



# Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue Eleven  
July 2008



## New Adventure Play Area is a hit with families:

Since opening the Adventure Play Area on 24 May, it has been great to see an upsurge in the number of families visiting the reserve. Enthusiasm for young people about wildlife, the environment and conservation is vital for the future, but we also recognise that, alongside watching and enjoying wildlife, our younger visitors have excess energy to burn! The new climbing frames, swings and sand toys are proving the perfect way for families to begin or end a trip, and we are pleased with how it is complementing the rest of the visitor experience here.



Jesper Mattias  
(rspb-images.com)

## Is it a plant or is it an insect? It's a bee orchid flower!

Three flowering spikes of this scarce plant were found on the river wall in mid-June and are the first orchids to be seen at Rainham Marshes for many years.

This unusual plant gets its name from the shape and pattern of the lower lip of the stunning flower.

Bees are attracted to the bee-like pattern of the flowers and on entering, are left with a dab of pollen on their heads. As they move into another plant the pollen rubs off and fertilizes another flower. Easy when you know how! Hopefully, even more will come up next year for all to enjoy.



Sam Shippey

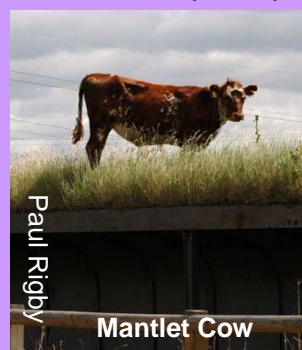
**Reserve Work:** We have had an excellent breeding season on the reserve for waders (our star birds!) with record numbers of lapwing and redshank, and our first ever avocet nests. Oystercatchers have been successful on the foreshore and it looks like little ringed plovers have bred close by with at least one family party being seen. There are two broods of mute swan and eight tufted ducklings was a welcome sight. Little grebe families have been seen in many of the ditches.

Many thanks to volunteers from Goldman Sachs who have been slogging away this summer by pulling up ragwort- a plant that grows in abundance but is unfortunately poisonous to our livestock. Talking of animals, we have been keeping a few of our cows busy with a very special task: grazing the old military mantlets to open up sand banks for our rare burrowing bees.



The new wildlife pond

Howard Vaughan



Paul Rigby

Mantlet Cow

The new wildlife gardens around the Visitor Centre have burst into flower and the scent of sweet peas and rosemary on warm days is fantastic. The idea of the gardens is to demonstrate wildlife gardening, as well as being a wonderful place for you to sit and relax and get closer to nature. We have built some new raised beds and planted them up with salads and herbs, which will end up on your plate in the café, and the wildlife pond we have dug at the garden entrance attracted seven species of dragonfly within days of being filled. If you'd like to help us in the gardens, do give us a call.

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: June:** The 4<sup>th</sup> was a good day when a **great white egret** dropped in unexpectedly, stayed all day and then disappeared until the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> when amazingly two were present on the last date. This is the third consecutive year that this imposing species has been recorded on site.



Paul Hawkins

Great White Egret



Pete Merchant

Fox

**Little egrets** built to about 20 with the first of the year's youngsters arriving. They included a colour ringed juvenile, probably from a north Kent breeding colony! **Marsh harriers** were seen on several dates and another **buzzard** was seen while **hobbies** and the first juvenile **peregrine** of the year hunted the marsh.

Waders returning from their northern breeding grounds included several **green sandpipers** and a **wood sandpiper** (22<sup>nd</sup>) in the last week. A single **black-tailed godwit** lingered and 19 were present as we headed into July and were probably on the move after the disastrous May floods washed out their fenland breeding grounds. The river was quiet but the first **yellow-legged gulls** started to appear and both **little gull** (13<sup>th</sup>) and several **Mediterranean gulls** were reported. At least four drake **garganey** started to moult into obscurity and a **turtle dove** (4<sup>th</sup>) was only the second record for the year. **Spotted flycatcher** (5<sup>th</sup>) and **firecrest** (4<sup>th</sup>) were the only small migrants of note.



Howard Vaughan

Speckled Bush Cricket

**Foxes** with cubs were seen around the reserve and young **weasels** became evident; often seen playing in the woodland. The first **adders** for some years were seen in June along with the first ever **slow-worm** and numerous **grass snakes** and **lizards**. **Grasshoppers** started to sing and only the second ever **speckled bush cricket** for the reserve was found in the wildlife gardens. Hopefully July and August will see an insect explosion on the reserve! We just need some sunshine!



Priscille Preston

Hobby

**Education Update:** What a fantastic past four months the education team has enjoyed; with more children than ever taking part in our outdoor learning during the summer term and new programmes (primary and secondary) going down a storm. The eight-strong team of Field Teachers have been on top form and even the weather was mostly perfect! Over 3,000 pupils will have taken part in education programmes by the end of July, building on the success of previous years. Looking forward to the summer holidays, further work on the Discovery Zones is planned and the education team are running a variety of events for all ages and families (see below for details), so why not come along and join in! For all education enquiries please contact Brona Doyle on 01708 899844 or [brona.doyle@rspb.org.uk](mailto:brona.doyle@rspb.org.uk)

### August is chock-a-block with events for all the family to enjoy!

Family Fun With Wildlife days every **Sunday** (3, 10, 17, 24, 31) 11am - 1pm, Creepy Crawly Days every **Tuesday** (5, 12, 19, 26) 10am—3pm, Meet the Wildlife on **Saturday** 9 11am - 4pm, Helping Hands on **Thursday** 14 10am - 3pm, Teddy Bears Picnic on **Tuesday** 26 11am –1pm (the second is on Wednesday 3 September). Booking is essential for all these fun days. Please contact us for more details on these and any of our regular events.

### What's On? Regular Events:

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

**Monthly: Wardens Walk** (11am start) Sunday 13 July & Sunday 10 August

**Wildlife Explorer Group and Kids Birdwatching Club: July:** Saturday 12 and Saturday 19 respectively. **August:** Saturday 9 and Saturday 16 respectively.

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

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