



South Essex Reserves Newsletter IX

10 January 2008

This is the ninth of a series of regular newsletters on progress at the RSPB's South Essex Reserve network.

Fresh water is now being abstracted from the river on Vange Marsh and is being fed into the moat system and onto the freshwater marsh. The water will be abstracted between the months of November and March. This water management will encourage wintering water birds to use the site and help control some of the vegetation across the marsh.

Species records

Bearded tits have been reported in small numbers on the Vange Marsh reedbed. A male showing on the 5 of January was a pleasant surprise for the visitors that turned out for the wardens walk. Wigeon and teal numbers have grown steadily, with 110 and 140 respectively in early January. Water rails have been regular on Vange Marsh, their presence being given away by their squealing call. A flock of 150 fieldfares were recorded feeding on the reserves hedgerows on the 1 December 2007. Other birds of interest recorded on Vange marshes include, snipes (8 on 9 January), jack snipe (1 on 22 November), marsh harrier (1 male on 24 December), green sandpiper (1 on 24 December), bramblings (2 on 22 November), grey wagtails and kingfishers.

Reserves habitat management

It's been a busy time on Vange Marsh! Livestock will be introduced to manage the grassland on Vange Marsh. To do this fencing has been installed to control the animals and stop them venturing onto neighbouring land or the railway track. Following the acquisition of the reedbed area on the marsh, works have been carried out on the habitat. Excavator machines have been on site and created pool areas in the reedbed. Reed-edge habitat is beneficial for many specialist birds including bearded tit. This rare species winters on Vange Marsh but does not breed. Studies have found bearded tits like dry areas but close to open water within reedbeds. The new habitat structure will hopefully encourage these beautiful birds to breed. A bund has been constructed across the reedbed. This will be the route of a footpath and will also enable the control of water levels. On the eastern side of the bund, the water levels will be higher and will be a freshwater system. The western side of the bund will remain a drier, saline habitat. This drier habitat has benefits for many non-avian species including invertebrates.

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