

They say it is a “mast year”, one in which the trees produce greater quantities of fruit (including nuts) than usual. I don't recall a year in which I've seen so many sloes on the hedgerow or crunched so many acorns underfoot. Perhaps that explains the 21 squirrels I spotted on Sunday 16 November, the most on one occasion I've ever noted in MENR. (Normally, I'd see not more than six.) It seems the favourable weather of 2025 has had an unexpected effect on the bumper apple harvest too. After the hottest summer on record, sugar levels in fruit have been higher than usual, and so when it comes to making cider, sweeter apples have generated increased alcohol contents – 8.5% rather than 6%, according to one producer, Charnwood Cider of Leicestershire. Cheers!

Edwin A.R. Trout

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Brambles in Lakeside



Photo: Edwin Trout

Autumn bounty



Photo: Bob Collis

The image above, taken by Bob Collis, is one of 28 that featured in the EEG Autumn Photo Exhibition this past October. It vividly captures the acorns and oakleaves that were such a feature of the autumn this year.

Other photos of the autumn abundance, though not from the exhibition, can be found on p.6.

Committee News

Announcements from the EEG committee



Jeremy Jones, Alan Broodbank and Bob Collis on the EEG stand

The Green Fair

The Earley Environmental Group made a good showing at the annual Green Fair in August, 'flying the flag', recruiting several new members and selling a good number of calendars.

The AGM – 21 January

The annual general meeting is a perfect opportunity to reflect on the year just passed and to catch up with plans for coming year.

We look forward to seeing you at Maiden Place on 21 January.

ETC Support

We are pleased to acknowledge Earley Town Council's continuing support in covering the cost of printing this newsletter for another year.

EEG's Autumn Photo Exhibition

Report by Bob Collis

In October, the EEG held its third annual photography exhibition hosted by St Nicolas Church in the gallery exhibition space. This year's theme, drawn from photos submitted for the EEG's calendars over the life of its seven editions, was "Autumn". Many of the photos had not been included in the EEG's calendars, so were being seen publicly for the first time.

The exhibition, comprising twenty-eight images, including autumn leaves, trees, fungi and flowers, portrayed the glorious colours of Autumn in Earley. The 'Meet the Photographer Day' on Saturday 18th October was attended by the Mayor of Earley, Cllr Nicola Brock (*below*), as well as several of the photographers whose images were on display.

We are grateful to Liz Kerry for commissioning the exhibition and to Stephen Kerry for hanging the photos, and also to the following photographers whose photos were displayed: Anne Booth, Bob Collis, Mark Craske, Cathy Garlick, Louise Kemp, Andrew McCaffrey, Rod MacFadyen, Derek Morgan, Steve Prior, Paul Rose, Peter Scott, Adrienne Skirka, Henry Thompson, Richard Tredgett, Edwin Trout and Ben Twigg.



EEG Walks

Reports of recent EEG walks and announcements of those to come

Feedback on Fungi

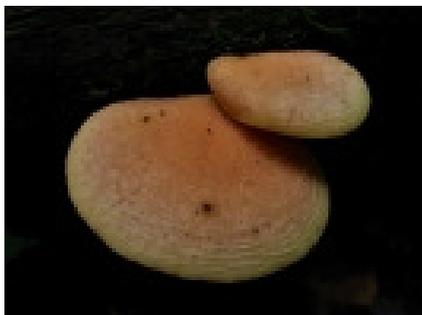
An appreciation by Robin Christian

I really enjoyed the fungal walk on Saturday, and please pass on my thanks also to your co-presenter, with whom I had some good chats. The 'dead man's fingers' were really spooky, and the 'wrinkled peach' and the 'trooping funnels' were 'the spots' I especially remember.

The wrinkled peach was rather hard to track down in my fairly old fungi books: I suspect because many fungi have only recently acquired common names due to the resurgence of interest. But when googled, I discovered them in my books as *Rhodotus palmatus*.

In Roger Philip's book, *Mushrooms*, he writes of them as "at one time rare, but due to the abundance of dead elms, now becoming quite frequent". That, I'd say, increases the likelihood it was a 'wrinkled peach' we saw, as there are a lot of elms up the path to the butterfly garden.

Cheers all and thanks again, from newly fungally enthused Robin.



Wrinkled Peach (above)

<https://www.wildfooduk.com/mushroom-guide/wrinkled-peach/>

Dead Man's Fingers (right)

(Photo: Edwin Trout)

Fungus Walk on Saturday 24 October



Photo: Bob Collis

This October walk was led by Henry Thompson and Edwin Trout, neither claiming to be an expert, but happily admitting to an enthusiasm for fungi. Anyone with a contribution to make was welcome to interject. Indeed, David Weeks was one such, drawing our attention to candlesnuff fungus on fallen branches and tiny pink fungal growths on holly leaves that we'd never have spotted otherwise. Another participant, Chris, described the medical qualities of Beech polypore.

The best of the autumn's bounty had passed and several of the more spectacular fungi were in a state of decay, or were obscured by fallen leaves, so Edwin brought with him some enlarged photographs of a selection of the fungi most characteristic of the reserve or of sites closely associated with displays of fungi in the past.

We followed a loose figure-of-eight route from the Interpretation Centre, through Old Pond Copse, Moor Copse, Old Lane Wood and back through the woodland strip dividing Laurel Park to the feeding station, then up through Oak Wood, down the meadow and back along the north bank of the lake.

We couldn't name all we found, but sightings included Coral, Jelly ear, Honey Fungus, Fairy Bells, Beech Polypores and other brackets, Sulphurtuft, Ink Caps, Turkey Tail, Chicken of the Woods, Trooping Funnel and King Alfred's cakes.

The chance find of a rare Wrinkled Peach toward the end of our walk, caused some excitement, and together with the Dead Man's Fingers found soon after, constituted a pleasing conclusion to the afternoon.



EEG Walks

Reports of recent EEG walks and announcements of those to come



Photo: Cathy Garlick

Big Broodbank Bug Hunt



The annual Big Broodbank Bug Hunt featured in the Group's activities again this year, held on Friday 25 July.

Bat Walk in September

Charlotte Allchin

It was dusk in early September, and a group walked slowly around Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. Led by the local bat group (www.berksbats.org.uk) the group explored different areas in the reserve that support the tiny but incredible bats that live, breed and hunt for food there.

Over the recently cut wildflower meadow, Common and Soprano Pipistrelles jinked through the air hunting for midges, mosquitos and gnats. Their wing pattern in flight differs over the meadow to that when the group travels the wooded path along the closest edge of the lake to instow Road. In this closer environment, their wings beat more quickly and they dart acrobatically between twigs, tree branches and trunks.

Bat detectors have helped the group to distinguish the two bat species from each other and as we near the feeding platform a pair of Noctule Bats pass far overhead at great speed. Their echolocation calls on the detectors are louder and slower than the pipistrelles and cause much excitement. Noctules are powerful and swooping in flight in ways that sometimes mean that they are mistaken for swifts. They were first described by naturalist Gilbert White in 1769 as the Great Large Bat and are still spoken of in the same way today! Their diet includes large flying beetles and they are able to fly many miles per night in the search for food.

The sky was dark and the group did not have to wait very long before the bat detectors emitted the characteristic dry clicks of the Daubenton's bat, also known as 'The Water Bat'. With their white abdominal fur and large feet, Daubenton's had come to hunt millimetres above the surface of the water on the lake. Accurate hunters that eat on the wing, Daubenton's thrive in habitats of parkland, woodland and open water so it is no surprise to see them.

Bats account for almost a third of all mammal species in the UK and can tell us a lot about the state of the environment as they are top predators of nocturnal insects. They face many challenges and the group were keen to learn how they could help bats in their immediate area.

Some ideas include :

- * Gardening for Wildlife with night scented varieties of flowering plants
- * Reducing the light levels in your garden as much as possible
- * Keeping cats indoors to reduce the chance of predation or injury to bats
- * Eliminating the use of toxic chemicals in gardens

To find out more information about bats, you may consider joining your local bat group or exploring the Bat Conservation Trust website. Keep an eye on the Earley Environmental Group Events calendar for more bat focussed events in 2026.

EEG talks

Reports of talks from the EEG's autumn programme.



Photo: Bob Collis

Ankolyika Kumar answering questions

EASI News

The latest EASI Newsletter contains reports of recent activities, including a Beavers' Litter Pick, the FoBOS Litter Pick of Bulmershe Field and the ETC Autumn Litter Pick.

The Hawkedon Primary School had a 'Kindness in the Community Day', which included a litter pick in the school grounds and nearby paths.

EASI is interested in identifying litter 'hot spots' in Earley in order to target locations where there are particular problems with littering or flytipping.

Please get in touch at easilittergroup@gmail.com if you know of any locations that need to be considered for a concerted litter clearance.

The EASI Newsletter can be found at the top left of the EEG homepage, highlighted in blue.

www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk

Film Festival

The EEG's 20th Anniversary Year closed with our fabulous film festival held at the Palmer Theatre in collaboration with the University of Reading (UoR). The festival, an inspiration by the EEG's Programme Co-Ordinator Charlotte Allchin, featured four films addressing the impact of, and response to, climate change. Two documentary films were created by Cornwall Climate Care; 'Plenty More Fish' and 'Down the Drain'. These beautifully crafted films presented the work of the Cornish fishing industry in responding to the impact of climate change on sea water temperatures and the consequential changes in fish stocks, and also the work of local conservations on reducing the impact of sewage and other pollutants on Cornish rivers.

'The Sirens Song' was produced by UoR student Ankolyika Kumar, who was in the theatre to tell us about her film and respond to questions. Her poignant film used the impact of erosion around the coast of Norfolk, as a starting point to illustrate how climate change may well affect all our ways of life in the long-term. The evening finished with a YouTube clip made by the Marshians of Fobney Marsh. The Marshians have taken on the preservation of the open marsh west of the A33 Basingstoke Road and the south of the River Kennet at Fobney. The group has grown in numbers, and regularly holds 'stomps' to simulate the trampling effect of wild cattle to create an open wetland habitat, which in turn supports local wildlife.

EEG members were joined by students from the UoR, members of The Friends of the Earth and the Marshians.

Thank you to Charlotte for organising such a splendid evening.

From an EASI feature on the EEG website

What to do if you find a nitrous oxide cannister

Report it to Wokingham Borough Council

As an aerosol cannister these need safe disposal rather than just putting them in a litter or wheelie bin.

Wokingham Borough Council have asked that they are reported to them as fly tipping for safe and separate collection from other litter – you could use the fix my street app.

Report it to Thames Valley Police

Thames Valley Police are aware of the use of nitrous oxide locally and share our concerns about this. They ask that any findings are reported on their non emergency website, using the following link:

<https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/contact/af/contact-us-beta/contact-us/report-crime-incident-suspicion/> and entering "other" and "other" as the category.

We would be grateful, therefore, if you could report any nitrous oxide canister finds when litter picking to keep our community both tidy and safe.

EEG talks

Report of talks from the EEG's programme – *see right*

Season of mellow fruitfulness



Toad Patrol to the Rescue

Report by Bob Collis

Toad Patrol at the Rescue

Elaine Butler's fascinating talk on the 11th of November at Maiden Place grabbed the audience's full attention, generating a captivating discussion about the Priest Hill and Henley Road Toad Patrols. Besides Elaine, who has been a toad rescuer for many years, there were several other audience members who have helped rescue toads at Priest Hill, at Henley Road or at Deerswood in Maidenhead.

At Priest Hill, near Farley Hill south of Arborfield, toad patrol volunteers help toads cross the road safely each year to prevent them from being killed by road traffic. The toads cross from the nearby woods to their breeding pond on the other side of the road. We learnt that the toad crossings tend to happen during dusk and at night in January and February when temperatures are milder for the toads, but it's usually a cold and wet patrol for the volunteers. The toads are collected in buckets and ferried across to their pond on the other side of the road. Unfortunately, some toads are not spotted and are run over by the road traffic, but most are rescued. Many find a mate on their journey and even 'partner-up' in the collecting bucket. Since 2009, at Priest Hill between around 500 and 1,500 toads have been helped across the road each year; usually well above the national average for rescues.

The Henley Toad Patrol helps migrating toads across the busy A4155, from The Culden Faw Estate near, Hambleden, to ponds on the other side. Here, the patrollers use barriers to funnel the toads towards the best point for them to be helped across the road. At Deerswood, the situation is even more complex as the toads cross a network of roads.

This was an excellent talk by Elaine – well done to our local Toad Patrollers. More information on Toad Patrols can be found on Froglife's Website <https://www.froglife.org/who-we-are/organisational-structure/>



Maiden Erlegh

Sightings in and around Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

Garden Surveys

Our garden surveyors Gillian and Margaret continue to record the wildlife in their gardens each month – systematic records that now go back quite a few years and which are currently being collated by the EEG for future analysis.

Margaret notes a Grey Wagtail at 8.45 on 9 October: “Very rare visitor to our pool”.

She records Longtailed tits in November and December, including – on 8 December – “a tree creeper amongst a flock of Longtailed tits and left behind to forage on our trellis of jasmine and a Field Maple”.

Sadly for the Longtailed tits – plus Blue, Coal and Great tits – their profusion did not go unnoticed: in November, a Sparrow hawk was “seen most days and enjoying tits for its food.” On 6 December, “one male and several other fleeting visits to feast on tits.”



Stock photo: EEG website

Gillian also notes the presence of Longtailed tits and ends her records for 2025 with a hint of the coming spring: “first Acconite peeping out”.

Life on the Reserve

By Edwin A.R. Trout

The autumn has seen the comings and goings of several species of water birds, some seasonal, others more occasional.

Little Egret

The Little Egret is only an occasional sight on Maiden Erlegh Lake. However, its simple graceful form, pure white, was to be seen here in the Autumn (Sunday 16 November).

Shovelers

The winter-visiting *Shovelers* are back, easily alarmed and startled into flight, and often seen wheeling in rapid rotation to feed on what is tried up by the vortex they create. A single male was noted on 23 October, two pairs on 16 November and at least 12 males and 10 females by 26 November.

Mute Swans

Having had a pair of swans for a while, there was just one on 4, 5, 9, 13, 16, 20, 22 & 25 August and none noted on 27 September, 16 & 26 November. There were, however, two on Tuesday 30 Sept and Saturday 29 Nov, then again in December. These contradictory sightings suggest there is no longer a resident swan, but occasional visits by a new pairing.

Welsh Harlequin

The two Welsh Harlequins – both males – came to Maiden Erlegh in the spring of 2016 and for years have been inseparable. There is only one now, it seems, as observed in early October following postings on the Facebook page that the other hadn't been seen for a week or two.

Grey Squirrels

Not only did I see 21 squirrels on Sunday 16 November – as mentioned on page 1, but also the sorry sight of two dead squirrel kits lying on the Lakeside path on 20 August.



Photo: Edwin A.R. Trout

EEG Programme

We list the Group's forthcoming walks, talks and other activities

2025 Programme Walks and Talks

Please see the EEG website and public notice boards for further details and updates.

Wednesday 21 January
Annual General Meeting
Maiden Place Community Centre.
7.30 pm

Sunday 8 February
**Wassail at the Earley
Community Orchard**
to be confirmed

Tuesday 10 March
Talk on moths
Maiden Place Community Centre.
7.30pm

Contributors to this issue

Charlotte Allchin
Gillian Cartwright
Robin Christian
Bob Collis
Margaret Holmes
Edwin Trout
Elizabeth Trout

Contributions from members are very welcome, whether in the form of articles photographs, notes, weblinks or simply ideas. The more we receive, the better able we are to reflect the Group in our coverage.

Loddon Garden Village Development: An update by Bob Collis

The University of Reading's planning application for Hall Farm, termed a hybrid development as it is partially a full application and partially in outline, was submitted to Wokingham Borough Council in October 2025, with a closing date for the consultation of 16th January 2026.

The application includes up to 2,800 residential units, two primary schools and a secondary school, one district centre, a local centre, a sports hub, commercial space and health care facilities. There will also be associated green infrastructure, landscaping, public open space, play areas, and ecological enhancement measures.

Supporting the development, there will be several infrastructure additions, including the internal road network, pedestrian and cycle connections, and a new pedestrian, cycle and vehicular bridge over the M4 at Meldreth Way, as well as the widening of part of Lower Earley Way east of Meldreth Way. The development will be built in stages, with the overall development completed in 2040, when the other developers' housing planned for the site will also have been built.

The application is supported by a large number of reports and documents, many of which members of the EEG Committee have reviewed. The EEG has been considering how to respond to the consultation, bearing in mind the possible impact that such a large development could have on the amenity of the Lower Earley residential area, and on the residents and wildlife living there.

Natural Inks

2025 saw considerable interest in the work of Jane Austen as the bicentenary of her death was marked by new publications, public lectures and television broadcasts. Among the commemorations locally was a lecture at Reading Museum that explained how to make the natural inks used in Jane Austen's time. These included the preparation of dyes from oak galls, and members of the audience were invited to have a go and make their own to try out. The session was led by Nicky Culetto, of www.naturesstory.co.uk

EEG Newsletter

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