

Season's
Greetings

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 2 DECEMBER 2005

Earley - Old English 'Earnley -eagle wood'

The winter of 2005/6 is going to be a cold one, if we believe the experts. Most of us will have warm, snug shelter but our local wildlife will have to be resilient to get through it. When you drive on our congested roads it's hard to imagine there are millions of living creatures other than us in Earley. Our support for wildlife in these hard times is mostly directed at birds, perhaps because they are so easily visible to us. Other animals have to rely on their own resourcefulness to survive. Some use ingenious ways to cope. The article on **winter moths** (page 2) explains how these delicate creatures get through winter. At Christmas we decorate our homes with **holly and ivy** but when you hang it in your hall, think of the creature that relies on these for its existence: our beautiful **Holly Blue butterfly**, see page 3. Christmas is a time for myths and legends and also on page 3 you will find a Cautionary Tale for Christmas. But before Christmas, make time to come to our **Hedgerow Talk on Dec 7** (see 'Forthcoming Events') by an acknowledged expert, Dick Greenaway, which promises to be a fascinating insight into Earley's environmental past.

ARTICLES:

Earley Walk - Thames Valley Path

Moths in Winter

Green Jargon

A Christmas Tale

"The Holly and the Ivy"

'Green' Christmas Stocking Fillers

Support your Local Shops

News from Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve

Earley Wildlife Sightings

Websites for children

Future Events

The POWER OF NUMBERS - 200 AND STILL RISING

Our membership numbers are steadily rising and have reached over 200. To give us a more powerful voice, why not enrol all your family members individually, including children? Or, tell your friends or neighbours if you think they are interested in the Earley environment, and would like to attend meetings or courses, participate in practical projects or just receive the newsletter to be informed, then sign them up! Remember, membership is free. To become a member send details to Liz Wild, 50 Kenton Road, Earley, or e-mail details to her on e.a.wild@reading.ac.uk. Go on: do your bit for Earley and see how many members you can enrol.

TECHNOLOGY BUGS

We admit to being novices in this technology business, and if you experience trouble receiving this newsletter, we should like to hear about it. E-mail sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com

Get to know your **EARLEY**

Want to go for a walk but don't know where to go?

Thames Valley Path

Take a stroll along the river bank, visit a nature reserve, and perhaps walk on to Sonning

It surprises some to learn that Earley extends as far as the Thames (see your map in the Earley Town Guide). You may need to use your car to get to the Thames Valley Business Park. To reach the start point, you can either join the A329M at Loddon Bridge roundabout which takes you straight through, or go via Pitts Lane, left at Shepherd's Hill roundabout onto London Road, straight over next roundabout and then follow signs for the Thames Valley Waterside Centre. You can park at the Centre, cross the grassed area and turn right to walk along the riverbank (Sonning direction). Alternatively, if you park on the dual carriageway just past the waterside centre, and near the Oracle business centre, (not to be confused with the shopping centre!), take the grassy path which leads to the river. Again, turn right for Sonning and you will eventually come to the Thames Valley Nature Reserve, which has several small lakes. There are various paths through the Reserve, or you can choose to walk on to the lock (and pub) at Sonning.



Nature Reserve



MOTHS in WINTER

The months of December and January are generally quiet for adult moths on the wing compared to the often enormous numbers of species and individuals around at other times of year. The appropriately-named **Winter Moth (*Operophtera brumata*)** can usually be found in December, January and February in a normal winter (when did we last have one of those?), and if, on a mild night, you notice large numbers of grey-winged moths about the same size as a common blue butterfly congregating on your lighted windows, that is what they will probably be. The caterpillars feed on oak and fruit trees and, together with another moth of winter, the **Mottled Umber (*Erannis defoliaria*)**, can practically defoliate oak trees in late May. Often you can hear and feel the frass falling to the ground if you stand under an infested tree, and see the small green caterpillars dangling from long silk threads. In my garden in Avalon Road, and no doubt elsewhere in our area, they form the basis of the diet for baby blue tits. If the rearing of the baby blue tits in May does not coincide with the brief presence of the caterpillars then they will run out of food, unless something else becomes available. In my garden this seems to happen in about one year in three.

The pretty russet and black, but highly-variable **December Moth (*Poecilocampa populi*)** is also attracted to light and is a much bulkier and furrier affair than most other winter moths. It's worth taking time to look at the incredible structure of the feathered antennae of the males. If you capture a female there is a good chance that it will lay eggs; the larvae will feed upon blackthorn or hawthorn, both of which are common in our area.

The **Mottled Umber** is of a generally yellowy-orange colour with interesting markings, but quite variable. It is, however, easily distinguished from a near relative, the **Dotted Border**, by the latter's row of black dots around the edges of both the fore and hind wings. Other species that may be encountered in January are the **Early Moth (*Theria primaria*)** – suggesting it's the first moth of the year), **Spring Usher** and the lovely **Brindled Beauty**, again an altogether bulkier and furrier species than most others around at the same time.

Moths that fly in winter have evolved various adaptations that render them fitter to cope with the low temperatures. The **Mottled Umber, the Winter Moth**, and no doubt other species can continue to fly happily in cold temperatures as they have antifreeze in their body fluids! Another most interesting fact is that most species have females that are to all intents and purposes wingless and therefore flightless, looking more like spiders than moths with "wings" no more than a millimetre or two in length. There are probably several theories as to why this should be, but the conventional one is that it is more "expensive" to fly in winter, as it takes more energy to warm up the flight muscles. This matters more to females than males, as eggs are more costly to produce than sperm. Clever things, moths!

Alan Broodbank

If you feel inspired to find out more about these beautiful creatures, join the Berkshire Moth Group www.berkshiremothgroup.co.uk

Check this website for photos of some of the above moths : www.ukmoths.org.uk (Select *Moth Search*, type in moth name, select *View thumbnails*)

GREEN JARGON

SUSTAINABILITY has been defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. A key part of sustainability is considering the rights of future generations, and their access to a similar quality of environment, and supply of resources. This is one of the toughest challenges of sustainability. To get people thinking outside of their immediate family and social group, and maybe five generations ahead, is a huge, some would say, impossible, challenge."

Or "improving the quality of life for all without damaging the environment or the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

A Christmas Tale



All families have Christmas traditions, and theirs was The Story. After the celebratory meal they each chose a slip of paper from the hat, and she picked the 'story teller' slip. She was given an object around which she must weave her story. It was a toy space craft. The children were delighted, but one or two of the large extended family groaned inwardly. They guessed the theme. She began by telling them they must suspend disbelief, it was a fantasy tale. It was the story of two distant imaginary planets, one called Pax and the other, Bellum. The Observation Panel on Pax was meeting to hear the report from one of their observation craft. The chief began his report. "As you know, we were concerned by the efforts of the planet Bellum to get their dominant species into space, although this has proved to be a puny affair. Our last very detailed observation was many years ago when we reported

their aptitude for aggression on both a large and individual scale, which is not unexpected since life on their planet is based on one species devouring another, unlike ours. But there seem to have been very disturbing changes since then. We have found an enormous increase in numbers of the dominant species. Their activities appear to be having an alarming effect on the make-up of their biosphere, which is posing considerable problems for them. They are trying to combat these effects but we estimate it will take some time to reverse the damage. Our conclusion is that they will be so preoccupied in the future by dealing with these problems, they will not have the resources to advance their space travel and do not present a threat to us." The Observation Panel, satisfied by the findings, and agreeing to monitor the situation in twenty years' time, broke up. The younger listeners, feeling cheated of an exciting story, soon went back to their games and the adults, not caring to think twenty years ahead, shook off the gloom spread by the story, and soon noisy chatter signalled everything was back to normal.



The HOLLY and the IVY

The HOLLY and the IVY

We like to decorate our halls with holly and ivy, and there is much folklore connected with them both. The custom of bringing evergreen boughs into our homes existed in pre-Christian times, and **holly** (also Hulver, Holm, Hollin) was seen as a powerful fertility symbol and a guard against witchcraft and house goblins. It later came to stand for the crown of thorns and its berries for Christ's blood, which may account for the belief held up to recent times (and even now by some people) that it was unlucky to cut down a holly tree; when a hedge was grubbed out the holly tree often survived. One belief, which may be particularly relevant, is a European tradition that says whoever brings the first holly into the house, husband or wife, at Christmas will rule the house for the next year! The berries are only borne on the female plant; they can be eaten by wildlife such as birds, but are poisonous, causing vomiting, in humans.

The **ivy** in early mythology is associated with Bacchus, his worship being characterised by wild dances, thrilling music and tipsy excess (shades of Reading on a Saturday night!), so it is therefore associated with having a good time. It's our only liana. One misunderstanding is that it is a parasite. This is not so, but very weak trees can become prone to wind damage. It gives great value as a wildlife plant and as a late nectar source for bees. During the utility years of the 1940s people would boil ivy leaves in water, then sponge down suits or gymslips to remove shine and clean them. For one creature, our beautiful **Holly Blue butterfly**, the holly and the ivy are necessary for its existence. This butterfly is quite happy to grace your garden, so if you see a blue butterfly there, it's almost certain to be a Holly Blue. The spring brood will lay eggs on the flower buds of holly although, if unavailable, other plants will do. When they become adults and mate, they lay their eggs on ivy. The ivy brood over winter as chrysalids and emerge in the spring to lay their eggs on holly. And the cycle begins again.

For more information on the Holly Blue try www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/401.shtml. Another very attractive site is Linda Walls' www.butterflygarden.co.uk/index.html. Linda is currently suffering from a serious illness and we wish her success in her treatment. She lived for 11 years in Wokingham before moving to Cirencester. For plant lore, treat yourself (quite expensive but worth it) to the monumental book 'Flora Britannica' by Richard Mabey, a guide to our wild flowers, plants and trees which includes lots of local superstition.



A FEW CHRISTMAS PRESENT IDEAS

The Secret Lives of Garden Birds by Dominic Couzens ISBN 0-7136-6616 An RSPB book, very entertainingly written, well illustrated, goes through the calendar year, for all the family. *How to be a bad birdwatcher* by Simon Barnes ISBN 1-904095-95-X pub by Short Books. More than just a book about birds, it's a delight and "can help us all to a better understanding of our place on this planet."

Find out about where you live, with two books from the Earley Local History Group, available from Earley Town Council Offices *Earley Days-An illustrated account of our community's development* - packed with information on how Earley developed. *Earley Memories- A Century of Change* - fascinating contemporary accounts of people remembering life in Earley in the twentieth century. Normally £14.99 each, but bring this newsletter into the Earley Town Council Offices and you can have each for £11.99.

Christmas Presents ideas cont'd

Laminated, well illustrated, folded identification charts to carry in your rucksack or car on a variety of wildlife subjects, e.g. butterflies, grasses, trees and several others, suitable for children, also available from Earley Town Council Offices. £2.50 each

Presents for children:

Membership of the Natural History Museum at Membership, Natural History Museum
Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD
Tel: 020 7942 5792 or
www.nhm.ac.uk
Laminated cards (as above)

BITS AND PIECES

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

Pet Fayre 9 Maiden Lane Centre Lower Earley

A small independent shop, with 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 9266512, or e mail enquiries@petfayre-reading.co.uk.

The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre

You might also be interested to know that there is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley. Their mission is to take low cost organic food out to the people, bypassing the supermarkets which charge a lot for organics, and making it convenient for people to buy - you don't have to take the car or, if you do, not very far. They appear every 2 weeks at the Silverdale Centre on the second & fourth Fridays 5pm to 8.15pm If you're interested they have a website giving dates
www.truefood.coop/truefood.html

NO COMPUTER? NO EXPERTISE? NO PROBLEM!

If you have no computer and would like to access any of the websites in the newsletter, your local library has computers for public use. If you're not a member, you need to join. They also do 2-hour instruction sessions.

SAVE PAPER

It would be helpful, if you are receiving a hard copy of this newsletter but have an internet address, if you could send me these details, as this would save paper. If you would like to contribute to the newsletter or want a particular subject covered, please write to Sheila Crowson, 2 Reeds Avenue, Earley RG6 5SR or e-mail sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com.

WOULD YOU LIKE A WILDLIFE GARDEN?

The WEA are running a course on wildlife gardening. This is a 5-meeting course on Monday evenings, 7.30 - 9.30 pm from 9 Jan 2006 at Silverdale Youth Centre with an expert, Dr. Colin Ryall. Ring by latest mid December Bent Weber, 0118 926 5200 for details.

News From the Park Ranger Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve

Progress on the Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve continues apace. The meadows have all been cut and raked to ensure that they stay in good condition and an additional "scallop" of wildflowers has been sown and planted on Instow Road, with another area being prepared for planting in 2006 or 2007.

The southern bank of the lake is being reshaped at present in preparation for the planting of a new reedbed and other marginal vegetation. This will provide shelter and food for fish fry and the chicks of the ducks, moorhens, coots, etc.

The paths around the lake are also receiving attention, with the large protruding stones being raked off and, where necessary, additional fine stones rolled into the surface.

In Meadow Park, the restoration of the two meadows is now complete. After removing the dominant grass, rotovating, raking and planting over 2000 wildflower plants, the areas have been sown with a grass-free wildflower mix. The Earley Environmental Group are planning to try and persuade the District Council to set aside areas for biodiversity in all of its parks and open spaces. Your backing will be essential if the group is to make this dream a reality.

Grahame Hawker



At work in the
Reserve

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

SPARROWHAWKS

(from Jane, Sep/Oct) seen in her garden in Mays Lane on several occasions.

(from Anne, Sep) saw one "circling above the public open space behind M&S (Lower Earley) on Thurs at 11am."

(from Alan, Sep) "One killed a jay very early in the morning in our garden in Avalon Rd a couple of weeks ago - that was a tough fight as the pile of both jay and S'hawk feathers bore witness. It was also very noisy - umpteen other birds (not just jays) gathered round and scolded, making an appalling row, but were careful not to venture too close! "

GOLDFINCHES (from Kate). "I put a niger bird feeder in my apple tree at the end of July and waited and waited! All of a sudden last Friday, 30th September, I spotted two goldfinches on it. And now they come every morning and mid-afternoon. I have never seen them before, so I am absolutely thrilled to have them in my garden now."

CAN YOU GUESS? Mark had an unexpected visitor in October in his garden. Frequently seen dead on country roads, and makes a tasty dish. People pay good money to shoot them. Begins with a 'P' and ends in 'T'. Anyone else had a visit from one of these?

FOX (from Sheila) seen in Reeds Avenue in the wee small hours in October, the second sighting in six months. A perky fox, walking purposefully in middle of road (perhaps he doesn't like the smells on the pavement) towards Hartsbourne Rd.

(From Anne) One of the wildlife highlights of the summer was watching a family of foxes in my neighbour's garden. At dusk they came out and prowled around while we sat in the lounge and watched them from the comfort of our armchairs. It was so exciting and we felt very privileged to be able to see them up close. This is the first year they have visited so often. They frequent my own garden, too, although I've never see them, only their droppings!

IS IT A BIRD? IS IT A PLANE? No, it's a butterfly!

Stuart, our ace identifier of unusual creatures (remember the case, reported in our first newsletter, of the *Scolopendra gigantea*, the world's biggest, rarest and most venomous centipede found crawling up someone's wall, as we would be if it were behind our TV!) was on the trail again. Stuart got a call from a resident of Silverdale Road, who reported seeing an enormous butterfly, three times the size of our largest British one, sipping juices from fallen fruit in his garden. Stuart identified it as a Giant Owl Butterfly. The patterns on the wings of this owl butterfly closely resemble the eyes and face of an owl, scaring off any potential predators. It feeds

exclusively on fermenting fruit, a habit which can result in the giant butterfly literally keeling over in a drunken stupor. No doubt the owner of the garden was wondering if he'd had too many that night as well! Stuart began to put two and two together, and after checking, found the residence of the Owl Butterfly was a nearby greenhouse owned by Mark, a keen moth and butterfly enthusiast. It had survived six weeks out in the wilds of Earley. Did anyone else see it?

RED ADMIRAL BUTTERFLIES

(From Anne 5 Nov) "Had a Red Admiral in our garden (Instow Rd) today." They can be seen if weather is fine almost into December.

MAGIC MUSHROOM

Seen locally in Earley in October, Fly Agaric mushroom is so called because in medieval times bits of it were broken into milk to stupefy flies. It's found near birch trees. The Lapps used it as an intoxicant and hallucinogenic, and it was also



much liked by reindeers, hence the story of Santa using it to get airborne along with the reindeer. It induced people to make huge leaps over quite small objects. Since early times it has been a mushroom used worldwide to put shamans into trances, sometimes for a couple of days. The Irish Celts used it, and it was a particular favourite of the Druids. One story (and it may only be this!) is that the Zulus hyped themselves up to super human strength with it to defeat the British. It's best left alone, **being very poisonous to humans.**



Seen in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve?

No, er, not actually, but a few years ago deer, possibly muntjac, were seen there.

There haven't been any recent sightings, so it's possible the green corridor they used has been closed by recent development.

Amazingly though, very close to us, there is a small colony of roe deer in a most unlikely location.

SOME WEBSITES FOR CHILDREN:

Natural History Museum:- www.nhm.ac.uk/kids-only/index.html

Pictures to colour in (to find the colours, search on Google etc. and find a photo of the birds):-

www.ra.org/programs/education/kids/coloring-book/index.html

Information and quizzes (click on Warden's Trail then FUN):

www.workingforwildlife.org.uk/index.htm

Excellent site for children interested in nature by the Woodland Trust-

www.naturedetectives.org.uk

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP: FORTHCOMING EVENTS

"Hedgerows - Windows into the Past" _An evening talk with Dick Greenaway

Wednesday 7 Dec 2005 7.30 - 9.00 p.m. in Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve Interpretation Centre off Instow Road, Earley.

Local expert **Dick Greenaway** will be talking about the importance of hedgerows, their history, and relevant legislation, and give an insight into how to survey hedgerows, as a taster to the hedgerow surveying practical day to be held in April 2006.

"The Magical World of Trees" An evening talk with Jonathan Matthews, Arboriculturist with Wokingham District Council

Tuesday 17 Jan 2006 7.30 - 9.00p.m. at the Interpretation Centre

Jonathan will be giving us an insight into Wokingham District tree policy, legislation, tree preservation orders and other glimpses into the magical world of trees.

"The Humble Bumblebee" _An evening talk with Stuart Hine.

Wednesday 22 Feb 2006 7.30 - 9.00p.m. at the Interpretation Centre

Stuart is a leading entomological expert from London's Natural History Museum, and our Chairman. Come and learn about these endearing, enigmatic little bundles of energy, including how to identify the common species and to take care of them in your own garden.

RESCUE Weekend Saturday 18 March and Sunday 19 March 2006

This year Earley will once again be joining in with RESCUE (Rivers and Environmental Spaces Clean Up Event). This is a huge event, which each year sees thousands of people helping to clean up the Kennet Valley from Hungerford to Reading. Earley Env. Group will be running events across Earley, so why not join in and have some fun while making Earley a more beautiful place to live in? More details in our next newsletter (or phone Earley Town Council for details nearer the event).

Hedgerow Surveying Course A follow-up to the December talk by Dick Greenaway

Saturday 22 April 2006 10a.m.-12.30 p.m. Meet at the Interpretation Centre

Dick will be showing us how to carry out a simple hedgerow survey. We will then have the knowledge to survey Earley's remaining hedgerows, to understand their importance and to protect their future. Come along and learn how to be a protector of Earley's heritage : no previous knowledge or experience is necessary.

If you would like to attend Dec 7 on Hedgerows, Jan 17 on Trees, or Feb 22 Bumblebees, it would be helpful (though not essential) if you could ring Sheila on 0118 9620004, so we have an idea whether it's "one man and his dog" or 60 attending.

National Moth Night Saturday 23 September 2006

Join the Berkshire Moth Group for a chance to get up close and personal with these fascinating, secretive creatures. The uninitiated often think of moths as dull, boring brown creatures but those who take time to get to know them better are privileged to enter a world of beautiful colours and intricate patterns. Your garden is almost certainly visited by 4 or 5 times as many moth species as there are butterfly species in the whole of Britain. On National Moth Night, which next year (2006) is to be held in September, people all over the country will gather around moth lights to marvel at these lovely insects and increase our knowledge of their distribution. Venue to be confirmed.

In addition to attending the above wildlife/environmental event, members of the Earley Environmental Group have the chance to get their hands dirty and make a practical contribution to conserving Earley's wildlife by joining Earley Town Council's Senior Park Ranger, Grahame Hawker, to help with practical conservation work **each Wednesday**. Meet at the Interpretation Centre on Instow Road, Earley at 9.30 am. Wear old clothes and stout footwear and bring a packed lunch if you intend to stay all day. (Phone Grahame on 0779 617 0689 for further details).

Also, on the **second Thursday of each month** the Berkshire Moth Group meets at the Interpretation Centre, Instow road. Why not come along and join the fun? But be warned, nothing is highly addictive! As well as a moth light, you will find a very warm welcome and copious quantities of tea, coffee, cakes and biscuits. The meetings start at 7.30 p.m. To save you having to work them out, the meeting dates are 8 Dec, 12 Jan 2006, 9 Feb, 9 Mar, 13 Apr, 11 May, 8 Jun, 13 Jul, 10 Aug, 14 Sep, 12 Oct, 9 Nov and 14 December.

We have several interesting walks planned for the spring and summer of 2006. See details in our next newsletter.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman	Stuart Hine
Vice-Chairman	Grahame Hawker
Secretary	Liz Wild
Treasurer	Liz Wild
Membership Secretary	Liz Wild
Newsletter Co-ordinator	Sheila Crowson
E-group Administrator	Stuart Hine
Website Manager	Paul Beckett
Biological Database Manager	Stuart Hine
Bird Recorder	Alan Broodbank
Plant Recorder	Anne Booth
Butterfly Recorder	Grahame Hawker
Moth Recorder	Mark Calway
Invertebrate (other) Recorder	Stuart Hine
Mammal Recorder	Russell Seymour
Reptile & Amphibian Recorder	Andy Glencross
Joint Tree Recorders	Anne Booth/Sheila Crowson

Ward Co-ordinators

Cutbush	Richard Cocks
Hawkedon	Anne Booth
Highwood/Bulmershe open	
Space	Suzanne Weston
Hillside	Jean Hackett
Maiden Erlegh LNR	Grahame Hawker
Maiden Erlegh & Redhatch	Sheila Crowson
Radstock	Anne Booth
St. Nicolas	Alan Broodbank
Shinfield Park	Mark Calway
Sutton and Thames Valley	
Business Parks	Stuart Hine
Whitegates	Mary Bather
Whiteknights Campus	Liz Wild

WILDLIFE IN AN EARLY GARDEN DURING 2005

Joan, one of our members, gets a great deal of pleasure watching wildlife in her garden in Silverdale Road. Here's her check list for 2005. How many can you tick? (See page 4 for details of a course for making your own Wildlife Garden, and page 8 for a monthly garden survey form). If, like Joan, you have kept wildlife records over several years, we would love to hear from you.

blackbird

great tit

blue tit

coal tit

long tailed tit

robin

sparrow

dunnock

greenfinch (passing)

goldfinch (passing)

starling

pigeon

collared dove

nuthatch

greater spotted woodpecker

lesser spotted woodpecker

wren

magpie

crow

sparrowhawk



red kite (overhead)

heron (overhead)

buzzard (overhead)

gull (overhead)

tern (overhead)

geese (overhead)

swan (overhead)

hedgehog

squirrel

woodmouse

two foxes (Jan or Feb)

dragonflies

damselies

water boatmen

frog spawn

butterflies - white, brown
and blue

Silver birch

Firs

Holly

Portuguese laurel

Oak }

Ash } seedlings

Walnut



