



South Essex Reserves: Newsletter 13

December 2008

It has been a busy time for the South Essex Marshes team in many ways. Firstly, we have seen the departure of Fiona Hazelton from the team and the arrival of Simon Murphy to maintain a full compliment of staff in the people engagement team. The reserves team have also welcomed the addition of Steve Roach as the new assistant warden. Steve and Simon have had to hit the ground running with the ever-growing developments in the South Essex and are rising to the challenge. The Conservation Policy Officer for Essex, Briony Coulson is also now based in the South Essex Marshes office. There has also been a great deal of activity on the reserves with the start of the habitat creation works on West Canvey Marshes.

Reserves Management

The reserves are changing and developing at a great pace. Vange Marsh has had additional fencing erected. This has allowed a greater control of the grazing regime and enabled us to put some cattle on the freshwater marsh to get the ideal conditions for the over wintering and breeding waterbirds. Water levels have started to rise across the marshes partly due to reduced evaporation and increased rainfall but because we are now abstracting water from the rivers running through various parts of the marshes.

The West Canvey Marsh reserve has seen the greatest non-avian activity. Contractors that specialise in surveying for unexploded ordnance have been gathering data for the past two months. This is essential prior to the moving of earth in the creation of scrapes and other wet features. The Thames Estuary was bombed heavily during World War II this therefore increases the risk of finding an unexploded bomb during habitat creation works. There has also been some scrub removal on the West Canvey site. This is an important task when creating wet grassland habitat for ground nesting birds. Avian and non-avian predators use scrub and trees as cover when trying to locate or attack ground nesting birds. By removing the scrub, species such as lapwing, redshank and skylark can see predators coming from greater distances, which help them avoid predation. Native trees will be planted elsewhere on the reserve to compensate for the losses elsewhere on the reserve.



Photo of Vange by Steve Roach

Species records

Wintering wildfowl and wader numbers have been increasing on the South Essex Marshes. Flocks of over 250 lapwing and over 40 curlew have been recorded on areas where we have been able to increase water levels. This is a good sign that with the improved water management across the marshes wader numbers will continue to rise. Waders such as spotted redshank, green sandpiper and greenshank were still present into December. The influx of winter thrushes does not seem as great as last year but there have still been sizable flocks of fieldfare with a flock of 60 birds present on Vange Marshes in early December. Other birds of note have included yellowhammer, Cetti's warbler, kingfisher, bearded tit and corn bunting. Finally, the RSPB South Essex Marshes wishes everyone all the best for the New Year.

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