



Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue Nine
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You think you have to get up early to go to work or school? Try being a blackbird!

Spring has sprung and as we head into May the country comes alive to the sound of resident and migrant birds proclaiming their territories as they try to set up home for the summer, attract a partner and bring up a family (or three). Sunday **4 May** is **National Dawn Chorus Day** and across the country the RSPB will be holding many special events.



Blackbird

Steve Lindsell



Chaffinch

Steve Lindsell

At Rainham Marshes we will be taking you on a guided walk every Sunday in May from the very reasonable hour of four in the morning! "Why the early start?" I hear you cry. Well, the half light before sun up is a magical time and a cross over between the night and day shifts. Owls start thinking about calling it a night and our songsters start to warm up (quite literally) by proclaiming the day before the sun shows itself. That first hour in the morning is not so much about you learning about the birds on the marsh but about you absorbing the cacophony of sound produced by everything singing at once. It is quite unforgettable.

As the sun climbs further, birds start to forage and it becomes easier to distinguish between the twenty or so species that will have been creating this wall of sound.

Each walk in May should reveal slightly different songsters so please hurry and book now as places are limited. However, if you are unable to attend one of our walks why not visit your local woodland or park or even stand out in your own garden and enjoy the sounds as another day begins.

Remember our Thick-knee? We have got to the bottom of the origins of our colour-ringed stone-curlew seen on the marshes on 30 March. It was ringed as a chick near Hilborough, Norfolk on 28 May 2006. A second bird was seen on 16 April and had no rings but was also quite likely on its way to Norfolk.

Reserve Work: With the breeding season upon us, most of the major projects on site are on hold until late July. This does not mean a quiet time for the team however, and the survey season has begun in earnest with dawn monitoring being carried out on waders, wildfowl and key indicator species on the reserve such as skylarks, meadow pipits and reed buntings. These help paint a picture of a healthy marsh. The water level on Purfleet Scrape is perfect and is already providing superb nesting habitat for lapwings and redshanks and even a pair of avocets are looking interested and have been seen mating and nest scraping!

It is not just the birds that get surveyed on the reserve but also the bees, dragonflies and butterflies. Teams of volunteers are at the ready!

The Adventure Area has now been completed and we are busy getting ready for the Grand Opening on 24 May which we are hoping will be hosted by a major celebrity! This will give time for the trees, shrubs and grass to establish themselves.

The final batch of plants for the Centre gardens arrived in mid-April and it did not take long for the volunteers to plant 160 highly scented rosemary. All in all over 1000 flowers, herbs, shrubs and trees have been planted since March and we can not wait for the summer to arrive now.



Sloe & Snow

Priscille Preston



Sheep on the marsh

Howard Vaughan

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 about? Spring was a little slow off the mark (lets not talk about the snow on the 6th!) but at last the winds changed and passage got underway. Three male and a single lucky female [garganey](#) arrived on the marsh on 16th. This is the only summer visiting British duck and like many species has come up from Africa; unlike the two feral [Egyptian geese](#) which arrived on 15th and stayed a few days. A single [brent goose](#) bobbed up river on 16th and had obviously lost the rest of his Siberian bound flock.



David Morrison

Little Egret

Wader passage was reasonable with the first [whimbrel](#) on 12th and groups of up to seven subsequently. Two [spotted redshanks](#) and six [greenshank](#) moved through along with 6 [ruff](#), [sanderling](#) (16th) and [turnstone](#) (19th) and the odd [bar-tailed godwit](#) or two. One had colour leg rings and an orange flag and we hope to trace its origins. Seven British race [black-tailed godwits](#) were seen in addition to our usual flock of Icelandic birds. Two [avocets](#) seem quite taken by the new scrape. Astonishingly, our second [stone-curlew](#) of the spring gave excellent, if distant views, for most of the 16th. Another crowd puller!



Les Harrison

Shelduck

The Thames yielded a few [common terns](#) from 18th, five [Arctic terns](#) (20th), a [black tern](#) (21st) and a flurry of pink fronted [little gulls](#) from 20th. There was plenty of big bird of prey action with at least seven [marsh harriers](#), a

[buzzard](#), a [red kite](#) (2nd) and two [goshawk](#) sightings. [Peregrines](#) were regular and the last [merlin](#) was a male seen on 11th while the first [hobby](#) was back from Africa on 22nd. Three [short-eared owls](#) stayed well into the month and give us hope that they may even stay to breed.



Neil Phillips

Zebra Jumping Spider

There were some goodies among the commoner migrants. A [common redstart](#) was seen on 9th with single [black redstarts](#) on 15th, 24th and 29th. A male [whinchat](#) with [wheatears](#) on the 24th was a good find. [Ring ouzels](#) were seen on 20th and 24th with a late [fieldfare](#) on 27th. One thrush arriving for the summer on our northern hills and the other heading back to Scandinavia to breed. [Yellow wagtails](#) were seen among the cattle and [tree pipit](#) (10th) and [yellowhammer](#) (13th) both flew over. Two [water pipits](#) stayed till 10th and the find of the month was a [Richard's pipit](#) from 27th. A new reserve bird! Three [grasshopper warblers](#) sang from 20th with our first [garden warbler](#) of the season seen the next day.



Paul Hawkins

Richard's Pipit

Butterflies were a bit thin on the ground but there were plenty of different bees and the frogs got croaking. [Water voles](#) have been amazingly obliging and a view is now almost guaranteed from the boardwalk in front of the centre. It is only April! Come and see what May has in store!

Forthcoming events: There are many great spring events in May from our [Dawn Chorus](#) walks each Sunday, [Late Opening](#) till 9pm & [Moth & Bat Night](#) on Thursday 8 May, the fantastic [Wildlife Explorers & Adventure Area Launch](#) on Saturday 24 May and our yearly [Low Tide Day](#) event on Saturday 31 May. Why not come along and join in one of these or any of our regular events listed below?

What's In The Shop?

Free [Fruity Nibbles](#) (550gm) with a coupon from the latest Birds magazine when you spend £30 on RSPB bird food or feeders!



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) **'Bombs & Battles'**: Sunday 11 May

Wildlife Explorer Group and Birdwatching Club Days for kids: **May** : Saturday 10 and Saturday 17 respectively and **June:** Saturday 14 and Saturday 21 June respectively .

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

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