

A time of change for our natural environment



Aside from the politics, we will soon experience the change from summer to autumn, a lovely time of year to enjoy the natural environment. However, this is under constant threat of change, witness the various articles detailing this - for instance, the decreasing number of pollinators, like bees, requiring assistance in any way we can give. (**'To Mow or Not To Mow'** pages 2, 3 and 5).

Another, the need to protect our local trees. Earley has many wonderful trees, some hundreds of years old, but we need to protect all our trees. (See **'Earley's Shrinking Natural Environment'** page 3). Is it not time that valuable (and valued) trees had the protection we give to old buildings, so why build next to them, affecting the building and the tree, or allow parking/car travel on their root-spread?

We hunger to acquire plants from foreign lands for our gardens, so introducing the havoc of non-native plants on our landscape. (**'Some Plants We Definitely Don't Want,'** pages 3 and 4). We flood the oceans with plastic microbeads affecting marine life, this in our use of cosmetics of all things! (**'Microbeads,'** page 6).

All these point to a lack of understanding of how nature works and our effect on it. In a very tiny way EEG tries to remedy this with our **Talks and Walks**. (See pages 5 and 6, and information on our website).

Our built environment does not escape change either. John Booth, of EEG and Friends of the Earth, keeps us up to date (see page 4).

Nature can enhance our lives, as the photo above proves, taken by EEG member David Jupe at the water reservoir site, Elm Lane.

Items of special interest:

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TO MOW OR NOT TO MOW, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Wokingham Borough Council's decision to change the mowing regime for grass areas has met with divided opinions. Those who oppose the changes accuse the Council of trying to save money, hijacking children's play areas, think it looks untidy, feel it will conceal litter and dog mess, etc. are concerned about the collection of long grass and generally reject the project.

There are probably some who do not much care either way, but many are in favour. In support of the project, some residents like the idea of bringing the countryside into an urban area, which once was a hamlet of open space and many farms. They enjoy looking at flowers and grassy areas instead of having places shorn to Wimbledon-like lawns, and knowing we are helping wildlife.

97% of our wildflower meadows have gone due to land development and change of use

Why the Change? It should be possible to accommodate both opposing views, and WBC is trying to do this. The wilding of Earley's grassy spaces - by allowing grass to grow and flowers to populate it - will offer nectar, pollen and a habitat free of harmful pesticides to creatures that have been



deprived of this. Over 97% of our wildflower meadows have gone due to modern farming practices and land development. Imagine how many thousands of living creatures are being ousted from their natural habitat at the moment through the building of new houses and roads to accommodate these. These practices cannot be halted, but we can do something, even in a small way, to offer a hand-up to the dispossessed.

Why worry, you might ask? Consider that so many of our food crops rely on an army of small pollinators like bees. Many responsible bodies are calling for a rethink on how we treat our green spaces: the Royal Horticultural Society, Countryfile, Gardeners World, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, Kew Gardens, and Alan Titchmarsh's Verge Campaign.

*Left: Bee orchid recently discovered in Earley. Other orchids have also appeared, photo by **Anne Booth**.*

The pollinators Our bee population, honey and wild, has been drastically reduced in recent years. Just think of a world without beans, tomatoes, onions and carrots, not to mention the hundreds of other vegetables, oilseeds and fruits that are dependent upon bees for pollination.

*'The production and diversity of agriculture seems to depend to a large extent on biotic pollination, particularly on the service provided by the honey-bee (*Apis mellifera*), the single most important pollinator species, and a plethora of wild bee species.'* (Annals of Botany 2009)

There are other pollinators: pollen wasps, a variety of flies including bee flies and hoverflies, flower beetles, moths and butterflies. Who doesn't love to see these?

Going forward: WBC performance officers will make checks across the borough to ensure the right balance is being struck, and WBC is enlisting experts from Reading University to assess the sites for biodiversity throughout the year to inform future plans; the hope is a marked improvement in pollinators with the increase in flower-rich grasslands. But remember, mimicking nature and old farming practices to achieve the sort of grassy meadow we would all like is very difficult.

<http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/parks-and-countryside/trees-hedges-and-grass-cutting/grass-cutting-in-public-spaces>



Apologies have been made for the controversial introduction of the project. The trick for WBC to make this project work is for the right places to be selected, and for residents to begin to accept a new way of looking at nature in their town. Earley residents and Wokingham Borough Council co-operating together can make this vital project work.

Earley's Shrinking Natural Environment

Users of Laurel Park may have noticed that some of the trees fringing the car park next to the pavilion have been cut down. This was done by members of the football club to provide vehicle access to the field behind for extra parking space on their Fun Day, apparently without permission from Wokingham Borough Council. Unfortunately the gap created is next to a lovely veteran Oak tree whose roots could be damaged by vehicles driving over them. WBC has now closed off the access with a temporary fence, but rumour has it that if and when Laurel Park is taken over by Earley Town Council, this field will become permanent overflow parking.

I find the gradual erosion of our natural environment and green space worrying. Very recently a large veteran Oak has been cut down along the cycleway from Beech Lane. This was believed to have been causing subsidence to a nearby property. The loss of this grand old tree clearly shows how the planning system did not protect either it, or the new house, at the time permission for building was granted.

Anne Booth

Clearing the Olympic site of Japanese knotweed has been estimated at £70 million. There are 1,377 non-native plants in the UK, but only 108 (8%) are considered invasive

Some plants we definitely don't want: Invasive non-native species

Our gardens have been greatly enriched by the introduction of plants from abroad but a small number have proved highly invasive in the UK, threatening natural habitats and native species, including waterways and aquatic life. The control of these species is difficult and costly, yet many are widely available with little indication of the damage they can do if they are allowed to escape

from gardens or are disposed of carelessly. After habitat destruction, invasive non-native species are the most serious threat. EEG members have helped to eradicate Himalayan Balsam locally which crowds out natural wildflowers and other wildlife.

Approximately 60% of invasive plants come from horticulture: It is a criminal offence to plant or cause to grow a non-native invasive species in the wild.



On the left, Skunk Cabbage, seen growing in a wet area in Whitenights Park, Earley.

Skunk cabbage is a perennial wildflower that grows in swampy, wet areas of forest lands. This unusual plant sprouts very early in the spring, and has an odd chemistry that creates its own heat, often melting the snow around itself as it first sprouts in the spring. Apparently its roots are food for bears (not too many of these in Whitenights!). Another name for it,

Swamp Lantern. From March 2016 The [EU Regulation](#) on Invasive Alien Species will prohibit the sale and exchange of this species. Gardeners who already have it in their gardens must ensure it does not spread further. *(How will Brexit affect this eventually?)*

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=530> <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm>

Updates from John Booth

Park-and-Ride:

The deadline for comments on Wokingham's planning application for a 277-space park and ride site at Broken Brow – just to the East of Kennet Mouth - has now passed. Issues included: loss of wildlife habitat; loss of amenity to Thames Path users from light and noise; whether it will have significant impact on traffic in Reading; and whether the £3.6 million cost would be better spent on alternative measures to reduce traffic. If approved it could make the **Mass Rapid Transit** scheme planned by Reading much more likely to happen. There is a consultation on this with information at www.reading.gov.uk/east-reading-mrt until 16th August (previously discussed in EEG Newsletter December 2015).

'Smart M4' Examination:

The Examination into proposals for a 'Smart M4' – a 'controlled motorway' with 'all lane running' with no hard shoulder - is over, and a decision is expected by 3rd September.

The Transport Select Committee has now investigated 'All Lane Running' and concluded "The Department should not proceed with a major motorway programme on the basis of cost savings while major safety concerns continue to exist."

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmtrans/63/63.pdf>

Campaign for Better Transport have launched a template e-mail to the Secretary of State

<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/tell-transport-secretary-say-no-all-lane-running> asking not to proceed

with All Lane Running which includes comments about the M4. Please also send a similar message to your MPs and Councillors. For more details see

www.readingfoe.org.uk/m4)

This is an update on the article in EEG April newsletter.

A Website Treat: Read the report by Edwin of the EEG Dawn Chorus walk in Maiden

Erlagh Reserve led by Ray Reedman. Clever website manager Brian Hackett has managed to add the birds' songs or calls, and you can hear these with just a click. There are also lovely photos.

<http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk/Birds/DawnChorus2016.asp>

'REST IN BEES' A queen in search of a resting place.



A swarm of bees wanting to make a new life somewhere landed on a bike in Valpy Street. A bee keeper was on her way, but a passing Pest Control van sprayed the bees

before they could be collected. The mystery is where the van came from, but the result is the sad sight above. People in the local office were upset, and someone cared enough to lay flowers, with a card and a pot of honey. (All photos by Claire Fiorentini)

From an article in The Guardian newspaper,



A swarm happens when a hive becomes overcrowded, a new queen appears and the old queen and a gang of around 20,000 go on the run. They head for temporary lodgings while scout bees look for somewhere safe to settle. Swarms in urban areas may rest on cars, lampposts, bicycle baskets or even Topshop's windows. "Bee swarms may look terrifying,

but if you are confronted with a buzzing horde don't panic: bees stuff themselves with honey before they head off, which makes them particularly docile. These are not 'attacks'. You can be very close to a swarm and they won't sting you. Honeybees aren't aggressive anyway," says Paul Webb of a London-based beehive rental firm. He recommends antihistamine cream should you get stung by a bee.

As bee numbers continue to decline, "people should be pleased to see swarms of bees," says Professor Dave Goulson of the University of Sussex. "They are obviously important and if they are swarming, they're creating new colonies and everyone should be happy" (except the beekeeper who lost half his/her hive!). **More education about bees seems to be required.**

TALKS AND WALKS

Barn Owls of West Berkshire

Extract from a report by Edwin Trout, photo by Tara Pirie, Berkshire Mammal Group. Full report on the EEG website www.earlyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk

We had a talk by John Dellow, followed by a practical session of owl pellet dissection on 5th May. John introduced himself as representing the West Berkshire Countryside Society, a body that was born out of the former FWAG a few years ago, and now comprises three groups: a barn owl group, friends of Bucklebury Heath, and a volunteers' group. The group mounts, maintains and monitors a number of nest boxes throughout West Berkshire, and has recently increased its coverage to around 150 boxes.

The short tailed field vole is the key element in the barn owl's diet, and their availability affects the owls' breeding success. 70% of barn owls are now box-bred.

Monitoring these owls is an expert's job and to inspect an owl box one needs a permit: a 'disturbance licence' from English Nature, via BTO. The requirements for obtaining a ringing licence are rather more rigorous.



Dissecting owl pellets gave a very fascinating insight into what owls eat. Pellets are the indigestible components of an owl's diet – the fur and bones of prey – and are coughed up, rather than excreted. We found umpteen tiny bones mostly from field vole skeletons.

June Walk



AN EEG June walk in the new SANGS in Shinfield (*Suitable Accessible Natural Green Space*). SANGS is the name given to green space that is of a quality and type suitable to be used as mitigation within the Thames Basin Heaths Planning Zone. Dog walkers are welcome. Led by Elaine Butler, photo by Anne Booth.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

MICROBEADS: Yet another threat caused by humans to our planet, in particular our seas. The small microbeads are used mostly in exfoliating and body scrub beauty products, also some toothpaste. If you use these, you may be releasing thousands of these tiny plastic beads into the environment with every wash. These go down our drains and, too small to be filtered out, end up in the ocean. They often include polyethylene (PE) or polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polymethyl methacrylate (PMMA) or nylon. Bottom line, it's all plastic. President Obama has ensured these will be banned in the US from 2017. The Govt. now appears to be supporting a Europe-wide ban. Get an app from <https://www.beatthemicrobead.org/en/> and <http://www.5gyres.org/microbeads/> (US site for children).

EARLEY'S EAGLE: See the banner on this newsletter explaining the origin of the town's name. It was likely to be the white-tailed eagle. See photos on <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2016/jun/16/sea-eagle-reintroduced-to-isle-of-mull-scottish-natural-heritage-rspb-photo-essay>

NEW ENVIRONMENT MINISTER: Andrea Leadsom is the new Env. Minister. Not known for previously championing environmental causes, her handling of the many complex issues involved will be awaited with interest.

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND GARDEN SURVEYS

Notes of interest from our two garden surveyors:

Margaret: **May 18th** 40+ lavender beetles (*Chrysolina americana*), aka Rosemary beetle. Pretty, green and purple stripe. (*Advice is Keep an eye out come September when they'll be busy feeding, mating and laying their lethal eggs. Hand-pick them and, steel yourself, stamp on them*).

Gillian: **May 7th** 4 starlings in back garden. Noisy family nesting in next door's eaves. *(Although still one of our commonest garden birds, it is awarded Red Status. Red is the highest conservation priority).*

Mon. **June 20th** : Edwin spotted a Muntjac deer in the Maiden Earley Nature Reserve. Perhaps displaced from its habitat by large local development.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS September 2016 – December 2016

Tuesday September 20th 7.30pm - 9.30 pm [Shakespeare's Flowers in Earley](#). In the 400th year of the death of Shakespeare, a presentation on the flowers which would have been familiar to the bard. Those thespians among you might like to read some of the relevant quotations. Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.

Wednesday October 5th 10am - lunchtime [Autumn litter pick](#). Meet at the Waterside Centre on Thames Valley Park Drive at 10am. Collect litter from Horseshoe bridge/Kennet Mouth to Sonning Lock along the River Thames finishing with lunch at the café at Sonning Lock.

Monday November 21st 7.30pm - 9.30pm [The Uses of Pollen in Forensic Science](#) A talk by Dr Michael Keith-Lucas, retired senior tutor in Plant Sciences at Reading University. A fascinating talk on how pollen can be used in solving crimes of fraud, theft, fire-arms offences, bombings and murder, and how pollen and spores disperse and arrive at the scenes of crime. Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.

Monday December 19th 7pm to 10pm [Christmas party](#). Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. Open to all EEG members. Come along - bring some food to share (please let us know what you are bringing, so we can balance the fare), we'll provide mulled wine.

Bits and Pieces

Don't forget - 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. **Contact Brian Hackett by phone (986 1115)** or by e-mail: brianh@talk21.co, or Peter Soul (926 4997), petersoul@peterjo.plus.com.

Can you offer active **help to EEG**? If so, phone 0118 962 0004 or go to the website <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 or maybe you have graphic design skills, computer skills, any other skills to offer. At the moment 'the few' help to keep EEG going.

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. **Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address** at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or e-mail her.

Erlegh Elfins: A pre-school playgroup on Thursdays at the Interpretation Centre in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve will run from 10am to 11:30 am, with a focus on outdoor play and exploration of the natural environment. The children have opportunities to explore the nature reserve, and Head Ranger Grahame Hawker or members of his team are on hand to share their extensive knowledge of the habitats, creatures and work that occur within the reserve.

For more information, please contact erleghelfins@gmail.com or Charlotte on 07771 605825. There is a limit on numbers to ensure safe play, so please make contact to give your name and details of your child. Child-minders are welcome. Adults are responsible for the children they bring with them, so a ratio of 2:1 is recommended. A charge of £1.50 per child applies.

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

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