

# Green Gym®



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

## full of little cuttings.

Number 59 March 2019

### Marshland on Nettlebed Common

At the Green Gym session on 13 December last year, we worked on the marshland on Nettlebed Common.



We created a dead hedge from trees and scrub that had been cut down by Rod d'Ayala, and removed a lot of Pendulous Sedge. To my surprise, others said this was the first time the Green Gym had worked in this area. Rod has a contract with the Nettlebed and District Commons Conservators to manage the nature conservation work on Nettlebed, Peppard and Kingwood Commons. This mainly involves maintaining and enhancing the heather areas on all three Commons and the marshland on Nettlebed Common. To assist with this work, the Green Gym has four sessions a quarter on the Commons.

The marshland is a wonderful complex of ponds and marshy areas near the reservoir on Nettlebed Common. There is a clay cap on that part of the Common which means that water doesn't drain away easily, hence ponds form in any depressions, and there are many of those, dating back to when clay was dug for local brick making. The resulting pond complex probably has the largest number of ponds of any in Oxfordshire although some of them are only temporary. The marshland is home to three types of Sphagnum, rare mosses in the county. Sphagnum mosses are common in the wetter parts of Britain but not the drier counties like Oxfordshire. They play a vital role in the creation of peat bogs: by storing water in their spongy forms, they prevent the decay of dead plant material and eventually form peat. They have also been used for centuries as a dressing for wounds, including through World War I.

On 13 December, we found a Collared Earthstar, *Geastrum triplex*, an unusual type of fungi. Its fruiting body dispenses its spores in a similar manner to Puffballs. Their usual habitat is leaf litter in deciduous woodland.  
-Sally Rankin-

### The Mudlarks

If you wanted intensive aerobic exercise Ewelme at the beginning of March was the place to be. The wader crew were in their element, raking mud and reeds to free up the channel in the reed bed beyond the weir. Shovelling the results into barrows was equally heavy work, to say nothing of heaving the loaded barrows up the steep bank before steering them along the path to the dumping area under trees. Meanwhile Wim and Peter Taylor were digging out thick clay from the pond further along, heroically lifting each shovelful over their heads into the waiting barrows. At the break, despite our mud-splattered clothes and faces, we enjoyed coffee and copious cake served with sunshine and birdsong on the bridge over the weir.

-Julia-





## TREE FELLING SAFETY

Part of our philosophy at the SCGG is that we need to pay attention to safety without being over bureaucratic. For that reason, we arrange training courses from time to time covering various topics.

Periodically we are asked to fell quite high trees and this can be dangerous. A heavy tree landing on somebody's head can seriously damage or kill the unlucky person. To make sure we are up to the mark, a tree felling course was run recently for 12 of us.

The morning session, run by Buffy Harris-Jones from tcv, was in the classroom and took us through how trees should be felled safely, what kind of



Tree being felled



Tree being processed

problems can occur, and what needs to be considered beforehand. It started with a picture of a tree which had smashed through a house – not really a good idea.

Some of the important points. Everyone should be wearing proper boots and helmets, If the tree is above 3 meters in height. People felling trees should be at least 2 tree lengths apart. Somebody must be keeping a lookout especially if the felling is near a public footpath. Make sure the first aid kit is handy and have the location details available if help needs to be summoned. It's important not to fell trees that are too large in diameter.

After lunch we all went to Kingwood Common to take down some silver birch. Divided into threes we got to work. Many trees came down well, putting in a sink cut (bird mouth) and then sawing through from the other side. But problems did arise which was helpful in seeing how to deal with them. One of the sink cuts went too far in which made dropping the tree more difficult. One or more trees got caught up in the canopy so we learnt how to deal with that. We made sure we looked carefully to see which way the tree was going to fall. Were there clear escape routes if the tree didn't fall where we expected?

I think we all felt the course had been useful and reminded us that we need to be careful. In particular we need to be at a safe distance from others and we do need to wear helmets at all times. Opportunities for felling are likely to arise with more glades being opened up on the Commons. Tree felling should only be done by those who have been on a course – not least because of insurance implications.

-John Hasler-



## Aston Rowant in February

Our task that Thursday was to continue the work started by other groups and clear back encroaching brambles and scrub from the south west side of Bald Hill. It was a delightful day and as the cloud cleared and the sun came out we were graced with blue skies, male brimstone butterflies darting around and skylarks singing overhead.

Steph Wilson says "Just a quick email to thank you and team for your work today – really pleased with how the slope is looking, and was a beautiful day to be out. Please pass on my thanks to the team."

-Tony-



## Dunsden Church Report

This year we held our two day visit at the end of January to help get as much as possible neat and tidy for the snowdrop Sunday on 17th February. There was a lot of jobs on the list, all important.

A rotted latching post was replaced. Two self closing gates occasionally need to stay open by being anchored to fixed posts rather than with traffic cones. Martin

latched on to this project and was so hooked on it he did two other posts needed to hold the main gates open. The french ditch needed clearing of vegetation (weeding) and the gutter downpipes were cleared of leaves and others things that block them. Some of the hedge had already been cut but we completed the rest. Brian was fired up for burning the hedge debris. The gate entrance was cleared of leaves and other debris. We



also promised to finish the hedge laying. We started this four years ago and it was possible then to do a lot of it with manual tools. The section left was getting thick stems and the pleachers were best laid using the chainsaw. Even so, there were some thin stems which could be laid manually and it was good to see enthusiastic hands come forward.

Hopefully next year we can find a hedge somewhere that is younger.

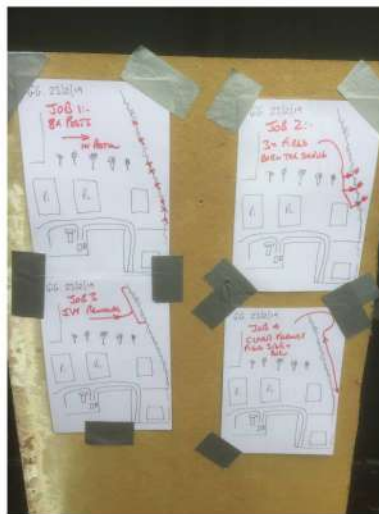
-Tony-

## Bishopswood

"Saturday 23rd February and we were at Bishopswood for our normal quarterly visit. 17 of us turned up to attack whatever tasks were required of us.

The weather was very mild but foggy. The sort of fog you got in Old London Town in the 1950's and thought were a thing of the distant past.

Trevor the groundsman had as usual taped illustrations of the tasks to the equipment store and we studied them trying to get our bearings. Fortunately he also explained what we had to do.



It turned out that over the past couple of weeks he had been very busy cutting down trees and thinning out vegetation on both sides of the barbed wire perimeter fence.

The main task today was consequently to collect all the cuttings and drag them to one of 3 bonfire sites. Very soon we had all 3 bonfires well ablaze and material was being brought to each of them and burned at a fair lick.

Meanwhile a small specialist team of 3 was tasked with driving 8 new wooden posts on the perimeter of the site to replace those that were rotting or simply missing. Their work was completed by coffee break and they joined the others in collecting, dragging, burning and raking.

Coffee break involved flapjacks, cookies and cake and it was appreciated by all.

At the end of the session the site had been cleaned up, all the cuttings had been burned and the site was looking spick and span. Even the sun came out to play and it turned into a beautiful warm sunny day, just like those you get at the seaside in June. Or maybe not." - Martin Rhodes-



### Conservation Down Under- A TREAT for Chris and Sheelagh!

We are still in the lovely lush rainforest area of Far North Queensland – specifically The Atherton Tableland - where friends invited us along this morning to join them on a volunteering session for an organisation called TREAT which stands for 'Trees for the Evelyn and Atherton Tablelands', and was started 37 years ago by a botanist and a rainforest ecologist. They recognised the need to re-join, through a process of reforestation, the isolated rainforest remnants that dairy farming, over decades, has created in this region area.

The aim of the volunteer group (TREAT) and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife service (QPWS) is to re-join the rainforest remnants by creating wildlife corridors. Obviously many birds and other mammals also benefit including the Southern Cassowary and the Lumholtz Tree Kangaroo, who need undisturbed rainforest to thrive..

The QPWS rangers survey the rainforest vegetation in the area and devise a planting plan to ensure consistency of vegetation, and then it's on to an army of 65 volunteers to help with the project. The tasks involved everything from sorting and cleaning seeds of all sorts, shapes and sizes, cracking them open, potting them up, and tending to the established saplings.

Approximately 25,000 indigenous plants, from massive trees to tiny ferns will be planted in the next 10 weeks with the help of volunteers!

-Chris and Sheelagh-



Trays of seedlings and saplings with the rainforest in the background ready to be planted by the army of volunteers



'Smoko' the coffee and cake break-just as important as it is for the Green Gym!

### Your Editor in Catterick...

I have a tough act to follow after a story about volunteering in the heat of the Australian sun, however I promise a nature reserve in North Yorkshire is just as exciting. I have been working at Foxglove for the last six months, and it has been great experience. There has been no such thing as a normal day, and the list of jobs continually gets longer, not shorter, but the variety which comes with the job is what has made it so rewarding. The reserve has nearly every possible habitat, from heathland to moorland, to wetland and scrapes, to broad-leaved and conifer woodlands, which certainly keeps us on our toes. We are responsible for managing it in the best possible way for both the wildlife and visitors, which includes doing anything from habitat management, path work, fencing, running events and sessions with school groups, and managing and leading the regular teams of volunteers. It's been a very busy non-stop winter with coppicing 3 acres of Willow Carr and with some big projects around the reserve, including restoring the Wetlands and thinning out a large conifer plantation (which involved some very impressive fires!).

It's been an amazing job, and I would recommend visiting if you are passing by on the A1, however it's back to Bempton for me at the end of March. The thousands of puffins (and visitors) are waiting for me back on the cliffs.

-Imogen-



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