

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1 SEPTEMBER 2005

Earley - Old English 'Earnley -eagle wood'

Welcome to the first newsletter of the **Earley Environmental Group**. Our numbers are steadily increasing, and together we can provide a powerful voice in the future to protect and enhance our local natural environment. **Just adding your name to the membership is already contributing to this protection.**

Earley is a pleasant place to live, with many positive attributes, and so it has become increasingly popular and urbanised. Urbanised it may be, but it doesn't mean that little can be done to keep or improve our remaining green spaces and all of us, as a group, can do something in the coming years to ensure this. The newsletter will keep you informed and, hopefully, open people's eyes to what is on offer environmentally in Earley.

EEG

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

We are a fledgling group, and a beginning has been made with baseline environmental surveys for the civil parish of Earley - not a small task. As soon as these are completed, we can then go ahead with more detailed survey work, when members can, if they wish to, contribute by giving some of their time (no expertise needed). We have ideas for many projects, which we will outline in future newsletters - so much to do, but Rome wasn't built in a day! Firstly, we are especially keen to record all notable trees in Earley, and to survey and record the remnants of old hedges. In the meantime, keep sending in your garden wildlife surveys - extra forms are available from the Town Council Offices, Radstock Lane, or our website. The good news is we have now established a website at

www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk.

The not-so-good news is that at present it only has one page - a download of the Garden Wildlife Form. Anyone out there with expertise on designing websites, please contact our Chairman, Stuart Hine, at 294, London Road, Earley, RG6 1AJ, tel 0118 9268270 or e mail:Stuart@hine5.wanadoo.co.uk who will be delighted to hear from you.

Leave the car behind and get to know your Earley

Want to go for a walk but don't know where to go?

MAIDEN ERLEGH NATURE RESERVE

You can start your walk from either side of the lake, in **Lakeside** or **Instow Road**. Don't just take the path round the lake. Delve into the rest of the nature reserve, beyond the weir. This is an old woodland site, with woods shown on maps of 1750. Do a full circular tour of the wood, noting some of the large, mature oaks, finally emerging near the Gemini Oak, which may have sprouted from an acorn when Queen Anne came to the throne in 1702. Two trees joined together, or one divided into two? (Good place for a photograph.) Younger walkers can try to count how many different species (you don't need to know the names). With luck, you may even see a kingfisher along Maiden Erlegh stream. The Reserve website has a map and will tell you all you need to know. www.maidenerleghlnr.org.uk A free leaflet is also available from Earley Town Council Offices, Radstock Lane. Let us know if you have a favourite walk in Earley.



Kite flying in Earley

There is some speculation that the name of Earley may come from the Old English meaning “Eagle-Wood”. There are no eagles now, but there are certainly other large birds of prey to be spotted over Earley. If you're lucky, you'll see a **large bird of prey with a forked tail circling round – a Red Kite**. Sometimes you may see more than one. They've been sighted at various times over Silverdale Road, Rushey Way, the woods in the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, the University and Reeds Avenue. Until recently very rare, these were reintroduced into the Oxfordshire countryside some years ago and have flourished. A walk in the **Chilterns** will certainly ensure seeing them. The clue to their presence above you is the mewling sound. They feed on carrion, worms and small mammals. To see a photo try

www.rspb.org.uk/birds/guide/r/redkite/index.asp

Has anyone seen one land in Earley? Let us know.

EARLEY TREES ARE ALL SPECIAL

“Every community has its special trees. Some are widely appreciated and much visited, others are local landmarks, known only to a few people, but all are worthy of celebration”

Once a small hamlet of narrow country lanes and farms, Earley has been transformed into a busy, residential area with little original open space left. What can be found, like skeletal remains, are mature trees which once lined quiet country roads or were part of woodland belts. When you next pass down an old Earley road, look for trees, particularly oaks, which may silently line it. Sometimes they may be in an avenue, sometimes in a remnant of hedgerow or perhaps isolated and ending up beached in a street shrubbery or someone's garden. These may have been youngsters when your great, great grandparents, were babes in arms. A few of them are older than even the oldest occupant of Earley by perhaps three hundred years. The clues to their early existence can be found in old maps of Earley.

Ancient trees, depending on your point of view, may look decrepit and almost dead, or impressive, grand reminders of our past. Their value to wildlife is now being recognised by all the experts. Hopefully, in time perhaps, everyone in Earley will come to view our old trees with respect and affection.

Take, for instance, the old oak at the school end of Maiden Erlegh Drive. This has a whopping girth of over 18 feet, nearly 6 metres, a true ancient. Once part of the avenue of trees lining the drive to the old Maiden Erlegh House, it has seen many comings and goings. If only it could talk. No doubt it might remember well the fantastic parties Solly Joel held in Ascot Week, or the showgirls from the West End theatre owned by Solly, who came to swim in the Pompeian pool. It probably doesn't appreciate the indignity of having graffiti sprayed on it. It's every bit as historic as an old timber framed cottage but, whilst the latter is protected, our old tree is much more vulnerable. Please tell us if you have an Earley 'tree story' to tell.

EEG's aim in the future is to ensure the continued existence and safety of as many Earley notable trees as we can, and to enhance the locality with new planting where possible.

Go to website www.woodland-trust.org.uk/ancient-tree-forum/atfhome/home.htm

Check out TREE CARE on the site.

FUTURE EVENTS

Oct 4, Tuesday, at 7.30 Interpretation Centre, Instow Road – Informal chat with Tree Officer from Wokingham DC about Earley Trees. A chance to raise any concerns or queries. Everyone welcome. If you care about trees, please come.

Oct 8, Saturday, at Reading Environment Centre, Prospect Park, Reading – Improving Urban Biodiversity (10-4pm) - A Berkshire Biodiversity Course. To get details or become a member (free) contact Andy Glencross at Dinton Pastures Country Park or e mail andy.glencross@wokingham.gov.uk

Oct 13, Thursday, at 7.30 Interpretation Centre, Instow Road - Meeting of Moth Group. All welcome.

Oct 18, Tuesday, at 7.30 Interpretation Centre, Instow Road - Committee Meeting. Open to all members. Non committee members would be actively welcomed. (Details of Committee meetings can be found on EEG Yahoo discussion group, see below)

Nov 10, and Dec 8, both Thursday, at 7.30 at Interpretation Centre, Instow Road - Meeting of Moth Group. All welcome.

Grahame, our Vice Chairman, is currently drawing up a programme of talks/walks/events for the next 12 months, so check the next newsletter for this. Details of these events will also appear eventually on our Yahoo discussion group. It's recommended everyone joins this topical discussion group, if possible, to keep up to date with all the news of Earley's wildlife. For details of how to join this group, please contact Stuart Hine on Stuart@hine5.wanadoo.co.uk.

GREEN JARGON

BIODIVERSITY is a relatively new term, first coined by the American biologist EO Wilson in the mid 1980s - it abbreviates 'biological diversity' and encompasses the range of variation in living organisms from genetic variation to species and ecosystem variation. Thus the term is a substitute for 'Nature' or 'variety of life' but it has grabbed the attention of politicians and decision-makers the world over in a way that the term 'wildlife conservation' never did.

LOOKING BACK TO SUMMER

Did you know that this area of the country is a 'hot spot' for **STAG BEETLES**? You may have been lucky enough to see the males in flight on summer evenings between May and August. Our Chairman, Stuart Hine, is a leading entomologist at the Natural History Museum and conducted his own stag beetle survey in his Earley garden in June. He found "4 males in/over the garden on Friday evening, 6 males on Saturday and 5 yesterday evening. All were captured and released later the same night, so some could be the same examples from the previous evenings." Did you find any in your garden? Let us know. If you want to know more about these beetles, get a free leaflet on **Friendly Gardening** from PTES 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Rd, London SW8 4BG

Interested in MOTHS and want to learn more? Well, you're in luck, as the Berkshire Moth group meets a stone's throw from you at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road, Earley. All are welcome. Meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday of each month. (See 'Events') Website; www.berkshiremothgroup.co.uk

Grahame Hawker, our Vice Chairman, is an expert on **butterflies and moths** and has made the Maiden Erlegh Reserve a great feeding and breeding place for these beautiful creatures. Log on to <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/1/hi/sci/tech/4683129.stm> where you can find out more about the National Moth Night (held on 9th July), featuring Grahame and Mark Calway. Grahame says - "In general 2005 has been a poor to average year for butterflies in Earley, and probably for most of the S.E. , although a few, like the Comma and large & small Whites have bucked the trend. If you have evidence to the contrary on other species, please let us know." If you need inspiration to keep a record of butterflies, try Linda Walls' website, which is her personal butterfly record, with excellent photos. Linda lived for eleven years in Wokingham before moving to Cirencester.

www.butterflygarden.co.uk/butterflies.htm

LOOKING FORWARD TO AUTUMN

Autumn is a time of many comings and goings in the bird world. Something we don't fully understand is how birds can use the stars, the sun or the earth's magnetic field to find their way. **Swifts** will already have left on their trip to their second summer season in Africa.

The **Swallows**, which are streaming overhead in early Autumn, will make a remarkable journey, reaching Botswana, Namibia or South Africa by Christmas. The swallows on our telephone wires have witnessed places and things we humans will never see. A 4 month outward trip, 2 months rest, and then they make a much quicker return journey, in less than 2 months. Why? To get the best territories.

Autumn brings its glut of berries and seeds. You may find that you're not alone in fighting for a place in the car park. The **Waxwing**, which loves rowan berries, may come to us from its Northern home to find these at the local supermarket. One of our members recorded seeing a flock of these birds on a rowan at Do

REPORTS FROM THE 'WILDS' of EARLEY

From EEG member Alan: "**You otter be there!**" (Alan's pun, not the editor's)

Otters in Earley? It sounds like the sort of yarn that young naturalists dream up to impress their friends, but in fact it could well be true. A dead otter has been found on a road near Wokingham, and tracks and droppings have also been found. Otters were frequent on the River Loddon until about the 1950s when it is thought that sewage and pesticides made them virtually extinct, but with the improvement in water quality and the provision of holts (otter burrows) by the Countryside Service, these beautiful animals could well become a welcome addition to the wildlife of our area.

Editor's Notes. Found on the Environment Agency website -

'Since the fourth National Otter Survey was carried out in 2000-02, there has also been evidence of otters on the River Loddon in Berkshire. This is the first time otters have been

It All, Winnersh in February of this year. You might be lucky.

If you thought of your garden **blackbird** as a true Brit, think again. Our locals are joined by blackbirds, chaffinches, robins, starlings even wood pigeons who could be Polish, German, Norwegian, Swedish, Estonian, French or Icelandic.

Blood is thicker than water, especially for the little groups of **Long Tailed Tits** flitting through your garden. It will usually be an adult pair, with offspring, and non breeding siblings, all blood relatives.

The female **robin** must qualify as a real feminist bird. Uniquely, among female birds she sings in winter, not to entertain us but to make sure she keeps her exclusive feeding territory. A real feisty little bird.

Remember, many of our small garden birds will rely on you for survival in the winter ahead. (Bird seed, including niger seed, and a good selection of feeders available locally at Pet Fayre, Maiden Lane Centre).

recorded in Berkshire for 20 years. '

Apparently a huge danger they face is traffic on busy roads. The answer is to have otter underpasses on new roads near rivers.

Do any readers have otter stories to tell?

<http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/herts/news%20and%20projects/species%20project/otter.htm>. Links on this page give otter recognition help.

Beware confusing mink for otter. Several mink have been seen recently in Earley.

On the subject of baseline surveys - EEG member Jean Hackett:

Hillside Ward I have just over half my area map filled in, and will do the rest in between breaks (cycling in France for 5 days up to the end of August, and a week in Majorca in mid-September). *Lucky her!*

EEG member Sheila Crowson : Finished Redhatch Ward and onto second, Maiden Erlegh. Seeing things I've never noticed before, especially street trees. Even found small remnants of old hedges in people's gardens. Discovered a mini wildlife haven at Three Tuns Crossroads.

EEG member Anne Booth:

Radstock ward I thought I knew the area like the back of my hand, so I was really excited to find a very good wildlife site that I didn't know existed – the ditch and old hedgerow which runs down from Elm Lane past Sibly Hall to Redhatch Drive. I was also fortunate to have in 'my' survey area a lot of cycleways which, as in other parts of Lower Earley, are still bounded by old hedges and trees

BIRD NOTES FROM AN EARLEY GARDEN (also Anne)

Earley birds! Since 2000 I have sent in sightings of birds in my garden once a week to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) as part of their Garden Birdwatch scheme. You don't have to be an expert to be able to identify the species that use your garden and how many of them there are. Overall the most common at our address is the Blue Tit closely followed by the Starling, then Blackbird and Robin. The least common visitors have been Coal Tit, Sparrowhawk, Redwing and Goldcrest.

The food put out really does make a difference. This was most clearly shown in my records when in December 2001 I bought a Niger seed feeder. Within hours I had Goldfinches! Whereas before they had been occasional visitors, now they seem to be permanently attached to the feeder!

For more information go to the website www.bto.org or write to BTO, The Nunnery, Thetford, IP24 2PU

(Cautionary note: Some members had to wait several weeks before this miraculous event occurred, so be patient!)

EARLEY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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|--|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
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| Mammal Recorder | Russell Seymour | | |
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Any comments or contributions to the newsletter to:

sheila.crowson@ntlworld.com or 2 Reeds Avenue, Earley, RG6 5SR

If you are on e mail but are receiving this by hard copy, perhaps you would let me know your e mail address, as it will save photocopying and paper.

If you know of anyone who would like to join EEG, memberships forms are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995.

Stop Press: Sept 1. A story covered by most of the national press - Aaron Balick of Islington thought he heard a mouse behind his TV, but found instead a 9 inch centipede crawling up his wall. He took it in a box to the Natural History Museum, where the entomologist in charge of insect identification is our Chairman, Stuart Hine, who identified it as Scolopendra gigantea, the world's biggest, rarest and most venomous centipede. Thankfully, he didn't pick it up. Even more thankfully, it's not common in Earley! More on this event in our next newsletter.