

## Flowercroft Wood: Stag Beetle Hotel

On a sunny spring morning in April Andrew Hawkins led us to the lower area of Flowercroft Wood to coppice hazel and use the arisings to construct two Stag Beetle Hotels. Stag Beetles are one the largest insects in the UK and are most commonly found from the Midlands to the South of the country. The Latin name is *Lucanus cervus* ( derived from; *Lucania* in Italy where they were used as amulets and *cervus* as Latin for Deer).

Stag beetles spend most of their life up to 50 cm underground in the larval form which lasts from between three and seven years: note that the fully grown larvae can be up to 11 cm long! After this time as a larva they spend a few weeks building a large cocoon below ground where the larva pupates before emerging (still underground) as an adult in the Autumn. Finally after spending winter and spring underground the adult will emerge in May to look for mates and will have a short life above ground. By the end of August most will have died (hopefully after mating successfully) and none will survive the Winter. The males are most commonly seen flying at dusk looking for females. The females are most commonly seen on the ground looking for nesting sites which typically are below ground near rotting wood. They lay small round eggs.

The most obvious problem for stag beetles is a significant loss of habitat due to urban development and change of farming methods. The many surviving open spaces have sadly been developed, including many woodlands. Development will continue to reduce stag beetle habitats, but increased awareness of their existence could encourage a population revival. In addition the 'tidying up' of the countryside has led to the removal of dead or decaying wood habitats; the stag beetle larva's food source. Stump grinding of felled trees removes a vital habitat. Predators such as corvids, foxes and kestrels tends to be around when adults are trying to mate and lay eggs. This is natural predation; it is possible that the rise in the numbers of magpies and carrion crows in the last decade is having a significant impact on stag beetle populations. Humans are, sometimes unwittingly, a direct threat to the stag beetle. Adult beetles are attracted to the warm surfaces such as roads and pavements with the consequential loss of life. Stag beetles look as though they could be dangerous, so some people kill them out of unwarranted fear. Stag beetles are harmless and do not damage living wood or timber. The larvae only feed on decaying wood so leave habitat piles to attract them. However as already stated they prefer rotting wood up to 50 cm below ground so to help them as much as we can we need to build Stag Beetle Hotels as shown below.



## Green Gym 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at Withymead



We celebrated the 15th anniversary of our inauguration with a work session at Withymead on 20th April to which we invited the other five Oxfordshire Green Gyms. There were plenty of tasks to keep a turnout of 3 dozen fully busy while renewing acquaintance with members of Wallingford, Bicester and Abingdon Green Gyms: putting in new fencing and shoring up the existing fence along the approach road, digging decades of leaf mould out of the slipway and barrowing to the car park, raking out paths in the lawn and spreading tons of gravel barrowed in from the car park, and brushing preservative onto the study centre.

The sun shone brightly all morning and there was plenty of cake for the coffee break, including an anniversary cake which was cut by Dr William Bird, who joined in the whole session. He gave a short talk on how the Health Service will be doing more to encourage exercise, such as with the Green Gym, to combat obesity and other health problems.

Abingdon Green Gym was so taken with Withymead that they now include it as a site on their programme. We are very grateful to wardens Keith and Dot for hosting such a large work contingent, and to Robert for organising, among many other things, a raft of wheelbarrows. We all had a good time and look forward to our next 15 years.

Julia





## Green by Sylvia Pugsley

Green is many hundreds of shades, Green is Earth's flowing robe  
Green is flora's perfect canvas, Green is Bowling Green,  
Candlewick Green, Golders Green, a Green Hill Far Away,  
La Costa Smeralda and the 18th Green.

Green is Under the Greenwood Tree, The Green Man,  
Greenmantle, Anne of Green Gables,  
How Green was my Valley and Joyce's snot-green sea.  
Green is the Wearing of the Green  
The Shamrock for St. Pat and the Emerald Isle.  
The Leprechaun and The Green, Green Grass of Home.

Green is the Green-Eyed Monster, Green about the Gills,  
Green with Envy and maybe Gangreen?

Green is for Greenhorn, The Corn is Green  
Green Card, Green Wine, Green Room  
Greenhouse and Cleo's Salad Days.

Green is In a Mountain Greenery, Greensleeves,  
Green Door, Fascinating Greeneyes and  
Green Grow the Rushes-O,  
Green Fingers and Green Gym??

Green is reining-in Nature, Controlling Rampant growth,  
Green Gym is Hedge-laying, Clearing Overgrown Meadows,  
Regenerating Heather, Planting Juniper Trees  
Once Plentiful in this Green and Pleasant Land.

Green Gym is Coppicing Trees, particularly Hazel,  
Haloing Oak trees to let in light, Clearing Willow,  
To help the spread of Orchids in our Pastures Green.

Green Gym cares about Green,  
Green Gym is Green,  
Green is Green Gym.

## Greys Court

We had great fun on a warm sunny Saturday making a den (as requested) to encourage children to do the same in the new play area by Rocky Lane. We also improved the path down to the play area by removing tree roots.

If you missed the bluebells this year, you missed a real treat! It makes the hard work worthwhile.



## Peppard Common

On a bright spring morning, as requested by the Commons Conservators, we set about diverting a footpath away from a dangerous quarry edge. A Century ago someone was killed on a dark night by mistaking the way. Various attempts have been made to fence the edge over the years without long lasting success. We moved the path about 6 metres away from the edge and then laid holly and other trees to make a natural and live growing barrier. Where there was no live material available we used dead tree trunks and any other material to hand to create a barrier.



## Moorend Common

One of the perennial tasks at Moorend Common is to try and make the footpaths passable in the winter. The clay soil dictates that the site is almost permanently wet and especially so in a wet winter, following a wet summer. The day was also a celebration of Keith's birthday. We set to work by raking up the water soaked wood chippings on North Glade, left by some tree felling operations. These were then dragged to Robert's pick-up truck and transported to Middle Glade where one of the more difficult paths was tackled. Hopefully the chippings will not completely vanish into the mud!



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# Green Gym



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

## full of little cuttings.

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## Anthony (Tony) Lennox Holmes 1928 - 2013

It is with great sadness that we have to announce that Tony died recently after a short illness. Tony worked for Ford throughout his life and was a very inventive engineer. His family remember him fondly as 'The dad that lived in the shed' always creating toys for them and working on more exciting projects such as a one man hovercraft. Tony joined Green Gym several years ago and kept himself fit cycling to many of the work sites. If it was too far to cycle he would arrive in his camper van (eventually). He was a very sociable person and enjoyed brass bands enormously and saw them 'live' whenever possible.

A fond memory from Susan Byers: Tony was very quiet and unassuming. He made me feel so welcome at Green Gym. As a newcomer to a group, I don't always find it easy to talk to lots of people I don't know, but we spent several 'cake breaks', (my term for teatime) chatting.

I think he had a problem remembering everybody's names but of course found mine easy because of his friend, Susan Bowles.

He was so pleased when I visited him in Townlands and we talked until his daughter arrived all the way from Essex.



## Cleeve Court Water Meadows

On a lovely day in June we arrived on the meadows to repair paths, move log piles and control unwanted weeds. Having moved some logs from a heap of wood chippings, we started loading the chippings into a barrow to move them to a path. Suddenly there was a squirming mass of bodies in the chippings, most of which vanished down a small hole. One was photographed before being reunited with its family. They were not immediately recognisable as their fur looked like



mole-skin, but they had long tails, long delicate feet and very long snouts. They were water shrews which are typically found along the banks of rivers. They feed on a variety of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates. They are solitary, but may live near to other individuals, and are more tolerant of each other than common and pygmy shrews. When swimming they are very buoyant due to the air trapped in their dense coat. They live in burrow systems along river banks. They are not considered to be endangered, although they may be threatened in Britain by loss of habitat due to pollution and disturbance.