

The summer has been a scorcher, so far at least, and with a record-breaking dry spring followed by the imminent threat of a hose pipe ban our thoughts turn to climate change and the challenges of an effective water supply. The numbers on warming are clear – as John's note at the foot of the page conveys – and probably have been for a while. Anecdotal evidence comes in what we experience – the EEG gazebo has been out in blazing sunshine twice this summer, as you'll see inside – and in the changes we observe in wildlife behaviour, such as the presence of unusual moths and butterflies. As for water supply, well, the report just out at the time of writing tells us Thames Water is the worst performing utility when it comes to unauthorised releases. The book reviewed on page 8 raises the prospect (already enacted in some places) of granting legal rights to watercourses for their protection. Something to think about? Still, hopefully we'll have another sunny day for the Green Fair – see you on the 2nd.

Edwin A.R. Trout

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Common Blue in Oak Wood meadow

A hot and dry summer



Photos: Edwin Trout

Globally, January 2025 was 1.75°C above the pre-industrial level and was the 18th month in the last nineteen months for which the global-average surface air temperature was more than 1.5°C above the pre-industrial level. According to the Met Office all four home nations, have recorded their warmest spring (March to May) for mean temperature since the series began in 1884, surpassing the previous record from 2024. This spring's mean temperature of 9.5°C surpassed the long-term climatological average by 1.4°C. The three warmest springs have all occurred since 2017, a sign of our changing climate. We will have to wait for analysis of the summer weather and the impacts of heat and drought on people, water, food, wildlife and transport at home and abroad ... let's hope it doesn't get too bad.

(John Booth)

Committee News

Announcements and reports from the EEG committee

Community Festival

Reading University's community festival was a cheery occasion, crowds basking in the warm sunshine listening to a varied line-up of local bands and sipping liquid refreshment on the lawn – not least the crisp beers of the Siren Craft Brewery. Among the many stands reflecting university activities and local community organisations, was the EEG stand – manned by Bob and Stewart – and close by, Grahame and Lesley's stall, selling books of local interest. Prominently located in the principal marquee, both were sure of a good attendance and were kept busy throughout the afternoon.

Also in the marquee was an interesting display of the University's work on climate change, plotting the increasing frequency of flooding along the River Thames and its catchment. Illustrations on a fluvial timeline highlighted the floods of 1821, at Windsor in 1869 and 1888, several in the 1920s (1922, 26, 28); at Guildford in 1968, and the more familiar ones of recent years. It was an eye-catching visual statement.

Loddon Garden Village Stakeholder Forum

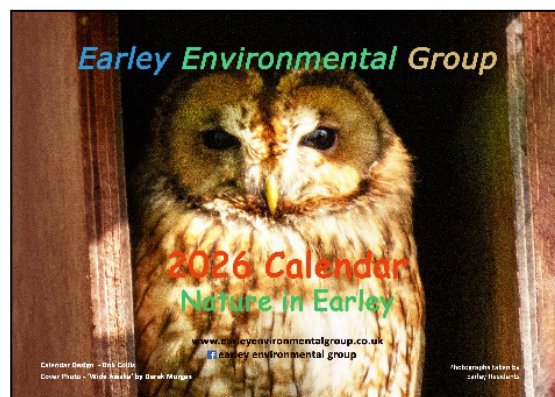
The EEG attended the stakeholder forum held on 16th July by the University of Reading in partnership with Hatch Farm Land Ltd and Gleeson Land. The forum, also attended by local councillors and MERA, set out the outline planning application for the development and the next steps following planned submission to Wokingham Borough Council at the end of July.

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The EEG's 2026 Calendar Now on Sale

Bob Collis, calendar editor

The EEG's *Nature in Earley* 2026 calendar is now on sale. Each of the calendar's months shows photos taken by local residents of the natural environment and wildlife found in Earley. The calendar also provides background information on some of the wildlife and plants shown on each page. UK bank holiday dates are included.



The price of the 2026 calendar remains at £6.00 each. Money raised from sales will be used to support EEG activities and initiatives. You can order copies by emailing the link below, letting us know how many you wish to purchase and how we can arrange to get your order to you. We will then arrange for delivery or collection.

EEGphotocalendar@earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk

The calendar is also on sale at the following locations in Earley:

Earley Town Council Helpshop, Radstock House, Radstock Lane,
Opening hours 9:00 am to 1:00 pm and 2:00 - 4:30 pm, Monday – Friday.
The Crescent Resource Centre, Warbler Drive, Earley – *to be confirmed*
Opening hours 8:30 am to 5:00 pm; Monday - Friday.



Loddon Garden Village will comprise 3,930 houses of which 2,800 will be built on university land and the remainder built by Hatch Farm Land Ltd and Gleeson Land as well as some by smaller landowners. It is intended that 40% of homes will be affordable housing. Discussion centered on the impact of the additional traffic generated by the development on roads in Lower Earley, the impact of flooding from the River Loddon, and on the provision of local medical, shopping and education facilities.

Practical Conservation

Reporting on the work of the
Wednesday Volunteers

Swallows Meadow



Photos: Bob Collis

On the very hot afternoon of the last Sunday in June, the Earley Environmental Group, University of Reading, Earley Town Council and Freely Fruity held a joint community picnic at Swallows Meadow in Lower Earley. This follows the recent fruit tree planting at the meadow organised by the university and Freely Fruity and supported by the EEG and town council. The EEG will be helping the university with further work to improve the biodiversity of the meadow and to maintain accessibility for all.

Contributors to this issue

- Anne Booth
- John Booth
- Gillian Cartwright
- Bob Collis
- Margaret Holmes
- Ashley Prior
- Edwin Trout
- Elizabeth Trout
- Peter 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.

The Wednesday Volunteers – Another Year of Great Work

By Ashley Prior (Ranger) & Bob Collis (EEG)

Throughout the past 12 months, the Wednesday Volunteers have continued to support the Council's Park Rangers in maintaining and improving the Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve and other green spaces in Earley. Their enthusiasm and combined experiences seem to have no limit as they take on a never-ending variety of tasks - provided they get their tea and biscuits at the mid-morning break! Some of the work undertaken by the volunteers over the past 12 months is set out below.



Summer 2024

- **The Nature Reserve:** The volunteers cut back the hedges surrounding the weir at the lake in preparation for the 10-year lake inspection. They also cut back the hedge on Lakeside and dug drainage gullies within the reserve to protect against winter flooding. The job of raking cut grass at the nature reserve's meadow is a regular summer task, with the volunteers working over several Wednesdays to complete the job. The meadow grass is cut to encourage biodiversity and wild flower growth. The volunteers also raked and bagged-up cut grass at the Paddock Drive Community Orchard, at Meadow Park, and along Rushey Way. They also helped prepare for the silt entrapment pond at the lake inlet to be desilted, removing vegetation and willow and alder trees.
- **Culver Lane Allotments:** This involved weeding and barking around the raised beds at Plot 2, and clearing vegetation around the gate and allotment sign.
- **Redhatch Copse:** The vegetation along the footpaths through the woodland was cut-back, and at the Nature Reserve the volunteers helped prepare the Green Fair site, including raking and clearing all the cut vegetation around the perimeter and 'laying down' the large hedge along the site's southern edge to reduce its height and encourage growth lower down.

cont.

- Collins Drive: the hedges along the main footpath at Collins Drive were cut-back in preparation for the official opening of the Council's new play area.

Special Projects

In 2024, the volunteers were delighted to have been asked to take part in two 'special' ETC projects at the Nature Reserve.

- Creating two Hibernacula: The volunteers assisted in digging out and creating two hibernacula within the nature reserve's meadow area. Hibernacula are underground chambers used during the winter by frogs and toads, as well as insects; to protect themselves from the cold winter weather.

- Creating a Willow Fence: The volunteers constructed a willow fence (*below*) along the northern edge of the meadow using lengths of willow coppiced from two nearby trees. The technique involved weaving willow poles between willow stakes driven into the ground, producing a very attractive feature for the reserve.



Top: completing the willow fence

Above: working in the Butterfly Garden

The Wednesday Volunteers *cont.*

Winter 20024/5

- Butterfly Garden: Maintaining the butterfly garden off Instow Road (*bottom left*) is one of the volunteers' long-term projects. Each small parterre has a different plant that is attractive to butterflies, and each parterre is 'owned' by a Wednesday Volunteer who is tasked with keeping it in good order. Weeding out encroaching plants from neighbouring parterres has become the main task – some with more success than others.
- Coppicing: The volunteers helped with the coppicing of selected sections of hazel and holly in the woods at the reserve to enable the regeneration of wild flowers in the woods, including snowdrops, wood anemones and bluebells.
- Maintaining Paths: The volunteers assisted in spreading gravel and woodchips on the woodland footpaths and improving gulleys to reduce surface water during the winter and spring months.
- Wildflower Beds: The volunteers assisted in digging over the wildflower beds on Beech Lane and at the verge near the Toby Carvery in preparation for seeding in early spring.



Spring 2025

- Barley Straw Sausages: The volunteers helped with the replacement of the barley straw sausages placed in the lake inlet (*above*) to prevent algae bloom build-up in the lake and help keep it clear. The regular replacement of the sausages is required as they soon become silted-up and lose their natural component 'magic'.
- Spring Tasks: The volunteers assisted in removing the branches of a diseased tree felled near the pond in the woods and in removing a fallen tree from the lake. They also assisted in replenishing the woodchip by the bird hide and continued a long-term job of clearing the overgrown vegetation adjacent along the southern margins of the lake to encourage wildflower growth and improve views of the lake.

Another productive year from the Wednesday Volunteers – hard work in all weathers, but worth it!

EEG talks

Reports of activities from the EEG's summer programme.

Dawn Chorus

The 5.30am start did not dampen the enthusiasm of around fifteen bird enthusiasts who joined the EEG's Dawn Chorus Walk on 3rd May. The walk, starting at the Interpretation Centre, was led by Elaine Charlson and Cathy Garlick; both members of the Berkshire Ornithological Club.

The songs and calls of many early-morning birds were heard, including:

Wren,
Robin,
Wood Pigeon,
Collared Dove,
Great Tit,
Blackbird,
Canada Goose,
Mallard,
Coot,
Jackdaw,
Sparrow,
Blackcap,
Chiffchaff,
Blue Tit,
Magpie,
Black-headed Gull,
Dunnock and
Stock Dove,

as well as the drum of the Great Spotted Woodpecker.

It was great to be up with the birds, and after the walk were treated to croissants and coffee and a chance to discuss the birds we'd heard. Thank you to the ETC Park Ranger Ashley Prior for opening up the Interpretation Centre for us, and special thanks to Elaine and Cathy for leading the walk, and to Chalotte Allchin for organising it.

Right: out for the dawn chorus:

Magical and Mysterious Moths

Report by Bob Collis

EEG members were treated to a magical morning on 25th June when Grahame Hawker opened the moth trap that had been left overnight at the Interpretation Centre in Instow Road. The trap is a large box with a bright light at the top that attracts the moths, which then hide from it underneath the egg boxes placed below. Why this happens is all very mysterious - but it does!

Grahame identified an amazing 69 species of moth; some during the session and some afterwards using the photos he had taken. In all, 154 moths were counted either in the trap or close to where it had been set-up. Moths with beautiful names such as Bright-Line Brown-Eye, Dark Arches, Double Striped Tabby, Garden Grass Veneer, Mother of Pearl, Setaceous Hebrew Character and Smokey Wainscot were identified. The highest number of a single moth species identified was the Bird Cherry Ermine at fifteen. The stars of the morning were two Elephant Hawkmoths and one Poplar Hawkmoth, both found in the moth trap (*see photo below*). All moths were released back into the nearby undergrowth. Thank you to Grahame for sharing his knowledge on moths and making it a magical morning!



Photo: Bob Collis



Maiden Erlegh

Sightings in and around Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve.



The first goslings of 2025

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.

Gillian reports a family of three foxes throughout April, May and June, 'playing tag' around the trees at the front of her house and knocking a tub over in the process. Butterflies include: Brimstone, Holly Blue, Orange tip, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Small White, Speckled Wood.

Margaret notes several families of birds this spring. In May: Blue tits + 5 juvs; Great tits + 4 juvs; a Robin + 1 juv; Dunnocks + 2 juvs. Then in June: Magpies + 2 juvs and Starlings + 2 juvs. She has observed many of her garden birds drinking from water dishes and her bird bath, adding that the starlings left for their summer break about 27th June, but about 18 of them returned to the bird baths etc and were probing the lawn by 1st July. "Obviously this summer was too hot and dry for them away from our gardens, they are usually away for about three weeks". Similarly, she comments on feeding activity by the Green woodpeckers, with "considerable digging, stones and soil removed and two ants' nests eaten!" With summer swifts around most days, she adds: "good to see them."

Goose Survey

By Edwin Trout

As in the previous three years, the Canada geese of Maiden Erlegh Lake have been very visible throughout much of Maiden Erlegh this summer, grazing on verges and lawns of nearby houses once the new grass started to appear in early April, and expanding their range to greater distances once there were goslings to nurture in May.

The first goslings hatched, as is normal, at the end of April, with a clutch sheltering beneath their mother's wing on 30th of the month. Others soon arrived. There were five and another seven on 1st May. 12 became 18 on 2nd, though that number gradually fell to 14 by 10th May, and 13 in June.

Unlike most previous years, later broods haven't all amalgamated as one, but a second creche formed on 9th May, with successive clutches pushing this total from 2, to 9 then 13 on 14th May. Another distinct pair appeared on 19th May, eventually combining with the second creche as 15, slipping soon to 14. The two have maintained distinct identities, sometime adjacent, but on other occasions, widely separated in different streets. A steady total of 27 juveniles in June and July compares with 16 last year.

With plumage replaced in late May to early July, to which discarded flight feathers bear witness, the pattern of geese flying in and out each day is temporarily suspended, and the population stabilises. This year, depending on the accuracy of sightings, the number has consistently been between 28-39 adults (cs. 43 in 2024), plus goslings. So, more goslings; fewer adults!

Until the grown-up youngsters can fly away at the beginning of August, they continue to roam the streets – farther afield, it has to be said, than in 2022, '23 and 2024. They can frequently be seen on Silverdale Road, from Kenton Rd to Betchworth Ave / Luckmore Dr, and farther north in Sevenoaks Rd and the full length of Radnor Rd to Kenton Rd. They have even been reported in Wilderness Rd and Wokingham Rd!



Beyond Earley

Media coverage of more general environmental interest

Water pollution

On 18th July, the BBC News announced the imminent publication of a major review of the water industry, reporting in advance that there had been 75 “serious incidents” (dangerous releases of sewage into the water supply) in 2024, up 60% from the 47 in 2023. Nearly half of these breaches (33 out of the 75) occurred in our local Thames Water area.

Lead shot From Anne Booth

This week there was some positive news for the environment! Government Minister Emma Hardy announced that shotgun pellets containing more than 1% lead, and bullets that have more than 3% will be banned. This change will be phased in over 3 years from 2026.

Wildlife groups have campaigned for a ban for decades. Lead ammunition is a significant pollutant and a particular risk to waterbirds. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) estimates that about 100,000 waterbirds in the UK die every year from lead poisoning. Birds often eat discarded lead pellets, confusing them for seeds or grit.

A 2022 report found that 99.5% of pheasants killed using shotgun pellets contained lead.
(*The Guardian*, 10 July 2025)

Planning and Infrastructure Bill “Pay Cash to Trash Nature” or to conserve it? By John Booth

The Government says: “The Planning and Infrastructure Bill is central to the Government’s plan to get Britain building again and deliver economic growth”. It was heavily criticised by wildlife campaigners – now some changes are in the pipeline.

The Bill introduces Environmental Delivery Plans (EDPs). These allow developers to pay a Nature Restoration Levy in place of adhering to legal duties to avoid, reduce, or redress environmental harm to protected wildlife sites and species. Key local features could be destroyed - not redressed by general improvements made later elsewhere.

The Bill passed ‘third reading’ in the Commons and is now in the Lords. ‘Wildlife and Countryside Link’ briefed that “As it stands, it risks harming nature under the guise of strategic benefit. With clear, enforceable safeguards, EDPs could become a useful tool, but only if they are underpinned by scientific evidence, proper sequencing, and a robust environmental improvement test.” They also called for wider improvements to embed nature throughout planning decisions.

http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Planning_&_Infrastructure%20Bill_Lords_Second_Reading_Briefing.pdf

The Government has recently tabled amendments for consideration during the Lords Committee Stage of the Bill and claims that “the effect of the conservation measures will materially outweigh the negative effect of development on the conservation status of each identified environmental feature.” This would be an improvement but probably does not go far enough for many wildlife campaigners who would like to see further amendments in the Lords.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-planning-and-infrastructure-bill/summary-planning-and-infrastructure-bill-government-amendments-to-part-3-lords-committee-stage>

Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Bob Collis & John Booth

The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is planned for publication in October and is now awaiting final review and sign-off by local Councils. The EEG has remained fully engaged throughout the consultation and following our comments on the strategy, we understand that additional sections have been added showcasing community-established urban wildlife corridors, such as the EEG’s Earley Green Corridor Network, which will be used as an example. This will provide a strategic boost for their further development and eventual implementation.

Local planners will use the strategy to help decide where new developments will go and landowners can use the strategy to help access funding to recover nature. Everyone can use the strategy to add weight to the species they are trying to protect, or the habitat they want to restore or create.

The Local Habitat Map and LNRS documents can be viewed at:

<https://rbwmtogether.rbwm.gov.uk/berkshire-local-nature-recovery-strategy>

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.

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

Tuesday 2 September
Bat walk

Saturday 25 October
Fungi Walk
2.30pm at the Interpretation Centre

Jersey Tiger Moth



Photo: Elizabeth Trout

The Jersey Tiger Moth, so named for obvious reasons, is indigenous to the Channel Islands and south coast, but is being found farther north as temperatures change. This one was photographed in Maiden Erlegh.

R. MacFarlane's *Is a River Alive?*

By Peter Trout

The tussles, campaigns and outcry over our rivers continue unabated as sewage and pollutants of all kinds pour into our beloved Thames, Severn, several Ouses etc. It is a major national issue. However, what is the international scene? I would point to a new book: *Is a River Alive?* by R. MacFarlane (Hamish Hamilton, £25).

This volume takes a worldwide view of what is happening to rivers across the globe. In many cases there are disasters: the River Ganges in India is so polluted with sewage that there are no longer any fish, when in 1949 there were 49 species; the dams of China's Great Rivers literally shape the world, while hydroelectricity schemes in Canada redirect rivers into a series of 'ponds', or chained reservoirs. On the other hand, rivers and their catchment areas are being protected by governments, and states such as Ecuador are giving them the legal right to exist. New Zealand, too, has given rights to the Whanganui River.

Thus it seems there is an increasingly awakening concern for the future of rivers. A balance has to be struck between man's use of rivers for such as HE schemes, water supply for domestic and industrial use, transport, etc, and the less tangible but vital environmental needs. While concerns regarding the Thames, Kennet, Loddon, etc. are a focus of local activity, this book provides a wider context of both hope and despair. A good buy to increase one's awareness of literally vital matter.

It doesn't take long to realize rivers have character, indeed spirit and soul. Use, do not abuse, or else!

Postscript

The 'Love Our Ouse' campaign featured on the BBC's regional news earlier this summer, call for rivers to be given rights: the right to flow; the right to be free of pollution. Described as a natural equivalent of listing buildings!

Natural Inks

2025 has seen considerable interest in the work of Jane Austen as the bicentenary of her death is marked by new publications, public lectures and television broadcasts. Among the commemorations locally was a lecture at Reading Museum that explained how to make the natural inks used in Jane Austen's time. These included the preparation of dyes from oak galls, and members of the audience were invited to have a go and make their own to try out. The session was led by Nicky Culetto, of naturesstory.co.uk

EEG Newsletter

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