

Green Gym[®]



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Number 46 December 2015

Seasons Greetings to all Green Gymers

Kennylands Millenium Green

Autumn brings a set of tasks at the Green Gym's only Sonning Common site. The brush cut wildflower area has to be raked, bagged and taken to the dump area. With some Wildlife Trust sourced wild flower seed packets available, two areas were scraped of turf. The seeds were spread around at a later date when rain was forecast. Before the leaves change colour and fall, the beech hedge is trimmed. The top was removed afterwards using a stabilised step ladder.

Tony



The Rakes Progress



Cutting Edge Technology



Tough Turf

Cleeve Water Meadow

This popular site saw us raking up the cut rushes into heaps and bringing prior heaped material to the fire site. Pollard willows were sorted into usable wood with the rest of the material brought to the fire which was sizable by the end of the session.



There were seven Green Gymers standing in a field



Autumn colours on Kennylands.

Withymead

The sun peeps through the trees,
Leaves rustle in the breeze.
Birds cheep, chirp and twitter.
Butterflies flutter and flitter.
We slash, rake and clear the rush,
So Loddon lilies flourish thus.

Willow is felled, dragged and burned.
Grass roots removed, soil turned,
Arable seeds will flower,
Whilst otters swim The Thames with power.
Sand Martins will find their nest,
Withymead really is the best.

Susan Byers

Tree surgeons were taking down some large trees in the Withymead reed fen during our October session, so we all lent a hand hauling the brash to the bonfire site. This made a welcome change from raking up grass by the roots in the lower lawn area to make a bare patch for meadow flower seeds. However we completed the raking with a will, hoping to see wildflowers there in profusion in the coming spring.



What a lovely sunny autumn day to be at Withymead on Thursday. Our main task was to slash down rushes, where Keith could not get with his machine due to willow saplings and habit log piles. We were told that they have a very rare beetle which is now at its larval stage in the wood piles. Some of us slashed and removed the rushes, some cut and dragged willow. All was taken to the bonfire where two hardy Green Gymmers sweltered as the morning sun warmed up the day. Delicious ham rolls and cakes were supplied by Christine to sustain us mid-morning.



Nuffield Place

Despite the dismal day with rain coming and going, we enthusiastically continued the task of removing accessible branches from the overgrown laurel hedge. Material was dragged into the field for processing into logs for chipping and brush for a future bonfire.



PHYTOPHORA

From the Greek –plant-destroyer, it is a fungus like organism whose member species are capable of causing enormous environmental damage. At present about 100 species are known but it is possible that 100 are yet to be discovered.

Phytophthora infestans was responsible for the potato blight that caused the Great Irish Famine of 1845 so it has been known for some time.

The latest form of the disease causing concern is P. ramorum which causes sudden oak death and has been disastrous in USA. However it has, so far, had little effect on native oak species but it has caused much damage to the larch species and it has been necessary to clear fell large areas of larch forest.

Another version – p.kernoviae lurks in beech and rhododendron and oaks and it is feared that there can be hybridisation of the two species which is why rhododendron has been removed in many old woods and estates. There is now also a worry that it could be spreading to the native heathlands.

Ramorum was first noted in the UK in 2002 and kernoviae in 2003. This spread is put down to various causes; weather and the world wide importation and movement of trees and timber being important.

Infected wood has to be removed and destroyed and as far as possible the ground replanted with disease resistant native woods and dead leaves and shoots have to be thoroughly cleaned up.

This is why we had to disinfect and clean up our tools and boots going in and out of Nuffield Place so that no infection could be spread.

NB Laurels are immune, as are human beings!

Jill Kendal

Aston Rowant

The October visit took us to "Linky Down" to tackle bramble and other growth from around the Junipers. Greg's help on clearing this lot of brambles is clearly shown in the two pictures below.

Enjoy the lunchtime view.



In November we returned to this much needed task but this time low cloud and intermittent rain kept us busy.

The December spud roast took place in an enclosure called "Tent Peg" as this is its shape. Twenty of us worked hard on a dull and dreary day. A large bonfire at the bottom of the slope meant constant up and downing as well as cutting and burning.



Parsons Wood

We are making good progress on the holly and had three fires in order to clear the back log of cut materials.



David attends the fire unaware of a giant slug behind him.

Eric's birthday cakes at Cleeve Water Meadow



Kingwood Klearers

Despite the first cold snap of the winter, ggers arrived early and in good numbers for our Kingwood Common second lowland heathland task this autumn. Three & a half hours of prior brush cutting had left plenty of clearance work along with bramble, bracken and small silver birch removal from existing heather. European gorse was also not spared and all the materials burnt up on a fire. Despite the strong winds we worked in a relatively sheltered area and was blessed with plenty of sunshine (and smoke).

Thanks to the Green Gym, we have already made a huge impact and look forward to a couple of sessions in Q1 of next year.



A Node to Autumn

Well someone had to quote it, so it might as well be me.

‘Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun,’

John Keats rambles on of course about trees bending with apples, hazel shells with a sweet kernel and bees thinking Summer will never end. Great stuff and fit to be recited aloud as we toil raking and slashing and many another –ing as we avoid the bit at Cleeve Meadow where the hornets lurk.

But talking of Autumnal fruits and fruit gathering let me get back to tools (you know my interest in them!)

So here I am at The Vyne using a wonderful bit of kit that you can use for gathering apples from the ground (in this case Barland perry pears used for making that wonderful dry tangy and refreshing aperitif) or indeed walnuts. This an ingenious but simple device. As you roll the cylinder along the individual wires part to admit anything of a firm substance. Very soon you can hear the walnuts or other fruit rolling around inside. Working underneath a walnut tree you hear the sudden rustle and plop of a walnut falling and you can rush over to scoop it up. No more bending and cracking of knees. What a medley of Autumnal sounds to be sure!

You can empty your load into a waiting bucket or tub by opening the wire springs by hand and letting the produce fall out. Alternatively you can place the whole thing over a triangular device that clips onto the bucket and this parts the wires for you.

I also quite liked the apple picker. This a neat little item that you position under the apple making sure you avoid the fruiting bud, a slight twist and the apple falls into the bag without bruising. Strange to say but I find however thoroughly you think you have cleared a complete tree coming along late there is also one or two apples hiding under a bunch of leaves you have missed!

Stepping back a bit and thinking about the whole philosophy thing, there is really something quite atavistic about the business of fruit gathering and collection, whether it is cultured or wild. Does it release some happiness endorphin? Not sure about this but I can in truth say you do get a great feeling of satisfaction releasing this old ‘hunter/gatherer’ instinct.

And when the rich harvest has been gathered in? Let’s go back to Keats,

‘Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours’

Mike Saunders
09 September, 2015

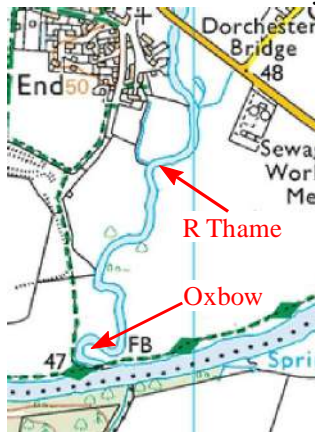
Hurst Water Meadow

We had two visits to this new site just outside Dorchester in meadows bounded by the rivers Thame and Thames.



16 SCGG members joined 12 local volunteers on 31st October for a work session at the beautiful water meadows by the river Thame in Dorchester. Our main task was to clear nettles and

willow saplings from the river bank by the bridge with a bonfire for the arisings. Further down the river we helped cut back a stand of blackthorn encroaching on the meadow, with a second bonfire. At the coffee break we enjoyed home-made Danish pastries and other yummy cakes whilst getting to know our hosts, who have put in a lot of hard work on the site over several years.



Our second visit was a morning of intermittent drizzle but we nevertheless help to complete the two remaining tasks of tree planting on the piece of land bounded by the oxbow on the river Thame and five black poplars along the side of the Thame which required both rabbit and deer guards.



Tea break underneath the arches and Peter the rabbit guard installer



Thank you so much for bringing a splendid group of SCGG volunteers to help us on Saturday 31st October. Please thank, on our behalf, everyone who came. We made great progress in those three hours and I hope that you all enjoyed the visit and the workout. We certainly enjoyed working with you all.

If you look at our website blog <http://www.hurst-water-meadow.org.uk/blog> you will see a gallery of photos taken on the day.

With best wishes

Gillian

Hon. Secretary,

*Hurst Water Meadow
Trust*

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