



South Essex Reserves

11 June 2008

This is the eleventh of a series of regular newsletters on progress at the RSPB's South Essex Marshes reserve network.

During April and May, the weather across the South Essex area has been unpredictable to say the least. Ranging from snow flurries in early April to hot, sunny weather a few weeks later that is not to mention the torrential rain witnessed in the latter part of May. The rain has made certain parts of the marshes wetter than anticipated. The full effects of this weather on the avian and non-avian species are not known but it will be interesting to see whether this has affected the breeding birds on the reserves.

Species records

April and May are the months when many birds arrive back on our shores from their wintering grounds. One of the first of the passage birds through the South Essex area were wheatear with birds being recorded at Vange Marsh in the first and last weeks of April on their way to their northern breeding grounds. Other birds that arrived at Vange included sedge warbler (14th April) followed in the next week by reed warbler, lesser whitethroat, common whitethroat, grasshopper warbler and cuckoo. The hirundines started to turn up on the RSPB reserve during the first week of April. Sand martins were the first to arrive, followed by swallows, house martins and finally swifts. The first recorded swift to arrive back on Vange Marsh was on the 26th April. Other birds of interest on Vange Marsh were Garganey (drake found on the 16 May and joined by a second drake on the 26th May), black terns were seen on 26th and 27th May and a male marsh harrier was seen over the reedbed on the 30th May.

Butterfly monitoring has proved difficult with the cool temperatures recorded throughout April. If the temperature does not get above 14°C, the guidelines for butterfly monitoring state that, monitoring should not take place as *Lepidoptera* do not take to the wing. The species recorded at Vange Marsh from April have included, small white, green-veined white, peacock and orange-tip. In the first week of May on the northern boundary of the West Canvey Marsh reserve, the locally scarce wall brown was recorded.

Reserves management

Habitat management is minimal during the summer months because of the problem of disturbance to breeding species therefore the main focus is on species monitoring. Tasks that have been carried out include the replacement of the viewing screen overlooking the saline lagoon on Vange Marsh and the installation of an electrical cable at Vange Wick. This electrical cable will feed a water abstraction pump on the site that will help increase water levels on the reserve.

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