

Green Gym[®]



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Lockdown Issue 5

Welcome

Thanks to everyone who sent in contributions for this issue of the Lockdown Lopper. I suspect we have a bit more lockdown to go so please continue to send in photos and words, Hopefully in the words of a very special regal lady *"we'll meet again"* soon.

--martin b--

-WILD FLOWERS IN THE GARDEN

A.k.a. Weeds in the Garden

My flower beds are looking really colourful in their spring finery, but there are also plenty of familiar wild flowers in the garden, growing along walls or trying it out among the cultivated plants. Here are three of them:

Herb Robert (**Right**) *Geranium robertianum* has pink flowers with stems which turn a fiery red in dry conditions such as we have now. Its name may be a corruption of the Latin *ruber* meaning red, or possibly derived from an association with the house goblin Robin Goodfellow because of the mousy stench of its leaves.



Herb Bennet (**Left**) *Geum urbanum* has spindly stalks bearing small yellow flowers, and was once hung above doors to stop the Devil crossing the threshold as it was considered to be a most powerful charm against evil spirits. Its name is a corruption of the medieval Latin *herba benedicta* and its roots have a delicate clove-like aroma. Augsburg Ale is said to owe its peculiar flavour to the addition of a small bag of Herb Bennet root in each cask.

Green Alkanet (**Right**) *Pentaglottis sempervirens* has intense azure blue flowers, but its name goes back to the Arabic *al-henna* because its roots supplied the red dye which Egyptian women used on their hair and nails. Also known in some places as Bird's-eye or Pheasant's-eye because of the eye-like appearance of the flowers.



--Julia--

Bird Ringing in East Yorkshire

Having returned from an incredible five months in New Zealand just in time before the lockdown started, it's been quite a strange place to come back to. However, the birds are busy as ever and in full swing of migration or breeding, and I have been lucky enough to spend the last two months bird ringing (in the garden) in East Yorkshire.

Bird ringing is an invaluable way to study bird populations and movements, and we have been able to catch and ring around 300 individuals of 27 species in a small garden in the Yorkshire Wolds this past month. We're incredibly fortunate to have a wide array of resident birds, including *House and Tree Sparrows, Blue Tits, Great Tits, Chaffinches, Greenfinches, Goldfinches, Wrens, Dunnocks, Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Robins*.

This time of year is particularly interesting for migrating birds too, with many returning from sub-Saharan Africa to breed here, an incredibly long and arduous journey for birds weighing only a handful of grams. The first to appear in the garden were *Chiffchaffs*; these short distance migrants spend their winter a little closer to home in northern Africa, Morocco and Iberia. Next were the *Blackcaps*; males with their glossy black caps, and females with subtle brown caps, both having crossed a desert, an ocean and a continent to get here... what a feat! A few days later saw the arrival of both *Common and Lesser Whitethroats*, and what a pleasure it is to see them again especially knowing the journey they've just undertaken. These birds will either settle to breed here or continue moving north, where they might be re-trapped by another ringer or at an Observatory, giving us valuable information on survival and movement. We've had a few surprises too, including a stunning female *Sparrowhawk*, a handful of *Yellowhammers* and *Goldcrests, Long-tailed Tits* and *Swallows*.

All ringing is carried out under license from the British Trust for Ornithology, by experienced ringers, and gives us valuable survival, movement and population data.

--Imogen--



"A good-looking bit of hedging"



Found in Rocky Lane (Rotherfield Greys) by **Robin** - should ring bells for a good number of us...

According to **Julia** it was laid on the 6th of February, which seems like an age ago!!

From Sowing to Sewing

This year I set broad beans "No till" where I had runners last year. First earlies are showing through and runner plants grown from seed will be planted out next week before the command from Monty. The back meadow now has cowslips, buttercups, daisies, dandelions and others showing through.

On Thursday I managed to find my St. Georges flag to put up for VE day. Unfortunately it was ripped so out with the sewing machine (thanks Chris) and after studying the manual (some men do read manuals first) and after practising on a spare bit of cloth the repair started. Unfortunately the bobbin ran out straight away and was replaced (after reading the manual) with a previously wound red thread. This did not match the reel thread which was yellow.

Embroidery !!!!

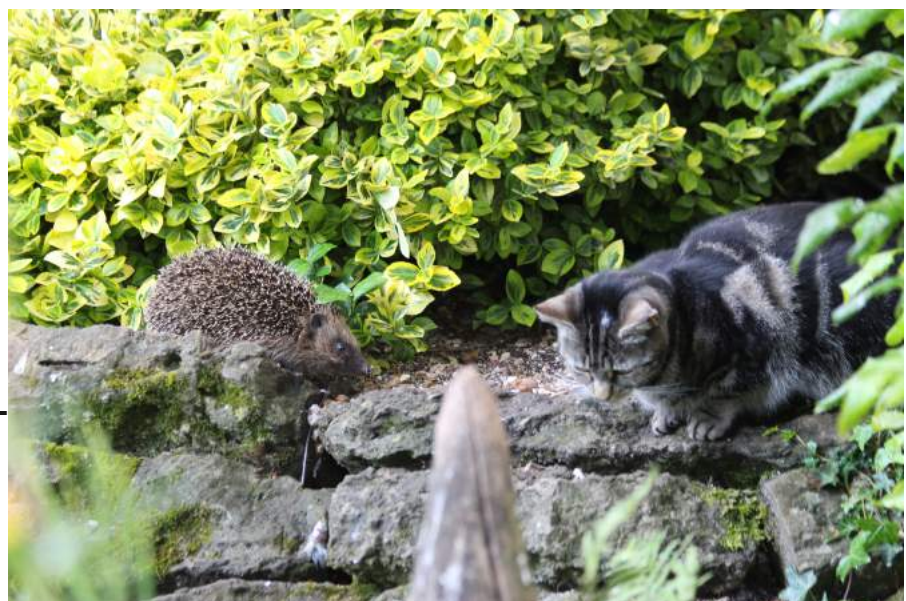


--Tony--

Garden visitor

Not sure my neighbour's cat was too impressed by this visitor to my garden as they both like to snooze under the euonymus shrub.

--martin b--



Australian Adventures Part 4: The Wollemi Pine... the rarest tree in the world.

In 1994, a NSW Parks Officer made the most amazing discovery when he abseiled with friends into a deep temperate rainforest gorge in Wollemi National Park. This is a very wild and remote area north of the Blue Mountains. Growing happily in this situation was a tree which had previously only been seen in fossil records and was thought to have been extinct for millions of years. The trees were up to 40 metres in height with a diameter of about 1 metre. It was named *Wollemia nobilis* after the area it was found and David Noble who found it. It was a bit like finding a dinosaur alive today!

Only a few stands have been found, so it is the world's rarest tree. There are fewer than 100 trees growing in the wild in three stands and it is thought they are all genetically identical.

Rather than have everyone go looking for it and decimating the area, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service developed a recovery plan to propagate it by cloning and distributed it to all botanic gardens, parks and large houses around the world. We first came across one some years ago in the middle of Sydney's Botanical Gardens and always visit it when we are in Sydney to see how it is coping with the exposure to the heat in the middle of a sunny flower bed!



There are now several planted in a more shaded damp spot in both Sydney and Melbourne Botanic Gardens, to mimic their natural habitat. This year we could see the male and female flowers on the ones out on the lawn in Melbourne Botanical Gardens. You will find one in Kew, and we have come across one at Kingston Lacey House near Abingdon although it looked rather bedraggled. There is also one in Buscot House but it is in Lord Faringdon's private garden and not in the NT part.

Wollemi Pine trees are related to Araucaria and not actually a pine at all. Trees in Araucaria include the South American Monkey Puzzle and the Australian Bunya Pine, which I'll tell you about another time.

The tree is bisexual (monoecious) having round female cones and pollen from the long male cones. It has unique chocolate brown bubbly bark which forms as the tree matures. It seems to naturally coppice itself as the one in Sydney has done. This may be a way of protecting itself from fires, rock fall or drought. I guess the one in Sydney had a water shortage at some point as the weather rarely is very cold there compared with Melbourne or Canberra. The oldest fossil of the Wollemi Pine has been dated to 200 million years ago.

This Australian summer of 2019/2020 with the raging fires in that area, the Wollemi Pines trees were in great danger. They were saved by the National Parks and Wildlife Service together with the Rural Fire Service. I think an irrigation system has been introduced now.

--Susan--



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