

# Green Gym®



## Sonning Common

# "THE LOPPER"

## full of little cuttings.

Issue 77 Sep 2023

### Congratulations on a Summer of Conservation!



Green Gymers you've been hard at work, Through rain and shine, you did not shirk. You felled the trees, laid the hedges, cleared the ponds and their edges.

You restored chalk downlands, and cleared the scrub with utmost care.

Your efforts were commendable, Your dedication truly formidable.

From scorching heatwaves to heavy rainfall, You persevered through it all.

### Parson's Field

Our session at Parson's Field, Rotherfield Greys in July was an experiment with two conservation objects at once: removing invasive hawthorn from an area of chalk grassland and immediately replanting them in the neighbouring hedge gaps to reinstate a wildlife corridor. We used mattocks, and tree poppers borrowed from Aston Rowant NR (many thanks to them) so the transplants would still have a root system. Mike Macleod found that horizontal roots could only be planted if trimmed to fit. We needn't have worried about watering them in – the heavens opened just as we were packing up.



Meanwhile Carol, Jill and Jane cleared the footpath at the field's entrance which had become choked with brambles and nettles. They revealed the remains of a kissing gate which became redundant when the

farm gate it was attached to was removed by the estate.

It had been installed there by us in 2010 in memory of past volunteer Len Saunders. Tony Chandler, Edward Sandars, Chris Ash and Richard Harris were some of the original installation crew.



Julia

What is Yellow Rattle?

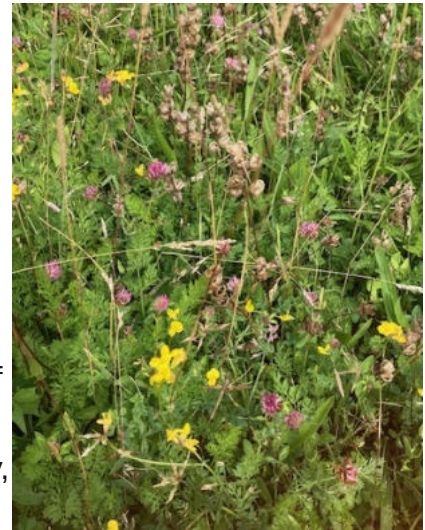
Great name, of course. And equally of course, Chatbot knows the answer,

**Yellow rattle is a herbaceous wildflower in the genus *Rhinanthus* in the family *Orobanchaceae* (the broomrapes).** Etc etc etc .....yes, alright I know you know everything, sorry I asked.

**.....thrives in grasslands, living a semi-parasitic life by feeding off nutrients in the roots of nearby grasses etc etc blah blah**

Yes, that's what Leo said, so here we are Barry and self at Greys Court in a huge grassland field trying to pull up the stuff but help (!), in July it is not exactly yellow, how do you spot it?

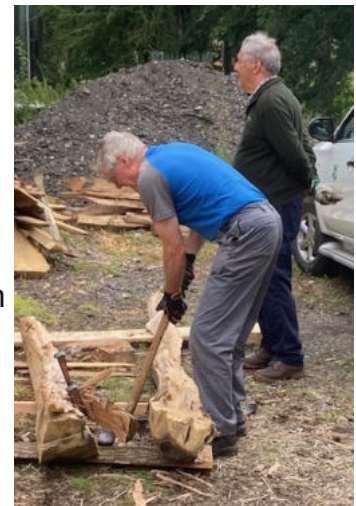
Great fun of course (again) and *mirabile dictu* it pulls up easily, once, as they say, you get your eye in.....



It's in there somewhere, promise.



Here we are, one of those excellent days when there are different jobs to do at Greys Court in the top farmyard. A mobile sawmill is at work in the barn on the big timber and one associated task is scalping bark and another splitting lengths into slimmer strips with wedges and sledgehammers.



Meanwhile, plenty of footpath clearance, clipping and trimming for those so inclined. Again the beauty of a multi-task site you can dip in and out doing different things till coffee break and use different muscles or simply look into the middle distance (of course).

Also spotted, a bridge over grass. A bridge over a long since dried up river? One wonders.





## Hay making at Cleeve

If we had any thought of a gentle rural activity in the hot sun we were quickly disabused as we looked up at the grey clouded sky and at the job we were being asked to do. No gentle grass here just thick piles of tough sedge and weeds to be raked into four long rolls that the tractor could collect up and dispose of. Luckily it was fairly dry and the rain held off.



Keith organised us into pairs working from each end of the rolls and it was amazing how soon we met in the middle looking with satisfaction at the long straight lines, Every group met exactly at the middle as well.



Apparently the contractor didn't expect that we would finish in a morning – in fact most of it was done before coffee, Leaving time later to put the finishing touches to a top class job.



And all the time there was plenty of opportunity for laughter and conversation – a vital part of Green Gym activities.

JK



Farmer Jed came along later with his tractor and trailer to collect the rows up and take them to the recycling plant at Crowmarsh

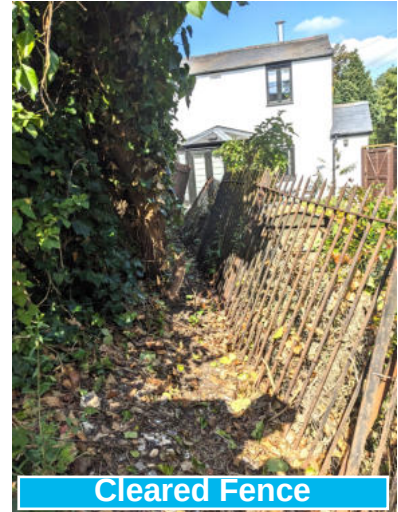


## Streatley Church

Its not often one gets the chance to really see behind the scenes at a church. No I don't mean where the vicar hangs his surplice, but behind the hedges that surround the churchyard.

In order that the splendid old metal railings that surround the site can be repaired and renovated the GG were asked if we could delve behind the five or six feet of hedge that had gradually encroached and make a clear passage for the fence repairers to get in. It meant removing the trees and scrub that had grown up.

Some started at one end and some at the other . Taking advantage of my lack of height I took a deep breath and chopped a small passage in to find the old railings .then attacked trees and shrubs of all shapes and sizes, throwing them out to be taken away by Martin, who at that stage had no chance of getting in to the space. Gradually a passage was cleared of size suitable for any workmen (and Martin).



Cleared Fence



Bags of cleared ivy

The final task was to clear the railings of years of ivy – some of the shoots were of arm thickness. It was amazing that the railings had remained so upright.

We look forward to seeing the smart new fence back in situ.

Jill K

## Ewelme

As those who come to Ewelme know , we have been working hard trying to separate the watercress from the burgeoning weeds down below the bridge at the bottom of The Street.

On first view it looked to be a fearsome task but as much of the weed has its roots in watery silt we made very good start.

On the first session Gill Vaughan made an inspired suggestion that we might follow the cress patches and cut a winding channel through the middle which we did.



This has proved really inspired as Tom , who was despairing of ever keeping this lower part of the site under control, took a long look at it and has decided that it would be just right for a

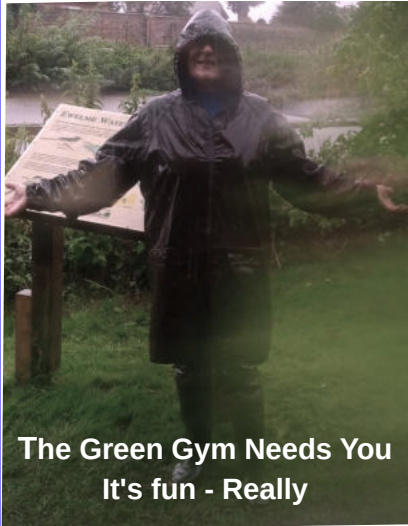


rewilding project involving keeping as much cress as possible but also retaining the water mint, water forget me not, rosebay willow herb fig wort, mimulus (monkey weed) etc etc that grow among the watercress, by cutting channels that wind between and through all this.

By letting the brook meander down and letting trees and plants grow naturally we shall have created a beautiful watery landscape that will benefit all the area round created from a once flourishing rural industry.

JK

## Ewelme - Nice weather for ducks!



The Green Gym Needs You  
It's fun - Really

Our August visit to Ewelme was a very wet one, but a trusty band of eight braved the elements and worked hard clearing one bed of weeds, with strict instructions to leave the watercress there, not that we found much of the latter.

Fortified by Mike's delicious American picnic cake, we set about bed number two, but in varying states of being very wet and muddy we decided to have an early bath, so to speak at 12.

The annual green gym butterfly count failed us, all that was spotted was a silvery moth, and that doesn't count, hey-ho, next year?

Gill V



Before



After

## Hobby at Cleeve Meadow

Charlotte was very excited to discover a Hobby had decided to break its migration in her meadow, where it stayed for about a week.

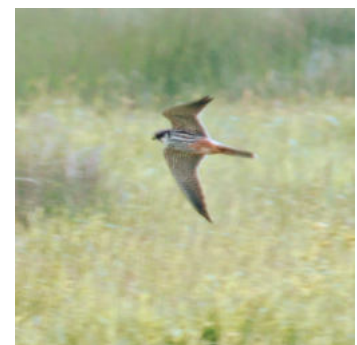
The hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) is a small falcon that is a summer visitor to the UK, arriving in April and departing in September or October to winter in tropical Africa.

Hobbies are found in a variety of habitats, including heathland, woodland edges, and farmland. They are particularly fond of hunting over wetland areas like Cleeve Meadows, where they prey on insects such as dragonflies and butterflies.

Hobbies are one of the most acrobatic birds of prey in the world. They are known for their agile, fast and erratic flight patterns, which they use to catch their prey in mid-air.

Hobbies are a beautiful and exciting bird to watch, and it is a real privilege that one decided to use the meadow which has been maintained for many years by the Green Gym.

**martinB**



Lopper Editor: Martin Barrett  
mdb.scgg@gmail.com

The Sonning Common Green Gym  
c/o Health Centre, 39 Wood Lane,  
Sonning Common

Enquires: Martin Rhodes 01189 724228