

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Lockdown Issue 10

Welcome to hopefully the last issue of the Lockdown Lopper. As you know the committee (Right) has been busy planning next month's sessions, when volunteering returns to the new normal.

I am sure everyone will join me in thanking them all for their hard work ensuring sessions can restart safely next month.

Also a big thank you to everyone who has sent in the wonderful words and photos to make ten issues of the Lockdown Lopper possible



--martin b--

RAGWORT & CO.

Ragwort-pulling is one of those love-it or hate-it tasks, causing groans or cheers from among our members. It was with a feeling of nostalgia I pulled out the few specimens from the paddock before Roger got down to cutting the long grass. This task was too big for the pair of us with an Austrian scythe (which we don't have) and definitely too much for the lawnmower, so Roger had hired a ride-on brush-cutter. This is a serious piece of kit which happily munches nettles and small scrub in addition to long grass.

Until recently the paddock had been kept short by a small herd of Shetland ponies belonging to an acquaintance. Since they left many different wildflowers have appeared, which were buzzing with insects as we pulled the ragwort. Their leaves were already half-devoured by cinnabar moth caterpillars. The wildflower-rich areas were left intact as they looked so pretty. They will be mown after they have set seed.



Ragwort

St John's Wort

We thought we had got all the ragwort until we saw a mass of yellow next to a bramble thicket. On closer inspection it turned out instead to be St. John's wort, so our ragwort pulling efforts in previous years had not been in vain. Until you get familiar with these plants it can be easy to mistake one for the other, as Sally is careful to point out before letting us loose on Gillott's Field. Ah, the good old days of Gillott's Field!

--Julia--

Some Walks around Nettlebed

We are blessed to live in such a wonderful area with so much variety when it comes to walking. I have been out with my husband, David, initially but only after I had recovered from a nasty chest bug and a cough which persisted for 7 weeks, and more recently with a friend from the village who puts up photos on her Facebook page linking me in hoping I will identify all the flowers and wildlife she snapped. It certainly keeps my brain ticking over! And I think she is beginning to learn a lot of the names too.

Spoilt for choice, we can traipse the immediate Commons, through the heather, which is now flowering, and down to Berrick Trench. This means walking through a private garden which has a huge pond (Right). A few years ago it was leaking and the owner paid £1000 just to have the fish rehoused during the renovation. The pond seems to be much bigger now but has lots of flowers planted around



it. There is a wonderful view across to The Five Horseshoes at Maidensgrove, magnificent in all seasons. The path continues through the wood of Berrick Trench and down to the bottom track which leads to Warburg nature reserve. We came back via fields full of dandelions (Left) in May and buttercups in June. Some years I have found field mushrooms growing there in early September.

Another direction takes us from Nettlebed Church or through Joyce Grove grounds towards Howberry Farm but turning to Nettlebed Sawmill. Deadman's Lane path, through the woodland shaw, is very pretty and it is one of the places that the Nettlebed Commons volunteers (Team Nettlebed) have been clearing Himalayan Balsam (HB). Crossing over the Highmoor Road takes us towards Merrimoles Farm. Just a little to the north along this road is a beautiful glade of Bluebells which tend to flower a little later. It had a huge infestation of the dreaded HB a few years ago and they are still being very determined to keep germinating in this area. We have been several times pulling, pulling and more pulling. One day we will win as we have done in the area behind Nettlebed Green!



Small Tortoiseshell in grounds of Joyce Grove

From the far corner of Crocker End, the path leads through a yew wood, and then a deciduous wood, which has some under-planting of box (I doubt that it germinated naturally) down a rocky track with more wonderful views to Old St James's Church, in Bix Bottom. From here you can go either towards Bix and home through Catslippe, or back nearer Warburg and up the track to Soundess Farm.



But my favourite walk is to go straight to Warburg and experience its peace and quiet away from the traffic and the trials and tribulations of life. The grass rides have been full of orchids (Common spotted Orchid Far Left) and all sorts of other chalk-land flowers (Field Scabious with some sort of Longhorn beetle Left) along with a multitude of butterflies. Annoyingly the butterflies rarely stay still long enough for a photo when I am about!

--Susan--

Wildlife Photos from Tony



Common Toadflax



Red Bartsia



7-Spot Ladybird

Harvest Time

This year the cereal harvest is all but over. I hope you were not too frustrated by being stuck behind a tractor and trailer loaded with grain.

Today the cereal seeds are sown in the autumn and the harvest last about four weeks depending on weather starting mid July. This short period is achieved as harvesters can be forty footers. This term describes the cutter/gatherer length on the front of the machine.

In the good old days, the seeds were sown in the spring and the harvest did not start until mid August and lasted through September and into October. The harvesters were mostly eight footers, one fifth today's size. The picture shows a Massey Harris eight footer with no cab, air-con, radio or satnav. The mischievous looking young lad was so keen to get back down on the farm for the harvest he forgot to change out of his school uniform.



--Tony--

PICK YOUR OWN



Wherever you walk along footpaths there are ripe blackberries begging to be put in a crumble – despite Green Gym’s best efforts at digging out brambles on certain sites. In Flowercroft Wood there are plenty and Andrew Hawkins is kindly inviting all Green Gym members to come along and pick as many as they want. (The giant beech which had fallen across the track from the Crosslanes end has now been cleared).

--Julia--

Glis Glis alert

Robert wants us all to remain aware of the significant damage which can result from the activities of the glis-glis (edible dormouse) - NB an import and NOT the native hazel dormouse. The glis-glis makes a home in lofts/outhouses, may hibernate indoors for many months and have up to ten young at a time. It shows a liking for chewing through plastic cables and water pipes and even plasterboard ceilings. As some of you will be aware, Robert speaks from experience and can tell you a lot more – he and several of his neighbours have had serious problems to deal with over the last three years. Be alert!



House Fire believed caused by Glis Glis chewing through cable

LIMERICK CORNER

(Contemplating the resumption of work sessions)

*If you don't bring some gloves and a mask
You may well get taken to task.
But worse still yet
Is if you forget
To bring coffee (or tea) in your flask!*

--Julia--

We'll
be right
back!



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