



Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

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The Frog Chorus is almost upon us! Sir Paul would be proud!

Now, our friend Vinny the water vole has long been one of the stars of the RSPB Rainham Marshes wildlife show but we reckon that come springtime the every increasing population of marsh frogs will be giving him a run for his reedmace!

This very large frog was first introduced to Walland Marsh in Kent in 1935 and has spread dramatically since then and can be found all over that county, Sussex, around the south-west of London and alongside the Thames in Essex where they seem to prefer ditches and marshland pools not usually used by our native species of frog.

However, not all of our marsh frogs are in-fact marsh frogs and those with brighter green skin and a vivid stripe down the back are edible frogs, a very close relative that also lives in Europe. Both species can interbreed and produce each



Mark Webb



Neil Phillips

other or bizarrely a third species called pool frog! All we can say at Rainham Marshes is that they come in all shapes, sizes and colours with some being as big as a side plate and others with yellow, blue or even turquoise skin.

And as for the croaking! When one starts up the others soon follow suit and a truly cacophonous symphony of bizarre un-frogl-like sounds echo round the marsh. If you manage to creep up on one with out it seeing you, you may even get to see it inflate the two air sacks on the side of its head every time it sings! They have to watch out though as the local grey herons and little egrets have got wise to all that noise and are quick to sneak an opportunist snack.

Reserve Work: We spent most of March was preparing the reserve for the spring and in the last week of the month our on-loan Romney Sheep headed back off to North Kent for the summer and with near perfect water levels, the first of our breeding lapwings were already sitting on four eggs!

Our wind turbine should be up by the time you read this and a new exit ramp from the centre has been craned in to create better access to the marsh. Out on the reserve two of our original green shipping containers have now been moved to a new compound up near the Ken Barrett hide where they will be better placed to be used by the team as workshops.



Brenda Clayton

If you wish to join our e-news group to receive future Marsh Matters please email and let us know.

All the images used in Marsh Matters are taken at RSPB Rainham Marshes.

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What's been about: March: Another month of gulls with diligent watching producing about five **Caspian**, at least three different immature **Iceland**s and two immature **glaucous** as well as what could well be a first winter **Kumlien's gull** (a type of Iceland gull all the way from north-west Alaska!) from 12th-20th. An albino large gull caused some consternation on most days! Several **Mediterranean gulls** and an adult **kittiwake** (19th) and **little gull** (21st-22nd) added interest. A



Andy Tweed

Glaucous Gull



Short-eared Owl

bittern was seen in the foreshore reedbed on 17th and was the first for the reserve while a male **Mandarin** on the 12th was the first for 19 years! A record 37 **curlew** were seen on 30th but there were few other waders bar a single **avocet** (3rd), two **black-tailed godwits** (18th), **jack snipe** (25th), three different **ruff**, 140 **golden plover** (last seen on 4th) and the first **little ringed plover** fresh back from Africa on 13th with up to six on subsequent days. The male **Dartford warbler** reappeared on 10th and 13th and at least nine **Cetti's warblers** were in song. A **bearded tit** was seen again on 22nd and amazingly two **penduline tits** dropped in for a while on 29th.

Water pipit numbers increased with at least eight on the barges on 31st. **Peregrine** sightings became scarce as the local birds headed back to their nest sites but there were still raptors to be had with a **merlin** (16th), **red kite** (19th), **marsh harrier** (male on 4th) and at least seven **buzzards** through. Three **short-eared** and a single **barn owl** were on the silt lagoons all month. A **brent goose** was seen on 4th and 5th and three **white-fronted geese** flew through on 29th. A few **siskin** headed north and a smart female **brambling** entertained us around the feeders from 24th.



Mandarin

Dave McGough

Summer migrants were scarce but the first **swallow** was amazingly early on 8th, followed by **sand martin** and **wheatear** on 14th. Several **chiffchaffs** and **blackcaps** were in song most days and the month ended well with a singing **firecrest** and a site rarity... a **red-legged partridge!** Six species of



Brambling

Tony Coombs

butterfly were recorded, lizards were seen out sunbathing on the boardwalks and **water voles** were still enthusing visitors with their antics.

Do not forget to check out www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/sightings.asp or www.elbf.co.uk for the latest reserve wildlife sightings.

Events: Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 April not only see the grand opening of 'The Bunker' but we will also be holding our annual **Easter Eggtravaganza!** Just turn up and join in! On Sunday 19 April we will be **Meeting The Voles** and as we head into May there are two **Dawn Chorus** (Sunday 3 and 17) and two **Dusk Walks** (Thursday 7 and Friday 22). Booking is essential.

What's On? Regular Events:

Weekly: Wednesday : **Birdwatch** (9.30am start)
 Thursday **Healthy Living Walk** (12.15pm start)
 Friday : **Beginners Birdwatch** (10am start)

Monthly: **Rangers Ramble** (1pm start) on the second Sunday of each month

Wildlife Explorer Group (10.30am-12.30pm) and **Kids Birdwatching Club** (10.00am-12.30pm):

April: Saturday 11 and 18 respectively **May:** Both Saturday 9

For more information about the events, RSPB and Wildlife Explorer Group

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