



YOUR FAVOURITE SEASON?

The transition from **autumn** to **winter** seems to have occurred all too fast. If we had a snap vote for our favourite season it's doubtful winter would come top. But spring is already plotting its re-emergence underground (see SEEDS on page 2). Wishing the seasons away too fast is not shared by all - *To be interested in the changing seasons is a happier state of mind than to be hopelessly in love with spring (George Santayana)*. Must remember this on a cold, wet and windy day in January.

This newsletter is something of a mixed bag and so I set myself a challenge to find a link from one item to the next. (Ed.)

Items of special interest:

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Red kites hold a fascination for many in Earley, including the children of Aldrynton Primary School, who voted it third. 1st came the robin, 2nd blue tit, 4th barn owl, 5th wood pigeon and 6th goldfinch (see EEG website, Schools Page).

Following the popular and well-attended talk in November given by member Mel Orris, 'Why we see so many of these large raptors in such a built-up town', member David Jupe's excellent photo shows one of these large, impressive birds coming in to feed.

They fly, they dance into new locations, they explode, they might even poison you! What are they?

SEEDS of course: Imagine a life without them. Animals and birds



would likely perish, and, with no farming, human beings would perish too.

So says Teri Dunn Chace in the book, 'Seeing Seeds', with superb close-up photography by Robert Llewellyn. It shows seeds in a way not seen before (photo: Sheila Crowson).

The text provides facts, many unknown to the majority of us, about individual seeds. Below are examples of two well-known seeds.

The seeds of the **dandelion** 'chimney sweeper' shown above, as we all know, are carried by the wind. Each yellow petal is a flower with male and female parts. Pollen is shed, but this does not lead to seeds. They grow directly from ovules. Once seeds are underway, the stem elongates and boosts the seed on its way. The dangling seed has tiny barbs along it that point backwards helping the seed to screw down into the soil.

Sunflowers are easy to grow. Humans generally prefer the tough-shelled striped or grey seeds. Birds prefer the easier-to-crack black oil ones with more nutrition and calories. The discarded husks contain a chemical that retards the growth of

other plants. There are two basic kinds of sunflowers: the types that produce edible seeds and the seedless hybrids used in flower arrangements. The spirals of the densely packed seedhead are found to correspond to Fibonacci* numbers, as the new seeds are added from the centre.



Never given much thought to **apple** seeds? A very simple seed, which you may have been told by your mother, as I was, not to eat the seeds as they're not good for you. In fact, they contain cyanide, which may protect them from predators. Having tasted them, they are quite bitter, but a human would have to ingest huge quantities to be affected.

Sheila Crowson

Source: Highly recommended publication "*SEEING SEEDS: A Journey into the World of Seedheads, Pods and Fruit.*" An American publication, but also relevant to the UK.

*Fibonacci, a mathematician who linked certain numbers to patterns in nature.
<http://www.maths.surrey.ac.uk/hosted-sites/R.Knott/Fibonacci/fibnat.html#seeds>

(For answers to the questions posed above, see page 6)

LINK: Mention of apple seeds leads us neatly into our next article → ORCHARDS

Latest news on the community orchard

After a long time in the planning, the community orchard is now about to happen, following discussion between WBC and ETC on the proposed site. The orchard will be planted on the strip of green alongside the public footpath to Maiden Place from the pavilion at Laurel Park, near the football pitches.



On 30th September, I heard from ETC that their officers had reached an agreement with WBC about the whole Laurel Park area, and that there was no opposition to the idea of an orchard on the chosen site.

Since then, Jonathan and Patricia Brown from the Orchard Group have measured up the site and drawn up a planting plan, as well as researching fruit tree varieties and suppliers. The aim is to plant heritage varieties which are not generally available in shops and supermarkets, although they will not necessarily have a Berkshire connection: the orchard at Paddick Drive, managed by ETC, concentrated on this aspect.

As some interested people are unable to offer help in planting and maintenance of the orchard, there have been several offers to sponsor a tree at £20 - £25 each. 3 suppliers have provided estimates of costs for the trees.

After a meeting last week, the draft constitution has been adopted; Anne Booth has offered to be treasurer, Jonathan and Patricia Brown have offered to take on the secretary's post, but we are looking for more committee members (plus a website designer, in future); we are going to open a bank account, and order the trees shortly. Planting will be done in February. The group is still looking for new members and/or sponsors so, if you're interested, please contact me, by phone (986 1115). The Group has an e-mail address: info@earleyorchard.org.uk

JEAN HACKETT

LINK: Apples → DEER

A friend assures me that deer in his New Forest garden LOVE apples.

Here's proof! These deer are feasting on the fallen fruit.

(Photos Roy Chamberlain)



Fallow Deer: Berkshire Mammal Group's November

Mammal of the Month

Time to say goodbye to the hedgehog and welcome the **FALLOW DEER** as our November Mammal of the Month.

Our top five facts for this species are:

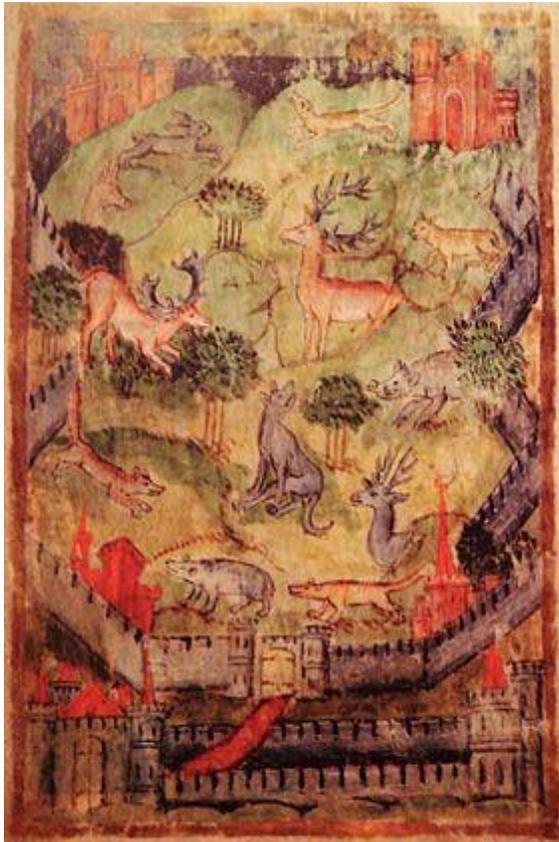
- They were introduced to the UK by the Normans - they originally come from south-west Asia - and are now the most common deer in the UK.
- They are in between roe deer and red deer in size and have spotty coats and a white bottom edged with black stripes.
- The rutting season is October and November.
- Females can live up to 16 years in the wild.
- Nearly 2/3 of their diet is grass but they will also browse young trees and eat acorns, beech mast and chestnuts in the autumn.

Please record your sightings at <http://www.berksmammals.org.uk/recording/4545119446>

If you'd like to find out more about this species check out the Mammal Society's fact sheet at: <http://www.mammal.org.uk/species-factsheets/Fallow%20deer>

Debbie Cousins, Secretary, Berkshire Mammal Group

AN ANCIENT DEER PARK IN WHITENIGHTS In medieval and Early Modern England, a **deer park** was an enclosed area containing deer. It was bounded by a ditch and bank with a wooden park pale on top of the bank, or by a stone or brick wall. The ditch was on the inside increasing the effective height. Some parks had deer "leaps", where there was an external ramp and the inner ditch was constructed on a grander scale, thus allowing deer to enter the park but preventing them from leaving (Wikipedia).



There is evidence that a Deer Park existed within Richard de Erlegh's Manor in 1276 being some 40 acres in size, but it is not clear where it was situated (*Hatherley and Cantor 1979*). However, a writer in 1944 records that a deep ditch ran along the south side of Wokingham Road near Maiden Erlegh Manor, but had been infilled to widen the road (*Dormer 1944*)(*Reading Chronicle 1983*). This could have been a feature to prevent deer from escaping from the old Deer Park.

Above left: Depiction of a medieval hunting park from a 15th-century manuscript version of *The Master of Game*, MS. Bodley 546 f. 3v (Wikipedia)

LINK: From one man-made feature in Whiteknights, to another → the GROTTO



Whiteknight's Grotto illustrated by Barbara Hofland, 1816, commissioned by the Duke of Marlborough.

WHITEKNIGHT'S GROTTO (CONT'D)

(see April newsletter)

Looking at the remnants of the grotto in Whiteknights Park created in the late 1700s, it's hard to envisage the wow factor intended when visitors were escorted round the park. But other grottoes of the time, some even surviving and restored, create a picture of what the Duke of Marlborough, had in mind.

Earlier grottoes were often man-made or naturally occurring, and housed religious figures, but it was in the 18th century that grottoes became fashionable and highly competitive. Parties were often held in them. Alexander Pope's featured rare stones and costly mirrors. 'Mine's prettier than Mr Pope's,' wrote Lady Hertford in 1736 of her Wiltshire cave.

Ships were docking with cargoes of shells, and in the late 1700s Lord Donegal had £10,000 of shells delivered for Fisherwick Park in Staffordshire. By mid-Victorian times grottoes had lost their appeal. More recently they have started to enjoy a revival. Restoration has finally finished on the grotto at Painshill Landscape Garden, Cobham, Surrey, the largest grotto in the country, with its gypsum stalactites, meandering 60ft entrance passage, and main chamber with dripping rock pools adorned with corals and giant clam shells. It took four months doing the superstructure of inverted wooden cones covered with lime plaster, and then another eight months putting in the hundreds of thousands of gypsum crystals.

If you like a challenge there are examples on YouTube of how to make your own. Like any grotto worth its salt, Painshill is hosting Father Christmas from early December. Read about it on the website <http://www.painshill.co.uk/father-christmas-in-the-crystal-grotto>. T. 01932 868 113. In fairness, other grottoes with a resident Father Christmas, are available locally at stores and garden centres.

LINK: From a 200-years-old man-made construction to one of 50 years → THE M4

TRAFFIC GROWTH ON THE M4 - Losing the hard shoulder J3 to J14

STOP PRESS:

Environmental campaigners from Earley joined Conservative and Lib Dem. politicians and local residents questioning government proposals to allow 'all lane running' on the M4 in Earley.

See report in <http://www.getreading.co.uk/news/local-news/smart-m4-lower-earley-people-10455450> and Page 6 of EEG August 2015 newsletter

<http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk/Newsletter/Newsletters/Aug15/EEG%20Newsletter%20Aug%2015.pdf> for background.

JOHN BOOTH



LINK: From ‘traffic growth’, to finding how to accommodate it → **PARK AND RIDE**
Park and Ride for Reading proposed for Earley Wildlife Site?

Wokingham Borough Council has consulted on its £3.6 million proposal to build a 300-space park and ride in Earley at Broken Brow, very close to the Thames and Kennet Mouth.

Park and ride at Broken Brow would result in loss of green space – mostly scrub and grassland with no public access, so certainly good for birds, insects and plants - between the Thames and the railway. At the consultation there were no measures proposed to compensate for this loss but I was told a wildlife survey will be completed before the planning application is submitted.

It would add to pressure for the ‘Eastern Expressway’ for buses, bikes and pedestrians to bridge Kennet Mouth by the old Horseshoe Bridge (built in 1891 to allow horses towing barges to cross the Kennet), which would be a major loss of amenity and heritage for Newtown. This was to have been the line of the ‘Cross Town Route’ which was defeated by campaigners in the 1990s. But with massive housing development underway in Wokingham Borough any road-space created may well be taken up by other travellers.

In 2013 Wokingham’s draft Park and Ride Strategy saw Broken Brow as providing capacity for traffic from the A4 and A329(M)/A3290, but there are a variety of potential rail and bus routes from both these directions which would avoid more cars travelling as far into Reading as the Sutton Seeds roundabout. The new housing estates will be big enough to support good conventional bus services, so people should be able to ‘walk and ride’ and do the long leg of their journey by bus.

The draft strategy said, “Persuading people to replace their complete car trips by the use of public transport would have the greatest impact on reducing congestion and pollution.” The Council should look hard at creating bus priority along the A4 from the Suttons Seeds roundabout to Cemetery Junction to make buses more attractive.

Other disadvantages of park and ride : public money spent on it is not available for other purposes; its use will reduce the patronage of conventional bus services leading to higher fares or subsidies and/or worse services; it is useless for people who are unable to drive through age or ill-health; it is useless for people who do not have access to a car; if shuttle buses are run throughout the day they are often very low-occupancy, so are both environmentally and economically costly.

Reading Green Party’s Councillor Rob White has launched a petition against it

www.change.org/p/no-park-and-ride-on-the-thameside.

John Booth

LINK: Travel by road, to another method of travel → **FLIGHT**



A small but gutsy butterfly has crossed mountain ranges and seas to arrive on our shores **Long-tailed Blue butterfly** (*Lampides boeticus*) is a Mediterranean species that was first spotted in England in 1859, but up until recently a handful of sightings in a year was the norm .

More than 60 of these adventurous little butterflies were spotted this summer across the south coast. The eggs they laid hatched in September, and there were sightings up to October. The emergence of this second generation is surprising and delighting butterfly enthusiasts. On the continent it is considered a pest of pea crops, one of its larval foodplants. The butterfly gets its name from the wispy ‘tails’ on the trailing edge of each of its hindwings, which flutter in the breeze. Adjacent eye spots fool birds into thinking this is the head of the butterfly, allowing it to escape any attacks unharmed.

Please report any Long-tailed Blue sightings to: info@butterfly-conservation.org
<http://butterfly-conservation.org/48-10378/mediterranean-blue-butterfly-invades-south-coast.html>

Seeds answers: Cedar winged seeds fly, horsetail spores dance, wisteria pods catapult seeds, Datura seeds poison.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

Nepal's elusive snow leopard radio-collared: Nepalese conservationists have successfully this year radio-collared a second snow leopard near Kanchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain. The leopard, an adult male approximately five years of age, was fitted with a GPS-satellite collar and released back into the wild. Data received from the satellite collar will enable conservationists to identify critical habitats for the elusive species, including trans-boundary links across India and China.

EARLEY NEWS

Garden Surveys:

Gillian had an interesting sighting on 26th October. She recorded a **hedgehog** in her front garden. It was reported recently in the media that our much-loved hedgehog is in danger of vanishing forever. According to fossil evidence, it has been around for 15 million years, but could have vanished by 2050. It has received no special protection from Parliament, unlike one of its predators, the badger. Ann Widdecombe wants a mandatory code of practice that would force Network Rail, the Highways Agency and other official bodies to treat the hedgehog's plight as critical. Please make a small hole in your garden fence for them to pass through.

Margaret recorded several troupes of tits, who flock together in the autumn. On October 1st she saw **6 blue tits, 6 great tits** and **two coal tits**, and October 8th **12 long-tailed tits**; also a pleasure to have them do a flypast through gardens. A flock of apparently **25 fieldfares** flew low over the garden – another sign of approaching winter. *(Many years ago, seen from a classroom window, the school playing field was covered with fieldfares and redwings. Wonder if it still is. Recommended reading or for a welcome Christmas present – The Secret Lives of Garden Birds, Dominic Couzens, a delightful and readable book. Ed.)*



Heron on Maiden Erlegh Lake

photo by David Jupe, text extract from Edwin Trout's piece on the website, '**Maiden Erlegh Lake in Spring and early Summer**'. The heron is usually seen alone, dominating a number of favoured hunting or resting places: wading in the sediment trap at the Beech Lane inlet, standing on the Duck & the World statue, obscured in the tree in the reed bed, perched on the fence posts along the reed bed, the dead tree opposite, and occasionally prowling the banks of Big Is. Sometimes a heron will fly low across lake, screeching horribly, and twice in May I have seen one fly through the treetops into, or out of, Old Pond Copse. On 8 May it was on the tree in the reed bed close to the coots' nest, quite possibly having eaten two of the cootlings that disappeared about that time. Though sightings are usually singular, there were two on 7 and 11 July, the second a slender and slighter specimen in grey plumage. If one's a juvenile, there must be another parent somewhere.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS December 2015 – April 2016

Monday December 21st 19.00 to 22.00 **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, tel 9868260), we'll provide mulled wine.

Monday January 18th 19.30 - 21.30 **EEG AGM and Talk on Street Trees**. Annual General Meeting, followed by a talk at approx. 8 pm by Chris Hannington, Team Manager of Wokingham Borough Council's Tree Department, on **Street Trees - their history, diversity and importance**. Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive, Lower Earley.

February Details to be confirmed by email, Facebook, check posters on Council noticeboards or the EEG website.

Sunday March 20th **HELP - Huge Earley Litter Pick**. The annual Earley Litter Pick has two sessions: 10:00 - 12:30 & 14:00 - 16:30. Meet at the Interpretation Centre in Instow Road for each session. Contact Grahame Hawker at the Council Office 0118 9868995.

April Details to be confirmed by email, Facebook, check posters on Council noticeboards or the EEG website.

Bits and Pieces

Don't forget - we're on Facebook! Now over a hundred members and climbing!

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.

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