



South Essex Reserves

21 August 2008

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

The availability of water, a vital ingredient for the success of the habitat management on the South Essex Marshes, has not been too much of an issue during the mid-summer period. The rains at the end of May meant that we had water levels at the ideal level. This allowed areas such as Vange Marsh to become very productive for wildlife such as aquatic invertebrates, which in turn attracted large numbers of birds.

Species records

There has been mixed fortunes for this years breeding birds across the marshes. High numbers of breeding skylark were recorded on the West Canvey Marshes site. Other breeding birds of note were pochard, shelduck, Cetti's warbler, meadow pipit and bearded tit. The saltmarsh on West Canvey Marshes was again a productive site for breeding redshank with 22 pairs holding territories. Unfortunately, carrion crows or gulls, it seems, predated the avocet nests on Vange Marsh leading to the failure of four nests.

Vange Marsh has seen high little egret numbers (29 on the 27th July) and black-tailed godwit (115 on the 10th August). From mid-July to the start of August saw the arrival of wood sandpiper (1 from the 18 to the 27th July and then 2 were present from the 30 July to mid-August) on Vange Marsh. Little Stint (2 on the 30th July) and Curlew Sandpiper (1 from the 31st July, to the 3rd of August) were also interesting passage waders. Large numbers of green and common sandpipers were also recorded with well over twenty individuals of each species present.

Other non-avian highlights included a very high count of 321 marbled white butterflies on West Canvey Marshes on the 4th July.

Reserves Management

The viewing screen overlooking the saline lagoon on Vange Marsh has been temporarily removed to allow access for work on the power line that runs through part of the reed bed behind the screen. This screen will be put back in place in due course.

Other habitat management tasks carried out include the ongoing removal of ragwort on the reserves, the focus for this recently being Vange Marsh. Although patches of this plant will be left for species, such as cinnerbar moth, that depend on it, areas have to be removed because we are going to introduce livestock onto Vange Marsh. The livestock will improve the quality of the grass sward for invertebrates, breeding birds and flowering plants.

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Newsletter No 12