

In this issue, in the midst of events celebrating Charles Darwin, we remember Canon Fowler, Earley's own famous entomologist on p.4. Darwin learnt much from breeding pigeons, and Ray Reedman explains the different members of that family (p.2). Neither Darwin nor Canon Fowler could have foreseen the severity of the environmental threats we now face, particularly the loss of all kinds of wildlife and the increasing problem of sustaining a burgeoning population on the planet (p.3). While we do our small bit like saving energy and recycling, these are small gestures compared to the distance some are prepared to go. Read on p.5 of the bravery of Marc Ona, who suffered imprisonment for his efforts in trying to protect the wildlife in the Ivindo National Park, Gabon, home of the forest elephant, which is being killed at an alarming rate.



Elephant bones in Ivindo Park



The vanishing turtle dove

It is now 65 years since D Day on June 6th 1944; on page 6 David Smith writes of his memories of the war in Earley, but also recalls happy days during that time playing in the 'wilds' of the Maiden Erlegh estate. And I'm happy to say 'Earley Fox' has been in touch again (p. 3)!

Items of special interest:

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Get to know your Earley

Big Houses: Maiden Erlegh House (see photo on p.6)

Although the newsletter has covered ME House in various articles, for those new to the Group this may be of interest. Originally formed out of the Manor of Erlegh St. Nicholas in 1362, it has passed through many hands. Among more recent owners was William Mathew Birt (see his will, Newsletter issue 6), Governor-general of the Leeward Islands and owner of sugar plantations and slaves in St. Kitts, who died in 1781. The will instructed that his work on the estate for 'improving and buytifying it' was to continue after his death. The Golding family then owned it; it eventually passed in 1878 to John Hargreaves, master of the South Berkshire Hunt who, it is believed, rebuilt it, embodying some of the old Georgian house. On his death the sale was advertised in The Times, with a detailed description of the house (See issue 9). Eventually it was sold to its most famous owner, Soloman Barnato Joel, who from humble beginnings became one of the richest men in England, amassing a fortune from diamonds and gold. Under his ownership it became a showpiece, with a Pompeian swimming pool, a palm court, and the house brimful with furnishings and paintings of immense value. He was famous for his interest in horse-racing with winners in the Ascot Gold cup and the Derby. He founded the famous Maiden Erlegh Stud (see issue 12). In spite of his riches, he admitted in later years to not knowing happiness through wealth. He died in 1931 and the grandeur of ME House came to an end. It became a boys' school, eventually being taken over by the Church Army for a training college. It was then sold to ICI; Cooper Estates bought the site in 1954 and in 1956 they allowed Hungarian refugees to live there. The house finally met its fate from bulldozers in 1960. By a great stroke of fortune, Earley Town Council was able to purchase part of the grounds including the lake, which became the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve of today. (For more information and photos see previous newsletters and "Earley Days" by the Earley Local History Group which should be in the local library, and the Earley Town Council website page on the history of Earley, 'Soly Joel')

Spare a thought for that pig of a pigeon!

Nowadays, one of the most regular birds in my Earley garden is the voracious **wood pigeon**. It is a very handsome creature, as are most members of the pigeon and dove family. The difference between the words “pigeon” and “dove”, is quite unimportant: as it has more to do with size than anything. They are members of the same family, the *Columbidae*. Doves are a symbol of peace and love, but no-one would use the word as *pigeon* there. It was a *dove* that brought Noah the sign that land was nigh. (And while we are there, isn't it a lovely irony of history that Ferdinand and Isabella sent off a man called Columbus to test the westward route to the Indies?) On the other hand, old recipe books might show you how to make pigeon pie, but *dove pie* would be a distinct no-no! But enough of semantics! Let us crack on with a look at this intriguing family...

I must admit that when a wood pigeon drops into the garden, and is then followed by the rest of the gang, the feeding of garden birds becomes a bit off-putting. They are just so greedy! We had the same thoughts about starlings and house sparrows, but where are the mobs of these hooligans nowadays? Something is changing in the world of birds, and big, greedy wood pigeons are not a great asset in the garden. It is only in relatively recent years that this bird has adapted its lifestyle to find our feeders. It probably followed the example of its smaller cousin, the collared dove, which found our gardens several decades ago. Even so, the thoroughly-urbanised **feral pigeon**, or town pigeon, a descendant of the rock dove, seems not to have adopted this habitat, nor has the smaller stock dove, which has remained a shy, rural bird. As for the other country cousin, the migratory turtle dove (see pic p.1), I wish it would learn to come to garden feeders; it might then stand some chance of surviving all the odds which are stacked against it.

Centuries ago other woodland birds like robins, dunnocks and blackbirds realised that co-habitation with man had its advantages. There may be two reasons for the wood pigeon coming late to the garden-bird list. Firstly, it is a farm pest, where it is often deterred by persecution, but most suburban gardens have few vegetable crops to defend, and little reason to persecute the pigeons. Another, and perhaps more significant reason is that farming practices have changed to leave few weeds growing in arable fields and virtually no spilt grain or peas. This highly adaptable bird will feast on the berries of wild ivy and other bushes, on acorns, and many other foods. We provide ornamental berries in our garden and the wood pigeons love them! Given plenty of food, freedom from persecution, milder winters, and nesting sites – any old bush or tree seems to do – wood pigeons have the capacity to breed in almost any month of the year, making a careless sketchy platform which looks wholly inadequate for the size of the bird. Their characteristic five-note call may be heard at almost any time. In all, we make it pretty easy for them and they don't do us a lot of harm. Mind you, I have to take care to protect the green-stuff on my allotment. Far more so the farmers, who have to deal with large winter flocks. 2,000 starving wood pigeons don't take no for an answer! Most of our native birds are sedentary, though some northern continental birds pass through the eastern counties on migration to Iberia. One spring, I witnessed the strange and wonderful spectacle of large flocks of this bulky land-bird flying off out over the North Sea to return in the general direction of Holland and Germany.

This reminds me that I have also seen **racing pigeons** released in Northern France to race back to Yorkshire. Crossing seas is not such an unlikely thing for pigeons and doves to do. Racing pigeons, like the feral pigeon of our town centres, are descended from the cliff-dwelling rock dove, a bird which can still be found on remoter sea-cliffs around Britain. Its domesticated form took well to buildings and was once a staple food when raised in dovecots. One branch of domestication led to “pigeon fancying” as a hobby, where selective breeding of aberrant forms served as a wonderful source of condensed evidence for Charles Darwin's work on evolution. Today the multi-coloured descendants of this grey pigeon find that ledges and crannies in towns are a good substitute for cliffs. Its robust cooing makes a good background to the office bustle, but its capacity to foul buildings and carry diseases has changed our tolerance levels.

The **collared dove**, another resilient and adaptable member of the pigeon family, crossed the sea-barrier to get here only fifty years ago. No-one really understands what caused the explosive spread of this bird up from the Balkans, but spread it did. It wasn't there in my childhood and teens, and then suddenly it was breeding everywhere. It is now a familiar sight in gardens, but a rather cuter and less-troublesome newcomer to the feeders than the wood pigeon. Its three-note call irritates some people intensely, but it always reminds me of one of the joyous themes in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony and it cheers me up no end.

If only the equally-beautiful **turtle dove** could be persuaded to follow the example of its more resilient cousins! It not only crosses the Channel, but the Mediterranean and Sahara too. Twice a year it runs the gauntlet of the widest of deserts, the guns of Mediterranean hunters, and two sea-crossings - and for what? At our end it suffers the deprivations of intensive agriculture and, in the Sahel where it winters, it deals with prolonged droughts and subsistence hunting. Why can't it learn from its cousins? A common farmland bird in my young days, whose wonderful purr was the sound of balmy summer days, this is one which many local birdwatchers now struggle to see or hear at all each year, and one which could even be lost to us within the next generation or so. Tragically, it has been estimated that more turtle doves are shot on migration in Malta alone than arrive annually on our shores. Only this year, and after years of pressure, did the Maltese Government at long last attempt to outlaw the carnage.

Maybe the turtle dove could also take a leaf out of the book of the **stock dove**, the last of our British species. This one tends to be overlooked, since it is relatively shy and because it resembles a small collarless wood pigeon, or the grey forms of the feral pigeon. In the 18th century, Gilbert White, the parson-naturalist, considered it to be as common as the wood pigeon around his home at Selborne in Hampshire in winter.

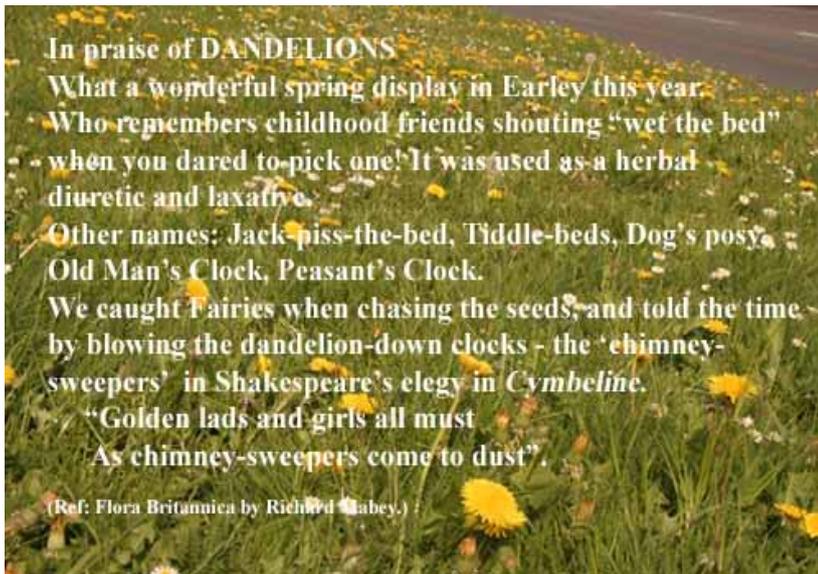
Interestingly, while his generation was still speculating about the origins of the domestic pigeon, he discounted the stock dove, since “no species is more unlikely to be domesticated”. Domestication tends to originate from a creature's propensity to live near humans, and this species still shows clear independence. Mind you, their monotonous, low-pitched “moaning” call can be heard in the Maiden Erleigh reserve. There, owl nesting-boxes and holes in large trees provide nesting sites. One pair also regularly tenants the upstairs flat in the barn owl box at Lavell's Lake.

You have to go a long way to see any other members of this family, but there are nearly 300 species world-wide: the nearest are in the Canaries, Madeira and North Africa. Australia has more species than Europe and North America put together – some 26 in all, and I have been lucky enough to see about half of those. It is a beautiful family. There used to be more in the world, and inevitably some 61 species of those remaining are seriously threatened. We can take nothing for granted. The **American passenger pigeon** was once estimated to be one of the most abundant birds in the world. Hunting and habitat change brought it to extinction, yet the beautiful **mourning dove** is still hunted there. A spring train journey through the agricultural plains of Quebec really brought home to me how empty a landscape can look without pigeons. One giant flightless pigeon became synonymous with the very word *extinction*. Next time you look at a wood pigeon and begrudge its place in the garden, remember its cousin the dodo, and what man has already done to so many of our birds. To borrow a supermarket cliché, once it's gone, it's gone!

The news that Sir David Attenborough has become a patron of the **Optimum Population Trust** highlights one of the most difficult and incendiary issues facing people of all nations. He stated that growth in human numbers is 'frightening'. On the threat to wildlife, he is quoted as saying: "I've never seen a problem that wouldn't be easier to solve with fewer people, and hardly, or ultimately impossible, with more." While we wring our hands at the devastating effects humans are having on wildlife, ultimately people may be amongst the most threatened with the need to feed 9 billion by 2050. It's easy to have a 'head in the sands' attitude to such a sensitive issue but it isn't going away, and no political party is anxious to confront this 'hot potato' and possibly commit electoral suicide. The OPT is committed to educate the public, to

promote research into the problem and to advance environmental protection by promoting policies in the United Kingdom or any other part or parts of the world which will lead or contribute to the achievement of stable human population levels which allow environmental sustainability. It is hoping to persuade people of child-bearing age of all countries to sign a *Stop at Two* pledge: "I am going to try not to have more than two children!" The comfort of being part of a large family is undeniable but unsustainable, barring catastrophic world events like pandemics. With the high-profile intervention of Sir David, this may lead to a greater awareness among our young people of the population time-bomb; they can then make an informed decision according to their own beliefs.

For more information: www.optimumpopulation.org



100 years of bird-ringing

It's a hundred years since bird-ringing began, enabling us to discover much about the migration of birds.

Although they're back I haven't seen swallows yet, but saw a swift today. (May 10th)



I'm glad to report I have heard from Earley Fox. One hears of wily foxes but this one has not only mastered the English language, but can also type, give or take an occasional overtyp!

March 2009

Hello,

We regularly read your newsletter, especially for news of family and friends. I haven't written recently, as there is little news. We are still about, just the two of us at present, and we regularly visit various gardens. We try to keep the rat population down, and leave these as gifts.

I see moles are around again. They leave good digging places.

Several more humans are keeping hens. Could be good to eat, but are often unobtainable. Though an occasional one gets out, and seems to have no idea how to get home.

And we did enjoy playing in the snow this winter.

Earley Fox

In this year of Darwin celebrations, we can also boast of Earley's own famous naturalist, the Revd. Canon William Weekes Fowler, D.Sc., M.A., vicar of Earley St. Peter's Church 1905 to 1923, known as 'Canon Fowler'.

A HIGHLY REGARDED PUBLICATION

If you have £2500 spare sloshing about in your bank account, you may be lucky enough to purchase a copy in good condition of Canon Fowler's *The Coleoptera of the British Islands : a descriptive account of the families, genera, and species indigenous to Great Britain and Ireland, with notes as to localities, habitats, etc.* London : L. Reeve and Co., 1887-1913. Copies of this book are held in many important establishments throughout the world, including the Natural History Museum and the Library of Congress in the U.S. It is still referenced in research publications.

RECOGNITION IN MANY AREAS

A former headmaster of Lincoln Grammar School, he held many important positions during his lifetime, including President of the Headmasters' Assn., member of Reading Board of Guardians and on the Board of Management of the Royal Berkshire Hospital. He was also a fellow of the Linnaean Society and vice-president for the year 1906-1907. A keen and enthusiastic entomologist, he was sub-editor of the Entomologists' Monthly Magazine from 1885 to his death in 1923. In 1902 Oxford University conferred on him a Doctorate of Science.

A DEVON CONNECTION, AND A REMARKABLE GRANDFATHER

In view of the positions William held throughout his life, it is surprising to learn that the Fowler family had lowly origins. Wm. Weekes Fowler was born in 1849 and, contrary to his usual place of birth quoted as Barnwood, Gloucs, he personally recorded his place of birth on the 1911 census form as Tavistock, Devon; in 1911 he was living in the Earley vicarage with wife Anne Frances, son William Thomas and domestic servant Emma Crisfield. His father, the Revd. Hugh Fowler, wrote an account of William's remarkable grandfather, Thomas Fowler. Thomas was born in 1777 in Great Torrington of humble parentage, his father being a cooper. He was an exceptional young man. Hugh wrote of Thomas:

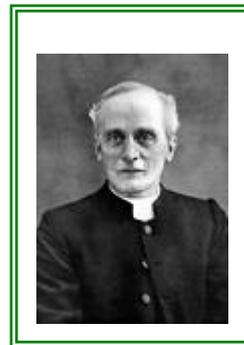
"He received the barest rudiments of education—not more, certainly, than the three R's—at a small school here. He was apprenticed at an early age—about 13 or 14 I think to a fellmonger (one who removes hair or wool from hides in preparation for leather-making). It was at this time that his taste for mathematical study began to develop itself. I have here, and I shall always retain as an heirloom, the very book, Ward's Mathematician's Guide, the only one on the subject which he for a long time possessed. This book he thoroughly mastered,

and that without the slightest help from anyone. No one could have been more entirely self taught than he was. Mathematicians in those days were very scarce in this part of Devon, and probably elsewhere, even in the great centres of education."

Thomas went on to invent a superior form of convective heating, the thermosiphon, which had only ever been preceded by the Roman hypocaust, and was angered when this was pirated by others. He also invented an early form of computer which some experts consider superior to Charles Babbage's, but did not receive recognition for this. Ten years after being apprenticed at 13 or 14 he became a printer and bookseller. He was a church organist, treasurer of the local Poor Law Union and became a partner in a local bank. Pretty good for a man who started out processing the hides of sheep! His son Hugh paid for a window to be installed in St. Michael's, Torrington showing the thermosiphon. Hugh entered university, something denied to Thomas and became vicar of Barnwood, Gloucs.

SO WHAT OF THE MAN HIMSELF?

William Weekes Fowler followed in his father's footsteps, ministering to his Earley parishioners. Ernest Dormer, author of *The Parish & Church of Saint Peter, Earley* (1944) knew him well. He wrote that 'his modest appraisal of himself, his genial manner, and his rich store of knowledge were all traits that endeared him to his parishioners and a much wider field of acquaintanceship. His courtesy and kindness were proverbial. His bete-noir was old bottles, jam jars and artificial wreaths on graves in the churchyard. Not that he was averse to floral tributes, far from it. He loved flowers, as many will recall who saw the profusion of daffodils, narcissi and tulips in the old vicarage garden....those invited to supper at the vicarage could enjoy his good humour, wit and lively conversation.' Living at the old vicarage had its drawbacks; in 1909 its terrible condition was noted at a vestry meeting and part of it was condemned as unsafe and unfit for habitation. It was rebuilt after his death. He died suddenly in the vestry just before a morning service on June 9th 1923. He is buried in the churchyard and on March 16th 1924 a stained glass window was dedicated by the Archdeacon of Berkshire to his memory.



(Canon Fowler's collection is held at Wollaton Hall, Nottingham. His name in Google will bring up many hits!)

RESCUE - the big rubbish pick-up in Earley organised by the **EEG**
 A report by Jean Hackett who gave her time up to organise the event

15th March: A successful day, with 105 volunteers over the 2 sessions, and 90 bags of rubbish. Collections in the morning were at **Thames Valley Park Rowing Club** (7 volunteers, including Sea Scouts), on the footpath leading from **Cutbush Lane to Paddick Drive** and around **Maiden Place** (13), and **Laurel Park** and the field behind (24); in the afternoon 1 group (37) went through the woods to near **Brookside Close** and then along the pedestrianised part of **Gipsy Lane as far as Kilnsea Drive**, and a second, consisting mainly of Abbey Junior School pupils and their parents (24) went round **Riverside Park**. Quantities collected were:



Thames Valley Park	8 black bags (landfill)	2 of cans and plastic bottles	2 of glass and bottles
Paddick Drive	12 black bags	2 of cans and plastic bottles	2 of glass and bottles
Laurel Park	15 black bags	2 of cans and plastic bottles	1 of glass and bottles
Reserve and Gipsy Lane	17 black bags	5 of cans and plastic bottles	4 of glass and bottles
Riverside Park	11 black bags	4 of cans and plastic bottles	3 of glass and bottles

Our thanks to all who turned out to help.

Jean

Spot the Reserve Butterflies

Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve boasts a third of the British butterflies

Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, Red Admiral (partial migrant), Painted Lady (Migrant)
 Small White, Large White, Green-veined White, Orange Tip, Brimstone
 Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet
 Holly Blue, Common Blue, Brown Argus, Purple Hairstreak (Top of oaks), Small Copper
 Large Skipper, Essex Skipper, Small Skipper
 How many can you spot in the Reserve or in your garden?

GREEN HEROES: Marc Ona Essangui, Gabon - winner of the international Goldman environmental prize



Deep inside **Gabon's** rainforest, is a sacred place bathed in a permanent rainbow.

The breathtaking **Kangou Falls** have inspired awe among the local pygmy and Bantu ethnic groups for centuries. They believe that many of their ancestors originated in these frothy pools, explains **Marc Ona Essangui**, an environmentalist who has been jailed for his fight to protect Gabon's rainforest.

Ona, who has been an activist since he developed polio as a child, campaigning for disabled rights and the environment, says: "My fight is the fight of all the people concerned with the survival of the planet. Our forest is home to the most extraordinary biodiversity. It is also a huge natural pharmacy. To destroy it would mean the ruin of humanity."

On April 19th Ona, 45, won the Goldman environmental prize, the world's richest prize for grassroots environmentalists, for his fight to save Gabon's protected Ivindo national park against development. He will share the \$900,000 (£607,000) prize with the winners from six continental regions.

The Ivindo park, created in 2002 to protect the Kangou Falls, also provides a habitat for the forest elephants, chimpanzees and thousands of rare plants and animals. It provides local people with water and fish. The Chinese want to develop a huge \$3.5bn iron ore mining development, and had the backing of Gabon's President, who allowed the Chinese consortium to construct a road directly through the park to the waterfalls, opening up the forest to poachers which resulted in many elephant deaths. Due to Ona's intervention the road has now been rerouted through the less protected area. He and other activists pay a heavy price for their actions. He has been refused to leave the country three times, he and his family have been evicted, and in December 2008 he and four other activists were imprisoned for "destabilising the state through propaganda".

"I am not afraid," Ona says with a sharp laugh. "It is too late for this. We are in this fight. If they want to get me, they'll get me. We have to protect our forests. It is our country, it is our duty." (Source: *Guardian* website)

MEMORIES OF MOVING TO EARLEY TO ESCAPE THE WAR IN LONDON: David moved to Earley to stay with relatives at No. 17 Salcombe Drive after the first bombs dropped on London.

MEMORIES OF WAR

The fathers of another seven children in the Drive were away with the services. Only one or two were stationed in this country and came home regularly. Elderly men or those like Uncle Bob, in reserved occupations, still lived at home. Neighbours always helped us with odd jobs and Mr. Hunt used to come and dig the garden so that my mother could grow vegetables.

Occasionally my mother and I went to London on the train to visit friends and relatives. There was a poster on Earley station asking 'Is your journey really necessary?' I didn't think that ours was and imagined that we should be turned off the train at the wrong station after showing our identity cards to the authorities. One day we were waiting at Reading station when a long train came in. It was full of injured troops. They were bandaged, often bloody, and many were wearing light blue uniforms with red ties which denoted wounded servicemen. My mother assured me that they were all going to be well again, but I saw men with missing arms and legs and faces completely covered in bandages.

Long convoys of army trucks, bren-gun carriers and tanks moved slowly along the Wokingham Road in Earley. When they stopped we children would ask the soldiers for bread. We weren't hungry but there was an excitement about eating army bread. We filled the soldiers' water bottles, although sometimes we took so long that the convoy was already moving again and we gave the bottles to any soldier.

We had a favourite game in the road. We all assumed names of generals and marshalled our imaginary armies against each other. There was Churchill, Montgomery, Eisenhower and Stalin against Hitler, Rommel, Mussolini and Ribbentrop. I was General Smuts and we weren't too sure whose side he was on but Smut became my nickname.

The war was never far away. We collected hips and haws from the hedges to take to school as well as newspapers called 'salvage' and books for the war effort. I worked out that if the Germans landed when I was in the Maiden Erlegh grounds, I should be able to disappear into one of my camps before they caught me. In fact I used to practise running away and once round a bend in the path I would fling myself sideways into the bracken and lay there motionless. I also felt safe running up to the post-box on the end of the Drive to post a letter for my mother. My worry was that once I was beyond the post-box and out on the Wokingham Road, they could land behind me and cut me off. Aunt Bobby who had managed to escape from Singapore had the answer. 'Pepper'" she said, "in their eyes. They won't be able to do anything then!"

A V 1 rocket exploded one night in a field near to us. I was able to inform my mother when I came home from school the next day that Farmer Bunce had been ploughing his field at the time and had shot up into the air, had done three somersaults and came back down again onto his tractor.

One foggy day a Tiger Moth aircraft made a forced landing in the field at the back of our house. I came into

the kitchen to find my mother under the kitchen sink telling me to get down.

HAPPY CHILDHOOD DAYS IN MAIDEN ERLEGH ESTATE

There were nine other children of my age who lived in Salcombe Drive. Some were refugees from London like me. We used to gather up and go to school together under the supervision of a mother or two. We soon formed a gang which played out in the road in the light evenings



(Maiden Erlegh House can just be seen in the distance)

and school holidays. I was always popular because our garden backed on to the fields, woods and lake of Maiden Erlegh Estate. It was once the stately home of Solomon Joel who made his fortune dealing in diamonds from South Africa.

The grounds were like tamed Nature and I loved it over there. The estate was deserted and unsupervised. Once over the fence we could pick baskets of blackberries in a small field, collect conkers from under a huge horse chestnut tree and sweet chestnuts from a tree that dropped the prickly cases in October. Making camps in the woods absorbed us for hours. There were birds' nests to find, trees to be climbed, and birds, butterflies and flowers to be identified from books. We picked armfuls of bluebells in May. In the autumn Auntie Elsie made blackberry and apple jam and roasted the chestnuts on a shovel in the coal fire. Playing conkers made a change from the other playground games of marbles and cigarette cards. Our parents allowed us over there unsupervised but we were forbidden to go to the lake, and that was where we were to be found most days. We once set sail, two at a time, in a barrel that we found, aiming for a summer house on the island. After several minutes of dizzying circles we gave up. Sometimes we went to a dam at one end of the lake and walked across its narrow top; mostly we pushed with sticks at the punts chained up in the boathouse until the day that Christopher fell in; he clung to the catwalk yelling for help. We ran up and down, shouting 'Oh', oh, oh!' in fright, all except Anthony Pickford, who pulled Christopher up and out. I felt ashamed. We could not think what Christopher's mother would say. Nobody made a fuss of Anthony, but I shall never forget his coolness and bravery. These days I see the T.V. programme filming the awards made to brave children and I think of Anthony.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

Good news for bees: a consortium of the government, charities and research establishments have pledged £10 million towards research into the worrying decline of bee colonies in the US, Canada and Europe (but not Australia), possible causes being new diseases and pests, as well as habitat loss, the inappropriate use of chemicals in farming, and poor weather conditions. Research into declining numbers of bumble bees will also be included. It is generally held that one in three mouthfuls of the food that we eat is bee-pollinated. Without effective pollination, the planet could face higher food costs and potential shortages. (See Issue 15 newsletter)

Good news on orangutans: In April conservationists discovered a new population of **orangutans** in a remote,

mountainous corner of **Indonesia** - perhaps as many as 2,000 - giving a rare boost to one of the world's most endangered great apes. A team surveying forests nestled between jagged, limestone cliffs on the eastern edge of Borneo Island counted 219 orangutan nests, indicating a "substantial" number of the animals, said Erik Meijaard, a senior ecologist at the U.S.-based Nature Conservancy. "We can't say for sure how many," he said, but even the most cautious estimate would indicate "several hundred at least, maybe 1,000 or 2,000 even." The team also encountered an adult male, which angrily threw branches as they tried to take photos, and a mother and child. The orangutan, also known as the "Man of the Forest", clearly did not welcome the other men in the forest!

EARLEY NEWS and WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Street Trees: Earley residents have local farmers to thank for planting many of our veteran trees in the past. They often mark what was once the boundary of an old field or lane. The local authorities and landowners have also planted some of our older trees on more recent roads. Most people now live in towns and cities so we should admire and treasure them. They face many threats: traffic pollution, salt from the roads in icy weather, heedless road works, pipe-work by utility companies, soil compaction from paving slabs blocking oxygen to roots, inexpert pruning and car parking near their roots. What we can thank them for: cool shade, acting as windbreaks, locking up carbon emissions, providing oxygen, giving a home to wildlife, soaking up flood water, softening the hard lines of our streets, helping people recover more quickly from illness if they can see trees, and making life in an urban area far more pleasurable. Very often they are wrongly accused of causing subsidence which may, in fact, be due to our present obsession with paving over our drives resulting in less water going into the soil, resulting in shrinkage. Trees in some cities are being felled at a horrifying rate; Chris Baines says "The big trees in our towns are irreplaceable in our lifetime." Next time you walk the streets of Earley, be sure to notice our many trees and give thanks. (Ref: no.72 'Broadleaf' magazine of the Woodland Trust. There are now over 2,000 veteran trees on the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Assn. database.)



More Litter: Some committee members were invited to attend a meeting of the Campaign against Waste group on Monday 30th March at the re3 Education Centre at Smallmead; a tour of the Materials Recycling Facility was on the agenda which proved very informative. EEG members also took part in the Wokingham Borough **Big Tidy** litter event, and collected a total of 9 black bags, 2 orange bags (cans and plastics) and 1 other orange bag (bottles and glass), plus assorted items: not at all bad, considering the size of the group. The full report by Jean can be found on www.earlyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk. If anyone out there does regular litter picking, please tell us about it.

A visit to Moor Copse, Tidmarsh: A party under the expert guidance of our member Anne Booth, who is the reserve Warden, visited this BBOWT Reserve and had a lovely time amongst the bluebells, with the Pang River flowing nearby. There is much to see; Anne regularly leads work parties in coppicing amongst other things to keep the woods looking beautiful and full of wildlife.



Anne second from right

Dawn chorus event, May 10th

The weather was glorious; it was worth rising at 5.30 a.m. to see the Maiden Erlegh Reserve looking its finest, with mist rising on the lake, the woods full of flowers and trees at their spring best. We are so fortunate to have this green oasis. Ray Reedman generously shared his enthusiasm and expertise with eighteen of us, and tuned our ears into the very varied bird-song. Bonuses were seeing a great spotted woodpecker drumming away on an old oak-tree branch, and two foxes foraging in the field. It was a magical morning. Everyone should do this once in their lifetime. A list of birds will appear on our website courtesy of Paul.

Sightings:

Alice March 2: Green woodpecker; **March 15:** Goldcrest still around, on fat feeders and on our tall Scots pine; also 2 reed buntings, coal tits; goldfinches are almost daily feeders on the nyger seed; 2 Comma butterflies; **March 17** a greenfinch and chaffinch - don't see them very often now.

Elaine, 20 March: Location: Moor Copse Close. During the last couple of months we have regularly sighted long-tailed tits in our garden. In the last week to ten days we have watched them pottering about, collecting feathers so think they are building a nest in the area. During the last two days we have not seen them so think they may have finished their building and are sitting on a nest. Also during the garden bird-watch we sighted a goldcrest and have seen him on one other occasion.

Personal Nature Notes from Val, Wokingham Road: During the snow, when it was very thick on the ground and ready for snowballs, my resident squirrel was seen with clumps of white stuff in his mouth, dashing up and down the tree. On looking further I saw that he had little balls of snow in his mouth. Oh dear, I thought, what does he know about the weather, he's making an igloo. But I wonder what he thought the next day: it had all melted. Never seen a squirrel do this before. He's very good, doesn't raid bird tables as he has his own hanging basket with nuts.

Also this week, two unusual doves were feeding on the lawn and looking them up in my book saw they were stock doves. Lovely pair with their emerald-feathered necks. The kites are often down if you have spare chicken pieces, etc. I put food on an old shed and it's amazing how quickly they fly down to pick it up.

My foxes are still around in the garden. Are you sure they kill hedgehogs? I've seen crows attack hedgehogs? Also foxes do not kill or harm cats as my foxes get chased away by the local cat; but it was lovely last year to see the cubs all playing together with the cat, mostly tail catching. A pair of jays come for nuts; they pick up about six peanuts but the pigeons can beat them to that taking 20...then try and fly! Robins, finches, sparrows, 10 blackbirds, when do they ever stop feeding? 2 thrushes, blue tits looking in boxes, and great tits, little jenny wrens, two noisy crows, ring doves. It's certainly worth gardening when they all sit and sing in the bushes around, so now waiting for the next generation to watch. Blow the housework!

Thanks to all our contributors.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS

June: **Sunday 7th June Walk in Highwood Local Nature Reserve**, Woodley. **2-4 p.m.** Meet at the Wokingham Borough notice board in Kingfisher Drive. From the Three Tuns, take Church Road, right into Woodlands Avenue, turn right at roundabout into Fairwater Drive, then right into Kingfisher Drive. A fair distance down on the right find the notice board and bar gate (for access Wokingham Borough vehicles to the Reserve). Park in road. We will meet there at 2.00 p.m. Everyone welcome.

July: **Sunday 19th July** Visit to **London Wetland Centre** which opens 9.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Meet at Earley Station at **8.10 a.m.** to catch 8.29 train to Barnes, (every 30 minutes) involving one change, journey about 1 hr 15 mins, then 15 minute walk.

(As Sunday, may be necessary to purchase ticket from automatic machine.)

Free to WWT members. Charges: including Gift Aid -

Adult: £9.50

Concession: £7.10 (over 65 years, full-time students, unemployed)

Child: £5.25 (4-16 years)

Family: £26.55 (2 adults & 2 children, 4-16 years)

Children (under 4 years): Free

Essential helpers assisting disabled visitors: Free

August: **Saturday 1st August Green Fair**, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

August: **Wednesday, 5th August Children's Bug Hunt** in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

September: **Tuesday, 22nd September** Talk on **Birds of the Farne Islands** by Ray Reedman, **7.30 to 9.30 p.m.** venue Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre.

October: **To be decided**

November: **Tuesday, 17th November Red Kite talk** by Brian Clews, **7.30 to 9.30 p.m.**, venue Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre

December: **Monday 14th December EEG Christmas Social**, **7.30 p.m.** at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road, Earley. All welcome. Music, Christmas refreshments.

You can check our events on the website, posters on local notice-boards, or the local press.

Meeting of the Moth Group every second Thursday of the month; volunteer work party in Maiden Erlegh Reserve every Wednesday morning. For both, contact Grahame Hawker on 07796170689.

Bits and Pieces

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 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 anyone 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 Liz Wild e.a.wild@reading.ac.uk. Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or send her an e-mail.

Can you offer active help to the Group? Phone 0118 962 0004 if you can. If you have no expertise and would like to get involved, you may be able to give practical help. We also need people with some expertise to undertake surveys of small habitats in Earley. To join the Earley Veteran Tree Survey phone 0118 962 0004.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre :There is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley. Their mission is to take low cost organic food out to the people, bypassing the supermarkets which charge a lot for organics. They hold markets at the Silverdale Centre on Fridays, 5pm to 8.15 pm. They have a website giving dates www.truefood.coop

Pet Fayre 9 Maiden Lane Centre Lower Earley : A small independent shop, with 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 9266512, e mail enquiries@petfayre-reading.co.uk. or go on the comprehensive website www.petfayre-reading.co.uk

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