



Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue Sixteen
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Seven Serins! Are we just very lucky or was it serendipity?

A month after they were first seen, our diminutive serins are still with us and although elusive you may still be able to find them with the large flocks of feasting linnets and goldfinches. This blue tit sized continental relative of the familiar canary is a scarce migrant to the UK with only a handful of birds making it across the Channel each Spring and Autumn. According to work recently published by the RSPB, the serin is one of many species predicted to colonise the UK in response to climate change



Pete Merchant

Showing the bright yellow rump

Given that serins have been few and far between this autumn, it is just possible that our extended family party may have originated from a pair breeding locally. Now, wouldn't that be something!

Over 1000 finches of ten species along with both house and tree sparrows and three species of buntings have been counted around the reserve recently with the

large banks of fruiting dock, fat-hen and bristly ox-tongue (don't plants have great names!) being stripped of their seeds by the marauding hoards.

So it's a great time to come and see our winter finch feeding frenzy, and if you wish to join in the at home, do not forget to leave a part of your garden wild and untamed with lots of stinging nettles, grasses and other native seed rich plants. You never know just what may turn up!



Tony Coombs

This one had some yellow on the breast as well

Reserve Work: In November we not only completed the northern boardwalk but also the first stage of works on our ground-breaking Marshland Discovery Zone. Now comes the fun bit of creating the heart of this hands-on family and education area, which is due to open at Easter! We currently have big JCBs digging out fantastic new pools in front of the zone which will be a major new area for wetland wildlife.



Howard Vaughan

Marshland Discovery Zone as seen from the river wall

We have brought in our Romney sheep for the winter and with the slowing down of grass growth, we are removing many of the cattle. We are also taking out old fences across the marsh and alongside Aveley Pool and it is amazing how much more open it feels without them.



Carys Morgan

Looking over Aveley Pool from the Northern Boardwalk

Heavy rain has allowed us to continue topping up the perimeter ditch which we use as a reservoir to feed the rest of the marsh and will allow us to manage water levels better during the winter and spring. As such the marsh currently looks fantastic.

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: October: Needless to say the serins dominated November's birding with up to four regularly being seen and at least seven on the 13th. Three were still around on the 20th with a single seen into December. Two of the **Dartford warblers** were seen at the west end of the seawall until the 12th with the fine male staying all month. The **twite** did likewise but was only seen occasionally with the 26th being the last date.



David Morrison

Over 100 Snipe were counted

There were several late summer migrant records during November with a **whitethroat** (until 17th), **swallows** (9th and 13th), **ring ouzel** (3rd) and a **willow warbler** (25th). A **squacco heron** shocked us all by flying past the centre window on the 10th. Another new reserve bird and very out of season for this southern European stray.

A **snow bunting** arrived on the 4th and stayed five days with another briefly on the 17th. **Fieldfares** and **redwings** were in the scrub and continued checking of the finch flocks produced a couple more **bramblings** and the hoped for **tree sparrow** and **corn bunting**. A small party of **bearded tits** have been seen on the trails along with up to eight singing **Cetti's warblers**.

An **Arctic skua** was found on the 4th and stayed all month, occasionally being joined by a second bird and **Mediterranean gulls** (3rd and 29th), **kittiwakes** (1st and 22nd) and **Caspian gulls** (from 23rd) added interest. Duck numbers were still fairly low but included **brent geese** on five dates, counts of 22 **pintail** and 121 **gadwall** along with four **Bewick's swans** that visited briefly on the 4th while **greylag** and **Canada geese** flocks have reached 375 and 180 respectively. A **red-throated diver** (1st) and **common scoter** (22nd) were both notable. **Lapwing** (1000), **golden plover** (200), **black-tailed godwit** (300) and **dunlin** (800) have slowly risen in number and amongst them we found **jack snipe**, four **grey plover**, **curlew sandpiper** (from 13th) and **little stint** (from 22nd). Our daily procession of **ring-necked parakeets** reached 64 on the 16th.

Red admirals and **common darters** were still around mid-month and **bumble bees** were still harvesting the remaining flowers in the wildlife garden.



Pete Jackson

A staggering 46 Stonechats were seen on the 12th!



Tony Coombs

This Sparrowhawk was on the hunt for starlings

Events: It is the gull watching season again and we have three forthcoming special **Gull ID workshops** on 13 December, 17 January and 14 February. Why not come along and **Meet Santa** in our secret woodland grotto? Book now for **13-14 December** and for those in need of a pre-Christmas stroll we have the traditional seasonal **Ramble** on Saturday 20 at 10am.

It's nearly Christmas and the shop is bursting with amazing gifts.

Don't forget that EVERYTHING has an extra 2.5% off due to the VAT decrease! This does include optics!!!



The new HD's

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 Sundays: 11 January, 8 February

Wildlife Explorer Group (10am start) and **Kids Birdwatching Club** (9.30am start) :

December: Saturday 13 & 6 respectively **January:** Saturday 10 & 17 respectively **February:** both Saturday 14. **For more information about the events, RSPB and Wildlife Explorer Group**

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