



Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue 17
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Bandit-masked reed-dwellers swing into RSPB Rainham Marshes for the sixth year running:

On December 6 we were delighted to discover that two **penduline tits** had chosen to come back to the marsh for the winter. These tiny insectivorous birds are normally to be found in mainland Europe and breed in many marshland areas. However, they are still a very rare visitor to Britain and Rainham Marshes is incredibly lucky to have been graced by their presence in every year since December 2004 with sometimes as many as six together! No other site in the whole country can boast this amazing track record although two of our other fantastic reserves at Dungeness and Minsmere are not far behind!

Although they can be quite tricky to locate in the miles of habitat, they can often be found by listening for their high pitched drawn out call and by checking the heads of the reedmace for fluff being thrown into the air as they demolish them in search of tiny bugs. Windy conditions do not

seem to bother them as their feet seem overly large and they have no problem clinging on!

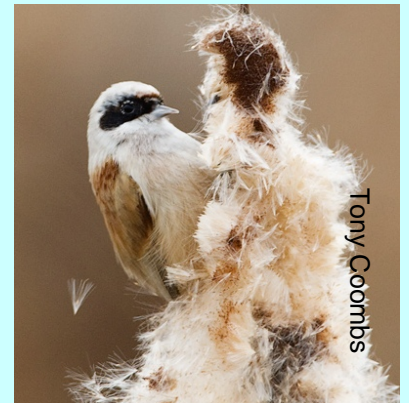
Penduline tits get their name from the style of their amazing nest that is woven skilfully into the end of a thin branch overhanging water and is made entirely of the downy reedmace seeds, grasses and animal hair. Our next challenge is to find one on the reserve!



Steve Arlow



Jeff Delves



Tony Coombs

Reserve Work: The marsh is looking wonderful at the moment and we are very pleased with the current winter water levels. The livestock are doing a great job of grazing the meadows and are being helped by the increasing flock of greylag and Canada geese and the nibbling of over 500 wigeon.

Work is progressing well at the Marshland Discovery Zone prior to its launch at Easter. We have now finished the new marshy pools in front of The Bunker and already pied wagtails, pipits, geese and even a green sandpiper have explored its edges. Water voles have already been seen swimming amongst the new Discovery Zone platforms and the kingfisher has been using the entrance boardwalk as a fishing perch to watch for sticklebacks.

We have started cutting reed out on Wennington Marsh for the first time and this certainly kept the team

warm on a cold day! It is hoped that this will encourage lots of fresh growth in the spring and provide excellent breeding habitat for reed and sedge warblers and hopefully bearded tits.



No Colin, that's a granny knot!



Meanwhile, Katy keeps cutting!

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 been about: December: With some good cold easterly winds we had high hopes of some interesting wildfowl but although numbers of Russian **wigeon** (c550), **pintail** (24) and **gadwall** (130) increased, the only unusual duck was a female **goosander** seen on 5th. Gulls were definitely on the move with a dramatic increase in **great black-backs** and **herring gulls** of the northern race. Amongst these were at least six **Caspian gulls**, 40 **yellow-legged gulls**, a huge **glaucous gull** from the Arctic (6th and then 20th-24th) and several **Mediterranean gulls**. **Dunlin** reached a high of 1000 and **lapwing** nearly 2500 with 420 **golden plover** and three wintering **ruff**. Icelandic **Black-tailed godwits** reached a reserve high of 500 and a single **bar-tailed godwit** was seen on 28th. **Rock pipits** increased to at least 22 on the whole river stretch and seven **water pipits** were amongst them. The finch flocks of October and November had dissipated from the landfill site but



Simon Knight

A biscuit coloured glaucous gull



Tony Coombs

Peregrine on the hunt

we were still attracting large numbers of **greenfinches**, **goldfinches**, **linnets** and **chaffinches** to the vicinity of the visitors centre. The **serin** made sporadic appearance into the new year with two again on 22nd and two **bramblings** were seen. Six **corn buntings** were mobile along the river wall and **reed buntings** began to flock. A new **Dartford warbler** was found on 1st and was last seen on 18th. Out on the trails **water rails** were very evident with lots of squealing and 'kipping' and at least eight **Cetti's warblers** were to be found. A pair of **bearded tits** was occasionally seen and a few **goldcrests** hung on despite the cold. There were very few winter thrushes.

red kite (8th) were seen.

Three **short-eared owls** continued to show at the west end and **peregrines** became daily once again. **Merlins** zoomed through on 2nd and 29th and a two **buzzards** and a



Les Harrison

A hardy little goldcrest

Two **brown hares** were seen near the silt lagoons and **fox** and **squirrel** sightings became more regular with the onset of the cold snap. The bull **grey seal** occasionally bobbed by but the biggest surprise was the two **harbour porpoises** seen on 15th with a single of 23rd. They were actively feeding in the Thames, a sure sign that the river now hosts a healthy fish population. Rainham Marshes is always coming up with little surprises! Do not forget to check out www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/sightings.asp or www.elbf.co.uk for the latest reserve wildlife sightings.

Events: It is the gull watching season again and we have two forthcoming special **Gull ID workshops** Saturday 17 January and 14 February. January 24-25 is the weekend for the **National Big Garden Bird Watch** so check out the RSPB website or call in for a form from reception. February 14-15 is the end of **National Nest Box Week** and we shall be making Home For Wildlife all weekend. Why not come and join us?

Shop news:

With winter biting hard this year do not forget that the birds in your garden need even more help with food and water than usual. The shop is always stocked up with everything you could need from seed and dried mealworms to new feeders and cages to keep the pesky squirrels at bay!

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 start) and **Kids Birdwatching Club** (10.00am start) :

February: both Saturday 14. **March:** Saturday 7 and 14 respectively

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

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