

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 3 MARCH 2006

Earley - Old English 'Earnley -eagle wood'

Spring is on our Earley doorstep. By March we should be able to spot the early signs of young queen bumble bees, still dazed by the winter cold, visiting the earliest spring flowers and, with luck, a Brimstone butterfly. Spring flowers, like lesser celandine, should be appearing and there will be the excitement of increasing bird activity. We report on the bumblebee talk by our Chairman, Stuart Hine, and throw some light on these lovely creatures, so vital to the well-being of our flowers and us (p.6). Get your camera out and let us have your photographic gems of bumblebees. Earley human residents will be busy with their blossoming gardens, but the local foxes will be just as busy, nurturing their newborn cubs, and soon hedgehogs and bats will be on the move. Read two items on Earley wildlife from members (p.5). After the gloom of January and February, spring is probably the most uplifting time of the year. However, if your lack of fitness is making you depressed, take our walk, or read "Grahame's Working Parties", forget the gym and find out how you can, for free, get fit and help the environment at the same time (p. 3). Or, you can help in our RESCUE Litter project (p.7). We now have a new website (see below) and, to discover what's happening further afield, read "News from Beyond Earley" (p.4) to check out what's going on in the global village.



Hooray! Our website's up and running

Thanks to the sterling efforts of Paul Beckett, our Website Manager, we now have a fully operational website www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk. Some of the pages are not complete yet but will be added to over the next few months. Surfers can now read Latest News, check Upcoming Events, can join the EEG in Downloads by printing out a Membership Form or fill in an e mail to our Membership Secretary, access other interesting sites in Links, read archived Newsletters, and take part in various surveys including our own on the Birds page under Survey.

Want to access the websites ?
No computer? No problem. Phone your local library for help

Get to know your Earley A short stroll along the Loddon

And we do mean short, about 35 mins!

Lower Earley Woods and Meadows

For a family stroll to counteract that big meal, or an energy-sapping power walk for the kids, take the **northward** path where Rushey Way meets Lower Earley Way at the Sindlesham roundabout. For a few yards this is parallel with Lower Earley Way and then skirts the west bank of the River Loddon, gradually moving away from the din of the traffic. Following this path, you eventually come to a flight of steps, (which would take you out onto the Wokingham Road). Turn left at the steps and follow the path in a circular direction to arrive back where you started. Pause when you get to the notice board there. It's worth studying, being very attractively illustrated, with lyrical details on the past history of the area you've just circulated. For instance, did you know you are treading in the footsteps of very early man, or that people used to set up eel traps on the Loddon until the recent past?

Eagles in Earley? Or What's In a Name?



The origin of 'Earley' has provoked a lot of discussion. It features in the Domesday Book as 'herlei'. It was also recorded as 'Arle' in 1297. 'Arley' as a place name in other counties was known to derive from the Old English 'earn-leah' meaning 'eagle-wood', hence the proposition that Earley came from 'earn-leah', sometimes translated as 'eagle's wood' or 'field of eagles'. If your eyes haven't yet glazed over, read on as to a possible tangible connection with eagles. In *Birds Britannica* there is an entry for Earley (yes, we're famous!) under White Tailed Eagle (Sea Eagle). It was a winter visitor in recent times, several being shot in Windsor Great Park in Victorian times. But here's the interesting bit. The book goes on:

"The intriguing evidence contained in English place names suggests that at one time white-tailed eagles also bred in heavily wooded parts of England as far south as Devon. The Anglo-Saxon name for eagle was *erne* or *earn*. ..
....(Margaret) Gelling found consistent associations with

(Note: the BBC Springwatch featured these eagles last year. Hopefully they'll do so again in 2006)

This bird of prey is very much alive in Earley

The Sparrowhawk

One member had a close encounter on 15 Feb. "*Had a head-on encounter with a sparrowhawk this a.m. on cycleway beyond ASDA. Fortunately it swerved - I had no time to react but it managed to. There was just an incredibly fast-moving blur and a memory of barred underside of tail as it went over me.*" Its aerial skills proved to be superior to John's cycling skills! Sparrowhawks have been sighted in gardens by several members during the winter. It's a secretive bird of prey with very mixed fortunes. A few hundred years ago it would have been valued by falconers for providing a meal for the pot. Even as recently as the early 1900s the use of sparrowhawks in Hungary to hunt quails was still in vogue. In the UK it would frequently feel the double barrel of a keeper's shotgun, but by the 1950s it was a common bird of prey, the war putting a stop to the killing. Then the full effects of toxic chemicals in farming decimated it, but with regulations on these it's now on the way

habitats and landscapes suitable for white-tailed eagle, such as *earn-leah*, an Old English name for 'eagle-wood' (e.g. *Arley, Cheshire, Earley, Berkshire*)...Most of the woodland names cluster around major river systems like the Severn (Areley, 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' pages 173-81 in *Leeds Studies in English* {eds Thorlac Turville Petre and Margaret Gelling} University of Leeds 1987.)" A small prize for anyone who can track this down! They have been reintroduced successfully into Scotland (see note below). There are currently plans for a possible reintroduction of these eagles into East Anglia. www.english-nature.org.uk/about/meetings/GCP0536.pdf, see top of page 2

Just one more thing. If you visit the Lower Earley Woods and Meadows Park, **south of Rushey Way**, near Sindlesham Mill roundabout, you will find a notice board featuring the white-tailed eagle. The board confidently asserts "Over 1000 years ago white tailed sea eagles once swept across the flooded plains of the River Loddon hunting for fish." Well, evidence suggests it could be true.

up. The male is smaller than the female. It eats many small creatures and birds, even bigger birds like wood pigeons. It will skim rapidly over fields, along lanes or roads, perhaps making for the nearest hedge, skirting this and darting through any gaps or gates. It seldom rises more than hedge height, except for when taking up a watching position on the branch of a tree, perhaps near a bird feeding station. The victim is eaten on the ground, the bird standing on its kill and spreading its wings like a tent, ripping off the feathers or fur. Both male and female build the nest, often using an old crow's nest. Four to six eggs will be laid in May, but only the female incubates them. Visit the [RSPB website](http://www.rspb.org.uk) or www.birdsofbritain.co.uk/bird-guide/sparrowhawk.htm. Photo copyright and courtesy of [Gary Cox](#). Click on his name to see some lovely natural history photography.



GRAHAME'S WORKING PARTIES

Get Fit For Free by Jean, our co-ordinator for Hillside

I was delighted to see an item, tucked away at the end of the December issue of the *Newsletter*, in which Grahame offered members of the group the chance to be involved in practical work on Wednesdays, and rang him to say that I was interested in helping, but couldn't guarantee to be available every Wednesday. I duly turned up early in December at the appointed time, to find that I was one of two volunteers that day. We spent a productive morning removing ground-covering ivy from a piece of woodland near the path leading down to the weir end of the lake in the local Nature Reserve: I hope the difference is noticeable! As I had other arrangements for the afternoon, I finished at lunch-time, but Alex, the other volunteer (who had attended several sessions), stayed on to help with the afternoon project.

I had assumed that everyone was busy before Christmas (I certainly wasn't free again on a Wednesday in December), but that more people would turn up after Christmas. I arrived on the first Wednesday in January to find that this time I was the only volunteer! Again, I stayed only for the morning, but three of us spent a very productive time removing brambles from Old Pond Copse, down below the weir in the area between the Silverdale Road gardens and Laurel Park – and I rediscovered some little-used muscles!

Since then, I've spent 2 more Wednesday mornings, again on the reserve round the

Join Earley Town Council's Senior Park Ranger, Grahame Hawker, to help with practical conservation **each Wednesday**. Meet at the **Interpretation Centre on Instow Road, Earley at 9.30 am**. Wear old clothes and stout footwear and bring a packed lunch if you intend to stay all day. (Phone Grahame on 0779 617 0689 for further details).

lake. For the first session, a group of 6 people from CROW (Conserving Reading On Wednesdays) arrived, so we were able to finish clearing the rest of the Old Pond Copse brambles that morning: subsequently, that area has been replanted with saplings, which will make quite a difference. There were 2 of us for the second session, in early February, plus Gary from ETC, and we did a variety of tasks: pruning the wildlife garden in Instow Road, re-marking the boundaries of one set of steps from Laurel Park into Old Pond Copse, measuring the amount of chicken wire required to re-surface the board-walk further along that path (towards Egremont Drive), and putting up a new fence near the weir, so that the wild flowers there have a chance to survive without being trodden down.

I would like to commend Grahame on this initiative (which has given him the chance to work out that there are over 100 projects on which the Park Rangers need practical help), and suggest that this is a good way for anyone else who is free to work off the post-Christmas/midwinter feeling. See you soon?
Jean Hackett



“WELCOME TO MAIDEN ERLEGH LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Population 50 billion”

Seen this sign at the entrance to Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, and doubted its veracity? Well, think about this : “In a gram of soil, there may be 1 billion individual single-celled organisms and millions more multicells. In that same soil sample, there may be 4,000 different species — almost all of them completely unknown to scientists.” (David Suzuki).

A Canadian website for children:

<http://school.discovery.com/schooladventures/soil/>

Check it out! Try the soil safari.

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

WOODCOCK (from Jan on 22.11.05) I disturbed a woodcock in the woods at Shinfield Park (nearly Earley!) today. I've never seen one there before.

FOX (from Rosemary 28.11.05) Sighting of fox, adult, on pathway between Beech Lane and Miller homes (road to Asda) at 5.10. Took off into brambles. Have also seen foxes in dip of Beech Lane

SPARROW (from Brian 10.1.06) I saw my first sparrow of the year today, and haven't yet seen a chaffinch anywhere.

A VARIETY OF BIRDS (from Dave and Jean 10.1.06) We have had regular visits from a male Blackcap, that is completely new. He likes the nuts but has not touched apples (I believe they are fond of fruit). Having said that we have not seen him for a couple of days now.

Our best day in December was the 29th, when at 10.40hrs, we had the following all within a few minutes - Green Woodpecker, who stayed for 10 minutes digging deep in the lawn, Pigeon, C/finch x 2, Sparrows x 2, Robin, Thrush, Blackbirds x 3, Collar neck Dove, Long Tail Tits x 2 and the Black Cap.

BLACKCAP (from Paul 21.1.06) Having seen Jean and Dave's email I thought I would add the fact I have also been getting regular visits from some Blackcaps since some time in December, having not seen them before. My feeders get visits from an adult with the Blackcap and also a juvenile with the "Red/brown" cap.

Does anybody know if these are rare visitors to this area or have we just not noticed them before? (from Liz 23.1.06) I saw my first Blackcaps (two males) in December and I saw one with a brown cap on Saturday and again this morning.

BRAMBLINGS (from Anne 15.2.06) I had a first for my garden, birdwise, last week when I had 5 [Bramblings](#) under the niger seed feeder picking up the seeds the goldfinches had spilt! Very exciting as I haven't seen them before.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

World news on the environment lately has been so doom-laden that the majority prefer to ignore it, so if you're part of that majority, skip this, but it won't go away!

Protests in the Streets: In December to coincide with the UN conference to work out a future policy on reduction of greenhouse gases, thousands over the world (including some Earley residents) took to the streets to protest over global warming. This is no longer in doubt, except by the misguided few. Just a few of the problems: ice in the Arctic and Antarctic Oceans melting at a faster rate than first supposed, glaciers shrinking, more violent and frequent hurricanes occurring - the list is huge. And now talk of water wars. All devastating news, not only for us but for wildlife.

Find out more on

www.royalsoc.ac.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=1630

– **“We are past the point of no return”** :

James Lovelock, a highly respected environmentalist, posited the idea that Earth regulated itself, chemically and atmospherically to keep fit for life as if it were a giant organism, and called it Gaia. He is now so pessimistic at the effects of climate control that he prophesies we have reached the point of no return in our treatment of our planet. Many top scientists find this a step too far, but hope it will provoke serious debate on what nations should do to reverse the damage, or at least mitigate it.

Now for some partially good news -

Star-gazing may improve: Most of

us hardly give the night sky more than a passing glance. It's not surprising when the sky glow over Reading makes seeing most stars impossible. Early people venerated them. Some fifty odd years ago children could gaze in awe at the Milky Way. Now very little of the UK can experience real darkness. Some of the main offenders are security lights, floodlights on roads, supermarket car parks, sports grounds and even churches. We can't blame anyone but ourselves. Not only humans are affected but wildlife, too. Birds are singing in Earley at 1am in January, and on any winter night 100,000 robins may be singing, unable to tell day from night (British Trust for Ornithology). Nocturnal animals are confused by it. Some bats dislike the light, hawkmoths only mate on dark, moonless nights, glow-worms also need the dark for mating, and fish prefer it to be dark at night. It's the upward direction of the lighting which is the problem. 400 churches were floodlit for the Millennium, mostly lit from the ground. Attractive though that may be, what's wrong with the imposing dark, dramatic silhouette of a church against the night sky? Things are improving; Highways Agency rules now require new lights to point down, and from April 1st new legislation will force local authorities granting planning permission to ensure that outdoor lighting does not add to light pollution.



Light pollution wastes finite energy resources – it takes 4.3 years for lights shining upwards to reach the nearest star, and there is unlikely to be anyone there who wants it!

<http://www.cpre.org.uk/campaigns/landscape-and-beauty/light-pollution/>

<http://www.dark-skies.org.uk/> (Click on Reading on map) So, if drought, hurricanes, flooding, or perpetual cold if and when the Gulf Stream packs in, cause you grief, you may at least have a clear view of the night sky!

WILDLIFE IN AN EARLEY GARDEN

One of our members in Beech Lane took part in the [Big Bird Watch](#) in January for the RSPB (see below). She has a delightful, old-fashioned garden in the nicest sense and is a keen bird watcher, putting plenty of food out for birds. When she moved into the house in 1963 the old hawthorn hedge from the field was still there, and also part of an old orchard. One of the apple trees was probably 70 years

old then, making a planting date of the late 1800s. Unfortunately this had to be removed because of honey fungus. The hedge remains, but has been added to with other planting. Beyond the rear garden, a stream, still unculverted in parts, runs down to the Maiden Erlegh Lake. This was the line of the old Maiden Erlegh Lane until the Enclosures, when it was re-routed and became the new Beech Lane.

The Big Bird Watch List

seen in 1 hour

Blackcap	2
Chaffinch	2
Nuthatch	1
Sparrow	5
Blue tit	2
Robin	2
Great tit	2
Collared dove	2
Wood pigeon	3
Coal tit	1
Greenfinch	1
Dunnock	2
Blackbird	3



Birds seen at other times

Sparrowhawk	1 Jan
Green woodpecker	Dec/Jan
Great spotted WP	1 Dec
Goldcrest	1 Nov
Greenfinch	2 Most days
Magpie	3-4 "
Starling	Occasional

Foxes and squirrels also visit the garden

Birds in Maiden Erlegh by one of our youngest members, Hannah Trout (aged 10)

My interest in birds started when I was about three. My first expedition was in the university grounds, dressed as a tree in green with a flowery jumper, fun but rather unsuccessful.

When I moved here a couple of years ago I saw quite a few birds and I would like to share some of them with you. This time last year **redwings** visited our back garden for the first time. I think they stopped on their migration to eat the berries. I have tried to encourage other birds to come to my back garden by making a bird table with my friend Phillipa. We have recently put up a seed feeder as well which attracts **tits** and **robins**. As I was climbing in the back hedge I found a bird's nest, then, on the ground, some broken egg shells. My friend Zoe identified them as **blackbird** eggs. I hope we see the chicks this year.

Another good viewing opportunity is the lake and as I am sure you'll know last year the swans had **cygnets**. My brother and I enjoyed going down to the lake daily to see the mother swan on her eggs. We also enjoyed watching the father swan chasing the geese away.

I am also pleased that **Red Kites** have been making a come back. I have seen a couple of them at different times in Earley.

Well done, Hannah!

[Reading Ornithological Club](#) are doing a **red kite/buzzard** survey in Berkshire. Please send details – where you saw them (map ref if poss), date, number of birds, what they were doing, your name and address (or e mail) – to Mike Turton, 7 Fawcett Crescent, Woodley RG65 3HX, or kiteandbuzzardsurvey@theroc.org.uk.

The Humble Bumble Bee

Our chairman, Stuart Hine, gave a very interesting talk on bumble bees on Feb 22nd. Stuart is a leading entomologist at the Natural History Museum, and knows his subject well. What came through was his admiration of and delight in these little creatures, which transferred to his audience. Here are just a few of the points he covered.

There are 26 species listed for the UK, 20 true BB, which lead a social life, and 6 cuckoo BB. They are doing well in gardens but not on chalk grassland. We should expect to find at least 6 or 7 in our Earley Gardens:

BUFF TAILED *Bombus terrestris*, which is very common and one of the largest

WHITE TAILED *B. lucorum*

COMMON CARDER BEE *B. pascuorum*, a gingery colour, likes dead-nettle, as does

GARDEN BUMBLE BEE *B. hortorum*, two yellow stripes on the thorax

RED TAILED *B. lapidarius*

EARLY *B. pratorum*, this nests early in the year, used to be the earliest but not now.

The seventh is a cuckoo BB: VESTAL CUCKOO BEE. As you would expect, the cuckoo BB lays its eggs in the nest of other social species. It may hide in the nest for while to take on the smell of the colony.

Books: Field Guide to the Bumblebees of Great Britain and Ireland Mike Edwards, Martin Jenner
Bumblebees (Naturalists' Handbook) O. E. Prys-Jones, Sarah A. Corbet

A couple of **websites:**

www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/projects/bombus/alphabet.html Find out more about bees
www.insectpix.net/index.htm (how to make bee homes for solitary bees)

A recent phenomenon is the sight of some bees foraging in the garden in December and January. This is likely due to climate change, and that there are now flowers to provide sustenance in winter, a favourite being Mahonia. When they visit your garden, look for the tongue length. These are differing lengths to take advantage of different flowers. Some probe deep into the flower, others steal nectar by biting into the base. Foxgloves, dead-nettles and polyanthus are some of the many plants good for bees.

Beware of BB look-alikes:

Narcissus Bulb Fly

Bee Fly, in April, has two wings (as all flies have), it may scatter eggs, then larvae crawl into cells of mining bee

Tawny Mining Bee, end of May/June, solitary bee, returns year on year to garden

Hairy Footed Flower Bee, a mining bee, one of the first active insects, must be in your garden, female almost black.

Wool Carder Bee, another solitary bee, and very territorial over its patch.

Want to know more about these popular visitors to our garden? Read the books or look at the websites, see below. But, if you don't want the hassle of identifying them, just enjoy their antics in the garden.

GREEN JARGON

BAP - not a soft roll, but Biodiversity Action Plan. This represents a coming together of the two previous Green Jargon subjects, **Sustainability** (*meeting our needs while ensuring that we leave a healthy and viable world for future generations*) and **Biodiversity** (*the variety of life on Earth and the natural patterns it forms*). BAP came about when many countries got together at an **Earth Summit in Rio** in 1992 to thrash out a shared environmental policy to avert some of the accruing global problems. Not all countries signed up, the USA being notably absent. World leaders agreed on a comprehensive strategy for "sustainable development". Each nation is responsible for its BAP, and this translates down eventually to a local level. For Wokingham District (see the website: www.wokingham.gov.uk), and put in a search for **BAP**.

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP: FORTHCOMING EVENTS

RESCUE Weekend Saturday 18 March and Sunday 19 March 2006: Help clean up Earley litter

This year Earley will again be joining in with RESCUE (Rivers and Environmental Spaces Clean Up Event). This is a huge event, which each year sees thousands of people helping to clean up the Kennet Valley from Hungerford to Reading. Earley Env. Group will be running events in Earley, so why not join in and have some fun while making Earley a more beautiful place to live in? If you can give some time from 10 am to 1pm, or 2 to 5 pm, e-mail Jean Hackett on jeanh149@btinternet.com or phone (0118) 986 1115

Hedgerow Surveying Course Saturday 29 April 2006 at Dinton Pastures. This has been changed from Sat 22 April

A follow-up to the December talk by Dick Greenaway. An all-day course on hedges, with indoor presentation, then practical work in the field. For those who already attended the earlier course, and who may wish to book just for the afternoon, meet at Dinton Pastures at 12.30 for directions to Brook Farm, Barkham. For more information and booking, ring Andy Glencross at 0118 9342016.

Pearman's Copse Walk Sunday 7 May 2006 2.00-4.00 pm. Meet in Ryhill Way (Grid Ref 736 694)

Join the EEG on the first of three summer walks. Pearman's Copse is a remnant of ancient woodland with a wide array of beautiful spring flowers. The terrain is easy going but stout shoes are recommended.

Thames Valley Nature Reserve Walk Sunday 11 June 2006 2.00-4.00pm. Meet at the Waterside Centre off Thames Valley Park Drive (grid ref 737 741)

This will be led by Alastair Driver, who is the National Conservation Manager for the Environment Agency and who has informally advised Oracle and its predecessors on the development of the reserve. Situated on the banks of the River Thames, this beautiful area straddles the Earley/Sonning border and is the finest wetland habitat in the area - a hidden gem. The pathways are well maintained but, again, stout walking shoes are recommended. For those looking for extra exercise, some of us will be walking a short section of the Thames National Pathway to the Bull at Sonning for refreshment.

Ali's Pond LNR The making of a community Nature Reserve. Sunday 16 July 2006 2.00 -4.00 p.m. Meet at Sonning Cricket Club Car Park, Pound Lane, Sonning (grid ref SU 759 752)

Join Alastair Driver for a guided tour around this award winning nature reserve and learn how Alastair's drive and inspiration has turned a dull, lifeless bit of mown grass into an enchanting oasis. We are hoping to apply what we all learn on this day to increase the beauty and value to wildlife of even the very smallest of Earley's open spaces.

Earley Green Fair Saturday 5 Aug 2006 10-3.00 pm The Green Fair site, Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve off Beech Lane. This popular event combines the atmosphere of an English village fete with the chance to learn about green issues, including recycling, wildlife conservation and country crafts.

And don't forget – On the **second Thursday of each month** the Berkshire Moth Group meets at the Interpretation Centre, Instow road, everyone welcome. The meetings start at 7.30 p.m. Meeting dates are 9 Mar, 13 Apr, 11 May, 8 Jun, 13 Jul, 10 Aug, 14 Sep, 12 Oct, 9 Nov and 14 December, and **National Moth Night** is **Saturday 23 September 2006**. Venue to be announced. Again, everyone welcome.

Bits and Pieces

Want to learn how to be a bird watcher? An introduction to Birdwatching

The Wokingham & Bracknell local group of the RSPB is running a short course called 'An Introduction to Birdwatching' at Dinton Pastures, with evening indoor sessions on Wednesday 29 March & 5 April from 7 to 9 pm, and morning outdoor sessions on Sunday 2 & 9 April from 9 to 12. The course covers the basics of birdwatching for novices. The cost is £12 and can be booked through Dinton Pastures on 0118 934 2016 or email countryside@wokingham.gov.uk.

EEG Committee Members can be found on the [website](#) under Contacts, or phone 0118 962 0004 for details.

For Wildlife Survey Forms, go to the website or phone Earley Town Council.

Any comments or contributions to the newsletter to:

sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com or 2 Reeds Avenue, Earley, RG6 5SR. Is there an artist out there who could do small designs or sketches when needed?

If you know anyone who would like to join EEG, membership forms are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995. or on the [website](#) under Downloads, or e mail to Liz Wild, Membership Sec on Contacts page.

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 appear every 2 weeks at the Silverdale Centre on the second & fourth Fridays 5pm to 8.15pm If you're interested they have a website giving dates www.truefood.coop/truefood.html

Pet Fayre 9 Maiden Lane Centre Lower Earley

AA 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, or e mail enquiries@petfayre-reading.co.uk.