



Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue 52
December 2011



We're almost there...

It has taken a lot of planning and hard work from our fine wardening team, RSPB ecologists and the legendary Norman Sills (creator of the magnificent RSPB Lakenheath Fen from carrot fields...) but all we need now is some rain to get things going on the newly landscaped [Purfleet Scrape](#).



Over 4500m³ have been removed from the area to create an unsurpassed wildlife spectacle for you and us. With improved hydrological control we will be able to manage water levels more closely and keep areas wet all year so here's hoping for a wet winter!



The views from the [Purfleet Hide](#) will at last be realised and already in the first week in December we have seen the greylag and Canada geese and duck investigating the muddy channels and a dunlin even touched down just in front of the hide on the last day of the work. This bodes well for the rest of the winter and numbers will increase as the waters rise.

The future is truly bright for next spring when hopefully we shall be able to capture the full glory of summer plumaged waders as they stream north in the spring to their high Arctic breeding grounds while local lapwing tumble and redshanks stake their claim as temporary 'wardens of the marshes'. Cannot wait!

Other things to do in December & January

For more information and to book please see contact details overleaf

- ◆ **Gull ID Workshop: January** Saturday 14 **February** Saturday 11 Free event..Just drop in during the day and pick up some tips from our gull experts!
- ◆ **Meet Santa:** Still places available for **December** Sat 17 & Sun 18. With the help of the elves, follow the trail to Santa's woodland grotto. All children receive a gift. Pre-payment booking essential.

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 by staff, volunteers and visitors.

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What's been about: November: A good selection of waders again with the low water levels working some magic. Eighteen species were recorded with the **little stint** staying till the 2nd and another on the 23rd, the **spotted redshank** all month, a record 550 **black-tailed godwits** (27th), seven **avocets**, 622 **golden plover** (21st) and singles of **knot**, **jack snipe** and **woodcock**. The Thames was quite productive with **brent geese** on six dates, **mergansers** on three dates including a record four on the 14th, **goosander**, **goldeneye**, **smew**, **Caspian gull**, several **little gulls** and a **pomarine skua** on the 7th. Duck numbers were low but our leucistic female **pintail** returned and three **white-fronted geese** dropped in on the 12th. A couple of **marsh harriers** were seen with the immature male being regular while **peregrines** were seen every day. There were two **merlin** sightings and up to five **short-eared owls** were seen at the west end. Surprisingly, **yellowhammers** were recorded on four dates and the first three **corn buntings** were back on the saltings (21st) while a **snow bunting** (23rd) was almost expected. A **Lapland bunting** (7th) completed a good bunting month and a **brambling** was with the growing finch flocks. Three **bearded tits** arrived on the 8th and there were nine pinging away by month end. **Blackcap** and **chiffchaff** may have been expected and the **wheatear** (4th) and **ring ouzel** (23rd) were not too unusual but the **sedge warbler** seen on the 20th was most definitely a tad late in leaving! A bull **common seal** has become more regular than **Bob**



Howard Vaughan

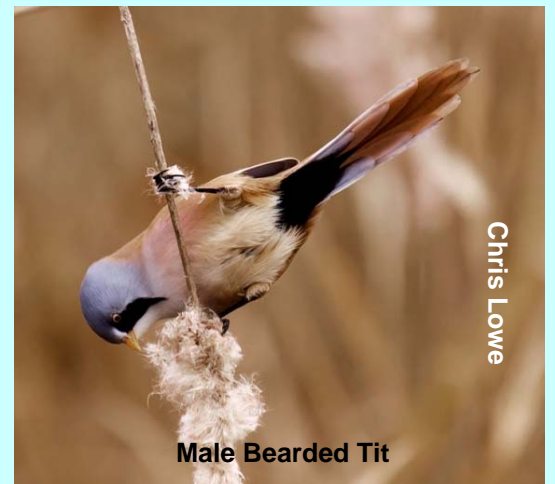
Reverse formation Avocets



Mark Hart

Un-spotted Spotted Redshank

the Grey and a very high tide on the 25th stranded many small mammals including **harvest mice** and **short-tailed voles** out on the saltmarsh where they fell prey to the crows if they did not get to the shore quick enough.



Chris Lowe

Male Bearded Tit



Dave McGough

Female Bearded Tit

Don't forget to check out www.rspb.org.uk/rainham and our Community Blog or www.elbf.co.uk for the latest reserve blog post, wildlife sightings and reserve news. Sign up at www.facebook.com and search for 'RSPB Rainham Marshes'.

What to look for next: Mid-winter is the best time to look for something unusual, as winter duck and wader numbers are at their peak and hopefully will include some geese and swans from the east while in the woodland who knows what may be lurking with a flock of feasting redwings and fieldfares? Oh and keep that water clean and ice free and your garden bird feeders topped up!

What's On? Regular Events:

Weekly: **Wednesday: Birdwatch** (9.30am start) **Friday: Beginners Birdwatch** (10am start)

Fortnightly: The Sunday Stroll at 1pm. **January 8 & 22 February 5 & 19.**

Monthly: Kids Birdwatching Club (10.00am-12.30pm): **January: Saturday 14 February: Saturday 11**

For more information about the events and the RSPB Phone : 01708 899 840

Email : rainham.marshes@rspb.org.uk Web : www.rspb.org.uk/rainham