



The changing face of Earley



A Blot on the Landscape? Much has changed in the landscape of Earley during the last hundred years. Those of us who have chosen to live in the pleasant town of Earley have been served well by the development. But there are still remnants of the old Earley, particularly in the two big estates (see below.)

The mast erected in Redhatch Copse accommodates mobile phone and emergency service aerals, and as a community we are the beneficiaries. But local residents who now have this feature looming over their properties

are devastated by this change in the landscape. Page 4 has a summary which represents exclusively one resident's strong views on this. Some points may need clarifying, and we will endeavour to do this in the next newsletter. The copse has changed little in shape over several hundred years and one has to wonder at the cavalier attitude towards our ancient woodlands; there seems to be no protection for them. It was stated that no other sites were suitable. However, if there had been a law against this sort of development in ancient landscape, no doubt another site would soon have been found.

(Photo by Anne Booth)

The Disappearance of Large Estates: Two big estates were also the victims of development, but who could afford the upkeep nowadays? Both these estates are described in "THE NABOBS OF BERKSHIRE" by Clive Williams, OBE. Two of the owners, Edward Golding of Maiden Erlegh and Wm Byam Martin of **Whiteknights**, acquired large fortunes through working for the East India Company. These large estates are no more, but the lakes and surrounding woodland areas still exist to give pleasure to local people.

The book gives a full description of the history of the East India Company and other fascinating information to do with the British in India (see page 6).

Items of special interest:

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Things that go “chirr” in the night

The Nightjar is a mysterious bird which few people today ever see well. That is partly because it is nocturnal, and partly because it is a bird of scarce heathland habitats. A nineteenth century record suggests that it was frequent around Reading in 1814, when Bulmershe Heath could have provided habitat for it. But today it is confined to the conifer-and-heathland habitat in the east and south of the county, and in very small numbers.

The birds arrive from Africa in late spring, and nest on the ground, producing two or three eggs and often a second brood. Its complex, cryptic plumage protects the brooding bird during the day, since it blends perfectly with the surrounding bracken. At dusk, displaying males, which sit along branches, begin a drawn-out metallic chorus, which is known as “chirring”. This is interspersed with a wing-clap flight and odd harsh calls. The male has white wing patches, which help to attract the female in the dusk. For that reason, Bill Oddie was seen on television waving a white handkerchief to draw the birds near. It can work, since I have known them to come very close.

In spite of some of its traditional names, such as Fern Owl and Churn Owl (the former from its habitat, the latter from its call), it is but a very distant cousin of the true owls. It is in fact much more closely related to the Swift. The Nightjar too feeds on the wing, its huge gape being surrounded by bristles which help to direct prey-large insects - such as moths and flying beetles, into the mouth. Curiously, it does not use echo-location like bats do.



The greatest calumny suffered by this innocuous bird dates back at least to the times of the Ancient Greeks, and to them we owe the origins of another traditional name, the Goatsucker. When they were observed regularly flying near herds of Hellenic goats, the not-so-wise among the Ancients decided that they must be after the milk. The truth was that a herd of smelly goats would be surrounded by clouds of juicy flies, and those were the target. But falsehoods often stick better than the facts, so the story has survived to travel the world. Today it appears in Latin as the modern scientific name, *Caprimulgus*.

There are many other species of nightjar around the world, so ours is now the European Nightjar. The world family includes various nighthawks such as the oddly-named Whippoorwill and Pauraque, the latter being one of three species we saw in Trinidad. We also saw two of their odder cousins, the Common Potoo and the Oilbird: the fat young of the latter made good lamp-oil! In the Blue Mountains of Australia, another relative, the Tawny Frogmouth, was sitting on a single egg wedged in a notch of a horizontal branch. Incidentally, the two world monographs for this species were researched and written by Berkshire resident, Nigel Cleere.

My acrylic sketch, made after a successful trip to Swinley Forest one evening, shows a male in display flight in the last afterglow from the west. Like so many migrants, this species is in some danger, due to habitat loss and the decline in the numbers of insects. **Ray Reedman, April 2013**

(See report of the walk led by Ray on page 5)

Susannah would like your help

A University of Reading project is being undertaken by Susannah Townroe who is investigating the breeding seasonality and success of Britain's commonest garden mosquito, *Culex pipiens*. Volunteers are needed who would allow a mosquito trap in their garden for **ONE NIGHT ONLY**. Traps consist of a tray containing nutrient-rich water, with a toolbox on top that contains a battery-powered suction system for collecting adult mosquitoes.

The study will run during May, July and September 2013, with 4 nights of trapping in each of these months. Each volunteer will have a trap in their garden for **one night only** and can choose the most convenient date.

Suitable gardens will have some leafy vegetation to provide the trap with cover. Ideally, traps will be placed in front gardens (allowing us easy access and more convenient for you); however, back gardens are suitable if access can be provided. Particularly welcome are volunteers who suspect that they have mosquito larvae or adults in their garden.

Contact: s.townroe@pgr.reading.ac.uk
or c/o Dr A. Callaghan, School of Biological Sciences, University of Reading, Whiteknights PO Box 68, Reading RG6 6BX.

Safer Cycling in Earley

The entire length of Lower Earley Way will soon offer cyclists a safe 3m-wide cycle and footway, thanks to a share of £20 million of Government funding announced last Thursday.

Wokingham Borough Council will use £358,575 of developer funding from the Marsh Farm estate in Lower Earley, along with £747,825 funding from the Department for Transport, to pay for the scheme.

The funding, which focuses specifically on cycling, is separate from a £2.75-million grant awarded to the council from the Government's Local Sustainable Transport Fund last year, which aims to create sustainable transport schemes and reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

Around £160,000 from that funding pot has already been allocated to improve cycle links for pupils in Woodley and Earley wanting to cycle to Bulmershe School.



The Changing Face of Maiden Erlegh Reserve : The Tithe Award Map on the right dates from about 1840. The large lake on the left looks much the same shape today. However, the lake on the right in Pond Copse has shrunk, and until recently was a small pond which sometimes dried out.

Work has been carried out to restore a small version of the lake by putting in a mini-dam. This has resulted in a small area of surrounding woodland flooding and becoming a type of carr, a wetland with trees, as it used to be. The water in the old pond, which is retained, has been stabilised. Water seeps into it, so it doesn't dry out. The dam can be used to prevent possible unwanted flooding.



Redhatch Copse Telecommunications Mast "A Blot on the Landscape"

David Storrie, of Fulmer Close, along with other residents, bitterly opposed the erection of this mast and, looking at the photo, one can see why. The following is a summary of Mr. Storrie's comments passed to EEG on the ramifications of this development. The full version of his strongly-held views can be found on the EEG website.

Mr. Storrie felt he had had little support from Wokingham Borough Council or Earley Town Council. The planning appeal on 6th and 7th March, 2012 came out in favour of erecting the mast in its present position, despite arguments from local residents about the size, noise, environment and other genuine issues being put forward. Access to the copse has now been denied.

The mast was supposedly built to a maximum of 30 m. It would appear it is now taller. As there is no access, it is impossible to verify this.

The University asserted that the mast could not be erected elsewhere. David's view is that this is nonsense; the objectors suggested several other possible sites, all rejected as these would not generate income for the University, as it did not own them.

The suggestion of putting the mast on the site of the Sibly Hall building did not meet approval, as this might depress the selling price of the proposed housing development. The effects on the price of already existing local housing was apparently of no consequence. House prices have apparently dropped by 10%, and properties will be harder to sell. Agreement to consult residents on the painting of the mast was ignored.

The copse is to be part of the sale of the land, in spite of a promise to hand it over to the Town Council. It is hard to believe the Town Council, who have promised to monitor the situation, when history says not to trust these comments.

The effects on the wildlife are numerous: fewer birds, the bats and foxes have departed, no signs of once-present stag beetles, trees felled, possibly oaks or deciduous trees amongst them. Bluebells are no longer abundant, particularly where they were removed to position the electronic equipment.

The residents of Fulmer Close (road nearest to the mast) are badly affected. One resident runs a child-care business which may be impacted on. The cooling systems will create a 'hum' audible from the gardens in the summer.

Mr. Storrie finishes up - *"What to do about all this? Well, we have the support of a local estate agent, and we are looking at the original agreements from 1947 when the land was bequeathed to the University. We must ensure that the copse is no longer violated in any way, and that any future development in the copse is stopped. We need the support of the Town Council: let us see if they have any backbone."*

Editor's Note: The above is a summary of Mr. Storrie's views. The topic of development of Sibly Hall and erection of the mast has been covered in the past in the EEG newsletter, and members have forwarded objections to the planning application and have attended the inquiry. It has also been featured on our website. It shows what little disregard authorities have for our environment to allow the erection of this mast in ancient woodland several hundred years old.

EGG has been notified that a nearby resident had complained to WBC about noise coming from the mast installation site. The Council said they would investigate and the noise has now stopped, but it is not known whether this is as a result of action by WBC.

A Tale of a Mousetail

A very rare native annual and member of the RANUNCULACEAE family.

This tiny plant, about 16 cm tall, aptly named Mousetail, could easily be overlooked. It's found in England and Wales, on damp, sandy arable open areas, and is often associated with features like rutted tracks, gateways and hollows on ploughed land. It was identified in the Dinton Pastures area, growing right in the middle of a cow trail. It's sometimes confused with plantain.

It has an interesting story to tell. The aptly-named Mousetail was used by the Navaho-Ramah medicinally to apply to ant bites (D. E. Moerman, 1986). Perhaps the reason for their using it can be found in the old English name, **Blood Strange**.

John Parkinson (1567–1650), the last of the great English herbalists and one of the first of the great English botanists, refers to it as styptic, and says: "*Blood-strange, I think corruptly from blood-staying*". (Some may know that a styptic stick can be used to staunch cuts when shaving). One wonders how in early times they prepared it for medicinal use - any explanation welcome. If someone has identified it elsewhere locally, please let the newsletter know.



Charles Kingsley for many years mulled over countless things in nature which he didn't understand and weren't known at the time. In one of his essays he posed the question, 'Why did *Myosurus minimus* which I had hunted for in vain for fourteen years, appear by dozens in the fifteenth, upon a new-made bank, which had been for at least two hundred years a farmyard gateway?' (Photo: thanks to Jon Cole who holds copyright)

Why "Butterfly"?

Ever wondered why butterflies are so-called? It's believed that the word 'butterfly' derives from the description of the male Brimstone on account of its butter-coloured wings. And why is it called "Brimstone"? The element brimstone (sulphur) is bright yellow. When first spotted early in the year it uplifts the spirit, as we know spring has arrived. Until then, as an adult it hides during the winter among ivy, bearing a resemblance to the leaves. Its food-plants are buckthorn, common and alder. The female is able to locate these small shrubs among all the other bushes along the woodland margin.

A butterfly which is not butter-coloured but blue, which may have passed through your garden recently, is probably a Holly Blue. May is the peak flying time for the first brood of Holly Blues, which coincides perfectly with the flowering of the holly tree, the main food-plant of the first-brood caterpillars. After this the Holly Blue disappears until the second-brood appears about mid-July, laying eggs on ivy.

JUNE 1ST A MEMBER'S NIGHTWALK IN SEARCH OF NIGHTJARS: In an ideal world, Nightjar watching should be done on a warm, clear evening, just after several damp and cold nights. That was exactly what happened on the last evening of May when a group of about ten of us set out from Earley to watch Nightjars at Padworth Common. Conditions were perfect! Arriving at about 8.30, we were entertained by a pair of passing Cuckoos, the odd patrolling Woodcock, and the evening song of Blackbirds, Robins and Chaffinches. The midges were less entertaining! By 9.20, the first bird was heard – a mechanical, chirring song. Soon afterwards, and still in good light, we had excellent views of a displaying male, a long-winged, floating style, which showed his white wing-patches off even to the naked eye. For about half an hour several others joined in a song and flight show quite unlike any other British species. As the birds quietened to set off in pursuit of their insect supper, we walked back to the cars to the sound of a calling Tawny Owl, stopping to admire the toad which young Richard had discovered.



Ray Reedman

There were 10 people. Weather was good - too good, as the midges were fiercely active. We heard and saw nightjar - both flying and perched on a tree branch - first time I've ever seen them other than flitting past. We also

saw woodcock, cuckoo and canada goose. **Brian Hackett**

“THE NABOBS OF BERKSHIRE”

In the past most villages and hamlets had large estates owned by wealthy individuals. Many of these amassed their fortunes through activities thousands of miles away. A recent book, “The Nabobs of Berkshire”, by Clive Williams OBE, goes into fascinating detail of the huge fortunes made by involvement with the East India Company. He explains that Nabob was a name given to returning employees of the Company, an anglicisation of ‘Nawab’, a title given to powerful Indians who became wealthy, running provinces in India.

Many young men chanced their luck, taking long and sometimes dangerous voyages, to seek their fortune with the East India Company. Most did not make it, often falling victim to the extreme heat and the plethora of diseases. It’s said, “You could breakfast with a man in the morning and attend his funeral in the afternoon”.

A NABOB OF WHITEKNIGHTS:

One of the local Nabobs was William Byam Martin (1744-1808), who arrived in Bengal as a Writer, the most junior position, but with possible opportunities to achieve wealth through advancing his position or through private trade. He must have succeeded because he was able to buy **Whiteknights** from the Englefield family on his return in 1783.

A NABOB OF MAIDEN ERLEGH:

Edward Golding Sr. (1746-1818) became a Bengal Writer in the East India Company in 1764. He progressed and in 1771 was made a supervisor of Sircar Saran, where there is still a village called Goldingunge, west of Chipra. He made enough money to purchase the **Maiden Erlegh estate** from William Mathew Birt, and also the Manor of Sindlesham. His son, Edward Golding Jr. (1780-1844), also became a Writer in Bengal. The sometimes tenuous hold on life is illustrated when his wife of less than a year, Elizabeth Bailie, tragically died in September 1802, aged not quite nineteen years. He returned to England in 1803. He passed the Maiden Erlegh estate to his son the Rev. Edward Golding in 1844.

Footnote: The returning Nabobs were held in the same sort of low esteem as some bankers are today! ‘Nob’ and ‘snob’ derive from Nabob.

Part of the Writer’s building, Calcutta, 2012



Some other Berkshire Nabob Estates

South Hill Park
Caversham Park
Englefield House
Swallowfield Park
Basildon Park

There were 31 listed in the book.

To purchase a copy of the book write to:
Clive Williams OBE, Honeycroft House,
Pangbourne Road, Upper Basildon, RG6
8LP for details.

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

The State of Nature Report: Scientists and researchers from 25 leading wildlife charities across the UK have worked together to produce the State of Nature report, which pulls together individual reports published in recent years charting the fortunes of bees, birds, moths and mammals in the UK and analyses material from on-going studies. But the data still only covers 5% of the UK's estimated 59,000 native species. Launched by Sir David Attenborough, it's shocking news for some of our iconic wildlife: for instance, **a decline of 93% in turtle doves** since 1970, **hedgehogs have declined by around a third** since the millennium, **the small tortoiseshell butterfly 77%** in the last ten years.



Sir David thought it also carried a message of hope. Our network of conservation bodies is supported by millions who love wildlife. Wildlife benefits from their willingness to become involved in monitoring projects providing data, and practical actions to protect their wildlife through conscientious gardening and land management. Dedicated individuals carry out practical actions, sometimes in dangerous circumstances (see next item below).

A further 6,225 UK species have been assessed according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List criteria, 12% of which are considered under threat of extinction. The highest number of threatened species is found within the flowering plants but bees, flies, moths and butterflies each have more than 200 listed.

Canine help for tigers and rhinos: The editor was fortunate enough last year to visit the wonderful **Kaziranga National**



Park, Assam, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which holds the largest herd of remaining **Indian one-horned rhinos** in the world (rising, now 2290). It is also one of the most important habitats for the threatened **Royal Bengal tiger**, as well as many, many other animals and 490 species of birds. It is plagued by incursions from poachers, whose main objective is financial gain, killing the rhinos to collect horn for questionable medical use (worth \$37,000) or tigers for their skins (\$20,000). **China** is a big market.

Recently two poachers triggered a camera trap in the Park and threw it into deep water. They hadn't reckoned with trained pooch, *Belgian Malinois* Jorba, supported by the **David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation**, who sniffed out the camera. Clear images of the poachers still remained, and were passed to investigators. Since he was introduced to the wildlife crime investigation team in Kaziranga, Jorba and his handler Anil have helped to secure the arrests of 30 poachers. However, 20 rhinos were lost in 2012 to poacher attacks. In recent years forest guards have lost their lives to the ruthless poachers, and ironically sometimes to animals which they are fanatical in their desire to protect. The local people are very poor, and find it difficult to turn down payments for local knowledge to aid the poaching by Nagaland agents, especially when wild animals from the park trash their crops. Like all conservation projects, there is a shortfall in finance. To donate, go to: <http://www.davidshepherd.org/project/assam-dog-squad-unit/> See also http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0kzdu_wTM0 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9a574_7nm9w

EARLEY WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Garden Survey, Suzy, during May: **Blackbirds** nesting in bush, **blue tits** nesting in bird box, **robin** nesting in flowerpot by back door (3 chicks, 2 adults), **holly blue** and **orange tip** seen in garden.

Yahoo Site, Jean, May 5th Fritillaries The ones in the Harris Garden at the university have done very well this year, and a few are still in peak condition. (Some present in grassland nr path next to part of lake encountered from Wilderness Road. Ed).

The grebes which nested on the Maiden Erlegh lake this year have at least 3 chicks. Also 2 sets of geese have **goslings**, one a family of 6 and the other of 3. 4 ducklings seem to enjoy sitting on and feeding from the straw bales at the Beech Lane end of the lake.

Yahoo Site, Edwin, May 8th Reinforcing Jean's remarks, I am pleased to say that the grebes have four chicks, now a week and a half old, recently avoiding predation by one of the two herons on the lake at present. I heard dreadful screeching a couple of days ago and just saw a failed/foiled attack! Three goslings appeared on Friday 3rd, and another six on Sunday 5th. There are five 'cootlings' in the reed-bed near the disabled fishing platform, also first seen on Sunday: I've been checking once or twice daily. There is at least one other coot nest in progress. The four ducklings are coming on well. They started out as a family of 18, but the four seen are now gaining their feathers. I have witnessed the swans and a pair of mandarin ducks mating, so we will see if any progeny arrive in the coming weeks. The carp are huge and very prominent at the moment, but not long ago I saw hundreds of small fry near the feeding station, which I have not seen before at Maiden Erlegh lake. Saw two foxes in the meadow last night. And finally the terns, seven or so, have returned, wheeling and squawking high in the air, or flapping around the lake and dive-bombing from time to time.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2013

Sunday, June 16 14.00 to 16.00 **Damselfly and Dragonfly Walk** led by Mike Turton, Berkshire Recorder for these species. Places are limited to 12, and must be booked beforehand. Alternative date June 23, if weather inclement. Location to be advised when booking. Contact Grahame Hawker 07796170689

Wednesday, June 19 19.30 to 22.00 **GREEN Member meeting**, hosted by the Earley Environmental Group, which will include opportunities to look around the local nature reserve. We hope to have bat detectors available - and a warm dry evening - for those who can stay late! Location: Interpretation Centre, Instow Road.

Saturday, July 6 **Butterfly walk in Pamber Forest** led by Alan Broodbank. Meet at 10 a.m. at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road to sort out car sharing. Contact: Alan on 07799 707301.

Saturday, August 3 10.00 to 15.00 **Earley Green Fair** Join us for our annual Green Fair at the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

Wednesday, August 7 10 to 12.00 **Children's Annual BUG HUNT** Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. Places must be booked, as numbers are limited. Come prepared for any weather. Minimum-age 4 years: responsible adults to accompany children aged up to 8yrs. Contact Sheila Crowson on 0118 962 0004 for details. Please give a contact number and information about any allergic reactions. Children may bring a drink.

Monday, September 16 19.30 to 21.30 **The resurgence of bovine TB in England and Wales: a scientific and political conundrum** - Nick Taylor, a veterinary epidemiologist working at the University of Reading. Location Function Room, Maiden Place, off Kilnsea Drive, Lower Earley

Bits and Pieces

June 7 and 8 : **'BioBlitz'** is being organised by Becky Thomas at Reading University. Becky and colleagues recently established the Berkshire Mammal Society. It will run over 24 hours and attempt to identify as many species as possible. Students and the general public are urged to take part in this exciting happening. There will be a range of indoor and outdoor activities

including walks, talks and displays. Local organisations will have stalls, including EEG. See www.uorbioblitz.co.uk.

Living Record is designed to encourage people to record the wildlife they see around them by making the process quick and easy. It provides a personal record system for each participant and shared distribution maps to inform and inspire. To find out more, go to <http://www.livingrecord.net/news/1109.cfm>. Also check out our **March 2012 newsletter on the EEG website**.

EASI (Earley Adopt-a-Street Initiative) would like more volunteers. Help keep your street clear of litter: all equipment provided.

Phone Brian Hackett on 0118 986 1115, or email ask.mera@btinternet.com.

Can you offer active **help to EEG**? If so, phone 0118 9620004, 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 wildlife sightings and messages. You'll find a link to Yahoo on our website.

EEG Committee Members can be found on www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk under Contacts, or phone 0118 962 0004.

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

Comments or contributions to the newsletter to: sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com or 2 Reeds Avenue, Earley, RG6 5SR. We would welcome short contributions from members to the newsletter.

If you know anyone who would like to join EEG, membership forms are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995, on the website under Downloads, or send an e-mail to Liz Wild at liz@helva.plus.com.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

The True Food Co-op: Their mission is to take low-cost organic food out to the people, bypassing the supermarkets which charge a lot for organics. Although the Silverdale Market is closing after May 31, you will be able to shop at Lower Earley Market, Trinity Church, Chalfont Close, Earley RG6 5HZ (next to Asda store), Saturdays 12 noon to 3pm. www.truefood.coop.

Pet Fayre, 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, tel 0118 926 6512, e-mail sales@petfayre-reading.co.uk or go on the comprehensive website www.petfayre-reading.co.uk



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