job.

Nettlebed Common

We are carrying out multiple tasks on Nettlebed Common as part of the Chiltern Commons lottery funded project. These include:

- clearing out ponds and letting more light into them in order to allow them to regenerate naturally
- clearing areas which have become overgrown with trees and scrub re regenerate marshy areas, heather and grassland
- controlling the bracken and low level scrub to allow the gorse to regenerate



Nuffield Place

On a cold cloudy day we started some synchronised raking to clear up the mown field which is being turned into a wildflower meadow. The arisings from the cutting have to be raked up and moved to prevent the soil improvement which will suppress the wildflower growth. Tea was a luxurious affair with a large woodshed provided to keep the rain from diluting the coffee and dampening the cakes.



Valley Road Chalk Bank

The main stand of trees at the top of Valley Road chalk bank are ageing fast and some have fungal infections indicating they will need to be felled soon. Green Gym working on behalf of the Henley Wildlife Group helped to make three large clearings in the scrub to allow the later planting of native deciduous trees as replacements. We cleared brambles, nettles, roses etc. as well as felling some invasive sycamores before digging out the bramble roots as much as possible. We were ably helped by Sally Rankin, Andrew Hawkins and Jess Bishop of HWG.



Ipsden Wood

We started at a new site near Checkendon, clearing the fence from around a Forestry Commission plantation. A long muddy walk from the field where we parked the cars brought us to a secluded ride. The day was sunny and warm while we cleared the first stretch of the fence, removing the rabbit wire, posts and strainers, then rolling everything up and stacking it for the FC to remove.

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"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

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Green Broom Wood

A site new to us on the edge of Crays Pond, this is an extensive wood with criss-crossing footpaths. It had not been worked or managed for many years until recently when contractors were engaged to fell a large number of trees and remove some of the wood. Green Gym now has the task of clearing a lot of the understorey, coppicing old hazel stands and generally making the paths safe. We will be working there for many months! We can recycle the hazel to make stakes and whips for hedge laying later in the year.



The Poster and Signboard

Thanks to the effort of a small committee, but mainly Ali, Wim, Julia and Tony, we now have a portable A-board which advertises who we are and what we do and hopefully will encourage passers-by to join us. This board is now in use as can be seen with the happy group of hedge-layers at Pack and Prime lane on a sunny but freezing cold October Saturday morning.



Moorend Common

we continued our work removing the invading silver birches which have grown since the felling of areas of woodland and have invaded some of the grassland.

