

Earley - Old English 'Earnley' = eagle wood

2019

Looking back on 2019, and without mentioning the B-word, it was a year notable for recognition by so many that human activity is making probably irreversible changes to our planet. A study made by a collaboration of more than 70 wildlife charities, "State of Nature 2019", purports to show that 41% of UK species, plant and animal, have significantly declined since 1970. There are some winners among the losers, but you have to worry when it found that starling numbers were down by 31%. It doesn't pay to take anything for granted. The report is on <https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/>. We should be thankful that so many committed organisations are doing their best to halt this trend.



Isn't it ironic that our understanding of the dire consequences of climate change comes when we're beginning to appreciate the importance of our connection with the natural environment for our good health, both mental and physical? Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve and reserves like it are important to provide opportunities for local people to get out and savour some of nature.



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CLIMATE CHANGE is the big threat to the survival of many selective-habitat animals, for example the beautiful snow leopard. The extinction of species has been going on for thousands of years, but there is an understanding that the rate of extinction is now well beyond normal. ‘**Climate Emergency**’ is the label attached to this global crisis so, with time running out, 2020 and beyond will require gargantuan action by the global community to deal with this. But local people can play a part.



So, what’s happening in our backyard?

BALFOUR BEATTY DEVELOPMENT: LOWER EARLEY WAY

Article for EEG by Kathy Maskell, Freelance Climate Communications Consultant

I have been talking to Balfour Beatty about the planting along the edge of Lower Earley Way (B3270), where the road has been widened and it joins the Showcase Cinema roundabout. They’ve sent me plans and some information about the roadside planting and pond.



The landscaped areas have been designed in consultation with the Wokingham Borough Council Landscape Architect and Ecology Officer. They include areas planted with native woodland, hedgerow, shrub, wetland marginal plants on the edges of the pond and ditch, species rich grassland, wetland grass mix and meadow grass mix: also some specimen tree planting of Alder, Field Maple, English Oak and Silver Birch.

Apparently, they have also cleared small areas within the scrubby area to the south of the pond. I can’t actually see that, but it was done to open up the scrub and increase biodiversity.+

Planting described in the plan as ‘native shrub mix’: includes Scots Pine, Field Maple, Hazel plus other native species. The density of the Scots Pine looks a bit strange. Photo: Kathy Maskell Nov 2019.

Biodiversity net gain has been used as one of the main design principles. Biodiversity net gain in development is defined as “development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before”¹. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that planning policy should identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable gains for biodiversity. Note “should”, not “must”. However, in March 2019 the Government announced that it will use the forthcoming Environment Bill to mandate ‘biodiversity net gain’, which is encouraging.

An ‘ephemeral pond’ has been created which is intended as a potential site for breeding amphibians. The old culvert under Lower Earley Way has been kept partially open to act as a wildlife- tunnel for small animals to move underneath the road. All plants were sourced from within the UK and where practical, seeds with local provenance were used.



A shallow ‘ephemeral pond’ has been created. Planting within the pond area includes native marginal plants, plus Alder and native shrub mix. The conifers (Scots Pine according to the plans) – look a little strange planted within the pond. Photo: Kathy Maskell, Nov 2019.

I've asked recently about maintenance of the planting, something that has been an issue on new developments, with many trees dying due to lack of aftercare. I haven't had an answer on this one just yet, but I have to say that, over-all, Balfour Beatty have been very happy to engage and have been really responsive in answering questions.

Kathy Maskell

The EEG August Newsletter reported that Wokingham Borough Council acknowledged there is a climate emergency, and committed to playing a big role in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030. A Climate Emergency Action Plan is to be produced and will be published in January 2020.

Residents are being asked for their ideas on reducing the council's carbon footprint in a survey that will run to **31 December**.

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/news-and-consultation/consultation-and-having-your-say/current-consultations/?entryid206=498317>

MORE TREES, PLEASE

Earlier this year **Cornwall Council** declared a climate emergency. They are taking action by planting not just trees but **A FOREST** for Cornwall.

What better way than to plant trees and cherish those we have? *Wokingham District Veteran Tree Assn.* hope to have talks in the near future with the Council on the part trees may play in the Borough's aspirations (see <https://www.wdvta.org.uk>).



Friends of the Earth are urging us to get our local council to commit to planting more trees to offset climate change. The following encouraging reply (I think) was received in answer to such a request I sent to Wokingham Borough Council:

*Re: Please support doubling tree cover
To Sheila Crowson.*

Good Evening,

Thank you for your email concerning trees and yes it would be great to increase tree planting in the future whilst also trying to look after the trees we already have. From Caroline Smith (Councillor, WBC)

Not exactly a commitment. However, currently on the WBC website:

"Request tree planting

Contact us if you would like a tree planted near your property. We prioritise in replacing trees that have been removed for safety. We also plant in open space areas where currently no trees exist, to increase the tree population."

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/countryside-parks-and-conservation/conservation/?categoryesct191f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=3103> or phone 0118 974 6000

See also Wokingham Borough Environmental Ideas Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/644086849443503/>

Network Rail and the proposed management of vegetation along the railway line from Wokingham and Reading.

The following are the British Rail motives for this work, details in the WDVTA newsletter 'Tree Watch'.

"Whilst we regret both the visual loss and the reduction in canopy, the railway embankments were not designed to withstand the growth of trees and railwaymen cleared the trackside regularly up to the end of steam trains as trees and undergrowth were fire risks. So this work is an unfortunate necessity. Network Rail now intends to develop a plan to schedule line vegetation management work on a more systematic and planned routine."

Photos in 'Tree Watch'- by Malcolm Inglis

Taken on 4th and 14th November from footbridge by St. Paul's churchyard, Wokingham looking towards Reading.



Malcolm will continue to record the changes.

SOMETHING YOU MAY SEE IN YOUR BACKYARD - OR FRONT GARDEN!

Back in late summer passers-by may have noticed Anne Booth standing in her front garden staring at the grass and wondered why: she was bee watching!

It was three years ago when we first noticed a lot of bees flying apparently aimlessly over our front lawn close to the ground. I sent a photo to the Bees, Wasps & Ants Recording Society (BWARS) for help with identification and soon had a very enthusiastic e-mail back confirming them as **Ivy Bees**, a type of mining bee. We learned that the males patrol the area waiting for females to emerge from the previous year's underground burrows. After mating the females excavate a burrow (or re-use an old one) for the eggs, contained in separate cells, and a provision of Ivy pollen for the larvae. The



cells are lined with a cellophane-like material which makes them water-proof, this earns them the name of 'plasterer' bee. The larvae grow over winter and pupate the following year before emerging in the autumn. The earth removed for the burrow forms a small mound of soil with an entrance hole in the top like a perfect miniature volcano about 3cms tall. The burrows can reach a depth of 30cms (12").

The bees are about the size of Honeybees and appear quite late in the year, usually in September, and fly for up to six weeks to coincide with the flowering of Ivy, their main forage plant. They don't sting, though in theory the females can, but to quote the BWARS 'you'd have to pick them up and squeeze them'!

They were only discovered as a species in 1993 in Southern Europe, and were first recorded in the UK at Worth Matravers, Dorset, in 2001. By 2009 they were being found in all the counties of the south and south-western coast, and have now extended their range as far north as Yorkshire.



There are several front gardens with ivy bees in my area of Maiden Erlegh, and MERA members may recall an item about them in the magazine last year. Some gardens have just the right soil conditions

for them – light, sandy, with patches of bare soil and a sunny aspect. In our garden this year, bee numbers have gone up but unfortunately they have caught the attention of the local magpies (who have also done well this year) and we’ve had at least six birds at a time pecking the ground, I assume to get at the eggs or larvae.

With so many bee species threatened by habitat loss and disease, how wonderful it is to have this fascinating addition to our native fauna.

Anne Booth

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IS GOOD FOR OUR WELLBEING

I think we have always known it, but engaging with the environment is good for our health, both mental and physical. Reports are pouring out from various groups and universities intent on proving it. Among various findings is that children’s play, independent of adults, has declined in part through traffic hazards and safety worries. They are more likely to experience the natural environment close to home with adults. Charlotte Allchin runs Earley Elfins, a pre-school playgroup with focus on outdoor play, and Earley Environmental Junior Group, both based in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve (see page 8). Some teenagers may like to use leisure time on-line and have a social media profile. However, in their post-teenage-years, they may develop an interest again in outdoor recreation.

Nature plus exercise is especially good for us. The Earley Environmental Group Wednesday Volunteers help look after the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve and other parts of the town, with benefits from companionship, improving the environment, and exercise for free. We should also include gardening here, good for exercise and the soul.

Research shows that taking part in nature-based activities helps people who are suffering from mental ill-health, and can contribute to a reduction in levels of anxiety, stress, and depression. https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/physical-activity-and-your-mental-health/#.XekpH_zqg70



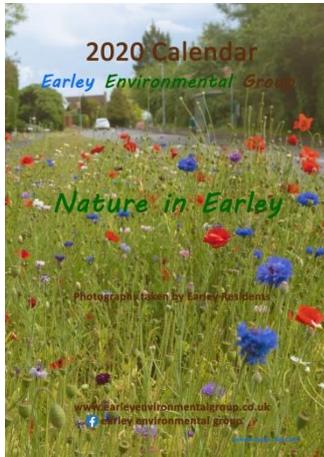
Lastly, don’t forget the walks and talks provided by EEG. Everyone is welcome. Just turn up. Details on page 7.



Reading’s first ‘green week’ celebration, held in July and August this year, brought together over 50 events held across 5 zones. EEG member Charlotte Allchin’s idea for ‘Wild about Reading’ brought several of the area’s regular summer events and many new ones into a single programme: most of them were completely free! ‘Wild about Reading’ was supported by many local organisations, including Reading Borough Council, Reading University, Nature Nurture and local environmental groups, including the EEG.

Charlotte’s brainchild grew into a festival for all, and included family picnics; walks and talks covering dragonflies, moths, bumblebees, butterflies, birds and bats; bug hunting; photography, architecture,

heritage, crafts, music, plants, gardening and a walk along the Thames with SOAR. There was a Lost Words Rock Draw, a Teddy Bears' Picnic, a BBQ, the Turbine visit and Earley's Green Fair. Bringing together so many organisations and events was a tremendous achievement, thanks to its many contributors and participants.



EEG's 2020 Calendar Success

The Earley Environmental Group's 2020 calendar has been such a success that it completely sold out at the Earley Green Fair in August, and a second batch of 100 copies had to be ordered.

The Group's first community calendar features Nature in Earley and brings together photographs of the local environment, plants, birds, flowers and fungi taken by local photographers. The calendar is dedicated to the memory of EEG 'champion' Sue Smith, whose photo is included on the October page; the month of her birthday.

We are grateful to the 11 photographers who contributed a total of 35 photos to the calendar, and to the EEG volunteers and staff at the Earley Town Council offices who have sold almost 200 calendars on behalf of the Group. All profits will be used in supporting the EEG's work to improve the environment around Earley.

A 2021 calendar is planned, so if you're keen to have a photo in the next edition look out for an announcement in the spring. Images showing Earley's natural environment in all seasons and weathers are welcome; including lake and woodland shots, wildflowers and birdlife, animals and insects; **so get snapping!**

Bob Collis, Calendar Editor

Earley Community Orchard

At the AGM the main item was that, in March, WBC turned down our proposal for an alternative orchard near the children's playground in Laurel Park, despite a request from the Neighbourhood Policing Team for a less conspicuous position. One of the reasons given was that the land is part of a proposed Community Asset Transfer from WBC to ETC, which has been on-going for several years, so no final decision could be taken by WBC. Luckily, there has been hardly any more vandalism this year, although there was a report of a broken fence post recently.



There was plenty of blossom on the trees this year, and the committee decided to allow the blossom to set to have fruit. Not all the trees produced any fruit, and what did develop was a collection of fairly small apples; they all seemed to disappear, though it's not sure if any of the orchard sponsors benefitted from them.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY:

THE GRAND TOUR PRESENTER, Jeremy Clarkson, has long been a critic of global warming, though he has said that shooting (*films*) in south-east Asia has led to his having a change of heart about the issue. However, it hasn't stopped him publicly attacking Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old eco-warrior from Sweden. Being rude in public seems, regrettably, to be acceptable these days.

EARLEY GARDEN SURVEYS:

One of the winners in the *State of Nature* report was the red kite, population up a staggering 274%. In her October survey, Margaret comments, "always around". I think we can all concur with that.

Starling population has fallen 31% but, thankfully, they are still present in our two surveyors' gardens. In Gillian's garden: July (8), Aug (5), Sept and Oct (0). In Margaret's garden, Aug (5), Sept (5), Oct (3).

Starling murmurations (the amazing displays in the skies) happen during the winter months. One place to see this is Brighton Pier.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS December 2019 – May 2020

Monday December 16th 7pm - 10pm [Christmas party](#). Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. Open to all EEG members. Come along and bring some food to share (please let us know what you are bringing, so we can balance the fare), we'll provide mulled wine.

Monday January 6th 7.30pm - 9.30pm [AGM and members' evening](#). If you would like to bring along photos and/or stories with an environmental flavour to share with the group, please e-mail grahamehawker@hotmail.com or phone Charlotte on 07771 605825, to make arrangements for the evening. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Monday February 3rd 7.30pm - 9.30pm [The Galapagos](#) An illustrated talk by local resident Jane Sellwood. Jane recently visited this magical place and will share her experiences with us. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Sunday February 16th [Erleigh Elfins wassailing event](#)
Details to follow, check website and local posters nearer the time.

Sunday March 29th 10am - 4.30pm [HELP - Huge Earley Litter Pick](#). The annual Earley Litter Pick has two sessions: 10am-12.30pm & 2pm-4.30pm. Meet at the Interpretation Centre in Instow Road for each session. Contact Grahame Hawker at the Council Office for more details.

Saturday May 2nd 5.30am - 7.30am [Dawn Chorus walk](#). Join local expert Ken White on a Dawn Chorus walk in Maiden Erleigh Local Nature Reserve. This joyous song only lasts for a short time in Spring, but it's worth making the effort to give up your lie-in, and share with others that unique sound of the dawn chorus. So set that alarm for early. Meet at the Interpretation Centre in Instow Road. Contact Grahame Hawker at the Council Office for more details.

Thursday May 28th 7.30pm - 9.30pm [Binfield Badgers](#) Binfield Badger Group was established to support the local population of this friendly mammal. Jill Holbin will be telling us about their work, and more about this nocturnal animal. This talk is part of Wild About Reading. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

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 upcoming 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.

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 easilittergroup@gmail.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. 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.

If you know someone who would like to join **EEG**, **membership forms** are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995, on the website under Downloads, or send an e-mail to the Membership Secretary, Liz Wild at liz@helva.plus.com. **Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address** at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or e-mail her.

Erlegh Elfins: A pre-school playgroup on Thursdays at the Interpretation Centre in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve runs from 10 am to 11:30 am, with a focus on outdoor play and exploration of the natural environment. For more information, please contact erleghelfins@gmail.com or Charlotte on 07771 605825. There is a limit on numbers to ensure safe play. Child-minders are welcome. Adults are responsible for the children they bring with them, so a ratio of 2:1 is recommended. A charge of £1.50 per child applies.

For information on **Earley Environmental Junior Group**, phone Charlotte as above.

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