

Rambles from The Common



For one glorious day Padworth became Paddleworth, when I joined a team from **Conserve Reading on Wednesdays** who splashed around with gay abandon in the Common's pond, and did some essential maintenance as well. Some willow and birch trees overhanging the pond were felled to let in more light, and some grassy vegetation around the perimeter was hoicked out with mattocks; it would have been drowned by the rising water level in winter anyway, so no harm was done.

The main task though was removing some **typha** from the centre of the pond; typha, also called bulrush, has broad flat leaves above the water level with a mass of horizontal rhizomes and shallow roots below and can easily dominate a small pond. To remove it, three or four brave souls donned waders, cut through the rhizomes and pulled up the resulting chunks for other folk to hook to the shore using old-fashioned crows. The rest of us squelched in the muddy shore and piled up the chunks above the high water level to decompose. Teamwork got the job done and by the day's end we had cut a clear channel through the typha so mallards and frogs can take a short-cut across the pond.

Conserve Reading on Wednesdays, aka CRoW, is just one of the groups run by **Econet Reading**, so head to www.econetreading.org.uk for further details of local conservation volunteering tasks, and tell your friends as well.

A few days later, the landlubbers of the monthly Padworth Common Volunteer Group turned up for some seasonal **coppicing**. We cut down a swathe of young birch on the North Common, treated the stumps with herbicide and burnt all the brash on a bonfire, and that rather sums up the day. Hopefully the heather that had been overshadowed by the birch will produce a stunning show of purple flowers next year. We shall have to wait and see.



Let's end this Ramble by looking at some **oak leaves**. The smaller leaf is probably from a sessile oak because it has a stalk, whereas leaves of the pedunculate (or "English") oak lack stalks. This leaf however was dragged out of the pond where it had been preserved under water for a year or so. We found a lot of them caught up in the typha roots, black and shiny and looking like bits of plastic. The larger narrow leaf with deeply indented lobes is from an invasive **Turkey oak**, introduced into Britain in the 18th century as an ornamental and now naturalised, with at least three growing on the Common. It's not a well-regarded tree: its timber is prone to splitting and warping so isn't widely used in construction, it's not as valuable to native wildlife as pedunculate and sessile oaks and it harbours the parasitic knopper oak gall wasp which can destroy other oaks' acorns. Sadly there's not much that can be done

about the Turkey oaks on the Common so I'll just shake my fist at them when walking by. So if you see a man apparently arguing with a tree, that's what's going on.

Peter Elliott
Padworth Common Volunteer Group