

Green Gym



Sonning Common

"THE LOPPER"

full of little cuttings.

Special Edition Issue 6



Last week was Volunteers' Week, so it seems appropriate to pass on a message posted by the Queen to all volunteers (--martin b--):

"As Volunteers' Week draws to a close, it is inspiring to reflect on the many thousands of people, who through their acts of generosity and kindness, have achieved so much for the greater good.

"I have been following with interest how men and women from around the world, including my own family, have been helping and recognising the vital role of the volunteer.

"I send my best wishes to all those who give themselves so freely and selflessly in the service of others."

GARDENING GYM

It's been wonderful that we've had such great weather during the lockdown. But it's been terribly dry for the plants and we've been watering madly. Luckily, we've got an underground rainwater tank – it's called a Chiltern flask which was put in at the turn of the last century in houses round here. It's about 8 foot down and with a domed roof and collects rainwater from the roof of the house

Some years ago we put a liner in – it was leaking – and a pump with a hose attached. For the first time ever it's nearly runout and the water butts are getting low too. And the pump won't power the main sprayer so a lot of the time it's watering cans (good exercise!)

The wisteria was as good as it's ever been and the crops are doing well. The onions, shallots and broad beans are looking good in the new raised bed – the broad beans are nearly ready to eat.

We've been picking lettuce and radishes.

The loganberries on the fence (planted two years ago) are doing really well and the raspberries (especially the autumn ones which are growing fast) should be fine. I had trouble getting tomato plants and grow bags when I wanted them. In the end I ended up with varieties I haven't grown before in pots so we'll see what happens.

Although I've missed the Green Gym, I have to admit this is the first year I've been able to give the garden the attention it deserves!



--John--

Being in lockdown has no doubt highlighted how good it has been in the past to get out in the fresh air and get some healthy exercise with the Green Gym. I am sure we will do the same in the future.

It brought to mind the following few lines of poetry below. It comes from The Deserted Village, written by Oliver Goldsmith in 1770. This was a time when greedy landowners were forcing the poor off the land.

--Tony--

*A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintain'd its man;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life requir'd, but gave no more:
His best companions, innocence and health:
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.*

BIRD LIFE

It was Stanley Baldwin who wrote "There are three classes which need sanctuary more than others – birds, wild flowers, and Prime Ministers". In their different ways all three loom large this spring, but my thoughts here are on the first.

Outside the window behind my computer screen is a yew hedge containing several birds' nests. The **dunnocks** use it every year, and at least one **blackbird** is ensconced at the far end. A pair of **wood pigeons** have built a nest at the top of the arch halfway down, having got cheesed-off with the severe pruning of their preferred site in the wisteria. I would prefer the pigeons didn't nest anywhere, especially as the arch is just a few yards from the veg patch burgeoning with pigeon snacks.



Last Sunday a **jay** arrived, having sussed out the nests in the hedge. The blackbirds were mobbing it as it hopped up and down trying to find a way in, though the dunnocks made themselves scarce. At the time I was taking part in a Zoom Morning Prayer with the churches in our benefice, and all must have seen my mouth in an appalled "O" as the jay lighted in the hedge side. Luckily the twigs couldn't support its weight so the nest was relieved, but the outside mayhem was no aid to my quiet concentration.

My bird book says the eggs and young of other birds are not the jay's main diet, but depend mostly on trees, especially oaks for their diet. They bury acorns for their winter food and also store beech-nuts, peas, potatoes, fruit and berries. So, even more netting required in my veg patch, then.

--Julia--

LIMERICK CORNER

I wish we could bring back Green Gym,
Though the prospect is still somewhat dim.
My muscles grow flabby,
My temper is crabby –
And my waistline is no longer trim.

REMINISCENCES OF AN OLD KNEE PAD (BLUE)

I've been seeing how many routes I can find starting from home that will give me a 3 to 5 mile walk, and it's amazing how many variations there are. As I go I've managed to go past a good number of Green Gym sites. It's good to see how much of an effect our labours have had on some areas.

Nettlebed Common has certainly benefited from our efforts in many areas. Priest Hill – by the notice board - has changed out of all recognition since we first worked there. The main aim was to restore the heather that once flourished there. The first job was to open up the glade which necessitated lots of tree felling and ignoramuses like me benefited from Tony's skilled instruction and had good fun at the same time. The cleared area was scraped to encourage heather seed to grow. An awful lot of weeding of saplings and brambles had to be done and I expect there were times when the gymmers thought "not weeding again". But when you visit the area in late summer and see the heather in bloom you know it was all worthwhile.

Yes it will always need spring and autumn work but that's nature for you.....

We have helped open up Kingwood similarly. Giles the past Warden from Warburg got a grant to open up an area through the middle which has been continued by Rod Dyala making a corridor that wild life can move through and where flora and fauna can thrive. This too necessitated felling and clearing scrub (really one of our favourite activities) and grass grew and we spent autumn's raking and clearing cut bracken and bramble in what is now a lovely open sunny area.

To rest our weary bones a rustic(!) seat was built, from which there is a lovely view of the open sunny area where butterflies and insects thrive. Seeing it now it is quite a revelation as to how much was achieved By Green Gym and other Friends of the common.

--JILL K--



MORE DIARIES OF THE BLUE KNEE PADS

Can anyone recollect parking at Red House Square on King wood Common about a year ago in order to clear a smallish space right by the car park.

We (my knees and I) remember that apparently this glade had something special about the soil and grew plants not found elsewhere on the Common – my knee pad wearer's memory is not what it was.

Well as we drove by this parking spot the other day we saw that the whole piece was now surrounded by dead hedging. It was open to the sunshine but inaccessible, covered in grass with a few stumps.

Had Rod d' Ayala been keeping his hand in? Working away happily on his own?

Can someone please tell the wearer of the blue knee pads whose memory is not what it was, what was special about the site, that has caused it to be so picked out. It would be nice to follow up our labours. I think Sally was the leader that day.

--Jill K--



Hello everyone.

I am writing this in early June, in a more relaxed stage of lockdown. Like you all I have been missing my usual places of work and was especially looking forward to seeing the show of bluebells and the newly laid hedge bursting into life by Rocky Lane, and hoped to have had the dreaded laurel uprooted by a digger.

Sadly none of this has been possible, whether in person or by letting a contract. I am amongst the 80% of National Trust staff across England, Wales and Northern Ireland who have been furloughed to protect charitable funds and have been expressly asked not to work, hence my submission will be more an account of wildlife and woodwork in my garden and the locality of Sandhurst.



When lockdown was announced all staff were sent to work from home. I took the opportunity to take home a newly purchased chainsaw milling attachment (see TCF engineering website) to try out on some large sweet chestnut logs in my garden. With some mixed success, ratchet straps and the use of my large ladder to get a straight edge, I have managed to cut myself some beams which will eventually form the base for new decking. I'm not sure how popular I was with my neighbours. Rip-cutting is a noisy and dusty process!

We had two beech trees reduced in our garden in March in a bid to avoid possible storm damage to the house and to get more sunlight. I spent a good proportion of the Easter holidays cutting up twigs to fill a 6 yard skip. I also let my eldest son loose on the hand axe to process the cordwood and we now have a healthy stock of firewood for the coming winter.



Despite heavy shade through much of the day, our garden is home to a variety of wildlife. From bluetits nesting under the roof tiles, through the impressive display of red campion, to greater stag beetle larvae underneath log piles, there is a lot of variety. My sons have especially enjoyed seeing a thriving frog population in our small garden pond. The highlight was seeing one small individual leap for (and miss) a hoverfly on a log, and watching a large red damselfly emerge from its casing on a flag iris stem. We found another 4 exuviae on nearby emergent plants.

Further afield our local walks with Buddy include BBOWT's Wildmoor Heath, NT's Ambarrow Hill and Wellington College Bog SSSI, where I was lucky enough to hear a nightjar "churring" last week: not a sound I recall growing up in Sonning Common, but maybe the ongoing restoration of Kingwood Common means they will one day return to breed.

I am lucky to have a variety of places near me but will be very glad to get back to some practical work at Greys Court and my other NT sites, hoping the axe of redundancy is kind to me!

I wish you all well with your health and wellbeing in this unusual situation and look forward to working with you all again in the best future.

**Leo Jennings, Area Ranger,
Greys Court etc.**



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