



# Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue Six  
February 2008



## Big Garden Bird Watch helps Rainham Marshes hit record number of visitors:

The RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch in late January was bigger and better than ever with hundreds of events nationwide. It is hoped that over half a million people will have taken part this year. It also gave us our busiest



Leaping Great Tit!

weekend since opening. Luckily, our staff and volunteers were there to give valuable information about the event and also our new Homes For Wildlife campaign!

A guided walk was led by Pat Hart and he was able to point out some of the plants and shrubs that grow on the marshes that would be equally at home in your garden.

These include wild plants such as hawthorn, dog rose, buddleja (butterfly bush), blackberries, teasel and burdock.



Blackberries



Rosehips

**Garden Bird Facts:** Did you know that goldfinch numbers have increased by half in the last thirty years? Or that blue tits had their worst breeding season on record last year? Thanks to your help with the RSPB's **Big Garden Bird Watch** this changing picture of our garden birdlife is becoming clear. [www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch)

**Time for a spring clean and a new home:** It is now the time of year for cleaning out your old nest boxes (if you have not done so already) and for putting up new ones. Monday 11 February sees the start of National Nest Box Week and at Rainham Marshes we are holding a 'build a box' day on Sunday 17.

So why not come along during the day and create your own home for wildlife?

There will be help and advice in all aspects of attracting a wildlife spectacle into your own wild space.

If you would like more information on **Homes For Wildlife** please visit [www.rspb.org.uk/hfw](http://www.rspb.org.uk/hfw)



**Reserve news:** A wet and windy start to 2008 saw the water levels rise dramatically on the marshes. We actually had to start draining the marshland so that there was enough pasture for the wigeon and geese as well as our cattle and sheep.

The reserve looks fantastic with this much water and should be in great condition for the spring breeding season. This is because young birds need soft wet ground full of worms and insects to get the energy they need grow. However, at the moment you may need to wear Wellingtons or stout shoes to navigate some of the wetter parts of the reserve.



Putting in pilings

Meanwhile work on the Northern Boardwalk continues. This new addition to the circular trail will give you the opportunity to get close to reed-bed wildlife and will be finished by April. You will also notice that machines are busy on the new Marshland Discovery Zone along the Marshland Trail. The Discovery Zone will include a viewpoint, pond dipping area, classroom and composting toilets – and the design is something quite special.



Purfleet Scrape



New hide platform

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.

**What's been about?** Our **barnacle geese** stayed until 16 January and attracted a steady stream of admirers before they headed east to our Elmley Reserve on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. Two **white-fronted geese** brightened



up the second day of the year when a sparkling, red-eyed **slavonian grebe** was also found fishing on Aveley Pools. This was only the second record for the reserve. Strong winds brought several **kittiwakes**, **little gulls** and a **goldeneye** up the Thames later in the month. **Lapwing** increased dramatically and by the 25th were a blanket of shimmering black and white across the marshes with 500 **golden plovers** with them for company.

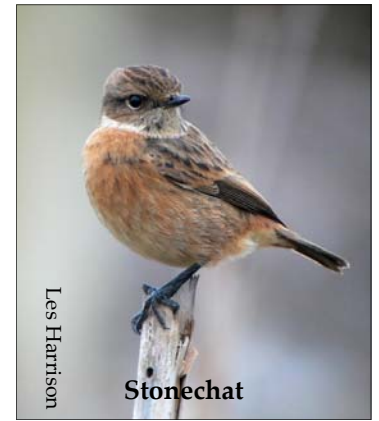


Other waders included 30 **curlew**, 410 **black-tailed godwits**, two **jack snipe** and a record 17 **knot**. An **Iceland gull** (and yes, some of them do come from there!) was found on the 3rd and visited sporadically into February. Another rare visitor was a North American **ring-billed gull** that was seen on 25th.

**Peregrines** made frequent hunting sorties on waders and ducks and a female **merlin** made irregular appearances in pursuit of finches and pipits. At least three **short-eared owls** were holding winter territory on the silt lagoons and our volunteers are taking groups to look for them on nicer weekend evenings.



**Reed** and **corn buntings** could be found on the foreshore with three species of **pipit**, **pied** and **grey wagtails**, **stonechats** and a **black redstart**. The mild weather prompted three male **Cetti's warblers** to explode into song and **robins**, **song** and **mistle thrushes** have all been proclaiming their spring intentions. Will we yet have a winter or will spring get there first?



### Forthcoming events:

The next **Gull Identification Workshop** is on Saturday 9 February followed by 'Love Actually', a Valentine's Day walk on Thursday 14. Sunday 17 sees us building boxes for **National Nest Box Week**.

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

### What's In The Shop?

We have a brand new range of gifts in our shop. From 'birdy' ceramics (right) to retro chic storage, plus a full range of bird care, new books and accessories. Why not pay a visit? 100% of profits go to helping birds and wildlife



### 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) '**Crystal Balls**': Sunday 10 February.

'**Living Lawnmowers**': Sunday 9 March

**Wildlife Explorer Group** and **Birdwatching Club Days** for kids both on Saturday 9 February and 8 March

**For more information about the events, RSPB and WEX**

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