

A CHANGING WORLD

Recent events, of Brexit, the climate emergency and now coronavirus, can be overwhelming for many of us - a good time to take to the hills, or maybe into the countryside or garden, and forget it all for a moment. At least the flowers will keep coming, and wildlife is oblivious to the above. Who knows, on balance, unintended consequences may benefit nature. We can but hope.

So get your camera sorted, get outside, in country or in garden, and enter the EEG's 2021 Community Calendar (details on page 5).

We are thrilled with the approach of spring to be visited by butterflies, that most beautiful of insects. In some parts of the world their supporters lose lives protecting them, pages (2, 3). Butterflies also face another offensive from humans (perhaps unknowingly), in the form of 'Butterfly Weddings' (pages 3, 4). On the positive side, you could plan a butterfly haven (see the link to 'Butterflies in a Reading Garden' on page 4).

The 'Wild About Reading' Celebration will run again from May 27 to 31 (See under Events, page 7), and check out our other future events. These are also on the EEG website, and this will keep you up-to-date should there be a change in view of the current coronavirus situation. Information will also be available on local notice boards.

Items of special interest:

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SOME GOOD NEWS FOR EARLEY'S VETERAN TREES



The last few months have seen two of our veteran Oaks face threats of total or partial destruction. Thankfully, outcomes for both appear positive at the moment.

The first is a large Oak (see left) at the side of the path from Laurel Park to Maiden Place to the south of the underpass under Rushey Way. This splendid healthy tree on council land is about 200 years old and has a Tree Preservation Order. It was subject to an application for felling, as it was alleged to be causing subsidence to a nearby property. The application was refused by Wokingham Planning Dept. on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence for this, and that alternatives to felling had not been properly considered.

The second tree, also an Oak, is in the Maiden Erleigh School car park. After the annual tree survey of the school site, a tree specialist advised that this tree was not in a good condition and represented a severe hazard. To render it safe the height has been reduced to about 15m. The school intends to leave the trunk as a wildlife habitat, which is a good option in cases like this. **Anne Booth**

DEFENDING THE ENVIRONMENT CAN BE DANGEROUS FOR SOME

Mexican authorities are investigating the possible murder of a tour guide, Raul Hernandez, who worked at a famous butterfly reserve in Michoacan. He was found dead from a head injury. There had been a death the previous week of activist Homero Gomez who was found buried, with possible signs of torture. He had been working to protect monarch butterflies.

The **MONARCH BUTTERFLY** is one of the most recognizable and well-studied butterflies on the



planet. Its orange wings are laced with black lines and bordered with white dots.

Known for its ability to travel large distances, the migrations in North America are one of the greatest natural phenomena in the world, where the adult butterflies can migrate from as far north as Canada to the overwintering grounds in Mexico, the west coast of California and Florida for the winter.

Monarch butterflies are native to North and

South America, but they've spread to other warm places where milkweed grows. No longer found in South America, monarchs in North America are divided into two main groups: the western monarch, which breeds west of the Rocky Mountains and overwinters in southern California, and the eastern monarch, which breeds in the Great Plains and Canada, overwintering in Central Mexico.

The female monarch butterfly lays each of her eggs individually on the leaf of a milkweed plant, a toxic plant (not native to the UK), and lays between 300 and 500 eggs over a two-to-five-week period. Although milkweed itself is toxic, monarchs have evolved not only to tolerate it, but to use it to their advantage by storing the toxins in their bodies, and making themselves poisonous to predators.

The monarch is the largest butterfly seen in the British Isles and is also one of our rarest migrants. It was first recorded in the UK in 1876. In recent years five sightings of monarch butterflies, among Britain's rarest migrant visitors, have been reported in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, with conservationists believing they have been blown across the Atlantic while on their stunning annual journey across North America to Mexico or California (<https://butterfly-conservation.org/>). Note: If you think yourself lucky enough to spot a monarch, you may be being deceived (see the next article).



Butterfly Weddings

The rising popularity of "butterfly weddings" is threatening British butterflies, a well-known charity has warned.

According to Butterfly Conservation, the growing trend of releasing the insects from a box to mark the vows of a bride and groom is harmful because it could spread disease, and makes recording the population difficult. The charity said the releases make it hard to know, "if any

future record of the species is truly wild or has been seen as a consequence of such a release. This has the potential to divert limited conservation resources, as it makes accurate mapping and hence conservation work for that species difficult, as we don't then know where it occurs naturally."

Butterfly boxes can be purchased for not only weddings but funerals, baptisms, birthdays, etc. Some suppliers are more responsible in their choice of butterflies, others not so, offering rare migrants, like the Camberwell Beauty for considerable amounts of money.

It is illegal to release some non-native butterflies in the UK, which brings us back to the monarch again, this being one of them. Several of these were spotted in Dorset, the result of a release at a recent wedding, giving a false reading for the records.

As the butterflies are kept in high-density cages, butterflies could be more susceptible to disease. The releases also "deflect attention" from the fact that the population of the insects is declining because of loss of habitat, the charity added.

Everything we do has an effect on the environment, and not wishing to spoil lovely wedding memories for those who have enjoyed a butterfly release, it is up to individuals in future, considering the above, to decide if it's right to use butterflies as confetti.

Another point of view: Comment from a butterfly enthusiast. The practice of rearing common native butterflies, like the migrant Painted Lady, in schools is relatively harmless and gives children great pleasure and a better understanding of and respect for the natural world.)

Camberwell Beauty/Mourning Cloak

Photo with permission of Adam Gor.

Adam is the editor of the Butterflies and Moths of Hungary website.

See many of his beautiful photos on <https://www.flickr.com/photos/charaxes14/>



What you might see or hear in the coming months in your garden

Garden surveyors Margaret and Gillian between them recorded the following **butterflies** in their Earley gardens from March to July 2019. You might see these, and others, in the next few weeks.

March: brimstone#, peacock#, holly blue* and small white

April: brimstone, large white, orange tip, holly blue, red admiral#, small white, speckled wood

May: holly blue, painted lady, red admiral, speckled wood

June: holly blue, painted lady, red admiral, speckled wood, comma#, small tortoiseshell#

July: holly blue, large white, small white, small tortoiseshell, ringlet, gatekeeper, red admiral, speckled wood

*According to Butterfly Conservation, the holly blue is the most widespread butterfly in Britain
#Hibernate over **winter** in their adult form

Read *Butterflies in a Reading Garden*:

<http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk/Butterflies/ButterflyGarden.asp>



We can expect to hear the familiar beautiful sound of **blackbird** song. It's capable of making a wide variety of calls and songs. During the breeding season the song is made up of flute-like phrases or notes, or sometimes the loud warning 'tchook-tchook-tchook' or 'chink, chink, chink' call.

Song learning occurs throughout a blackbird's life and reciprocal learning between neighbours can create local dialects. Blackbirds like a great many other birds, are superb mimics.

Blackbirds tend to be solitary birds. This is borne out by the numbers recorded by our garden surveyors, Gillian and Margaret, mostly 1 or 2 in their gardens for each month during February 2019-February 2020. Exceptions were 3 in each month of January and February 2019 by Margaret, and in July she noted a family of 4 + 2 parents. To find out what birds you will see in your garden over a year, with lots of information, go to

<http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk/Birds/Birds.asp>

<https://www.british-birdsongs.uk/>

EEG's 2021 Community Calendar



The Earley Environmental Group's 2020 community calendar 'Nature in Earley' was a great success, with almost 200 copies sold and over £300 raised in support of the Group's environmental work in Earley. We are now planning a 2021 calendar for release in August and welcome images from amateur photographers to celebrate Earley's natural environment - especially the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. Photos can have been taken specifically for this year's calendar or have been taken in previous years. Scenes of the woods, lake, green spaces and wildflower beds, as well as pictures of the trees, birds, flowers, fungi, animals and insects found in Earley will be welcome.

Monies raised from the sale of the calendar will again be used to support the EEG's activities. The copyright of all selected images would remain with the photographer, but by providing the image for the calendar the photographer would grant a perpetual licence to the EEG to feature the image in any of its publications. All images used will be credited to the photographer. The deadline for the submission of images is the 30th June 2020. Photographs should ideally be submitted in JPEG format and no larger than 5MB in file-size. Please send your photos with your name, photo titles and contact e-mail address to **Bob Collis** at: EEGphotocalendar@earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk

Bob Collis, Calendar Editor

Bringing you up-to-date with local affairs

Wokingham Climate Emergency Action Plan

Wokingham Borough has announced a 3-year plan with a commitment to spend £50 million – including £18 million on renewable energy and £13 million on future road building/enhancement to reduce congestion, which may tend to increase vehicle use.

It is termed an **initial** plan to be reviewed and enhanced every July. It sets out the status quo and defines some positive actions but does not estimate the expected carbon-reduction outcomes over 3 years, let alone 10 years, so yes, revision and continuous improvement will be needed.

Executive Member for Climate Emergency, Councillor Gregor Murray, is presenting this plan to Earley Environmental Group on 23rd April (*see Forthcoming Events*) which will be a chance to get involved and make suggestions.

The very interesting document is available at <https://wokingham.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s38824/Enc.%201%20for%20Declare%20a%20Climate%20Emergency.pdf>

Wokingham Plan – Grazeley and East Reading Mass Rapid Transit

Local Authorities have to have up-to-date Plans to accommodate the level of housing and other development the government agrees is appropriate. Wokingham proposes building 769 new homes per year up to 2036 when the government target is 804 per year. A consultation period concluded on 20th March, and there will be a further consultation in the autumn on a version to be submitted for government inspection.

For an overview of the current proposals see the display boards used at recent consultation events <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=511397>

Particularly controversially it proposes a 15,000-home 'new garden town' at Grazeley south of Reading, to take some of the housing allocation of West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading. This would be on a greenfield site some distance from Reading, which would grow slowly over and beyond the plan period. A proposal for a much smaller settlement in this location was defeated by CPRE and others in 1999. This larger development is planned to incorporate more schools and employment but proximity to J11 of the M4 and Reading would make car-use attractive even if the proposed railway station is built. (Policy SS3)

The draft Plan also retains the designation of the Thames riverbank as a Protected Strategic Transport Area for links to Reading and a new Thames Bridge despite the rejection of the East Reading Mass Rapid Transit proposals on Landscape grounds in 2018. (Policy SS11 c and e)

Opposition is being discussed at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/SOSSaveOurVillages/>

John Booth

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

Good news for badgers: Brian May, who founded the animal welfare charity Save Me Trust, has welcomed the Government's move to phase out badger culling, and instead use a vaccine to tackle bovine TB. Note: See Talk by Binfield Badger Group under Events, p.7. This is part of *Wild About Reading*.

EARLEY GARDEN SURVEYS

Notable comments so far for 2020 by our surveyors, Gillian Cartwright and Margaret Holmes:

Gillian: January - 20 starlings on front garden as well as 1 each of green woodpecker, great and spotted woodpecker and coal tit. (Starling numbers have been declining for several years, reason unknown.)

Margaret : February - 14 blue tits on fat balls during storm! 12 long-tailed tits, 1 house sparrow 'rare sighting'. (House sparrows have been in a sharp decline in the UK.)

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS April 2020 – August 2020

All these events are on the EEG website. There are likely to be changes due to the influence of the coronavirus, so please check the website or local notice boards.

Thursday April 23rd 8pm – 9.30pm [Wokingham Borough's Climate Change Action Plan](#).

Councillor Murray from Wokingham Borough Council will present and discuss the details of the Plan agreed to by the Borough Council **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Saturday May 2nd 5.30am – 7.30am [Dawn Chorus walk](#). Join local expert Ken White on a Dawn Chorus walk in Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve. This joyous song only lasts for a short time in Spring, but it's worth making the effort to give up your lie-in, and share with others that unique sound of the dawn chorus, so set that alarm for early. Meet at the Interpretation Centre in Instow Road for each session. Contact Grahame Hawker at the Council Office for more details.

May 27th – May 31st [Wild About Reading](#). A range of events across the Reading area that celebrate the individuals, groups and organisations that preserve, conserve and showcase the green spaces in our local communities for the benefit of wildlife and people of all ages. There are free and varied activities and events daily for all ages (see wildaboutrg.com for further details).

Thursday May 28th 7.30pm – 9.30pm [Binfield Badgers](#). Binfield Badger Group was established to support the local population of this friendly mammal. Jill Holbin will be telling us about their work, and more about this nocturnal animal. This talk is part of *Wild About Reading*. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Monday June 15th 7.30pm – 9.30pm [Compassion in World Farming](#). More details about this talk soon, check posters and website. **Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.**

Thursday July 23rd 10am – 1pm & 12noon – 3pm [Children's annual Bug Hunt](#). Places must be booked as numbers are limited - please specify morning or afternoon. Wear LONG SLEEVES, TROUSERS AND CLOSED SHOES. Dress for the weather. Children must be attended by a responsible adult at all times during the event. Equipment will be provided. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. For booking information see <http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk>

Saturday August 1st 10am – 3pm [Earley Green Fair](#). Join us for our annual Green Fair at the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. Lots of stalls on all aspects of environmental matters. This is Earley's most popular annual event. **Contact 0118 9868995.**

Friday September 4th 7.30pm [Bat walk and talk](#). Rose-Ann Movsovic will give a short talk followed by a walk to see these wonderful mammals. 30 spaces only so pre-booking required - check poster and website for booking details nearer the time. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road.

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.

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 e-mail easilittergroup@gmail.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. 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.

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 10 am to 11:30 am, with a focus on outdoor play and exploration of the natural environment. For more information, please contact erleghelfins@gmail.com or Charlotte on 07771 605825. There is a limit on numbers to ensure safe play. 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.

For information on **Earley Environmental Junior Group**, phone Charlotte as above.

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