

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

No 52 June 2017

From the Desk with a View

Spring has eased her way into Summer and the ground has cracked and died beneath GGers feet. Drought reigns supreme. Whoops, a pun. No, a homophone. But surprisingly the green is green, the nettles form their densely barbed banks at Cleeve Court and the watercress at Ewelme splurges and gurgles as ever before. Hmm spoke too soon a deluge came as I looked skywards.

But to turn to more mundane matters...cakes that is. The cake register is filling up and I am to ask you GGers for recipes to share.. Crumbs (I use the term advisedly) on telly next! Don't forget your personal mugs too though Brian whispers we still have 1500 of the polystyrene so no rush. BTW cakes do not have to be home made so no worries there about burnt offerings.

Lots more new people... nice to see. I think we had 22 at Sue Ryder where we split into small parties hacking and dragging assorted unwanted shrubbery. A special welcome to our young Duke of Edinburgh Award contestants (is that the right word?) Amazing they kindly offered to sign up for the cake rota!

We said a splendid thank you to Diane and David (see note) for -what was it?- 18 years of cake and hot water flasks, all those times, twice a week. So now we have the Thursday and Saturday hot drinks routine Julia on one and Jill on the other, plenty of offers to cover very welcome. So far it all seems to be going well.

How lovely to see in all our bramble and bracken clearance the heather coming through at Nettlebed Common and the bluebells earlier on at Park Wood and Parsons Wood. So much of our efforts are maintenance, clearing then coming back to re-clear now in these places we are developing, building on past work to move matters forward. How lovely to see.

Susan writes:

On the 1st of June I saw this moth fluttering on one of the conifer trees at Burnt Platt when we were busy weeding the heather. It is the Small Blood-vein moth, *scopularia imitaria*, which has a wingspan of 26-29mm. its cross-lines extend over all 4 wings when it is at rest. I had obviously disturbed it sleeping in the vegetation as it is usually flying at night. The web tells me that it feeds on privet and other low-growing plants and the caterpillars overwinter. It is only common in southern Britain and rare in the north. Its habitats include hedgerows, waste ground and coastal sand dunes.



Hon Ed adds:

I do think it useful when we can develop our knowledge of the wonderful world of Nature around us on our sites, spotting things, learning names of plants and birds, taking pictures and making notes. We need to educate ourselves into the context of what we do and where we work, very motivational and good to balance the cerebral with the physical.

Pictures and details of anything you spot on our sites very welcome. Keep your eyes open.



Julia explains some of our other tasks at Aston Rowant away from the usual scrub bashing.

Hon Ed suggests for this:

- start with shears to cut the thorn or bramble to manageable size-use lopper to cut major stems now you can see them

- pruning saw for thicker stems-bow saw if needed-rake clear to finish

Sessions at Aston Rowant usually (but not always) involve walking up and down steep slopes, certainly the case on recent visits where our task has been to clear and restore fence lines. The fences surround sheep exclusion plots set up as a long-term Oxford University study on how best to manage chalk grassland for flowering plant species. The plots are perched high up, from where our cut material had to be hauled to bonfire sites which were sometimes placed lower down, making for much extra hill climbing. All very aerobic – but on the other hand the views were magnificent!

Our advisor for these sessions was Tim King of Wolfson College who is an expert on ant hills and has been studying the colonies at Aston Rowant for many years. One of his interests is in the relationship between ant activity and grassland restoration, so he has been involved with this experiment to study changing plant species in the exclusion plots set up in 1969. This study is the longest-running of its kind and is described in a paper published in 1990 by L.K. Ward and R.D. Jennings.

Four randomised blocks were created containing four differently-treated 10 x 12 m plots: annual grazing; no treatment; no grazing after disturbance by burning; and no grazing after rotavating in 1969. The plots have been monitored on the last week of June ever since and all plant growth recorded. The records take plant positions in relation to the fence posts, hence we had to be meticulous when making replacements.

The experiment demonstrated that the original flora was not entirely lost over the first 14 years when woody plants moved in, and could probably be restored if scrub clearance were re-instated. Some species in particular preferred the disturbed plots, e.g. the uncommon wild candytuft *Iberis amara*, then continued to thrive in the early succession to scrub. In our work on the fences we found that the scrub had sometimes migrated outside the exclusion plots despite being available to sheep grazing.

We can take some pride in the thought that our everyday scrub cutting and fence work is making a contribution to an academic study which is unique in that similar studies elsewhere in the country have long since been abandoned.

Julia



We returned to Spring Wood and were delighted to see bluebells coming through once more. This is partly in the areas we have cleared of the ubiquitous holly on previous occasions. Uprooting where possible has paid off evidenced by those stretches still remaining open, thanks to efforts of these (and other) happy campers! Who is that man in the middle dragging away our woodland?



Peter goes it with the mattock getting down to the root....leave some for Wim and Hon. Ed please, Peter!



Among those sitting out the group photo.....
..or appearing aloof....or just awaiting their turn on the fire!



We really put our backs into it and grasped the nettle at Cleeve Court. I don't know who these GGers are but they are certainly keeping their heads down all to the good of course.

They say nettle stings are good for your arthritis.....!

What a joy to see the handkerchief tree (*davidia involucrata*) in full bloom at Joyce Grove. Honestly could be no better description. Who did I see pick up a fallen one...run out of tissues, Jane?

Originating from South China it is widely cultivated, the bracts flutter in a May breeze like white doves or pocket handkerchiefs hence the name.



I thought this memorial bench near the tree was so evocative as a momento mori. As the memory fades the bramble creeps over obscuring all that is in the past.....but the scene moves on with GGers at work (note the gloves)



The trees at Joyce Grove are magnificent and a pleasure to behold. There is a real 'Lost Gardens of...' feel to the place and one gets a real sense of the former splendour of the grounds as they may have been in the heady days of the Flemings ownership.

Oh well autres temps, autres moeurs as Nick Odell might say.....!





The little river Bin at Binfield Heath was very overgrown and hardly flowing until SCGG arrived in March to give it some TLC. Brambles and self-sown saplings crowded the banks and crossed the channel, which had silted up with logs and other debris. Concentrating on the south side of the bridge, we cut back the vegetation and barrowed it across the road bridge to a bonfire. Waders were donned by a hardy few to dig out the mud clogging the river bed, getting the water moving again by the end of the session, as shown in the photos.

The Bin is not a long stream, welling up from a spring a mile or so south of the village and disappearing down a sink hole further north. The parish council had asked us to help restore its attractive setting for the enjoyment of locals and visitors. The progress made in March spurred a group of villagers to carry on with bramble clearance, so that when we returned in April we were able to tackle the banks north of the bridge. There is scope for more work on the Bin and other projects in the area, so we can look forward to revisiting Binfield Heath in future programmes.

Julia



Cakes, ale and mugs

Well, talk about let them eat cake. Was it not Sir Toby Belch who said to Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* 'Does thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' As far as I can see GGers are pretty virtuous and as there is no ale we do enjoy our cake break. So heigh-ho get signing the cake roster only twice a quarter per person. And don't forget to bring a cup or mug. (there's probably a spare if you forgot).



How about this one?

Mike Macleod and Hon. Ed were tasked by Tom at Ewelme with putting soil over bottom rung of the boundary fence by the bridge to facilitate motor mowing.. Wallingford GG had previously done most of the job now the mud being set firm. Surprise surprise WGG had been etched in the mud. Difficult to see on photos but they say it pays to advertise.

Idea for SCGG anyone?

All magnificent hugs to Diane (and David) for 18 years slaving over a hot stove, many thanks you two Gordons. You've done us proud.

Yes. Have you not met One-Match Gordon doyenne of the bonfire?
(no close up pic to spare their blushes)

An example of Hard Fern (*blechnum*) pointed out by Sally on Nettlebed Common. Vivid green with delicate needle leaves it is a genus of between 150 and 220 species of ferns with a cosmopolitan distribution.

Meanwhile the heat of the sun makes coffee break more welcome than ever usual!

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