

South Essex Reserves

01st April 2008



Newsletter X

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

The water levels across the marshes have continued to rise. This being said, the months of January and February have seen little rainfall resulting in lower water levels than expected across the marshes. This has not stopped good numbers of wildfowl using the RSPB's south Essex sites.

Species records

On the South Essex Marshes, the highlights included peak counts of teals (350 on the 19 January), wigeons (250 on the 19 January), shovelers (65 on the 16 February), black-headed gulls (260 on the 11 February). Other birds of interest on the marshes have been kingfishers, bearded tits, yellowhammers, green sandpipers (2 throughout the winter), corn buntings (21 on the 22 February), reed buntings (23 on the 27 January), lapwings (c. 200 on the 19 February), curlews (35 on the 24 January), water pipit (1 on the 3 February) and merlin (1 on the 1 February). The bird that gained quite a lot of interest was a barn owl that was regularly seen quartering over Vange Marsh. It was best observed just before dusk but had also been seen hunting at mid-day.

Early signs of spring that were recorded were a *Bombus* sp. on the 19 January and flowering blackthorn on the 1 February. The water voles have also been active with fresh latrines and other field signs being found across Vange Marsh.

Reserves management

The installation of a peregrine nestbox went ahead and was undertaken in partnership with the Environment Agency. Peregrines are regularly seen in the area and with a good food source locally it is felt that the nestbox will make a suitable nesting site for the species.

The Vange Marsh saline lagoon islands have been cleared of vegetation ready for the breeding season. The viewing screen overlooking the saline lagoon had been temporarily removed. Some wooden fencing was put up in its place to stop people walking into the wildlife refuge part of the site. Unfortunately, there are still people entering the sites refuge area causing disturbance to the bird species present. Last year's human disturbance to the saline lagoon had a detrimental effect on the habitats breeding birds. A new screen will be put up in the near future to eradicate this problem before this years breeding season.

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