



# Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue Eight  
April 2008



## Thick-knee on the marshes! Don't panic! It is not contagious!

On 30 March a visiting RSPB group from Surbiton got lucky and found a dozing **stone-curlew** near the rifle butts. Known elsewhere in the world as **thick-knees** due to their knobby leg joints, this is a rare wading bird that migrates each spring from Africa to breed in the southern half of Britain on dry, open places with bare, stony ground or very short vegetation. Some are now even nesting in specially managed farmland.

It is a rare species and has required a lot of help from the RSPB and other conservation bodies to increase its numbers and now over 350 pairs are thought to breed each year in the UK. It is a crow-sized bird with a large head, long yellow legs and big yellow eyes that allow it to be active at night. Despite its name, it is not actually related to curlews and gets its name from its curlew-like call.

Our **stone-curlew** stayed for just a day but attracted many visitors as it was the first one to be seen on the marshes since October 1978!

If you look closely at the photograph you may see that it has coloured rings on its legs. This tells us that it is probably on its way north to breed in Breckland which lies at the heart of Suffolk and Norfolk and is one of the country's strongholds.

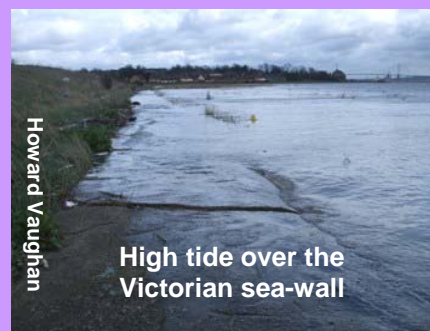
We are awaiting details of the life history of this bird and will hopefully let you know what we find out in the next issue.



Pete Merchant

Stone-curlew

**Reserve Work:** Team Challenges by the Royal Mail and RBS have resulted in a rapid increase in the amount of boardwalk being laid. High water levels continue to make this an 'interesting' job for our volunteers!



Howard Vaughan

High tide over the Victorian sea-wall

A weekend work-party did a sterling job at clearing plastic rubbish from the foreshore opposite the Visitor Centre. Incredibly high tides had made this task all the more important.

With the breeding season upon us we have started to survey lapwings and have already found our first nest with eggs. This is very encouraging. Grazing on the military mantlet banks has created extra mining-bee habitat and this will be monitored during the summer.

A team of nearly 20 volunteers have helped to plant over 800 trees, shrubs and herbs around the centre. So far the rabbits have not taken too much interest and all we need now is some sunshine to go with all the rain we have had to help create a fantastic summer spectacle.

If you are interested in volunteering please contact Sue Housden on 01708 899840 or [sue.housden@rspb.org.uk](mailto:sue.housden@rspb.org.uk)



Howard Vaughan

A Harvest Mouse rescued from the Thames



Howard Vaughan

Volunteer gardeners at work!

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?

Unlike February, March was distinctly inclement with plenty of wind, rain and even enough snow for a snowman! Duck numbers remained high and a fish-eating **goosander** on 6th was an excellent record for the reserve. Thousands of **black-headed gulls** moved through on passage to their breeding grounds and at least four **Mediterranean**, one **little**, two **Caspian** and two **Iceland gulls** were amongst them.



**Oystercatchers** were back and proclaiming their territories on the foreshore and on the 9th a very early **little ringed plover** arrived back from Africa. The 15th was our first real spring day with seven **wheatears** and the first two **avocets** of the year. Numerous **chiffchaffs**, a **willow warbler**, three **white wagtails** and a couple of **sand martins** and **swallows**, all summer visitors, suggested a change in the weather. Four **bearded tits** and three **Cetti's warblers** were on the trail circuit but **stonechat** numbers as usual for this time of year dwindled to just couple of pairs. At least ten **little egrets** were seen fishing in the pools and ditches.

On the 27th a flock of 15 **common scoters** (a type of sea-duck) bobbed around on the Thames all day. This spring movement was mirrored across East Anglia on the same day. Three **short-eared owls** continued to hunt the silt lagoons and three each of **marsh harrier** and **buzzard** moved through from 14th. Star raptor goes to the **osprey** seen heading north on 29th but the bird of the month was found next day with our cover-story **stone-curlew** catching some zzzz's amongst the ant-hills.

The cold weather resulted in few insects but **brimstone** and **small tortoiseshell** butterflies were seen on the wing on 29th. **Water voles** have been very active in the ditches while the **brown hares** are still being seen near the landfill site. We are still finding evidence of **badgers** on site and the **foxes** have been as brazen as ever. The **marsh frog** chorus eventually got started as we

headed into April. Why not come along and soak up the sounds of springtime?



## Forthcoming events:

Our Homes for Wildlife day on **20 April** will give you the opportunity to make bug and bird boxes for your garden as well as giving you ideas for what plants to grow to attract all kinds of life to your own wildspace.

Why not come along and join in one of these or any of our regular events listed below?

## What's In The Shop?

**Special Offer**

**FREE EXPLORER RUCKSACK**  
worth £12.99 with every pair of  
**RSPB 8x25 compact binoculars**  
purchased during April.



## 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) **'Larking About'**: Sunday 13 April.  
**'Bombs & Battles'**: Sunday 11 May

**Wildlife Explorer Group and Birdwatching Club Days** for kids both on Saturday 12 April.

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

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