

**Sociable Plover at Rainham Marshes**  
**4<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> December 2005**  
**The Fourth Essex Record**  
*by Howard Vaughan*

The 4<sup>th</sup> December started as a normal winter WeBS day... Mike Dent and I were already at RSPB Rainham Marshes waiting for Colin Bartholomew, the Senior Warden, to arrive. Normally I do not count the Aveley Pools but leave that to Mike while I head out onto Wennington with Colin in the 4x4. Colin was running late so I decided to help Mike rather than stand around doing nothing. It was immediately obvious that the Lapwing flock had increased over night and a rough count revealed about 800 in flight. We were both working our way through the duck looking for Teal lurking among the Lapwings on the bank when there, slap bang in the middle of my scope was a dozing plover with a brown back, huge eye stripe and visibly pied wings. There were no ifs and buts other than: "Mike, look in my scope quick, there is a Sociable Plover out there!" This is of course the clean version! Mike's initial puzzlement was replaced by an expletive and a quiet laugh!

At that point Colin trundled to a stop and we hastily beckoned him over. He was blissfully unaware of the enormity of the find at that point, until we pointed out a few key facts about the world status of the species, the gap since the last British record and the fact that a lot of people would be dropping everything as soon as the news was released. He took it all very well considering that the reserve is not yet open to the public and agreed that, if we could get in some help, we could open up immediately. At that point everything got up and we all had great flight views of its juvenile Sabine's Gull-like wings and then willed it to come back down again rather than disappear off in to the distance. The next half an hour was spent on the phone and during the rest of the day nearly 300 people descended upon us. I do not think I have ever smiled so much or shaken so many hands! Over 1,900 birders visited during its stay. The bird remained on the site or on nearby fields throughout its stay other than the 9<sup>th</sup> December when it was seen by me to fly across the Thames and land on the Kentish foreshore at Dartford Marsh ... which is where the last London record was back in 1984!

Nearly £1,700 was raised by donations received by visiting birders during the course of its stay.



Reg Mellis