



# Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

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## Moustachioed reed dwellers steal the show!



Russ Sherriff



Sam Shippey

Just before Christmas we were delighted to discover a pair of **Bearded Tits** on the southern trail. Over the next few days they performed admirably down to a few feet and were quite unperturbed by the gasps of admiration.

These cute, long-tailed orange balls of fluff are regular visitors to the reserve, particularly in the winter months. They are in fact not related to the tits that you get in your garden but are quite unique and belong in a family of birds all of their own! They have even bred on the marsh before but are usually incredibly difficult to see as they spend most of their time feeding on insects and seeds very low in the reeds with only their distinctive pinging call to draw attention to their presence. The cold weather and a covering of snow obviously encouraged them to brave the limelight!



Les Harrison

Why not come along and see if you too can get as close as this to these enigmatic reedbed denizens!



Brenda Clayton

Apologies for the gratuitous number of photos but we simply could not resist the opportunity to showcase such fabulous birds!

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.

## What's been about: December

A very good mix of species were seen on the reserve in December with the continued presence of the male **marsh harrier** and the arrival of two females from 23rd being one of the highlights. They seem quite tolerant of each other so who knows what may happen if they stay till spring? A **buzzard** was seen daily on the Silt Lagoons and a female **merlin** was seen on 11th and 28th while at least six **peregrines** are using the site. A **hen harrier** on 14th was unfortunately all too brief. Three **short-eared owls** have been seen in the evenings.



Les Harrison

Short-eared Owl



Andy Tweed

Yellow-legged Gull



Russ Sherriff

Immature Spoonbill



Priscille Preston

Female Serin

Gull watching produced at least several **yellow-legged** and five **Caspian** (including one ringed as a chick in Poland) and the **Atlantic-type yellow-legged gull** was seen again on 11th. A **great skua** was a great find on 29th and was still terrorising birds on 31st and **little gulls** were seen on each of these days with counts of six, 17 and eight. A single **kittiwake** was also tagging along. An unseasonal **spoonbill** dropped in on 22nd. **Lapwing** numbers remained stable at about 1000 with about 150 **golden plover**, many **snipe** and three **ruff** amongst them.

About 200 **black-tailed godwits** have been seen, mainly at the Stone Barges but one on the reserve on 27th was a colour ringed Icelandic bird that we saw here in January (see Marsh Matters 18 February 2009). Other notable waders included **bar-tailed godwit** and **turnstone** (29th), three **avocet** (18th), singles of **jack snipe**, three **woodcock** (21st) and eight **grey plover** (from 18th). A pair of **bearded tits** showed very well from 19th and the two **serins** remained throughout. Single **bramblings** were noted and **bullfinch** on 21st was a good find. A **snow bunting** was seen on 4th and 6th and a couple of **yellowhammers** were also found. Cold weather brought in 400 **fieldfare** on 26th and on 18th 238 **skylark** were seen heading north.

The **harbour porpoise** was seen close in on the 18th and the **grey seal** bobbed by now and again.

Don't forget to check out [www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/sightings.asp](http://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/sightings.asp) or [www.elbf.co.uk](http://www.elbf.co.uk) for the latest reserve wildlife sightings.

Sign up at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)



Jonathan Lethbridge

Great Skua



Stonechat appreciating art!

Barry Jackson

**Events: Gull ID Days** Saturday 16 January and Saturday 13 February where you will be able to learn more about this fascinating family of birds, so why not just turn up and join in. Wrap up warm though!

## What's On? Regular Events:

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

**Monthly: Wildlife Explorer Group** (10.30am-12.30pm) and **Kids Birdwatching Club** (10.00am-12.30pm): **January:** Saturday 9 and 16 **February:** both Saturday 13

**For more information about the events, RSPB and Wildlife Explorer Group** Phone : 01708 899 840

Email : [rainham.marshes@rspb.org.uk](mailto:rainham.marshes@rspb.org.uk) Web : [www.rspb.org.uk/rainham](http://www.rspb.org.uk/rainham)