

Earley - Old English 'Earnley' = eagle wood

Significant colours

The colours chosen for the banner-headline this issue are significant - white, purple and green, the suffragette colours. Every year commemorates special centenaries. 2018 has been notable for celebrations surrounding the 100th anniversary of many women winning the right to vote. In Reading as early as 1872, George Palmer chaired a meeting where Rhoda Garrett read a paper about suffrage. In 1874 and 1878 there were further meetings at Reading Town Hall, with George Palmer in attendance at both. Read more of local connections on page 2.

Spring is officially here, and the appearance of spring flowers in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve is featured on pages 2,3. The Earley Environmental Group volunteers have been busy planting over 3,000 bulbs of snowdrop and wild garlic around the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, so we will soon enjoy these wonderful flowers. The volunteers meet every Wednesday morning, 9.30am at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. Feel free to come along and join.

Pet ownership carries responsibilities

Our beloved (by some) moggies, and their effect on wildlife, have been the subject of much research throughout the world. Feral cats in Australia are responsible for the reduction in millions of native wildlife. Likewise, New Zealand, a cat-loving country, is facing extinction of unique wildlife, due to cat predation. Their cat villains are 'feral' and 'stray' cats, the subject of big eradication projects. In the UK our domestic cats are not blameless. Our desire to own a cat and also feed our garden birds brings problems. Read the comments on page 4 made by Mark Fellowes, Professor of Ecology, Reading University, who does offer some solutions to local cat predation.

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VOTES FOR WOMEN

By 1908 the WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union) and the NUWSS (The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies) had formed groups in Reading. Both Emmeline Pankhurst (WSPU) and Millicent Fawcett (NUWSS) came to speak in Reading, the latter preferring peaceful means to achieve women's suffrage. She was a remarkable woman, and a statue of Fawcett, designed by artist Gillian Wearing, will be unveiled in London's Parliament Square in April. She is the first woman to be commemorated with a statue in Parliament Square.



Sowing the seeds of change: the Earley connection with women's suffrage

Sutton Seeds' trial grounds in Earley dated from 1870, and in 1962 they relocated from the centre of Reading to purpose-built premises at Earley. (See 'SUTTONS SEEDS A History 1806-2006': Earley Local History Group).

Reading had an active suffrage movement in the years before the outbreak of the First World War, and one of the Sutton family, **Edith Sutton**, had sought to persuade Reading's local council to consider the issue of votes for women in 1904. She eventually joined the Labour Party in 1921 and was the first female Mayor of Reading.

The Flowers of Spring: From 1908, the WSPU adopted the colour scheme of white, purple and green, which colours we celebrate in some of our spring flowers, using the meteorological calendar of March 1st <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning/seasons/spring/when-does-spring-start>



WHITE Snowdrops in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve: planted by volunteer groups. At a guess *Galanthus nivalis* or common snowdrop, they make a cheering appearance through February and March. Fanatic galanthophiles think nothing of spending over £100 on a rare variety, some with splendid names like **Green Man** and **Blewbury Tart** (see right). In 2012 a rare one changed hands at over £1000!



They now come in many different-shaped flowers and some have yellow coloration. From a 1956 book, *Saints and Their Flowers*, it refers to snowdrops as Candlemas Bells, 'and these little blooms are called Fair Maids of February after the white garlanded maidens who walked in procession at Candlemas'.

PURPLE Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*), undeterred by its rather unappealing name, it takes up



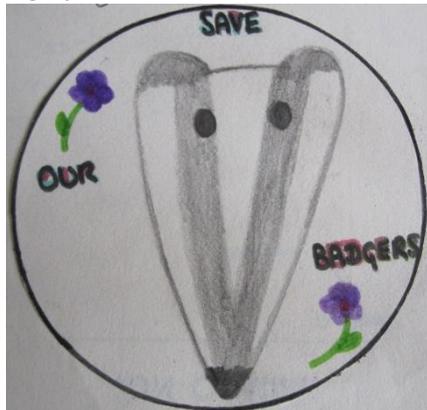
position in local verges and seems to withstand the council-cutting and dog trampling. Unlike its much favoured relative, the sweet violet (*V. odorata*), which used to be sold in bunches on flower stands, it is unscented hence the unflattering description, 'dog'. It is the most common violet in the UK, and was also known as Blue Mice in Somerset and Shoes and Stockings in Pembrokeshire. Another common name was Horse Violet ('horse' also being a derogatory term). There was a small stand of white sweet violets in Beech Lane, but this may no longer exist. Dog violet is also present in M.E.N. Reserve, as well as patches in local grass verges. It probably only gets a cursory glance from passers-by, not appreciative of its announcement that spring is here.

GREEN (predominantly). **Dog's Mercury** (*Mercurialis perennis*), aka Adder's Meat. For such an unremarkable plant, there is much to learn about this plant. It is dioecious, that is a plant having male and female reproductive organs in separate individuals, although it spreads mainly by rhizomes. Data junkies could try <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2745.2007.01348.x/full>, which states, 'it generally has a moderate to strong affinity for ancient woods in Britain (woods originating before 1600)'. A poisonous plant, dogs are often attracted to it and some become violently sick, although others can tolerate it.



Culling of Badgers in Berkshire?

"Poor old Brock. Although it's never had friendly treatment, by being a tough, independent character, a ditchcomber and hedge rummager, for centuries it's got by. Are there beginning to be too many obstacles for it to get by?" (From 'In the Country' by Kenneth Allsop – highly recommended and still available).



Many of us have never been fortunate enough to see live badgers, to hear them noisily making their way through a wood searching for a meal and, if you're lucky and keep stock-still upwind (never mind the biting mosquitos), see them crossing one of their ancient paths, unaware of you.

The Government is to carry out a review into what it should prioritise in the next phase of their strategy for achieving Officially Bovine Tuberculosis Free (OTF) status in England by 2038.

(Left: Drawing by an 8 year old, created in 1982. 36 years on and we don't seem to have resolved this problem)

Binfield Badger Group sent the following email to interested parties:

"Early last week the Government issued a statement signalling the strong possibility of a badger cull being held in Berkshire during 2018. This proposed extension of the cull into our county is devastating news and if licences are granted, this will mean the start of a 3-4 year culling programme. It has never been scientifically proven that badgers transmit bTB directly to cattle. After five years, it has cost taxpayers around £50 million with no proof of any disease control benefit whatsoever. Badgers, farmers and taxpayers alike deserve better than this stubborn pursuit of an incompetent disease mismanagement policy."

The review is expected to begin in March and finish by the end of September 2018.

To find out more go to

<http://www.binfieldbadgers.org.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-strategy-for-achieving-bovine-tuberculosis-free-status-for-england-2018-review>

<http://www.bbowl.org.uk/news/2018/03/08/wildlife-trust-response-possible-extension-badger-cull-oxfordshire-and-berkshire>

Calories, Crows, Kites and Cats.

Reading's Professor of Ecology, Mark Fellowes, gave a wide-ranging talk on urban birds to EEG on 26th February, 2018. Today, we have become a truly urban society, with almost 90% of



British people living in built-up areas. Biodiversity, and our society's connection with nature, is threatened by urbanisation, and our gardens provide a vital link between people and wildlife. The following are notes made during his talk by John Booth.

Feed the Birds Feeding birds was big business costing over £200 million per annum in the UK and contributing over 100 calories per day per garden – enough to feed 31 million of the ten most common species.

Goldfinch and Reed Bunting had increased in gardens, and Blackcaps now over-winter in the UK, but there is evidence that urban birds have smaller clutches and are lighter than rural counterparts. Feeding creates high densities of birds in gardens, which then lower the numbers of natural food sources such as aphids and beetles.

Crows Corvids and other predators are attracted by feeders and the birds using them, and this leads to nest predation. Camera traps had monitored events at artificial nests containing quail eggs; 50% survived if feeders were empty but only 10% if feeders were kept full.

Kites Reintroduction to the Chilterns had been a great success with up to 450 per day (less when moulting) visiting residential areas of Reading for food. Reading was one of only three places in the world where there was large-scale feeding of birds of prey – the others being Alaska (Bald Eagles) and Delhi (Black Kites).

5% of Reading households often feed kites – often with chicken or beef. 'Stable Isotope Analysis' of samples from different sections of feathers from birds from different parts of the country showed that kites living in urban areas had high protein/low fat diets, the opposite of birds from rural areas.

Cats are a major threat to global biodiversity: a 'principal threat' to 8% of birds and reptiles. On a 'biomass density' basis, cats in Reading are equivalent to 11 Bengal Tigers per square kilometre.

Cats have been established as pets for so long that our impression of 'natural' diversity of British Wildlife represents a 'false baseline'; creatures that cannot live with cats have not survived. Animals such as Wood Mice, where the males play no part in rearing young, can afford to lose 'surplus males', but in many bird species the males take part in feeding large broods.

In urban areas predation of birds is higher than replacement: particularly serious for ground-nesting birds. Pet cats kill around 1 million birds per week. Cat owners can fit collars and bells, keep pets in overnight, and neutering males can reduce their wandering. More radical measures are not popular, although Australia has placed restrictions on ownership. Each cat typically ranges over an area of almost two hectares; sensitive wildlife areas should have a buffer zone from domestic dwellings of some 300-400m.

Links to Prof. Fellowes' research and publications can be found at <https://www.reading.ac.uk/biologicalsciences/about/staff/m-fellowes.aspx>



Laurel Park Community Orchard

has within the last month once again been the victim of vandalism. One tree was nearly pulled out but survived, and the protective poles were removed. Our local police have been informed, and will keep a watchful eye. All the trees have been donated, often as a dedication to a relative or friend. If you see any damage being inflicted, it would be helpful for you to phone Thames Valley

Police on 101 or Earley Town Council on 0118 986 8995.

We look forward to the spring-blossom and, eventually, delicious fruit, from these trees.

<http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk/News/Orchard.asp>



Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust Volunteers of the Year 2017



Regrettably, we did not receive news of this award in time for our last newsletter, but our congratulations to EEG committee member Anne Booth, who was elected one of BBOWT 'Trust Volunteers of the Year 2017'. She was recognised for all her commitment and dedication shown as warden of BBOWT Moor Copse nature reserve for more than 30 years. She is passionate about the natural environment, and gives up

much of her time, aided by voluntary helpers, looking after the reserve. www.moorcopse.org.uk

<http://www.bbowl.org.uk/reserves/moor-copse>

The Young Ones



The EEG Junior section has been busy. On Feb 10th they had a close-up look at an oak tree on the ME Nature Reserve (no. 1583 on Wokingham District Veteran Tree Assn. Website

<http://www.wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS/index.php>).

On Mar 10th the Group did map reading in the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve from a tree-map drawn by Liz Kerry. They meet on the second Saturday of the month at the Interpretation Centre,

Instow Road, Earley. Phone Charlotte 07771 605825 for details.

UPDATES from John Booth

Broken Brow Park and Ride:

People have been horrified at the devastation of Broken Brow as clearance work started for Wokingham's Park and Ride. Trees, shrubs and much more have been cut down. Presumably the Council wanted to make rapid progress so it was important to do this by the end of February before the bird-nesting season. There are plans to re-locate protected slow-worms from the site and so the earliest development work can start is July. See videos on <https://www.facebook.com/SaveOurAncientRiverside/> .

Save Our Ancient Riverside (SOAR) have raised questions about the legality of the land acquisition and designation process, and whether best practice for reptile survival and relocation is being followed.

East Reading Mass Rapid Transit:

The impact seen on Broken Brow is a small indication of the effect on wildlife and open space that the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit route would have if it is built across Kennet Mouth; the route runs close to the Thames and through the woodland towards Tesco.

Reading is said to be making changes to the MRT proposals – perhaps as a result of continuing objections from the Environment Agency. Among other points the EA has said the bridge over the Kennet must be higher than planned to allow bigger boats to get through, there are unresolved issues on development in the flood zone, and there is an issue about loss of a Local Wildlife Site to provide replacement car parking for Tesco.

The MRT is now expected to go to planning committees in summer of 2018. On the Council's figures it will have a negligible effect on air quality and on traffic densities on the A4. The people who benefit will be people who take the buses over Kennet Mouth, travelling between Reading town centre and Wokingham or beyond; the people who lose will be the local people who used to walk along the riverbank, and taxpayers whose £25 million could be better spent.

To see others' objections, and to make your own:

Wokingham: <http://planning.wokingham.gov.uk/FastWebPL/welcome.asp> use application number 172048

Reading: http://planning.reading.gov.uk/fastweb_PL/welcome.asp use application number 171108.

Goodbye to Janet Whiting of Pet Fayre, Maiden Place

Janet has provided all our pets' requirements for 14 years in Maiden Place, in recent years moving from the site now occupied by Sainsbury to a nearby position. For the last 3 years her premises have offered a very convenient Post Office, which closes as well as the shop on March 17th. Both these services will be very much missed by local people. It is understood that W. H. Smith has applied to take over the Post Office and, should this happen, there will be a period of training before it opens. We wish Janet a happy and enjoyable retirement.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

BAD, BAD NEWS:

Researchers estimate that the number of **ORANGUTANS** left on Borneo now stands at between 70,000 and 100,000, meaning the population more than halved over the study period which ran from 1999 to 2015. Female orangutans are occasionally killed for their young, which are sold on as pets, while others are killed for food or for venturing onto plantations or into gardens. The steepest percentage losses occurred in regions where the forest has been cut down to make way for palm oil and acacia plantations; more animals were also killed by hunters who ventured into the forest.

Unbelievably, 20,000 **AFRICAN ELEPHANTS** are being killed each year by poachers. Perhaps encouraging news is that the public overwhelmingly support a total ban on the ivory trade, subverting the loophole that ivory pieces made after 1947 may be sold (difficult to enforce). Let's hope our Government has the nerve to introduce the total ban.



China introduced a full ban on the ivory trade at the start of this year, but the war is not yet won. Chinese visitors can now get their ivory fix in Laos and in other neighbouring countries with little enforcement.

GOOD NEWS:

The sale and manufacture of **plastic-stemmed cotton buds** is to be banned under new Scottish government plans. The move follows concerns about the number of buds being washed up on beaches after being flushed down toilets. In England Johnson's cotton buds claim to be 100% pure cotton. Plastic-stemmed buds are likely to be cheaper and made in China. Let's have a similar ban in England.

Another very small step to rid the planet of plastic, the Co-op had announced their **tea bag sachets** will become free of plastic. Now other brands may follow suit.

Not such good news: the Government has rejected proposals to introduce a charge for **disposable coffee cups**.

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS AND GARDEN SURVEYS

Cherry Tilbrook, Facebook: Feb 4th Saw a little egret by the river Loddon recently, exciting! Are they regulars? Don't recall seeing one around here before.

Susan Smith, Facebook: Feb 7th Today's Environmental Group Volunteers jaunt, was in order to put more grit on some of the paths near the 'Gemini' (Twin) Oak, and tidy up the Interpretation Centre.

Our regular garden surveyors - comparison of some garden birds seen in January

	blue tit	chaffinch	goldfinch	great tit	long tailed tit	nuthatch	starling	jay
Margaret	8	0	0	8	14	0	3	2
Gillian	2	1	2	1	?	2	2	?

Gillian noted the following birds made use of bird feeders in January:

blue tit, chaffinch, goldfinch, great tit, greenfinch, nuthatch, gt. spotted woodpecker.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS April to August 2018

Saturday April 28th 5.30am - 7.30am Dawn Chorus walk Come along and listen to the birdsong with local expert Ray Reedman. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road.

Monday May 21st 7.30pm - 9.30pm Himalayan Balsam A talk by Dr Carol Ellison, Senior Plant Pathologist, invasive species management, CABI Europe. Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.

Sunday June 10th 2-4.30pm Shinfield walk Led by Jane Sellwood this 5-6 mile walk in Shinfield Parish will follow an ancient pathway and pass veteran trees as we walk through woods and fields - involves a couple of stiles and 'a gentle hill.' Meeting point outside the Swan Inn, Three Mile Cross. Contact 07841 571990.

Sunday July 15th 11am - 1pm Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve walk Led by Grahame Hawker, Senior Park Ranger. We'll be hoping to see butterflies (weather permitting) and wildflowers in the woods and meadows. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road.

Saturday August 4th 10am - 3pm Earley Green Fair All the usual stalls and fun for all the family. Details 0118 9868995.

August Children's Bug Hunt Details to follow. Check noticeboards, website or Facebook.

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 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.

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.

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