



Earley - Old English 'Earnley' = eagle wood

Celebrating Ten Years of the Earley Environmental Group

Meeting for its AGM on 26 January, the locally-based Earley Environmental Group marked its tenth anniversary, and celebrated the achievements of its first decade: we now have well over 500 members. The occasion was favoured by the presence of Earley's lady mayor, Linda Chambers, and was marked with a birthday cake, pictured above.

Chairman, Alan Broodbank, presented his report for 2014 and reflected on the Group's longer-term success. The Environmental Group has over the years presented a variety of talks on environmental topics, and arranged interesting walks in the warmer months. It has catered for younger environmentalists with its highly successful Bug Hunts, led by Alan (see Events on page 8).

It is a community-based group, its own members working with other volunteers to pursue major projects in Earley: to name just a few, planting the reed bed in Maiden Erlegh Lake, restoring



Marefield Pond in Rushey Way, landscaping the area around the BMX track in Paddock Drive and remodelling the Butterfly Garden in Instow Road. In the past year members have worked with Grahame Hawker, Senior Park Ranger with Earley Town Council, to produce the highly acclaimed displays around Earley of nectar-rich and wild flowers. The Group are very aware of and thankful for the great support and encouragement given by the Town Council. To see a fuller description of EEG's activities and achievements over the past ten years, go to

www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk. The photo above is of the nectar-rich flowers in the Butterfly Garden.

The biggest environmental problem of all to solve? The increasing world population is one of those 'head in the sand' topics. If you missed our recent talk on Population, see page 4 for some facts that might appal you. If this makes you have sleepless nights, you could get up at 6.15 am on May 3rd and join Ray Reedman on one of his fascinating '**Dawn Chorus**' Walks, something not to be missed (see all our Events on page 7).

Items of special interest:

	<i>Pages</i>
<i>Why does Reading have so many kites?</i>	2/3
<i>Tracking the Fox</i>	3
<i>Earley's Community Orchard</i>	4
<i>Are we sleepwalking into a catastrophe?</i>	4
<i>Poll for the National Bird</i>	5
<i>Help with bicycles and broken goods</i>	6
<i>News from Beyond Earley</i>	6
<i>Wildlife Sightings and Garden Surveys</i>	6/7
<i>Forthcoming Events, and Bits & Pieces</i>	7/8

Why does Reading have so many Red Kites?

by Mel Orros

Red Kites were once such urbanites that London was ‘the city of kites and crows’ (Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*). Lacking sanitation, the streets provided rich pickings for an unfussy scavenger. Yet, although kites have been reintroduced across the UK, our far cleaner towns and cities weren’t expected to appeal. So why are hundreds now visiting Greater Reading (by this I mean Reading town, Woodley, Earley, Tilehurst, Holybrook and Purley-on-Thames parishes, and Shinfield North ward)? Part of my PhD at the University of Reading was to find out.

I wasn’t supposed to be studying Red Kites. I was researching garden-bird feeding, but a passing comment by my supervisor, Mark Fellowes, changed things. He’d noticed he saw far more kites once he got into Reading than on the rest of his commute through the countryside. This seemed strange – Greater Reading is pretty built-up. It has no substantial kite roosts, hardly any nest sites (from the recent Birds of Berkshire Atlas), and, at first sight, relatively few food sources.

We got to chatting about the kites’ behaviour – as we know in Earley they often circle over gardens, occasionally swooping behind fences. We assumed that they spot likely food items, perhaps provided deliberately. Many villagers close to the Chilterns reintroduction area feed kites. Do many people really do the same in urban Reading?

Our interest piqued, we decided to find out. A team of students diligently stood outside supermarkets and asked 500 people questions about kites, including whether they fed them. We were so taken aback at how many said yes (4.5%) that we repeated the questionnaire 6

months later. We found the same again. Kites are fed in over 4,000 Greater Reading gardens.

Could this be the main reason behind Mark’s observations? We investigated further. Driving set routes across Reading, we saw more kites over residential areas than elsewhere. But were foods given in gardens or other urban meals the main draw? After all, their medieval predecessors fed on waste on city streets in huge numbers – road-kill or discarded human foods might have similar importance to today’s kites.

Surveys of Reading’s streets recording every item that kites might eat revealed only enough to feed up to 29 kites a day. In fact, the actual amount is probably far lower – street-cleaners or other scavengers might find food first, daily replacement of all food is unlikely and kites might not be able (or want) to eat everything seen. In the low hundreds of kites visiting Reading daily, it seems street food isn’t what they come for.

This brought us back to garden feeding. Although we knew lots of people fed kites, we didn’t know the amounts. Time for another questionnaire, this one just for kite-feeders. From this, we estimated how much food was taken by kites. Per garden, this isn’t much – on average a kite would need to visit 4–9 feeding gardens for a full day’s meal and on any given day only around 1/4 feeders actually provide food. However, as so many people feed in Reading this is still enough for between 140–320 kites each day, and even more may take some food. This accounts for most of Reading’s kites – we had an explanation for Mark’s early-morning musings.

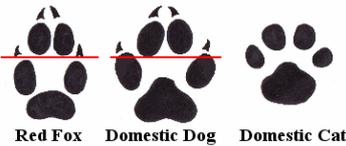
Read the article on which this article is based at www.bou.org.uk/red-kites-back-in-town

Scientific paper detailing the study is at [://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ibi.12237/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ibi.12237/abstract)

Fantastic photo below of Red Kite by kind permission of Stuart Gay



Tracking the fox Edwin A. R. Trout



It had been a mild winter – no sledging and snowmen before Christmas as we had in 2010 and 11 – but at the end of January came what the media called “the Beast from the East”. Cold air swept in from the Continent, chivvying flocks of redwings before it, and hail pelted down in a furious, but mercifully brief, burst on the 29th. Then on Saturday 31st, I awoke to find the landscape covered in a velvety coating of snow.

It wasn't yet 7.00 in the morning, so the scene looked calm and peaceful in the lamplight; there was only one set of tyre tracks in the road out front. I thought I'd go for a walk in the first snow of the year, and enjoy the frozen serenity of Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve before anyone else was up.

Wrapped up in hat, scarf and gloves I set out, my Wellingtons pressing on the virgin snow. Only it wasn't virgin – someone, or something, had been here before. There was a set of paw prints stretching down the pavement towards the lake. Instinctively I followed them, wondering what they were: cat? (wrong shape); dog? (too big) – surely fox! They crossed the road and proscribed a circle on a neighbour's lawn, then on to the grass in Lakeside and went along the footpath. Approaching the gate I saw them divert across the sward and out onto the road. One set of tracks led out to the houses in Lakeside, and another came back. I followed them along the path to the weir and the foot of the lake. They diverged: one into the woods, and the other on to the fishing platform. They were definitely fox tracks, dainty, forward facing and, vitally, unaccompanied. Prints were to be found on the path leading to the playground, and though I lost sight of them in Laurel park and around the pavilion, I found them again passing the Interpretation Centre and onto Instow Road. This was too easy, the fox was following one of the routes I take of an evening! The trail went cold in the meadow, disappointingly, as that is where a den can usually be found in the summer, but was picked up again as I rounded the sediment pond at the Beech Lane end. The tracks crossed the road and along the footpath for a while, before cutting through a gap and up Allendale Road.

One, or possibly two foxes between them, had taken the same circuit as I often do, before daybreak prompted them to seek cover. But then I've also seen them on summer evenings in the past, openly trotting along the paths at dusk. But now, when sightings of foxes are rare (compared with a couple of years ago), these tracks came as a pleasing reassurance of their continuing presence.

Earley's Community Orchard

On a bright but blustery spring morning, a group of Earley Town Council park rangers, university students and local volunteers - not forgetting the Mayor - planted out a new community orchard in the town. The location is to the east of the BMX track in the Paddock Drive reserve. A total of 21 trees were planted, chosen for their association with Berkshire and historic importance. (For photos, see the EEG website). The trees planted were:

Apple:

John Standish (Berks)
Charles Ross (Berks)
Strawberry Pippin (Berks/Woodley)
Winston (Berks)
Pomona (Bucks)
Blenheim Orange (Oxon)
Arthur Turner (Bucks)
Millers Seedling (Berks)
Charles Eyre (Berks)
Caudal Market (Oxon)
Old Fred (Oxon)
Cox's Orange Pippin (Berks)
Grenadier (Bucks)

Pear:

Williams Bon Chretien (Berks)
Beurre Hardy
Doyenne Du Comice

Plum:

Marjorie's Seedling (Berks)

Damson:

Aylesbury Prune

Greengage:

Old Green Gage

Mulberry:

Black Mulberry

Cherry:

Morello, donated by residents



Plans are in hand for a second orchard in Earley, the site yet to be decided. Please contact Jean Hackett on jeanh149@btinternet.com if you would like to be involved. (Photo by Jane Campbell)

Are we sleepwalking into a catastrophe?

Our recent talk by members of the Population Matters Group, Hilde Bartlett and Bill Dowling, **'Going green is not enough – the shocking truth about World population'**, was full of stark information on the increasing world population. Earth's population is over 7 billion, and is increasing by 1 billion every twelve years. It's not difficult to envisage global conflicts over food, water and energy.

To quote Bill Dowling: ***'Clearly, on a finite planet when 7.2 billion of us are collectively consuming non-renewable resources like there is no tomorrow, and the renewable ones at a 50% overshoot level, along with the population still growing by 150 people a minute, the use of the word 'sustainable', when coupled with population and development and any other form of growth whatsoever, is a complete and utter oxymoron!'***

Population Matters' patron, Sir David Attenborough, has commented 'All environmental problems become harder – and ultimately impossible – to solve with ever more people'. **To search for possible solutions : <http://www.populationmatters.org/>**

Poll to find the first national bird for Britain

To coincide with the turn-out for the big Election on May 7th, there is another election with the closing date taking place on the same day.

David Lindo, aka The Urban Birder, at <http://www.votenationalbird.com/> has a list of the shortlist of ten birds already voted for on his campaign website from an original list of 60, and you can, if you wish, vote for one of these on his website. He feels it's time to challenge the unofficial position held by the robin for so long. The RSPB welcome the initiative.

The short list, all much loved, of course:

Robin	Kingfisher
Blue tit	Barn owl
Wren	Puffin
Blackbird	Hen harrier
Mute swan	Red kite

Being an urban southerner, I'm going to hop off the garden fence and proclaim my vote for the blackbird. Childhood seemed full of summer days when its lovely song was heard loud and clear after a short, warm shower of rain. It's sad to know that come July it's reaching the end of the song recital, but this



makes it all the more to treasure. To find more facts about the blackbird, go to the RSPB website.

At present I have a male blackbird visiting me every time I first venture to open the back door, in the foolish hope warmer days are here. He has a badly injured foot which is doubled back, and seems to expect my daily helping of dried mealworms. (Photo of Hop-a-long on left.)

But please don't let me influence you!

Sheila Crowson

David has his own website on <http://www.theurbanbirder.com/>



Bicycles need mending?

Reading Bicycle Kitchen

It was sad to see the Jackson's store in Reading closed and empty, but then... the displays in the windows filled up, this time with secondhand bikes taking pride of place. Reading Bike Kitchen had arrived!

This is a community bike project providing cyclists with access to workstands and good quality tools, along with experienced mechanics to help them with everything from simple maintenance to a complete rebuild.

It is open Mondays 4-8, Wednesdays and Thursdays 6-9 and Saturdays 9-5. During quiet spells, volunteers work on donated bikes to sell at a reasonable price, to make cycling in Reading accessible to all. For more information see www.readingbicyclekitchen.org

Silverdale Cycles is Earley's own long-standing bike workshop. It is located in the Silverdale Centre and is open Thursday 5pm – 7.30pm & Saturday 10am – 3pm. It offers advice, repairs, spares, secondhand bikes and accessories. <http://www.earley-tc.gov.uk/holidayact.html>

Broken but not beyond repair?

Reading Repair Café

This is another community group to be offered space in the empty Jackson's shop. You are welcome to come along to get anything repaired - from electronics and computers to clothing, blunt tools and broken toys. The idea is to save you buying new stuff and to prevent your old things being scrapped.

Their trusty team of volunteers are on hand to help you to repair anything – if possible passing on their skills to you. As well as repairs, you can pop in for a cuppa and homemade cake. Everything is free, but they welcome donations to ensure they can keep running in future.

So far, Repair Cafe has been going for over a year and has helped to delay over 600 items ending up in landfill! It runs on the 3rd Sunday of every month 12.00 – 4.30pm. For more information see www.readingrepaircafe.org.uk

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

Oil companies have been given the green light to explore for oil in Baffin Bay, in the Arctic. This is threatening the wildlife there, including most of the world's narwhal population. Local people are trying to do all they can to stop this. Support them at <https://secure.greenpeace.org.uk/narwhal>

WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND GARDEN SURVEYS

I received a delightful letter last year, with personal observations written by Val, and it is now on the website. Please take time to read it, as her comments put you in touch with your local environment in a way reams of data cannot.

Dec/Jan/Feb: Our garden surveyors, **Margaret and Gillian**, as to be expected, included several of the birds on the voting list on page 5 – blackbird, blue tit, robin, wren and sightings of red kites circling. Gillian welcomed seeing the wren in Dec, the first since May. In addition they saw: chaffinch, great tit, greenfinch, magpie, starling, woodpigeon, dunnock, long tailed tit, green woodpecker, jay, house sparrow, song thrush, crow, coal tit. Thanks to Margaret and Gillian for their listings.

Other members' sightings:

27/2 **Anne and John** recorded a hedgehog on their Earley garden trail camera (see course on <http://www.berksmammals.org.uk/events/4545119445> by Berkshire Mammal Group for trail cameras).

7/3 **Anne** again: Have just seen my first butterflies of the year – a male Brimstone and a Peacock at the top of Oakwood meadow, Maiden Erlegh nature reserve. **Edwin**: Referring to above sighting. Likewise - two Brimstones at the top of the meadow and one by the outflow at about 11.00. No Peacocks for me though.

7/3 **Grahame**: Must be butterfly day! Having not seen a single butterfly so far this year, I have seen a Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and from 2 to 8 (hard to be sure of double counting) Brimstones here in Brimpton Common.

7/3 **Liz**: Spring is definitely in the air. I saw a Red Admiral and a male Brimstone at Shepperlands Farm this morning. Also saw four adders on one of my Make the Adder Count surveys this morning.

On the subject of butterflies, does anyone recognise this one? Answer next newsletter.



LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS April – August 2015

Wednesday April 1st 7.30 to 9.30pm. [Earley's flowering roadside verges - the how and why](#), a talk by Grahame Hawker, Senior Park Ranger, Earley Town Council about the creation of the spectacular beds of insect-attracting flowers in some of Earley's grass verges. Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive. (Local resident and renowned photographer, Nigel Burkitt, has been awarded Highly Commended for his photo of the wild flower bed on Rushey Way in the prestigious International Garden Photographer of the Year competition. This means Earley flower beds are now being viewed in all their glory all round the world. Well done to Nigel. See it on www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk and http://www.igpoty.com/competition08/winners_greeningthecity_hc1.asp. The EEG website 'Flowers' page also has lists by Renee Grayer of local wildflowers).

Sunday May 3rd [Dawn Chorus walk](#). We invite you to get up with the lark and hear the dawn chorus conducted by Ray Reedman. Taking part should be Sedge, Reed, Garden & Cetti's Warblers, Whitethroat and maybe even a Nightingale. Meet at 6.15am for 6.30 start, Lavell's Lake car park, Sandford Lane, Woodley (£2 fee for parking).

Sunday June 14th 11am to 1pm [Shinfield ramble](#). A 3-mile walk with knowledgeable local resident Patricia Green. Discover this ancient parish, and see some of the hidden places on our doorstep. Meet at the start of the at the junction of Old Basingstoke Road and Clares Green Road, grid ref: 751667. There is parking along the main road, and at the village hall if there is no special event taking place there.

Saturday July 11th 10.30am to 12.30pm [Butterfly walk in Pamber Forest](#) Summer walk of about 2.5 miles through this ancient woodland managed by Hampshire Wildlife Trust. Walk led by Alan Broodbank. Meet by the cricket pavilion on Silchester Common (adjacent to the Calleva Arms, RG7 2PH). Any queries or if needing a lift, contact Alan 07799 707301.

Saturday 1st August 10am to 3pm. Earley Green Fair Join us at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. All the usual stalls and fun of the fair.

Wednesday 5th August Children's Bug Hunt 10 to 12.00 or 2pm to 4pm. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. Places must be booked, as numbers are limited. Come prepared for any weather. Minimum age 4 years: responsible adults to accompany children aged up to 8yrs. Contact Sheila Crowson on 0118 962 0004 for details. Please give a contact number and information about any allergic reactions.

Bits and Pieces

Don't forget - we're on Facebook!

The Earley Environmental Group has a **Facebook** presence. We will be using this in addition to the main website, the Yahoo Group and the Newsletter as a way of keeping everyone up to date with our activities and to let you know about upcoming events. Members are also welcome to post news stories or any photographs relevant to the group. If you are a Facebook user, please do join up - just search for 'Earley Environmental Group' and we should pop up. Look forward to seeing you on there. Mel Orros

EASI (Earley Adopt-a-Street Initiative) would like more volunteers. Help keep your street clear of litter. Everything provided. Phone Brian Hackett on 0118 986 1115 or email ask.mera@btinternet.com.

Can you offer active **help to EEG**? If so, phone 0118 962 0004 or go to [the website http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk](http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk). We would welcome more member involvement. If you have no expertise and would like to get involved, you may be able to give practical help. Perhaps help with distributing the newsletter hard copies, or maybe you have graphic design skills (for occasional posters, leaflets), computer skills, any other skills to offer.

Join the **EEG Yahoo Group** and post your sightings and messages. You'll find a link to Yahoo on our [website](#).

EEG committee members can be found on www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk under Contacts, or phone 0118 962 0004

For **Wildlife Survey Forms**, go to the website, or phone Earley Town Council on 0118 986 8995.

Comments or contributions to the newsletter to: sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com, or 2 Reeds Avenue, Earley, RG6 5SR. We would welcome short contributions from members to the newsletter.

If you know someone who would like to **join EEG**, **membership forms** are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995, on the website under [Downloads](#), or send an e-mail to the [Membership Secretary, Liz Wild at liz@helva.plus.com](mailto:liz@helva.plus.com). **Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address** at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or [e-mail](#) her.

Support your local shops & Post Office

Pet Fayre, Maiden Lane Centre, Lower Earley : A small independent shop, now also home to **the post office**. It has bird feeders of all kinds, a variety of bird feed, large bags of which the shop is willing to deliver locally, or pick it up in your car from the back of the shop, tel 0118 926 6512, e-mail sales@petfayre-reading.co.uk or go on the comprehensive website www.petfayre-reading.co.uk

Thanks to ORACLE Corporation for reproducing our newsletter on recycled paper. Oracle is the world's second-largest software company, situated at Thames Valley Business Park in Earley. Oracle UK adheres to the ISO14001 Environment Standard which confirms Oracle has considered and acted upon its environmental impact. As part of Oracle's corporate social responsibility, it supports a number of local groups, including us. It has given us valuable support in reproducing the hard copies of our newsletter in colour, as well as printing off posters and membership leaflets for us to distribute to libraries, schools etc.