



# Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue Five  
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## Anyone for Christmas Goose?

December 2007 will be remembered as the month that wild geese descended on our new reserve. We're very used to resident [Canada](#) and [greylag geese](#) here, but what was about to unfold was quite unprecedented. Sixteen [white-fronted geese](#) flying down the Thames on the 16th were just the start of what was to become a goose-filled Christmas period. Then at dawn on the 21<sup>st</sup>, 32 [barnacle geese](#) spiraled down onto the pools. Coming as they did on the back of very cold easterly winds we are confident that they were wild birds that breed in Arctic Russia and spend the winter in Holland. Within half an hour another 56 flew in. They settled in quickly and during the course of the day were joined by six [white-fronted](#) and 12 [tundra bean geese](#) making over 100 wild geese on the reserve. Thirty-seven of the [barnacle geese](#) stayed into the New Year and we hosted a further 56 [white-fronts](#) on the 31st. It must have been incredibly cold on the continent to cause the birds to move west so hastily but we are not complaining!

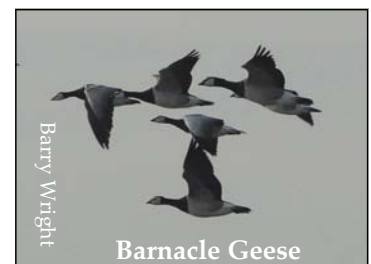


It is not just the weather that has attracted these arctic visitors to Rainham Marshes – much of the credit goes to the wardening team and their volunteers for getting the reserve in ideal condition: wonderfully wet and the grass height just perfect to entice passing wildfowl to land. It is only the start of January so who knows what else is to come. This is the kind of event that marks Rainham Marshes out as being special, and our aim is to bring people closer to wildlife such as this so that everyone can enjoy it.



## Fish or Fowl?

[Barnacle geese](#) get their name from an old fable that they grew from barnacles, the hard shelled sea-creatures that cling to boat hulls and rocks. This was because their autumn arrival on the north-west coast coincided with storm driven driftwood covered in a species of barnacle that had a resemblance to the head and neck of a goose. This assumption allowed the Catholic Church to proclaim that the goose could be eaten during Lent as it was actually a fish...



## Reserve News:

In creating the new Northern Boardwalk route, we have unearthed a stone pavement that has proved to be the tramway station platform from when the reserve was a rifle range. This tramway linked the Shooting Butts and the Cordite Store, where the explosives were kept, to a junction with the mainline railway nearby. We will preserve this as part of the important military heritage of the site. The sheep have been moved from Purfleet Scrape to higher ground alongside the A13, allowing the wigeon to carry on grazing in their place while the cattle have been inquisitively checking out the new corral on Wennington Marsh.



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 on RSPB Rainham Marshes.

Reg. Charity No. 207076

**What's been about?** In December, numbers of wintering duck and wading birds started to build, with most of the new arrivals occurring from about 16th after a week of colder easterly weather. Of the ducks, **wigeon** and **teal** reached 650 and **pintail** a respectable 39 while **Gadwall** increased to 70. The change in weather saw the arrival of the wild geese covered in our lead story.



Sam Shippey

**Bearded Tits**

Three **Egyptian geese** on the 10th were only the fourth site record – unlike the other geese, these are not from the Arctic, nor are they from Egypt, at least not these days! They are most likely to have come from feral populations living wild in East Anglia. **Black-tailed godwit**, **lapwing** and **golden plover** numbers fluctuated with highs of 400, 2200 and 540 respectively, which has been quite a spectacle and should continue through to about March. Over 60 **snipe** and a couple of **jack snipe** were reported and a **ruff** was with the lapwing flock throughout.

Adult **Mediterranean gulls** were seen on several dates. Four **short-eared owls** continued to hunt the silt lagoons and the **barn owls** were seen more often than they had all year. Birds of prey always cause a stir as they hunt through the reserve. Two **merlins** were briefly seen and up to four **peregrines** were hunting the site including a very large female that even had the **barnacle geese** scared! A **marsh harrier** on the 31<sup>st</sup> rounded off a record year for the species on the reserve. Small birds included up to six each of **bearded tit** and **corn bunting**, a flock of **lesser redpolls** and one **mealy redpoll** with the **linnet** flocks and four **twite**. **Water** and **rock pipits** continued to show well on the foreshore including the yellow headed xanthistic individual (a rare pigment condition similar to albinism) seen



Les Harrison

**Funny Rock Pipit!**

in the previous two winters. The occasional **water vole** was seen on milder days as were a couple of **bumble-bees** just before New Year. **Stoats** and **weasels** have been seen most days, often from the comfort of the Visitor Centre. However, if it is colour you need, then our now-regular **kingfisher** has continued to entertain many visitors with stunning views. Don't worry if you don't know your twites from your pipits or you godwits from your geese, come along on one of our wildlife walks and we will help you appreciate the wildlife riches to be found here.



Sam Shippey

**Wren**

**Recent & forth coming events:** Visitors enjoyed our Christmas events and Santa and his little helpers were well received. The Christmas Ramble was as popular as ever with Laurie Bigg in the Visitor Centre on musical accompaniment and mince pies and mulled wine to get everyone in the spirit. The third **Gull Identification Day** was also very successful with plenty to show people.



**Frosty Rosehip**

The next one will be on Saturday 9 February. However, January's major event is the **Big Garden Birdwatch** on Saturday 26. Come along and sign up for this important national event and find out more about how to look after and attract wildlife to your garden.

## What's On? Regular Events

**Weekly:** Wednesday : **Birdwatch** (9:30am start)  
 Thursday : **Healthy Living Walks** (12:15pm start)  
 Friday : **A Walk With Wildlife—formerly Beginners Birdwatch** (10am start)

**Monthly:** **Wardens Walk** (11am start) **'Why wet is wonderful'**: Sunday 20 January  
 and **'Crystal Balls'**: Sunday 10 February.

**Wildlife Explorer Group** and **Birdwatching Club Days** for kids both on Saturday 9 February.

**For more information about the events, RSPB and WEX**

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