



**Items of special interest:**

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*Welcome to our SPRING Newsletter*

I begin this newsletter in February, as I did the last one, with snow on the ground. After mourning the passing of really cold, snowless winters, Nature throws a spanner in the works and produced the biggest dump of snow for 20 years! Naysayers of global warming may gain some confidence from the cold spell, but although our climate is warming, weatherwise we can still experience periodic freezing conditions.

We're constantly warned of possible extreme weather. While North Australia is under water through very heavy rainfall, in the south high temperatures ravage parts of Australia. As the driest continent in the world their government is now taking it very seriously, and acknowledges climate change as one of the greatest economic, social, and environmental challenges of our time.

Enough gloom and doom, spring is almost here, lifting our spirits. With luck, our gardens will be graced with a variety of bees. Read about what they're up against (p. 2) and treasure their presence. Make Earley a tidy place to live, and help out with our annual **RESCUE** clean-up (p.2), listen with Ray to the 'dawn chorus' on May 10th (p.3) and join us on a **walk in Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve** with deputy warden and EEG member Anne Booth on (p.8), hopefully timing it for that quintessentially British event - the flowering of bluebells. Another feature of spring is the appearance of Morris dancers. Members who are ex-pupils of **Earley St. Peter's School**, and those who have children there will be particularly interested to read **David Smith's memories** of the halcyon days when country dancing played a prominent role in school life, and children carried bunches of flowers to school to decorate the maypole in celebration of May Day (p.5).

**Get to know your Earley**

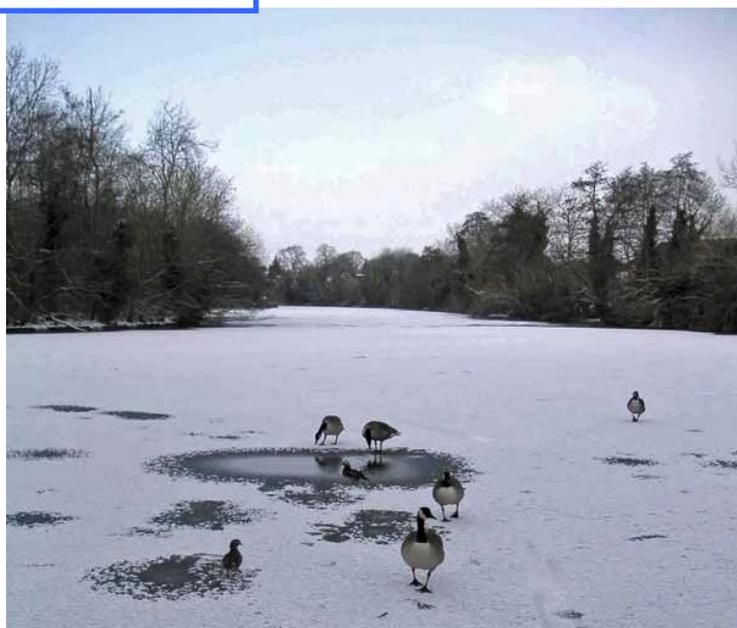
***Big Houses: Woodley House aka Woodley Lodge aka Bulmershe Court.***

The estate had its roots in the old Bulmarsh Manor, probably formed from portions of Sonning and Earley manors. Henry Addington purchased the estate in 1789. Bullmarsh Court was in a state of decay so Addington built a new mansion, Woodley House. When in 1801 James Wheble purchased the estate it became known as Woodley Lodge. There had been an earlier Wheble connection, as James' father, James W. Snr, had inherited a farm in 1771 situated in about the same area, which was subsequently sold. The family were catholics and there was a catholic chapel associated with the house; from 1802 Mass was celebrated there by a French émigré priest, Abbé la Blandière, one of six in Reading at the time. James Joseph Wheble inherited Woodley Lodge and in 1850, he married Lady Catherine, daughter of the Earl of Howth. Following the Catholic Hierarchy Act of 1851, he was appointed High Sheriff of Berkshire in 1854. He engaged J.C. Loudon to landscape the park and the family lived there for another two generations. James Wheble's son made additions, such as the billiard room containing a fine table purchased at the Great Exhibition of 1851; eventually the estate was sold in 1926. By now called 'Bulmershe Court,' the house was used by the Ministry of Defence during World War II, but by 1960, was derelict. It was pulled down in 1962 to make way for Bulmershe College. Modern signs call it Bulmershe Court.

# Postscript to a cold winter

Following on the history of past cold winters in the last newsletter, the cold snap in January 2009 saw skating on the Fens again after 11 years, the Maiden Erlegh Lake froze over (see right), and in February the whole of the country ground to a halt for a while.

David Smith (read his article on p.5) remembered the infamous winter of 1947. "The most exhilarating activity in the school playground was sliding. We made long runs of black ice about a foot wide ...up to 20 feet long...Our free milk was frozen in the bottles." His neighbour took him skating on Whiteknights Lake (*not allowed now*). To his delight he picked up skating quickly from his roller skating skills. "I lengthened my rhythmic stride as I glided past the trees and bushes that fringed our improvised ice stadium. I thought enviously of the Dutch people. I had read that each winter, as soon as the canals had frozen they skated along them to work or to visit their relatives and friends. We went home when it got dark, leaving the silent, white lake to the wildfowl." The cold weather started the last week of January through to the second week in March.



## AND SO TO SPRING...

Spring brings with it the welcome sound of bees visiting our garden flowers, sometimes bumblebees, sometimes honeybees. Be warned, it may not always be so. Lose our bees and the countryside would be devastated and food supplies threatened.



It's not good news on the bee front. Some of our **bumblebees** are in severe decline, suffering greatly from loss of habitat as well as other threats from pesticides, etc. In America, where pollination is done on a huge, commercial scale, the **honeybee** is facing the threat of CCD (colony collapse disorder); in 2008 in the US about one million colonies mysteriously died. This is catastrophic news to farmers whose crops rely on bee pollination. We're all familiar with the bee's habit of foraging sometimes 5 km from the hive for food and returning to feed the colony. CCD means they don't return and the queen, eggs and larvae starve to death. A second complication is the present drought in California, where some farmers are letting certain crops die to preserve others, and therefore making redundant the use of commercial bee colonies.

In the UK bee-keeping is on a more amateur level. A worrying decline estimated at 25% is not officially attributed to CCD, but a farming minister has warned that all the country's 270,000 colonies may be gone in ten years. *Homo sapiens* (a misnomer in this case?) does not yet have all the answers to halt this decline. One threat amongst many, the blood-sucking varroa mite, is an unwelcome guest in our hives, although there are some means of control.

There is some good news. More people than can be accommodated are enrolling on bee-keeping courses, perhaps spurred on by the need to help this beleaguered, charming little creature, but this hobby is proving more expensive than previously, due to the need to restock

queen bees. We can plant bee-friendly gardens, throw away the weed killer, get rid of decking, stop spraying damaging pesticides, stop paving over front gardens, and plant wildflowers and cottage plants, all a move in the right direction, but this alone won't save our bees. Large areas of farmland need to be managed sympathetically, hedgerows planted, and wildflower meadows established. The Government needs to wake up to the problem and fund more research.

References: - "**A World Without Bees**" by Alison Benjamin and Brian McCallum, pub. Guardian Books, highly recommended. The **Bumblebee Conservation Trust** (BBCT). You can find lots of information, including gardening for bees, by joining the Trust at The School of Biological and Environmental Science, University of Stirling, FK9 4LA and receive an attractive pack, or go online to: [www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk](http://www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk). Read an article by the BBCT about bumblebees on the EEG website - [www.earlyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk](http://www.earlyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk).



Spring also brings  
with it the Dawn  
Chorus

Join us on Sunday May 10 at 6 am (yes, 6 am!) to hear the dawn chorus in Maiden Erlegh Reserve. Meet at the duck feeding/observation area, where Ray Reedman will open our ears to the sounds of birds as we creep, silently in Indian file, in the Reserve woods.

## OUR FARMING PAST: ONCE THERE WERE

GREENFIELDS where there are now hundreds of homes. Older Earley residents may remember the local farms and farmers but it's as if they never were – not a single one exists. All that's left are odd stands of veteran oaks, and small stretches of hedgerow which mark the boundaries of old fields, and a couple of old farmhouses.

In 1940/41 a survey of all farms was carried out in an effort to improve the food production during the war. These surveys are kept at the National Archives, Kew and a cursory search revealed some interesting things about Earley.

Approximately 25 farms and smallholdings were listed. Plucking a few facts from the records: Mr. Colebrook of **Elm Tree Farm** produced the most hay – 30 tons. Many details were noted, such as state of the soil, fences, field drainage, condition of cottages, whether there were infestations, weeds, water source (pipe, well or stream), numbers of cattle, horses, chickens etc., tractors etc.

**Marsh Farm & Lower Wood Farms** showed that water from the well was used for the farmhouse and farm buildings, and stream for fields. Four males over 21 worked it. Cows and heifers in milk 36, cows in calf but not milk 7, heifers in calf 6, bulls used for service 2, other cattle 17. **Woodbine Poultry Farm, Cutbush Lane** showed the condition of farmhouse and building as good, and the water supply to the farmhouse and farm buildings was from a well, electricity supply 'NONE'. They grew potatoes, half an acre of orchards, 3 dozen small fruit, 1 acre of grass for mowing, 3 acres for grazing. There were two cows in calf, 500 fowl over 6 months, and 200 under 6 months. **Mr Forster** of St. Peters Road, address of holding shown as **Earley Common**, kept 14 two- to five-month-old pigs and 40 fowl, and Capt. Waterlow Fox, Headmaster of Maiden Erlegh School, kept 67 poultry on The Old Potato Patch. The farmers were assessed for management skills, and some, who shall be nameless, fell rather short with 'Personal Failings'.

## Sweeping all before us!

We are purchasing five sweep nets for use in bug hunts. Last year our August bug hunt with about 16 children, led by Alan, our chairman, was a huge success. We are aiming to repeat this and instead of begging, borrowing or stealing we will have our own equipment, thanks to the £500 Dorothy Morley award.



**March 15 (Sunday) RESCUE** Clean Up, organised by Jean Hackett of EEG.

Please support this big annual litter pick-up. Year on year the number of people taking part has increased: let's make 2009 the best. Just a couple of hours of your time is all that's required to make Earley a tidier place. Two sessions: 10 - 12.30 p.m. and 2 - 4.30 p.m. All hands to the pump! To volunteer your help, ring Jean on 986 1115 a.s.a.p as she needs to know numbers.

On Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April Wokingham Borough Council are running **The BIG TIDY UP**, an event to clear up the litter on our streets. EEG is not actively involved this year, but if you are interested in helping, information can be found on the WBC website or you can contact Jean (see above).

## GREEN HEROES Charles Darwin 1809-1882

Nearly everyone must know now that we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication in Nov 1859 of *On the Origin of Species*. Many special events are scheduled including *The Darwin Big Idea Exhibition* at the Natural History Museum which runs till April 19<sup>th</sup>. You can retrace Darwin's historic HMS Beagle voyage and learn about his work in London and at his home in Down House, Kent, and much more. Tickets can be bought on line. The 18 million pound giant cocoon Darwin Centre at the Natural History Museum will open in September 2009.

It is also 200 years since his birth on 12<sup>th</sup> February and there will be 300 events across the UK to celebrate **Darwin 200** ending on 24<sup>th</sup> November. See [www.darwin200.org](http://www.darwin200.org), Hard to find events in Reading or Berkshire, except for a road named Darwin Drive and faith discussions on Radio Berkshire. Does anyone know of any more?

The skies of Earley are rarely without a "seagull" at some time of day, but how many of us give them a second thought? They do, after all, raise some interesting questions...

What are "seagulls" doing over Berkshire? This is in part the result of our changing life-styles, since the development of towns and roads in the 20th century produced acres of open water in areas like the Thames Valley. To this is added the presence of huge landfills for a human society which throws away a huge percentage of its food. This has provided an attractive inland habitat for birds which, until the end of the 19th century, were considered predominantly birds of the coast and sea. Richard Keaton, writing for children in 1900, comments on a changing pattern of gull behaviour and predicts that "we shall soon have to change their name from Sea Gulls to Land Gulls". We have never done that, but it is certainly more accurate just to use the term "gull".



So what exactly is a "gull"? Naturally the answer is complex, since we might look up on an average winter's evening and see Black-headed Gulls, Herring Gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Common Gulls, or even Great Black-backed Gulls. And a less-than-average evening might well produce a Yellow-legged Gull or a Mediterranean Gull, while half-dozen other scarce and rare species have been recorded in Berkshire. In short, the term "gull" is as broad as the word "duck": it represents a whole family of birds.

Here it is fair to say that gulls are a complex bunch. Our smallest species, the passage Little Gull, is hardly bigger than a Mistle Thrush, while the Great Black-backed Gull is the largest of its family in the whole world and the one which can swallow whole birds somewhat larger than the Little Gull! Even so, identification of gulls is complex, since they appear to

come in monochrome: even their adult plumage takes a bit of practice, since all gulls wear two plumages each year. Larger species take three or four years to mature, with subtle stages of plumage development. I have heard more than one keen birdwatcher say in despair: "I don't do gulls!" But it pays to persevere and some people get really good at this major sub-set of bird-watching.

Those gulls we see winging their determined way over Earley on a winter's evening are off to roost on the larger lakes. Watch carefully as skeins of twenty or more join with others to aim for Sonning Eye, Burghfield or Theale. If you want to see one of the great spectacles of local wildlife, it is worth standing on a freezing evening by one of these stretches of water to see the birds arriving to form flocks of thousands. Many of them will have come from landfill, others from farmland. The keener bird-watchers will be there to look for the rarer species: Yellow-legged Gull from the Mediterranean, Caspian Gull from Eastern Europe, Glaucous Gull or Iceland Gull from much further north. We have even had a Laughing Gull and Ring-billed Gulls from America.

But if you are not that hardy or that keen, try a trip to Dinton Pastures on a winter's day and you will be sure to find a lot of smallish gulls with smudgy heads and a lot to say for themselves. These are the confusingly-named Black-headed Gulls, which have just the smudges in winter and a brown-grey hood in summer. But just admire their elegance on the water and lightness on the wing. Look very closely and you may well find some of the larger species among them, with a number of tricky immature plumages on display. It also pays to look carefully in the local playing-field. Some gulls may be seen standing and "paddling" the turf with their feet. The vibration brings up worms which they eat. These are most likely to be Common Gulls, by the way.

Most of the gulls which spend their winter here will disappear in spring: then many of them will revert to their coastal habitats to breed. But small numbers of immature gulls will be seen locally through the spring, summer and autumn, since there is no imperative for non-breeders to leave a healthy inland food supply. A small number of Black-headed Gulls will breed locally on islands in the gravel pits. If there is any one species which we can consider the "local" gull it has to be this one, since we are without significant numbers of them for scarcely three months every year: they return to their favourite lakes from June onwards. In high summer, wait for one of those sultry days when the ants swarm and then delight in the aerobatics of Black-headed Gulls as they join birds such as starlings and house martins in hawking for flying ants.

So, next time you look up and see a "seagull", do admire its beauty, but do look at it with a questioning mind: there is a lot more to that grey bird than you might imagine!

## Ray Reedman

*To remove some of the frustrations of identification, I recommend the use of a good modern field guide, such as Collins Bird Guide, which shows more than one plumage form for each species. Helm publishes a specialist work on gulls.*

## Valuable help from Oracle

For over two years now we have received valuable support from the Oracle

Corporation in printing our newsletter. Oracle is situated in the Thames Valley Business Park, an attractive area on the site of the old Earley power station, which helps promote biodiversity, where employees can enjoy the local tranquil environment and members of the public can stroll along the nearby riverside walks. Oracle is committed to developing practices and products that help protect the environment. Read below more of Oracle's commitment from Anna.

### Oracle develops the Ozone Environment Centre

My name is Anna Batchelor and in January of this year I took the post of Oracle's Ozone Environment Centre (OEC) Manager. For several years Oracle at Thames Valley Park (TVP) has run a number of initiatives to encourage staff to use more sustainable methods of commuting; encouraging cycling, running a car share scheme and supporting the TVP courtesy bus.

Late in 2008 Oracle established the 'Ozone Centre'. A building refurbished to provide showers and changing facilities to support sustainable commuters. In 2009 Oracle has gone one step further to develop the facility into 'Ozone Environment Centre' (OEC) bringing me on board to champion environmental activities.

The OEC will showcase environmental actions that Oracle staff can undertake at work and at home through a programme of activities. The centre will also be a resource and provide a space for meetings. These activities will run alongside Oracle's comprehensive environmental management system that monitors the company's environmental impacts.

We are pleased to have been able to provide support to the EEG newsletter and hope to be further involved in the coming months.

*On the subject of the Newsletter, member Edwin Trout writes:*

"The *Newsletter* is a good read; there is always something of interest, and I'm pleased to report that it has made a difference to at least one reader. I am only talking about small, personal differences, admittedly, but I have been prompted by two descriptions of walks in the *Newsletter* to have a go myself. The first was to Lavell's Lake. I had never even heard of it, but the description tempted me to look it up on my map last summer and head off with my binoculars. On arrival it wasn't too prepossessing: a dilapidated bird hide that looked neglected and smelt worse, followed by a route under power lines. But at the other end of the lake I came across a completely different view, from a completely different hide. The lake was heaving with wildfowl: coots, moorhens, Canada geese, swans, cormorants, a heron or

two and a multitude of various ducks. The scrape in front of the hide, enclosed by a curved spit of land provided the perfect lagoon for viewing as the sun gradually set. I brought the kids on the next two evenings! Then, during the Christmas holidays, I pulled on my boots for a long-promised walk around the lakes at Twyford and set off with my son for the morning. For the number and variety of birds it was even better! Mallards, shovelers, wigeons, pochards, tufted ducks ... and, besides the expected Canada geese, there were greylags in large numbers and a solitary snow goose. We had a great time. I would not have thought of exploring either location without the suggestion of the *Newsletter* and I hope you, too, will find it leads you on to something new." (You may be lucky and spot bitterns. Dinton Pastures & Lavell's Lake are the best wintering sites in Berkshire for this fantastic species. Ed)

**MEMORIES OF MOVING TO EARLEY TO ESCAPE THE WAR IN LONDON:** David moved to Earley to stay with relatives at No. 17 Salcombe Drive after the first bombs dropped on London.

### ARRIVAL IN EARLEY

I shall always be grateful to our relatives for inviting us to stay. They saved me, a three-year-old, from becoming an evacuee, separated from my mother, and sent to an unknown family living in the countryside for the duration of the Blitz. The problems of being confined to one room were alleviated when my mother and Auntie Elsie rented No.19 **Salcombe Drive**. Salcombe Drive was a quiet, graceful cul-de-sac in Earley, a suburb of Reading, with thirty-nine mostly semi-detached houses. The road was separated from the pavement

by a wide grassy verge in front of each house. A trimmed laurel bush at each end of these lawns stood sentry to wide driveways leading off the road and into the front gardens. The houses themselves were three- bedroomed with bay windows upstairs and down. Arched porches with prominent keystones protected the front doors that were set in a frame with side-windows of stained glass. The drive ended in a kerbed roundabout planted with more laurel bushes. The houses were supplied with gas and electricity and made perfect homes for the middleclass of the 1930s.

David attended Earley St. Peter's School and you can read more of his schooldays in a future newsletter. Mr. Willoughby, Headmaster for many years, was very keen on Morris dancing, and some ex- pupils will remember the maypole and Morris dancing exhibitions. David eventually made the Morris dancing team, can still remember some of the steps, and is in the photos below. You, too, can Morris dance: join Hurst Morris People (HUMP), a local group. Read about it on [www.hump.org.uk](http://www.hump.org.uk)

### MAYPOLE AND MORRIS DANCING

“Time was set aside from the beginning of the Summer Term in April to practice dancing for the school May Day. The infants were taught to weave intricate patterns with the maypole ribbons as they skipped round it. The older children learned country dances such as "Gathering Peascods", although nobody ever explained what peascods were. Mr. Willoughby instructed the senior boys in the steps of Morris dances using either sticks or hankies. There was not enough time to perfect the programme by May 1st. On that day, Mr. Willoughby arranged an early-morning visit to Oxford to see the traditional May morning celebrations. This trip was for as many of his best-behaved oldest boys as he could get into his car. They had to promise to be at the school by 4.30a.m. so that they would arrive at Magdalen Bridge by 6 a.m. to hear the Magdalen College choir singing from the top of the college tower. They would stay to see the Morris dancing in Radcliffe Square before returning to school.

### GATHERING FLOWERS

“A date was set near to half-term for our May Day. A vote was held in each class to elect one of the oldest girls to be crowned May Queen in a ceremony on the day. Mr. Willoughby selected his six strongest boys to cut rhododendrons in Maiden Erlegh Drive after school on the night before the big day. In those days the rhododendron bushes were magnificent with red, pink white and purple blooms. The headmaster had permission to cut as many as he wanted for the next day. Every pupil was asked to bring a bunch of flowers to school on the big day. The pavement of Church Road was a walking flower-bed as everybody arrived with their bouquets. There was asphalt in front of the buildings which Mr. Shalford swept clean of dust and stones. We could dance there, but half the playground, in front of the church hall, was covered in cinders. Here we put rows of chairs for our audience to sit on. Mr. Willoughby and Mr. Shalford made a throne and placed it on the top of a makeshift dais in front of the dancing area. They stood what looked like bed frames on end to flank the throne and threaded the rhododendrons through the springs. The rest of the flowers in motley pots were massed on either side of the rhododendrons. The school piano was wheeled out, and a large loudspeaker placed precariously on the flat roof of the infants block. The maypole was put in position near the piano.

*(Do children still take flowers to school?Ed.)*

### THE PERFORMANCE

“After lunch our parents began to arrive. The chairs were soon occupied and people stood several rows deep behind them. Spectators also stood under the trees on the sand dunes at the side of the playground for a better view. The May Queen and her attendants with flower wreaths in their hair took their places on the dais. A school governor or local dignitary made a short speech and then performed the coronation. That was the signal for applause and the dancing to begin. The infants swarmed round the maypole. Some took their ribbons and stood to



attention with them over their shoulder in a circle next to their partners ready to dance. Others sat on the base to prevent it toppling, and yet more children knelt in pairs around the perimeter of the dance area holding aloft a spray of flowers for as long as their arms would let them. A loud chord rang out from Mr. Willoughby's piano and the dancing began. Each class provided an item. The girls wore their best summer dresses with ankle socks and plimsolls. The boys wore white shirts, shorts and plimsolls with grey socks for the country dancing. Those lucky enough to be Morris dancing were given a red and a green braid to wear crossed over their shirts and bells attached to red-and-green garters over their socks. They were so proud of them and the jingle they made as they walked and danced. The Morris dancing was usually in teams of six but one year Mr. Willoughby trained four boys to dance solo jigs as the finale, which stole the show.” *(Read more of David's Personal Recollections in the next newsletter)*



## NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY



**THE EARLEY EAGLE:** You may have noticed in our title banner “*Earley - Old English ‘Earnley’ = eagle wood*”. There is a powerful argument that Earley may have derived from the Old English ‘*earn-leah*’ meaning ‘eagle-wood’, hence the proposition that Earley came from ‘*earn-leah*’, sometimes translated as ‘eagle’s wood’ or ‘field of eagles’. In *Birds Britannica* there is an entry for Earley (yes, we’re famous!) under White-tailed Eagle (Sea Eagle). See article in newsletter Issue 3, March 2006..

This magnificent sea eagle, extinct in England for more than 200 years, could make a return along the Norfolk coast next summer if a proposed re-introduction scheme gets the go-ahead.



**THE WOKINGHAM DISTRICT VETERAN TREE ASSN.** survey has now passed the 2000 mark. There are now 2,211 trees on the database with 1,682 photos, 120 in Earley. The trees and photos can be accessed via the website. There is another training event in April - at Swallowfield Village Hall, on Saturday morning April 4<sup>th</sup>. So if you fancy recording veteran trees in Earley phone 0118 962 0004.

[www.tverc.org/WDVTS/wdvtsmap.html](http://www.tverc.org/WDVTS/wdvtsmap.html)

## NEWS FROM EARLEY and WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

**Roy, 10<sup>th</sup> Jan:** You may wish to note that **redwings** are paying their annual visit, flocks can be seen in the trees at Meadow Road end of Roman Way at various times. I can never remember how long they are here for, but I have made a note to check on these and others on 25 Jan.

**Ann, 19<sup>th</sup> Jan: Blackcap**, first seen in garden. Female. **24<sup>th</sup> Jan:** a **goldcrest**. First ever seen, close to house!

**Alice, 30<sup>th</sup> Jan:** I sighted a pair of **reed buntings** yesterday (29 Jan.), a bit later than in previous years. They’ve taken over from a **female blackcap** as principal feeders on the fat balls. Today spotted a **thrush**, a rare visitor in my garden now. **7<sup>th</sup> Feb:** Yesterday a male **sparrow-hawk** caught a small bird for its breakfast in the garden. In the late afternoon, just as it was getting dark, a male sparrow-hawk sat perched on a high branch for quite a while, looking hopefully around, but then flew off without a kill.

**Elizabeth, 8<sup>th</sup> Feb:** On Saturday at 9.15am, we had 15 **fieldfares** in our garden stripping the remaining rosehips from the dog rose! Did anyone else see them? I expect they are finding this weather harsh in the countryside as we also saw some in Caversham Park Village this morning (Sunday).

**Gillian:** Further **deer** spotting. Gillian writes that her son who lives in Winnersh had a deer run in front of his car late one evening a few weeks ago. Also saw one eating a neighbour’s plants and he discovered a small shrub in front of his house was very depleted of leaves. He thought these were not muntjac but larger **roe(?)** deer. Any other deer sightings?

### From our regular contributors:

As well as the usual common garden birds, etc. the following extracted observations are of interest.

#### November:

**Margaret: 1st, Fox** sitting under street light, **2<sup>nd</sup>** Jay burying acorns on lawn, **19<sup>th</sup>** Two coal tits hiding food

**Gillian: 1st, Bumble bee** on jasmine at 8.30 am! **16<sup>th</sup>, female blackcap** on pyracantha bush, **No date**, large flock of **starlings** in neighbour’s ash tree. Rarely descend. There often.

#### December:

**Gillian, 1st:** A large **hedgehog** dead and beheaded on back lawn. Killer fox? **Collared dove** in back garden, the first for months.

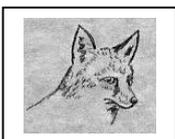
**Margaret, 21<sup>st</sup>:** **Robins** observed fighting. **Coal tit** eating and hiding seeds. **Red kite** very low over garden, no more than 12 feet up. Great in sun.

#### January:

**Gillian: 2<sup>nd</sup>:** **Green woodpecker** on front lawn, **21<sup>st</sup>, aconite**, the first flowers. **26<sup>th</sup>**, Mistle thrush singing in neighbour’s tree.

## Nature Notes from Edwin

*The First Woodpeckers of 2009:* I went for a walk round Maiden Erlegh lake today and heard the drumming of a woodpecker. I heard one yesterday for the first time in Earley this year, though had also seen one last week on a branch of the tree outside work. I was reminded of the several sightings in 2008 – the pair in Old Oak Wood and the feeding family in Moor Copse. Anyway, I continued in the bright sunshine looking out over the frozen lake. There were the occasional ducks, a pair of coots and seven Canada geese standing one-legged on the ice. A cormorant was in its usual tree on the island. A bit further round toward the stream and another seven geese were standing, and the swan was floating on the small stretch of water enclosed by the jagged ice. Three seagulls circled overhead and the ‘domestic’ ducks drifted in the distance. As I passed the hedge a robin landed and pigeons clapped through the trees. I was nearly at the small island again when I heard the distinctive calls aloft, and I strained to see against the clear blue sky. There they were, flitting from branch to branch, pausing for a few moments in perfect profile. Black, white and red. Oh, what bright red, a splash of crimson as they flew on again! One headed off into the wood and the other followed a minute or so later. But that brief moment had given me time to admire these beautiful birds in the best conditions of the year so far; it felt like a privilege and I look forward to seeing them again throughout the spring.



*Foxes again:* What a lot of snow we’ve had! We have dutifully put food out for the birds in our garden, but most of the wildlife has to fend for its self. We were woken last week by the distinctive yelp of foxes, and there were two of them in the street, stark against the white of the snow with fur puffed up against the cold. Not the best weather for scavenging, but very atmospheric. I have seen foxes three times since Christmas, but last week’s sighting was certainly the best.

Edwin A.R. Trout, 14 February 2009

## LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- March:** **Sunday 15th March RESCUE** (Rivers and Environmental Spaces Clean-up Event) with a morning session from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and an afternoon one from 2 to 4.30 p.m. Meet at Interpretation Centre, Instow Road. Please contact Jean Hackett [jeanh149@btinternet.com](mailto:jeanh149@btinternet.com), or phone 0118 986 1115. See page 3.
- April:** **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April** Wokingham Borough Council are running The BIG TIDY UP, see page 3.
- May:** **Sunday 3rd May** Walk in **Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve**, Tidmarsh, nr. Pangbourne, RG8 8HE, Leader Anne Booth. Meet at Moor Copse Car Park. Location: OS Sheet 175; SU 633 738 at 2.30 pm.
- May:** **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May** Listen to the **dawn chorus in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve** with Ray Reedman, **6 to 8 a.m.** Meet by the feeding/observation station in the Reserve. See page 3.
- June:** **Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June** Walk in **Highwood Local Nature Reserve, Woodley**. For more information, check local press, posters on notice boards, and e-mail reminder.
- July:** **Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July** Visit to **London Wetland Centre** – details to follow
- August:** **Saturday 1 August Green Fair**, Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.
- Some future events for 2009 to be finalised**
- Children's Bug Hunt in Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve,
  - Talk on Red Kites
  - Talk on Birds of the Farne Islands
- December:** **Monday 14<sup>th</sup> December EEG Christmas Social**, 7.30 at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road, Earley. You can check our events on the website, posters on local notice boards, or the local press.

Meeting of the Moth Group every second Thursday of the month; volunteer work party in Maiden Erlegh Reserve every Wednesday morning. For both, contact Grahame Hawker on 07796170689.

## Bits and Pieces

No news lately from **Earley Fox**. Hope she's prospering.

When walking in the Reserve, look for the huge duck taking flight from Swan Island in Maiden Erlegh Lake. Designed by a ME pupil, Anna Zavialova, paid for by MERA (Maiden Erlegh Residents' Assn) and sculpted by Andy Noyes. Picture on [www.earley-tc.gov.uk](http://www.earley-tc.gov.uk), Views of Earley.

Last year I received a lovely piece of descriptive nature writing from Val. I don't have a surname, address or date and would like to get in touch. Ed.

**EEG Committee Members** can be found on [www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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 962 0004 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 962 0004.**

Regretfully, **No Page Unturned**, our local bookshop at Maiden Place shopping precinct has closed down. Emily, the manager, worked hard to provide a pleasant environment in which to choose books, but suffered a series of setbacks including a close family bereavement, and her book supplier going into administration. We wish Emily well.

### SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

**The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre** :There is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley. Their mission is to take low cost organic food out to the people, bypassing the supermarkets which charge a lot for organics. They hold markets at the Silverdale Centre on Fridays, 5pm to 8. 15pm. They have a website giving dates [www.truefood.coop/truefood.html](http://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](mailto:enquiries@petfayre-reading.co.uk).

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