



Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue 19
March 2009



Are you ready to discover 'Marshland'?!

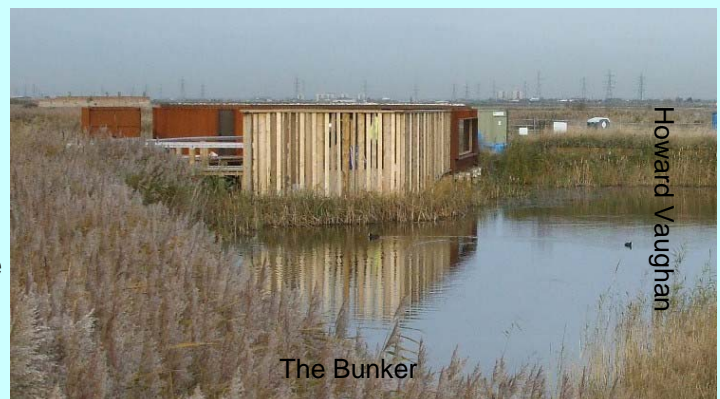
On Easter Saturday (11 April) we launch our new Marshland Discovery Zone. Especially designed for families (but we hope everyone else will get something from it too), it's our way of getting you really close to the marshes.

Only ten minutes' walk from the visitor centre, it includes:

- ◆ **'The Bunker'** - an all-weather warm metal pod with a big picture window overlooking a new bit of marsh we have created. We are hopeful that **coots** will nest right outside the window on the specially provided platforms and, who knows, **kingfishers** or **sand martins** may come too. There will be all sorts of marshy things to do inside the Bunker, including an art trolley and activity sheets.
- ◆ **Pond-dipping platforms** - book yourself and your family in for one of our pond-dipping sessions to find what lurks beneath the water's surface. If there is no session running, you can check out the giant tank of marshland wildlife.
- ◆ An **education area** for the thousands of school children that come to our field teaching scheme each year.

The Zone will be open every day 10am-4pm (but remember pond-dipping only on booked sessions, please).

Once 'Marshland' is open, we'll turn our attentions to opening up a new path from the reserve onto the river wall, and it's then onto making a new birdwatching hide up by the shooting butts and opening up the footbridge across the Mardyke river next to the visitor centre. All go, eh?!



Howard Vaughan

We are still looking for new volunteers who love working with families to help us run 'The Bunker' so if you feel you can spare us a few hours please get in touch with Sue Housden on [01708 899840](tel:01708899840) or sue.housden@rspb.org.uk. We look forward to hearing from you!

Reserve Work: The thick covering of snow in early February left the marsh looking picture-book pretty and although we had to close the trails for a couple of days, we managed to keep the cafe open and great (and definitely warmer) views could be had over the reserve! The subsequent thaw and torrential deluge that followed resulted in amazingly high water levels not experienced since 2001 and as a result there were flocks of feeding duck, gulls and waders in almost every corner and large wisps of snipe zig-zagging across the sky. Water levels are now almost back to normal in time for the spring.



Howard Vaughan

Work has started on the new wind-turbine by the reserve entrance and it is hoped to be operational by mid-March making the site carbon neutral. More on this breaking story to follow.

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.

Charity registered in England and Wales no 207076, in Scotland no SC037654

What's been about: February: The month started well with a flurry of **yellowhammers** and two riverside **corn buntings** amongst the carpet of snow. Our two **penduline tits** reappeared on the 6th and were last seen on the 11th while a pair of **bearded tits** made sporadic appearances. Gull watching produced several smart **Mediterranean**, at least six **Caspian** and two **Iceland gulls**. A female **smew** on the 11th was a very rare visitor to the site (there are more records of penduline tit!) but no other unusual wildfowl came in with all the snow and easterly winds.



Iceland Gull :
note the white wing tips

Jonathan Wasse



Smew:
the females are known as redheads

Pete Merchant

Up to 300 **black-tailed godwits** still joined us at every high tide and 200 **golden plovers** spangled over the marsh. **Snipe** peaked at 150 in very wet conditions on the 22nd. There was some sign of other wader passage with two **oystercatchers** (17th), **greenshank** and **knot** (19th), **little stint** (21st) and three **avocet** (25th). Will the avocets try and breed again this year? A pair of **blackcaps** was seen daily on the fat balls and the wintering **chiffchaffs** had even started to sing by the

end of the month while a **Dartford warbler** was heard again on the 17th. Thankfully many of the small birds such as **Cetti's warblers**, **wrens**, **tits** and **kingfishers** appear to have survived the protracted spell of snow and ice. A male **merlin** was seen on several dates and the peregrines made daily sorties. An escaped **Harris' hawk** has been back on the reserve and has been causing consternation on the pools whilst looking for a meal.



Penduline Tit

Priscille Preston

Several **bees** were bumbling around on the warmer days and a **brimstone** was seen on the 28th making it the first butterfly of the year. As for **water voles**...they seem to be everywhere at the moment with animals showing down to a metre on the trails and even coming to apple on demand! Spring is nearly upon us and it will not be long now till little ringed plovers, sand martins and wheatears return from

Africa and the first flush of spring flowers poke their heads out to wait for early bees and more butterflies. We can't wait!

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



Male Blackcap

Gary Boyes



Eye to eye with a Water Vole

Barry Jackson

Events: As well as our regular monthly events in March we have an **Architecture Tour** on Saturday 14 for those interested in our amazing building and on Sunday 19 April we will be **Meeting The Voles**. Booking is essential for both. Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 April not only see the grand opening of 'The Bunker' but we will also be holding our annual **Easter Eggravaganza!** Just turn up and join in!



Why not pop into our shop to try out our new range of **Skinny Dipper** palm oil free toiletries? Surely the perfect Mothers Day Gift?

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 first Sunday of each month

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

March: Saturday 7 and 14 respectively **April:** Saturday 11 and 18 respectively **May:** Both Saturday 9

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

Phone : 01708 899 840 Email : rainham.marshes@rspb.org.uk Web : www.rspb.org.uk/rainham

