



Items of special interest:

	Page
Loddon Bridge Turnpike	1
Ray's birds: the thrushes	2
Dawn Chorus walk	2
Earley spring floral display	3
Personal recollections of David Smith, Part 5	4
Mole	4
Dirty Oil	5
EASI	5
The Big Tidy Up	5
Feed the Birds	5
Visit Kew	5
The Price of Wood	6
English oaks in trouble	6
Green Heroes	6
News from beyond Earley	7
Earley news and wildlife sighting	7,8
Forthcoming events and Bits and Pieces	8

Halfway through the **International Year of Biodiversity** already. Perhaps now the word itself will have some resonance with a greater number of the population, although apparently many of us, excepting those more scientifically qualified, are unable to define it or even care. Not surprising, as there are a plethora of definitions and it can mean many things to many people. One favoured definition is "the variety of life on earth", which will trigger vague recollections of school lessons in 'food chains', 'dependency of life' and 'the web of life' to many.

Panic sets in when we read of numbers of tigers falling. We love tigers! The majority couldn't care less about the common earthworm. We love pretty insects and impressive mammals, but these don't exist in a vacuum and are dependent on other living creatures and plants. Conserving biodiversity is the current big idea, not surprising in view of its benefit to the human species - food, clothing, shelter, fuel and medicines, as well as sheer enjoyment of nature. Some people lose their lives protecting it, read of heroic Sister Dorothy Stang (p.6). Like all environmental issues, biodiversity is a mighty complex one. Extinction of species has been going on from the beginning of time, and the sixth great extinction is being talked of - the one by us. The balancing act is what to conserve and what to let go. Virtually all the articles in our newsletters are concerned with our local biodiversity, birds (pp 2, 5), plants (p.3), mammals (p.4), trees (p.6), and sometimes our negative impact on it (pp 5, 6). There are some events being run to mark the IYB, e.g. Kew

Garden (p. 5). Even the extinction of the horse-drawn carts of Earley Co-op Dairy and horses like Whiskey (p.3) is a cause for regret!

Get to know your Earley:

Loddon Bridge and the Turnpike Trust

When you next drive over Loddon Bridge, you might like to ponder on its history. There has been a bridge spanning the **Loddon** at this site for several hundred years; it occupied an important point on the east/west road into Windsor Forest. It was rebuilt in 1754 by three individuals who received £7 per year to maintain the bridge, one of whom was Daniel Rich of the Rich family, Lords of the manor of Sonning. The present bridge was rebuilt in 1950, unfortunately with none of the aesthetic appeal of the old ones.

About the end of the 17th century, the introduction of the broad-wheeled vehicle demanded better roads and the Windsor Forest Turnpike Act of 1759 was passed, the preamble of which states "the Road leading from a Place called the 'Old Gallows'" (an old inn called the Gallows Tavern was situated on the site of the Marquis of Granby pub). Houses were demolished and the old road straightened on Earley Heath (the Three Tuns crossroads area). Milestones and direction posts were erected. Many of the local 'great and the good' were Trustees, some receiving 5% return on money advanced. The three principal turnpike gates with tollhouses were **Loddon Bridge** (on the Winnersh side of the Loddon), Copped Beach (sic), Wokingham and Blacknest nr Virginia Water. No cattle or carriage was to be permitted to pass without paying tolls or duties. The toll collectors were not allowed to keep ale-houses - 'No victualler shall hold any Place of Profit'.

An old account book for 1759 to 1768 was unearthed in the Easthampstead Estate Office in the early 1900s, beautifully set out in copperplate writing by the clerk, Bryan Richards, who received a pittance. The Loddon Bridge gate-keeper was Thomas Doe, with a weekly wage of 8 shillings which he deducted from the tolls levied, these averaging yearly £2.8s.0d.

In living memory residents remember swimming and boating by The George, and the Loddon Bridge Lido and Country Club stood where the garden centre is today, the 'lido' consisting of a landing-stage with a diving-board and platform on the bank of the river. It was rumoured that all kinds of 'naughty behaviour' took place there! They were 'wild swimming' then, which is becoming popular once again.

(Sources: *Earley Days* and *Earley Memories* (in local library) both full of fascinating local history, and Berks Archaeological Journal, Spring 1933, see http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/adldata/arch-787-1/ahds/dissemination/pdf/BAJ037_PDFs/BAJ037_A05_heelas.pdf. If this doesn't appear, try putting it in the Google Search box.

HAVE YOU SPOTTED A THRUSH LATELY?

The invasion of many of our gardens by Redwings and Fieldfares last winter was a spectacle of some note, but in spring our gardens could be warmed by the song of our three resident species of thrush: Blackbird, Song Thrush, and, if you have large trees nearby, maybe a Mistle Thrush. The fact that Blackbirds are true thrushes can be seen easily in the speckled young birds, just as spotted Lion cubs show their relationship to Leopards and Cheetahs (not that we get too many of those in the garden!). A sixth thrush, the Ring Ouzel, passes through the area on migration and lucky indeed is the person who spots one of those in Berkshire!



Sadly, the once-common Song Thrush is no longer as frequently seen in our gardens as it was. The decline shows quite clearly in the annual Garden Bird survey, though it has stabilised recently. When birds start to decline in this noticeable way, we have to look for reasons: some of those may be down to the birds, and some down to us.

First, the birds... One of the aspects of the evolution of birds is that they exploit a niche. Another is that they respond to opportunities. And there is little doubt that the Blackbird is better placed and more adaptable in a suburban environment than the Song Thrush. The two closely-related birds use a similar habitat in different

ways and specialise in different foods. That way they co-exist. Song Thrushes tend to feed in deeper cover than Blackbirds, while they are also much more specialised in feeding on insects, snails and worms found under that cover. Blackbirds enjoy a wider diet, which includes fruit and berries from the canopy of the bushes.

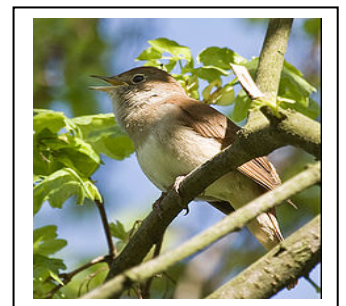
Then there is the human factor... Small, bare gardens, or a fashion for minimalism and non-native planting, do little for such birds. Even in more lush gardens we like to be in control, so we spray on chemicals and put down slug pellets. The result is a decline in the birds most likely to prey on slugs and snails. Not only birds suffer, by the way, but hedgehogs, frogs, and family pets can be poisoned. In short, Song Thrushes are doing less well in gardens than their Blackbird cousins, whose wider tastes allow them to enjoy berries, household scraps, and seed at the feeders. The *hostas* may look majestic, and the bedding plants may survive to bloom, but neither can sing like a Song Thrush!

RSPB/BTO garden surveys, which provide the statistics, are an example of “citizen science”, since everyone can contribute to the data collection. And it doesn’t need rocket science to tell us that, since we may inadvertently create negative changes for the Song Thrush, we could do things to encourage them back. We can plant appropriate shrubs; we can use fewer chemicals; and we can value our green spaces as habitat. On a wider level we could encourage planners and councils to give more consideration to wildlife. **Ray Reedman**

Read more by Ray about other members of the Thrush family in the next newsletter

Earley Risers

While most of Earley slumbered, nine of us surfaced at about 5.30 am on May 2nd and experienced a rare treat. Ray led us on a **Dawn Chorus walk** round Black Swan and Sandford Lakes. The rain kept off for most of the walk and, with Ray’s expertise, we heard or saw, or sometimes both: Swallow, House Martin, Swift, Sand Martin, Grey Wagtail, Pied Wagtail, Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Song Thrush, Blackbird, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Wren, Chiff Chaff, Green Woodpecker, Gt. Spotted Woodpecker, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Sedge Warbler, Cuckoo, Reed Bunting, AND BEST OF ALL WE HEARD NIGHTINGALES SINGING, ‘in full throated ease’, as Keats described it in *Ode to a Nightingale*. Six male nightingales are known, and some must breed as young have been seen. See www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk; check under Latest News to see birds and hear their song. Join Ray on a walk round the lakes on June 20th.



Nightingale
Photo: J Dietrich

EARLEY SPRING FLORAL DISPLAY



Lesser celandine



Dandelion chimney sweeper



Bluebells and stitchwort



White violets



Wood sorrel



Golden saxifrage



Earley St. Peter's

There may not be an abundance of wildflowers in Earley, but there's quite a variety if you care to look. Those above represent only a small 'posy' of what you could find, and have all been photographed in Earley. The **lesser celandines** and the sweet **white violets** both graced grassy banks in Beech Lane. The former is one of the first to announce spring, and the roots were once used to treat haemorrhoids, hence its name *pilewort*. Don't try this at home – the plant is poisonous! Another warning: don't introduce it into your garden; in parts of N. America it's cited as an invasive species. If you give a small bunch of **white violets** to someone, remember, in the language of flowers, **white violet** means "let's take a chance on happiness." The **dandelions and daisies** have once again been allowed to put on a wonderful show in many Earley grassy areas, followed by buttercups; thankfully, the authorities don't fuss like gardeners over a perfect lawn. In Maiden Erlegh, growing in a very wet area, there's a small clump of opposite-leaved **golden saxifrage**; this is included on the ancient woodland indicator list; so, too, is wood sorrel which is also found in Maiden Erlegh woods. **Greater stitchwort** is another plant once used medicinally with acorns to cure a stitch of the side. Our favourite flower, **bluebell**, was featured in the last newsletter. Whenever you walk in Earley, take time to look at what might be growing on the roadside grassy banks or verges, or in the Maiden Erlegh Reserve. You might be surprised. If you care to make a list, please send the newsletter a copy. Lastly, next spring be sure to see the lovely row of cherry blossom trees on the boundary of Earley St. Peter's Church. Lucky the bride who marries there in April/May. The future promises a show of oxeye daisies, and those of a romantic disposition can pluck the petals and play "*he loves me, he loves me not*" – thought to have originated in France.

MEMORIES OF MOVING TO EARLEY TO ESCAPE THE WAR IN LONDON: David as a young child moved to Earley to stay with relatives at 17 Salcombe Drive after the first bombs dropped on London. Before starting his National Service, David finds a job at the Co-op Dairy, Maiden Erlegh, and has a baptism of fire when handling a wily old cart horse. David is ready to begin his first milk delivery with Whiskey in charge! (cont'd from March issue)

Outside we led Whiskey over to the trough and let him have a good drink. Wilf brought the harness over from the tack room, and the second lesson was how to put it on. It was confusing, and I was nervous when putting a strap under his tail and apprehensive when buckling up under his belly. Terror only returned when I had to force his mouth open to accept the bit. It was getting light now, and I got a glimpse of the size of his teeth on the one occasion that I nearly got him to open his mouth. Wilf did it for me in the end.

There is such a thing as horse sense, and Whiskey was not lacking in it. It was occurring to him that he had been brought out of his cosy stall, given a welcome drink and then dressed up in his fine leather harness for a purpose. This was not to be another day of lazing around swallowing pills and getting injections. He was going back to work. Consequently, when Wilf presented the shafts of our cart to his rear, his co-operation came to an end. I held his head and walked him backwards, while Wilf held up the shafts at the right height for the harness. Whiskey veered to the right. I pulled him forward again and walked him back, and he went to the left. My only success came that morning when I confused the horse by swinging his head to left and right to leave him disorientated. I then walked him backwards and in he went!

We joined the queue of carts to load our quota of milk from the lorry. The carts were open on both sides, and the height between the floor and roof was about 4 feet six inches high. The roundsman had to crouch in the space while the lorry driver and his mate handed the crates down to him. The bottom four corners of the crates had slots and the top four corners had lugs. The crates were stacked securely by locating the slots onto the lugs. Filling the cart with crates stacked 4 high from the crouch position was a test of strength, dexterity and stamina. This I enjoyed. When it was over, it was daylight and I felt that I'd already done a day's work, but we had only completed the preliminaries!

Wilf made good use of the time it took to get from the stables to the first house on our round. He taught me the rudiments of driving a horse and cart. Pull on the right-hand or left-hand rein to go right or left. Pull his head back with both reins to stop him. Never let the reins go slack. Wilf demonstrated the manoeuvres down the straight section of **Wokingham Road**, which was empty at this time in the morning, and we zigzagged our way to the traffic lights at varying speeds, stopping and starting. We turned right and were ready to start delivering at some cottages in **Church Road**. Wilf had the book and read out the number of pints required on the doorsteps. We left Whiskey in Church Road while we disappeared down an alleyway to deliver with our hand crates. When we came back with the empties, Whiskey and the cart were gone.

We ran down to the bend in the road and could see Whiskey plodding past the church, school and customers' houses. We ran to catch him up, turn him round and carry on from where we left off. We inspected the braking system. According to Wilf, normally the brake handle was wired through to the brake pads. Attached to the wire was a heavy weight which dangled above the road when the brake was off and the wire was slack. On applying the brake, the wire tightened and pulled the pads on to the wheel, held in place with the help of the weight. Our wire and weight were missing. We had no brake on the cart, and a horse with a delicate medical condition.

That day Wilf had to stay with the cart whilst I delivered. There were no further problems, and we returned to the yard at 2 p.m. Everybody else had finished their rounds before lunch time. He told the groom about the brake. The groom apparently said that he couldn't get the parts, but he would try to repair it. The horses and carts were the groom's responsibility at the end of the rounds. After we had unloaded the crates of empties, we were free to jump on our bikes and go home. **A first momentous day was over, but what else did Whiskey have in store for David? Find out in the September newsletter.**

MOLE - adorable character in 'Wind in the Willows' or vermin?

You can be sure that mole is among the mammals resident in Earley. His recent presence was noted, unofficially digging, in the local churchyard. He was excelling himself in the path circling the Cherry Bowl in the Harris Garden, Whiteknights. Many molehills may be the work of one mole, tunnelling through about 18 kg of soil in an hour (like you shifting 12 tons!). Molehills only last for a short time while he constructs his tunnels so, lawn-lovers, spare that mole! He's sometimes described as 'bumbling', but there's a lot more to Mole than ruining lawns.

Favourite food: earthworms - bites heads off worms to store them for future. Size: to about 15 cms. Weight: 100 to 150 grams. Life span: up to 3 years. Teeth: 44, more than any other mammal in Britain. Territory: will fight other moles for territory which can cover a quarter-acre. Physical skill: can do complete U-turn in tunnel width of shoulders. Active: all year round. Distribution: lowland Britain, here for the last 7000 years, but not N. Ireland. His waterproof fur can lie in any direction. When moleskin clothing was popular, professional mole catchers called "wanters" ("wa(u)nt" is old name for mole) killed and skinned millions, with a waistcoat requiring 100 skins. The mole was classified as vermin in the Act of 1566, and parishes paid one halfpenny for each mole head. Big estates employed a mole catcher; our present Queen employs a royal mole catcher at Sandringham. Perhaps she noted that William III died after being thrown from his horse when it stumbled on a molehill.

It might surprise you to find that Canada is a global polluter in our oil-hungry world.

Dirty Oil



Canada has the second-largest oil reserves in the world after Saudi Arabia.

Extracting the oil from the vast tar sands in Alberta is hugely carbon-intensive, and is the biggest open-cast mining operation on Earth. Pristine wilderness in the Peace River and Athabasca area of northern Alberta is being destroyed, and in its place massive lakes containing toxic slurry are formed from the bitumen extraction process, as well as huge pits and the risk of ground-water and river pollution. With the oil rig disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, increased interest in onshore oil such as the tar sands could result. Alberta's premier, Ed Stelmach, has recently been promoting it as a 'safer' option. The US and China are already big consumers, and it has indirectly entered the EU petrol supply, according to Greenpeace.

I visited the forests and rivers of this area many years ago, and its wild beauty remains with me still.

ANNE BOOTH

EASI (Earley Adopt-a-Street Initiative)

now has over 30 volunteers signed up to keep Earley free of litter. If you would like to care for your street, phone Brian Hackett on 9861115 or e-mail ask.mera@btinternet.com

WBC 'THE BIG TIDY UP', March 2010: A fantastic litter pick in Earley
Grand totals collected: 59 bags of rubbish; 27 of cans and plastic bottles; 7 plus 1 box glass bottles, or 93 bags and 1 box altogether, all thanks to the **Wellington Grange residents** (6 adults, 4 children), the **EEG/TVP Rowing Club group** near Kennet Mouth (8 adults, 2 children incl. Cllr Lissaman), and **EEG morning and afternoon groups** (31 adults, 4 children, incl Councillors Tim and Linda Chambers, and Tim Holton) covering Laurel Park and field, plus footpath down to Lower Earley Baptist Church, Beech Lane from footpath to Instow Road as far as cul-de-sac end of Beech Lane, Rushey Way parallel with Beech Lane, and Radstock Lane (part). Thanks to all those who gave time and took part, especially to Jean Hackett who organised it. On April 21st We received a certificate for our part in this from the ex High Sheriff of Berkshire, Dr. Hill Williams, who came to our Grasshopper and Cricket talk by Adrian Hickman especially to present it. **JOIN US NEXT YEAR.**

FEED THE BIRDS.....

Melanie Orros, one of our members, is looking for volunteers to take part in a Reading University research project into the effects of bird feeders in your garden. They want to hear from people who provide food all year round, from those who provide food in the winter only, and also from people who do not put out any food at all. There are two separate projects, one of interest to gardeners, as it aims at finding out whether garden birds earn their keep by keeping down pests in the garden.

For more information, and to sign up for the research projects, see <http://www.reading.ac.uk/gardenwatch>
Contact Melanie Orros at gardenwatch@reading.ac.uk, or write to Room 205 Lyle Tower, School of Biological Sciences, University of Reading, Reading RG5 6BX.

Kew

Why not visit Kew in the International Year of Biodiversity

Kew Gardens are laying on special activities for IYB 2010. Here are just a few:

'Biodiversity in a Native British Woodland', walk until 29th June on Tues, Thurs & Sat 2.30, £5. Ring 0208 332 5604.

Now to 30th Sep 'Biodiversity - what's it all about?', walk daily 12 noon from Guides Desk, Victoria Plaza, free.

To 5th Sep Self-Guided Family Walk, 'Biodiversity Trail' Leaflet at any gate.

To 5th Sep, new natural woodland play area for children.

To find out more, phone general enquiries: 020 8332 5655 or www.kew.org gives you lots of information.

The Price of WOOD

WOOD PROVENANCE AND CERTIFICATION

While taking care of the environment and the heritage of our surroundings is essential and pleases us, unfortunately we are not able to provide *in loco* all the materials (let alone the energy) that we need for our livelihoods. Have we ever asked ourselves where things we use come from? Take wood. Wood is a warm and natural material that can acquire beauty through ageing. In our houses and gardens we're surrounded by it, in the shape of furniture, beams, floors, fences, toys. Where is it from? Most of it is imported, and reports state that only 10% comes from forests that are managed in a sustainable way. According to the Rainforest Alliance, between 50 and 80 per cent of all logging in countries such as Indonesia, the Cameroon, Bolivia, and the Brazilian Amazon is estimated to be illegal. The good news is that wood provenance can be certified by third-party schemes: there are now several independent bodies that follow the production of raw materials and certify material that comes from sustainably-run forests. They are, for example, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), or the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes (PEFC). These are among the largest at an international level; but there are others at a national and local level, and even some certifying recovered, recycled or salvaged wood, like the SmartWood program. Encouraging as this is, these schemes work exclusively and only if the buyer chooses items that come through these channels and refuses to buy from the uncertified others. The link below allows you to see a list of companies, including well-known household names, that have collaborated with such schemes:
<http://www.rainforestalliance.org/forestry.cfm?id=smartsource>

Another simple thing we can do is always inquire of sellers what they know about the provenance of their wood and their products: it could be **very interesting**.

Ornella Trevisan

See right, and item below.

English oaks in trouble!

We've lost our elms, which were such a feature of our countryside, and now our oaks face a grave threat. Acute Oak Decline (AOD), thought to be caused by a previously unknown bacteria which causes the tree to bleed black fluid and can kill within 5 years, is now present in 55 sites, including southern England, and there may be many more as yet unidentified.

The loss of oaks to our countryside would be incalculable and catastrophic. The countryside without oaks is just unimaginable.

What to do? Write to Defra at Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1 3JR or email defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk and ask what extra funding for research into this disease they propose to provide, which is urgently needed. Write to MP John Redwood.

Earley has many veteran oaks from its rural past and it would be a barren place without them. We have 270 trees on the Wok. District Vet. Tree Assn, database, most of them oaks.

Here are just some of the well-known companies that have worked with SmartSource

Marks & Spencer

Unilever

Kraft

Coca Cola

Staples

Knoll

United Kingdom Timber Trade Federation

Ben & Jerry

Scholastic

GREEN HEROES: US Nun Sister Dorothy Stang

Dorothy Stang was brutally murdered in February 2005. She had dared to speak out for the rights of the rainforest and its people against the disastrous exploitation of the logging firms and ranchers. Born in Dayton, Ohio, she worked in the Amazon for 30 years, protecting the rainforest and the rights of rural workers against large-scale farmers wanting to take their land. She also helped to encourage small-scale, sustainable farming. On her way with two peasants to a meeting to discuss a settlement in the area, she was gunned down by two gunmen, shot six times at close range. Justice was finally served in May 2010 when rancher Regivaldo Galvao was convicted of her murder and sentenced to 30 years in prison. He and land-owner Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, who also received 30 years, conspired to have her assassinated. Another three men had been previously convicted of involvement. The murder shook Brazil and the President ordered an immediate investigation. The Government has the difficult task of balancing the rainforest people's welfare against the need to earn income to clear billions of dollars owing to the IMF.

Right: People escorting her coffin from Belem airport to Anapu, her home, for a wake

The Amazonian rainforests have unparalleled [biodiversity](#). More than 1/3rd of all species in the world live in the Amazon rainforest.



NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

A helping hand for orang-utans: World Land Trust is excited to discover for the first time that in Borneo an orang-utan, searching for a new habitat, has used one of their specially-designed rope bridges. This was photographed by a member of the local community. These bridges are necessary as the large trees which provide natural bridges have been lost to deforestation, and drains built by palm oil producers have further fragmented the habitat. Other wild species have also benefitted.

More good news: The Chagos archipelago is a very special and rare place, a relatively unpolluted and undisturbed part of the Indian Ocean, with its islands, reefs and waters still teeming with life. The waters around the Chagos Islands are by far the richest marine ecosystem under UK jurisdiction. On April 1st David Miliband announced the creation of a Marine Protected Area in the British Indian Ocean Territory (the Chagos Archipelago). This will include a no-take marine reserve where commercial fishing will be banned. This represents a worthy contribution from the UK in the Year of International Biodiversity. Let us hope that, if the dispossessed Chagossian people win their legal battle to return, they will benefit and live in harmony with this remarkable environment www.chagos-trust.org

Stop press: The World Land Trust won a gold at the Chelsea Flower show. The exhibit, named 'World Land Trust: Saving the Atlantic Rainforest' is helping the Trust to celebrate 21 years of direct conservation action in saving and preserving tropical forests and other critically-threatened habitats, in this the **International Year of Biodiversity** (attendees at our talk by the WLT donated enough to purchase an acre of rain forest).

EARLEY NEWS and WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Date unknown: from **Alison.** We have had several sightings of **deer** when walking our dog over recent months, twice on the green area between Rushey Way and the cinema and, most recently, my 11-year-old daughter came home very excited to have seen one on the green area between Wickham Road and Hornbeam Drive, at the back of Lower Earley Way. I'm not sure how many there are or how long they have been there, wondered if you knew any more? On May 26th received follow-up from Alison. We think it may have been either a **red deer** or a **roe deer**. We now know from our neighbours that there is a family of at least three of them which have been seen at one time! I am not sure exactly when Abigail saw one, but it must have been about March time as it was before the Easter holidays. My husband has also seen one twice during this last winter. Sorry I can't be more specific! (Can anyone add to this or throw any light on where the deer are coming from? According to one website, there are **munjac** and red deer on the Bearwood estate. However, the Earley deer could be roe deer. The Mammal Society states: 'Small deer, reddish brown in summer and grey in winter. They are generally found in open, mixed coniferous or deciduous woodland, particularly at edges and between woodland habitats. They exist solitary or in small groups.' Looking at Google Maps, there is a fair amount of green space and wooded area along both sides of Lower Earley Way) www.mammal.org.uk. Lucky Alison, Stephen, Abigail and neighbours!

Thursday, 11th March: from **John.** I have just seen in the recent EEG newsletter that you would like to hear of recent sightings of **green woodpeckers**. I have seen one in our Radstock Lane garden and one on Mapledurham golf course in the last two weeks.

Friday, 12th March: Observations from **Alice.** Amongst the most regular visitors to our mid-Earley garden since the severe weather have been **goldfinches, blackcaps, great spotted woodpeckers, long-tailed tits** and **reed buntings** - all still present in mid-March. Some of the least common now are **thrush** (2 sightings), **bullfinch** (2 sightings of a male), **house sparrows, starlings** and **collared doves**. Two **foxes** have been doing their rounds (separately), mostly seen just before dusk, eating and/or hiding my proffered dog biscuits (only one particular variety is acceptable).



Sunday, 14th March: from **Penny.** I saw a **kingfisher** last week while walking the dog down at the Loddon meadows. It is the second time I have seen one in the same spot, so assume it was the same bird; I saw it fly along the course of the stream that comes in, running toward the river. We also have occasional **green woodpeckers** in our garden (Gipsy Lane).

Sunday 4th April: from **Brian.** A pair of **tufted ducks** on ME lake today (Easter Sun). Tufted ducks are nothing to get excited about, but in over 30 years (heaven forbid!) of walking round the lake, this is the second occasion on which I've seen tufties. Why this is so is interesting in itself - they quite happily stay on Whitenights lake, on South lake and on the Loddon, as well as masses at Dinton. Reply from **Ray.** I would normally not expect to see them there. It is probably due to season, when they are exploring potential breeding sites. The significant factor is the presence of an island, which is a strong preference for breeding. Normally Tufties stay with more open surfaces of water, where they prefer a certain depth (3m-14m) for feeding, though the ducklings feed in much shallower water. These are all-black and very precocious (they need to be, as the parents are generally very careless), diving to feed right from the moment they find water. Small numbers do breed in this area: they have sometimes bred at Lavell's Lake and occur at a few other sites locally. The vast majority of the large winter flocks fly northwards to breed.

Wednesday 5th May : from **Jean.** Juvenile **cormorant** (plus an adult) Maiden Erlegh Lake, sitting on a low branch on the large island near the gate through from Lakeside, and again, 9th, fishing, and drying its wings on the same branch. 9th May, 2 common terns. **Egyptian geese** now have 2 goslings (4 originally), also **Canada goose** goslings and mallard duck ducklings.

Tuesday 11th May: from **Edwin.** Maiden Erlegh Lake. Egyptian geese had five originally, but note that in addition to the four Canada goslings that have been out for a week or two, there were seven newly hatched goslings on the lake last night. I have seen several broods of **mallard** ducklings over the past month, with as many as eighteen in one view, but last night there were six large ducklings by the sediment trap, three smaller ones by the feeding station, and a single tiny duckling on the bank. This year is the first since 2005, as far as I'm aware, that a **grebe** has settled on the lake, and at least one **heron** has been a regular visitor. Besides the breeding pair of **Egyptian geese**, at least one other pair has visited. I have also seen a passing pair of **tufted ducks** – just once, at Easter.

Garden Survey:

Margaret, April: 25th, a visit from a **jay**, shy, colourful member of the crow family. Aside from birds, Margaret notes among several weeds or wildflowers, depending on your point of view, **common whitlow grass**, and **hairy bitter cress**. Another common name for whitlow grass is **nailwort**. Since a whitlow is a nasty infection at the base of the fingernail or toenail this hints at the plant once having medicinal purposes. The h.b.cress has seed pods that explode at the slightest touch when mature, hence common names of **popping cress**, **jumping Jesus**. **Red admiral** and **speckled wood** visited.

Gillian, April: Notable visits- 6th **Gt. Spotted woodpecker** on prunus tree, 7th **garden warbler** in shrub, 13th green woodpecker, and 19th two gt. spotted woodpeckers and 1 green woodpecker in back garden at the same time – a lovely sight. 9th **red admiral** and 18th, **speckled wood**. 10th **Bat** over back garden. 13th, Young **frog** in the border.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- June:** **Sunday, 20th** 2 to 4 p.m. (maybe to 5 p.m. for those who wish to carry on) Walk round **Lavell's Lake and Twyford Lakes**. Leader Ray Reedman. Meet at Lavell's Lake car park at 1.45 p.m.
- July:** **Saturday, 17th** 1.30 to 4 p.m. Walk in **Paices Wood**. John Lerpiniere will lead us round this reserve. Meet in car park at 1.15. Postcode - RG7 4PQ. Directions - At the top of Paices Hill, off the A 340, south from Aldermaston village turn into Young's Industrial Estate and drive straight through the estate. You will see the country park entrance to your left.
www.pangandkennetvalleys.org.uk/paices%20wood%20leaflet.pdf
- August:** **Saturday, 7th** **Green Fair**, Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve, Beech Lane entrance.
- September:** **Wednesday, 15th** 7.30 p.m. "**British Bats and Bats of the World**", talk by Julian Mason, Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.
- October:** **Monday, 18th** "**Spiders**", talk by Martin Woolner, Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.
- November:** **To be announced.**
- December:** **Monday, 13th** 7.30 p.m. **EEG Christmas Social: Interpretation Centre**, Maiden Erlegh Reserve

Bits and Pieces

Can you offer active help to the Group? If you can, phone 0118 962 0004 or go to the website. We would welcome more member involvement. **If you have no expertise and would like to get involved, you may be able to give practical help.** Perhaps help with distributing the newsletter hard copies, or maybe you have graphic design skills (for occasional posters, leaflets), computer skills, any other skills to offer.

Join the **EEG Yahoo Group** and **post your 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](http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk) under Downloads, or send an e-mail to 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 send an e-mail.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre : There is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley, their most successful market. Their mission is to take low-cost organic food out to the people, bypassing the supermarkets which charge a lot for organics. They hold markets at the Silverdale Centre on Fridays, 5 to 8. 15 p.m. They have a website giving dates 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, they support a number of local groups, including us. They have 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.