

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 4 JUNE 2006

Earley - Old English 'Earnley' = eagle wood

Summer is icumen in* and, with luck, we might enjoy some lazy days in the garden or countryside. Join our Thames Valley Nature Reserve Walk on Sunday 11 June. Situated on the banks of the Thames, this interesting reserve straddles the Earley/Sonning border and is the finest wetland habitat in the area; visit a local wildlife reserve in Sonning in July; and make a date for the Green Fair in August. (see details in 'Events'). You may like to take a leisurely stroll through Whiteknights Park (see below). On a sunny day the Oakwood wildflower meadow and butterfly garden in Maiden Earley Nature Reserve should be teeming with butterflies and insects, so take your cameras. www.maidenerleghlnr.org.uk. Whilst on the subject of the Reserve, congratulations to the Egyptian Geese on Maiden Erlegh Lake, who have reared four goslings for the first time. Normally, we might hope for a warm and sunny summer, but this may be at odds with a need for rain to fill our reservoirs, and might prompt apprehension about the rise in global temperatures. If you're puzzled by talk of "global warming", read our explanation on p.5.

*A world famous medieval song by a Reading Abbey monk

HOW ARE WE DOING?

Progress has been made since the group was formed. The basic environmental surveys of Earley are now complete, and the next step is to pinpoint projects the group can focus on in more depth. We will put details of these in the newsletter and on the website, so that members may see what is happening and volunteer to help. Eventually, it is hoped the surveys can also be put on our website, but this may take some time. We've had a full programme of talks and walks, and will give details of a future programme of events in our September newsletter. We now have our own website up and running, and membership is steadily climbing, although we would like to recruit more new members. So, a pleasing start.

Want to use a computer and don't know how? Phone your local library for help

Get to know your Earley Stroll in Whiteknights Park

The Marquess of Blandford (later Duke of Marlborough) spent a fortune on creating his pleasure garden, but ended up in debt and the estate was dispersed, even his precious plants being sold, and little remains of his garden. It is now the property of the University of Reading but the public can still enjoy access.

There's a public right of way from Earley Gate to Shinfield Road, and also a small entrance in Wilderness Road, opposite Beech Lane, which is not a right of way but 'pedestrians are welcome'. Dogs should be kept on a lead. Using the Wilderness Road entrance, turn right where the main path divides. Cross the rustic bridge and turn right. Walk alongside the lake, keeping the bridges on your right till you come to the lake's end. (Note how the level of the water changes at the bridges.) Turn right onto lakeside path on other side of lake, and again keep to lakeside edge. Turn right at lodge until you come back to the bridge with grotto on right. Cross this and keep to main path back to entrance in Wilderness Road. Wellies might be a good idea if there's been recent rain. An excellent leaflet with map and information is available by phoning 0118 378 8005. Another lovely feature worth visiting is the Harris Gardens. You can become a member by phoning 0118 987 2119.

Read Renee Grayer's article, Wild flowers of Whiteknights, on page 7.

A Look at Old Earley

A Quiet Hamlet

How do you imagine Earley looked a couple of hundred years ago? Within living memory Earley was a rural area, with little to ruffle the quietness of its old lanes and enclosed fields. It's never been the sort of place to cut much of a dash, not even achieving a mention in Arthur Mee's *Berkshire*, but, importantly, it does appear in the *Domesday Book*. Earley had its manors, but was never a typical English village - more a hamlet of scattered dwellings.

The Unsung Labouring Inhabitants

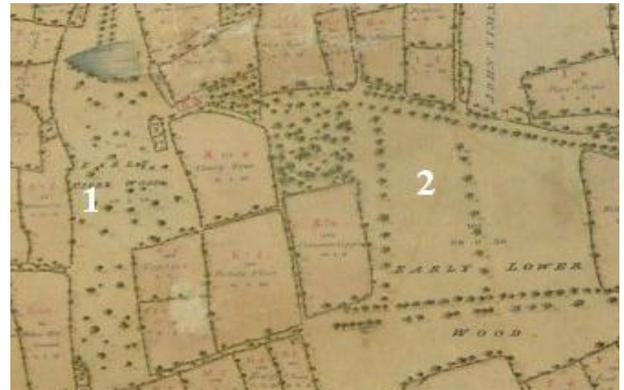
The history of wealthy residents, the aristocracy and diamond magnates, is well-known, but stories of Earley people lower down the social scale are not so easy to find. The compassionate vicar of nearby Barkham, David Davies, wrote a famous book in 1795 on rural poverty, "The Case of Labourers in Husbandry", detailing the extreme misery of his parishioners, finding them "indifferently fed; badly clothed; some children without shoes and stockings; most families in debt to shopkeepers", and this one might assume applied to Earley. He urged a minimum wage, but without success.

Compounding the Misery

What changed the landscape of Britain, and brought more misery and poverty to the poor, were the Enclosure Acts in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, when the rich and powerful were able to enclose much of the land, often resulting in the loss of the poor people's rights to use the common, particularly for fuel and grazing animals; but we are the beneficiaries today from the footpaths and hedgerows that were created. From old maps Earley had three commons, Earley Heath, Earley Upper Wood

Common and Lower Earley Wood Common. Commons were usually privately owned, but local people would have had rights on them, giving some small independence. The 1820 Enclosure Map, shows that allotments in Earley were made to the rich and powerful, the commons were enclosed, and small areas given for the Earley Charity and for the poor, for gathering fuel which was a legal requirement.

Ballard Map 1756 showing: 1. Earley Upper and 2. Earley Lower Wood commons, Cutbush Lane near bottom. Note hedgerows. Map courtesy of Berkshire Records Office



What's Left?

Old Earley has almost entirely disappeared with recent rapid housing development, although some evidence of it still exists in old lanes (Cutbush Lane), patches of old woodland (Redhatch Copse, Pearmans Copse, Maiden Erlegh Reserve) and stretches of old hedgerow containing veteran oak trees. With so little left, these small rural remnants seem increasingly precious and necessary to conserve.

*They hang the man and flog the woman
Who steals the goose from off the common.
But let the greater criminal go loose
Who steals the common from the goose. Anon*

SOME OLD BERKSHIRE WORDS AND QUOTES

Flitter Mouse	<i>a bat</i>	Inons	<i>onions</i>
Cluttery weather	<i>showery</i>	Cheeselog	<i>woodlouse</i>
Shrammed	<i>very cold</i>		

'Doan't 'e take no notice of 'e, e's nought but a turmut (turnip) headed wuzbird'

'Er telled I what that boy as minds Ted Wallins' cows telled she'

'Er knows as much as a toad knows about a side pocket'

'I wonder if you have heard the true story of the little Cockney boy, who on his first visit to the country saw a skylark singing, he stood dumbfounded and then said, "Coo, look at that little sparrer, he can't get up and he can't get down, and 'e ain't 'arf 'ollerin.'" (from Memories of Old Berkshire) Does anyone know any more?

National Insect Week 2006

University of Reading

From 19 to 25 June 2006 you are invited to join in creating a buzz about insects. So, get the dates in your diary now!

On the 25th June 2006, the Cole Museum of Zoology will be hosting a series of special events to accompany National Insect Week 2006, sponsored by The Royal Entomological Society. This will include the successful Flutterby Butterfly and Bug Safari events for children, live insect displays, free gifts, special museum exhibits, talks and What's That Bug? - an identification and question session with insect experts. Watch local press for further details (Cole Museum on Whiteknights campus, in the foyer of the AMS building)

Veteran Trees in Earley need your help

Wokingham Town has recently been involved in drawing up a record of all its veteran and near veteran trees, mainly oaks. This will be passed to the Ancient Tree Forum, and, with luck, make people more aware of the ecological and historical value of their local trees, and the need to protect them. Wokingham District Council has approached Earley Town Council with a view to carrying this out in Earley. EEG are very keen to get involved in a similar project for Earley's trees, and volunteers will be needed. Measuring and recording trees is not an onerous task. If you feel you can help, phone 0118 986 8260

Berkshire Top 15 birds in RSPB Big Bird Watch 2006

Berkshire		
	Species	Mean per garden
1	blue tit	2.75
2	blackbird	2.72
3	house sparrow	2.70
4	starling	2.49
5	woodpigeon	2.24
6	chaffinch	1.91
7	robin	1.46
8	collared dove	1.41
9	great tit	1.39
10	greenfinch	1.22
11	magpie	1.04
12	long-tailed tit	0.98
13	dunnock	0.93
14	goldfinch	0.90
15	coal tit	0.54

"It's only a sparrow"

In spite of coming top nationally in the RSPB Big Bird Watch, and third in Berkshire, the House Sparrow, the 'little brown job' we all recognise and have taken for granted for years, is vanishing before our eyes. This is especially true in towns and urban areas. The little cockney 'sparrer' is a common bird no more in London (or Paris). Numbers overall have dropped by over 50% in the last 25 years. They've never been cherished. One Berkshire writer, born c 1880, recalls in winter the boys going sparrow-catching with nets, "skinning them and roasting them in front of a good fire".

Suddenly, their lack of operatic talent, poor building skills in nest-making and dull plumage have become endearing traits. Add to this, their habit of mating for life and their admirable community spirit, and there's much to like about this little bird. The reason for the decline in numbers is not fully understood, and research is being carried out. So, take time out to admire the sparrow in your garden while you may.

NEWS FROM MAIDEN ERLEGH NATURE RESERVE

Really good news! The Environment Agency has given a grant of £12,500 to the lake and reserve, which will be used for developing a large new reed bed, which will act as a safe haven for baby birds and fish fry, marginal planting around the lake, a new dipping pond and additional facilities for disabled anglers. "The project will enhance the natural environment and improve the conservation status of the lake", said Philip Truppin, Earley Town Council Clerk. We look forward to seeing these improvements take place over the next year.



Oakwood Hay Meadow, Maiden Erlegh Reserve

WILDLIFE IN AN EARLEY GARDEN

Insects in the garden

At this time of year our gardens are simply teeming with insect life, so much so that it may take something pretty unusual to make us sit up and take notice. When working on a flower border in Springtime, particularly one containing *aubretia*, you may well have been startled by the sudden unexpected appearance of a stout furry bee-like insect that hovered, humming-bird like, thrusting its long proboscis into the flowers. That will almost certainly have been a **bee fly**, probably *Bombylius major*, although eleven other species occur in Britain. Although it superficially resembles a bee, it is in fact a true fly of the order Diptera, having but a single pair of wings as opposed to the two pairs possessed by bees. The larvae are parasitic on other insects, particularly bees and wasps. For a picture of this most interesting insect see http://www.insectpix.net/Bombylius_major.htm

Whilst digging in my garden at the end of April, I suddenly unearthed a number of **stag beetles**, *Lucanus cervus*. They were a mixture of adult males and females, the former easily recognizable by their huge but quite harmless mandibles. There was also a number of the white larvae, massive affairs as thick as a finger and curled into a "C" shape. In fact I had inadvertently dug into the rotting remains of a long-dead tree: the species, in common with many others, breeds in rotting tree stumps and depends on them for its continued survival.

<http://www.bioimages.org.uk/HTML/T23877.HTM>

A tolerably common but rarely seen butterfly in Earley is the **purple hairstreak**, *Quercusia quercus*. It tends to frequent the tops of oak trees and spends much of its time at rest, only taking to the air in order to flit rapidly to its next perching-post. The adults are on the wing in late July and August, and they seem particularly partial to Oak

saplings of 2 – 3 metres in height, particularly if the leaves are coated with aphid honeydew on which they probably feed. The silvery underside of the wings, seen when the insect has its wings closed, is in vivid contrast to the dark brown upperside, suffused with iridescent purple. They do tend to fly nearer the ground in early morning, sometimes too close; one became stranded on my pond in Avalon Road last year in this way and had to be rescued! <http://www.guypadfield.com/purplehairstreak.html>

As I write this in on a warm thundery afternoon in early May, a number of large hairy flies with conspicuously long dangling legs are forming a small swarm over the lawn. They are **robber-flies** and at first sight are quite alarming although they are quite harmless to man. There are several species, all of which predate upon other insects, some hunting their prey whilst on the wing, others lying in wait and pouncing.

<http://www.bioimages.org.uk/html/T32355.HTM>

If you notice a jet-black fast-flying bee emerging from a hole in the ground or in mortar in an old wall, it will probably be the female **hairy footed flower bee**, *Anthophora plumipes*. The males are easily mistaken for bumble bees but have white faces. The fact that a number of individuals may be nesting in holes which are close together may suggest that they are a social species but in fact they are solitary. Unlike social bees and wasps they are not programmed to attack if the nest is threatened and are generally considered to pose no threat to humans. They do have a sting which they would only use if roughly handled but it is a very feeble affair, no more than a pin-prick and is used to paralyse the prey that they store up for their young. http://www.insectpix.net/Hairy_footed_flower_bee.htm

Thanks to member Alan Broodbank for this article

Why bumble bees don't get a buzz out of the 2012 Olympics!

Ted Benton Professor of sociology at Essex Uni, and the author of a new book on bumble bees, a creature he loves, emphasises the importance of urban open space, due to degradation of greenfield sites and states that "wildlife has taken refuge in cities", so **your** garden is ever more important. He wishes people would realise that a roadside verge or roundabout with the regulation one inch of grass with no weeds is not as 'good' as one with a riot of wild flowers and 10 species of butterflies and bees. He wouldn't be too impressed with the landscaping of roundabouts in Earley! The choice is ours - an immaculately manicured town (perhaps), or one friendly to wildlife, which could be equally attractive. Oh, and the reason bumble bees weren't whooping and cheering about the 2012 Olympics? The London Olympic village will destroy swathes of semi-derelict industrial wasteland rich in biodiversity. Good news for some but not bumble bees and other wildlife. If you want to know how to make your garden bee-friendly, try - <http://www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk>. (see mail address on page 8)

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

Global Warming You can't open a newspaper without reading about it; Canada's Inuit people see it in disappearing Arctic ice, Europeans see it in disappearing glaciers, forest fires and fatal heat waves, scientists see it in tree rings, ancient coral and bubbles trapped in ice cores. These reveal that the world has not been as warm as it is now for a millennium or more. The three warmest years on record have all occurred since 1998; 19 of the warmest 20 since 1980. Earth has probably never warmed as fast as in the past 30 years but it's the future that's really worrying many people.

As well as nitrogen and oxygen, the atmosphere contains '**greenhouse gases**' (primarily water vapour, carbon dioxide and methane) which make up a kind of thermal blanket over the earth. Without them the earth would be about 20°C colder than it is and most animals, plants and humans could not survive. The earth is naturally warmed by rays (or radiation) from the sun, which are not stopped by the greenhouse gases. The warm earth radiates energy back out towards space but at different (infra-red) wavelengths which are absorbed by the greenhouse gases.

If more greenhouse gases are made, through burning fossil fuels, cutting down large areas of forests, and animals producing too much methane, the thermal blanket gets denser, less heat escapes, and the earth grows warmer. Some scientists deny this is a man-made problem, but the evidence seems to be piling up. Carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere are about 35% higher than in pre-industrial times and are rising rapidly. Scientists are predicting a temperature rise of between 2°C and 3°C this century when for the last 8,000 years temperatures have only varied by about +/- 1°C.

A clue as to why some may not be exercised over global warming may lie in this statement. 'A warmer Arctic may have many consequences. "It's a value judgment. For the oil industry it will be an advantage if the ice disappears, increasing access to oil and gas reserves," notes Prestrud. He says that about 25% of the Earth's remaining reserves are in the Arctic.' (Pål Prestrud, vice-chairman of the steering committee for the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) report, 2004)

To find out more go to www.stopclimatechaos.org
<http://www.foe.co.uk>

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Worries over sparrows

19.4.06 David:

I have only seen a couple of sparrows and a dunnock over the last 3 to 4 weeks. We were getting regular sparrows, but not lately.



20.4.06 Paul:

At the end of last year I was regularly visited by up to 6 sparrows at one time, but during Jan and Feb and during the bird watch I hardly saw any sparrows

at all. In the last few weeks they have reappeared again and I have had 6 feeding off my patio again. I can only guess that many died during the cold months.

25.4.06 Stuart

We have a good flock of House Sparrows in north Earley, although when we were living on the other side of the road we had none. This species is strongly territorial, forming family groups; where two such groups meet, there tends to be an area of no mans land. This is often the reason that some gardens are devoid of these chirpy chappies. A plethora of hypotheses have been proposed to explain the crash in numbers from aflatoxins in bird food, herbicides used to weed the streets and a specific disease, but I do not think that any have been substantiated. Enjoy them if you have them!

20.4.06 Jean: **News from the Reserve**

While we were working on the reserve yesterday, we saw a tufted duck on the lake (Grahame has only seen these a few times, although he expected it to be an ideal habitat for them). Also Alan Broodbank and I saw a swallow swooping low over the lake.

A pair of Egyptian geese nested on the large island, and produced a brood of 6 young. This has now been reduced to 4, but these four are doing well. We saw them swimming on the lake on Sunday, and with their parents on the Instow Road bank on Monday this week.

5.5.06 Sheila **Butterflies on the wing**

Have seen an orange tip several times in my garden in last couple of days. One year it laid eggs on my sweet rocket, but I think because a plant can only support one caterpillar, they cannibalise and so probably most were eaten by their siblings. It's a tough world!

You win some, you lose some!

White tailed eagles, which once hunted over the marshes of the Thames and Loddon, have become victims of wind-farms in Norway. Those birds introduced into the Western Isles of Scotland could face a similar fate, as wind farms may well be sited there.

A Visit to Pearmans Copse

Nine members of Earley Environmental Group visited on 7th May, 2006 from 2 to 4 pm.

Pearmans Copse is situated off Ryhill Way, grid ref 735 694. It measures 2 hectares (or about 5 acres). As its name implies, it's a small area of ancient woodland managed as coppiced ash, hazel, and field maple under oak standards and contains many classic archaeological features, like boundary banks and ditches. It is shown in old maps such as Rocque's map of 1761, and in the 1883 OS, although one source quoted it dating from at least 1600. Pearmans Copse is listed as an "Ancient Woodland" on English Nature's National Ancient Woodland Inventory and, as such, has been woodland



since at least 1600. It is also a Wildlife Heritage Site, a County designation identifying a site of Local Wildlife Importance. It was bounded to the north by

Pearmans Lane, which led southwards toward Browns

Green in Cutbush /Gipsy Lane. There is still part of a narrow lane along the edge of the ditch and bank on the north side, which then turns northwards, and is likely to be a remnant of the old lane.

It's a very attractive site, with lots of spring wildflowers, although there is noise pollution from the M4, which is more obvious in those parts of the copse nearest to Lower Earley Way. It seemed quieter on Sunday than on a weekday visit. There is an admirable lack of litter and it did not seem to be too over-used during our visit. There are several paths criss-crossing through the copse and it's small enough to take any one of these and not get lost. Ash seems to be the dominant tree; there's a large area of coppiced ash, and the changes over time should be interesting to note.

Amongst its notable features at the time of our visit were substantial patches of Wood Goldilocks *Ranunculus auricomus*, which Flora Britannica states "is quite frequent in ancient woods and grassland. It has a curious habit of not always forming a full quota of petals"; other indicators of old woodland were Dog's Mercury, Bluebell, and Wood Anemone. One also has to mention the birdsong, which could, thankfully, still be heard above the traffic noise. Join our next walk on June 11th (See "Events").

WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH!

Members of EEG took part in a litter pickup on Sunday 19 March, as part of the large RESCUE litter project run by Reading Borough Council. Our thanks go to **Jean Hackett**, who did the organisation, and also to all the volunteers who turned out on a very pleasant day. We underestimated how long it would take and only managed to cover a small part of our intended target area, but we picked up 39 large bags of rubbish, much of it glass bottles, plastic items, cans and various other things, including two cans of oil. Next year we hope to do a much bigger pickup, but what a shame it's necessary!

DON'T DUMP UNWANTED ITEMS: RECYCLE

Here are some ideas on where to take items which are not so easy to recycle.

Mobile phones	Crescent Centre, Warbler Drive, any Nationwide Building Society, any Oxfam shop.
Glasses (spectacles)	Crescent Centre.
Household batteries	Civic Offices, Reading, Smallmead tip.
Stamps	Crescent Centre.
Foreign coins/old coins	Crescent Centre.
Printer cartridges	Crescent Centre. (not Epson)
Tin foil	Headley Rd. car park, Woodley; Sainsbury's, Winnersh.
Wool/knitted blankets	Crescent Centre.
Tetrapak cartons (milk, juice, etc.)	True food co-op, Silverdale Centre, 2 nd & 4 th Fridays 5-8.15pm. (please wash and cut off any plastic bits)
Garden pesticides	Smallmead tip. Ask the site staff where to put them. (for safe disposal rather than recycling)

Useful websites: <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/refuse-recycling--roads/refuse--recycling>

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/wasteandrecycling>

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/reading_freecycle (Don't throw away, give away at Freecycle)

Thanks to member Anne Booth for this article.

Wild flowers of **WHITEKNIGHTS**

In the late 18th and early 19th century the gardens of the Whiteknights Estate were among the most famous in the South of England, as they were laid out with rare plants and trees from the colonies by the Marquess of Blandford. In 1867 the estate was divided into six leaseholds, which caused a lot of changes, but fortunately the lake and the woodlands of the "Wilderness" remained. Many of the unusual trees still survive and the Rhododendrons which were planted in the 19th century have spread through large areas of the Wilderness. However, most of the cultivated plants have long gone and wildflowers have taken their place. I have studied these from 1975 onwards when we moved into the area. There are several different habitats such as woodland, meadows and wet areas, so that there is a wide variety of plants. Below I will list some of the more unusual or interesting species.

As early as February or March the first flowers of Coltsfoot appear in muddy areas around the lake. They are yellow and look like small dandelions, but they do not have leaves at this time of the year. These appear after the flowers have gone and have the shape of a horseshoe, hence the name of this species. A related plant is Butterbur, which also grows in wet places and flowers in late winter along the lake near the small bridge in the Wilderness. It has large inflorescences of pinkish daisy-like flowers, and the leaves, which appear later in the season, have the same shape as those of Coltsfoot, but are much bigger and almost like rhubarb leaves.

Some fifteen years ago Daffodil bulbs were planted along the main path in the Wilderness, and although they are not wild flowers, it is still nice to see them all fully in bloom under the trees in early spring. The end of April is the time that Garlic Mustard and Bluebells start flowering. Both can be found in the woods, especially in the botanic garden, but also in the grass next to the outside fence of the University along Pepper Lane, from the botanic garden to the boiler house entrance. Garlic Mustard with its small white flowers belongs to the cabbage family, but smells like onions. It is the food plant of the orange tip butterfly. At this time of the year you can also see the unusual inflorescence of Cuckoo-pint or Lords-and-ladies in the woods. The green bract or "spathe" around the fleshy purple flower spike or "spadix" traps insects until they have pollinated the flowers. Later in the year the beautiful fruits appear, which look like red sweetcorn cobs.

At the end of May or beginning of June Yellow Flag starts flowering in several places around the lake. It is one of our native irises and is as big and showy as a garden plant. Another beautiful native plant at this time of the year is Goatsbeard, which has yellow star-like flowers. They can be admired in the meadows along the path from the lake to Bridges Hall, but only in the morning as the flowers are closed in the afternoon. Hence this species is also called "Jack-goes-to-bed-at-noon".



Along the path to the Plant Science Labs there are several clumps of Field Madder, which has very small but pretty pink flowers in

June. This unusual species is related to the more common Ladies Bedstraw, which has yellow flowers and can be seen in the meadows behind the grotto in the Wilderness. In the summer this meadow is also full of the purple flowers of Knapweed.

A water plant which is common in Berkshire and surrounding counties, but rare in other areas of the UK, is the toxic Hemlock Water Dropwort. It grows around the lake in Whiteknights and in some of the wet meadows. It has big parsley-like leaves and inflorescences, and big white poisonous taproots which look like fingers. There are reports that these roots killed cattle when they ate them and therefore the plant used to be called "five-finger death" by farmers.

A parasitic native species, Common Broomrape, occurs in some of the flowerbeds of the Earley Gate buildings. It does not produce chlorophyll and therefore has no green pigment. It has, however, unusual purplish flowers.

A non-native species flowering along the main path in the Wilderness in the summer is Small Yellow Balsam. This plant is related to the much more common Indian Balsam or Policeman's Helmet, which is sweet-smelling and has pretty pink flowers. However, it is a wolf in sheep's clothing, as this non-native species is terribly invasive and has spread everywhere around the lake in Whiteknights and indeed elsewhere along lakes and streams in the UK, pushing out the native plants. When you touch the ripe fruits of both balsam species, the seeds jump out with an enormous

speed, and this efficient seed dispersal is one of the reasons why these species have spread so widely.

At the end of the summer two rather rare wildflowers can be seen in the wet meadows along the path from the lake to the Senior Common Room, Sneezewort with small white daisy-like flowers and Pepper Saxifrage (not related to true saxifrages) with yellowish umbels. Late summer is also the time to look at the water plants at the north end of the lake near Whiteknights Road. There are many different and beautiful species growing along

the dam and in the water, the most interesting of which are probably Skullcap, Bur-marigold, Water Figwort and Sweet Flag. Skullcap has two-lipped flowers of a very intensive colour blue, Bur-marigold has daisy-like flowers with small orange-yellow petals and a large brown centre, whereas Water Figwort has small shiny dark-red two-lipped flowers. Sweet Flag is related to the cuckoo-pint, and sometimes the whitish fleshy flower spikes can be seen, held at an angle of 45°. The leaves look like those of yellow flag, but they have wavy edges.

Thanks to member Renee Grayer for this article

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP: FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Thames Valley Nature Reserve Walk Sunday 11 June 2006 2.00-4.00pm. Meet at the Waterside Centre off Thames Valley Park Drive (grid ref SU 737 741). See December newsletter for 'Walk'

This will be led by Alastair Driver, who is the National Conservation Manager for the Environment Agency and who has informally advised Oracle and its predecessors on the development of the reserve. Situated on the banks of the River Thames, this beautiful area straddles the Earley/Sonning border and is the finest wetland habitat in the area - a hidden gem. The pathways are well maintained but, again, stout walking shoes are recommended. For those looking for extra exercise, some of us will be walking a short section of the Thames National Pathway to the Bull at Sonning for refreshment.

Ali's Pond LNR The making of a community Nature Reserve. Sunday 16 July 2006 2.00 -4.00 p.m. Meet at Sonning Cricket Club Car Park, Pound Lane, Sonning (grid ref SU 759 752)

Join Alastair Driver for a guided tour around this award-winning nature reserve and learn how Alastair's drive and inspiration has turned a dull, lifeless bit of mown grass into an enchanting oasis. We are hoping to apply what we all learn on this day to increase the beauty and value to wildlife of even the very smallest of Earley's open spaces.

Earley Green Fair Saturday 5 Aug 2006 10-3.00 pm The Green Fair site, Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve off Beech Lane. This popular event combines the atmosphere of an English village fete with the chance to learn about green issues, including recycling, wildlife conservation and country crafts.

And don't forget – On the **second Thursday of each month** the Berkshire Moth Group meets at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road, everyone welcome. The meetings start at 7.30 p.m. Meeting dates are 8 Jun, 13 Jul, 10 Aug, 14 Sep, 12 Oct, 9 Nov and 14 December, and **National Moth Night is Saturday 23 September 2006.** Venue to be announced. Again, everyone welcome.

Bits and Pieces

Websites for children: www.bbc.co.uk/nature/reallywild and www.epa.gov/globalwarming/kids

Website for wildlife gardening: www.wildaboutgardens.org

To join the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (£16) write to BBCT School of Biological & Environmental Sciences, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA or access website, see page 4.

EEG Committee Members can be found on the [website](#) under Contacts, or phone 0118 962 0004 for details.

For Wildlife Survey Forms, go to the website or phone Earley Town Council 0118 986 8995

Any comments or contributions to the newsletter to:

sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com or 2 Reeds Avenue, Earley, RG6 5SR. Is there an artist out there who could do small designs or sketches when needed?

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 e.a.wild@reading.ac.uk.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre

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 appear every 2 weeks at the Silverdale Centre on the second & fourth Fridays 5pm to 8.15pm If you're interested they have a website giving dates

www.truefood.coop/truefood.html

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 9266512, or e mail enquiries@petfayre-reading.co.uk.