



Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve

Earley has a population of over 30,000 residents, but a significant proportion is unaware of Earley's environmental 'jewel in the crown'. How lucky we are that this was saved from development and is there for all to enjoy, whether experiencing the natural environment, using it to educate children, walking, jogging, dog-walking, photography, holding a Green Fair and, importantly, helping to protect the local wildlife. Read about it on pages 2 and 3.

Bug hunting in
the Reserve



As Christmas draws near, many cards will feature a robin. Read Ray Reedman's piece about this favourite little bird on page 7.

Items of special interest:

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Maiden Erlegh Reserve</i>	2,3
<i>Food For Thought</i>	4
<i>Bad News for the Environment</i>	4
<i>Bovine TB Talk</i>	5
<i>On Yer Bike</i>	5
<i>PV Solar Performance</i>	5,6
<i>Butterflies</i>	6
<i>A Christmas Card Icon</i>	7
<i>Birds of Berkshire Atlas</i>	7
<i>News from Beyond Earley</i>	8
<i>Earley Garden Surveys</i>	8
<i>Forthcoming events</i>	8

Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve

The Reserve is located between Lakeside, Beech Lane and Instow Road. It was originally part of the large old Maiden Erlegh estate, and has been managed by Earley Town Council since the 1960s. It consists of areas of ancient and secondary woodland, grassland, a large lake, a brook, an old woodland pond and surrounding wetland habitat. The woodland is ably managed on the Town Council's behalf by its Park Ranger and Bailiff Services. The park was declared a Local Nature Reserve in 1997 and was officially opened on 23rd April that year; it also contains Wildlife Heritage Sites and is a Site of Urban Landscape Value.

Recent History...

In 1965 Maiden Erlegh Lake and surrounding woodland was bought for £8,500.

As it was realised the purchase would lead to an increase in the rates, the Council held a public meeting and a referendum. With the backing of the people of Earley, the Council purchased the site



for £8,500 in 1965. Cooper Estates agreed to sell Maiden Erlegh Lake and the surrounding woodland to Earley Parish Council in return for being allowed to build on another greenfield site. The land consisted of the lake itself, plus Oak Wood, Old Pond Copse and a small part of Moor Copse. More recently Old Lane Wood, at the rear of Sellafield Way, was acquired from Wokingham District Council for £1, giving the Park a total area of some 24 acres.

Earlier History...

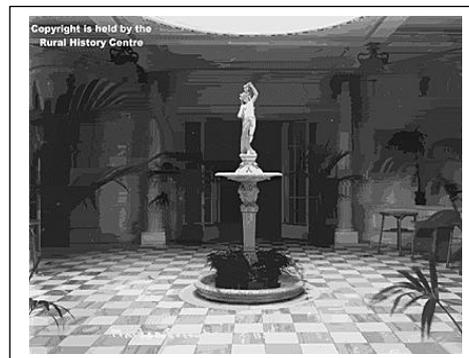
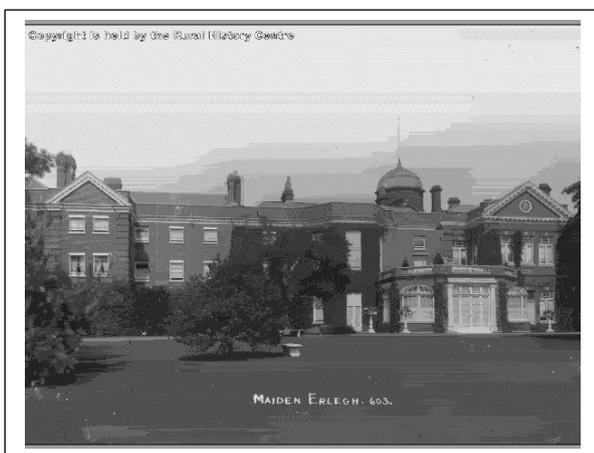
The Woods date back to the 16th century

The woodlands within the Park are of great historical and ecological importance, with Oak Wood dating from at least the 16th century; it contains some 18 indicator species associated with old woodlands. Look for bluebells and wood anemones in spring. Research suggests that the lake was almost certainly created by building a dam and flooding the valley bottom, which had once been wet woodland, rendering it unfavourable for agricultural development.

Maiden Erlegh House

There has been a dwelling on the site for hundreds of years. Several owners of Maiden Erlegh House made their fortunes through overseas ventures: William Mathew Birt, owner of slaves and sugar plantations in the West Indies in the 1700s, Edward Golding, Bengal Writer in the East India Company in 1764, and, more recently in 1903, Solly Joel, the son of a poor publican, who made an immense fortune through diamonds and gold in South Africa, and founded the famous Maiden Erlegh Horse Racing Stables. On Solly Joel's death the estate was split up and sold, eventually being developed for housing. A few clues remain of earlier times: a road called Marefield, and Maiden Erlegh Drive.

Maiden Erlegh House in Solly Joel's time was a most impressive pile.



Copyright of photos Reading Rural History Museum

Wildlife of the Reserve...

The area supports a large amount of wildlife including some 100+ species of butterflies and moths, over 50 species of birds, 50 species of fungi and over 20 species of trees, and many wildflowers.



EEG member Edmund keeps a constant eye on the reserve and the following is an extract from his notebook of 2012, 2013 entries to follow in the next newsletter.

One of the eye-catching birds that visited the Reserve this year was the great crested grebe - actually a pair of them.

In 2012, for the first time in several years, there were grebes on Maiden Erlegh lake. I first noticed a pair of new arrivals on 19th or 20th March, and certainly there were two of them for the next few days. Throughout April, however, only one was in evidence, and I wondered, mid-month, whether one was nesting. I was right, and on 15 March I saw the female on a cluster of twigs amid the low lying branches projecting off the north side of Big Island. But throughout the next couple of months, nesting appeared to be highly intermittent. Sometimes I would see just one grebe, sometimes one in the water and one on the nest. Sometimes I wouldn't see one at all. There appeared to be little continuity in the nesting. This went on through May and June, until on Friday 29 June, at 9.30pm I noted, "The grebes have greblings (not sure how many)".

Although for the next few days the youngsters were audible rather than visible, it soon became apparent that there were four. In these early days, the chicks would be carried around on the back of one of their parents, held in place by wings raised as gunwales. Throughout July and August, the pair raised their young, sometimes together, sometimes apart, but a family of six in total. At the end of



August the growing chicks retained their stripy heads, and still were piping whenever there was the prospect of being fed. The adults would call, too, in a deeper rattling tone, though not so often. In September and October, there were fewer sightings and, it would appear, fewer grebes – just 2 or 3 at a time. The youngsters were getting bigger, and by October the juveniles were getting harder to distinguish from their parents. In November, single sightings were the norm, and in December none. The family, it would seem, had dispersed.

Maiden Erlegh Lake would be no more if eventually left to its own devices through silting up. It was very expensive to desilt it in the 1980s. However, work has been carried out to prevent this expense in the future, with the construction of a silt settlement pond at the inlet end of the lake. Silt from the entrapment area will be moved into marginal planting pockets to be planted with water plants.

Food for thought

Despite producing less food waste now than in 2007, as a nation, we are still throwing away £12.5bn worth of food and drink each year, or about £470 per household. This was one of the interesting facts highlighted at an information session run by the Love Food Hate Waste campaign for the local Campaign against Waste, which John Booth and I attended in early November. Associated with this waste when it is sent to landfill is the production of methane, which is one of the green house gases which is believed to affect our climate.



The main aims of the session were:

To offer tips on using all the food we buy, even if that involves freezing some fresh produce and left-overs for later use. Almost anything can be frozen e.g. egg yolks and whites (separately), bananas (peeled, and frozen whole or in slices), soft and hard cheeses, cooked pasta and rice. Other suggestions were to plan meals to use food already bought; to take account of the 'best before' (taste and quality may be affected after this) and 'use by' dates (definitive, as unseen bacteria may begin to develop after this); to dish up smaller portions to those who leave food on their plate.

To try to spread the word in particular to hard-to-reach groups or families, who could often not afford waste, so that there will be less than the current 7 million tonnes of household food waste. The organisers recognised that they were preaching to the converted, but hoped that they could pass the message on to others – so this is my offering!

Many local councils have begun processing separately collected food waste to turn it into compost, which is then available to the local community, or to produce local energy. Unfortunately, our local scheme re3 does not yet take either of these steps, so perhaps we should start campaigning for it to happen here.

If you'd like more information on how you can reduce your food waste, visit the website lovefoodhatewaste.com. You can also find more of the figures behind the facts from the Waste Resources Action Programme (WRAP) report published on 7th November 2013. **Jean Hackett**

BAD NEWS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The Environment Agency is to shed 1,700 of its staff as it faces larger than expected government-led budget cuts. 11,400 members of staff make up the non-departmental agency, which is a body of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The cut will come into force by next October. Even worse, staff numbers are likely to be reduced to around 9,700 by October 2014.

Bovine TB talk, 16th September

This was a well-attended talk given by Nick Taylor of the Veterinary Epidemiology and Economics Research Unit, Reading University.

The history of the disease in the UK started with an increase in the mid 19C, due to the intensification of dairying. Children were badly affected by TB through the consumption of milk, with 25,000 deaths in the 1930s. In 1935 milk pasteurisation began to be introduced and now protects human health.

In 1950 compulsory testing and slaughter of infected cattle was introduced. The 1970s saw the lowest rate of TB at 0.49% of herds affected, down from 40% in the 1930s. Then from the early 1990s came a sharp rise, which was worst in SW & W England. The cost to the taxpayer to control the disease has been £500m in the last 10 years.

TB was identified in badgers in 1971. Various ways to reduce TB in cattle have been tried, including gassing of badgers (banned as inhumane in 1982). A culling trial in 1998-2007 was inconclusive, but suggested it would not be very effective in the long term.

The badger population, and its interaction with cattle, has increased due to several factors: legal protection, increase in growing of maize for cattle fodder which acts as a winter food resource for badgers, milder winters, improved cattle pasture resulting in increased earthworms, the use of feed concentrate to finish beef cattle earlier which is left on fields, attracting badgers. The DEFRA position is that it is a complex situation, and the reservoir of disease in badgers has to be addressed. Vaccination for cattle and badgers is the goal.

This was a detailed and illuminating talk on a complex subject which I can only give a brief glimpse of here.

On yer bike!

Is your bike mouldering away in the garage? Have you intended for the last few months to get it in good nick, but lack the knowhow?

Struggle no more. If you need any help with sorting out bike problems, one of the Youth Club activities at Silverdale Community Centre (adjacent to Maiden Erleigh School) is the bike workshop, there to give expert help to everyone at a very minimal cost. Some spare parts stocked.

Opening times of bike workshop:
Thurs 5-7.30pm, Sat 10-3 pm.

Cycling is such an easy and enjoyable way to get that necessary exercise and fresh air.



BUT DON'T TRY THIS!

(Note: Earley Town Council have taken over Silverdale and Centrepont youth centres from WBC, who were no longer able to fund them. New members welcome)

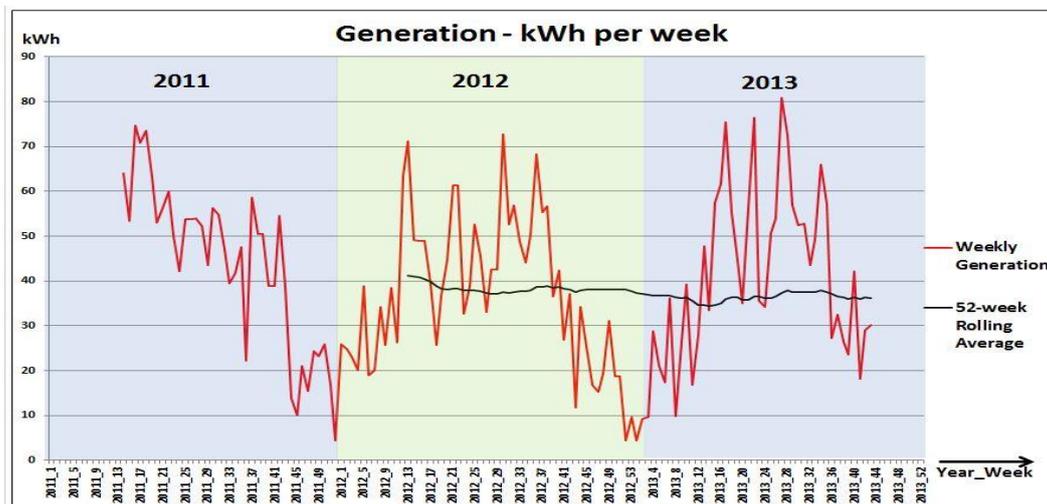


For those of you thinking about installing solar panels, read John's thoughts on this:

PV Solar Performance – So Far, So Good!

I wrote an article for this Newsletter in 2011 about the installation of our solar panels in March that year. Now, after three summers, it's time for a progress report on their performance – although we don't expect them to have paid for themselves until 2019 at the earliest.

Our fairly modest 12-panel 2.22 kWp (peak output rated) installation is working well. The average annualised generation has been 1,943 kWh per year (at mains frequency and voltage) - about as much electricity as our two-person household usually uses. The highest power output we have ever seen is 1.92 kW – 86% of the panels' rating.



The red line on the graph shows the number of units of electricity generated each week – varying from a minimum of 4.4 up to 80.8 kWh. As would be expected output is usually much higher in summer than in the six winter months. There is a lot of variation from week to week at any time of year - a plot of daily readings would be even livelier. If only the clouds would always pass in the night!

Because there is so much short-term variation it is useful to plot annual average figures to give confidence that generation is fairly consistent year-to-year. The black line on the graph, starting after the first year of operation, shows the average weekly output for the previous 52 weeks. This started high, fell to a low in April 2013, and has now improved because of the sunny summer of 2013.

Our system probably performs relatively well when the sun is low in the sky from September to April because our roof is steep. Friends with panels that are more ideally orientated enjoy rather better performance over a year. (See this reference <http://www.solarpv.co.uk/solar-pv-orientation.html>.)

Because we use more electricity in winter than in summer, and relatively little during the sunniest hours of the day at any time of year (we use gas for cooking and water heating), over a year we only use around 30% of the energy we generate and so we export around 70% to the grid.

Since our index-linked Feed-In Tariff (FiT) deal was fixed in 2011 FiT rates and panel prices have both fallen dramatically and there is a trend towards larger installations around 3.5 kWp. For a new domestic installation the FiT rate is now 14.9 p per unit generated plus 4.64 p per unit 'exported' (assumed to be 50% of generation if no export meter fitted). So it has become more important to have an export meter (if you expect to export much more than 50%), and to use more of the energy generated in the home, to get the best return on investment.

John Booth

BUTTERFLIES: Grahame Hawker, our butterfly and moth guru, has written a report on the plight of our butterflies (to see his report, check it out on www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk).

Sir David Attenborough had stated, "Last year's washout weather proved a disaster for our butterflies; these conditions coupled with ongoing long-term declines, means there are probably now fewer butterflies in the UK than at any point during my lifetime". But things began to look a bit rosier. The midsummer spell of wonderfully sunny weather did us a power of good, and our butterflies too. Among woodland winners were the purple emperor and silver-washed fritillary, but stand-out champions were the peacock and the small tortoiseshell.



Later in the summer, we were graced with good numbers of the clouded yellow from the Continent, an event that only happens occasionally (see photo). Grahame sums it up that 'with exceptional weather our butterflies can return to the numbers of yesteryear, but the challenge is to restore our countryside so that we can see them in good numbers in more normal weather years.'



A Christmas card icon All iconic images have a story, not least the Robin on our Christmas cards. We all probably have some recollection that these cards were an invention of the Victorians, but none of us is old enough to remember when Victorian postmen wore a red uniform jacket. As a result postmen were nicknamed “robins”. From that banal fact grew the convention of including the bird in the card designs. After all, the Robin has no more right to sit on snow-covered holly than the Blackbird or the Mistle Thrush.

But the story didn’t stop there. In 1858, an eminent scientist, Alfred Newton, had founded the British Ornithologists Union, which became the self-appointed authority on the correct naming of birds. It appears that Newton became a little fed up with the popularisation of the Robin image and consequently felt that the name should be changed to

something with more dignity: he therefore reached back to an older name *Redbreast*, which became the formal name until well into the 20th Century. Clearly, that decision was eventually reversed.

However, we need to go back further again to realise that both names existed in an older tradition, as evidenced in one of Mother Goose’s nursery rhymes:

*Little Jenny Wren fell sick, upon a time.
In came Robin Redbreast and brought her cake and wine...*

In fact, Robin had been adopted as early as medieval times and in a tradition which is better illustrated by the use of *Jenny Wren*. In a world which was much closer to Nature, familiar creatures were often dubbed with personal names: *Brock* the badger, *Reynard* the fox and even *Mag* the pie. In the case of *Reynard*, he started life in a French romance as *Renart le goupil*. In France he eventually became *le renard*, and *le goupil* was lost in time. It was Shakespeare who ensured that *Mag* became attached to the pied bird whose English name had evolved from the Latin *pica*: the origin of *Mag* is in a French ditty about *Margot la Pie*, a hapless bird who nested in someone’s yard and had her legs cut off for her impertinence.

But let me get back to Robin himself... Clearly that name followed the pattern of *Renart*, in becoming the dominant usage, though *Redbreast* was also used until the early 19th Century. If there had been any consistency, we might now be referring to *Troglodytes troglodytes* as a *Jenny*, but usage is erratic.

But even *Redbreast* was preceded by an Old English name *Ruddock*, which still has echoes today. It literally meant “a ruddy-coloured small bird”, and had a parallel form in *Wrennock*. A dun-coloured small bird of our gardens still bears the formal name *Dunnock*, proving that in the archaeology of bird names, some things change very little.

In the New World a red-breasted thrush became the *American Robin*, while a bunch of robin-like Australian birds became known as *Flame Robin* and the like. It proved a more flexible word in that context than Newton’s alternative, since there is a Yellow Robin –and it really does have a lemon-yellow breast. But because of that overseas usage, ours is now the European Robin. But whatever we call it, it is still an icon. **Ray Reedman**

Birds of Berkshire Atlas The long-awaited atlas is now in the final throes with the printer and scheduled to be delivered by Dec 2nd. It costs £35 plus £2.50 towards P&P, see website www.berkshirebirdatlas.org.uk. With a foreword by the Duke of Edinburgh, it contains 500 pages of colourful accounts of habitats, the birds themselves (over 350 of them), sites to visit, recommendations for the future etc. Some original illustrations for the book are obtainable to buy: www.flickr.com/photos/bocbirds/sets/72157637385922673/. To find out what is still available, contact colin.wilson@berksoc.org.uk.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY



The Okapi: For ages it was just a myth, but soon it may be just a memory. The **okapi**, the "forest giraffe" from the Congo - that gentle, fascinating beast known to Western science only since 1901 - is now threatened with extinction through war, illegal hunting and habitat destruction. It was memorably featured at the beginning of Barbara Kingsolver's novel, 'The Poisonwood Bible'. It is the national symbol of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Good news is that Dallas Zoo's breeding

programme last month produced a newborn okapi.

EARLEY GARDEN SURVEYS

Our garden surveys in October: Margaret noted on Oct 1st 8 longtailed tits, on 6th 18 blackbirds seen on pyracantha! Gillian noted a small white, a red admiral sunning on house, gt spotted woodpecker taking a drink, and they both spotted a green woodpecker at the end of the month.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2014

January 20th: 7.30 to 9.30 pm **Annual General Meeting** of the Environmental Group and a follow-up to the **Plants on Walls** that Kit Brownlee did this past year. She will tell us about the creatures that we can find on the walls around us. Function Room, Maiden Place, off Kilnsea Drive, Lower Earley

February 24th: 7.30 to 9.30 pm **British Bees - a talk by Victoria Wickens.** Function Room, Maiden Place, off Kilnsea Drive, Lower Earley.

March 31st: 7.30 to 9.30 pm **Damselfly and Dragonfly Identification by Des Sussex.** Function Room, Maiden Place, off Kilnsea Drive, Lower Earley.

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. Can you offer active **help to EEG**? If so, phone 0118 962 0004 or go to the website. We would welcome someone to take over booking the various talks we hold as Ricki Bull, who has done such a good job on this, is giving it up due to family commitments.

Join the **EEG Yahoo Group** and post your wildlife 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, 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 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.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

The True Food Co-op: There is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley. Their mission is to take low-cost organic food out to the people, bypassing the supermarkets which charge a lot for organics. They hold Lower Earley Market at Trinity Church, Chalfont Close, Earley RG6 5HZ (next to Asda store) Saturdays 12noon to 3pm. 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 or go on the comprehensive website www.petfayre-reading.co.uk

Thanks to ORACLE Corporation for reproducing our newsletter on recycled paper. Oracle is the world's second-largest software company, situated at Thames Valley Business Park in Earley. Oracle UK adheres to the ISO14001 Environment Standard which confirms Oracle has considered and acted upon its environmental impact. As part of Oracle's corporate social responsibility, it supports a number of local groups, including us. It has given us valuable support in reproducing the hard copies of our newsletter in colour, as well as printing off posters and membership leaflets for us to distribute to libraries, schools etc.