

Last autumn, I recall crunching through a profusion of fallen accords along the edge of the wood as I walked to and from my place of work. It seemed to be a record crop of nuts. And now, a couple of seasons on – as I take a short cut across the tinder dry field – I am struck by the carpet of pale green oak seedlings that dot the beige grass in the shade of the nearby trees. One is clearly the product of the other. It is not a new observation, of course, but I am taken by the image as a symbol of the circularity of life.

We can't not talk about the weather, can we? After wall-to-wall rain in January and February, we had a warm and dry spring, a cold snap in May and have enjoyed continuous sunshine since. Three uncomfortable heat waves threaten to invite a fourth. During one of the red weather warnings, the record for hottest temperature was broken three days in a row! I'd organised a conference in London for the 24 June – the date of the red weather accompanied by dire predictions of travel disruption. Well, we were committed, and disruption there was, but we had only one no-show. Another London conference was cancelled: its subject – climate change!

Edwin A.R. Trout

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Teasel coming into bloom

Greylag Geese



Both photos: Edwin Trout

Having reported, last time, the arrival of four greylag geese on Maiden Erlegh Lake in April, we note they were down to two in May and just one throughout June and July. But four months is a prolonged sojourn for greylag geese in this particular location; a day to a fortnight has been more usual in the past.

Committee News

Announcements from the EEG committee

Green Fair

Earley Town Council's Green Fair on Saturday
1st August, 10am to 3pm:

Held at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve, off Beech Lane, EEG will have a stall at the Green Fair along with the EASI litter picking group.

Please visit us and find out more about the EEG's activities, including our plans to launch of the Earley Green Corridor Network.

Thank you for supporting the Earley Environmental Group.

Wednesday Volunteers

The "Wednesday Volunteers" (many of whom are EEG Members) 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. They are a splendid team, bringing spirit, enthusiasm, skills and fun to their many tasks.

Spring featured wildflower seed sowing and bulb planting. After ETC staff had mowed the meadow areas at Collins Drive, the volunteers raked up the cuttings and sowed wildflower seeds. They also planted 2,000 Snowdrops and 1,000 Winter Aconites at the nature reserve. However, weeding is also needed at this time of year, and the volunteers undertook the weeding at the bases of trees at Paddock Drive and Meadow Park, then spread fresh woodchip below. (*cont. right.*)

The EEG's 2027 Calendar Now on Sale



The EEG's Nature in Earley 2027 Calendar will be on sale from 1st August. The cover shows a brilliant photo taken by Stephen Lynch of four Tawny Owlets at the University of Reading. Each of the calendar's months shows other beautiful photos of Earley's natural environment and wildlife taken by local residents. Each month includes information about the natural environment as well as UK bank holiday dates.

The price of the 2027 calendar remains at £6.00 each. Money raised from sales will be used to support the EEG's many activities and initiatives. The calendar will make a great Christmas present!

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:

Earley Town Council Helpshop, Radstock House, Radstock Lane, Earley; opening hours 9:00 am to 1:00 pm and 2:00 pm to 4:30 pm; Monday – Friday.

Bob Collis, Calendar Editor

One large task involved the cutting back of the large Viburnum shrub on Lakeside to reduce its dominant growth and then applying fresh woodchip to the base (*illus p.3*). Another challenging task undertaken by the volunteers is the removal of bramble and ivy growth from the woodland floor. This was undertaken at Old Lane Wood and Oak Wood at the Nature Reserve, as well as when forming new scallop areas for wildflowers at Redhatch Copse.

Notably, during June the Ranger had to make the rare decision to cancel the volunteer work because of heatwave conditions affecting the UK. Phew – lots of splendid work by the Wednesday Volunteers!

Ashley Prior (Ranger) and Bob Collis (EEG)

Planning Policy

See left and below for commentary on a local planning issue

Reducing the need for data centres worldwide

Data centres use large amounts of energy and can also use masses of water if this is how they are cooled. Alternatively, they raise the local air temperature if they are cooled by dumping heat to the atmosphere as this proposed operation would be. A recent article in New Scientist claimed this could increase the local air temperature by as much as nine degrees centigrade.

One way to reduce the need for such data centres by considering and acting upon the following

- Consider backing your data and photos up to a reusable physical disk rather than on the “cloud” – which is a nice name for a data centre like this
- Be aware that an AI inclusive search engine result uses ten times as much energy as a non-AI internet search.
- Opt out of the AI result your search engine try to offer you, so for example add “- AI” to a search on Google.
 - Alternatively switch to a search engine that does not use AI - they do exist for example <https://noai.duckduckgo.com/>.

If it helps make the decision to change, think about what being spoon fed an AI summary (possible accurate, or possibly not) every time we search the internet rather than assessing the results offered for ourselves might be doing to our brains?

Richard Tredgett

A large data centre in Earley?

By Richard Tredgett

The owners of the site that was formerly the workplace of almost three thousand Microsoft staff on Thames Valley Park are looking to redevelop it, since the three buildings there are now almost completely empty – so generating minimal rent.

The proposal is to build a giant data centre to provide services to the growing needs of the AI (artificial intelligence) and/or data storage (cloud) industry.

Proposal

The data centre would house many computers to provide services to whoever chooses to buy them. The proposed unit:

- Will consume 72 megawatts of electricity that is roughly enough to power between 10,800 and 21,600 average homes - about the size of Earley plus Woodley.
- This will initially be provided by gas generators backed up by diesel generators. In 2037 they hope to become connected to the national grid and run on electricity when grid capacity become available. Ironically the site is the other side of the railway from the former Earley power station.
- The dispersal of the massive amount of heat generated will probably be by dumping heat to the atmosphere. There are no plans to use water from the River Thames or elsewhere to provide cooling.

Timeline

- Early 2026 – consultation started with Wokingham Borough Council.
- “Autumn 2026” presentation of planning permission for the site to Wokingham Borough Council
- 2031 – site goes operational.

The data centre project plans to plant more trees than they will remove from the current site car park, as a part of a scheme to “rewild the current car park” – their words.

How to have your say about this proposed data centre:

- Respond to the planning permission application in the autumn directly as an individual.
- Also share your views with your elected councillor or possible through environmental groups like EEG.
- Raise awareness of the proposal and planning permission process with friends and neighbours.

Over to you ...



Cutting back the Viburnum in Maiden Erlegh LNR

EEG Talks

Reports of recent EEG talks and

Green Corridors

Yuan's talk (*right*) followed an update by Bob Collis on progress with the Earley Green Corridor Network. Bob let the audience know that Wokingham Borough Council has asked the EEG to 'launch' the Green Corridor Network. This is a big step forward for the initiative which now has support from the Borough, Earley Town Council and the University of Reading and many residents. The first corridor to be launched is likely to be the Lower Earley Green Corridor. The EEG is now working on the launch and how to set up Friends Group's to help sustain the green corridor initiative following launch. More information will be available soon.



The New Barley Straw Bales installed at the lake Inlet.

Wildflower Meadows & Earley's Green Corridors Report by Bob Collis



Yuan Yang MP with members of the EEG Committee, *left to right*: Alan Broodbank, Grahame Hawker, Charlotte Allchin, Bob Collis, Yuan, Jeremy Jones and Chris Kaine.

On 11th June, at Maiden Place Community Centre, Yuan Yang, MP for Earley and Woodley, gave EEG members and local residents a delightful and very topical talk on "The Value of Wildflower Meadows for our Local Communities". Yuan informed us that since the 1930s, we've lost 97 per cent of UK wildflower meadows; mainly because of larger-scale, intensive farming, increased urbanisation and lack of awareness.

She explained that wildflower meadows support pollinators, and that insects that feed on wildflowers also provide a food source for other animals whilst reducing pests like aphids. Wildflower meadows also promote wellbeing for people, making places such as Dinton Pastures, Swallows Meadow and the green corridors being promoted by the EEG very important to the community.

No Mow May

Using information supplied by Iain Parkinson, a meadows expert from Kew Gardens, Yuan spoke about the importance of the No Mow May initiative. She said that Iain's view was that, in general, not mowing for a longer period into the summer is much more effective than for just one month, and that mowing should be left until mid July.

Yuan was encouraged by many of the opportunities and initiatives that could help to increase the planting of wildflowers, and pointed out that there are 85,000 ha of road verges in the UK that could support them. She mentioned Reading Borough Council's rewilding, the University of Reading's work on wildflower meadows, and flower grants available from Kew via the following link: <https://growwild.kew.org/>

Yuan ended by covering the government's actions in supporting nature, including the 30 by 30 initiative which commits government to protect 30% of the UK's land and seas by 2030. In addition, tree planting in the UK was at a twenty year high last year, and the government is supporting nature-friendly farming through a new deal for farmers, with £5 billion in funding over two years. The government's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) 2025 is available on-line through the government publications website.

Surveys

Sightings in Earley's gardens and Maiden Erlegh nature reserve

Garden Surveys

Our garden surveyors Gillian and Margaret continue to record the wildlife in their gardens each month.

Gillian reports 50 or more starlings on her back lawn towards the end of May, the youngsters having fledged from the eaves next door. There were six at a time in the bird bath and on 31 May, one fell down the chimney into the lounge, despite the chimney guard. Earlier in the month, there was a Greater Spotted Woodpecker in the trees, seen drinking from the bird bath, and a Green Woodpecker on the lawn. By June the Greater Spotted Woodpecker was accompanied by a juvenile.

Among the many other birds in her garden, Margaret too had starlings in May – “10 enjoying probing the lawn and bathing” – and a Greater Spotted Woodpecker. The latter was “drinking well and enjoying peanuts and loganberries” in the garden at the end of the month.

Butterflies seen by both observers over the summer included the Holly Blue, Orange Tip, Speckled Wood, Small White, Green-Veined White, Red Admiral and Painted Lady.

Among the wildflowers noted by Margaret are Shepherd's Purse and Wild Candytuft: “had this delight for the last 3/4 years.”

Earley Birds up for the Dawn Chorus at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve



Around 22 EEG members and friends joined the EEG's May 2026 Dawn Chorus walk at the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve this year, starting at a very early 5.30am. The walk, led by Elaine Charlson and Cathy Garlick, both members of the Berkshire Ornithological Club, took us around Maiden Erlegh Lake and into the adjoining woods. Elaine and Cathy identified the bird song and calls, and provided us with plenty of information about the birds' habitats and behaviours. Some birds were heard and not seen, some were seen and not heard, and some were both seen and heard! The total recorded list included Chiff Chaff, Robin, Blackbird, Wood Pigeon, Coot, Great Tit, Wren, House Sparrow, Moorhen, Black Cap, Collared Dove, Jackdaw, Stock Dove, Woodpecker, Song Thrush, Blue Tit, Mallard, Canada Goose, Swan, Jay, Magpie, Heron, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Crow, Red Kite, Jackdaw and Egyptian Goose.

Afterwards, croissants and coffee were provided, and we had a chance to discuss the birds we'd heard. Thank you to the ETC Park Ranger Ashley Prior for opening the Interpretation Centre at such an early time, and special thanks to Elaine and Cathy for leading the walk, and to Chalotte Allchin for organising it.

Bob Collis

Young birds in 2026

Compared with the double flocks of goslings over the past couple of years – and totals of 27 reaching adulthood in both 2025 and 2023 – there have been very few this year. There were ten newly hatched chicks on 1 May and four in another location a day later – so allowing for double counting, no more than 14 at most. Attrition was rapid and soon there were only five youngsters, and after 19 May, just two were left to make it to full size – a far cry from last year's total and a return to the more modest numbers prior to the pandemic? (See table on back page for past years.) Much the same in the case of the mallards, with only a couple of broods and five ducklings surviving to the summer eclipse. One 'cootling', one moorhen chick, and no Egyptian goslings, heron chicks or cygnets. It has been an exceptionally quiet summer on the lake.

Birds cont.

More about birds – in Earley and farther afield.



The Birds at Maiden Erlegh LNR

Earley Town Council Ranger Ashley Prior's talk on 22 April at Maiden Place Community Centre was a pure delight. A packed room was given a fabulous talk on the birds seen by Ashley during his time as Ranger at the reserve, and birds seen and heard on the EEG's dawn chorus walk in May 2025. He was aware that there are birds that others have seen at the reserve but felt that as neither he nor the EEG dawn chorus walk members had not seen them he could not include them in his talk.

Ashley told us that he went to Berkshire College of Agriculture, near Maidenhead, from 2004 to 2007 and worked as volunteer at National Trust property Cliveden from 2006 to 2009. He commenced working for Earley Town Council in July 2010.

His presentation included two slides for each species describing an amazing 47 species of bird; showing photos of the birds and giving their Latin name, size, diet, number of eggs laid, appearance and habitat. Photos were provided by Edwin Trout, Martyn Mills and Stephen Lynch, as well as contributors to the EEG's many calendars. Thank you to Ashley for such an excellent and informative talk.

KINGFISHER (ALCEDO ATTHIS)

Appearance

- Both male & female have bright orange-red underparts and mainly blue upperparts, which shines in good light.
- Female bird (shown here), has red lower mandible bill.

Habitat

- Kingfisher nests are widespread on rivers, streams, lakes and gravel pits.



THE VANISHING MEW GULL

A Guide to the Bird Names of the Western Palearctic



Bird Names

EEG member Ray Reedman has fully updated his *Vanishing Mew Gull* for a paperback edition that retails at £24.99. It came out in July.

The original hope was to make a one-stop reference available to the 'ordinary birder' and this edition will be more accessible price-wise. Ordered directly from Ray (using his email address below), it will cost members just £20.00. Any profits from such sales will be donated to EEG.

Ray Reedman: meander2@hotmail.com

For details: The Vanishing Mew Gull - Reedman - Pelagic Publishing - 9781784274627

Maiden Erlegh

Sightings in and around Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve.



The Welsh Harlequin in former times

Seen on the Reserve

Brown Argus & other butterflies

"I was at last able to confirm the presence of the odd Brown Argus at the wildflower patch at Instow Road. Usually chalk downland but less often in dry verges etc. The marjoram is the attraction. They have been recorded in Whiteknights in the past, and I had one in the garden in 2022, but we also found several this week in a lane at Swallowfield.

"Recently in our garden Jersey Tiger and Hummingbird Hawk moths."

Ray Reedman

Kingfisher

The elusive Kingfisher was spotted on 25 June, flying low from the big island to the pontoon

Tufted Ducks

Tufted Ducks have been sporadic day-visitors to the lake, with a pair present on 2 and 26 June and one on 18 July

Hedgehog

Walking up the path through Oak Wood, one evening in mid-July, I was delighted to see a dark, short-legged shadow scurry across in front of me and into the undergrowth. It was a hedgehog, moving at unexpected speed. What a pleasure see one that isn't sick or squashed on the roadway.

Edwin Trout

Ducks Departed

In March 2016 two ducks of an unfamiliar breed appeared on Maiden Erlegh Lake, evidently part-mallard, but larger, with white breast and frosting amid the cinnamon brown plumage, a conspicuously yellow bill and quite a wide white ring around the neck just below the bottle-green head. As both were drakes they were evidently not a 'couple', but they kept close together and presumably were siblings; maybe they were youngsters, though they appeared to be full size.

Unlike most visitors to the lake, they didn't move on, either days or even weeks later. Rather, they quickly settled down as more or less a fixture at the eastern end of the lake. The tangle of branches between the water pipe and the disabled fishing platforms on the south bank, opposite the island – seemed to be their favoured roost. They would swim down to the feeding station and perhaps to the weir, but that was the extent of their closely defined territory. Then in May they undertook their first few forays past the island out to the central reach of the lake – "first time out of area to middle of lake" (I noted on 2 May) and "third time seen out here – getting more adventurous" (20 May) – but most of the time they kept to their patch.

In July they lost their colouring for a period of eclipse, looking increasingly pale with drab heads. Around this time, I heard they were 'Welsh Harlequins', developed by a duck breeder at Criccieth, North Wales, in 1949, from a strain of Khaki Campbell. They are generally placid and friendly in demeanour – though the drakes have a high libido in season – and they seldom fly. (That perhaps explains why they remained on the lake here, though not how they arrived in the first place!)

Their ongoing residence was indicated not only by their ubiquity, but also by their remaining presence on the lake when it iced over in March. They were seen while it was snowing, hemmed in by the ice when the lake was frozen – even 'running' over the ice on one occasion. In March and April, they were often on the big island – having been chasing female mallards in March – and in April they were seen swimming in mid lake downstream from Swan Is. In November, they were swimming mid lake.

With the passing of the years, swimming beyond the island became less exceptional, the two seen swimming mid lake – even up between the reed bed and the smaller Swan Is – and with the reed-bed pontoons that were installed the previous October a favoured spot from April onward. .

Thereafter, with the whole lake at their disposal, the Welsh Harlequins could be seen throughout, unrestricted to a home zone. They could appear at the Beech Lane end all the way down to the weir. In March they were repeatedly at, or even on, Swan Is, sometimes swimming from the island all the way down to the feeding station. In April they were sometimes on the big island, but thereafter appearances have been widespread. One of the Lakeside fishing bays has been popular as a place to rest, as have pontoons and the dead trees at each end of the reed bed.

It is striking how thoroughly familiar these ducks became and how continuous has been the pattern of their behaviour, yet at the same time how, with the passing of years, their territory has grown with them.

Sadly, one after the other both have disappeared during 2026, passing on ten years after their arrival.

EEG Programme

We list events from the Group's programme of activities

2026 Programme Walks and Talks

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

Friday 24 July

Big Broodbank Bug Hunt

Finding and identifying mini beasts with Alan Broodbank at the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. This event is aimed at youngsters accompanied by an adult.

Interpretation Centre, 13 Instow Road, Earley, Reading RG6 5QH
Two Sessions, 10.30am to 12.30 noon and 1pm to 3pm

nature@earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk

Saturday 1 August

Earley Green Fair.

Maiden Erlegh nature reserve, off Beech Lane:
10.00 am - 3.00 pm

Monday 7 September

Bat Walk, led by Berkshire Bat

Rescue. 8.00 pm – 9.30 pm
Meet at the Interpretation Centre

Sunday 25 October

Fungi Walk in Maiden Erlegh

2.30 at the Interpretation Centre

Contributors to this issue

Gillian Cartwright
Bob Collis
Margaret Holmes
Ashley Prior
Ray Reedman
Richard Tredgett
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.

Lower Earley Green Corridor Trail



The Loddon Valley Ramblers (LVR), in association with the EEG, is in the process of completing a new walking trail along the length of the Lower Earley Green Corridor between the Shinfield Arms roundabout and The George public house at Wokingham Road. The 3.5-mile trail marks out the walking route through the green spaces that run along the north side of Lower Earley Way, passing through Pearman's Copse, Swallows Meadow, Wood of Eagles and Riverside Park, running alongside the River Loddon. Steve Vale, who has led the initiative for LVR, has cleverly used images for these four

locations to form the trail's logo, which has been used on the way-markers along the route. We are grateful to Earley Town Council for funding the cost of the way-marker posts and logos. The route instructions are now being tested by volunteers and a leaflet with the trails route map has been designed. Instructions will also be available on the EEG and LVR Websites. The Trail is a brilliant addition to the Lower Earley Green Corridor.

Bob Collis

Young Birds cont.

Following the comment on p.5, about fewer goslings this year, it might be instructive to set the decline against a longer-term trend.

Gosling survival rates pre-pandemic

2020	8 from a maximum of 13
2019	5 from a maximum of 8
2018	5 from a maximum of 14
2017	4 from a maximum of 16
2016	3 from a maximum of 11
2015	0 from a maximum of 9
2014	0 from a maximum of 10
2013	4 from a maximum of 13

EEG Newsletter

Edited by Edwin A.R. Trout, Earley Environmental Group.
Printed for the Earley Environmental Group by Purco Print.
Printing costs covered by a grant from Earley Town Council