



Earley - Old English 'Earnley' = eagle wood

BIODIVERSITY has many interpretations. Two simple definitions: Biodiversity 'is concerned with maintaining the variety of life forms' ; 'is the variety of life on Earth'. You can probably think of many more. Our planet has so many different forms of life; 2010 has been declared the **International Year of Biodiversity** by the UN, and the logo, symbolising biodiversity, shows fish, waves, a flamingo, an adult and child, and a tree. Wokingham Borough states on its website '*Biodiversity - the variety of life on earth - is at the heart of our aim for a more sustainable future. We have a duty to ensure a diverse and thriving natural environment, for it is essential to the economic, social and spiritual health and well being of this and future generations*'. EEG hopes to promote an understanding of biodiversity in the coming year through our various activities, newsletter and website. On p. 2 there are ideas of how you can do just one thing for biodiversity.

The wonderful variety of life on our planet includes some remarkable small creatures frequently ignored or overlooked. Learn about the fascinating attributes of grasshoppers and crickets which may surprise you at our meeting on Wednesday April 21st; on Sunday May 2nd join Ray Reedman for a Dawn Chorus walk at Lavell's Lake to hear a wonderful variety of bird song; we hope to time our walk in Nores Hill on Sunday May 16th to see that glory of English woods, the bluebell, in full flower (see p.6); finally, a walk round Lavell's Lake and Twyford Lakes on Sunday June 20th. And if you hate litter, join us on Sunday 21st March. See page 8 for full details. On page 3 read about a new anti-litter scheme for Earley.

Get to know your Earley:

Earley St. Peter's Church, Church Road, Earley

Our last newsletter covered the history of the Porter Institute, which adjoins Earley St. Peter's Church. This handsome church was built by donations from local wealthy families and consecrated in May 1844. It meant Earley people had their own church and no longer had to trudge through all weathers and sometimes impassable roads to Sonning. The site chosen had been part of Earley Common, and the architect was John Turner, at one time steward to Robert Palmer of Holme Park. By 1881 it was decided the church was too small for the increasing population. An appeal was issued but this fell short and many subscribers increased their donation; Mr. Hargreaves of Maiden Erlegh House gave £1000 and Mr. Porter £700 (see page 8). The Lady Chapel was added at the time of the enlargement. Only the tower, the nave roof and the west end remained from the original building. It was rededicated in 1883. As the tower was not strong enough to support the weight of a peal of bells, a clock was installed instead. In 1900 John Hargreaves Jnr. gifted land to enlarge the churchyard consecrated by the Bishop of Oxford, and on the same day the lych-gate was dedicated to Charles Stephens. Edward Heelas purchased a carillon of bells bought from Douai Abbey in 1919. (Ref: *Earley Days*, Earley Local History Group, *The Parish & Church of St.Peter, Earley*, Ernest W. Dormer. www.earley-stpeter.org.uk/;))

Items of special interest:

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A pledge to DO ONE THING IN 2010 to help biodiversity. Some suggestions –

Plant more garden flowers attractive to bees, butterflies and other insects: aubretia, primrose, pot and French marigolds, sweet rocket, lavender, valerian, candytuft, pansy, wallflower, escallonia and buddleia.

A big garden? Plant a mini orchard of fruit trees and/or shrubs for insects and birds

Find out more about biodiversity and join EEG walks and talks. A talk on May 21 on Grasshoppers and Crickets, the Olympic high jumpers of the insect world may sound specialist, but consider that beetles, birds, mice and spiders all feed on grasshoppers. Think of the biodiversity webs you can make up from that! And did you know crickets bring good luck? There's much more to these fascinating little creatures than you can ever imagine.

Avid for more biodiversity information, visit the new Angela Marmont Centre for UK Biodiversity in the Darwin Centre building at the Natural History Museum.

Why not adopt an orang-utan (or a tiger, a turtle or others) through the WWF animal adoption scheme by a direct debit for as little as £3 per month. Brilliant present for a child, you get a welcome pack which includes cuddly toy, certificate and a print of your animal. www.wwf-adopt-a-animal.org.uk See photo p.3. of destruction of orang-utan's habitat.

For the more adventurous:

Get fit and meet people. Join the Wednesday morning work party in Maiden Erlegh Reserve and do something for local biodiversity. Recent projects: creating reed beds, replanting the butterfly garden, making wildflower areas. Phone Grahame on 07796170689.

Visit Mull to see the white tailed eagle, from which Earley (earnley = eagle wood) in all probability got its name.

www.biodiversityislife.net/?q=node/69 (See issue 3, Mar newsletter 2006)

Fancy keeping bees? Contact Wokingham and District Beekeepers Association: <http://www.wdbka.ik.com/> or write to Mr Neil Marshall, Brandon House, Wokingham Road, Hurst, RG10 0RX

Specialist in something environmental? Offer to go into your local school and talk to the children.

Please let the newsletter know if you take up any of these suggestions. (See p.8)

Wokingham Borough has been busy....

'Wokingham Borough Council has managed to deliver a large number of biodiversity enhancements in the last 5 years including 3.5ha of new wet woodland, 7ha of new wildflower-rich grassland at Sindlesham Meadows and 6ha of new reedbeds at various sites. In addition to this we have created 19 new ponds and restored 9 old ponds, installed 19 barn owl pole boxes and constructed 10 artificial otter holts. Indeed evidence that otters are continuing to thrive on the River Loddon has emerged only in the last year. Surveys in 2008 found fresh footprints and spraints* on the river between Swallowfield and the A327 at Arborfield. Then in 2009 further surveys found spraints on the river north of the A327. However, most tantalisingly a local fisherman reported seeing an otter and 3 cubs at Dinton Pastures this autumn. Although it is almost impossible to know for sure that this was an otter family (rather than the much more common mink) we are fairly sure that otters are now using the park.' (Reference WBC website)

*Spraint is the faeces of the otter

Members may remember we collected enough at a talk on the **World Land Trust** to buy an acre of rainforest. In celebration of the habitats protected by WLT's project partners and the diversity of wildlife safe-guarded in these reserves, they have been invited to take part in the 2010 **Chelsea Flower Show** in London this May. Their exhibit will aim to replicate a tiny corner of the Atlantic rainforest. WLT have found some positive encouragement from Copenhagen. Six nations, including the UK, have pledged substantial financial support to combat deforestation of the rainforest. The Prince of Wales has played a major role in this. See www.rainforestsos.org

NOT QUITE ‘WONDERFUL, WONDERFUL COPENHAGEN’ Suggestions of a ‘conspiracy’ on the leaking of e-mails on climate change from the Univ. of East Anglia just prior to the meeting, detrimental to the campaign to stop global warming, have provoked cries of ‘who dunnit?’ and “why”? With further news of alleged tweaking of scientific facts, it gets more and more difficult for outsiders to make judgements but the mounting evidence on global warming cannot be ignored. There are some positives to take away - read what the Friends of the Earth have to say.

Comments on COPENHAGEN from *Friends of the Earth National*:

“The Copenhagen negotiations ended with no legally binding agreement. Instead we have an “accord” drafted and agreed by a few rich countries, who will now use dubious tactics to get weaker countries to sign up.

“Not only is there is no timetable or framework in place to get to a legally binding agreement, but the very existence of the “accord” will weaken pressure for one. The talks over the past two weeks have taken us further away from a fair and multilateral process in the future. However, in an immensely positive development, the sometimes disparate environment and development organisations found a way of working together in a strong and unified global movement for climate justice. Friends of the Earth was central to this. As a result developed countries have found it impossible to sell the final outcome as a triumph and secret negotiations and bullying tactics have been exposed as never before.”

Hilary Benn is the UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The Green Room is a series of opinion articles on environmental topics running weekly on the BBC News website. 17th January 2010

‘The decline in the world's biodiversity is approaching a point of no return’, warns Hilary Benn. In this week's Green Room, the UK's environment secretary urges the international community to seize the chance to act before it is too late.

‘In 2002, the world's governments made a commitment to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. Although it is hard to measure how much biodiversity we have, we do know these targets have not been met. Our ecological footprint - what we take out of the planet - is now 1.3 times the biological capacity of the Earth. In the words of Professor Bob Watson, Defra's chief scientific adviser and former chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), we are in danger of approaching "a point of no return".’ (Source: BBC News Website)’



Degraded forest, Indonesia

TWO WAYS YOU CAN HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

Good news on batteries

You may have noticed some shops have started collecting batteries for recycling. Under the Waste Batteries Regulations 2009 (see <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file51268.pdf>) any shop selling over 32 kg of batteries per year must now offer this service. There are also collection points at Smallmead and the Reading Civic Offices. The Regulations set out requirements for waste battery collection, treatment, recycling and disposal for all battery types including arrangements by which the UK intends to meet waste portable battery separate collection targets of 25% by 2012 and 45% by 2016. It is estimated that around 60% of the UK's waste portable batteries will be treated overseas at facilities such as Citron SA's plant at Le Havre in the north of France, with alkaline manganese batteries, which represent the largest proportion of the UK market, generally being exported for treatment. See http://www.letsrecycle.com/do/ecco.py/view_item?listid=37&listcatid=5453&listitemid=54353§ion=legislation

(I'm told Asda has a collection point. Ed.)

A LITTER-FREE EARLEY: Yearning for a pristine, clean Earley, free of litter? You can help.

Earley Environmental Group is joining with Maiden Erlegh Residents' Association to start an "Adopt-an-Earley-street!", which has the strong backing of the Town Council. Litter picking tools, bags and gloves would be provided and safety advice given, and, if taste allows, a yellow jacket to publicly spread the word. We may think it's not up to us but, realistically, the council cannot deal with all the litter currently being dropped in our streets. **Be proud of Earley!**

Volunteer your help to **Brian Hackett on 986 1115**, or email ask.mera@btinternet.com by the middle of April. (If you can think of a different title for the scheme appropriate for Earley, let us know.)

Note: This is a different initiative from our yearly litter pick (see p.8 for details of this).

A nationwide website (www.litteraction.org.uk) lists anti-litter groups and provides information for such groups.

When the best form of defence is attack

Part 2

Speaking of eagles, I remember once watching in Florida a gang of fish crows fly up to defend their nesting trees from a passing bald eagle. They were not at all worried by over-flying ospreys: they seemed to know that ospreys are exclusively fish-eating and posed no threat. Bald eagles have wider tastes. Interestingly, the fish crows were joined in that attack by several mockingbirds, which are only the size of a song thrush!

That reminds me that last year I saw a flock of goldfinches and siskins rise from the tree-tops at Dinton Pastures to briefly mob a low-flying red kite, which may have been looking to snatch one of them from the tree-tops. Another local birder witnessed an ambush staged by a red kite, which flew in low behind a tree and swooped up to snatch a newly-fledged rook from the canopy top. Such a hunting technique is not usual for the red kite, though it is a standard method for the swallow-tailed kite of the Americas.

As the examples of the mockingbirds and finches show, aerial harassment is used by a number of species. I once watched a cuckoo fly across marshes, acting like a magnet for a string of meadow pipits which popped up from vegetation to see it off. Cuckoos are surprisingly hawk-like in shape, but it is probable that the pipits knew that it posed an entirely different threat as a nest parasite. Terns use a similar technique, rising in a massed scramble, like WW2 fighter squadrons, to see off a passing heron or large gull that might want to snack on their young. Their sharp beaks are real weapons, which can deliver quite a blow. I know - an arctic tern turned woodpecker when it landed on my head in the Farne Islands! These birds also add their droppings to their armoury, and I experienced that, too! The fieldfare uses guano to even greater effect. It also nests in close colonies for mutual protection. Any potential predator is subjected to a heavy bombardment of droppings, so effective that the intruder is sometimes rendered flightless by clogged feathers, and may even die of exposure if it loses insulation.

Other protective forms of harassment take place in our gardens. We are all familiar with the blackbird's alarm call when its nest or young are threatened: this is the way by which one species alerts others to mutual danger. Sometimes such alarms result in "mobbing", when the local songbirds gang up on the intruder to drive it to confusion and distraction. It is not the brave pecks and

dashes that work so much as the chaos of movement around the threat. This weapon is particularly directed against sitting owls, and I have seen tawny owls and little owls mobbed in this way. The picture here is one I took of



a little owl braving the onslaught of three blackbirds, with a number of finches and warblers outside the picture. Recently the aggressive calls of a few songbirds drew my eye to a sitting tawny owl in Pamber Forest. Such awareness was used to even greater effect by our birding guide in Trinidad: he had mastered the call of the ferruginous pygmy owl to perfection and used it to lure small birds out of dense cover. My favourite moment was when two dozen birds of about six species emerged from the roadside bushes, all metaphorically rolling up their sleeves to sort out the intruder: you could almost hear them sigh that Roodal had conned them yet again!

While some of my examples refer to things seen in my travels, much of my watching time is spent locally. It doesn't cost a lot to keep your eyes open, to be observant, and to question the reasons behind what you see, as some contributors are clearly doing. You certainly don't need to be an "expert" to do this: all journeys start with a single step and there is so much wonder in the natural world to discover. In the 18th century Gilbert White used exactly those techniques in Selborne to put down the foundations, among other things, of the modern study of bird behaviour. As to watching the skies, I calculate that I have now seen some ten raptor species over the skies of Earley and Woodley, and a good many of the sightings were signalled by corvid behaviour. Brian Clews has the catch-phrase: "Eyes to the skies!" It is great advice.

Ray Reedman, Sept. 2009

On bird behaviour, I recommend two very accessible books by Dominic Couzens: "The Secret Lives of Garden Birds" and "The Secret Lives of British Birds". "The Natural History of Selborne", by Gilbert White, has never been out of print in 220 years. White's house at Selborne, Hampshire, is only 40 minutes away, with Jane Austen's house in nearby Chawton. Our thanks to Ray for this interesting article.

MEMORIES OF MOVING TO EARLEY TO ESCAPE THE WAR IN LONDON: David as a young child moved to Earley to stay with relatives at 17 Salcombe Drive after the first bombs dropped on London. Before starting his National Service David finds a job at the Co-op Dairy, Earley, and has a baptism of fire when handling a wily old cart horse.

"Be at the stables at Maiden Erlegh at 5.30 on Monday morning. You can do a round. It's a man's job so you can have a man's wage, £9. Ask for Wilf! He will train you." It occurred to me that I had never been up that early before and that I was afraid of horses!

The alarm clock went off at 4 a.m. I did not want to get up. The moment when I should have to face a savage carthorse was almost upon me. I forced open my eyes. They felt as though ash had been rubbed into them. I got out of bed and splashed cold water on my face and my eyes felt better. I didn't feel hungry but I ate some cornflakes and drank a cup of tea. My blood didn't seem to be circulating properly and I felt weak. I cycled half a mile to the stables. It was September and still dark. My bicycle splashed through the puddles on the unmade-up surface of the stable yard.

I could make out the silhouette of the single-storey stables around the square perimeter of the yard. It was unreal, like a film set. This area, a few hundred yards from the stately home of Maiden Erlegh, must have been the centre of Solomon Joel's famous racehorse empire. There were stables for one hundred horses and I wondered which ones were reserved for the Derby hopefuls. The yard was only lit by lamps over a few of the stable doors and a light which shone brightly on top of a large flat-bed lorry, parked in the middle of the yard. Its cargo was crates of milk in stacks, held in by chains looped to removable posts. The red milk carts were lined up in a row with shafts pointing skywards.

I asked for Wilf. If anybody asked me what a typical English countryman was like, then I should have to describe Wilf. He was six feet tall and stocky, giving the impression of immense strength. He had a weather-beaten complexion, brown eyes and wiry, untamed, short fair hair. His hands were large with fingers like pork sausages. When he spoke to you in his Berkshire brogue, it was as though he was addressing his neighbour in the cottage two hundred yards down the road. If you said anything witty, you were rewarded with uproarious laughter which was usually much more than the remark deserved, but it made him very likeable.

"Are you any good with horses, Dave?"

"No! I'm dead scared of them!"

"No need to be scared of these old fellers. They're a lovely lot! Let's go and see the groom and see who we've got."

The groom must have had a name but he was always addressed as "Groom". Perhaps it was a horse-stabling tradition like at the school where the headmaster is never identified by his name. He sat by an oil lamp in a large room surrounded by a miscellany of leather, metal and rope goods mostly hung round the walls but also lying on the earthen floor. I couldn't believe that Sol Joel would give his grooms such non-prestigious accommodation without a proper floor. Perhaps this was another tradition in the world of horses.

The groom was Scottish. I understood, "Whiskey, in Number Five" but I was unable to decipher the additional information that we were given. When I asked Wilf what he had said, Wilf replied that Whiskey was just back from the vet's and was almost over his diarrhoea. At No. 5 Wilf unhooked a rope halter and opened the stable door. The horse was round to the left. We couldn't see anything but we could hear him stand up as we came in. Wilf shouted and hollered nothing in particular. "That's to let him know who's boss. Now you try!" My effort was more suited to the vicarage than the stable and made Wilf laugh. "O.K. Come over here and find out which way he's facing." "How do I do that?" "Well, feel for him."

I edged forward and kept my hands vertical and flat. I did not want to stick my finger in this terrifying beast's eye by mistake. I found his coat but at first I was so nervous that I couldn't work out which end was which. Eventually, I found his mane and neck going above my head. "OK", said Wilf, "now slip the halter over his head."

"Won't he bite me?" "Only if you put your hand in his mouth!"

Slipping a halter over a horse's head in the pitch dark seemed to me to carry a big risk of putting your hand in his mouth. Luckily, Wilf took over from my trembling efforts and gave me the rope. "We've got to turn him round and lead him out. Be careful he doesn't tread on your foot when he comes round and mind that thing in the next stall. He might try and kick Whiskey as he goes by. Hold on tight." Once again, I screwed up my tiny bit of courage for this last act. He did avoid treading on my toe, although I had no idea whose foot was where in the dark. They did attack each other as we went out. I held on tight but still went up and down with Whiskey's head as he bucked and kicked his neighbour.
(Read David's sharp learning curve handling Whiskey next issue)



A Co-op Milk Cart

Keith Pope in *Earley Days* remembers working for the Co-op Dairy as a milkman. "My milk float was a four-wheeled cart drawn by a horse. In 1950 the stables were to the side of Maiden Erlegh Mansion House and on the return to the stables we turned into Betchworth Avenue and just past the old oak tree was a farm gate, and a gravel drive which curved to the left of the house. The stables were quite large with approximately 100 horses that delivered milk and bread throughout the Reading area. The best horses were used on the milk rounds and the frisky horses were used for delivering bread."

THE TROUBLE WITH BLUEBELLS.....

The nation's favourite wild flower - but can you recognise our true bluebell?

How lucky we are to possess between 25% and 50% of the world's population of *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*. Walking through a bluebell wood is one of the joys of spring, the heady scent reminding one guiltily of gathering armfuls in childhood. But there may be danger lurking there. Not since the Spanish Armada have we feared invasion from Spain so much. The threat is the Spanish bluebell, *H. hispanica*, first introduced into our gardens in 1608. Our native bluebell, sweetly scented, delicately droops with the bells on one side, having pale cream anthers, whereas the vigorous foreign invader has a much more upright stem with pale to mid-blue anthers; the flowers are usually unscented, even on warm days, and point outwards. Spanish bluebells are mainly found in the vicinity of villages, towns and cities.

Unfortunately, our indigenous bluebell mixes in gay abandon with its Spanish relative; the resulting fertile hybrid, *H. x massartiana*, weakly scented, can be difficult to separate from the native one, having pale creamy-blue anthers, which can sometimes be creamy-white just to confuse.

There is a real worry that the interlopers are encroaching into woodlands and hedgerows, the favoured habitats of our native bluebell; *H. non-scripta* can also be found in bracken and on sea cliffs - the cotils of Sark feature bluebells in the spring. Gardeners should beware of planting garden bluebells into the countryside or near wild bluebell areas. A licence is required to collect quantities of seed.

What's in a name?

The bluebell has gone through many name changes. Famous Victorian botanist Anne Pratt in *Wild Flowers of the Year* (1846) wrote, "By the latter end of April, almost every woodland displays its stores of blue wild hyacinths (*Scilla nutans*)...The Germans call our woodland flower the *Englische* hyacinth." She also mentions that the starch in the roots was used, not only by the laundress, but also instead of gum for pasting books and setting feathers on arrows. Edward Step (1855-1931) in *Spring Flowers of the Wild* wrote of the bluebell, "(*Endymion non-scriptum*) or wild hyacinth has been the sport of classifying botanists for generations. Linnaeus placed it in the genus *Hyacinthus*; Link removed it to *Agraphis*; Dumortier to *Endymion*; Smith transferred it to *Scilla*.....at last under the rules adopted by the International Botanical Congress it has come back to *Endymion*."

It has many common names listed on the Natural History Museum website www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/british-natural-history/survey-bluebells/index.html including *auld man's bell*, *ring o'bells*, *glockenblume*, *jacinth sauvage* and even *ying guo lan zhong hua*! The website gives lots of interesting information and help on identification.

Since 1998 it has been illegal for anyone to collect native bluebells from the wild for sale. This was to protect the bluebell bulbs from being sold at garden centres.



A wood nr Marlborough

An 1866 book illustration



Did you know ... there is an old belief that if you could turn one of the flowers inside out without tearing it, you would eventually win the one you love; trampling the leaves is more damaging than picking the flowers, which quickly wilt and die; that bluebells will not tolerate deep shade, and humidity is a key to success?

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

Lucky French Bees: The French Ministry of Sustainable Development are to sow nectar-bearing flowers on the sides of roads in an experiment aimed at helping the honey bee, hit by an alarming worldwide decline. More than 250 km of roadside will be sown in the coming months, launching a three-year test that could be extended to the country's 12 000km network of non-toll roads. A third of our food is provided by pollinating insects.

Interested in wind power? Log on to www.westmill.coop. Westmill Wind Farm is a community-owned wind energy scheme. The website gives lots of information. Visits can be arranged. You can either phone 01229 821028 or email info@westmill.coop for more information. There is going to be an open day on June 19, which may be open to all but check for details.

19th February: A willow warbler has been heard singing on the edge of the London Wetland Centre site this week. These small songbirds typically spend summer in the UK and fly over 3,000 miles south to spend winter in West Africa. The centre's staff are amazed at this bird's early arrival and are keen to discover if this is the first willow warbler to be heard calling this year anywhere in the country.

EARLEY NEWS and WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Cooking Oil: Residents can recycle used cooking oil into clean electricity. Smallmead and Longshot Lane Household Amenity Centres' cooking-oil collection tanks were installed on 18th January by Living Fuels, part of the British group Renewable Energy Generation in partnership with re3. Residents can use both sites to recycle their used cooking oil and do their bit for the local environment. Just one litre of used cooking oil converts into a new green fuel called LF100, producing enough clean electricity to make 240 cups of tea. Many households currently pour used cooking oil into the sink, causing problems for drainage and the environment – with over £15 million a year being spent by water companies in cleaning it up. This cost is added to our water bills. Take your cooking oil to your nearest household amenity centre and help the environment as well as your pocket!

Tuesday 15th December: E-mail from **Alice**. A few observations: two visits from a heron at the beginning of November finished off the few fish left in the pond, which I didn't begrudge at all; on the 24 a female (or juvenile?) blackcap stopped off for a brief snack on the fat feeders (I've wired little bamboo perches into them and now robins and dunnocks use them too); a jay on the 27th, next day a handsome fox sniffing around at 7.30 a.m. and 2 more on Dec.6 at 7.15pm - I was alerted by the screaming noise - they left in different directions when I switched on the floodlight. The small group of starlings and the gt.spotted woodpeckers are paying regular visits again. (All of this in the back garden.)

Friday 8th January: E-mail from **Elizabeth**

1. Redwings first appeared in our garden on Monday 21 December - heralding bad weather?
2. We've been woken several times over the past few weeks by foxes playing in the snow during the night in Crawford Close and Allendale Road - four one night. I saw one trotting down the road when I opened the curtains at 7am. They look quite stocky in their thick winter coats.
3. Just noticed today (Jan 8) some hedge sparrows picking up little twigs and flying into the ivy hedge - early nest building or just trying to keep warm?
4. The birds are so hungry that I've been filling up the seed feeder every other day. I've put out extra fat balls as well and have run out of peanuts. Feeding the birds has been an interesting experience this week as I'm sinking up to my knees in snow to get across the garden! I cannot remember snow this deep since I was a child in rural Bedfordshire.

Sunday 10th January: E-mail reply to Elizabeth from **Ray Reedman**

Firstly, the redwings:

We have had a lot in the vicinity of my house over the past two weeks. They have been stripping pyracantha and have now started on cotoneaster berries. They tend to feed under bushes after stripping them, because a lot of berries drop to the ground. There have also been a number of the larger fieldfares, though I haven't seen any feeding under the bushes: they tend to prefer the open ground, but they don't have a lot of that at the moment! They tend to range more widely to find food.

Secondly, the dunnock/hedge sparrow

These do normally start nesting behaviour from February, but I suspect that what you observed was a signal that a female has established a territory: they are an odd species in their habits in that the female sets up the territory and attracts a male. Another interesting aspect of this is that birds respond to the increase in the daylight length, rather than to temperature, to begin courting and song behaviour: the brain is triggered by the increased day length to stimulate hormone production. In short, I think this might be a sign of oncoming spring, in spite of the current weather. You will see woodpigeons and collared doves in display flight and you could well hear song thrushes in short bursts of song. Hope that helps!

Garden Surveys:

Margaret, December: Notable Birds – 10 long tailed tits, 2 coal tits, jay searching for acorns in row of leeks, gt. spotted woodpecker in ash tree.

Gillian, January: **Birds** – blackbird, blue tit, chaffinch, collared dove, gt.tit, greenfinch, robin, song thrush, starling, woodpigeon, wren, dunnock, coal tit, pied wagtail, coal tit, but no house sparrow. Most were on the feeders but the wren was seen in the jasmine. A harlequin ladybird found a hiding place behind the kitchen blind. On the 29th January Gillian notesd, "the first yellow crocus out in garden – is spring coming?" Unfortunately not, Gillian!

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- March:** **Sunday, 21st March** EEG will join with the Wokingham Borough Council in the **Campaign against Waste** litter-pick. WBC is running the event over 2 days on 20th and 21st March, but EEG will run it on Sunday 21st only, as in previous years.
2 sessions: 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and 2 to 4.30 p.m. Register participation with **Jean** on (0118) 986 1115. Venues to be chosen nearer the time. **Your chance to do your bit for the environment** so contact Jean as soon as possible. Watch out for posters.
- April:** **Wednesday, 21st April,** 7.30 p.m. **'Grasshoppers and Crickets'** talk by **Adrian Hickman**, Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.
- May:** **Sunday, 2nd May** 6.30 to 8.30 a.m. **Dawn Chorus** walk led by Ray Reedman at **Lavell's Lake**. Meet at Lavells Lake car park at 6.15 a.m.
- May:** **Sunday, 16th May** 2 to 4 p.m. Walk in **Nores Hill Wood**, an ancient woodland site with veteran trees, one dating from King Henry VIII's time. There is no car park for this site, but the woodland is accessed from near the Shinfield Players theatre on Whitley Wood Lane. Follow the road past the Shinfield Players onto Greenwich Drive and turn left onto Cirrus Drive. A kissing gate is located at the end of the paved driveway in front of you. Meet at 1.45 p.m.
- June:** **Sunday, 20th June** 2 to 4 p.m. Walk round **Lavell's Lake and Twyford Lakes**. Leader to be announced. Meet at Lavell's Lake car park at 1.45 p.m.
- Future events:** **July 11th:** Walk, Paices Wood, Nr. Aldermaston, **August 7th:** Green Fair, **September 15th:** Talk on Bats, **October 18th:** Talk on Spiders. More details in next newsletter.

Bits and Pieces

Footnote to **"A Look at Old Earley"**, item on Thomas Porter in Dec newsletter.

John Platt, who researched Porter history, wrote an e-mail on 17th Dec.: "Some of the Victoria purchasers were from Porter plantations. I think Tom must have been one of the better men in British Guyana despite his background."

Victoria was a settlement in Guyana founded and purchased by ex-slaves, and Thomas Porter was involved in the judiciary side of the project.

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

Join the **EEG Yahoo Group** and **post your sightings and messages**. You'll find a link to Yahoo on our website.

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

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

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

If you know anyone who would like to **join EEG, membership** forms are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995, on the [website](#) under Downloads, or send an e-mail to Liz Wild at liz@helva.plus.com **Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address** at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or send an e-mail.

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

The True Food Co-op, Silverdale Centre : There is now a True Food Co-op operating in Earley, their most successful market. Their mission is to take low cost organic food out to the people, bypassing the supermarkets which charge a lot for organics. They hold markets at the Silverdale Centre on Fridays, 5pm to 8. 15 pm. They have a website giving dates www.truefood.coop

Pet Fayre 9 Maiden Lane Centre Lower Earley : A small independent shop, with bird feeders of all kinds, a variety of bird feed, large bags of which the shop is willing to deliver locally, or pick it up in your car from the back of the shop, tel 0118 9266512, e mail sales@petfayre-reading.co.uk or go on the comprehensive website www.petfayre-reading.co.uk

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