



Vange Marshes Reserve

This is the second of a series of regular newsletters on progress at the RSPB's new Vange Marshes Reserve.

Vange Marsh North: The majority of the plans detailed in the first newsletter have been achieved. We received all the permissions needed to carry out the required ground works on 10th March. Being confident of a successful outcome, we had machinery ready to deploy immediately. All of the large-scale extensive works were completed by 31st March, with some localised specific jobs running into April/early May. Work completed to date:

- The installation of a tilting weir sluice to allow precise control of water levels. This sluice will create a mosaic of water, mud and vegetation, with water levels adjusted to provide optimum conditions for wintering, breeding and passage birds.
- The moat to control access, providing a site that is usable by as many birds as possible, whilst being readily viewable by visitors.
- The diversion weir to allow the flow of water from the stream along the east boundary of the site into the moat, this water will be essential for the moat to function effectively.
- A major rubbish clearance, including 400m of chain-link fence, five motor bikes, four supermarket trolleys and a wide range of other mess – two large skip loads in all.

Localised works to be completed by mid-May:

- The fencing that will ensure the functioning of the moat and the viewing screen at the south east corner.
- Improvements to the security at the wood yard access. These works were delayed due to an exceptionally long delivery time for a disabled access kissing gate.
- A drop-board sluice to control water levels in the reedbed to the east of the site.

The following works have been deferred to the autumn of 2006:

- The reopening of the blocked sluice to allow the creation of a 1ha, self contained, saline lagoon habitat with islands.
- The connection of the stream to the moat; an Abstraction Licence is required before we can flow water via this route.

We are still researching the possibility of a bridge to provide access from Wat Tyler CP, via the former County Tip. This project should reach the Planning Permission stage in the near future.

The site is currently set up to capture rainfall to raise water levels, this is obviously subject to the vagaries of the Great British climate. The requirement to raise water levels has to be balanced against the need to prevent any nesting birds being flooded. Given these factors, and the awaited abstraction licence, it is likely to be late autumn before we can take full control of the water management of the site.

Vange Wick Marsh: At the same time as executing the above work at Vange Marsh North, we have also been carrying out similar work at Vange Wick Marsh. These works will ensure that we capture any rainfall within the grazing marsh water systems. In the autumn, a second Abstraction Licence will allow us to re-wet these marshes for the first time in many years.

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