

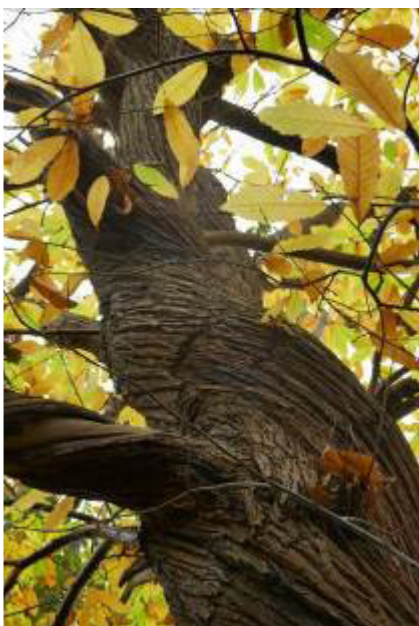
As we conclude 2024 and enter the new year, we approach the Earley Environmental Group's 20th anniversary. First proposed in 2004, the Group was established in 2005 and immediately commenced a busy programme of walks and talks, litter picking and supporting the Earley Town Council through the Wednesday Volunteers. Much else was achieved in those early years, as recognised by an award from BBOWT, and in 2015 we marked the Group's first ten years with the production of a commemorative leaflet and an article in the local *MERA Magazine*. Now we plan to mark the passing of 20 years with several, more substantive projects in 2025, and will share more next time.

In this issue we celebrate progress in the protection of Swallows Meadow, and John Booth brings us updates on Wokingham Borough's plan and climate emergency. Rosie Street will address the local nature strategy in our next meeting, the AGM in January. Walking and photographs come together in the report of a photography walk led by Bob Collis, with another one planned for February, and the publication of the local *Walking Through History* book. Finally, we finish with birds, both in Maiden Erlegh and farther afield, with another contribution by Ray Reedman.

Edwin A.R. Trout

Inside ...

Committee News	2
Wednesday Volunteers	2
Planning / Swallows Meadow	3
Walks	4
Maiden Erlegh	5
Thomas Bewick	6
Climate Emergency	7
Words & Birds	7-8
EEG Programme	8



Autumn leaves in the Wilderness



Photos: Edwin Trout

Fungi in Maiden Erlegh

October saw a considerable burgeoning of fruiting fungi in Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve – as elsewhere – from free standing toadstools to large brackets, and all manner in between.

Committee News

Announcements and news from the EEG committee.

AGM

The EEG Annual General Meeting is to be held at 7.30 pm on 22 January 2025 at Maiden Place Community Centre

EEG Committee

The EEG Committee met in early December to consider the 2025 programme and activities to mark the Group's 20th year.

Big Green Week Open Eco Afternoon

The Earley Environmental Group took space at the Big Green Week Open Eco afternoon at St James Church Woodley, on Saturday 19th October. This provided the opportunity to advertise the EEG's activities and to sell calendars – much as at the Green Fair in August.

Mayor of Earley's Reception

Both EEG and EASI have been invited to be represented at the annual Town Mayor's Reception on 9 January, along with other voluntary groups from the locality.

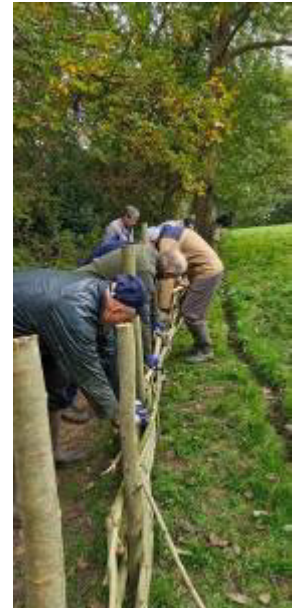
Earley's Green Fair



The Earley Environmental Group was represented at Earley's annual Green Fair, with two stands promoting the Green Corridors proposal and launching the 2025 calendar. Alongside the EEG was EASI and new printed supplies of the new local publication, *Walking Through History*.

The Wednesday Volunteers

By Bob Collis



Photos: Bob Collis (top and right) and Edwin Trout (above)

On 16th and 30th October, the Wednesday Volunteers assisted ETC's Park Rangers in creating a willow 'fencing screen' at the bottom of the Meadow area. This consisted of a traditional technique weaving of poles around vertical posts, using timber from two coppiced willow trees in the nearby meadow.

Planning

How local planning affects us all.

Wokingham Plan Update By John Booth

Since our last Newsletter the Wokingham Plan Update 2023-2040 (for development in the Borough) has been through its 'Proposed Submission Plan' consultation phase and is (I think) awaiting final Council approval before being submitted for Public Examination by a Government Inspector – probably in 2025.

The Council is keen to have it examined against the 2023 projection of need for new housing – on average 751 dwellings per year (total 12,763) – before the government's recently mandated 'Standard Method' of calculation – requiring 1,308 new homes (an increase of 560) per year – is imposed. It is not clear if/when government will seek to impose higher numbers on Wokingham.

The current draft includes 'Loddon Valley Garden Village' (Hall Farm) south of Earley, with a reduced housing allocation of 3,930 and 2,700 to be delivered by 2040. I think development here will lead to loss of agricultural land and, despite ambitious policy aims, relatively high car use with impacts on congestion, energy demand and travel times. The Borough's Sustainability Appraisal says, "None of the strategic sites are ideally located from a transport perspective – with LVGV located between strategic transport corridors".

The general development policies contain very positive-reading elements: 20% biodiversity net gain; buildings with low heat and energy needs; heating without direct use of fossil fuels; and renewable energy generation to meet total annual energy demand across the year. It remains to be seen whether the Inspector will find them 'sound' and then whether developers will get away with claims they are 'not viable'.

For useful links see p.4

Swallows Meadow Open to all

By Bob Collis

Swallows Meadow is now open to the public. It has two new kissing gates installed at its entrances off Meldreth Way and Chatteris Way, and clearly defined pathways linking the meadow's entrances and the route towards Danehill. The official opening of the meadow took place on the afternoon of Saturday 2nd November. Many local residents turned out to walk the meadow's paths; some taking part on the short guided walk through the meadow led by the EEG. The ceremonial ribbon was cut by University of Reading (UoR) Vice-Chancellor Professor Robert Van de Noort CBE. The photo right shows Robert cutting the ribbon along with Earley Town Mayor Cllr. Mike Smith (*left*), UoR's Swallows Meadow Project Manager Jules Shaw (*centre*) and Yuan Yang MP (*right*).



Back in September, EEG volunteers had helped with the installation of the new kissing gate at Meldreth Way, replacing part of the hedge and providing much easier access to the meadow. The photo below shows (*from left to right*) EEG volunteers Andrew Mickleburgh, Grahame Hawker, Paul Rose and Martin Armstrong.



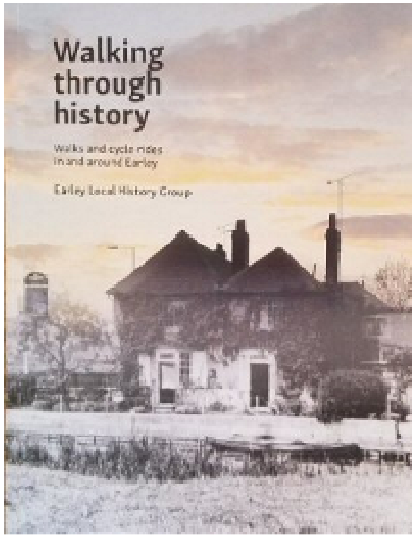
The EEG is delighted to have been asked to support the UoR in opening up this natural green space to the public. The Meadow, which lies to the north of Lower Earley Way, sits within the EEG's proposed Loddon and Lower Earley Green Corridor and also our proposed Lower Earley Local Nature Reserve; both of which link the green spaces along the southern edge of Lower Earley.

The university intends to develop a plan for improving the biodiversity of the meadow; where possible retaining its natural meadow areas, whilst removing some of the scrub and brambles. It's expected that new trees will be planted in some parts of the site, and possibly a pond or wetland area established to encourage amphibians and insects. The EEG will be supporting the university with the development of the plan and with its implementation.

EEG Walks

Report of the autumn photo walk and news of the new walks book.

Walking Through History



This new book of walks and cycle rides in and around Earley is now available, priced £9.99, from the Earley Town Council help shop in Radstock Lane. The book contains 16 walks, from 1.5 to 9 miles in length, and 3 cycle rides from 5.5 to 10 miles. Each has detailed instructions and a map, together with points of interest and history along the way. The routes included have been used as the basis of several EEG walks over the past year or so.

The book was prepared by Earley Local History Group with help from Loddon Valley Ramblers, and printed by the Creative & Print Services of Reading University.



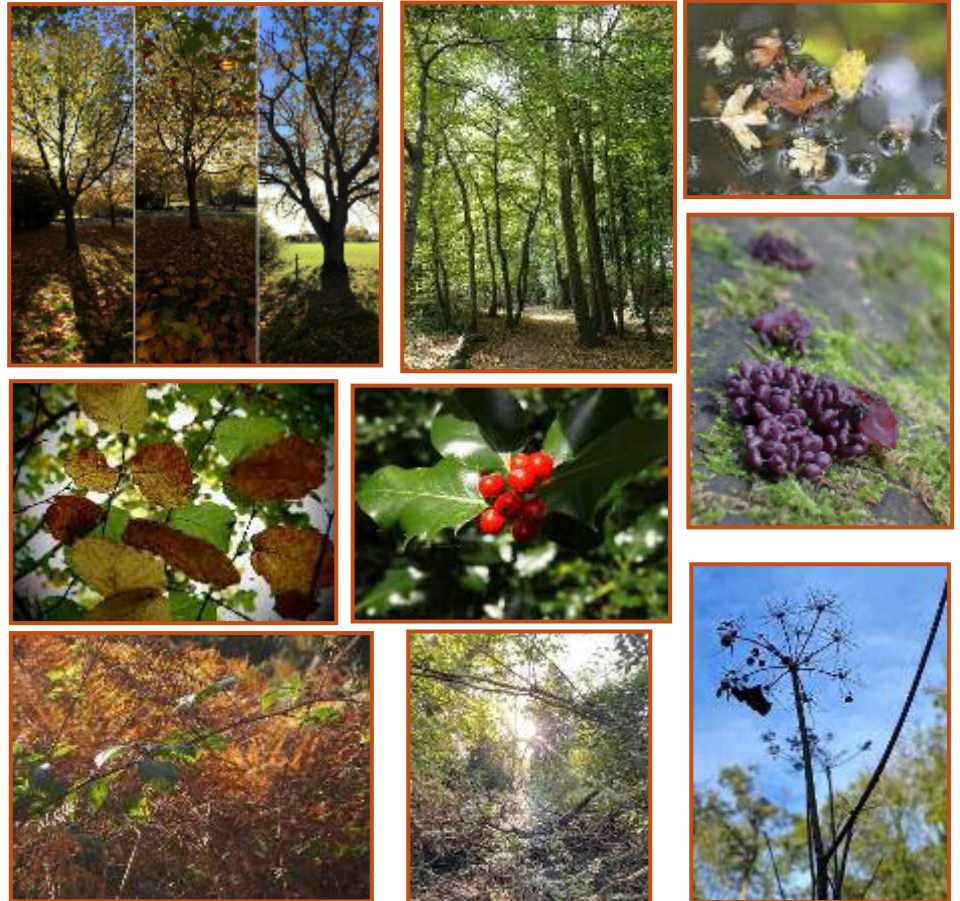
The book was launched at the Green Fair and generated plenty of interest.

The EEG's Photographic Walk

By Bob Collis

The EEG's Photographic Walk held in Maiden Erlegh woods on 27 October attracted eleven keen nature photographers on a fine autumn day which gave us beautiful light and splendid autumn colour. With the help of Henry Thompson, local nature photographer and frequent poster on the EEG's Facebook Page, we were able to capture some great autumn images. The group's enthusiasm was infectious, and we were soon finding interesting images to capture, either with our cameras or mobile phones, including ferns and fungi and the sunlight through the trees and leaves. It was a most enjoyable morning's photography. Thank you to all who joined the walk and particularly to Henry for sharing his knowledge of plants and photography.

The photos below were taken by some of those on the walk who posted on the EEG's Facebook Page (*spiralling clockwise from top left*): three-tree collage by Dan Tang; trees on the path, leaves in the stream and purple jellydisc fungus by Karen Rowlett; seed head and light through the trees by Lori Day; golden ferns, autumn leaves and holly berries (*in the centre*) by June Isherwood.



Wokingham Plan Update cont.

For Wokingham information see: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan-update>

Opposition group 'SOLVE HALL FARM' has a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/224503629758175/> and a website at <https://www.green4grow.org/>

Maiden Erlegh

The latest wildlife sightings in and around Maiden Erlegh.

Garden Surveys

Our garden surveyors Gillian and Margaret continue to record the wildlife in their gardens each month – generating systematic records that now go back quite a few years and which are currently being collated by the EEG for future analysis of long-term trends.

Gillian includes a note with her November records: “There is not much bird life at present, though we do have a visiting Gr Spotted woodpecker – seen in next door’s Cherry tree today – and also two noisy Jays, which are colourful. We have been enjoying seeing the two Tawny Owls in the owl boxes in the reserve these past few weeks and when on the Thursday walk this morning I spotted the Heron on a perch near the island at close view.”

In addition to these continuously maintained records, Edwin was delighted to spot a juvenile Sparrow Hawk in his garden in the early Autumn.



Photos: Edwin Trout

Owls make the headlines



The presence of two owls in bird boxes on the reserve – one in Old Pond Copse (*above left*) and one in Oak Wood (*above right*) – has been a talking point locally throughout the autumn. They can often be seen during the day and heard at night. And a photograph of the two together even found its way onto the BBC News website in November.

Canada Geese



The range and frequency of the geese’s summer perambulations, and the number of goslings, were reviewed in this autumn’s *MERA Magazine*.

Comings and Goings

Shovelers returned to Maiden Erlegh in November, as they have done in previous years, with three pairs in evidence most days. More than the usual two Egyptian geese have been resident recently, very vocal while perching on the roof tops of, among other places, the Silverdale Road shops, and the resident pair often seen flying over chasing away intruders. Of the pair of swans, one is now alone, and the originally six cygnets down to just one.

Beyond Berkshire

An item of general wildlife interest.



Portrait of Bewick painted in 1820.

On holiday in Northumberland, my wife and I had an unexpected opportunity to visit the birthplace of Thomas Bewick (1753-1828), the master engraver and an amateur naturalist of note (after whom the swan is named). We arrived just before last admittance and were shown around the premises in a guided tour of our own. The curator was a mine of information, delivered at speed in the characteristic local accent and with an infectious enthusiasm.



The Grey Heron printed from a woodblock engraved by Bewick

Thomas Bewick of Cherryburn

Bewick was born in Mickley in the Tyne valley upstream from Newcastle, on a small family farm – a central hall with cross passage, a range at one end and a pull-down bed at the other, and a sleeping loft above, a cow shed to one side and the remains of a second living room opposite. He is said to have routinely slept with his head out of the upper window in the second room, accompanied by the sound of the burn that ran alongside the cottage. He attended a local school and completed his education in another nearby, leaving at 14. Not attracted to agriculture, he elected to become an engraver, leaving brother William to maintain the farm. He moved to Newcastle and was apprenticed to Mr Beilby, with whom he later went into partnership. During his long career he was to take on 30 apprentices himself, including his brother John and son Robert. His brother died at the age of 35, and of him Thomas said that, had he lived, John would have exceeded his own attainments as an engraver.

He had undertaken not to marry while his parents still lived, but in 1785 he lost his mother, father and sister. (A surviving ornamental gravestone fell and broke, so never made it to St Mary's; it remains on the farm.) Free of constraints, Thomas married Isabella Elliot in 1786 and raised a family of four.

Remaining in Newcastle, Bewick made his living from jobs for commercial clients, preparing adverts, bank notes and the like – but in the evening laboured over his own creative ventures: books on animals, birds and plants.

- The Natural History of Quadrupeds (1790)
- The Natural History of Birds (v.1 Land Birds, 1797; v. 2 Water Birds, 1804)
- A Family Herbal by Robert Thornton, engraved by Bewick (1810)
- Aesop's Fables (1818)

The Natural History of Quadrupeds was illustrated in part from observation, but also from sketches made by his brother who, for a while, was based in the capital and had access to the Tower of London's menagerie – and so it was possible to include the newly discovered Platypus! Its successor volumes are considered to be among the first field guides to British birds, including name variants and quoting from cited sources.

He engraved on wooden blocks – especially dense boxwood – but sometimes copper plates too. Perhaps his most famous individual image was the Chillingham Bull. Audobon visited him later in life and reportedly said of him just three things, including the rather personal comment that Bewick's eyes were exceptionally widely spaced apart, but also that he considered Bewick was "Britain's finest".

With declining health he retired to Gateshead. (He was advised to treat his failing eyesight by plunging his head into cold water, which apparently had some beneficial effect.) He eventually died on 8 November 1828, his final words indicating he was considering possible 'tail pieces' for his latest book.



Wokingham Climate Emergency – Progress

By John Booth

Wokingham Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019, committing to do as much as possible to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030. The Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) established nine key priority areas and 91 actions to mitigate carbon emissions.

2021 data (latest available) shows Wokingham's emissions are split: transport 29%; the industrial and commercial sector 23%; and the domestic sector 48%; with a contribution of -2% from carbon sequestration efforts.

The Fifth CEAP Progress Report was released in September 2024. Good progress is reported in many (but not all) areas. While 'Business As Usual' (BAU) – following government strategies and targets – should lead us to 'Net Zero' in 2047 the CEAP aims to bring this forward to 2035 so saving over three million tonnes CO₂ equivalent by 2050 compared to BAU.

It is important to remember that the CEAP only covers emissions within the Borough, plus those associated with energy (mostly electricity) which is purchased from elsewhere but used here. In this wealthy area the CEAP perhaps covers about 30% of the total emissions we are responsible for. So we and the government should take action to reduce our environmental impacts outside the Borough.

Wokingham's Climate Emergency Hub – with links to the CEAP - is at <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/climate-emergency>

A Berkshire-based podcast discussing climate issues can be found at <https://www.mixcloud.com/4legsradio/the-local-eco-show-6th-december-2024/>

Words and Birds: Part 2

By Ray Reedman

Several English bird names are just as old as that of the Mew Gull – considered in the previous issue of the newsletter. Let us look at a much more familiar name with similar origins – that of the simple Starling.

The first surprise is that the name we use is a relatively modern development. Two hundred years ago the bird was commonly called the Stare, a word that was stæra to the Anglo-Saxons and was probably related to the Ancient Greek word psar. It is still Stæra in modern Norwegian and Danish, Stare in Swedish and Star in modern German.

The bird's association with feeding flocks of sheep was well-observed by country folk in medieval times and that led to the name Shepstare (sheep starling) and to its derivatives, Shepster, Chepster, Sheppie and the otherwise inexplicable Ship Starling.

So where did the -ling element come from? Take a close look at these two pictures. Most people will readily recognise the perched adult bird, but the slim brown youngster might puzzle some. It remains brown-grey until the autumn moult, when it begins to look like an adult. It looked so different all summer that it was traditionally labelled as a Starling, a 'little Stare', -ling being a widely-used diminutive suffix, as in nestling, underling, foundling.

So what provoked the change of use during the 19th Century? It seems most likely that it was due to a popular cage-bird habit. Mozart famously kept a tame Starling during the 1780s, teaching it to sing tunes. Starlings are natural mimics: they sing quietly, but I have heard coastal birds imitate the Curlew and have noted that some local birds perform a perfect Red Kite. They can often imitate human speech too. In some parts of the world, their close cousins, the mynas, are known for their similar prowess and are frequently caged. Young Starlings were plentiful and teachable, so were kept as house pets by many newly-urbanised families during the 19th Century as a way of keeping a piece of the countryside close by. That habit probably promoted the more popular use of the young birds' name, while the shorter form Stare fell out of fashion. The cage bird habit was widespread and had its own social history, which lasted with some intensity until World War 1, but that is another story.

The Romans used the word Sturnus, which may also have been rooted in the Greek. From the 18th Century onwards a new set of influencers was involved in naming our birds. The Swede Linnaeus was typical of a community of scientists who bridged international language barriers by using the then common scholar's language - an evolved form of Latin. Linnaeus's system of classification and its Latinate structure eventually became the world standard that enabled all scientists of any language and culture to recognise that the name Sturnus vulgaris applied to what we call the Starling. The adjective vulgaris underlines the fact that this is indeed the common form (though some of us might look at the bird's table manners and think that 'vulgar' is the better translation). It was made even more common by its widespread introduction into the Americas and Australia, for example, where it is often seen as a pest. With the use of that scientific label, a scientist in Bogota or Kyoto, reading a paper written by a Reading University scientist, would not confuse the bird with Sturnus unicolor, the Spotless species that we might see in Spain. That convention also means that scientists have agreed in modern times to universalise the English names: modern bird books will now call it the Common Starling to be quite sure that we are not confused.

EEG Programme

Here we list the Group's forthcoming walks and talks.

2025 Programme Walks and Talks

Please see the EEG website and public notice boards for further details and updates.

Wednesday 22 January 2025
The Local Nature Recovery Strategy: an update by Rosie Street (followed by the AGM)
7.30 pm at Maiden Place Community Centre

Sunday 23 February 2025
Photography Walk - led by Bob Collis
11.00 am at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road

Talks are also planned for March and April, with Jane Sellwood speaking on the subject of 'Water: how we use it and abuse it' and wildlife photographer Simon Booker on 'Strictly Nature'. *Exact dates still to be confirmed and will be announced.*

Contributors

Charlotte Allchin
John Booth
Gillian Cartwright
Bob Collis
Ray Reedman
Edwin Trout

Words and Birds *cont.*

TV presenters often get quite excited about the Starling 'murmurations' and some of you may have been lucky enough to see the spectacle for yourselves. Now there is a word with a history! Today the term generally describes the swirling, predator-defying, shape-changing mass of thousands of birds in their pre-roost flight, but it didn't have that use at the start.

Our first evidence of that Latinate word is found in The Book of St Albans, a 1486 document thought to be the work of the Abbess Juliana Berners. In that she uses 'a mumuration of stares' as a simple collective noun alongside such as 'a cherme (charm) of goldfinches' and 'a covey of pertryches' (partridges). The term was largely ignored until 1924, when the blockbuster success of Mary Webb's novel, Precious Bane, brought into popular focus the sentence: 'Breakfast was ready as soon as our ploughland thawed a bit and in the stackyard there was a great murmuration of starlings'. Clearly the author was not using murmuration in either of the senses previously suggested, but in a way that is easily understood by someone who has woken up to the sound of a stirring roost, as the Abbess Berners may well have done. At that time of day, a quiet chatter builds up to a series of swells as the birds set off in fragmented flocks towards their feeding grounds. Scientists feel that the birds use this conversation to impart information, to build relationships and to make decisions. It would, after all, make no sense for tens of thousands of birds to fly *en masse* to nowhere in particular on the chance of finding food: different groups make different choices, based on experience. We need to realise, perhaps, that Mary Webb was a best-selling author in her day, whose work was quite capable of popularising such an obscure term. Via her use of it, the word came into fashion and subsequently evolved to describe the generally silent, swirling masses that only become vociferous as they establish their roosting hierarchies in shrubs and reed-beds. At that time, the sound of a large flock can be worthy of a Wembley final.



EEG Newsletter

Edited by Edwin A.R. Trout, Earley Environmental Group.
Printed for the Earley Environmental Group by Purco Print.
Printing costs covered by a grant from Earley Town Council