

**A Floral Tribute:**

As summer draws to a close, this edition is something of a floral tribute, looking at one wild flower of great benefit to insects, others which should be treated with caution (pages 2&3), and those seemingly unknown to children (page 5).

**Autumn is fast approaching:**

Ray Reedman discusses the changeover of our bird population during autumn (page 4).

**There’s always a price to pay:**

Funny how things we see as the best inventions ever turn out to be the biggest threats to our planet. ‘Plastic’ is one such invention. It takes many forms, and an understanding of its composition is best left to the scientists. We are now realising its long-lasting property is its best and worst characteristic. From our reliance on this material we’re trashing our lands, oceans and our beaches (see pages 5-6). There is some good news, however.

**Something for the child in us:**



Read something you didn’t know about Winnie the Pooh. It does have an environmental connection (Bits and Pieces page 7).

**Items of special interest:**

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## KNOW YOUR PLANTS

In a recently released film, the charming female protagonist made use of seeds of that favourite garden tree, laburnum, to bump off her husband. There are many seemingly innocent garden and wild flowers poisonous in one way or another, and sometimes different parts cause trouble, e.g. leaves, seeds, roots or flowers.

As a child, I certainly remember warnings about 'Deadly Nightshade'. This I now know was Bittersweet/Woody Nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*), a fairly common mistake. The real Deadly Nightshade is *Atropa belladonna* (see below). Both are, of course, poisonous.

As children are the most vulnerable to adverse effects, the RHS website gives details of poisonous plants, and also the sound advice to teach children not to play with or eat growing plants. Good advice, but one wouldn't want to be so alarmist as to stop children picking daisies for chains, finding out the time with dandelion 'clocks', or using buttercups to check a predilection for butter.

Sheila Crowson

*Folklore: the plant's Latin name, Atropa, was derived from the Greek Atropos, who was a goddess of fate and could end human life. The rest of the Latin name, belladonna, refers to its use as an eye beauty treatment, to dilate women's pupils.*

The 'nightshade' family includes tomatoes, potatoes, aubergines, peppers and chillies.



**Atropa belladonna**

Our most poisonous plant is aconitum, 'queen of poisons', also known as aconite, monkshood, wolf's bane, leopard's bane, mousebane, women's bane and devil's helmet. In ancient times a sinister use of this poison on the island of Ceos or Keos (now Kea) was the administering of it to "senile persons of no value to the state"! I have many plants 'potentially' harmful to humans in my garden... and I'm still here. Check it out at <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=524>

## *A Hogweed by any other name...*

A stand of common hogweed by any other name would still smell rather disagreeable to us, reminiscent of pigs and, according to *Geoffrey Grigson*, also used as pig food, but what a wonderful food plant for pollen seeking insects. It may not be Chanel No. 5, but it's as good as to certain insects.

The photo shows the sort of gathering the flower attracts. If the photo is enlarged there are nine by my counting, maybe more, including four red soldier beetles (see below, aka 'the Bloodsucker', harmless to us, but not to other insect visitors), hoverflies and other pollen seeking insects, and one fly which has the most beautiful irridescent green body (a greenbottle, attracted by the unpleasant smell?). The photo was taken in Whiteknights Park. There are good stands of these in the Oak Wood Meadow, Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

**Sheila Crowson**

<https://theresagreen.me/tag/medicinal-uses-of-hogweed/>



**GIANT HOGWEED**, a non-native plant sometimes reaching 3m, is to be avoided at all costs. Its sap can cause severe skin burns. First documented in 1817 in a Kew seed list, it became a popular garden plant. It is now the subject of various regulations.



## *Autumn - a time of movement (Part 1)*



If you have a £1 coin to hand, heft it in your palm and imagine it to be a bird. Pretty small, isn't it? It weighs just 9g, in fact, a bit more than a Willow Warbler. Now imagine that bird is about to fly off to Africa on a 4,000km journey and will make the return journey next spring – that's about 100 marathons each way. That is normal behaviour for a whole lot of warblers, flycatchers, swallows and the like, which leave British shores in autumn to winter in warmer climes.

Migration is a strange phenomenon: it's all about food and breeding. The Northern Hemisphere's summer (as you may have noticed) is a good time for insect production and that is the attraction, since young birds need to be raised on plenty of protein. In winter that supply largely disappears, so the insectivores fly back south to another warm, insect-laden summer. The benefits clearly outweigh the risks and fatigue of the journey or they would not do it.

So how do these tiny birds do it? There are three broad strategies. Birds like Swallows fly by day and can catch insects on the wing, so they feed as they go. Others travel by night for safety. Some of these choose to travel by stages, stopping to feed as they go. Others travel in massive flights over huge distances, making few stops. These birds all need brown fat as fuel, which they accumulate under the skin. It seems odd that to be fit for their multi-marathon these birds may gain 25-100% in body weight as they build up their fuel tank, the gain being greatest for the birds intending to stop the least number of times.

Autumn is not all about departures however. Many birds may be passing through from further north and east on their way south. Wheatears from Greenland, waders from the Arctic tundra, songbirds from the boreal forests, all pass through in their thousands, often causing great excitement among the rarity-seekers. What we don't always appreciate is the degree of east-west movement which takes place as birds vacate Continental Europe and Asia: I was in Norfolk last October when an unprecedented number of Siberian birds passed through the area.

But apart from departures and passage birds, there is a third category - the arrivals. Amazingly a whole bunch of birds prefer our winter and arrive in autumn. But more about those next time...

**Ray Reedman**

## 'B' is for Bluebell.... or Blog?

**Plantlife** has launched a Great British Wildflower Hunt, which is part of their Forget-me-not campaign. This was developed in response to the Oxford Junior Dictionary dropping plant names such as bluebell and blackberry from its latest edition, because they were not seen as relevant for children today, replacing them with words such as blog and chatroom.



28 authors, including Margaret Atwood, Andrew Motion, Michael Morpurgo and Robert Macfarlane, warned that the decision to cut around 50 words connected with nature and the countryside from the Dictionary is “shocking and poorly considered” in the light of the decline in outdoor play for today’s children.

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/wildflowerhunt/> Or contact Plantlife at 01722 342730.

## KEEPING OUR LOCAL STREETS CLEAN



### Cigarette Stub Micro-Bins for Local Hotspots

EASI’s big project this year is the installation of micro-bins for depositing ciggy stubs and chewing gum in various local hotspots, and thereby cutting down unwanted litter in our streets. This has been funded by the Earley Charity. About 25 have been installed, so see if you can spot them.

## Trashing our planet - a disaster in the making



**The journey of a discarded plastic water bottle:** a plastic water bottle discarded off the coast of California takes the California Current south toward Mexico. There, it may catch the North Equatorial Current, which crosses the vast Pacific. Near the coast of Japan, the bottle may travel north on the powerful Kuroshiro Current. Finally, the bottle travels westward on the North Pacific Current. The gently rolling vortexes of the Eastern and Western Garbage Patches gradually draw in the bottle ( National Geographic). These ocean gyres are composed of millions of pieces of micro-plastic which fish may eventually ingest and pass up the food chain to us.

PLASTIC was such a good invention, just think of the plastic items you use from rising in the morning to bed at night, but it has brought terrible problems with it. Its great characteristic is that it is so much lighter than other substances and very easy to mould. The downside is it is indestructible.

The **good news** is that Environment Secretary Michael Gove has pledged legislation will be introduced this year to ban the sale and manufacture of microbeads and to reduce plastic waste choking our oceans as he set out his ambition for the UK to lead the world in environmental protection. Talk is easy, action is more problematic.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/environment-secretary-pledges-action-on-ocean-plastics> <https://www.sas.org.uk/our-work/plastic-pollution/>

Every day approximately 8 million pieces of plastic pollution find their way into our oceans. The UK's rivers carry plastic from across the country out into the seas around us.

Once plastic reaches open water it can be carried for thousands of miles, but it is more likely to join one of five huge circulating masses of water known as ocean gyres.

Plastic can be incredibly useful. Diabetics use it for their disposable syringes; arthritic patients have it for their replaced hips; and construction workers wear it to protect their heads.

Without it we wouldn't have computers, mobile phones or cars. Essentially, it is vital. **The big problem is single use plastics**, and the quantities in which they are used.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:** Small individual acts can make a difference.

**Buy cotton buds with paper stems**, discard in the bin, not the toilet.

**Carry a collapsible or bamboo coffee cup with you.** (*'You can indeed take your reusable coffee cup into a Costa store, they actually take 20p off your coffee if you bring your own reusable cup. I believe they also do this in Starbucks and other coffee chains'* (source Plastic Free Coastlines). Interesting one to test!

**Refill a plastic water bottle from your tap.**

**Buy a bamboo toothbrush.** Millions of plastic ones end up in the tip.

To check out exactly what you are allowed to recycle in your black box and brown bin, go to <http://www.recyclenow.com/local-recycling> and put in your postcode. Surprised to see shredded paper is allowed, but must be put in a paper envelope.

## Local news update

Council 'Vandalism' over Kennet Mouth a step nearer.

**Wokingham's Park-and-Ride scheme for 'Broken Brow' in Earley has** received approval for a £2.9 million grant from the 'Berkshire Local Transport Body' – which turned down suggestions of alternative locations. Mysteries remain as to how the land could have been acquired at zero cost, which private enterprise will run the scheme, and why it is sensible to assess its 'benefit-cost-ratio' over a period as long as 60 years.

If built it will encourage more people to drive to the 'Suttons Seeds' roundabout and its 277 spaces will do little to improve traffic flow in Reading. As Reading Councillor Tony Page commented to the BLTB meeting it is a 'small scheme' that 'will not reduce congestion on London Road' - but he supported it as part of a wider strategy.

**Reading and Wokingham's 'Mass Rapid Transit' scheme** - Bridging Kennet Mouth - to carry buses from the Park and Ride and the A3290 to Reading town centre – is seeking planning permission and is expected to apply for funding in November. Plan of Park and Ride (Wokingham) end of MRT is at

<http://documents.reading.gov.uk/AnitePublicDocs/00378391.pdf>. For all the details (over 100 documents) and to register comments go to <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning/planning-applications/search-planning-applications/> and enter Application Number 172048. Save Our Ancient Riverside group Facebook is at <https://www.facebook.com/NoPaRThamesideWokingham/>

**John Booth**

## **NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY:**

Canada has celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> birthday and there is a strong Canadian connection with Winnie the Pooh. On August 24<sup>th</sup> 1914, en route to the war in Europe, vet Lieutenant Harry Colebourn purchased a black bear cub at White River, Ontario, for \$20 from a hunter who had killed its mother. He called her Winnie after his home town Winnipeg. His regiment came to England, and when sent to France he left Winnie with London Zoo, eventually donating it to the zoo. A.A. Milne and Christopher Robin visited Winnie, and the rest is history. There is a child's book written by a Colebourn descendant, "Finding Winnie".

## **EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND GARDEN SURVEYS**

There is concern over the decline in urban butterflies. References are being made to 'grey cities', the result of a variety of changes, in particular the paving over of front gardens for parking. Our garden surveyors recorded the following butterflies during July:

**Margaret: comma, holly blue, large white, painted lady, red admiral**

**Gillian: holly blue, red admiral, small white, speckled wood, gate keeper**

Birds recorded in July (M=Margaret, G=Gillian, B=Both)



**Blackbird B, blue tit B, great tit B, greenfinch M, magpie B, nuthatch B, robin B, starling G, woodpigeon B, wren G, crow M, jay M, long-tailed tit M, coal tit M, dunnock B, green woodpecker G**

**Jay (member Trisha)**

## **LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS, September 2017 – December 2017**

**Saturday September 2<sup>nd</sup> 10am – 17.00** A joint visit with Wokingham District Veteran Tree Assn. to Bartlett Tree Research Laboratory, Shinfield Field Unit, Cutbush Lane, University of Reading, Reading, RG2 9AF to hear Glynn Percival, an expert on diseases threatening our trees, and the latest research programmes to fight these. To book a free place, contact Kerry honsec@wdvta.org.uk

**Wednesday September 20<sup>th</sup> 10am - lunchtime** Autumn litter pick. Meet at the Waterside Centre on Thames Valley Park Drive at 10am. Collect litter from Horseshoe bridge/Kennet Mouth to Sonning Lock along the River Thames finishing with lunch at the café at Sonning Lock.

**Monday November 6<sup>th</sup> 7.30 to 9.30 pm**, Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive. Talk - 'Can Eco-Philosophy support the formation of a Global Ethics?' Tanja Rebel, a teacher of Philosophy with a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy and Psychological Studies, raised this question in her dissertation in 2001. She's still asking.

**Monday December 18<sup>th</sup> 7pm to 10pm** Christmas party. Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. Open to all EEG members. Come along - bring some food to share (please let us know what you are bringing, so we can balance the fare), we'll provide mulled wine.

## **BITS AND PIECES**

Don't forget - the Earley Environmental Group has a **Facebook** presence. We will be using this in addition to the main website, the Yahoo Group and the Newsletter as a way

of keeping everyone up to date with our activities and to let you know about upcoming events. Members are also welcome to post news stories or any photographs relevant to the group. Search for 'Earley Environmental Group' and we should pop up. Look forward to seeing you on there. **Mel Orros**

**EASI** (Earley Adopt-a-Street Initiative) would like more volunteers. Help keep your street clear of litter. Everything provided. **Contact Brian Hackett by phone (986 1115)** or by e-mail: [brianh@talk21.com](mailto:brianh@talk21.com), or Peter Soul (926 4997), [petersoul@peterjo.plus.com](mailto:petersoul@peterjo.plus.com).

**EEG committee members** can be found on [www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk](http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk) under Contacts.

For **Wildlife Survey Forms**, go to the website, or phone Earley Town Council on 0118 986 8995.

**Comments or contributions to the newsletter** to: [sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com](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 someone who would like to **join EEG, membership forms** are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995, on the website under Downloads , or send an e-mail to the Membership Secretary, Liz Wild at [liz@helva.plus.com](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 e-mail her.

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

A new '**Over 50s**' group is starting up at the Interpretation Centre, Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, Instow Road, Earley, RG6 5QH on Thursday August 10th. To be held each Thursday, 12.30 to 2.30pm . Contact [charlotte@nature-nurture.co.uk](mailto:charlotte@nature-nurture.co.uk), 07771 605825. Or look for posters.

### **Support your local shops & Post Office**

**Pet Fayre, Maiden Lane Centre, Lower Earley:** A small independent shop, now also home to the **post office**. It has 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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