



AN EYE ON RYE

The newsletter of Rye Meads RSPB nature reserve

a million
voices for
nature

Issue 1 Spring 2010

Protecting our birds of prey

Watching a kestrel hover in the air as it spots a vole on the ground below, is a view we never tire of. Here at Rye Meads we have breeding kestrels on the reserve, but they are not our only birds of prey.

Our summer sky has hobbies swooping through the air chasing dragonflies, we regularly see buzzards, sparrowhawks and peregrine falcons and occasionally in winter a marsh harrier flying over our reedbeds.

All our birds of prey are popular and we hear countless tales of how exciting it was when the peregrine flew over the car park or the kestrels went in and out of the nestbox.

So, why did the RSPB need to organise a giant peregrine falcon in Westminster recently? Well birds of prey are still being killed – shot,

poisoned, trapped and having eggs stolen from their nests – even though it is illegal.

Joan Childs, site manager at Rye Meads told Eye: 'We have been asking visitors to Rye Meads to sign the birds of prey pledge – saying that no more birds of prey will die at the hands of these lawbreakers. All our signatures were added to those collected across the UK to make a staggering total of 210,567.

'I'd like to thank all our visitors who signed the pledge – you helped us send a powerful message that this killing must stop.'



Face of the Future

A young visitor to Rye Meads – photographed while at the reserve – has become the face of the RSPB's Letter to the Future campaign.



Eleanor Bentall rspb-images.com

This is our major campaign in the run up to the election and aims to ensure that politicians don't forget about nature. If you want to join the 150,000 plus who have already signed the letter go to rspb.org.uk

Kingfisher watch

They call it spring cleaning for a reason! This is the time of year when we expect our kingfisher pair to start thinking about nesting. This means they have a look at the tunnels in our specially created kingfisher nest bank to decide which one they want to use in 2010.

It has been a very cold winter, so life has been difficult for kingfishers, but they have been seen regularly around the nest site, so fingers crossed. Look out for them from the Kingfisher hide.

Kingfisher image by Mike Langman rspb-images.com



IN THIS ISSUE: what to see at Rye Meads this spring • site manager interviewed • events to look out for

The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment
Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076,
Scotland no. SC037654

Springwatching at Rye Meads

Spring is a very exciting time at Rye Meads. It is a time of huge change, as all our wintering birds bid farewell to the reserve and head for their breeding grounds in the north. At the same time our resident breeding birds, resplendent in their breeding plumage, start their annual courtship rituals. And it is when we see the return of our summer visitors who have spent the winter in warmer climes.

Kingfishers - Malcolm Housden



One of the first things you notice is the call of the chiffchaff who, along with the daffodil, is the true harbinger of spring. They are one of the first migrants to return to the reserve and you can't miss them - even though they can be difficult to see - as they sing their name over and over again from the branches of the budding trees.

They signal the start of the warbler invasion and are soon followed by the blackcap, the willow warbler, the garden warbler, the whitethroat and the lesser whitethroat. Check out the trees and bushes by the lakes as that is where they will be. A good tip is to look for these birds in early spring before the trees are in full leaf and while the male birds are singing for territory.

Soon the reedbeds will echo to the sound of reed and sedge warblers singing for territory. And where there are reed warblers, there will be cuckoos, the male cuckooing from high in the trees forcing the warblers to fly from their nests. Then the female cuckoo nips in and lays her egg alongside those of the reed warbler - and the familiar drama unfolds. Rye Meads is a perfect place to witness this.

Kestrel - Nathalie Schorbon



The kingfishers are busy starting their first family and the kestrels are on eggs in their nestbox high on the pylon. And all around the edges of the lakes, the remarkable structures that are coot's nests are beginning to take shape.

Everywhere you turn something is happening - the lapwings and great crested grebes are displaying, the swans are performing their elegant courtship dance and the ducks are pairing up left right and centre!

The swifts, swallows and martins wing in and the sky is full of activity. They are soon joined by the terns checking out our tern rafts and fishing constantly to replenish their

energy levels after their long flight from Africa.

Everywhere is turning green and the reserve explodes with life as the world wakes up after winter.

Insects, butterflies and dragonflies will soon be flitting around the reserve as the days get warmer and if you're really lucky you will hear the soft purring of a turtle dove.

But don't just take our word for it - come and see for yourself - it is as good as any episode of Springwatch and you can experience the sights, sounds and smells first hand. See you there!



Mute swan - Nathalie Schorbon

Visitor views

We caught up with a couple of visitors to Rye Meads to find out what they enjoyed about their visit.



Dave enjoys his visit

Dave, from North London told us:

‘Although I have been a member of the RSPB for some years, surprisingly my first visit to Rye Meads was not until 2009. Situated just 400 yards (366 metres) from Rye House station, just 37 minutes from Liverpool Street, it is in an ideal location for a non-car owning Londoner such as myself.

‘I spent quite a bit of time in the hides and was impressed at how close I could get to the action. The star of the show was a kingfisher, and unlike so many sightings, where all you see is a flash of blue, it was happy to pose for a long time. We also saw gadwall, lapwings, shovelers and a delightful little grebe.’

Sardi, visiting the reserve in April said:

‘I’ve seen some great things today including cetti’s warbler four or five times which is unbelievable, as I only usually hear them. I also got great views of the kingfisher from the kingfisher hide, a pair of redshank, blackcap and my first view of a cuckoo this year which was very exciting.

‘I really like Rye Meads because it’s got such a variety of wildlife, from small birds to waders and ducks on the water. I recommend this reserve because it’s nice and peaceful, the visitor centre is great, it’s easily accessible by public transport and there is plenty of parking if you drive.’



Sardi spots her first cuckoo of the year

A great place to visit

Rye Meads is an urban nature reserve that has something for everyone. It appeals to families, walkers, birdwatchers and photographers and is a great place to relax and wind down. Just listen to the birdsong, see flocks of wild ducks and enjoy views of lakes, meadows and marshes. There are plenty of birds, but lots of other wildlife to see too, including dragonflies, butterflies, mammals, and “the girls”, the three water buffalo.

There are nine hides on the reserve as a whole and three trails, Moorhen, Kingfisher and Otter - the longest a mile long. You don’t have to be an expert, or even to have your own binoculars as you can hire a pair from us. We have some fun things for children too - pick up an activity rucksack, or have a game of bird bingo. You can get full details at reception.

Entry is free, the reserve is open from 10am-5pm everyday except Christmas and Boxing days.

We are in Hoddesdon, near Rye House station (trains from London Liverpool St and have parking for cars and bicycles. Take the Hoddesdon turn off the A10 and follow the brown duck signs.

Rye Meads in numbers:

Over 40 pairs of common terns make an epic round trip of over 25,000 miles to breed at Rye Meads.



6 second interview

We put site manager Joan Childs on the spot!

What is your job and how long have you worked here?

I head up the Rye Meads team as site manager and I've worked here for five and a half years. Before that I had various jobs with the RSPB including investigations officer.

What is your favourite Rye Meads place and why?

I love the Draper Hide. There is always lots to see no matter what time of year or time of day. Some of the best birds I've spotted there have been bittern, a group of five garganey and two tundra bean geese, but just the sound and sight of our more familiar birds is fantastic.

What's the best thing about your job?

There's a great view from my window so it's wonderful to look out when I need inspiration and see a peregrine sitting on the pylon or a sparrowhawk streak by.

What's the worst thing about your job?

I spend a lot of time stuck behind my computer!

If you could pick any RSPB nature reserve to work at which would it be and why?

I'm spoilt for choice! Some of my favourites are Abernethy, Minsmere, Titchwell, Leighton Moss, Insh Marsh and Arne.



Joan releasing rudd into the lagoon at the reserve - Mark Fish - rspb-images.com

Working for the RSPB is great because

I'm working with like minded people who are motivated by conservation.

Who is your hero and why?

My gran taught me to make the most of every second. Her enthusiasm encouraged me to live life to the full, never turn down an opportunity (even if it was scary), and travel extensively.

Rye Meads in numbers:
In 2009/10 18,577 people visited Rye Meads

Events at Rye Meads

Why not come along and enjoy one of our special events at Rye Meads.

So, if you fancy a guided walk round the reserve why not join us for a twilight tour, dawn chorus walk or bat and moth nights?



Andy Hay rspb-images.com

Or, you can come along to one of our twice monthly Wildlife Watch days when we have volunteers in the hides pointing out the wildlife to be seen on the reserve.

We have a range of events for families – Spring-watch, Feed the Birds Day etc as well as wacky wildlife adventures during the school holidays and on certain weekends. Our Wildlife Explorers Club has events each month.

You can try your hand at pond dipping, learn about wildlife with our Wildlife Watching Course or come along to sketching or photography days. During the breeding season come along on a nestbox watch or see how the Rye Meads Ringing Group catch and ring birds.

Some of our events only run at specific times during the year, or are one-off events. To find out what is coming up pick up an events leaflet from the reserve or check out the website.

Booking is often required and there is a charge for many events (discount for RSPB members). Please contact the reserve for more information.

For further information about Rye Meads:

Telephone: 01992 708383

Email: rye.meads@rspb.org.uk

Open 10 am to 5pm (except Christmas and Boxing day). **Entry is free.**

EN11 0EH - SatNav postcode

For other directions visit rspb.org.uk/ryemeads

An Eye on Rye is edited by Carol Rawlings and Nathalie Schorbon.

We welcome your letters, pictures and general feedback about this newsletter. Email us at: eyeonrye@gmail.com

