

Earley - Old English 'Earnley' = eagle wood

2020 – A Year Like No Other

According to a *Friends of the Earth* survey, now that the less hospitable weather has arrived, we are less able to get up, go out and enjoy the local environment, than we did during the first lockdown. Many of us feel a bit jaded this time round, with spring some way off.



Enjoy the Christmas Break

On the media we hear a lot about 'hygge', pronounced "hue-guh" (huh?), roughly meaning, a 'quality of cosiness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being (regarded as a defining characteristic of Danish culture)'. All very well for those who live in countries with snow-covered countryside, cross-country skiing trails, hot tubs in the garden, or hill-sledging, plus Danish beer and pastries. The top five supposedly happiest countries in the world seem to share a common thread of having much snow in the winter. Our Christmas cards further the myth of snowy, enchanting villages with olde worlde pubs? Where's the reality of rain and fog? Think of it though, isn't there a lot of this in the Scandi-noir films?

There are pointers on the internet on how to enjoy the worst of winter, e.g. low lighting (difficult to read the paper), lots of candles (not one suggested by the Fire Service), indoor plants (hopefully still alive by April), a new hobby (if you haven't exhausted these) and decorate or declutter your home (not everyone's cup of tea). Joking apart, all these could make one feel more contented.

But we do have lots to be thankful for in Earley. It's a very pleasant place to live: we don't often have to keep shovelling buckets of snow or get bogged down in it. We can get out most days, and we do have green spaces to walk and exercise in - but please don't build on them. With layers of warm/waterproof clothing, boots, scarves, hats and gloves it's possible to face almost everything nature throws at us and enjoy facing it down. You can then round it off with a hot shower and a mug of cocoa. Then wrap yourself in your Scandinavian throw, slob it out, and read the EEG newsletter. Winter sorted!

Items of special interest:

<i>Time to plan next year's garden</i>	2
<i>Laurel Park Community Orchard Report</i>	3
<i>Recognition of an old tree</i>	3
<i>The Luckmore/Betchworth oak</i>	4
<i>The Bigger Picture by John Booth</i>	4
<i>Swallows Meadow</i>	5
<i>Last chance to buy EEG calendar</i>	5
<i>Funding from the Earley Charity</i>	6
<i>News from Beyond Earley</i>	6
<i>Garden Surveys</i>	7
<i>Forthcoming Events</i>	7
<i>Bits and Pieces</i>	7/8



Time to plan next year's garden, and order seeds or plants for 2021.

It's like seeing magic at work, taking a tiny seed, nurturing it and seeing a plant grow in a matter of weeks, some taller than us.

You may not have a large enough plot to have a wildflower meadow, but no need to despair because many popular garden flowers are attractive to wildlife. It's an interesting exercise to see which pollinators are attracted to your flowers. I've found Welsh poppies are loved by bumblebees early in the season, making a noisy buzzing perhaps to dislodge the pollen, and later the open-flowered dahlias are popular. Single flowers are best, purple is good for bees as they can see this more clearly than any other, and tubular-shaped flowers like foxglove are liked by long-tongued garden bumblebees. For help, try <https://www.gardenersworld.com/plants/plants-for-bees> and the RHS website, <https://www.rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators>. Look for the logo on plant packets. Order seed catalogues and enjoy gazing at the lovely photos.

Many garden plants are poisonous but, presumably if you're reading this, you have survived them! Research leads you down weird and wonderful avenues. I have several Brugmansias (Angels Trumpets) and they, in late summer, attract many honey bees, which fight for possession of a particular flower, finding it hard to ascend the long slippery slope to the treasure within. It is a poisonous plant, and *Brugmansia sanguinea* is one of the medicinal plants used traditionally for circulatory disorders, which has been listed as 'extinct in the wild' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

World Wide Beekeeping website discussed it: "I had a couple approach me at our club meeting tonight with a question about Angel Trumpet. They were worried that the hallucinogenic effects might hurt their feral bees. I assured them that the bees knew what they were doing and would avoid it if it were toxic to them. Apparently the bees love the plant. But I didn't have an opinion as to whether the honey would be safe to eat." ...

Another entry; "Would the honey be safe to eat? Probably, because it would be diluted down with hundreds of thousands of other sources".

Rhododendron is also poisonous. One writer described the 'wondrous toxic honey' of rhododendron flowers collected by the honey hunters of Nepal: "It resembled drunkenness at first, but then became visual, like a magic mushroom trip...painted dots were dripping across my irises like technicolour rain. My body felt light and tingly, filled with warm rushes and heat-bursts. It was wild and strangely wonderful". *Honey and Dust: Travels in search of sweetness*, Piers Moore Ede.

<https://blog.fantasticgardeners.co.uk/17-toxic-plants-in-your-garden/> Well worth a read (ed.)

Perhaps the above is an argument for wearing gloves, if in doubt, when gardening. A good Christmas present?

Sheila Crowson

Brugmansia



Laurel Park Community Orchard Extract from the Chairman's Report, 2020.

“Although this has not been a normal year for everyone, there was reasonable success with the orchard, due to the remarkably good weather. There was a particularly good display of blossom during the spring, and all the trees except the greengage bore fruit this year. Despite the efforts of some orchard volunteers to keep the trees watered during spells of intense heat and drought, their action probably helped the trees to survive but wasn't enough to save the fruit.

There was a small pruning working party in January, and a small group weeded plots in early summer. In addition, further pruning was done in the summer, to the greengage, the damson and an apple tree. I'd like to express my thanks to all who lent a hand at any time. There still does not seem to be a need for regular working parties, but there would not have been an opportunity to set them up with lock-down restrictions in place.

Another point to be optimistic about is the replanting of the original damson tree, uprooted in 2016, but nursed back to health by its sponsor. This will take place shortly after the normal AGM date, at the end of October.”

Jean Hackett

Jean (Chair) expressed her thanks to the committee for their support and practical help.



Recognition of an old tree



One to be added to the long list of ancient trees in Earley, tree no.8793, a field maple, on the WDVTA map (www.wdvta.org.uk/WDVTS/index.php).

An old pollard situated by a ditch in Riverside Park, Lower Earley, and recorded by Anne Booth.

The final exit - the Luckmore/Betchworth Oak *What a pity it can't talk!*



The end came with a huge crash, on April 13th at 02.30. It had a girth of 4.9m and was found to be rotten at its base (massive cubical brown rot from the 'Chicken of the woods' fungus).

Although greatly chopped and hacked about, it had great personality and presence, and will be very much missed.

The Bigger Picture – from John Booth

Environmental Recovery after Brexit – Environment Bill back to Parliament

Discussion of the Environment Bill returned to Parliament on 3rd November after a delay of more than 200 days. Much improvement needed!

The **Green Party** says “Government's vague long-term plans to deliver environmental improvements, ‘enabling’ local authorities and ‘promoting’ resource efficiency amount to little when compared with the European law it intends to replace.”

<https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2020/10/28/green-party-accuses-government-of-ripping-up-environmental-protections/>

Meanwhile, the government's Natural Capital Committee

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-capital-committee-advice-on-governments-25-year-environment-plan> reports “Based on a partial assessment of available data, **no significant progress has been made towards most of the 25 Year Environment Plan ten goals since 2011**, with many areas in decline. A proper assessment of progress is inhibited by the lack of a baseline.”

It recommends that “the government should ensure that the proposed Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment pilot and any subsequent fully-developed baseline exercise focuses on measuring the extent and condition of all natural assets across England, as per the NCC's detailed advice – not just habitats, and should incorporate a substantial citizen science component.”

Swallows Meadow: Save our green spaces - land between Bassett Close and Lower Earley Way



In the middle of November, people living in Bassett Close and nearby roads were horrified to see wholesale destruction taking place of their local green space. A large area has been cleared of all the trees and shrubs. It is private land but people have used it for many years for walking their dogs, or just themselves. Reading University owned the land and recently sold it to a company called Lower Earley Properties Ltd which was formed on August 7th 2020 and is a wholly owned subsidiary of parent company, Jansons Property. (Get Reading Nov 20th). This must raise concern that the land is being prepared for some form of housing or other development.

The vegetation destroyed appears to have been blackthorn scrub and hawthorn trees, a very valuable habitat for wildlife, especially for nesting birds, and small mammals.

Local Councillor and EEG member Andrew Mickleburgh has set up a petition to keep the area as green space, see [Save our green spaces - land between Bassett Close and Lower Earley Way in Wokingham Borough, Berkshire - Petitions.net](#)

Anne Booth

Latest News: 25th Nov. Wokingham Borough Council have today advised the three Hawkedon Ward councillors that a tree preservation order has been served on the owners of Swallows Meadow. This will mean that the existing trees are adequately considered and incorporated into any current and/or future planning proposal that might impact the trees. Trees can now only be removed with the specific authority of the Borough Council. These trees can now be protected and retained to make a positive long-term contribution to mature tree cover in this area.

Last Chance to Buy the *Earley Environmental Group* 2021 Calendar for Christmas

The EEG's 2021 'Nature in Earley' calendar has been selling fast. If you would like a copy for Christmas, you will need to get in quick while stocks last.

The calendar is in A4 format folding out to A3 and comes with an envelope, and costs £5.00. All monies raised will be used to support the EEG's activities.

You can order copies from the EEG at the following email address:

EEGphotocalendar@earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk or phone 07720294077. We will then arrange to either deliver it to you or for you to collect. In addition, it is available at Fad, the delicatessen in the Silverdale Road parade of shops.

Bob Collis, Calendar Editor

(See picture page 8)



HELP FROM THE EARLEY CHARITY

Earley Environmental Group are delighted to have been awarded funding from the Earley Charity, which will give 130 local families the gift of a nature goodie bag, containing resources and ideas to hopefully make their exploration in local nature easier and fulfilling.

The funding provided by the Earley Charity will give the resource bags, in return for a pledge by families to take their children out for an hour a day, and will be given on a first-come, first-served basis.

Scientific research has shown that, when children spend regular time in nature, this has a positive impact on their mental health, their physical health and their long-term success. The Earley Environmental Group and Earley Environmental Junior Group are delighted to be able to help with the provision of this time in nature, by providing impetus and resources for local families to get out and feel amazing!

On a national level, the Forest School Association is campaigning for government to provide a nature premium to enable all children the opportunity to get outdoors. To find out more and to support this valuable scheme, visit www.naturepremium.org.

Charlotte Allchin

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY:

AN ETHICAL ALTERNATIVE TO MAINSTREAM SUPERMARKETS AND THE HIGH STREET.

RISC's Zero Waste shop offers bulk food, including household liquids, to be dispensed into your own bottles in Reading town centre. You can view the entire stocklist here:

<https://www.risc.org.uk/global-refills>.

A BAN ON PLASTIC STRAWS, STIRRERS AND PLASTIC-STEMMED COTTON BUDS

The ban on supplying plastic straws, stirrers and plastic-stemmed cotton buds came into force in England on Thursday 1 October. It is estimated we use 4.7 billion plastic straws, 316 million plastic stirrers, and 1.8 billion plastic-stemmed cotton buds in England every year, many of which find their way into our ocean.

OCCASIONALLY SIGHTED AT CHRISTMAS



Of all the deer species found in the UK, the hardest one to find is the reindeer (especially the flying variety). Reindeer disappeared from the UK about 8,500 years ago, but in 1952 a few were re-introduced from Sweden to the Cairngorm Mountains in the north of Scotland.

The herd there has now grown to over 150. These animals are well adapted to life in Arctic conditions. Their thick winter coats are made up of hollow hairs which provide extra insulation, and even their noses are covered in fur to prevent frostbite.

Scientists now believe that the Flying Reindeer used by Santa Claus to propel his sleigh are a very special sub-species (*Rangifer magickus*). They spend most of the year at the North Pole, but nature enthusiasts in the UK can sometimes spot them as they pass overhead on Christmas Eve. http://www.uksafari.com/december_reindeer.htm

GARDEN SURVEYS: *Our two garden surveyors, Gillian Cartwright and Margaret Holmes, have provided data about their own Earley gardens for several years. The following are recent notable entries* (Number in brackets refers to how many birds seen on one particular day):-

Gillian:

Gt. spotted woodpecker (1) June

Green woodpecker (1) June plus 1 young, (1) July plus 3 young, (1) August, (1) October.

August - very few birds.

August - "Exciting, painted lady butterfly on patio".

October - "Still a quiet month in the garden – too much food in the wild".

Like many, Gillian and her husband enjoyed their walks during the lockdown, seeing the changing seasons round the Maiden Erlegh lake and reserve, the progression of wildflowers, butterflies and the rearing of young water birds..."A special delight was to see that the Egyptian geese had managed to rear a chick to adulthood". (Photos in ME Reserve by Gillian's husband)



Margaret:

Blue tit (17) in July, a goodly number!

Gt. spotted woodpecker (1) July

Red kite (8) July, "regular visitors"

Goldfinch (25 plus) August "on water dish and in bushes"

Whitethroat (4) August

Goldfinch (12), chiffchaff "on buddleia" (1), long-tailed tits (14),

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2021

Many of our activities during 2020 have had to be cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic. However, the EEG AGM will be take place on 25th January using Zoom. More details of the format and procedure for attending will be published nearer the date. We hope to include a social aspect to the meeting as well as the formal business. We will notify you of any activities arranged in the future.

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.

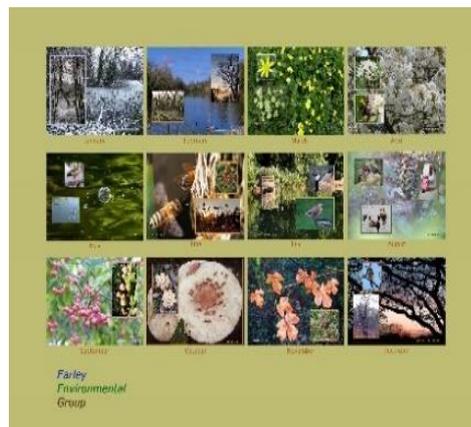
EEG committee members can be found on www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk under Contacts. For **Wildlife Survey Forms**, go to the website, or phone Earley Town Council on 0118 986 8995.

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 and **Earley Environmental Junior Group** have had to cease activities for the moment, and Charlotte Allchin will be updating interested participants in due course.

The EEG 2021 Calendar. Have you got yours?



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.