

Once again, the Earley Environmental Group has been busy in arranging a varied programme of activities for this, the Group's 20th year: talks, walks, practical conservation work, special projects, collaboration with other groups, public exhibitions and participation in the planning process locally – please see the back page for more. And this variety is reflected in the pages of this newsletter. You'll read about work at Swallows Meadow, plans to help with the community orchard, reports of a couple of outstanding talks – similar for walks, with details of those to come – and observations of nature in our own locality. I should flag up the deadline for submitting photographs for possible inclusion in the next Nature in Earley calendar too – it's 31st May. The committee is working on plans for a few more tangible projects to mark our anniversary, and we hope to highlight them in the coming months. Until then, I hope you find something of interest on these pages.

Edwin A.R. Trout

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Catkins in Lakeside

Signs of Spring



Photos: Edwin Trout

Coltsfoot by the edge of Maiden Erlegh Lake

The inconspicuous Coltsfoot – or *Tussilago farfara* – is one of the earlier flowers to appear in Spring, tending to bloom in early March. Bright yellow and fringed with finely divided petals, the flowers look at first glance much like a dandelion and similarly end their flowering with 'clocks' of air-borne seed heads, but they are also easily distinguishable by their distinctively scaly stems. They are also less scattered and tend to grow in clumps; in Maiden Erlegh, they cluster in just one of the fishing bays in Lakeside.

Committee News

Announcements from the EEG committee

EEG Committee

At the AGM in January, Jean Hackett asked if the EEG would be interested in taking on the maintenance of the Laurel Park Community Orchard, as the existing orchard committee has relatively few remaining members who can undertake the work. We discussed this in committee and it was suggested that Freely Fruity might also be interested in taking this on, as they have an experienced group of volunteers.

Matt Knight from Freely Fruity and the EEG met with members of the existing committee at the Orchard and it was agreed that the best way forward would be for the EEG and Freely Fruity to jointly undertake the future maintenance of the orchard. Both organisations would provide volunteers, generally on a monthly basis, with Freely Fruity providing the expertise on the care of the trees, such as pruning.

The first task will be weeding and re-barking the ground within the cages around the trees. It was decided that the cages should remain in place for now. Ashley, the Park Ranger, has agreed to provide the bark.

Jointly taking on the orchard will add another activity to our 'portfolio', and perhaps enable us to work with Freely Fruity on other community projects in the area. Matt has agreed to join the EEG committee to help with managing the orchard.

The EEG's Seventh 'Nature in Earley' Calendar Needs Photos

Photographers are invited to submit photos for the EEG's 2026 calendar celebrating the natural environment of the Earley area. This will be the EEG's seventh community calendar; the previous six having raised over £2,000 towards events for our members, publishing newsletters, running our website and covering our insurance costs.

The EEG's 2025 community calendar proved to be very popular; with a record of 280 sold. We are grateful to the organisations that sold calendars on our behalf, including Earley Town Council, The Crescent Centre, St Nicolas Church, Huntly & Palmer Allotment Association, East Reading Horticultural Society, Our Lady of Peace Social Club. Most importantly, thank you to all the photographers who submitted such wonderful photos for the calendar.

Submitted photos can be taken specifically for the 2026 calendar or have been taken in previous years. Scenes of the woods, lake, green spaces and wildflower beds, as well as pictures of the trees, birds, flowers, fungi, animals and insects found in Earley are welcome.

The copyright of all selected images would remain with the photographer, but by providing the image for the calendar the photographer would grant perpetual license to the EEG to feature the image in any of its publications. All images used will be credited to the photographer. The deadline for the submission of images is **31st May 2025**. Photographs should ideally be submitted in JPEG format and no larger than 5MB in file size. Please send your photos with your name, preferred photo titles, if you have these in mind, and your contact email address to: collismob@ntlworld.com

Bob Collis, Calendar Editor

The Community Orchard at Laurel Park



Practical Conservation

Reporting on the work of the
Wednesday Volunteers



Matt Knight of Freely Fruity demonstrating how to plant a young tree



Phil Miller and Stuart McLeod placing a guard around a newly planted tree
(Photos: Bob Collis)

Contributors to this issue

Charlotte Allchin
Gillian Cartwright
Bob Collis
Margaret Holmes
Edwin Trout

Contributions from members are very welcome, whether in the form of articles photographs, notes, weblinks or simply ideas. The more we receive, the better able we are to reflect the Group in our coverage.

Fruit Trees for the Community at Swallows Meadow

Bob Collis

Having opened Swallows Meadow to the public in November last year, the University of Reading (UoR) commenced its plans for improving the meadow's biodiversity by holding a community tree planting day on Saturday 29th March. Around sixty young fruit trees and bushes were planted in three groups within the eastern part of the meadow, including crab apple, cherry and pear trees, as well as guelder rose bushes. The trees and bushes were donated by Freely Fruity, a local charity which has set up many community orchards and planted fruit trees in several local schools. They have donated hundreds of kilograms of organic produce from their trees to local foodbanks.

EEG members and Wednesday Volunteers joined Freely Fruity's team, several town councillors and many members of the local community, including families, in planting the young trees. Before we started, however, we were given a brilliant demonstration from Freely Fruity's Matt Knight on the right way to plant a young tree. We then put it into practice.

Swallows Meadow is a key section within the EEG's proposed Loddon and Lower Earley Green Corridor and also our proposed Lower Earley Local Nature Reserve, both of which link the green spaces along the southern edge of Lower Earley. Improving the meadow as a natural green space for wildlife and people will help establish the long-term future of the green corridor.

Thank you to EEG members/Wednesday Volunteers Grahame Hawker, Phil Miller, Jeremy Jones, Robin Christian, Stuart McLeod and Andrew Mickleburgh for joining in the fun on such a glorious day. Thank you also to Jules Shaw at the UoR for organising the day, and to Freely Fruity for doing such an excellent job in providing the trees and organising us! The EEG will continue to support the university with the upkeep of the meadow and its natural development as a green space both for wildlife and people.



Volunteers planting a group of trees at the Meadow

EEG Walks

Reports of recent EEG walks and announcements of those to come

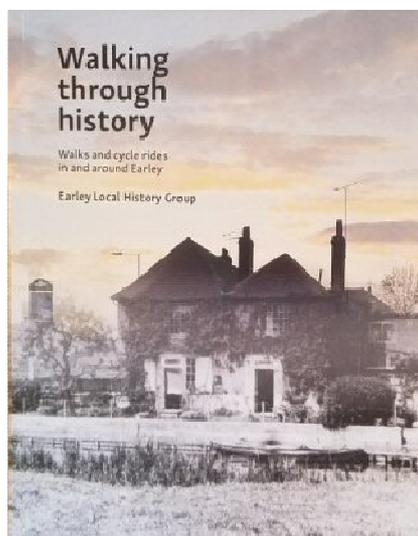
Reading Walks Festival

We will be supporting the Reading Walks Festival held between May 10th and May 18th by hosting two walks in the Earley area, as follows:

Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve Walk - Wednesday 14th May, 10am to 12 noon meet at The Interpretation Centre, Instow Road.

Loddon and Wood of Eagles Walk - Friday 16th May, 1.30pm to 3.30pm meet at The George PH, Wokingham Road.

To join us on these walks you will need to book a place on the Reading Walks Festival site at: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/readingwalksfestival>



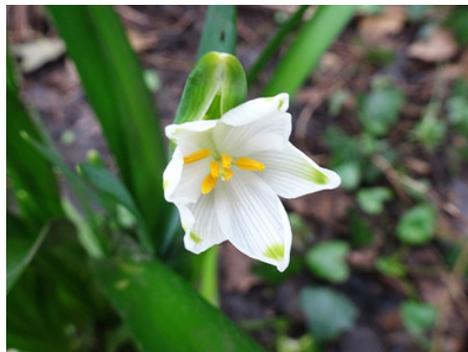
This new book of walks and cycle rides in and around Earley is now available, priced £9.99, from the Earley Town Council help shop in Radstock Lane. The book contains 16 walks, from 1.5 to 9 miles, and 3 cycle rides from 5.5 to 10 miles. Each has detailed instructions and a map, together with points of interest and history along the way.

Photographers Capture Spring Interest on EEG's Photographic Walk

By Bob Collis

The dull February weather failed to dent the enthusiasm of the seventeen keen photographers who attended the EEG's Spring Photographic Walk at the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. Some early spring flowers were in bloom, and there was plenty of interest to be found in the fungi, reflections and trees around the reserve. With the help of Henry Thompson, a frequent contributor to the EEG's Facebook Page, we were able to capture some great photos, whether using a camera or mobile phone. These included snowdrops, winter aconites, and the Loddon lily, as well as tree silhouettes and reflections in the lake. Shooting from low angles was encouraged, as well as looking up and seeking out the small detail that makes a photo interesting.

Thank you to all who attended, and to those who posted images on the EEG Facebook page. Some of the group's photos are shown below.



Loddon Lily by Gil Thompson



Snowdrop by Rachel Burrow



Tree Silhouettes by Dan Tang



Winter Aconite by Karen Rowlett

Look out for details of our fungi walk proposed for October.

An intriguing snippet

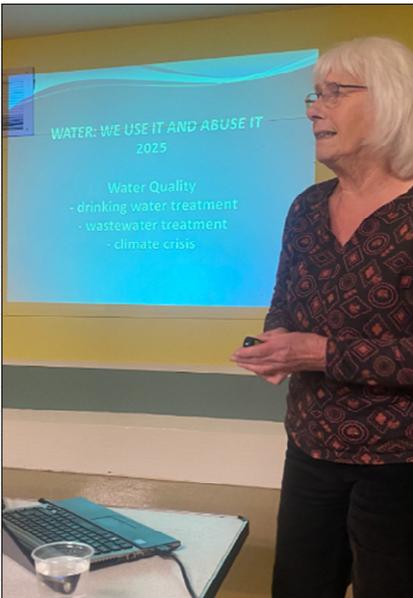
The largest badger sett on record contained a tunnel network 2,883 ft long, with 50 underground chambers and 178 entrances. (*Daily Mail*, 'Answers to Correspondents')

EEG talks

Reports of talks from the EEG's spring programme.



Simon in his camouflage



Jane addresses the EEG

Wildlife Photographer Simon Booker Inspires EEG Members

Report by Bob Collis

On Wednesday 2nd April, EEG members were treated to an inspiring evening by Simon Booker, Wildlife Photographer, whose talk at Maiden Place Community Centre covered all you need to know about taking great wildlife photos and videos. He told us about the equipment he uses, the thinking behind his photography, and the enthusiasm and dedication needed. Most importantly, he showed us some of the beautiful photos and videos of wildlife that he has taken.

Simon captivated the EEG audience with the story of his photographic journey, taking us through his evolution as a photographer, his favoured camera settings, how he sets up a photo opportunity in the wild and the camouflage he wears – as demonstrated when he donned all his camouflage and just about remained visible in the darkened room. His tripod and camera were camouflaged as well!

Simon, who lives in South Oxfordshire, took a more serious interest in photography in 2020 during lockdown, and has now extensively captured most of his 'dream' animals in photos and videos, including kingfishers, hares, otters and most of the UK's raptor species. He gets up early to start his photographic day and spends many an hour lying in wait for the right moment. I'm not sure many of those in the audience will be getting up at 4.30am to take photos very often, but it might be worth considering if the results are even half as good as Simon's. Much of his splendid work can be seen on his website: <https://www.stokerpix.com/>

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of our Water Supply

Report by Bob Collis

On 11th March, Dr. Jane Sellwood gave EEG members a fascinating talk at Maiden Place Community Centre titled "Water: How We Use It and Abuse It". Jane, a member of the EEG and also of EASI, has a PhD in virology and previously worked in the Pathology Department at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. I understand that she also has several published research papers to her name.

Jane, an excellent speaker, held the audience's attention throughout the evening as she initially explained how the world's 'water cycle' works, and how water is captured, cleaned and distributed. She also told us about her work in the microbiological testing of waterborne diseases and viruses. Her talk then covered how the world uses and abuses such a scarce resource, before going on to cover the wonderful world of sewage treatment, explaining the different systems used to treat and recycle the water from sewage. Jane gave us plenty of facts about water, and fascinating insights into the world of water and sewage treatment. A truly brilliant talk from a brilliant speaker!

Maiden Erlegh

Sightings in and around Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.

Garden Surveys

Our garden surveyors Gillian and Margaret continue to record the wildlife in their gardens each month – systematic records that now go back quite a few years and which are currently being collated by the EEG for future analysis.

Besides the usual range of squirrels and garden birds – many of them making use of the fat balls and garden feeds – Gillian notes a fox crossing in front of the house on 3 February and bats over the back garden throughout March. A pair of robins were courting on 15 February, and Gillian's first butterfly sighting on the year was a Brimstone on 22 February.

Margaret's records for April include references to amphibians in her pond: a common frog seen on 6 April – with masses of tadpoles by 30 April – and a palmate newt seen on 24 April.

Fungus Foray



It wasn't the purpose of the Fungus Walk, but once spotted the Fairy Elf Cups in Oak Wood were hard to resist. Small, but boldly coloured, they stood out amid the fallen branches and leaf litter

Life on the Reserve



Just as we go to press at the end of April, the first of this year's Canada goslings have hatched. Sadly, the Egyptian geese have already lost two broods this year. There have been at least four clutches of mallard ducklings, with one hapless juvenile witnessed being taken by a heron at the upper end of the lake. The over-wintering Shovelers maintained a presence until mid-April, and a pair of Mandarins have recently arrived for the summer. Tufted Ducks have been in residence for several months now, continuously since three ducklings hatched last summer.

In 2024, the nesting herons caused quite a stir, and they returned again this year, with as many as four in the main island at one time, and the nest site reoccupied. For a while the call of the nestlings was clearly audible from the nearby bank. The owls, too, have continued to maintain a presence, alternating between bird boxes, interest in them even drawing in visitors from neighbouring districts.

Butterflies

The relatively warm and dry spring has seen a range of butterflies around the reserve: Brimstone, Holly Blue, Orange Tip, Speckled Wood and various types of White. It is sobering, therefore, to read that many of our native species are in trouble, as reported by Butterfly Conservation:

More than half of the UK's butterfly species are in long-term decline, as their habitats are degraded by development, the use of pesticides and the effects of climate change. The UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme has found that last year was one of the worst ever for types such as the Small Tortoiseshell, Chalk Hill Blue and Small Copper. The study found that 2024 was the fifth worst year since records began, with 51 of the UK's 59 species declining compared with the year before, while just six increased. And it was the second-worst for common butterflies such as the Common Blue, Gatekeeper and Large White. Nine species suffered their worst year since counting began in 1976. Last year's low numbers were due in part to a wet spring and cool summer, but 31 species are in long-term decline. Of these, 22 saw significant slumps, including the Small Tortoiseshell (down 86%) and the Green-veined White (down 28%).

Beyond Earley

Press coverage of more general environmental interest

Lifting regs review bagged up with 'bat and newt' red tape purge

The Government has called in key regulators to firm up plans to speed up water projects, ease environmental red tape slowing house building and reform the industry LOLER lifting regulations. Details of the measures will now be worked up but regulators have been handed a set of clear instructions to lift barriers to economic growth. A streamlined process for environmental regulations will also be put in place for major projects.

Construction Enquirer, 18 March

MPs fear nature levy will hit BNG

A report from the cross-party House of Commons environmental audit committee (EAC) warns that without substantial private investment and clear commitments from ministers, the UK may not meet its pledge to protect 30% of land by 2030 and offer communities greater access to nature. With the government pushing mass house-building and large-scale infrastructure development, the committee says that private investment in biodiversity net gain (BNG) schemes will be critical to reverse the UK's position as one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. In its report on the role of natural capital in the UK's green economy, the EAC urges ministers to set out unequivocally the government's support for BNG, which requires developers to provide a minimum increase in biodiversity of 10%, whether this is done on the development site, delivered somewhere else, or by buying 'credits' from the government as compensation.

Construction Index, 7 May 2025

Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Update by Bob Collis

The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LRNS) concluded its draft strategy consultation stage in March. The online publication of the finished strategy is programmed for June/July this year.

The aim of the local strategy is to recover nature across Berkshire by mapping areas of particular importance for biodiversity by working with partners from many groups, including landowners, businesses, community groups and the public. Priorities for nature recovery will be agreed and used to create a local habitat map. This map will depict what needs to happen to achieve agreed aims for nature and link up with delivery mechanisms, such as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for planning, Environmental Land Management (ELM) and schemes for land management, including farming. Together, the strategies developed by each county or region will form a Nature Recovery Network (NRN) covering the whole country.

The EEG hosted the Community Workshop for the Wokingham area in April 2024, and since then has contributed to the consultation draft strategy. Our aim has been to encourage greater emphasis within the list of priorities and measures on protecting species and green spaces within the urban environment. With this aim in mind, we have suggested additional habitats to be added to the local habitat map within the Earley area, many of these lying within our proposed green corridor network.

The Berkshire LRNS is being managed on behalf of the Berkshire local authorities by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.



The Wokingham workshop held at Maiden Place Community Centre

Mace signs £92.6m contract for Reading weather centre

The Government Property Agency has appointed Mace to manage the construction of a new headquarters for the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts in Reading. It will be built on the site previously occupied by the university's School of Art, next to the Department of Meteorology on Reading's Whiteknights campus. Mace signed a pre-construction services agreement with the Agency in November 2023, and has now been formally appointed as main contractor. The contract value is £92.6m. Construction will begin this week, with completion expected by early 2027.

Construction Index, 20 Jan 2025

EEG Programme

We list the Group's forthcoming walks, talks and other activities

2025 Programme Walks and Talks

Please see the EEG website and public notice boards for further details and updates.

Wednesday 14 May
Maiden Erlegh LNR Walk
Part of Reading Walks Festival
10am to 12 noon - start at The Interpretation Centre

Friday 16 May
Loddon & Wood of Eagles Walk
Part of Reading Walks Festival.
1.30pm to 3.30pm, starting at the George PH, Wokingham Road

Saturday 17 May
UoR Community Festival
Visit the EEG stall

Sunday 28 June
Exploring Magical Moths
an identification session with moth expert Grahame Hawker, 10am to 12 noon, meet at the Interpretation Centre. (Wild About Reading)

Friday 25 July
Broodbank Bug Hunt
Find and identify mini beasts with Alan Broodbank. Meet at the Interpretation Centre. Two sessions: 10-12 am and 1-3 pm

Saturday 2 August
Earley Town Council Green Fair
Visit the EEG stall

Saturday 25 October
Fungi Walk
2.30pm at the Interpretation Centre

2025: the 20th anniversary year of the Earley Environmental Group

The EEG is 20 this year and there is much to celebrate! Starting with an idea in 2004, and residents of Earley canvassed for their interest that summer, the Earley Environment Group was set up in 2005. A committee was formed and complimentary membership extended to all those in sympathy with its aims of encouraging interest in local wildlife and nature conservation, and in broader environmental issues. Its first newsletter was issued in the September, a website launched and an online community formed – initially a Yahoo group, long since superseded by Facebook. Soon a pattern of monthly talks and walks was established, with volunteers contributing each week to practical conservation activity throughout Earley, and taking part in occasional litter picks coordinated with other groups in the locality. Habitat surveys were attempted in the first couple of years, and considerable effort subsequently put into surveying wildflowers in Earley's verges and encouraging members to enter their sightings on iRecord. Moreover, EEG contributed local data to the Wokingham District Veteran Tree project. A long-running garden survey was started, one of which is still in operation today. Each summer a children's bug hunt was held shortly after Earley's popular Green Fair, at which the EEG became a regular exhibitor.

Since then the Group has added more, having made contributions to the Town Plan, local planning policy and green space designations, campaigning on specific issues such as threats to Laurel Park, projects such as the White Letter Hairstreak reintroduction, support for EASI, surveys and nature recording, an active presence on social media, publication of the newsletter and introduction of the Nature in Earley calendar, exhibitions and community events, children's activities, not to mention the continuation of a varied programme of walks and talks throughout the two decades. Even the Service to Earley award has been presented to a couple of our members.



Seasonal blossom in the Laurel Park community orchard (photo: Bob Collis)

EEG Newsletter

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