



Time to Celebrate

Christmas celebrations are almost here. During the year we celebrate many things, often personal ones, but this edition of the newsletter celebrates the efforts of local people. The future of the local environment depends to a large extent on the action of unpaid volunteers, witness this edition's articles on the Earley notice boards, the action to ensure the survival of the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly, and the work put in by various volunteer groups like the Earley Environment Group, the Wednesday Group and Earley Adopt a Street Initiative group (EASI). Also, we should not forget the excellent input from our local Park Rangers, Grahame and Ashley.

Here's wishing a Happy New Year to all, and a good year for the environment.

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The History of Earley on Noticeboards

Several years ago two noticeboards were erected in Earley by Wokingham Borough Council, depicting the history of the area, one in Lower Earley Meadows and another in parkland near the Loddon River. Over the years these became badly dilapidated, and the Earley Environmental Group decided it was important to preserve them. After consulting Peter Baveystock of Wokingham Borough Council, we received the go-ahead for financial backing to get these repaired. Step forward member Derek Davies. With a little help from members John and Anne Booth, he dismantled the boards, then single-handedly repaired metal- and wood-work, painted and cleaned them, and finally re-erected them. They now present a very attractive face to walkers-by. You can see the difference below.

Lower Earley Meadows - 'Wood of Eagles' notice-board



BEFORE



AFTER



Derek shown erecting 'The Riches of the Loddon River' noticeboard in all its glory.

See page 6 for more about the history shown on these boards.

Project Hairstreak, another 'good news' story

EARLY DAYS: This will interest butterfly lovers, and who doesn't love butterflies? But there are those whose curiosity runs a good deal deeper, like EEG member Alan Broodbank. His interest began very early on, in the '60s, along with two friends, Terry Babbage and Richard Beard, (described by Alan as like-minded *'fanatical lepidopterists'*) and they roamed locally, searching for

butterflies and moths. *"We built up a considerable knowledge of the Lepidoptera of this area, in particular the woods and fields around Maiden Erlegh. If the White-letter Hairstreak was present we would surely have encountered it at some point, yet we never did."*

THE WHITE-LETTER HAIRSTREAK BUTTERFLY, *Satyrrium w-album* :



This is not an easy butterfly to spot, although Alan collected 16 larvae in Sunninghill, and reared them. *"The butterfly frequents Elm, on which the larva feeds, and with sharp eyes or a pair of binoculars the adults may occasionally be seen flitting in and out of the upper branches, often resting for lengthy periods. Hence they are unobtrusive and difficult to spot let alone identify with any certainty. In contrast the bright green woodlouse-shaped larvae can be found relatively easily by simply lifting up the lower branches and holding*

them against the light, when their silhouettes will easily be spotted despite being exactly the same colour as the leaf." (Photo: Butterfly Conservation website)

THREATS TO WOODLAND TREES: Death in the form of Dutch Elm disease in the 1960s decimated many of our iconic elms, such a feature of the English countryside, and so endangered the survival of the White-letter Hairstreak. The threat of development hung over the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve and its woodlands for a time.

A RE-APPEARANCE: Our W-L S butterfly has struck lucky in Earley. In later years, Terry and Richard moved away, Terry to Stratford-on-Avon and Richard to Vancouver, Canada, but all three maintained their enthusiastic interest in butterflies. *"Fast forward several decades to about 2014. On a bright breezy morning, approaching the bridge that crosses the lake outlet, I was very surprised to see a White-letter Hairstreak fly down and settle for a few seconds on the wooden planking, the first I had ever seen or heard of in our area. At the time I did not attach too much significance to this event as freak sightings do occur from time to time – for example the Purple Emperor that was seen and photographed on a lawn in Instow Road in June this year (2018). However, the following year there was another definite sighting from an utterly reliable source, followed by a 'probable' sighting from a different but equally reliable source. All these were in the same area near the bridge"* (Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve). One explanation may be that there are several small elms nearby, which will unhappily in time become victims of Dutch Elm disease, but perhaps support a small population.

SERENDIPITY: The internet proves a blessing. *"And so to May of the present year. Imagine my amazement when I was forwarded an e-mail from the 'Enquiries' section of the website, asking that, if I should happen to read this, could I please make contact with my old friend Mr Richard Beard in Vancouver, Canada? Sadly, among much other news, Richard explained that his father, Colin, who had played a pivotal role in saving the Maiden Erlegh woodland and lake from development, had sadly passed away last year, and that he (Richard) had been in England recently to attend the memorial service with his brother and sister."*

While they were here they visited MELNR, being highly impressed by the conservation work undertaken by the Park Rangers, the Wednesday group of EEG and other volunteers. *"Bearing in mind that this had been made possible in the first place by the sterling efforts of Colin and a few others, they had decided that they would like to make a contribution to the Reserve that would be in keeping with his wishes and interests. Could I suggest something? Something butterfly-related perhaps? I said I would try and I went away and had a Big Think."*

A PROJECT IS HATCHED (appropriate?): How to help the White-letter Hairstreak? Ideas were discussed with ETC Park Ranger Grahame Hawker (another fanatic lepidopterist) and members of the Wednesday work party, and a proposal put to Richard and family. *"We would try to obtain and*

plant some elm saplings of a cultivar that was resistant to Dutch Elm disease. Grahame knew of a potential supplier of these.” The supplier, Peter Cuss, was also a champion of the White-letter Hairstreak (another bit of serendipity!). Next move, where to put them? A suitable plot in the Reserve was identified by Alan, Grahame and Peter and, to honour the memory of Colin Beard, a handsome donation was made by the Beard family to Butterfly Conservation, and a number of Wych-elm trees were ordered from Peter.



MAKING IT HAPPEN: *“The saplings were delivered on October 22nd and the last-minute site preparation and actual planting took place on the beautiful autumn morning of the 24th by a team of some thirteen enthusiastic volunteers.”* In time, users of the Reserve can look forward to seeing beautiful elm trees, and the White-letter Streak butterfly may repay all this dedicated effort by taking up residence.

Grahame left, Alan right, and members of the volunteer team

THE LAST WORD FROM ALAN: *“A suitable memorial indeed to the far-sighted Colin Beard and his colleagues, who saved the Reserve in the first place, and to those who have developed and nurtured it ever since.”*

Alan Broodbank, 24th October 2018.

It is recommended you read the unedited version of Alan’s article on the EEG website to give you a much fuller appreciation of the enthusiasm and dedication of all those involved. Quotes above in italics are from this.

THEY DESERVE PRAISE: *The Earley Conservation Group is shown below, waging their battle against the 'brambles of Redhatch Copse', which are a concern of the group because as member Susan Smith says, they want to make it “all ready for lovely things like bluebells and snowdrops to put on a show next spring”.*

Phone Grahame on 07796 170689 if you would like to be involved in the voluntary work.

Note: Redhatch Copse is still in the ownership of Persimmon Homes, but is awaiting transfer to Earley Town Council. The Group was concerned about the negative effect of the brambles on bluebells, etc. and had gone in to minimise such damage.

Redhatch Copse, is shown on maps over several hundred years and is still much the same shape. (Photo by Sue)

The group do so much conservation work in the Maiden Erlegh Reserve and around Earley. All praise to them.



Others worthy of praise: A letter from Jo Friend, Town Clerk, Earley Town Council, of 7th November praised the work done by the Earley Adopt a Street Initiative group (EASI) to keep Earley tidy and litter-free, and also recognised the work done by the Earley Environmental Group, some of whose members are also involved in the two above-mentioned groups.

KEEPING EARLEY TIDY

Ever wondered what happens to all the stuff we put in our black boxes? Well, it ends up for sorting at Smallmead (Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC), Island Rd, Reading). The EASI Group recently paid a visit there and was given a presentation, which revealed some interesting facts:

The Smallmead site is on a big area previously used for landfill.

For techies: A new smartphone app is available, **re3cyclopedia**, which tells you what is recyclable or not.

50% (by weight) of all our refuse is recycled now, with 40% being used for energy generation and not much more than 10% going into landfill.

A limited check shows that our blue bags still contain a lot of recyclable material.

20% of items in black boxes are not recyclable, and have to be extracted by a dozen human pickers (shame on us!).

If you're not sure whether to recycle, put it in the black box so long as it's CLEAN.

The tiniest fragment of glass among paper for recycling is a disaster (not explained but perhaps dangerous to sorters).

Damp paper is harder to sort, so try to keep it dry.

Staples are not a problem, nor plastic windows in envelopes, though removing them would be helpful.

Shredded paper should go in blue bags, please.

Greetings cards with a small amount of metallic decoration are OK.

Metallic wrapping paper is definitely not wanted.
(Think Christmas!)

Photo: EASI group

More news on the visit in the next newsletter.

Information provided by Peter Soul, joint co-ordinator, EASI



Kennet Mouth and Broken Brow – East Reading Mass Rapid Transit

After the proposal for this scheme was rejected by Wokingham Borough Council in June on landscape grounds, Reading Borough Council submitted a new and revised planning application which was considered by Wokingham on December 12th.

They proposed, “Planters beside the parapets containing ivy to spill over the deck of the viaduct. This would provide greening of the structure. Maintenance will be required; however, automatic irrigation, a planting replacement programme, and CCTV could keep this to a minimum.”

I think Reading must have a very low opinion of Wokingham’s Planning Committee if they think it would be won over by the cosmetic changes proposed.

At time of writing the decision was not known (see Save Our Ancient Riverside (SOAR) website www.saveourancientriverside.co.uk for latest news.

6th December 2018

John Booth

THE STORY OF EARLEY, AS TOLD ON THE NOTICE BOARDS

Eagles once quartered the Loddon area in Earley. One notice board headed, 'Wood of Eagles', in Lower Earley Meadows, features a picture of a majestic white-tailed eagle (sea eagle). It asserts, "Over 1000 years ago white-tailed sea eagles once swept across the flooded plains of the River Loddon hunting for fish." In a much earlier edition of the EEG newsletter, a possible explanation of the origin of the place-name EARLEY appeared as follows.

At one time the white-tailed sea eagle bred in heavily- wooded parts of England as far south as Devon. The Anglo-Saxon name for eagle was *erne* or *earn*. Margaret Gelling, a top authority on English place-names, wrote that there were consistent associations with habitats and landscapes suitable for white-tailed sea eagles, such as *earn-leah*, Old English for eagle wood (e.g. Arley, Cheshire, Earley, Berkshire). Most of the woodland names cluster around major river systems like the Severn (Areley (sic), Worcs and the Thames (Earley, Berkshire). In the case of the latter site, white-tailed eagle bones were found just 20 miles away at a fifth century archaeological excavation (Margaret Gelling, 'Anglo Saxon Eagles' pp 173-81 in Leeds Studies in English {eds Thorlac Turville Petre and Margaret Gelling} Leeds University 1987.)

In *Birds Britannica*, under 'White-Tailed Eagle (Sea Eagle)', there is a reference to Earley, not that fanciful, as there would have been a vast local river system in early times of the Thames and Loddon, full of fish and good pickings for a 'sea eagle'. The Loddon was a boundary for the Great Windsor Forest. Up to recent times the eagle was a winter visitor, several being shot in Windsor Great Park in Victorian times. It was persecuted to extinction in the UK by 1918. Its wingspan can be almost **2.5metres** in length and, at a height of almost a metre, it is our largest bird of prey. It has recently been re-introduced into Scotland.

A source of food. The second board, 'The Riches of the River Loddon', tells us much about the Loddon River, now mostly frequented by walkers treading the very place where pre-historic man may have hunted for eels and fish. Willow harvested locally was used to make eel bucks, which were long, narrow traps lowered into the water to catch the eels, and were still in use along the Loddon up to the 1950s. The eels provided food, and could be sold in London's Billingsgate fish market. (The boards are on the EEG website Environment page)



Man operating an eel trap

A few snips from the EARLEY COMMUNITY ORCHARD

At the 2nd AGM, Chairman Jean Hackett reported that the orchard has suffered more vandalism, and the local police team have been informed. Good news, though, that there was plenty of blossom on the trees this year, but once again the committee decided that it was too early to have fruit, so this was removed before the fruit set – with one exception, which had a mass of small fruit. Thanks were accorded to the Earley Town Council Park Rangers, Grahame and Ashley, and the Wednesday Conservation Volunteers, as the latter group did essential watering during the very hot summer. Jean is hoping to see further growth in the orchard next year, with the possibility of the first crop of fruit.



LIFE WITHOUT BEES?

Hard to contemplate, isn't it? Humans are not the only ones looking after the environment. Without bees pollinating plants, the world would be mighty short of food. Help them by donating a CHRISTMAS BEE SAVER KIT through Friends of the Earth, <https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/donate-save-britains-bees-get-your-christmas-bee-saver-kit-today>. You decide what to donate.



NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY: Much fury has surrounded the fate of the historic Bethnal Green Mulberry in the grounds of the London Chest Hospital, which is now in the hands of developers. In spite of a 10,000-signature petition to leave the mulberry tree in situ, the developers won, and planning permission was granted for development to go ahead - the mulberry tree was to be dug up and replanted elsewhere. It is categorised as a Veteran Tree and, under the new guidelines, Ancient & Veteran Trees can only be removed for 'exceptional reasons'!! Didn't help this tree! The developers' tree expert is 100% sure the tree will survive being replanted. We shall see . .

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND GARDEN SURVEYS

Charlotte: November 22nd The shoveller ducks are back. (*presumably on Maiden Erlegh Lake*).

Thank you to our two garden surveyors, Margaret Holmes and Gillian Cartwright for regularly submitting their surveys during 2018.

Late butterflies. Margaret sighted large white, red admiral, and small white in October, red admiral in November. Jay seen burying acorns in October, and one red kite on the lawn in November. She says, "They are always around".

In November, Gillian was lucky enough to have a green woodpecker on her back lawn and great spotted woodpecker on rowan tree in front, red admiral in back garden.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS December 2018 – April 2019

Monday December 17th, 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 15th, 7.30pm - 9.30pm **AGM and 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 or Charlotte on 07771 605825, to make arrangements for the evening. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Wednesday February 13th, 7.30pm - 9.30pm **The Mauritius Fody.** Teresa Robinson will talk to us about the Mauritius Fody, a rare bird of the weaver family found only on Mauritius. Teresa is studying for her Conservation Biology PhD at Reading University with a focus on territoriality and implications for management. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Wednesday March 13th, 7.30pm - 9.30pm **Air Quality.** John Oversby will give a talk on how poor air quality can be fatal yet improvement is a minefield of conflicting facts and ideologies. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Sunday March 24th [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

Saturday April 27th [5.30am -7.30am Dawn Chorus walk](#). Come along and listen to the birdsong with local expert Ray Reedman. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road

BITS AND PIECES

Don't forget. We're on Facebook now!

The Earley Environmental Group now 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 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 e-mail brianh@talk21.com, or Peter Soul (926 4997), e-mail 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 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, 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, Maiden Erlegh local 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 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.

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