

RSPB SOUTH ESSEX MARSHES

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009

Reserves

West Canvey Marshes has been the focus over the past few months as work has progressed at pace on site which is scheduled to open in April 2010. A car park with over 30 spaces has been completed along with new footpaths, steep sided ditches for particular to benefit Water Voles and a playground area. We have also had work completed on an additional scrape area. This area features an open back viewing screen overlooking it. There will be four viewing points in total overlooking a range of wet features. Other work has included the installation of six kilometres of internal fencing to manage cattle on the reserve.

The abstraction pumping facilities and power supply cables have been installed, this will enable water to be abstracted from the river that runs through the site. This water will then be fed across the marsh to improve the habitat for wintering and breeding wildfowl and waders. A two metre high viewing point that replicates a Red Hill, which is a common archaeological feature found across the South Essex Marshes has been created giving excellent views of the landscape. Our volunteers have been hard at work on the hedgerows that line the footpaths opening up areas that will be planted up with various native species, providing a greater diversity to the hedgerow structure.

The RSPB South Essex Team has taken over management of Pitsea Scrape adjacent to Wat Tyler Country Park. This valuable freshwater lagoon area has in the past been used by breeding Avocet and has been a good spot for gulls and migrant waders. Reserves Wardens and volunteers have been hard at work with the habitat management, which included the task of removing much of the vegetation from the islands.

The Vange Marsh reserve has had some work completed on the Saline Lagoon islands, this includes cutting the vegetation on all but one of the islands and to the bank/sea wall. The islands on the lagoon will be cut once more at the end of the winter in preparation for the breeding season. Cattle have been grazing the site through autumn but now the water levels have risen considerably the cattle will be moved onto the dry grassland.

Wildlife Sightings

The early autumn months saw second broods Wall Browns at West Canvey Marsh. These butterflies are scarce locally so they are always a pleasure to see. A Great White Egret flew over Wat Tyler Country Park on the 29th September and, what was presumably the same bird, was reported on a number of occasions along the North Thames coast over the next month. There was also a report of 60 Corn Bunting on West Canvey Marshes in November. Numbers of wildfowl and waders have increased significantly across the marshes, with the onset of winter and the higher

water levels, with a count of around 250 wigeon and similar numbers of teal using Vange Marsh once the ice thawed. Lapwing numbers are have reached over a thousand birds across the wet grassland with the occasional golden plover joining these flocks. Curlew are also taking advantage of the improving conditions on the reserve with a record count for the marshes with a flock of 130 feeding on the wet grassland habitat. The recent cold weather undoubtedly put pressure on many bird species. This was apparent across much of the reserve once the snow melted as thousands of birds fed on the freshly exposed grasslands, with buntings, skylark, thrushes and waders all seen in great numbers.

People Engagement

Our New Visitor Centre and People Engagement Office based at Wat Tyler Country Park officially opened to the public on 1 November. The buildings were previously used by Basildon District Council and have been refurbished to include a discovery zone dedicated to education, a new visitor centre packed with displays and information about the RSPB in South Essex. We welcome three new members of staff who Join Alan, Glenn and the team based there. Angela Jones – Community Programme Manager, Leila Peacock – Education Manager and Anna Nickell – Education Officer. All have settled into their roles and smart new surroundings.