

White-tailed Plover
RSPB Rainham Marshes
7th July 2010

The weather had changed from warm and sultry to very cool and windy and to be honest it was not surprising that Howard Vaughan and I only had six people on the normally busy Wednesday Walk. It was proving to be pretty quiet with just two Whimbrel and a brood of Shelduck to speak of.

At 1050 as we approached the first viewing platform on the northern boardwalk, six Black-tailed Godwits came in high from the river and almost landed. The pools had started to look really good in recent days so I put up my scope and started scanning from right to left through the Black-headed Gulls and ducks while Howard amused himself counting Herons and Egrets. About midway along the back edge of the Aveley Pool a bird walked out of the rushes along the back edge. It required a second look...

At first I could not believe what I was looking at. A bold, round jet black eye set in a very pale face with a soft brown cap to the head and a black bill. As it came forward the deep darker brown breast band and the very long bright yellow legs and its overall size and shape immediately identified it for me.

I quickly called Howard over and suggested that I thought that I had found something pretty rare and he ought to take a look. He had a quick glance through my scope and let out a shout of 'White-tailed Plover!' to our group and turned to me and gave me an enormous face to face bear hug, lifting me off the ground. I think he was quite happy! You will have to imagine what the people in our group were wondering... I have never seen Howard speechless before!



Tony Coombs



Sam Shippey

Once we got our breaths back we quickly set about getting everyone onto the bird and then radioed it out around the reserve before phoning it out to friends and the information networks. Then the phones started to melt.

The next couple of hours were spent soaking up this delightfully elegant lapwing with its subtle plumage of browns, whites and greys whilst tiptoeing around on those spindly yellow legs. It seemed settled but did get spooked briefly by a young Grey Heron and flew. At that point we all thought that it was going to disappear from the reserve on its striking tri-coloured wings, but to our relief it turned round and dropped back onto the pool.

Amazingly, Mike Dent, who was with Howard when he found the Sociable Plover in exactly the same spot back in December 2005 was only yards away on the next viewing platform and was first on the scene. Much handshaking (but no more bear hugging!) ensued.



Jono Lethbridge

The first birders from off site were with us in under thirty minutes and before very long a good crowd had gathered and fortunately the bird performed admirably all day to the delight of the 550 exceptionally well behaved birders who made the journey.

Sam Shippey

And just a short additional note from Howard to say a big thank you to all the RSPB volunteers (including Sam) who stayed on the reserve to help me martial the twitch, car park and after hours entrance till 10pm and arrived back at 6am the following morning just in case it was still there. Amazingly we have been bigging up White-tailed Plover for Rainham Marshes since the north-west bird of June 2007 and so I felt very privileged to have been with Sam on such a great day and it was just reward for him for being my co-leader on many walks around the reserve over the last six years. We have worked very hard to create an urban oasis for wildlife on the outskirts of London over the last decade and on top of the breeding birds and other wildlife, it is moments like this that make me realise why we have gone to all the trouble.

Howard Vaughan

Information Officer RSPB Rainham Marshes



Matthew Deans