



Marsh Matters

Issue Two
October 2007

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Reserve Work:

Work moved on apace with the two cattle corrals, with one member of the public enquiring whether the two circles of huge wooden pilings were either a piece of modern 'living art' or our take on Wood Henge!

Bunding has been put in place on Aveley Pools to help control water levels and create separate manageable water bodies. Despite the close proximity to the birds on the pools there was almost no disturbance and the waders and ducks simply moved a little further away! This bodes well for the work on the Northern Trail during the late autumn and winter. Similar bunding is now helping to keep the perimeter ditch watertight on Wennington while work to raise the path through the woodland has been completed to avoid flooding during the winter.

A group from London Thames Gateway Development Corporation has helped to plant up the side of the trail nearest the centre with native trees. This will naturally screen visitors from the birds with viewing through strategic gaps.



The Wennington Corral takes shape (Katy Smith)

Britain's biggest moth is out there somewhere!

A very large yellow caterpillar found in the cordite scrub turned out to be a **death's head hawk-moth** larvae. This is a very scarce moth in the UK and the discovery on the reserve was a big surprise. The young of this species feeds exclusively on the leaves of potato related plants and we have a growing population of **deadly nightshade**, its favourite food! Rainham Marshes is now the best place in the county for this unusual plant.

There is a wealth of superstition and fear around the 'death moth' (largely related to the skull-like shape on the adult moth's back) and in European folklore it was seen as a bringer of suffering, plague and blindness! This was perpetuated further by the caterpillar being granted the role of a serial killer's calling card that was slipped down the throat of the victims in the film

'Silence of the Lambs'.

Although no adult moths were seen, they must be out there somewhere and we hope that the caterpillars safely pupate so that we may get another chance.!



Death's Head Hawk-moth Caterpillar (Matt Bruty)



Deadly Nightshade fruit
(Howard Vaughan)

What's been about? September got off to a grand start with a new bird for the reserve in the shape of a **spotted crane**. This secretive relative of the moorhen was found around the muddy edges of Aveley Pools. Unfortunately it only stayed for two days but attracted quite a few visitors. The pools also attracted a wide variety of waders including a **curlew sandpiper** and several ruff. Our little **red-backed shrike** stayed until 6th and there were other signs of autumn with **finches** and **pipits** starting to migrate overhead. With north-easterly winds in the last few days of the month we even had two early **redwings** and more **teal**, **wigeon** and four



Spotted Crane (Sam Shippey)

pintail arrived.

The **hobbies** were still catching dragonflies and even going after the **house martins** and **swallows** moving through and a **hen harrier** flew down the river on 27th. There were still good butterfly days to be had with newly emerged **speckled woods**, **wall browns** and **small coppers** and hungry migrant **clouded yellows**, **red admirals** and **commas** searching for nectar from the ivy flowers. For the first time we have seen many young **marsh frogs** and the bright yellow individual was seen again several times. The local



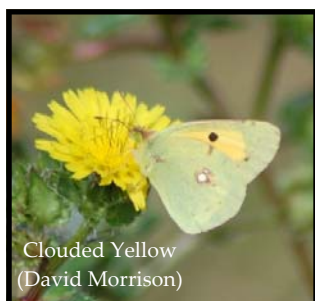
Little Grebe (David Preston)

grey herons and **little egrets** have been having a field day and even a **kestrel** was seen munching one on a post!



Education Team Grows!

Autumn is a time of change and the newly expanded team (four new field teachers!) are getting their hands dirty with many projects including renovating the Woodland classroom whilst still inspiring future generations on education programmes. The latest RSPB podcast (Nature's Voice, episode 4 www.rspb.org.uk/podcasts/naturesvoice.asp) features Rainham Marshes. Have a listen and see what the children think!



Clouded Yellow (David Morrison)

Fancy Volunteering? We are urgently seeking volunteers to help out in the shop, cafe and reception area. If you can offer your time please contact us via the details below.

Winter Opening Hours: Note that as of 1 October the reserve will close daily at 4:30pm and early opening and late closing days are at an end for the year.

What's On?

We are gearing up for national **Feed The Birds Day** on 27 **October**. Why not come along and build bird and bug boxes as get some advice on feeders and planting for wildlife..

Regular Events:

Weekly: Wednesday : **Birdwatch** (9:30am start)
Thursday : **Healthy Living Walks** (12:15pm start)
Friday : **Beginners Birdwatch** (10am start)

Monthly: **Wardens Walk** (10am start) on the first Monday of each month and **Wildlife Explorer Group** and **Birdwatching Club Days** for kids on one Saturday per month.

For more information about the events, RSPB and WEX

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If you wish to join our e-news group to receive future Marsh Matters please email and let us know.