

Spring in earlier years, when we felt a certainty about our weather patterns, brought with it the promise of welcome warmth after a chilly winter. The item on a Berkshire winter in 1784, page 5, might remind you how cold winters could be. That belief in the constancy of our weather is now tempered with doubt. Every day we are informed of surveys indicating strange things happening - birds which usually migrate stay through the winter, plants come into flower several weeks earlier, unexpected exotic birds and insects arrive from warmer climes. What to make of it? Are many of us still in denial about global warming? A large number of scientists now seem to be convinced it's happening. Providing energy for hungry nations without burning up the planet is the task.

Two of our **forthcoming talks** may seem quite disconnected, but **nuclear power** and **the plight of the threatened rainforest** do have something in common. As a solution is sought for the replacement of finite fossil fuel, with its nasty effect on our climate, nuclear power is once again up for discussion. We are all aware of the downside of disposing of nuclear waste, not to mention possible future accidents like Chernobyl (although we are told the design of nuclear power stations has moved on and this cannot happen again). On March 25 our talk is by Nigel Bell on **Chernobyl, Before and After**. If nuclear power may be too risky for some people, then surely growing plants for biofuel is one beneficial solution? George W. Bush seems to think so. For a short time this was the straw grasped at but now some problems are beginning to emerge. Cutting down valuable natural 'carbon sinks' like pristine forests to grow biofuels, with subsequent pressures on tribal people and some of our most cherished wildlife, and gobbling up land once used for food crops to grow biofuels and so creating more hunger for many, are just some of the negative effects. On April 22 Renton Righelato's talk is on the work of the **World Land Trust** and its fight to save the rainforest. Solving environmental problems is one huge balancing act! Here's hoping scientists, environmentalists, politicians and perhaps even commerce can come up with some really big ideas that work, sooner than later. Meanwhile individuals can only tread their lonely low-carbon footpaths as best they can. **Other events:** March 16 Do your bit, join the big RESCUE litter pick. May 18 Walk round Green Park with possible look at Wind Turbine (For details of talks and walks see page 8)

Items of special interest:

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Get to know your Earley and beyond

If you're at a loss where to go for a quick trip out, see page 2 for details of a suggested visit by Anne Booth to a small BBOWT reserve in Twyford.



Photo: Anne Booth

Get to know your Earley and beyond

Renewable Energy Sources THEN AND NOW

A short walk around the Loddon reserve, Twyford. (see photo p.1)

This flooded gravel pit has an attractive scalloped edge and several islands where common tern and redshank breed. The wooded fringe contains many wonderful old willows, some with woodpecker holes. The more scrubby areas are home to blackcaps and whitethroats. Along the river margins in summer many dragonflies and damselflies can be seen.

The shallow pit is a BBOWT (Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust) nature reserve and it forms part of a complicated mosaic of lakes, ponds and watercourses including the river Loddon, near Twyford. It is a tranquil place despite the proximity of the railway line.

There is an hourly bus service from Reading via Shepherd's Hill, Earley to Twyford, or park in Polehampton Close car park off the B3018 just before the traffic lights in the town centre (if coming from the A4 at the Wee Waif). If visiting the Waggon & Horses pub the reserve can be accessed from its car park. Or maybe park in Waitrose and do your shopping as well!

From Polehampton Close walk back towards Reading for 100yds, turn left into Silk Lane then quickly left into Weaver's Way. Turn right down a few steps to cross a narrow river bridge, then turn left and walk 100 yds to another bridge crossing a sluice. Turn left here, walk 30yds then turn right at a public footpath sign to find the Trust reserve information board at the lake's edge.

The path mostly follows the lake's edge and is level with a few slopes. It is often muddy with some sections prone to flooding, so strong footwear is advisable! The walk is about 1.5 miles in length.

A circular walk of 8 miles can be made to (or from) Dinton Pastures or a shorter walk to Lavell's Lake. Contact Anne for details. booths@clara.net or phone 0118 986 8260

Anne Booth

MORE WALKS: For those with internet, Paul Beckett has put an account on the EEG website (see p.8) of his walk to **Lavell's Lake**, courtesy of Liz Wild, with lovely photos. On Friday 2nd May 7-9.30pm Trish Marcouse of BBOWT is leading an evening walk at **Lavells Lake** and along the **River Loddon** for spring birds, spring flowers and the Loddon Lily. Meet at Lavells Lake car park in Sandford Lane.

WATERMILLS: The Domesday Book does not record any mills for Earley but a mill at Sindlesham (Synnels Ham) was recorded as belonging to the Bishop of Salisbury's manor at Sonning (*Earley Days*, Earley Local History Group). We can still see the successors to earlier mills in the vicinity: Sonning, Arborfield, Sandford and Twyford. They, of course, made use of water power which is no longer an option locally.

WINDPUMPS: On the 1911 OS 25 inch to mile map a windpump is shown on the field next to the farm on the corner of Wilderness Road and Beech Lane. On the 1912 OS 25 inch to mile map a windpump is marked on the open land bordering the drive entrance to Maiden Erlegh House, approximately between Raggleswood and Old Lane Copse (Repton/Finch Roads). Were they used for pumping water for cattle? I imagine these were very simple windpumps as opposed to large windmills but I have a vague recollection that there was once a windmill in Wokingham sited off Broad Street, but could be corrected on this.

WIND TURBINES: A modern solution to providing renewable energy. The imposing structure at Green Park is now a well-known landmark, and a further wind farm of perhaps six wind turbines is planned for Rushy Mead, Shinfield on land south of the M4. There's a long way to go before this becomes fact and there will be consultation with local communities.



www.pfr.co.uk/rushymead

If you have any questions or wish to discuss the project contact the project team at:
Rushy Mead Green Energy Team, c/o Partnerships for Renewables, Festival House, Jessop Avenue, Cheltenham GL50 3SH

HAVE YOUR SAY!



Things happen locally not always to our liking, but *you* can make your opinions known. The proposed changes by the University to Whiteknights Park are concerning many. A considerable number of Earley residents enjoy the local natural environment of Whiteknights and the wildlife it supports. The possible closing of the footpath from Wilderness Road, opposite Beech Lane, and the building of a road bridge over the lake to accommodate traffic, albeit internal traffic, are viewed with dismay by many. The University has closed its public consultation but you can write for information to Ann Westgarth, Communications Office, University of Reading, RG6 6AH.

queries@reading.ac.uk and/or Planning and Environment Dept., Wokingham Borough Council, Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN.

Not so local, but a proposal by Prudential to build 7000 homes on Kennet Meadows will effectively concrete over a valued natural environment area, which supports nightingales and acts as a floodplain, the outcome being increased flooding of the area and a big impact on local wildlife. Should you want to support those opposing this development, you can write to Martin Salter MP, c/o 413 Oxford Rd, Reading RG30 1HA or sign an online petition at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/SaveKennetMeadow>. Deadline 11 March.

NATURE IN LITERATURE



Snowdrop time

From "Saints and their Flowers", Gladys Taylor 1956

"For the feast of the Purification there are Snowdrops - also known as Candlemas Bells; and these little blooms are called Fair Maids of February after the white garlanded maidens who walked in procession at Candlemas. In some places the statue of Our Lady was removed from her altar, and snowdrops were strewn in its place. There is a tradition that when the Blessed Virgin went to visit her cousin Elisabeth, snowdrops bloomed wherever her feet had trodden. This festival is an instance of transference: in Roman times it was held in honour of Februa, the mother of Mars, and on the night of Feb 2nd people walked in procession carrying lights. Pope Sergius commanded that Christians should offer their candles to the honour of Our Lady, and thus the old custom was sanctified."

From "God's Acre, The Flowers and Animals of the Churchyard", Francesca Greenoak 1985

"Churchyards are the best places to go in the late winter for a glimpse of the first flowers of the year. Only a few weeks after Christmas the first snowdrops start to appear. The snowdrop, thought to be native in parts of Wales and western England and possibly elsewhere, has been so widely introduced that it would be impossible to identify an aboriginal population without a record of the floral history of a churchyard. It readily becomes naturalised in churchyard conditions and there are many splendid churchyards where both single and double varieties spread over large areas under the trees and between the graves."

Our Village - Mary Russell Mitford, famous for writing about her locality of Three Mile Cross in the 1820/30s, who walked the woods at midnight to hear the nightingales. It's still available. She was delighted to find the first primrose. From chapter, "The First Primrose".

"...there is a primrose springing in yonder sheltered nook, from the mossy roots of an old willow, and living again in the clear bright pool. Oh, how beautiful they are - three fully blown, and two bursting buds! How glad I am I came."

In the Country - Kenneth Allsopp, famous broadcaster, writer and nature lover. 1972 From the chapter "April".
"The bees aren't yet fully operational. The sun had prodded an arousing finger down the shrew's tunnel or through the eiderdown of moss where each had dozed through the frosts. They stirred, quaffed this refreshment, but will probably nod off again until the flowers are everywhere abrim with loads for the pollen baskets on their shanks."

The Secret Lives of Garden Birds - Dominic Couzens 2004. Eminently readable and amusing.

April. The Dawn Chorus. "The dawn chorus begins by lapping at your toes, and ends up as a total immersion. What starts as a lonely voice in the darkness builds up, bit by bit, into a multitude of voices, all competing for attention, like the din from dealers on the floor of the Stock Exchange."

In the Country - Kenneth Allsopp again. Many of us can empathise with this.

"I am a somewhat shiftless botanist. I like to know what things are. So I make haphazard attempts at being better at recognizing flowers. While walking over the chalk shoulders or just slouching beside the river I keep an eye open for plants new to me. Most are. For although I'm always ferreting about in textbooks for the identity of some unremarkable, hedge bottom sprig, by next spring I can't remember it. Life is an ever-renewing cycle of surprises. More often anyway, I forget to look them up when I get home. By the time it comes to mind, and I go to my windcheater to retrieve the specimens, they are limp, pulpy shreds which would baffle a C.I.D. laboratory. My pockets are lined like old birds' nests with decayed stalks."

From *Common Ground anthology* "Field Days".

"April

To the fresh wet fields

and the white

Froth of flowers

Came the wild errant swallows with a scream." Herbert Read



Illustration from
*Wild Life in Woods
and Fields* 1901, see
page 4

Wild Life in Woods and Fields -Arabella M. Buckley. Cassell's Eyes and No Eyes Series for children.

1901 price 4d. Attitudes acceptable 100 years ago would not now find their way into a child's book. Children no longer have the chance to experience nature as close as this.

The Woodpecker's Nest. "His nest must be in this tree," said Peter. "Give me a back, Paul, and I will soon find it." Peter caught hold of the boughs and crept round the trunk. "Here it is," he cried. "There is a small hole, just big enough for a bird to creep in. But they have made such a big hole inside the tree. I can only just reach down". Then Peter drew his hand back with the mother bird in it. Her head was not so red as the father's and she had no red whiskers. He let her fly away, and then pulled out six white shining eggs. "Shall I put them back?" "Of course," said Paul; "then the mother will fly back and sit on them, and we will come again and see the little birds when they are hatched." Which they did.

"RED KITES IN THE CHILTERNs"



A book review by Edwin Trout

In the mid 1980s, when I was a student at Aberystwyth, the red kite was a rare and endangered species. There were (as I understood at the time) 21 pairs in the country, all resident in the Rheiddol Valley inland from the university, and protected by the Army during breeding season. Little did I expect that years later, back at home, I would see the red kite flying over my parents' house in Woodcote, on the way to my brother's in Princess Risborough, and overhead here in Earley. Yet the red kite has become a frequent sight in the Chilterns (and near my in-laws, as it happens, in the Wharf Valley in Yorkshire, as well as Northamptonshire and parts of Scotland). My kids and I have clocked up as many as 70 sightings on the road from Henley to Watlington, which even allowing for a fair degree of double-counting, suggests a lot of birds. This revival of fortunes since the first reintroduction project in 1989 is a great success story, and to judge by the reaction of residents to sightings locally, one that has captured the imagination.

Yet despite the increase in sightings, and the positive reception, the story of the kites' reintroduction to England in the Chilterns, and their spread southward to the Thames as far as Reading, is probably not widely known in any detail. I was delighted, therefore, when my brother recently presented me with a slim booklet, *Red Kites in the Chilterns*, by Ian Carter and Gerry Whitlow.

The reintroduction project is outlined here, from the establishment of a population of Spanish chicks in 1989 and their release in the Chilterns, monitoring of the

population, first successful breeding in 1991 and the transfer of chicks to other reintroduction projects from 1997 onward. Monitoring with wing tags and radio transmitters is explained and the population quantified. A graph indicating the number of breeding pairs shows an explosive growth from 4 pairs in 1992 to 109 in 2000, to over 250 pairs in 2005. A map highlights the local territory, with the proviso that it is ever-expanding!

Superb photographs illustrate the booklet in its treatment of the kite's way of life. Sections cover diet and feeding; nesting; plumage and moulting; social behaviour and aerial interactions. One sequence of pictures shows a kite swooping on a rabbit, only to fly off when it transpired the rabbit was alive! Another photograph captures a kite flying with wool for nest lining in its talons, while a close-up of a nest reveals children's cuddly toys as lining material. Other shots capture kites' flight patterns and aerial interactions, and, along with the conventional illustrations for identification of eggs and plumage, there are some stunning portraits.

As an introduction to this glorious bird and its successful colonisation of the nearby Chilterns, this booklet is a pleasure to read. Carter, Ian and Whitlow, Gerry. *Red Kites in the Chilterns*. 2nd edition. Chinnor: English Nature and the Chilterns Conservation Board, 2005. ISBN 0-9545242-303.

(Cheque for £5 to Chiltern Conservation Board, The Lodge, Station Road, Chinnor OX39 4HA, tel 01844 355500)

GREEN HEROES

The Green Belt Movement: A remarkable woman, **Wangari Maathai**, was born at the foot of Mount Kenya in 1940. In 1971, she became the first woman in East and Central Africa to earn a Ph.D. She was awarded a doctorate in Anatomy from the University of Nairobi, where she taught for many years. She introduced the idea of planting trees using local labour and indigenous wisdom. Under her dynamic leadership, this idea developed into a broad-based, grassroots organization called the Green Belt Movement (GBM). Since that time the Green Belt Movement has grown into a dramatic force for change. Along the way, nearly 900,000 rural women have worked to establish tree nurseries and plant trees to reverse the effects of deforestation. To date, these women, through the Green Belt Movement, have planted more than 30 million trees worldwide. Dr. Maathai has now launched the Green Belt Movement International, which aims to enable these simple conservation and livelihood-creating techniques to be practised around the world. In 2004 she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

CLIMATE CHANGE, A FACT OR JUST BLIPS?

Most older people admit to remembering colder winters when they were young. There seems to be evidence from observations of nature (phenology) that our seasons are changing. Spring is coming earlier. Scientists seem to be reaching a consensus that our climate is changing. The following extracts show a contrast in the past and present. *"A Berkshire Bachelor's Diary, being the diary and letters of Francis Prior recusant and gentleman farmer of Upton, Berks., in the latter half of the 18th century"* contains intermittent references to weather. The diary unfortunately is not continuous.

1784 A Hard Winter

Feb 7 On coming from Upton Crt I fell on the Ice and sprain'd my left Hand Wrist very much
Feb 14 A meeting at Reading to address the King (George III). Not able myself to attend the inclemency of the weather and a fall this morning on the Ice. My Team brought from Reading one Chaldron of Coals from Mr. Willis's Barges which Could not Come on to ye Warff (Aldermaston) hear for ye hard frost.
Feb 19 a long frost and Snow at Intervals since the 24th December last
Feb 20 This morning Hard frost in the afternoon much Snow from the South.
Feb 25 First day going to Plow since Christmass, prevented by hard frost and much snow.
(There were some compensations)
Feb 28 Recd. 13 bottles of Red Port Wine. (However, Francis suffered painful bouts of gout!)
Still no let up.
Mar 10 much Snow in the fore part of the day.
Mar 12 Hard Frost
Mar 15 very Cold sharp Air and frost, Cant set Beans, very few plant'd
Mar 16 the cold continues, wind at East
Mar 26 Snow almost all day
Mar 29 frost in the morning Snow at Intervals great part of ye day
Mar 30 Much Snow fell last Night or this Morning
Apr 7 This morning snow on ground
Apr 14 This morning snows fast
Oct 25 Snow great part of this day
Dec 8 Snow in the last Night, and all this day. Very deep following night Hard frost.
Dec 9 Hard frost continues
Dec 11 Hard frost and Snow. I did not go to Reading this day.
Dec 12 Hard frost All day. Mr. Ring sleep'd hear last Night
Dec 13 Hard frost
Dec 14 Hard frost, Snow. A little thaw this Afternoon.
Dec 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 27 28, 29 Hard frosts and some small Blands of Snow.
Finally, 1785 Jan 2 fine Thaw all day.

What do we know about Francis? Although he was a committed Catholic, he seemed to get on well with local Anglican clergy. He appeared a kind and generous man, but at his death it transpired he had been living on borrowed money for 40 years and was hopelessly insolvent.

Press Release from The Woodland Trust Feb 2008

From Woodland Trust website: "The last few years have thrown up mild springs. Last year records between January and April made it the warmest spring since records began in 1659. January temperatures for this year are probably two degrees above the seasonal average, but until we have the complete spring picture it's too early to judge overall impact."

Some observations recorded by the Trust: catkins flowering beginning of December 2007 (Isle of Wight), snowdrops in flower November 2007 (Somerset), frogspawn in November 2007 (Penzance). The first of four sightings of tadpoles 24 January (Devon). Changing weather patterns can prove disastrous for some species. As frogs only breed once a year, if there's a cold snap their spawn may not survive.

A fascinating look at changes in nature can be found on www.naturescalendar.org.uk



Above: Frogspawn in Old Pond Copse, Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, April 2006. Frogspawn noted in same pond Feb 29 2008.



BIRDS in our GARDEN

This Christmas my son was given a couple of bird feeders by his godparents, along with some nuts, seeds and some fat balls. Having put them up in the trees, and resurrected a somewhat battered bird table, we took advantage of the Christmas holiday to spend time watching and admiring the birds in our garden, something we have continued to do in the weeks since.

Our sightings had an immediately seasonal flavour. For only the second time in our four years here, **redwings** visited our garden, attracted by the abundance of bright red cotoneaster berries. As many as six birds at time could be seen working their way through the bushes, and were with us for about four weeks. Another excitement was the appearance of a **coal tit**. This was a first ever sighting for us, made possible by the proximity of one of the feeders to our dining room window, allowing us to distinguish it easily from the frequent visits of the more numerous **blue tits** and **great tits**.

Despite its national decline, the **house sparrow** is a regular in our garden. With a pair nesting in next door's eaves last summer, and having raised three broods, sparrows are plentiful here. Other common birds have caused little surprise: **blackbirds**, **starlings**, **woodpigeons**, **magpies** and a **robin** or two. The **chaffinch**, no rarity nationally, made a brief and solo appearance in early February.

Living near Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, aquatic visitors regularly pass overhead: **mallards** and **Canada geese**, of course, plus two **cormorants** and a **heron**. Gulls, mainly **black-headed gulls**, have been prolific during the winter, and one of the **Egyptian geese** was spotted on a roof-top opposite. Also we have seen a **red kite** soaring above the garden on several occasions, its forked tail in silhouette, or its ruddy plumage brightened by the winter sun.

Most recent was the magnificent sight of a **green woodpecker**, on the lawn only feet away from the kitchen window, vividly coloured and in perfect profile. Its red-topped head was busily pecking the earth, and after pausing momentarily, it flew off, in a flash of yellowy-green.

Last February, the children made a nesting box at the Earley Environment Group's workshop. We dutifully attached it to a fence post and though it remained empty in 2007, the **tits** appear to be investigating it at present so, fingers crossed, we may soon have further additions to our list of garden inhabitants as we move into Spring. (A pretty good tally! Thanks to Edwin Trout and son Richard for this)

MORE BIRD NEWS FROM EARLEY

Our regular contributor with her monthly garden survey, Gillian, tallied 15 bird species which also included green woodpecker in front garden. One was recently seen on lawn near Interpretation Centre and have received another recent sighting in Earley. We achieved some sort of fame when we received, via the internet, a bird survey on our wildlife recording form taken from the EEG website by a bird watcher in Glossop, Derbys. She had mistakenly picked this up when recording her RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch. I duly thanked her and it was interesting to see that all the birds (13) she recorded in her hour-long watch on our form were much the same as those in Earley, although not sure about red poll (see below). Anyone know about this? (I regret when I did my hour there was hardly a bird in sight, although the great spotted woodpecker improved my morale with a last minute appearance. Ed)

Gillian's List in Earley (length of watch a month): blue tit, robin, greenfinch, wood pigeon, magpie, blackbird, chaffinch, heron (overhead), dunnock, collared dove, goldfinch, red kite (overhead), songthrush, wren, green woodpecker

Jayne's List in Glossop, Derbys. (length of watch one hour): robin, siskin, starling, blackbird, blue tit, great tit, wren, magpie, nuthatch, collared dove, jackdaw, goldfinch, red poll

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

Biofuels not such a good idea?: Two recent scientific studies published in the magazine "Science" claim that growing crops to make biofuels results in making global warming worse by adding to the man-made emissions of carbon dioxide that they are supposed to curb. Scientists found that in the case of some crops it would take several centuries of growing them to pay off the "carbon debt" caused by their initial cultivation. Not only this, the clearing of tracts of pristine rainforest would result in a loss of biodiversity. The E.U. is having second thoughts about possible negative effects of a target to derive 10% of transport fuel from plants. Professor John Pickett, chairing a study by the Royal Society, stated that "The greenhouse gas savings that a biofuel can provide are dependent on how crops are grown and converted and how the fuel is used." Not to forget, also, that the rush to grow biofuels is pushing up food prices and badly hitting poor countries. Obviously, careful, considered thought is needed.

Stop Press: the good news - A review of the environmental and economic damage caused by growing biofuels was ordered by the government yesterday. (21 Feb) Ministers say a number of studies have emerged recently which question the environmental benefits of biofuels, and the government wants to check that UK and European biofuel targets will not cause more problems than they solve. **The bad news?** - Ministers intend to press ahead with a plan to force oil suppliers to have biofuels constitute 2.5% of transport fuel from April, rising to 5% by 2010.

The downside to land conservation: Many wealthy people, billionaires (Ted Turner) and celebs (Sharon Stone) included, as well as trusts and conservation groups, are buying up large tracts of land in Africa and South America to conserve the natural environment. As with all good ideas there can be a downside. Very often indigenous people are pushed aside, not to mention the possible future antics of less than scrupulous businesses getting involved in carbon trading – where poor countries sell carbon locked up in their trees to allow rich countries to continue polluting as usual. Our speaker in April, Dr. Renton Righelato is Chairman of the Trustees of the World Land Trust. They purchase tracts of rainforest from donations, but enable local partners to manage them. www.worldlandtrust.org

Garbage, not in Earley, but in the sea: An alarming amount of waste, a "trash vortex", is claimed to be in the Pacific, swirled by underwater currents, and described, "like a plastic soup", also "endless for an area that is maybe twice the size as continental United States". Plastic is believed to constitute 90% of all rubbish in the sea and the UN Environment Programme estimated in 2006 every square mile of ocean contained 46,000 pieces of floating plastic. This spells death to seabirds and animals. (Clean up Earley – see details of RESCUE on page 8)

NEWS FROM EARLEY and WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Gillian Dec 31: Over the past month we keep finding "sleepy" **Harlequin ladybirds** in the house, which obviously came into the house during October to hibernate. **Foxes** - one destroyed our bin bag overnight last month leaving the area covered with litter, confirming we should not leave it out overnight. Also, a neighbour came face to face with a fox in her garden this autumn whilst feeding her fish.

Elaine Jan 15: I have been very pleased to see **brambings** in my garden. They have been visiting my bird table since Saturday 12 January and I have seen one today in spite of the weather. This is the first time I've had them in the garden. Just before Christmas I also had a **sparrowhawk** (female) take a **pigeon** in my back garden. I didn't see the actual kill but watched it for a good few minutes.

Alan Jan 23: Found a dead **fox** in the woods near the Interpretation Centre this morning, but in one of the gardens on the other side of the stream so I couldn't actually get to it.

Alice Jan 24: for the third year running we've been having regular visits (since Dec.2) from a small group of **reed buntings** in the back garden, attracted by the bird seed. The group is smaller than in previous years - usually only 2-3 at a time.

Elizabeth Feb 14 - Fantastic sighting of a **green woodpecker** on our back garden lawn this afternoon. It stayed for about 10 minutes pecking for insects and grubs. We've never seen one so close and were amazed at how big it was - about the size of a pigeon. The blaze on its head was brilliant red.

Alice Feb 16: Female **blackcap**, **starling** (1), the **goldfinch** are back, several **reed buntings**, **collared**

doves, a **woodmouse** who lives in a dilapidated shed and who brazenly pinches the birdseed even when I'm in the garden (seems to be shortsighted), and an almost fully open **cowslip**.

John and Josephine Feb 16: We had a lovely sighting this week. On Tuesday my husband heard a buzzard calling in the woods at the end of Ryhill Way, and sure enough a few moments later the bird itself flew over our house. We have seen buzzards overhead previously, but never so close before. Red kites are also regular visitors.

Brian Feb 17: I was working in the front garden on one of the sunny days last week, when I saw a **buzzard** over Whitenights campus (no, it wasn't a red kite.) I watched it against a clear blue sky, as with scarcely a beat of its wings and in what seemed like no time at all, it had passed overhead and was heading off over Lower Earley down towards the Loddon. As I turned away, a **sparrowhawk** sped over the house. **buzzards** are becoming much more widespread nationally, and are spreading east in Berks; apparently they are now seen around Slough. This is only the second I have seen over this part of Earley, although I did see 3 down by the Thames one afternoon. **Sparrowhawks** have territory around the nature reserve, and can often be seen. We have had one plucking a **collared dove** on our back lawn. We had taken the grandchildren to the play area near the Interpretation Centre a few weeks ago, when suddenly the whole area erupted with **pigeons**, **starlings**, etc, shortly followed by a **sparrowhawk** gliding over the hedge.

Feb 22: Playing fields at the University, a flock of 80 - 100 **redwings**

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS

March 16 (Sunday) RESCUE Clean Up, organised by Jean Hackett. Please support this big annual litter pick-up. Earley has over 30,000 residents and we hope to beat last year's volunteer number of just over 40. Earley can do better than that! Just a couple of hours of your time is all that's needed. Two sessions: 10 - 12.30pm and 2 - 4.30 pm. All hands to the pump! To volunteer your help, ring Jean on 986 1115 a.s.a.p as she needs to know numbers.

Mar 25 (Tuesday) Nigel Bell, Chernobyl, Before and After at Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive, RG6 3HE, start 7.30. Nigel is Professor of Environmental Pollution at The Imperial College, London with personal experience of the Chernobyl environment. He has been UK representative on the Chernobyl International Radioecology Laboratory, which involved his visiting the contaminated area in the Ukraine. The world's worst nuclear accident occurred at Chernobyl in the Ukraine on 26 April 1986. This had devastating consequences for a large area contaminated by radioactivity in both Belarus and the Ukraine. The talk should prove to be a fascinating insight into this terrible nuclear catastrophe, with particular emphasis on the subsequent effects of radiocaesium on the UK uplands, how this was handled, and the lessons to be learned.

April 22 (Tuesday) Dr. Renton Righelato on The World Land Trust and Bird Conservation in Ecuador. At the Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive, RG6 3HE start 7.30. The patron of the WLT is Sir David Attenborough. The World Land Trust (WLT) is an international conservation organisation that takes direct action to save rainforest and other biologically important lands – they buy it, acre by acre. Over 350,000 acres of wildlife habitat have already been saved. We look forward to seeing Renton's pictures of somewhat more exotic bird species than our garden ones.

May 18 (Sunday) – Walk around Green Park. 2-4pm. Arrangements to be finalised. With luck we may be able to find out more about the Wind Turbine. Watch for more details via local posters or Reading Chronicle.

BITS AND PIECES

BBOWT courses - **Birds for beginners** Saturday 19 April 2008, 11am-4pm Dinton Pastures Country Park (Wokingham District Council), **Wild about gardens** Saturday 26 April 2008, 10am-4pm BBOWT Office, Woolley Firs, nr Maidenhead, **Wildflower identification and meadow management** Saturday 14 June 2008, 10am-4pm Sandhurst Community Centre, Sandhurst, **Urban discovery** Saturday 26 July 2008, 10am-3.30pm Reading City Centre, **Veteran trees**, Saturday 16 August 2008, 10am-4pm Westmorland Park Pavilion, Bracknell. Send name, address, email address, and a £10 returnable deposit cheque payable to BBOWT course bookings, FREEPOST OF2051, Oxford, OX4 4BR. For more information contact: Lindsay Watts, Volunteer Development Officer, Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, The Lodge, 1 Armstrong Road, Littlemore, OX4 4XT Members might like to know that BBOWT are having a PLANTS, BOOKS, and BRIC-A-BRAC SALE on Friday, 18 April, 10am - 4pm at the Pagoda, Woodley Shopping Precinct. (Also on Friday 23 May.)

Have a look at www.greenhomeshop.co.uk/shop. They repair, refurbish and put back to use quality used hi fi and audio equipment, with a full parts and labour warranty, saving hundreds of items from the landfill site. They're based at Bracknell. 01344 300661 Another site well-worth looking at is <http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/barbarajupe/>. Barbara, an EEG member, is very talented in the art of calligraphy and you can see some of her exquisite creations in her gallery. What other talents lurk in our group?

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 e.a.wild@reading.ac.uk. **Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address** at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or send her an e-mail.

Can you offer active help to the Group? Phone 0118 9620004 if you can. If you have no expertise and would like to get involved, you may be able to give practical help. We also need people with some expertise to undertake surveys of small habitats in Earley. To join the Earley Veteran Tree Survey phone 0118 9620004.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre :There is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley. Their aim 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 now every Friday, 5pm to 8. 15pm. They have a website giving details 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.

No Page Unturned: A new bookshop in Earley, 3 Maiden Lane Centre. Emily will get any book you need in 24/48 hrs, 5% off for EEG members Phone her on 0118 966 9351 or e-mail emily@nopageuntuned.org.uk. Visit her pleasant premises and browse. New and second-hand books, wrapping paper, audio books, etc.

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