

Cleeve Water Meadows

The management work being undertaken here is intended to restore the field to a water meadow, rich in wildflower species such as the Loddon Lily, Cuckooflower, Ragged Robin and Water Mint. Records show that the meadow used to be rich in wildflowers, but for a number of years it was not possible to carry out the work necessary to maintain it. Now, with the help of local conservation volunteers from the Sonning Common Green Gym and the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers, together with funding from a Natural England Higher Level Stewardship agreement, the meadow is being brought back into the management regime needed to ensure its long-term future.

Wet meadows were once a common habitat along the flood plains of the River Thames but in recent years their numbers have declined due to development and other changes in land use. The main work being carried out on the site is the removal, coppicing and pollarding of a number of trees and scrub, the mowing of the grassland and the removal of mown grass.

Reducing the number and size of the trees allows more light to penetrate down to the grassland giving wildflowers more chance to thrive. The trees also transpire water from the meadow, causing it to dry out hence changing the character of the wetland, to a drier meadow. Removing much of the scrub and the work on the trees will help in the restoration of the water levels and a water meadow habitat. The work will also restore the character of the meadow by giving it a more open feel. In addition the removal of some of the trees will make the meadow easier to manage in the future and help retain the valuable habitat that is being restored.

Regular mowing of the grass reduces its vigour and allows wildflower seeds that are lying dormant in the soil to begin to germinate successfully. Removing the mown grass ensures that it does not remain on the top of the soil and form a mat, restricting the ability of wildflowers to push through. It will also ensure that the cut grass does not rot down into the soil. This will help control the fertility of the soil over time and create better conditions for wildflowers.

In the future the water meadow will continue to be maintained through a programme of mowing, scrub control and tree management to ensure the long-term success of this conservation project.....Charlotte Turner.

On an improving morning weather-wise 19 of us volunteered for the wide variety of jobs available. These included a bonfire burning all the brash, whilst others moved brash from near the Loddon Lilies beyond the wooded area to the fire. An area was cleared of invasive weeds to encourage the spread of the Lilies. Some of us accepted the challenge of clearing stinging nettles and docks from the woodland area and carting them to be burnt. Eric reckoned that docks with complete roots would be worth £1 each but Gill, Elizabeth P. and I are still awaiting our rather large payment as the soil was so damp that most of them came out with intact roots. Any dock root which breaks off will regrow so it was good to be able to clear so many whilst they were still such juvenile plants. We were sustained by a delicious bread pudding from Diane and Rock Buns made by Charlotte.....Susan



In mid July Charlotte kindly allowed members from the Reading and District Natural History Society, organised by Sheelagh, to visit the meadows to carry out a brief survey of the flora and fauna. Although the findings were in no way comprehensive it was very encouraging to see a variety of the water meadow species returning. The plants shown below are a selection of those found. The unusual one is the Greater Dodder in this case parasitising on nettles. It is found mostly in South east England and is categorised as rare. It likes wet areas and seems to grow alongside watercourses. Some of the other plants are less unusual, but are typical of water meadow habitats. Pictured are Common Valerian, Marsh Woundwort, Common Meadow-rue, Celery-leaved Buttercup (with Water Forget-me-not) and Marsh Speedwell. We also saw Water Figwort, Fen Bedstraw, Marsh Yellow-cress, etc.

One of the rarely seen insects, that was captured, was a Snakefly: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snakefly> . This insect has an unusually long neck, which it can move like a snake and is predatory both as a larva and as an adult, on caterpillars, smaller insects etc.



Marsh Woundwort, *Stachys palustris*



Common Valerian, *Valeriana officianalis*



Common Meadow-rue, *Thalictrum flavum*



Celery-leaved Buttercup, *Ranunculus sceleratus*



Greater Dodder, *Cuscuta europaea*



Marsh Speedwell, *Veronica scutellata*

Green Broom Wood

On a rather damp morning, eleven hardy souls turned up to clear brambles and the tops of felled trees at Green Broom Wood. The footpath and the area we were working in were both extremely wet and rather slippery but the bluebells were looking wonderful and the birds were singing well to entertain us, even the sun thought about coming out. It



was too wet underfoot for a bonfire so we did what Green Gymmers do best and made large stacks of logs and brush, and other piles of brambles. I hadn't been to this site for about a year and what a difference Green Gym have made in that time by getting much further into the wood with all the clearance. We celebrated Jill Kendall's 80th birthday. She had made us a delicious fruitcake, all iced and decorated with silver balls, despite saying that she is unable to bake cakes! Susan

Dunsden Church

Finally the last section of hedge-laying across the back of the graveyard - could it have been St. Patrick's Day? With help from Diane lighting a fire to cook the cakes and warm the Guinness.



Greys Court

On a rather wet morning, we gathered in Rocky Lane where the footpath enters the Greys Court land, ready to attack the spreading laurel problem. Hard hats were the order of the day due to the height that the branches had stretched. Many of the lower branches had bent over



and re-rooted in the leaf litter. A prospective new member, Sheena, was welcomed as we were doing our warm-up exercises. There was plenty of work to keep us very well occupied whilst shielded from the worst of the rain by the dense leaf canopy, which is provided by these intrusive plants. By the end of the morning we had made good headway leaving the way for the NT to follow in with their chainsaws on a later occasion, as well as have the most enormous bonfire of all our prunings and sawings. As usual we were well sustained halfway through, this time by delicious marmalade cake and date slices with thanks to Diane. Susan (the work continues)

Bishopswood

As part of our activities to pay the rent for the tool store:- Our chairman hard at work stripping ivy from perimeter trees at Bishopswood in May.

Julia



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

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 40 June 2014

Park Wood

On a gorgeously sunny morning in April we worked at a new site, Park Wood, Nuffield, which is owned by Nuffield College, Oxford. We also welcomed another new volunteer, Barry, who was introduced by Chris and Sheelagh. Our task for the morning was to remove as much holly as we could from alongside the footpaths. This was pulled out when it was small enough, otherwise it was lopped or sawn down. The branches were then carried and hidden amongst the undergrowth with as little impact as possible to the bluebells. These are just beginning to flower and are about 2-3 weeks early. Elizabeth pointed out that they looked like real English ones and reckoned she could smell them.

I came home and after a shower was wondering about the rash on my legs. Ah, yes! All the dragging and carrying that very prickly stuff to hide away. Leather trousers would have been very welcome! It was worth it though because I'd had the opportunity to talk to almost everyone who was there that day and as usual we had some of Diane's delicious cakes to sustain us half way through the morning. Susan



Withymead

We've never done this before at the Green Gym - install a cable for a nesting box webcam. Robin started digging a narrow trench while Sian and Ian together devised the optimum working method for making a lengthwise slit in an old hose. The hose was to necessary to protect the cable in the ground leading from the Withymead Visitor Centre to a bird box next to the railway. This was but one of many tasks on a grand work session at Withymead at the beginning of May. We were joined by Abingdon Green Gym and Withymead's Saturday Volunteers to dig out a new pond, build two sections of fence, clean out the greenhouse and cut down acres (possibly) of nettles. Julia



Kennylands

In case anyone has not driven past Kennylands field - this year we owe a great deal of thanks to Tony for a very professional job of hedgelaying along the Kennylands Road edge. This is Tony's personal 'Forth Bridge' project since he tackling it single handed. By the time he has worked his way round the entire boundary of the Millenium field, it will be time to start again.

Photo from Jane

