



Marsh Matters

Issue One
September 2007

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Welcome to the first issue of Marsh Matters. In this newsletter we hope to regularly bring you up to date with life on the reserve from wildlife spectacles and the latest management work to up and coming events and campaigns. *Eds.*

A Potted History

The RSPB bought Rainham Marshes, covering 352 hectares of lowland wet grazing marsh and silt lagoons, from the Ministry of Defence in July 2000. The MoD formerly used the marsh as a firing range. Since the purchase the RSPB has strived to restore these Medieval grazing marshes to their former glory - turning them into a fantastic home for wildlife and people.

It is amazing how quickly our first year of full public access has gone by. In that time we have already seen the addition of sheep to the marsh and the fantastic success of our new Purfleet Scrape, which in its first season attracted record numbers of redshank and lapwing to breed.

The remainder of the new trails are being constructed and visitors are flocking to find out just why this 'big wet flat field' is so vital to the wildlife and people of London and the South East.



Kestrel by Pete Merchant

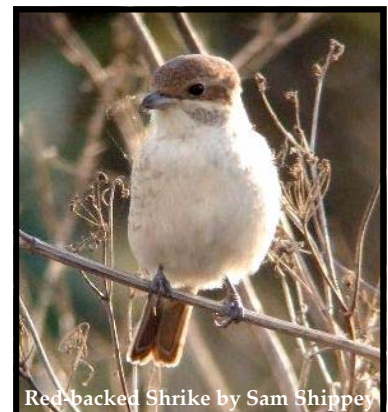
Our state of the art Environment and Education Centre has already won several important architectural awards and has been ranked by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) as one of the UK's top 14 buildings. It is currently in the running for five more awards. The centre serves as a wonderful viewpoint to sit and watch life on the reserve from the comfort of the café with a nice cuppa and a piece of cake..... very civilised!

What's been about?

August saw the start of return bird passage with frequent sightings of **whimbrels** and **greenshanks** from the Arctic as well as **marsh harriers** from closer to home on the North Kent Marshes. An **osprey** headed down the Thames and the local **hobbies** (a summer visiting falcon) were busy catching dragonflies. The icing on the cake came on 29 August when a **red-backed shrike** was found along the seawall.

This tiny predator is also known as a butcher bird and was seen devouring the local bees and wasps and even impaling them on twigs for a later snack! This species no longer breeds in the UK and was stopping off on its way south from Scandinavia to winter in Africa.

Insects have had a prolific season with **small red-eyed** and **scarce emerald damselflies** being seen in good numbers and **clouded yellow** and **brown argus** butterflies being among over 20 species recorded. **Marsh frogs** have remained very vocal and we have even found some yellow ones while **water voles** have been very public friendly!



Red-backed Shrike by Sam Shippey

Reserve Work:

Late July and early August saw over 500 Scouts from 20 countries descend on the reserve as part of World Jamboree. They helped us to clear poisonous yellow Ragwort from the meadows so that our cattle and sheep can graze safely. Subsequently the wardening team have been out with the tractor and topper to help promote re-growth of grass for the livestock and stop the thistles and sedge from setting seed. Work on the new cattle corrals has commenced and the start of the last kilometre of trail is imminent so please bear with us as there will be heavy machinery around the site over the coming months. It will be worth it in the end with a fully accessible circuit of the reserve to look forward to!



Colin and Katy give the Scouts the low-down on Ragwort

The Ken Barrett Hide

The hide that overlooks Aveley Pools has been revamped and the area around it landscaped with donations received in memory of key local birdwatcher and volunteer, Ken Barrett, who passed away in March 2006. As such the hide has been dedicated to his memory. Renowned Essex and international bird artist, Richard Allen has also recently completed a mural depicting the spring-summer view from the hide along the entire back wall. He hopes to return in the late autumn to create a winter scene on the reverse. One of the four panels can be seen opposite.



What's On?

Regular Events:

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

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

Forthcoming special events include **Feed The Birds Day** on **27 October**, where you can find out more about creating Homes for Wildlife and **Trick or Tweet** our scary Halloween extravaganza on **31 October**.

For more information about the events, RSPB and WEX

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Wasp Spider and Small Red-eyed Damselfly



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