

Green Gym®



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Lockdown Edition April 2020

Welcome

Welcome to this first edition of The Lockdown Lopper. I hope it finds everyone well and safe, and not becoming too bored with the social distancing regulations. A big thank you to everyone who has sent in articles and photos for this edition. As it sounds like the current situation will continue for a bit longer please send me any articles or photos you would like to share. They would be very welcome for the next edition.

Keep safe, and hopefully see everyone again soon.

--martin b--

NEWSLETTER FROM THE BLUE KNEE PADS

We'd like to keep you up to date with the latest knee pad news.

No way are we going to gather moss or spiders webs with no green gym activities. You will be pleased to hear that we have already had several outings of an environmental kind. The knee pad wearer gets bored indoors very quickly so she decided that the time had come to dig up what was thought to be a small bush cluttering up one corner of the garden. It was one of those things that began with a few tentative pokes with the spade ... and before you could say green kneeler, orange kneeler a rampart of earth was built up round the unsuspecting bush.



It was the roots that were a problem, as a bigger bully of a neighbouring bush had infiltrated everywhere. But no problem, this was a job for good old Green Gym tools and loppers were brought in as was a pick axe (no mattocks being kept in the local shed) and after much scrabbling on hands and knee pads and leverage using rhododendron technique the bush was finally excavated. Kneepads were cleaned of mud and a satisfactory task was completed in the usual GG manner.

Since then we have been down on her knees weeding in the rain, clearing the pond (now covered with frog spawn) and generally making ourselves useful. Sadly nothing to attack with a saw in this environmental area - so far.

--Jill--

HOLLY SHAW

Our visit to Holly Shaw planned for 11th April is but one of the casualties of the current emergency, but to anybody half-expecting to meet a charming lady it should be pointed out that this is a new site for SCGG in Exlade Street (Spell check can't cope with Exlade Street, suggesting among others **Explode Street**). Shaw derives from an Old English name for a small wood.

When I was looking over the wood with Ken Hume, the owner, a fairly large bird flew up from the ground through the trees to the opposite field and I wondered if it could be a woodcock. Ken reports: "A week or so later I was near the same spot again with John Morris (Chilterns Woodland project manager) and we both saw the same bird which he very quickly identified as being a snipe or woodcock. That might well fit since the lane that runs up one side of our woodland is known as Cox Hill and our Douglas Fir plantation is on what was called Cockshot field. Apparently they fly in and overwinter here in SE England."



According to the RSPB the woodcock is a large, bulky wading bird with short legs and a very long straight tapering bill. It is largely nocturnal, spending most of the day in dense cover. The breeding population has been falling in recent years, perhaps because of less habitat as conifer plantations become too mature for woodcocks to find open enough breeding areas.

Let's hope we may catch a glimpse of a woodcock when we finally reach Holly Shaw.

--Julia--

Daffodils at South Stoke Recreation Ground



"Life is the greatest gift that could ever be conceived ... A daffodil pushing up through the dark earth to the spring, knowing somehow deep in its roots that spring and light and sunshine will come, has more courage and more knowledge of the value of life than any human being I've met."

Madeleine L'Engle
American writer

Thanks to Tony for these lovely daffs that will brighten may a walker's days in South Stoke

Photo by Michael Saunders

Nettlebed Common (5th of March)

It has to happen from time to time, we can't always be lucky with the weather. Though, surprisingly, we are generally very well served by "*what comes from above*". But Thursday the 5th of March at Nettlebed was one of the exceptions as it poured all morning. Still 15 people turned out and worked cheerfully – though we did go home a little early!

The task was to start opening up an area of the common that had been left untouched for a considerable time - a job much enjoyed by Green Gymmers.

At first all you could see was shoulder high dead bracken and brambles. What we were tackling was what you might call environmental archaeology, because as we cleared away the dead bracken fronds a sub world was revealed.

Lying about all over the site was old timber left from a previous clearing exercise. Tree trunks that were well rotted; branches that would crumble in your hand as you picked them up and tangled piles that would be great habitats for who knows what creatures, insects and fungi.

As we cleared we made big piles which will form havens for wildlife but also revealed some fascinating inhabitants of the common. Struggling ferns were everywhere and moss covered logs. The bracken will of course regenerate but lets hope our efforts give the ferns a helping hand. Fungi of all sorts were flourishing on the logs. One tiny little red flower like fungi (Scarlet Elf Cup see below) was much admired and carefully replaced in a damp corner; a small green and brown frog was gently encouraged into untouched undergrowth and as the ground became muddier and squelchier small pools of a bright yellow clay soil emerged. Presumably that was the clay that was used to make the bricks that Nettlebed was known for. This area was right by a pond that was no doubt created by extraction of the clay in the 19C.

We will be back to continue to attack the brambles and open up the area to the light; hopefully on a drier occasion.....

--Jill K--

Scarlet Elf Cup seen at Nettlebed Common



Thanks to **Sally** for these photos of the Scarlet Elf Cup seen at Nettlebed Common.

Looking at them, you can see why it was believed that the "**elves of the wood**" visit these cups in the morning and drink the dew from them.

In past times, elf cups were made into arrangements with moss and leaves and sold as table decorations.

Australian Adventures Part 1

"As many of you know, we had what is becoming our normal four weeks during our UK winter in Australia, their summer, primarily to visit our two children in Melbourne and also catch up with other friends and relatives, but the treat is to see some of natural Australia:- trees, plants and also wildlife if it will stay stationary long enough for a photo! (My problem with butterflies later on)

The best way to acclimatise to the time difference on arrival is to spend as much time outside during the day as possible. The biggest problem with this policy can be the excessive heat! We stayed in a little hotel about a fifteen minutes walk from Sydney Botanic Garden but on our first day we decided to go in the opposite direction, which is east. We soon fell off the map and I think navigated with my smartphone or maybe it was with the sun, it could even have been with street maps, neither of us can remember.



Our first stop was Fitzroy gardens which were not really a garden but a triangle with a beautiful fountain and a few trees. We walked through some leafy suburban streets to McElhone Reserve, a delightful garden with running water, fish, lots of plants and a gardener trimming the box hedges and catching the trimmings with a fishing net.



Onwards and downwards towards the water, where we stopped briefly in Elizabeth Bay, until we reached Rushcutters Bay. In the early days of the colony, convicts would cut the reeds in this swampy place to be used for thatching, hence its name. In 1876, six acres were reserved for recreation and later the site of what was Sydney Stadium,



where The Beatles played in their 1964 tour. it was lovely to see the blue Ipomoea, growing outside naturally intertwining around the palm, although it is actually indigenous to Central and South America. We then found a rather sluggish beetle which may be a Christmas beetle, named after the time of year they first appear.

Susan's Australian adventures will continue in the next edition of the Lockdown Lopper coming soon, when Susan visits Embarkation Gardens, Woolloomooloo Finger Wharf, and photographs a Christmas Beetle.

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