



## South Essex Reserves

This is the third of a series of regular newsletters on progress at the RSPB's South Essex Reserve network.

**Vange Marsh North:** When I wrote the last newsletter in May we had some small-scale works still to complete:

- The fencing to ensure the functioning of the moat and the viewing screen at the south east corner.
- Improvements to the security at the wood yard access.
- A drop-board sluice to control water levels in the reedbed to the east of the site.

These works were completed to schedule, with the works to the reedbed particularly pleasing. This important habitat was suffering from a lack of water control and saltwater inundation. Addressing both these issues has produced a more extensive sustainable reedbed.

The need for groundworks in March, combined with the expected summer drawdown meant that the site dried out in the early summer but not before a successful first nesting by little ringed plovers. The growth of seed bearing weeds across the site means that there will be super abundant food when the site is re-wetted this winter.

The following works were deferred until autumn 2006<sup>1</sup>:

- The reopening of the blocked sluice to create a 1ha, self contained, saline lagoon habitat with islands.
- The connection of the stream running along east boundary of the site to the moat, this water will be essential for the moat to function effectively; an Abstraction Licence is required before we can flow water via this route.

As I write we are putting the finishing touches to the saline lagoon and we have the Abstraction Licence needed to wet the moat and aid the re wetting of the freshwater wetland system. We have concluded that it is feasible of bring visitors to the site from Wat Tyler Country Park, via the former county landfill site and a bridge over Pitsea Creek, we expect to be in a position to apply for planning permission in the near future. The other progress to report is the near completion of the acquisition of two blocks of adjacent land, totalling 6ha, as extensions to the site. These areas include the excellent reedbed detailed above.

**Vange Wick Marsh:** Phase two groundworks<sup>1</sup> were started in August, with completion expected by mid-November. The main focus of these works was the construction of a 35,000m<sup>3</sup> winter storage reservoir. This reservoir will ensure optimum conditions for breeding birds and other important wildlife. The other works included further improvements to the water control infrastructure, the field water supply, tracks and fencing. An Abstraction Licence has been acquired for sufficient water to supply both the existing creek systems and the reservoir.

**West Canvey Marshes:** We acquired<sup>2</sup> this 254ha site, from Morrison's Supermarkets, on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2006. Progress to-date has concentrated on site investigation, including a full ground survey and a range of ecological surveys. Habitat management and people engagement proposals will be out for extensive consultation in the near future.

We have appointed a Sites Manager for our growing South Essex land-holding, he is Dave Hedges, joining us from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust. Dave's appointment will mean a gradual reduction in my role as South Essex Project Officer<sup>3</sup> and an eventual return to a full time role as Essex Area Manager. Dave will be the first point of contact for any queries from now on.

**Chris Tyas** **Essex Area Manager**

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<sup>1</sup> The additional works at Vange Marshes were funded by DCLG and the Cleanaway Pitsea Marshes Trust

<sup>2</sup> The West Canvey Marshes acquisition was funded by the Cleanaway Pitsea Marshes Trust and EEDA

<sup>3</sup> The role of South Essex Project Officer is supported by the Cleanaway Pitsea Marshes Trust