



**W**ant to keep a record of wildlife in your garden or local environment? Some of the best-selling books in the past have often been publication of the wildlife sketches and notes made by an ancestor. Some latter-day enthusiasts still prefer the tactile use of pencil and paper or paints (as does member Patricia Brown, page 4), but it's now possible to use a computer to record what you see of wildlife locally. Take a look on page 5 at the article on *Living Record*.

Could you create a wildflower meadow? Garden fashions come and go. For example, 'the latest colour is mauve', 'architectural plants are in this year', 'go for ornamental grasses'...Wildflower meadows have been pronounced

'in' for 2012. Fashions are often passing fancies and let's hope this will not be the fate of wildflower meadows. A horrifying fact is we have lost 98% since WW2, resulting in the loss of a high proportion of the living things that depend on them. Creating a small patch in the garden could help our most precious wildlife. See page 5 for wildflowers good for bumblebees, provided by the Bumblebee Conservation Trust [www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk](http://www.bumblebeeconservation.org.uk).

Growing wildflowers is not an easy option. Most prefer rather impoverished soil, in a sunny spot. It may be necessary to remove existing turves, or top soil before planting or sowing. Yellow rattle is a good choice in the mix as it is semi-parasitic on grass and keeps it under control. Wildflower meadows can be purchased as one metre square carpets, or as mixes. See a list of wildflower sites in Earley on page 7.

Items of special interest:

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## All that glisters... Dishing the dirt on the Kingfisher (cont'd)

And that brings me to the family itself... The urge to reproduce in quantity makes for very neglectful parents: once they leave the nest, the young are fed for no more than two or three days before being deserted by parents which are intent on starting the next brood. As a result, half the young die in the first two weeks, some of starvation, some victims of predators, while others drown while learning to fish. Many more perish during their first winter. By human standards that seems a dreadful story of neglect, but, in Darwinian terms, only the fittest young will survive to perpetuate the genes. After the prolonged freeze of 1962-3, the species was decimated, but their ability to produce many young enabled the survivors to restore the population within a year or two: with reduced competition, more young survived. In short, it just doesn't do to judge these matters by human values: the kingfishers have been around a long while and have the answers to survival as a species. The kookaburra is one.



Ours is therefore known as the *Common* Kingfisher. Its manners and habits are certainly pretty vulgar, but if you are lucky enough to see one perched in the sunlight, you will understand why it makes for beautiful birthday cards.

To see a Kingfisher locally, walk along the Loddon or visit Dinton Pastures. My picture of an adult female (December newsletter) was taken from Bittern Hide at Lavell's Lake, where sticks are placed to tempt them within camera range. The second (left) depicts a young bird (note the shorter bill) which was doing very nicely: we watched it take a whole series of fish. Don't expect to see them easily: sightings are still scarce enough to excite hardened birders. On the other hand watch carefully if the smallest goldfish in your garden pond have been disappearing!

**Ray Reedman**



**Easter Bunny Time** or, *The Bitter Taste of Chocolate*

**Have you thought what it costs to produce your Easter egg?**

**The Ivory Coast leads the world in producing cocoa beans used to make chocolate, where 200,000 children work in the industry. Many of these may be victims of human trafficking or slavery, and subject to exposure to chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Organic eggs would be the best choice for those concerned about this. Another good choice is Fairtrade. FT chocolate will most likely have come from a co-operative of Ghanaian cocoa farmers. Fairtrade would mean that participants farm in a way kind to humans and the environment, work in safe conditions, child labour is banned and women participate in making decisions. One in three cocoa farmers in the co-operative is a woman. Lastly, remember chocolate is good for you!**

[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/products/chocolate\\_products/meet\\_the\\_farmers.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/products/chocolate_products/meet_the_farmers.aspx)

# A Look at Old Earley

## A Voice from the Past – Who Lived in Elm Farm, Elm Lane in 1900?

Searching on Google for Elm Farm, Earley, Paul Burbidge found the EEG website and asked about the occupants of Elm Farm, Earley, c1900. A cousin of his in Cheltenham has a painting entitled '*Elm Farm, Earley*', done by a great aunt, who lived in the Reading area, circa 1900. The painting is an internal view, looking out through a door. He believed his grandfather's family (**Craft**) lived in a house called **Oakleigh** in Earley, and one family member, possibly his father, was a homeopathic chemist in Reading.

The 1881 census shows James Craft, a chemist, employing an assistant and a boy. James, g.grandfather to Paul, lived in Oakleigh, with six children on the census, including Walter, Paul's maternal grandfather. Paul thinks his g.grandfather's shop may have been in London Street, Reading.

Also on the 1881 census is Mary Edith Craft, and she is responsible for the painting mentioned above. She became a prolific painter, later living in a house called Maynard, on the corner of Bath Road and Berkeley Avenue in Reading.



She is buried in St. Peter's in Earley in a grave with Chris, her first husband, on the bottom, then Edith, and then Len, her second husband and brother of her first, on top. It's affectionately known in the family as 'an Aunt Edith sandwich'. Chris had fought in the war in South Africa, and was given a souvenir tin of Cadbury's chocolate to mark the turn of the century from 1899 to 1900; Paul still has the tin, complete with its original chocolate. The grave is next to her parents' grave. Paul spent many days, years ago, when he lived in Bracknell and worked shifts, clearing the weeds, long grass and brambles from that area of the graveyard. Hopefully, Paul will sometime in the future be able to send us a photo of the painting.

Two other family members are also buried in St. Peter's, with a tragic story. Lottie, aged 13 in the 1881 census, had a daughter, Kathleen, who caught what was probably typhoid fever. Lottie, possibly because of certain religious principles, refused medication for Kathleen, nursed her daughter and caught it herself. They both died and are buried with a celtic-cross-style grave.

*A footnote on Elm Farm: In 1881 the resident was bachelor Robert Goddard, farming 200 acres with 5 men and 2 boys. His two elderly unmarried sisters lived with him. The Goddards had been farming in Earley for a very long time. A former resident of Earley, Liz Vincent, was able to inform Paul that the farmer at Elm Farm in 1900 went by the name of Hatch. If anyone can add any information or find the graves mentioned, please let us know.*

## More local wild flowers: Illustrations by Patricia, an EEG member

Source of information: Geoffrey Grigson, *The Englishman's Flora*, first published 1958. Geoffrey Grigson (1905-1985) was one of seven sons of a Norfolk clergyman, five of whom died in WW1 and 2. He was greatly talented: a poet, journalist, teacher and broadcaster. Very few books are full of so many fascinating and unknown facts about our much loved wild flowers, and their colourful, local names.



Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*), mediaeval latin 'prima rosa', the 'first rose' of the year. Also called BUTTER ROSE, Dev; DARLING OF APRIL, Som; MAY-FLOOER, Shet. In 1619 to distinguish the primrose from the cowslip Parkinson in his *Paradisus* wrote, 'I doe therefore...call those onely Primroses that carry but one flower upon a stalke, and those Cowslips, that beare many flowers upon a stalk together constantly'.

Violets, sweet (*Viola odorata*), and dog (*Viola riviniana*), 'dog' intimating it was inferior to the sweet v. as it has no scent. *V. odorata* was the flower of Aphrodite; it was used in a famous tapestry, *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, where the Unicorn is depicted surrounded by various flowers representing sex including Lords-and-Ladies and Bistort. A favourite bloom in the sixteenth century, Gerard in his *Herbal* writes, 'for there may be made of them Garlands for the head, nosegaies and poesies, which are delightful to look upon and pleasant to smell'.



Lungwort, *Pulmonaria officinalis* and *Pulmonaria longifolia*. Both known as ADAM AND EVE, *P. officinalis* so called by the gypsies in the New Forest, and first discovered by the Hampshire botanist John Goodyer in the seventeenth century; JOSEPH AND MARIES, Hants; *P. officinalis* also called JERUSALEM COWSLIP, BEDLAM (i.e. Bethlehem) COWSLIP, Som; LADY MARY'S TEARS, Dor.; SOLDIER AND HIS WIFE, I.o.W.; SOLDIERS AND SAILORS, Som. Suff.



Want to make a permanent record of all the wildlife in your garden and countryside? Make use of your computer and keep a note of the birds, bees, butterflies or whatever grabs you, using the LIVING RECORD database.

## FLOWERS FOR BUMBLEBEES

March – April

Apple  
Bluebell  
Broom  
Bugle  
Cherry  
Erica carnea (heather)  
Flowering Currant  
Lungwort (Pulmonaria)  
Pear  
Plum

May – June

Alliums  
Aquilegia  
Birds-foot trefoil  
Bugle  
Bush vetch  
Campanula  
Ceanothus  
Chives  
Comfrey  
Cotoneaster  
Escallonia  
Everlasting Pea  
Wallflower  
Foxglove  
Geranium  
Honeysuckle  
Kidney Vetch  
Laburnum  
Lupin  
Monkshood  
Poppies  
Raspberries  
Red campion  
Roses (single)  
Sage  
Salvia  
Thyme  
Tufted Vetch  
Meadow Cranesbill  
White Clover  
Wisteria  
Woundwort

## Living Record.net - Online environmental recording

We have been investigating this online database with the idea of using it to record flora and fauna found within Earley. The surveys which the Thursday group do within Earley will be put on this database so that anyone can see what has been discovered. We would also like to encourage you to put your own wildlife records onto this website.



Living Record allows you to create your own records system and gives you access to a selection of distribution maps. Records that are submitted are reviewed online and passed on to local and national record centres and to organisations working for conservation. Your records can then form part of the big picture which is used nationally and locally to understand species distribution and population trends, to identify key sites, and to develop conservation plans.

We hope that some of our members will be interested in this way of recording the wildlife that they see. You can start by recording the wildlife in your back garden and, if you wish, you can add other wildlife sightings locally and nationally. This will help to build up a detailed picture of our local area and be useful now and into the future.

To find out more, have a look at [www.livingrecord.net](http://www.livingrecord.net)

By signing up to the site you can practise adding records through recording 'dragons.' There is also a user guide which can be found on the site – the quick link is here –

<http://www.livingrecord.net/Recording/LivingRecordUserGuide2>

Please contact Ricki Bull, [r.m.b@ntlworld.com](mailto:r.m.b@ntlworld.com) for further information on how to take part, for help in setting up or understanding how the site works and so that you can be added to our Earley Users Group.

**Anne Booth**

## Early Signs of Spring in Maiden Erlegh Reserve

I am struck, as I imagine you may have been, by how soon the signs of spring have appeared this year. We all know that December and January have been exceptionally mild, following on from the record high temperatures of autumn. It is all so different from a year ago; remember the snow! As an amateur phenologist in my own small way, I have made a note or two of how the years have differed. Let's take the earliest flowers to bloom:

<u>Flower</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2011</u>
Crocus	22 Jan	26 Feb
Loddon Lily	28 Jan	25 Mar
Snowdrop	28 Jan	6 Feb

The appearance of Loddon lilies in January is quite remarkable. These usually bloom in April: 30 April (2006); 8 April (2007); 27 April (2008); 18 April (2009) and 6 April (2010). Yet not all are quite so early; some of last year's first few flowers are still to bloom: Lesser Celandine, 16 February; Gorse 16; Cowslip 24; Lungwort 24; Violet 24; Coltsfoot 26 and Daffodil, 26 Feb 2011. How will 2012's compare?

There was ice on Maiden Erlegh Lake in January, but only on the odd occasion and nothing like the month's worth we had last year. With little frost, and no snow, the autumn berries are still on many of the bushes; none of the prolific flocks of redwings and redstarts we had a year ago. With survival less of a struggle, the birds have turned to mating. The blue tits have been exploring potential nest sites, the woodpeckers are drumming, and the mallards and coots have been showing all the signs of seasonal friskiness on the water – flapping and splashing in courtship display or arguments over females.

Other visiting birds have come to call during the warm winter weather. Shortly before Christmas two pairs of shovellers were swimming on the lake in their trademark circles, and for only the second time that I can recall in the past few years. The cormorants that often perch in the island treetops became uncharacteristically numerous: five on one count and seven on another. And some old favourites are back. The mute swan is here again, after an absence of six months or more, as is the occasional mandarin and wood duck. With as many as ten mandarins at mid summer 2011, these have been conspicuous by their absence until reappearing in the opening weeks of this year.

The weather seems to have caused one less welcome change, however, as the strong gusty winds of mid January appear to have damaged a number of mature trees. Several large, ivy-clad tree trunks are lying along the banks towards the head of the lake. But in death these will at least provide a habitat for new life to grow.

**Edwin A.R. Trout**

29 January



*In writing about the weather one is usually a hostage to fortune! Days after writing the above, Britain experienced the 'Siberian cold snap' as freezing temperatures and snow blew in from the East. On Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February, there were redwings at last, picking berries from trees around the lake, just hours before the snow arrived. Soon the swan, mallards, coots and moorhens, and a solitary Canada goose, were clustered around the only unfrozen*

*water at each end of the lake. (And under the cover of darkness, yours truly could be seen enjoying the snow on the sledge of his youth!) A week later, and following another snowfall, the fieldfares flocked in on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup>. Just when the winter should be slackening its hold, the cold weather has finally arrived and smothered – just for a while – those early signs of spring.*

## NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

### Lovely chalk streams – will they disappear?-

Some of our chalk streams, one of nature's loveliest sights in spring and early summer, may be under threat after one of the driest winters for ages. Michael McCarthy, writing in his Nature Studies in The Independent newspaper, states that they occur nowhere else in the world except for a few in Normandy, and describes those in the south, including the Kennet, as '*one of the two most sublime natural habitats in our country (the other being the bluebell wood, also found nowhere else*'. They also provide a wonderful habitat for wildlife. Because of their purity they are coveted by the water companies and may suffer from over-abstraction.

### Cuckoos calling!

Hearing the first cuckoo is one of nature's good moments. If you've ever wondered what they do when they leave us, check out the BTO website where you will find out about five birds fitted with satellite-tracking devices.

## EARLEY NEWS and WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

7 January 2012. From David and Barbara Jupe: Barbara and I spotted a cowslip just coming into flower in the Earley Nature Reserve. 10 days earlier than last year!

### January news from our two regular garden recorders

**Gillian:** Visiting birds – blackbird, blue tit, chaffinch, collared dove, great tit, house sparrow, magpie, robin, starling, woodpigeon, wren, green woodpecker, dunnock. A total of 13 different species. Bonus – on 31 January, redwings on the top of neighbour's ash tree all day, coming and going. Squirrel seen most days. Crocus and snowdrops in flower 9 January.

**Margaret:** Visiting birds – blackbird, blue tit, chaffinch (looking poorly), great tit, magpie, robin, wood pigeon, dunnock, crow, jay, long tailed tit (6) coal tit, sparrow hawk. A total of 13 different species. Bonus - 4 red kites floating around most days, beautiful!

**Look for Earley's Wildflower Sites**, so enthusiastically created by Grahame Hawker, Head Park Ranger ETC, and bands of willing volunteers, including the Wednesday Volunteer Group. Many of the plants have been grown and also planted by members of Growing Places, the gardening and conservation section of the Learning Disability Day Service.



**Maiden Erlegh Reserve** - Oakwood Meadow; three Instow road scallops (one a chalk bank); wildflower plantings in woods; either side of path; at outlet end of lake; lake edge between weir and Lakeside road; around silt entrapment ponds at inlet end of lake; chalk bank between inlet and hedge; wildlife demonstration garden by Interpretation Centre. **Farther afield** - verge in front of Marefield pond (planted this winter); new meadow by BMX track (sown last winter); two meadows at Meadow Park; environmental area at Hillside school.

All created to give pleasure to the eye and sustenance to wildlife dependent on flowers.

### Sibly Hall update

The revised application by Reading University to develop the Sibly Hall site was passed by the Planning Committee at Wokingham on 8<sup>th</sup> Feb. This gives permission for the building of 89 houses over the whole site (excluding Redhatch Copse) and the demolition of Sibly Hall.

The University are appealing against the Council's decision to refuse their application for the 'Proposed erection of a 30m lattice telecommunications mast and associated ground based equipment compound' in Redhatch Copse. The Appeal will be heard at Wokingham Borough Council offices on 6<sup>th</sup> March. EEG objected to both the phone mast and the housing applications primarily because of the damage to the woodland habitat of Redhatch Copse, which is classified as a Local Wildlife Site of County Value. While accepting that the University will develop the site, we feel that an opportunity has been missed to do something useful for the community and less damaging to wildlife. **Anne Booth**

## LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2012

### Sunday, March 25

**HELP! Litter Clean-up:** Join the annual Earley Litter Pick. Two sessions, 10 a.m. to 12.30p.m. and 2.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. Everything provided. **Contact Grahame Hawker on 0118 986 8995.** Meet at Interpretation Centre, Instow Road.

### Wednesday, April 25

**Talk on Peak Oil, by Roger Bentley. 7.30 to 9.30 p.m. Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.** The global production of conventional oil is near a peak, and the same may apply to the global production of 'all-liquids'. This talk will discuss the phenomenon of oil peaking, show why it is counter-intuitive, and consider possible implications.

### Sunday, May 6

**A guided walk around the bluebell woods of Ruscombe** with Stephen Lloyd of FORWOOD (Friends of Ruscombe Woods). Duration about 2 hours. Meet at Ruscombe Church (parking available) at 14:00, SU79747627.

## Bits and Pieces

EASI (Earley Adopt-a-Street Initiative) would like more volunteers. Help keep your street clear of litter. Everything provided. Phone Brian Hackett on 0118 986 1115 or email [ask.mera@btinternet.com](mailto:ask.mera@btinternet.com). We need some new blood! Can you offer active help to EEG? If so, phone 0118 962 0004 or go to the website. We would welcome more member involvement. If you have no expertise and would like to get involved, you may be able to give practical help. Perhaps help with distributing the newsletter hard copies, or maybe you have graphic design skills (for occasional posters, leaflets), computer skills, any other skills to offer. Do your bit for the environment.

Join the EEG Yahoo Group and post your sightings and messages. You'll find a link to Yahoo on our website. EEG Committee Members can be found on [www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk](http://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](mailto: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 at [liz@helva.plus.com](mailto:liz@helva.plus.com). Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or send an e-mail.

## SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

**The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre** : There is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley, their most successful market. 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, 5 to 8.15 p.m. They have a website giving dates [www.truefood.coop](http://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 926 6512, e-mail [sales@petfayre-reading.co.uk](mailto:sales@petfayre-reading.co.uk) or go on the comprehensive website [www.petfayre-reading.co.uk](http://www.petfayre-reading.co.uk)

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