

Conservation – is it working?

'Conservation' means many things to many people. The definition we are looking for can best be summed up as, *Conservation (ethic) of biodiversity, environment, and natural resources, including protection and management*. There are so many bodies working hard to halt the progressive destruction of so much that we hold dear, whether it be plants, animals, countryside etc., etc., etc.

Still the bad stories come: **giraffes** are now considered to be endangered. However, there are good stories: we can count the reappearance of the **red kite** locally as one, and a search of the web reveals many, but there are pitfalls. Just one example - the giant panda populations have improved enough so the panda is no longer considered endangered, and is now listed as [vulnerable to extinction](#). Good news perhaps, but some have expressed worry that the foot may come off the pedal, and this categorization change will lessen the ability to provide protection for pandas.



Those who work hard locally to protect and enhance our environment often sacrifice time and energy to do so, and we owe them thanks. This includes many local organisation and volunteers. One of our articles highlights such a group, the **Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association**, which celebrates its tenth birthday this year.

Items of special interest:

<i>Ten Years of WDVTA</i>	2
<i>Laurel Park Community Orchard</i>	2
<i>'Buy Nothing/Earley' Project</i>	3
<i>Redhatch Copse Update</i>	3
<i>Giant Sequoia in Whiteknights cont'd</i>	4
<i>Toad Crossing</i>	5
<i>Talk on Leopards</i>	5
<i>Threats to Kennet Mouth and Thames Riverbank</i>	6
<i>Sand and Gravel Extraction, between Arborfield and Shinfield</i>	6
<i>Criminal act against Large Blue Butterfly</i>	6
<i>News from Beyond Earley,</i>	
<i>Wildlife Sightings and Garden Surveys</i>	7
<i>Forthcoming Events</i>	7
<i>Bits and Pieces</i>	7/8



Congratulations to the **Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association** on its 10th anniversary

It was the sound of a chainsaw and the felling of a fine mature English oak in 2005 on the borders of Manor Road play area, Wokingham, that provided the impetus for the founding of WDVTA.



After consulting Andy Glencross, then Countryside Officer for Wokingham District Council, it was discovered that, although some important old trees were included in Tree Preservation Orders, there was no overall map of these trees. Andy and Barbara Stagles (the latter such an inspiration in pushing this project forward) agreed it would be very worthwhile to record all veteran trees within the boundaries of Wokingham Town. A grant of £10,000 was obtained, and initially the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers set up a database and provided training for a survey. Originally WDVTA focused its survey on Wokingham Town, but the aim was always to cover the wider Wokingham district, and Earley was later included. *(Photo: Lime tree Earley - find details of it by searching tree 3386 on the interactive map.)*

The WDVTA website <http://www.wdvta.org.uk> has a wealth of information. It includes an interactive map, highly recommended, recording the trees which in January 2017 totalled **7296**, with **10132** photographs. The Earley Town section shows 509 trees surveyed. The WDVTA is producing a 10th Anniversary Report, which will eventually be available on the website.

News of the Laurel Park community orchard

It is now just over a year since the community orchard was planted by sponsors and volunteers in Laurel Park. In general, the trees are thriving, after some redefinition of plots in the summer and the replacement in January this year of the 2 damaged trees. We were not able to obtain a direct replacement for the Beurre Hardy pear tree, so have planted a variety called Onward. The Greensleeves apple tree, damaged during the October half-term, has now been replaced by another.

The orchard has a '**Merryweather Damson**', a vigorous, spreading tree with relatively large, blue-black fruits that can be used fresh when fully ripe in late summer, though they are normally used for cooking. Damsons make a delicious jam.

The information board (rescued from the former 'Maiden Over' pub, with Tesco's permission) was broken deliberately, also during the October half-term, and several of the supporting stakes were broken: the board has been repaired and new stakes put up. This was the first indication that the orchard was becoming a target for vandalism, but fortunately no further damage has occurred since.

With the aid of an expert, some pruning of lead shoots was carried out by a small working party on 24th February, in order to encourage the growth of strong side shoots. With that done, we are looking forward to a good show of blossom later in the spring.

Jean Hackett

AN INTERESTING PROJECT STARTING IN EARLEY

Buy Nothing Earley/Lower Earley

Having a clear-out but hate throwing things away? Like the idea of a sharing community? **BUY NOTHING EARLEY/LOWER EARLEY** is a local neighbourhood Facebook group where you give, share, lend or ask for what you want. Born out of a worldwide **BUY NOTHING** movement, local groups are springing up in communities all over the country. It's easy to see why. When you join you are helping someone within your community or making use of something that they no longer want. At the same time as preventing waste, you are making new friends and connections within the area, and you are living more sustainably.

A huge range of stuff gets offered on the page. Recently, there have been children's and adult's clothing, furniture and household items, a bicycle, numerous books and magazines, lighting and tools and unopened gifts.

Requests have been made for wire coat hangers for an art project, an Edwardian costume for a play, wellington boots for a child going camping, and surplus jam jars.

The **BUY NOTHING EARLEY/LOWER EARLEY** is for residents within the area west of the Wokingham Road, south of the University, east of Shinfield Road and north of the M4. This defined area means that participants are not travelling miles to give, collect or share. Currently there are 200 members of the group and you are invited to join by visiting the Facebook page where you'll find some simple rules and guidelines.



 [Buy Nothing Earley/Lower Earley](#)

Left: Two examples given/received.

For more information www.buynothingproject.org

Redhatch Copse update

The former Sibly Hall site was sold by the University to Persimmon Homes who have built 89 dwellings here. As part of the agreement with the Planning Authority - Wokingham Borough Council, Redhatch Copse would be transferred via Wokingham to Earley Town Council with a developer contribution for its maintenance in perpetuity.

Prior to the transfer, there was a requirement that Persimmon Homes would carry out certain works including proper pathways, a small play area, various works to trees and undergrowth, construction of fences and wildflower seeding. Earley Town Council's Amenities & Leisure Committee held in January 2017 were told that, while much of the work has been carried out, many items were still outstanding. This has further delayed the transfer of the woodland to the Town Council. The Committee were also told that it was not always easy to contact representatives of Persimmon Homes, and they have given no date for completion of the work at the time of writing this update.

Anne Booth

HOW DID OUR GIANT SEQUOIA ARRIVE IN WHITEKNIGHTS?

(Part 1 of this article in EEG December newsletter)

One of the notable trees in Earley is Tree No. 5713 (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) on the interactive map on WDVTA website (see article on page 2), with a girth of 5.37m at 1.5m in 2009. Plant hunters were responsible for so many of our trees, and landscape designers were quick to make use of them for wealthy clients.



In the summer of 1853 William Lobb, born 1809 in Cornwall, was collecting plants in California for the nursery firm of Veitch and Sons, Exeter. He had been travelling in search of plants almost continuously since 1840. By luck, he attended an event in San Francisco in 1853, giving news of mammoth trees in Calaveras Grove. He left immediately for Calaveras, in north California.

He collected foliage, cones, seeds and seedling trees. He returned almost straight away to England, which suggests the importance he attached to his botanical discovery, exotic conifers becoming a mania in England.

When Veitch and Sons placed their first mammoth-tree seedlings on sale in early 1854, they sold 3,000 in one day. Each seedling sold for two guineas, a lot of money then. It was said that Big Trees were planted everywhere: on suburban lawns, on great estates and in triumphal urban avenues. William Lobb died aged 55, and was buried in a Public Plot in Lone Mountain Cemetery near San Francisco in San Francisco. Tree 5713 may not have been a seedling from Veitch, who's to say, but William Lobb and Veitch were responsible for many of the Big Trees in the UK. (Apologies due. Photo in Dec newsletter issue was of Wellington Court, Spencers Wood, not Wellingtonia Avenue, Finchampstead.)

Some plants introduced by William Lobb

Penstemon, Fuchsia, Alstroemeria, Calceolaris, Ceanothus (blue), Coastal escallonia, Flowering berberis, Monkey Puzzle Tree

William Lobb's travels

South America
where he found MonkeyPuzzle Tree forests in Chile

Borneo, Java, India

Toad Crossing – Take Care!

16th January : Elaine Butler and Edwin Trout gave an illuminating talk to the EEG on the assistance given to toads as each spring they make a perilous crossing to return to their ancestral pond for breeding, following the same route each year regardless of whether this means crossing busy roads. Volunteers turn out in the most cheerless time of the year, when it is dark and possibly wet, to make sure the little creatures cross the road safely. The following is volunteer Anne Booth's account of her patrol:



Toad Patrol: *I help at Priest Hill, near Farley Hill, and have been out 4 times so far this year. The first time the weather was mild – 11C with light drizzle and we moved 108 toads. The next 2 occasions there were none, but it was cold – under 5C, but the last time the temperature was 10C and we had 25.*

Sadly we do find dead toads run over by cars, and these numbers are also counted. Priest Hill is fairly quiet with mostly locals using it, many drivers being familiar with the annual sight of yellow-clad figures with buckets and torches! Some stop, ask about toad numbers, tell us we're doing a good job (much appreciated), then drive on carefully.

Elaine Butler organises the volunteer rota and sends in the data to Froglife. By the end of the migration on March 20th this year, 666 toads had been moved: in 2016 the total was 293. Very encouraging!

Toads need help, recent research estimates they have declined 68% over the last 30 years in the UK, maybe more in the South East. For information <http://www.froglife.org/info-advice>.

A talk on leopards by Dr. Tara Pirie



20th February: That Tara has a wealth of experience on the subject of leopards was obvious from the fluent and interesting talk she gave. She led a leopard research program in South Africa on the Thaba Tholo wilderness reserve 2012-2015, where she conducted research into leopard behaviour and dynamics within the reserve as part of her PhD from Reading University. The **INGWE** Leopard Research program is an independent not-for-profit research organisation, operating under the auspice of the **On Track Foundation** (a UK-registered charitable organisation). During that time she worked with farmers, who were concerned with the predatory nature of the leopards, and with schools, educating children on conserving the animals. Tourism is very important for education and income. Leopards face many of the threats common to all big cats including habitation fragmentation, legal hunting, poaching, snaring for bush meat; 4 road deaths per year were recorded, but it became 2 when the high grass was cut. To find out more go to www.ontrackfoundation.org. See Tara on one of several YouTube videos <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHD74ftYpN4>. (Footnote: Not a leopard, but the earliest fossil remains of a wildcat were found in Berkshire.,source: Facebook SAVE OUR WILDCATS. More wildcat facts at <http://ow.ly/77TX308XsIO> Peter Cairns)

Threats to Kennet Mouth and the Thames Riverbank

Proposals for a park-and-ride (PNR) site at Broken Brow and a 'Mass Rapid Transit' (MRT) bus-way across the Kennet to provide a route to central Reading are still being debated.

The PNR has planning permission from Wokingham. Applications for funding from the Local Economic Partnership for both schemes (expected total around £25 million) may be considered in July. Local campaigners have so far been denied sight of the 'business case' documents to be presented, so have been unable to criticise them.

Reading Council have said the MRT will require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to accompany its planning application; their planners have said that this must cover both the MRT scheme and the PNR; must give adequate consideration to alternatives; and must cover the environmental effects fully, including noise and socio-economic effects. It is good that the two schemes will be assessed together and the scope will be wider – but the Planning Committee may still find reasons to allow the schemes.

See <https://reading.greenparty.org.uk/news/2017/02/02/east-reading-transport-scheme-slammed-by-planners>

John Booth

More possible threats:

A huge plan to excavate 3.6 million tonnes of sand and gravel from land between Arborfield and Shinfield has been submitted to Wokingham Borough Council.

CEMEX UK Operations Ltd has applied to the council for permission to carry out the work on Bridge Farm in Reading Road, Arborfield. The application proposes setting up a processing plant and a ready-mix concrete plant. Once the building work is done, the company believes the project will take around 14 years, with excavation starting in 2018. Source

<http://www.getreading.co.uk>

The rarer a creature becomes, the more its market price goes up



A man was found guilty of killing one of Britain's rarest butterflies. He was spotted chasing Large Blues with a net at a Gloucestershire reserve. A police raid on his house found dead, mounted butterflies in about 30 trays, including two Large Blues. The Large Blue became extinct in the 1970s, and has been reintroduced to a few sites. It has a remarkable life cycle, but perhaps more of that in the next newsletter. The perpetrator was found guilty by a jury.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY: Led by the Woodland Trust, more than 50 organisations from across multiple sectors are standing together to call for a Charter for Trees, Woods and People. <https://treecharter.uk/what-is-the-charter>

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND GARDEN SURVEYS

Margaret: Jan 26th 'A rare visitor, a song thrush.' RSPB : Numbers are declining. Its habit of repeating song phrases distinguishes it from singing blackbirds. It likes to eat snails, which it breaks into by smashing them against a stone with a flick of the head.



Gillian: Feb 6th 'First sighting of black cap.' RSPB : Its delightful fluting song has earned it the name 'northern nightingale'. Although primarily a summer visitor, some are increasingly spending the winter in the UK.



John: Feb 28th Sighting captured on his trail camera. 'Fox, and hedgehog - not really bothered by each other! Foxes are always here, but hedgehog has not been seen out in really cold January weather.'

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS April to August 2017

Tuesday April 11th 7.30pm – 9.30 pm Grahame Hawker, Head Ranger, Earley Town Council. **The Problem with Conservation**, Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive. Despite a century of conservation our wildlife is still going downhill. How can this be? This talk will touch on some of the reasons for this sad state of affairs. It will be more philosophy than facts and figures to encourage audience participation'.

May A joint event with the Berkshire Mammal Group and EEG. Details to be decided. Check posters and website.

Saturday June 17th 10am 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.

Sunday July 16th 14:00 A walk with Elaine Butler through Pearmans Copse and Nores Hill, especially looking at the veteran trees. Meet at the entrance to Pearmans Copse in Ryhill Way, Earley SU 7350 6944. Note :There is only limited on-road parking. The paths may be muddy and slippery.

Saturday August 6th GREEN FAIR 10am to 3pm, Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve

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, or Peter Soul (926 4997), petersoul@peterjo.plus.com.

Can you offer active **help to EEG**? If so, phone 0118 962 0004 or go to the website <http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk>. 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 or maybe you have graphic design skills, computer skills, any other skills to offer. At the moment 'the few' help to keep EEG going.

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 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, 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. **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. The children have opportunities to explore the nature reserve, and Head Ranger Grahame Hawker or members of his team are on hand to share their extensive knowledge of the habitats, creatures and work that occur within the reserve.

For more information, please contact 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.

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 or go on the comprehensive website www.petfayre-reading.co.uk

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