



We look forward each year to autumn colours but perhaps this year they will be more colourful than usual. Following the great influx of beautiful Painted Lady butterflies in the spring from North Africa, some of the second generation born here should be making the return journey back south in September (see photo p. 4). This remarkable butterfly, one of the greatest migrants, is found all over the world, from England to India, from below sea level to 18,000 feet in the Himalayas.

Michael Collins achieved an even greater voyage on Apollo 11. Forty years ago he described Earth seen from space as *"small, shiny, serene, blue and white, fragile..."* Now his perception is different. *"When we flew to the moon, our population was 3 billion; today it has more than doubled and is headed for 8 billion, the experts say. I do not think this growth is sustainable or healthy. The loss of habitat, the trashing of oceans, the accumulation of waste products - this is no way to treat a planet."* One of the most intractable problems is climate change.

Learn more from our talk in October (see p. 8).

There is something of a Whiteknights theme in this edition: the front page has a small piece on its history, on page 2 an account of an evening amble in Whiteknights with Wokingham District Veteran Tree Assn, and read about our local green hero who is the driving force behind this organisation, also p.2. Autumn also brings benefits other than colours.

September's talk by Ray Reedman will outline his Farne Island experiences concentrating on the bird life (and Ray champions the magpie on p. 5); in October learn about climate change; in November hear all about the wonderful red kite which graces Earley with its fantastic aerobatics, and in December we have our drinks and music gathering. All details on p.8. Join us, no charge but a small donation would be nice.

Items of special interest:

An evening amble.....	p.2
Local Green Hero.....	p.2
2009 Bug Hunt.....	p.2
A much loved visitor.....	p.3
Nest box project in Earley.....	p.3
Summer sightings.....	p.3,4
Green Fair winners.....	p.4
Visit by a Painted Lady.....	p.4
The magpie story is not all black and white.....	p.5
Personal recollections of Earley..	p.6
News from beyond Earley.....	p.6
Earley news and wildlife sightings.....	p.7,8
Forthcoming events.....	p.8
Bits and Pieces.....	p.8

Get to know your Earley

WHITEKNIGHTS PARK

In 1798 the Englefield family sold Whiteknights to the Marquess of Blandford, later the Duke of Marlborough, who lavished more than he could afford on both the house and garden; it became one of the most famous estates in the country. The house was beautifully furnished with great masters, a wonderful wine cellar and extensive library. The greatest attraction, however, was the garden, expensively laid out with very rare plants and the envy of many. Unfortunately the Duke went bankrupt in 1819 and everything of value was auctioned off. He did not sell or let Whiteknights but continued to visit it; by then it was a bleak, empty place with no curtains and little furniture. It was eventually seized by Sir Charles Cockerell to whom it had been mortgaged. The Duke moved to Blenheim Palace which he inherited from his father. Eventually the land was divided into six leasehold units in 1867 and a number of the new houses were designed by Alfred Waterhouse, who lived at Foxhill while his father resided at the new and smaller Whiteknights House. Later, united as a public park, in 1947 Whiteknights became the site of the University of Reading. Some of the 19th century leasehold properties remain, among them Park House which stands on the site of the old 18th century mansion. If you take a walk you can still see the remnants of the Park's earlier splendour: the lake, the grotto, the Wilderness and numerous beautiful trees. (See 'An Evening Amble' page 2)

AN EVENING AMBLE, looking for veteran and exotic trees in historic Whiteknights Park, with leader Rupert Taylor, Assistant Grounds Manager

On July 15th a group of tree enthusiasts from the **Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association** followed Rupert on a trail round Whiteknights' large collection of ornamental trees and ancient woodlands. He explained the intricacies of tree management both from a conservation point of view and a safety one. We got a sense of Rupert's commitment to conserving the native trees and saw many lovely oaks, particularly in the Wilderness woods, some already veterans and others possible future ones. Long may they live. We criss-crossed paths in the Wilderness woods and, apart from many oaks, we saw yew, turkey oak, cypress oak (*Fastigiata*), and beech to name a few. We also saw a couple of hybrids or oak oddities. One was a Lucombe oak, raised by Mr. Lucombe in 1762, a cross between a Turkey and Cork oak grafted on to a common oak (see bottom p.6), and a Turners Oak, raised by Mr. Turner in 1783, a cross between the English oak and the Holm oak grafted on to another oak. These had big girths and a very distinctive bulge caused by the graft. You can't miss 'em. But there were also nuggets of information dropped into Rupert's narrative of trees which conjured up far more



exotic places than Whiteknights Park. Take the Jeffrey Pine with an aptitude for growing in high altitudes, proving how tolerant it is to grow in not-very-mountainous Reading; it was discovered in 1852 by John Jeffrey, a Scottish botanical explorer in the Shasta Valley of California. What a tale he could tell. He disappeared forever, leaving San Diego to cross the Colorado Desert, still looking for plants, and possibly died of thirst or was perhaps killed by Native Americans.

Rich collectors wanting to show off the latest exotics probably fell over themselves to get hold of specimens from the New World. Another tree, from the Eastern states of North America and in Whiteknights Park, is the Shagbark Hickory, first known in this country from about 1629. From its name you can gather the mature tree has shaggy bark. It's used for smoking meat, provides nuts for squirrels and its cut timber is highly prized. There were many ornamentals to see including the Highclere Holly and the Cretan Maple, the only evergreen maple and possibly the second best specimen in the country. £53.60 was raised for Tree Aid. **Sheila Crowson**

Rich collectors wanting to show off the latest exotics probably fell over themselves to get hold of specimens from the New World. Another tree, from the Eastern states of North America and in Whiteknights Park, is the Shagbark Hickory, first known in this country from about 1629. From its name you can gather the mature tree has shaggy bark. It's used for smoking meat, provides nuts for squirrels and its cut timber is highly prized. There were many ornamentals to see including the Highclere Holly and the Cretan Maple, the only evergreen maple and possibly the second best specimen in the country. £53.60 was raised for Tree Aid. **Sheila Crowson**

A LOCAL GREEN HERO: Barbara Stagles

Often it is the famous who are feted for their commitment to an environmental cause but local people also show unswerving dedication. Barbara is one such person. Dismayed at the felling of beautiful old trees, she initially became involved, along with husband Ray, in the Wokingham Town Veteran Tree project in Sept 2005 which in 2007 evolved into the **Wokingham District Veteran Tree Assn**, of which Barbara is chairman and Ray secretary. The Assn now has over 230 members, many volunteers covering the 17 towns/parishes in the Wokingham Borough unitary area, recording and photographing veteran trees. This information is uploaded onto a database, for which Barbara and other members of the WDVTA secured lottery funding. The records are then passed to the Woodland Trust and the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre for archiving. Barbara has personally recorded a staggering 281 trees, 11% of all trees in the database which totalled in August 2739, including 231 in Earley. Trees greatly enhance the small patch that we occupy and they couldn't have a better champion than Barbara, who would be the first to acknowledge the support of husband Ray and other members of the Assn.

To join WDVTA contact Barbara chair@wdvta.org.uk or ring 0118 978 4013. Trees recorded so far can be seen on WDVTA map www.wdvta.org.uk



August 2009 Bug Hunt in Maiden Erlegh Reserve
Photos by Anne Booth



A MUCH-LOVED VISITOR WHO NEEDS YOUR HELP

(aka urchin, highogg, fuzzi-pigg, hoghog, hedgepig)

Hedgehogs have faced many perils. In 1566 they had a bounty on their head of 2d. a head in the erroneous notion that they milked cows, and many parish records show churchwardens paid up. It's possible that between 1660 and 1800 in just ten counties, by a rough estimate, half a million could have been killed (Roger Lovegrove, "Silent Fields"). In 1829 Knapp wrote 'every village boy with his cur detects the haunt of the poor hedgehog and assuredly worries and kills him'. Motorised transport is probably one of the biggest man-made threats these days but now, far from wishing to rid ourselves of this harmless little creature, much is being done to conserve it and that's where you can help.

Several visitors to the EEG stand at the Green Fair mentioned that they had not been visited this year, as in previous years, by hedgehogs; others stated they had not noticed so many dead ones in the road this year. This is just hearsay but recent studies suggest that hedgehogs are in decline in Britain and urgent action is needed to help conserve them. You have an excellent opportunity to help. **Reading University's Urban Ecology Section** is starting a project to investigate the behaviour of suburban hedgehogs. Their three methods of study will be: catching and marking animals to quantify density and survival, radio-tracking to monitor foraging behaviour, and *post mortem* examination of hedgehogs recovered dead to find out age of death, physical condition and reproductive rates. To do this **they need your help** in receiving recent hedgehog sightings in your garden, whether you feed them in your garden, and sightings of hedgehog casualties over the coming year. Email hedgehogs@reading.ac.uk, phone



(for casualty collection only) 07794 685376, or write Melanie Orros, Philip Lyle Building, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading RG6 6AA. There's more information on www.reading.ac.uk/hedgehogs. Useful info on www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk.

University of Reading runs nest box project in Maiden Erlegh

The Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve had a few new additions this February with the installation of 30 new bird nest boxes. These were put up as part of a larger project by the University of Reading, looking at the impacts of urbanisation on the breeding performance of **great tits** and **blue tits**. In total 150 boxes were installed all over Reading and monitored weekly to see how the birds were doing. This caused little disturbance to the birds, but allowed information to be gathered on the number of eggs laid and number of chicks that went on to successfully leave each nest.

Birds breeding in urban areas face a number of challenges when raising their young. Firstly and most importantly, there may not be enough food available to feed all their chicks. Most birds feed their chicks insects and there may be fewer insects available in more urban areas compared to the countryside. Secondly, there are higher levels of pollution and increased disturbance by humans which may affect their success. Other important factors include the increased numbers of predators, such as cats, which mean that many birds are killed once they leave the nest. Despite these added pressures, many bird species do very well in urban areas. In the Maiden Erlegh Reserve well over half of the boxes were used by birds this spring, showing that natural nesting spaces may be hard to come by. From these boxes, over 120 young birds left the nest successfully and hopefully many of these birds will survive the winter and go on to raise young of their own next spring.

Becky Thomas

Arrival of Summer

Early in May as Nature, bursting with life, signalled the change of season, and the cowslips gave way to cow parsley, it was clear that summer had arrived. For me it was the appearance of the terns over Maiden Erlegh lake, with their distinctively jerky flight, that marked the

start of the summer migration.

Then, in the sunny glare of June, flocks of **swifts** that had recently arrived from Africa could be heard calling as they soared in the skies over Earley. Usually they were on the wing, high up above, but one evening by the lake, captivated, I watched a solitary bird passing repeatedly back and forth, skimming over the surface of the water as it scooped its insect prey with its beak.

Other birds, of the common or garden varieties, have been raising broods of home-bred chicks. **Sparrows**, against the national trend, have multiplied exceedingly in the gardens behind our house, and iridescent **starlings** have made their annual

appearance, along with spotty young **robins** and dainty **blue tits**. Even the ubiquitous **blackbird** has been seen feeding its fledglings, passing worms from beak to beak. Meanwhile, in Oak Wood, the **woodpeckers** also raised a clutch of young.

Maiden Erlegh lake has had its share of new life this summer, too: a family of **moorhen** chicks, three families of **Canada goslings**, three or more of **mandarins** and a bumper crop of **mallard** ducklings. But the delight for me has been the **heron** family. A solitary heron, striking its statuesque pose, can be seen sporadically along the bank, and occasionally, just occasionally over the years, I have seen two simultaneously. In 2009, however, the 'heronry' has grown. Early in the summer a heron sometimes appeared, looking rather drab, with no sign of the adult bird's striking black and white head plumage. Later I even saw it skulking in the stream at the entrance to the wood, out of the way of its usual lakeside haunts. All became clear, of course, when I saw two together on 8 June - on the roof of the house behind us, as it happened, like the storks in Spain - and one was obviously a juvenile. Two together, as I've said, is a rare sight for me. On an evening in late June, taking a turn around the lake, I heard an awful screeching and a heron slewed and flapped its way around the island mobbed by a lesser bird. Then, as it disappeared, I saw a young one on one of the recently felled trees that drape their foliage in the water. This became a favourite spot for the herons in the following weeks, and in early July I was rewarded by my first sighting of three in this locality - two by the island and a third further along the reed bed.

I have heard of **red kites** being mobbed, unlikely as it sounds (for kites are a fair size), but this summer I have witnessed one being attacked by a **crow** on Whiteknights campus and shortly afterwards, as I was painting the eaves of my house, I watched as half a dozen kites were dispersed by a smaller bird in quite a display overhead.

The Thames Valley is Britain's hotspot for **stag beetles** and true to form, local specimens appeared in June. My family encountered two and a half! The first was crawling along the pavement on Wilderness Road and the second was clumsily buzzing and lumbering among the trees that fringe the edge of Maiden Erlegh lake. Where the half came from I have no idea, but my son now has a dismembered head and thorax nestling in the cotton wool lining of his insect collection.

Richard was hugely excited in early July when we noticed a diminutive **froglet** on the woodland path just beyond the feeding station at the end of Maiden Erlegh lake. It was a tiny thing, less than half an inch in length. Gently encouraged, it hopped into the leaf litter at the verge of the footway. There was another movement - another froglet - and then another! All along the path by the edge of Oak Wood there were miniature amphibians in varying shades of black, brown and khaki: 43 three in all. For several rainy days we trod cautiously when walking along that stretch of path, but soon enough they had gone.

The spate of wet weather in July has prompted similar changes closer to home. We have had at least four frogs in our garden, and just the other day, a bulbous and rather sedentary **toad**. The raid has flushed the **Canada geese** from the lake, too. We have had 26 of them grazing on the lawns up our road. At least the fish in the brook have a chance now. In early July a few survivors of the heat wave could be seen thrashing around in the residual muddy pools in an otherwise dry stream bed, but by the end of the month, the water was flowing freely again. We might grumble about the rain, and scoff at the Met Office's spurious forecast, but the summer showers have played their role in keeping our landscape green and the early-ripening **brambles** are plump and juicy ahead of time.

Edwin R. A. Trout, early summer

GREEN FAIR

Congratulations to prize-winners in the EEG childrens' competitions: Katie Broad 'Spot the Difference' and Emma Johnstone 'Name that Bird'.

In spite of the weather local residents, being the stalwart people they are, turned out in good numbers for the Green Fair on Saturday August 1st. The EEG stand was well patronised and gained a number of new members.

Visit by a Painted Lady

Like most of you I was visited by many PLs in May, stopping to sip from my Bowles Mauve erysimum wallflower. After a couple of days they were off and I've only seen the odd one or two since. Amazing that these delicate beings can make the journey from the deserts of North Africa via Spain, France and then to the UK. The last major migration was in 1996. Thistle is a favoured feeding plant. PLs cannot survive the British winter but some of the second generation should be undertaking the herculean reverse trip in September. (Photo: by the late Linda Walls, courtesy of Colin Walls. See www.butterflygarden.co.uk)



The Magpie story is not all black and white by Ray Reedman, Aug 2009

In a poll for the most unpopular bird in the garden, I daresay the magpie would win hands down. Its reputation as a killer of baby birds far outstrips appreciation of its undoubted usefulness, beauty and intelligence. Our dislike of its habits is deep-seated in our psychology and culture: on the one hand, song birds are cherished: on the other, we are instinctively biased towards protection of young things and we dislike bullies and killers. What is more, the magpie has always been high on the gamekeeper's list of creatures to be controlled or eradicated as a pest. More ingrained still are the folk memories of the thieving magpie, harbinger of bad luck, a sinister bird: even its nest was likened to a witch's broom in the tree. Prejudice and dislike are deeply ingrained in our cultural and traditional attitudes, so the magpie is *avis non grata* in most of our gardens and gets nearly all the blame for the decline of garden birds. But do we condemn it without a reasonable trial?

Firstly, I would point out that the magpie's undoubted predation on eggs and young is only part of the overall problem for song birds. Domestic cats outnumber magpies in our gardens and will kill adult birds all the year round. In general, a cat kills discreetly and without the raucous cackling that attends the magpie's bad habits. Indeed, some of that noise in the garden may well be the magpie's cat alert, since they fear the silent hunter as much as any bird. Don't get me wrong: I love cats, but cats and careless cat owners really do have a lot to answer for. "Cuddly" squirrels too are pretty adept at bird-nest robbing, as are "pretty" great spotted woodpeckers, and dear old Tigglywinkle, the hedgehog! Not to mention rats, stoats, weasels and mink. But we generally don't witness the crimes of that lot. The poor old magpie gets all the blame, partly because it goes about its business too overtly and too noisily.

Secondly, within the natural world, predation is generally a balanced activity, since no predator can afford to eradicate its prey-base. Predation is beneficial, in that it removes the weak and sickly and clears the way for the strongest members of the population. And why did the two blue tits in your garden produce twelve chicks? In a single word: insurance. Only the fittest will survive. In fact, only two of the total family of fourteen have to survive into next year for the population to remain stable. Otherwise we would be wading knee-deep in blue tits! In any case, they are predators of caterpillars, which fact prevents us from drowning in moths and butterflies! Do the sums! The balance of predation has worked well throughout evolution, but disruption of that balance is often down to us. If we let Tiddles roam

to hunt; if we sow the garden with slug pellets and soak foliage with pesticides; if we have gardens devoid of cover and native plants; if we introduce non-native species like grey squirrels and

mink; if the countryside is intensively farmed for our cheap food... In short, how far do we, our neighbours, our culture, and our economics all contribute to the decline of garden birds? It is all too easy to blame the magpie. RSPB studies have in fact shown that the magpie is not as guilty as it seems.

But does the magpie have any redeeming virtues? We certainly take their good looks for granted. I was once jerked out of my apathy



when a niece had just arrived from Canada and encountered her first magpie on our patio. "Wow! It's beautiful!" And it really is, of course, with its elegant proportions and smart black, white and blue plumage. But the magpie is also endowed with brain, as are members of the crow family in general. It is a sharp-eyed opportunist, which has evolved to exploit every chance. For at least seven months of the year there are no nests and fledglings to exploit, of course, and in any case these are mainly a means of feeding their own young. Normally the adult survives by any means it can, eating worms, slugs, household scraps, anything that comes to beak. But it also eats carrion, serving Nature's disposal service by removing dead, weak and dying creatures. Not a pretty habit, but one which removes the source of decay and infection, which sanitises and recycles. Those who persecute magpies tend to ignore the fact that such species offer a beneficial service throughout the year. And if you are still not convinced, then take some comfort from the fact that the nests of magpies may well be predated upon by the much larger carrion crow, or by one of the arboreal mammals, as part of Nature's balance.

Of the other crows, the most likely to be seen in or near our gardens are the carrion crow, the jackdaw and the jay, though these are generally less bold in human company. The large carrion crow is mostly seen in pairs, often nesting in a large tree and preferring open areas. The much smaller, grey-headed jackdaw is probably the boldest and will sometimes forage in gardens. It nests in hollow trees and even in large buildings, hence one of its old names, the Chimney Daw. The jay is certainly the shyest and the prettiest of the family, with its pink-buff plumage offset by black, white and electric blue. This is a bird of woodland and dense cover, though it will increasingly visit garden feeders. Mind you, all three are quite partial to the young of smaller birds, given the opportunity. Not so the fifth member of the family, the rook, which avoids human habitation and forages open land for smaller food items. A wryly expressed old country adage claimed that "a rook on its own is a crow and that a crowd of crows are rooks". Not all the time, of course. There is in fact a traditional collective term for the former, significantly a "murder" of crows, since non-breeders hang around the countryside in deadly gangs. On that note, I should mention that the original "hoodie" is the hooded crow, which is found in Scotland and Northern Ireland. A seventh member of the family, the elegant chough, is at home in the coastal west. Last and biggest of the family, the huge raven has been spreading from the west in recent years and is increasingly recorded in Berkshire and neighbouring counties. Its heavy "kronk" call gave away an over-flying bird at Dinton Pastures not so long ago, and found me one in a tree in the New Forest just this week.

Worldwide there are well over 100 members of the family, some of which, like the Blue Jay of North America or the Azure-winged magpie of Spain, are extraordinarily beautiful, while others have demonstrated their intelligence in remarkable ways, among them the use of tools.

In short, magpies are part of a broader family which has evolved to perform a function as part of Nature's checks and balances. They are at the very least part of our legitimate natural environment. The same can't be said of cats, grey squirrels and mink, which are here because of the intervention of Man. Nor can it be said of our propensity to garden in "unnatural" ways. As to predation itself, our weakness is to judge Nature with reference to preferred human morals. In the natural world such practice is essential to survival and few predators kill more than they need. O.K! magpies are not too cuddly, and they are not too nice in their habits, but they belong, they are beautiful, and they are useful. In short they have as much right to exist in our landscape as any other native species.

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. After summer holidays life seems to move up a gear in September when the new school year begins.

FIRST SCHOOLDAYS

My first day at Earley C. of E. Primary School inevitably came. Dressed in my black shoes, grey socks held up by garters, grey school shorts, grey Viyella shirt, blue and white school tie, V-necked navy blue pullover, gabardine navy-blue mac, navy blue school cap and my gas mask, I arrived in Miss Plum's class kicking and screaming under the arm of the headmaster, Mr. Willoughby.

Miss Plum looked at my mother and said, "Make sure he comes back this afternoon."

I was rushed through the infants' classes. Miss Plum, Mrs. Annetts and Miss Gould all came and went. I was generally unhappy. I was passed over when it came to being selected for the Maypole dancing on May Day*. I was also often in a dilemma having to choose between getting slapped legs for making a mistake, or getting slapped legs for rubbing the mistake out with my finger. I also had a spanking from Miss Gould and had to take my book to show Mrs. Annetts when I wrote out six times "Gob is Love."

PROGRESS TO PEN AND INK

I arrived in Miss Hinkley's Class 5. Here we were given pens and inkwells so that the trouble caused by rubbing out with my finger disappeared. I was put next to Martin Hawkins who blew a piece of paper over to me and it shot in the air. We doubled up with suppressed laughter and, thereafter, we messed about and laughed and laughed. Suddenly, it was a pleasure to go to school. Martin and I were best friends. We were good at anything sporty and always on the look out for a laugh. Miss Hinkley was very tolerant but it was a different story in Mrs. Mobley's Class

*He was eventually selected



4. She used the edge of the ruler to hit our knuckles and that hurt. Martin and I were split up. I was moved next to Danny Bridger who had the advantage of having two older brothers. He taught Martin and me things that we hadn't thought of. Danny loved cricket and football and made humorous remarks. The three of us were great mates even though Danny and I were soon invited to sit

apart.

THE HEADMASTER

Mr Willoughby, the headmaster, was a tall well-built, blue-eyed athletic man in his thirties. He had thin ginger hair and freckles on his red face. His lace-up shoes were always well polished and he was never without a tie. He always wore a grey-blue pinstripe suit which had a shiny seat. His home was in the house on the school premises where he lived alone. Mr. Shalford, the caretaker, helped him with the garden in which he also kept bees and bred rabbits. During the war he was the only male teacher. His staff could rely on his backing in disciplinary matters. He caned boys on the hand in his room for normal misdemeanours like chewing gum in class. For more serious matters, like cheating in exams, they received the stick in front of the class after he had explained the reason for the punishment. Our mothers all agreed that he was just what we children needed with our fathers being away in the war. We held him in respect and fear. He was a pianist, a keen cricketer and an enthusiastic morris-dancer.

(More of David's early memories in the next newsletter)

NEWS FROM BEYOND EARLEY

THE WAVE: Looking ahead, for those who feel they want to put pressure on our political leaders re climate change, on Saturday 5 December 2009 ahead of the crucial UN climate summit in Copenhagen tens of thousands of people from all walks of life will flow through the streets of London to demonstrate support for a safe climate future. **The Wave** is organised by the *Stop Climate Chaos Coalition*.

'NERDY' ENVIRONMENTAL INFO (for the mystified!) **Facebook:** Local people *can* make a difference. In Crewkerne they fought to save the felling of a Lucombe Oak* and succeeded. Their recent entry on Facebook reads - "The Lucombe Oak will stand, be fenced to protect it from further vehicle/building damage and have a funky-ass plaque describing its history...how cool is that?" **Blogs:** You may ask 'What is a blog?' According to Wikipedia a blog, contraction of 'weblog', is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material. There are many environmental blogs. As an example see <http://www.hastings.gov.uk/rangersblog>, a monthly blog maintained by a member's son, with day-to-day detail of his work and photos. **Twitter** is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? The Woodland Trust twitters - <http://twitter.com/WoodlandTrust>. Anyone know of an environmental blogger in Earley?

* See "An Evening Amble" on p.2

EARLEY NEWS and WILDLIFE SIGHTINGS

Some very personal garden notes from Val, who gets so much joy from nature

June observations: Have just met Mrs. Vixen and her two little ones, they have just enjoyed a meal of dog food. The cubs are growing so quickly but on putting out their food the other evening it was a bit of an Alfred Hitchcock experience as suddenly a rushing of wings and a red kite came hurtling down, then another, looking up six kites circling round and they too enjoyed the food. It's amazing how they eat on the wing. At the moment the old black crow has decided he is not happy with all these birds around so in for the attack, a very brave bird, but they have had enough of this black bird trying to attack them, so off they go. The baby blue tits are out and about like little bumble bees, dashing after mum. The thrush has little ones somewhere, also the blackbirds, so wait to see them. Two blackbirds, mum and dad, have a passion for cat biscuits; they dash around the back door till I put a saucer of food for them. It's amazing what birds decide they like, the fox enjoys the peanuts. The three stock doves are still around, so pretty, and where have all these pigeons come from? The poor little collared doves don't have a chance so they get fed when the pigeons have had their fill and flown off. The jays and magpies have also had their fill and flown off. The jays and magpies have their usual punch-ups for nuts, etc., jenny wren has had her babies in some ivy I was just going to chop down, greenfinches and sparrows on the feeders, robin with his fat balls. Now the warmer weather the little bats are flying around.

The strange creatures I found in the rock-pool like little maggots in leafy blankets I discovered were caddis flies, so must look round the pond at evening time to see if I can spot them. The damselflies are busy laying their eggs on the water lilies and round the pond. The raspberries had a mass of bees as I was going to tie the canes up but decided not to as so many buzzing around; wonder where they have a hive, also lots of other bees and bumbles.

Must stop, get carried away, so many things to see everyday. *Thanks to Val for sharing her experiences with us.*

Notes from Beech Lane, a lament for disappeared nature, but not all is doom and gloom

It's not the birds we see now – it's the ones we've lost! When we first lived here there were skylarks and peewits in the fields. The fields went – so did the birds! We used to see wagtails, sparrows and bullfinches in the garden, and a host of starlings used to fly over on their way to roost. Where are they now?

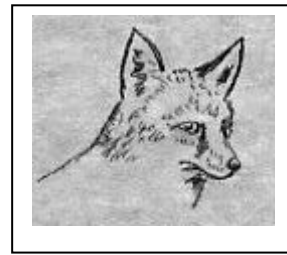
However, it's not all doom and gloom!! We have all the tits, dunnocks, some greenfinches and chaffinches,

robins, a jenny wren, the odd goldfinch, nuthatches, a pair of crows, too many pigeons, magpies and a pair of jays.

I have in the past seen 9 or 10 collared doves, but their number has depleted owing to the sparrowhawk – only two or three at a time – and feathers on the lawn! A yaffle and a spotted woodpecker arrive from time to time and two stock doves.

A cock pheasant spent a long weekend here in April and in May we had visits from 9 or 10 mallard drakes, and a pair of mallards.

Foxes are always around, but poor little hedgehog has disappeared. *Thanks for a picture of garden nature past and present from an unsigned contribution.*



A p.s. to Earley Fox's last letter (see p.3 June newsletter)

Late May, a p.s. to my latest letter to you. There is a youngster now who recently

trotted out of hiding mid-morning, got 'spooked' and rushed off to the next safe spot. All part of learning, I suppose. *Earley Fox*

An E-mail from Alice, July 5th

This is the first year that I've continued to provide fat balls and slabs for the birds, and they seem to be attracting more birds than in the winter. First it was the parent birds feeding themselves and their offspring, and now coach loads of blue and great titlets, juvenile great spotted woodpeckers, the occasional coal tit and a small gang of noisome 'starlets'. Even the robins and blackbirds manage to get a share of them and the wood pigeons, dunnocks and collared doves effectively clear up underneath.

The local starlings are now numerous enough to give a modest bedtime aerial display before one takes the lead, and they all dive into the canopy of a large tree a couple of doors down from us. In the last few days I gave a female great stag beetle a lift from a tarmac path to a log pile in the garden and have also had visits from a sparrowhawk who took over a bird bath usually monopolised by the wood pigeons, a young hedgehog in daytime with a limp* and to my great surprise, for the last four days, a male and female bullfinch on the nyger feeders - I haven't seen them in the garden for over 20 years. **See top of p.8* *Lovely to hear of the bullfinches. Thanks Alice.*

An e-mail from Suzy received too late for June issue

Forgot to add that my daughter and I also saw Painted Ladies back in May. There were 6 of them one afternoon, sunning themselves on our pyracantha. (It was the first time I was glad we had it in the garden!!) They were very happy there and we were able to have really good look at them.

A quick check on May, June and July reports from our regular garden survey contributors for hedgehogs and butterflies

Hedgehogs: Two sightings - 27 May front lawn, and 22 June *with injured leg*. No others reported.

Butterflies:

May - holly blue, orange tip, painted lady, white large, white small

June - comma, gatekeeper, painted lady, white large, white small

July - green veined white, painted lady, peacock, red admiral, small white

Painted ladies seen on buddleia and pyracantha blossom.

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS

September: Tuesday, 22nd September Talk on **Birds of the Farne Islands** by Ray Reedman, **7.30 p.m.** venue Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre. **(Please note venue, not Radstock)**

October: Monday, 26th October "**Are we to blame for climate change?**" talk by Professor Keith P. Shine, FRS, Dept of Meteorology, Reading University, **7.30 p.m.** Parish Room, Radstock Lane Community Centre

November: Tuesday, 17th November **Red Kite talk** by Brian Clews, **7.30 p.m.**, venue Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre

December: Monday 14th December **EEG Christmas Social, 7.30 p.m.** at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road, Earley. All welcome. Music, Christmas refreshments. Anyone welcome to offer a song, recitation etc.

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 Erleigh Reserve every Wednesday morning. For both, contact Grahame Hawker on 07796170689.

Bits and Pieces

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**. It's under *Links* on the website. Sightings of hedgehogs would be particularly helpful.

A six-mile local walk in Earley: see 'Urban Crawl Walk' under Latest News on the 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 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.

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 enquiries@petfayre-reading.co.uk or go on the comprehensive website www.petfayre-reading.co.uk

Thanks to ORACLE for reproducing our newsletter on recycled paper. Oracle is the world's second-largest software company, situated at Thames Valley Business Park in Earley. Oracle UK is environmentally accredited to the ISO14001 standard which confirms Oracle has considered and acted against its environmental impact. As part of their corporate social responsibility they support a number of local groups, including us. They have given us valuable support in reproducing the hard copies of our newsletter in colour, as well as printing off posters and membership leaflets for us to distribute to libraries, schools etc.