

**Christmas trees often only last the short celebration season**, but we have trees in Earley, some of which have lasted hundreds of years. For the last ten years, volunteers from seventeen parishes have been out surveying all kinds of local trees, particularly veteran and notable ones, measuring, photographing and recording data (see page 3 for one such notable). The result is the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Assn. Tenth Anniversary Report, a real achievement. The Earley extract is on page 2. We owe thanks to all those volunteers who helped to map Earley Town parish, which took several years. The complete report can be found on the excellent WDVTA website [http://www.wdvta.org.uk/r10\\_parishes.php#9966220](http://www.wdvta.org.uk/r10_parishes.php#9966220)

**Birds we might see now:** Check these out on part 2 of Ray Reedman's article on page 3.

**A lonely mulberry tree:** There is just one recorded for Earley in the Anniversary Report. It didn't get there by magic, but the answer of how it got there, where it is and some interesting facts about it are on pages 3 & 4. Please tell us via the EEG website if you know of more in Earley. See page 5 for news of Earley's own orchard.

**Food for thought:** Anne's report on the EEG members' talk, 'Philosophy and the Planet' by Tanja Rebel will make you think, pages 5 & 6.

**'Desecrating' Mass Rapid Transit:** News on this development from John Booth, pages 5 & 6.

**A new group for Earley children:** exciting news on page 6.

**Items of special interest:**

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## Earley



### Excerpt from Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association Tenth Anniversary Report

<i>Survey status</i>	<i>Complete</i>
<i>Trees recorded</i>	<i>509</i>
<i>English oak</i>	<i>57%</i>
<i>Horse Chestnut</i>	<i>6%</i>
<i>Ash</i>	<i>4%</i>

The name 'Earley' probably derives from the Anglo Saxon – 'Wood of Eagles'. From having 100 inhabitants in Domesday times, it has now reached over 30,000. In the 1980s, Earley saw a dramatic transition from agricultural countryside to the building of Lower Earley, but lanes have been preserved as footpaths and cycle routes, many of which have their original hedges and trees. Someone had the foresight to retain these important features.

**Whiteknights Park**, owned by the University of Reading, is one of Earley's old manors retaining its eclectic collection of trees, some of them exotics, a legacy of landscaping by earlier owners.

The lake and part of the grounds of **Maiden Erlegh House**, demolished in 1960, have ancient woodland and some original parkland trees such as the Holm oak in **Crawford Close** ([MRN 4642](#)) and the stately common lime in **Laurel Park** ([MRN 3386](#)), now over 200 years old. **Maiden Erlegh Drive** was the original avenue to the house, and its largest oak ([MRN 5930](#), 5.5m) is probably over 400 years old, now named the Solly Joel Oak after a former owner of the house. Early maps show the drive as a path cutting through Earley Common, so the tree was promoted from a lowly tree on the common to one in an avenue to the big house.

[MRN 4642](#)



Near **Moor Copse** are two large oaks ([MRN 2814](#) and [MRN 2815](#)). Locally known as the 'Gemini Oak', they are unusual in that a branch from one tree has merged with the trunk of its neighbour to form a skewed letter 'H'.

There are several veteran trees in **Redhatch Copse**. Its shape has been unchanged for many years, although human infringement has made it very different from the working copse of earlier years filled with wild flowers.

The **Loddon floodplain** forms part of the southern fringe of Earley and has several veteran trees, mainly English oaks in remnant hedgerows.



[MRN 5930](#)

Ref: **Earley Days** (2001 Earley Local History Group), available in local libraries. MRN numbers show position of trees on WDVTA website map.

Evidence there was no lack of timber in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Earley:  
1410 ST.LAWRENCE, READING was re-roofed with timber from **Earley**. The oldest roll of the churchwardens' accounts gives a list of contributors to the cost. (Victoria County History)

## Autumn- a season of movement (Part 2) by Ray Reedman

Alongside the departures and the through movement which I discussed last time, there are autumn arrivals too. Britain's winter (hard to believe, I know!) is ideal for great flocks of ducks and geese and swans that arrive from the northern shores of Siberia and from Arctic Canada and Greenland. The Gulf Stream keeps us relatively warm. The sad truth, however, is that climate warming means that more can now survive as far north as the Baltic, so their numbers in Britain are declining.

But wildfowl are not the only birds that arrive in autumn to enjoy the British winter. A great many birds of the thrush family arrive too: Redwings and Fieldfares are pretty obvious, though we don't always notice the arrival of many Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Robins, nor do we realise that a good many of our own thrushes will have moved further south too.



One of the most curious arrivals is the tiny Goldcrest (left), which according to folklore travelled on the backs of Short-eared Owls and Woodcocks as they moved across the North Sea. Surely they were too tiny to do the journey under their own steam? But we now know that this 5.5g bird does it with relative ease. In October last year I witnessed flocks of them on the North

Norfolk coast, almost tame as they fed voraciously in the hedges. Some of the Short-eared Owls may winter in rough ground on the Berkshire Downs, while the Woodcock will sit in damp woodland locally, until emerging at dusk to feed in marshy areas.

One visitor from the Continent may well be seen in our gardens. In recent decades, Blackcaps from Central Europe have cottoned on to climate change in a big way. A small part of the population of that warbler species discovered that our winter was not so bad, and that it was possible to avoid the long journey south. Their descendants followed them, and their numbers grew. Scientists have now concluded that the feeders in our gardens attracted them and helped this behaviour to evolve. Meanwhile the Blackcaps that breed in Britain carry on migrating as normal and the two populations never overlap, so we may be seeing the start of an evolutionary split.

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### SILK AND JAM

Earley has one mulberry tree recorded on the Veteran Tree survey, not in the community orchard, but on a grass verge of a relatively new Earley housing estate. It's on the WDVTA map with photos, and on the *Morus Londinium* mulberry map, <https://www.moruslondinium.org/map>.



I had close encounters with mulberry trees when, as a student at the age of 17, I worked on the Wilkins Tiptree farm picking them, roughing it in a tent, plus Elsan loos, travelling to work in a lorry, while dining in a barn. Hands became completely red with mulberry juice and turned blue when washed. Strangely, I count it as a very memorable experience. Mulberry jam is, or was, Wilkins' most expensive product, but in recent years their old orchard of 13 mulberry trees has produced very little. English mulberry jam is a rarity, unless you're lucky, have a tree and can make it yourself.



Tiptree worker - picking mulberries

Mulberry trees are not common on road verges, more usually found in the grounds of stately homes, public parks, squares and private gardens. Our Earley mulberry, tree number 6554 (see two photos), with girth of 2.4m measured at 1.1m, is now marooned in Ebborn Square, and is possibly

the survivor of a small private orchard once on an old Earley farm south of Cutbush Lane. Using old maps, with reference points on Cutbush Lane, and a modern map showing Ebborn Square, these indicate Earley Lodge Farm. The Lodge is shown on maps from 1820 onwards. In the 1941 farm census, the farmer was C. G. Spiller.



Mulberry trees can look deceptively old, so it's difficult to date the Earley mulberry, but it looks to be a mature one and produces fruit. The story goes that James I in 1609 ordered thousands of black mulberries from France to be planted throughout, with an eye to commercial silk cultivation, so providing the court with silk and possibly creating wealth. His courtiers **had** to plant them on their estates. Silkworms love mulberry leaves, but especially white ones, from which they produce the best silk, so his big scheme was not a success.



### Some Mulberry Tree Facts

They can live for hundreds of years.  
 It is said the Romans introduced mulberries here.  
 They are valued by their owners for the beauty of their leaves and their fruit.  
 They are often favoured as commemorative trees.  
 The wood has been used for memento mori.  
 The most common locality for the tree is in gardens.  
 The scarce wood was rarely used for furniture, but the great storm of 1987 resulted in many mulberry trees being blown down and wood turners were able to obtain the wood.  
 Mulberry wood from the Japanese Izu Islands has become the world's most expensive wood.  
 Pity the French workers in small cottage outhouses, responsible for thousands of silkworms chomping the leaves and defecating. The smell was noxious.

It's suggested black was chosen by James as white would not survive in our climate so well. The famous silk industry in Spitalfields Shoreditch and Bethnal Green (weaver ancestors of mine there) gave sanctuary to thousands of Huguenot refugees, many with skills in silk weaving, who came to settle after the Revocation. There the raw silk was imported. Wokingham had silk weaving, in particular stockings, in the past. More information on this on [www.wdvta.org.uk/pubs.php#Newsletter\\_table](http://www.wdvta.org.uk/pubs.php#Newsletter_table). About 30 years ago, during development in Cross Street, an old mulberry was moved to a Rose Street garden, but I believe it died. On a small path near the old Woolworths was an old building called the Silk Mill.

**Sheila Crowson**

## PHILOSOPHY AND THE PLANET - an Eco-philosophical Journey

At EEG's November meeting, philosophy teacher Tanja Rebel reviewed how philosophers' approach to people and planet has changed down the centuries, and illustrated this with relevant views through the ages:

**Aristotle:** the purpose of nature was to feed and clothe humanity

**Abrahamic faiths:** originally held that people had dominion over the natural world.

Over the centuries there has been a paradigm shift from Anthropocentric (human-centred) to Ecocentric (valuing nature for its own sake) views - and the evolution of ideas continues.

In the twentieth century economist **E. F Schumacher** called for quality over quantity – 'not mass production but production by the masses' – and recognised that oil reserves should be treated as capital.

**James Lovelock:** 'Gaia Hypothesis' saw the world as a living and self-protecting organism. Eco-utilitarianism, like utilitarianism, looks for the greatest good for the greatest number, but applies the concept to all living things, and argues that it is wrong to do unnecessary harm.

**Ecofeminists** want feminine 'caring' principles to be applied to the environment in contrast to the urge to take and exploit to the max.

Norwegian philosopher **Arne Naess** propounded Ecosophy or 'Deep Ecology' in 1972. The 'bio-centric' principle is that the living environment as a whole should be respected independent of its utilitarian benefits for human society - understanding that each living thing is dependent on the existence of other creatures in the complex web of interrelationships that is the natural world.

In 1982 **Henryk Skolimovski** developed Ecophilosophy in response to concerns about humanity's dependence on technology and advocating respect, responsibility and reverence for life, and altruism and sharing as the basis for ethics.

Tanja's presentation concluded with a quotation from **Dr. Albert Schweitzer:** "*Empathy, which ought to be the root of all ethics, can only reach its fullest width and depth when it includes all living beings and so does not limit itself to human beings alone.*"

In discussion there were calls for reduction in consumption, help for developing countries, greater self-sufficiency, and much greater attention to be paid to how we treat each other. Religious studies should be taught so that people can distinguish dogma from widely-accepted ethical principles.

**Anne Booth**



Photo by Sue Smith

### *Laurel Park Community Orchard*

For better protection of the orchard fencing and posts were ordered, and on 23<sup>rd</sup> November EEG volunteers, park rangers and members of the Earley Community Orchard group worked on putting posts and fencing in place.

Replacement trees were also planted where original trees had been vandalised or died. Jenny is wielding the hammer.

<http://www.earleyorchard.org.uk/>



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## **'Desecrating' Mass Rapid Transit won't cure congestion**

**Reading and Wokingham's 'East Reading Mass Rapid Transit' scheme,** bridging Kennet Mouth to carry buses from the proposed Park and Ride near Suttons Business Park to Reading town centre, has had funding of £19 million of public money approved despite a benefit-cost-ratio of only 1.81:1 over 60 years.

The scheme has been branded by its critics as a desecration of the historic Kennet Mouth which will adversely affect the riverside ( see illustration). It still does not have planning permission from either authority, so campaigners remain optimistic it can be stopped. The Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) has put in

a strong objection, as have the Environment Agency and Reading's own Sports and Leisure Department.

The scheme is designed for buses only (plus bikes and pedestrians) with a one-way-at-a-time crossing of the Kennet, so capacity will be limited, but it should provide time-saving for bus users on this route. However the traffic analysis shows the scheme only provides small changes in peak-hour traffic on roads in East Reading in 2021, and presumably traffic will increase thereafter.

Concerns are being raised about the capacity of the Vastern Road/Napier Road roundabout, which is said already to be a hotspot for accidents for cyclists. Campaigners say less damaging alternatives should be investigated.



For all the details (over 100 documents) and to register comments, go to <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning/planning-applications/search-planning-applications/> and enter Application Number 172048. Save Our Ancient Riverside group Facebook is at <https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurAncientRiverside/>

**John Booth**



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## Good News for Children

**Erleigh Elphins Extended!** The children were delighted to see that Maiden Erleigh Reserve Rangers have extended the area on which they play. Apparently there are grand plans that involve a larger sandpit, and some wooden growing boxes in the pipeline too. The children have been enjoying the colours of autumn and the changes in the reserve that the new season brings. Elphins are a weekly drop-in group for pre-schoolers, with a focus on self-led outdoor play (see page 8 for details).

### **Earley Environmental Junior Group**

An exciting new group will meet at Maiden Erleigh Interpretation Centre every second Saturday of the month, starting on Saturday January 13<sup>th</sup> 2018. The group is for children and their families to develop their knowledge of the natural world, and help with conservation activities within the reserve. Sessions will run from 2pm to 4pm, and need to be booked monthly. A charge of £3 per child will be payable, and an adult will need to stay with their children for the duration of the session. Please contact [erleghelfins@gmail.com](mailto:erleghelfins@gmail.com) for further details.

## **NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY: Use of antibiotics in food production:**

Five of the top eight supermarkets have clear bans on their suppliers using antibiotics for routine prevention (Co-op, M&S, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Waitrose). Waitrose leads the field, having banned routine preventative use, restricted the use of critical antibiotics, and publicly stated that they've banned the use of the last-resort antibiotic colistin. They are also the only supermarket that has committed to publishing antibiotic-use data for its suppliers.

## **EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND GARDEN SURVEYS**



We send Season's Greetings and our sincere thanks to Margaret and Gillian, who diligently send in their garden surveys every month.

These are stored for future reference, but we would like to computerise these, so any offers of help for this would be gratefully received.

The photo of the beautiful young sparrowhawk on the left was taken by David Jupe in his Earley garden.

## **LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS December 2017 – April 2018**

Monday December 18th 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.

Tuesday January 23rd 7.30pm - 9.30pm [AGM & members' reports](#). If you would like to bring along photos and/or stories with an environmental flavour to share with the group please contact [grahamehawker@hotmail.com](mailto:grahamehawker@hotmail.com) or Charlotte on 07771 605825, to make arrangements for the evening. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Monday February 26th 7.30pm - 9.30pm [Urban Wildlife](#) A talk by Prof. Mark Fellowes of Reading University on research into urban ecology. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Sunday March 25<sup>th</sup> [HELP - Huge Earley Litter Pick](#) The annual litter-pick has two sessions: 10:00 - 12:30 & 14:00 - 16:30. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road for each session. Contact Grahame Hawker at the Town Council Office 0118 9868995.

Thursday April 5th start 7.15pm [Towards solving some prickly problems with hedgehog conservation](#) A joint meeting with Berkshire Mammal Group outlining the current research at the University of Reading with Dr Phil Baker, School of Biological Sciences, University of Reading. **Park United Reformed Church, on the corner of Palmer Park Avenue and Wokingham Road, Reading. Members free, non-members £4.**

## **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 and the newsletter, as a way of keeping everyone up to date with our activities and to let you know about forthcoming events. Members are also welcome to post news stories or any photographs relevant to the group. Search for 'Earley Environmental Group' and we should pop up. Look forward to seeing you on there. We have closed our Yahoo group through lack of support.

**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 e-mail [brianh@talk21.com](mailto:brianh@talk21.com), or Peter Soul (926 4997), e-mail [petersoul@peterjo.plus.com](mailto: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, or other skills to offer. At the moment 'the few' help to keep EEG going.

**EEG committee members** can be found on [www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk](http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk) under Contacts.

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](mailto: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.

**Erlegh Elfins**: A pre-school playgroup on Thursdays at the Interpretation Centre, Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve runs from 10 to 11.30 am, with a focus on outdoor play and exploration of the natural environment. The children have opportunities to explore the 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](mailto:erleghelfins@gmail.com) or Charlotte on 07771 605825. Numbers are limited 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, 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](mailto:sales@petfayre-reading.co.uk) or go on the comprehensive website [www.petfayre-reading.co.uk](http://www.petfayre-reading.co.uk)

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