



Marsh Matters

The Newsletter of RSPB Rainham Marshes

Issue 18
February 2009



Icelandic born Black-tailed Godwit has a taste for English coastal holidays :

RR-OL: No, it is not some mysterious mobile phone text speak but the colour ring combination of a well travelled **black-tailed godwit** that, between breeding seasons in its Icelandic homeland has flown thousands of kilometres whilst visiting various sites around the British Isles including our wonderful wetland.

In recent years Rainham Marshes has become a very important wintering site in the River Thames for **black-tailed godwits**, with up to 500 at high tide recently. **Red-Red-Orange-Lime (or RR-OL)** has been seen on the marshes in the last two Januarys and is part of an ongoing project between British and Icelandic conservationists to monitor the ecology, breeding behaviour and movements of these godwits. Over the years birds marked in this way have also been found in Spain,

France, Holland and Eire. As you can see **RR-OL** has even had the good sense to take in two other RSPB reserves on its travels!

So look out for any godwits with coloured leg jewellery and if you are lucky enough to find one please contact Jenny Gill at j.gill@uea.ac.uk and she will be able to tell you all about its perambulations around Europe! Perhaps **RR-OL** will stop off at a wetland RSPB reserve near you?

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First ringed in Kaldaðarnes, Árnessýsla, Iceland in July 2000. Seen here in May 2001 and returned to breed in May 2002 and June 2005.

About 1900km to Rainham Marshes in a straight line!



RSPB Leighton Moss, Lancashire in April 2008

Cresswell Pond, Northumberland in July 2003

RSPB Stour Estuary, Essex in September 2004, December 2005 & October 2006

RSPB Rainham Marshes, Essex in January 2008 and 2009

Oare Marshes, Kent in July, 2004

Reserve Work: The sheer numbers of lapwings, wildfowl and gulls out on the marsh speak volumes for just how wet the reserve is at the moment. We are over the moon that even the new scrape in front of the Bunker is full and already attracting birds!

We are continuing with our **harvest mouse** monitoring and it has been amazingly successful with well over 100 tennis-ball sized grass nests found by our volunteers. They have only seen two of the occupants and this is still one of the most difficult mammals to see on the marsh but keep your eyes open and you never know!

In recent weeks we have planted a further 400 trees around the centre gardens to provide extra habitat for the myriad of wildlife we are already attracting. The first bulbs are already pushing through to fool us into thinking Spring is on the way.



A very snug mouse home!

If you wish to join our e-news group to receive future Marsh Matters please email and let us know.

All the images used in Marsh Matters are taken at RSPB Rainham Marshes.

Charity registered in England and Wales no 207076, in Scotland no SC037654

What's been about: January: New Year's Day saw 87 species recorded on the marsh including two site rarities in the shape of a **coal tit** and a **lesser spotted woodpecker**. The latter was only the second record for the reserve and was seen again on the 8th. Our two showy **penduline tits** stayed till the 14th and attracted a steady stream of visitors. **Bearded tits** were seen most days with up to four present while two different **Dartford warblers** were seen on the 1st and 8th. At least two **blackcaps** and six **chiffchaffs** are wintering and a very pale chiffchaff of one of the eastern races has been cause for much discussion. **Cetti's warblers**



The little egrets are already in breeding dress!

Tony Coombs



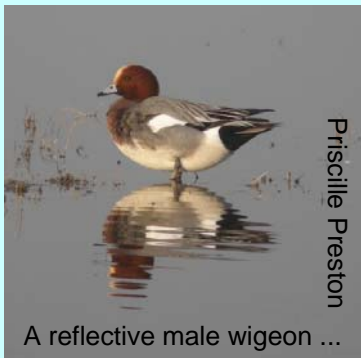
Dave Martin

The striking Eastern race chiffchaff

appear to have survived the worst of the cold and up to 30 **water rails** were on the trails circuit often being seen scuttling over the ice like clockwork toys! The finch flocks around the centre are still attracting good numbers of **goldfinches**, **greenfinches** and **chaffinches** along with **bramblings** on the 18th and 30th and a final show from the **serin** on 2nd. A **bullfinch** on the 8th was a good record.

Water and rock pipits continue to be seen along the foreshore and the six **corn buntings** were still around. **Lapwings** slowly increased to about 2000 with up to 100 **golden plover**, 15 **grey plovers** (a new record on 10th), 25 **curlew**, 3 **ruff**, 500 **black-tailed godwits**, 1200 **dunlin** and 18 **ringed plover** making for a good wader spectacle. Small parties of **snipe** were often caught dozing on the islands and at least three bobbing **jack snipe** were also skilfully found.

Gull numbers increased dramatically after the cold snap with upwards of 20,000 in the area and careful scrutiny revealed **Caspian gulls** on ten dates and **Mediterranean gulls** on five. The only large bird of prey was an immature male **marsh harrier** on 26th while a female **merlin** was seen well on 22nd and 25th.



Priscille Preston

A reflective male wigeon ...

The local **peregrines** have been seen daily, often hunting together and even engaging in some early pair bonding displays. Two **barn owls** and three **short-eared owls** have been seen of an evening.



Les Harrison

A very showy tide-line water pipit

Do not forget to check out www.rspb.org.uk/reserves/sightings.asp or www.elbf.co.uk for the latest reserve wildlife sightings.

Events: It is the gull watching season again and we have our forthcoming **Free special Gull ID workshop** on Saturday 14 February. Simply drop in during the day to learn more about this fascinating family of birds. To celebrate **National Nest Box Week** we shall be making Homes For Wildlife on the weekend of February 14-15. There will also be 10% off all nest-boxes in the shop for a week starting 16 February. Why not come and join us?

LOVE YOUR BIRDS
this Valentine's Day

FREE 1.2 kg bag of
♥ sunflower hearts ♥
when you spend £20
or more.

What's On? Regular Events:

Weekly: Wednesday : **Birdwatch** (9.30am start)
Thursday **Healthy Living Walk** (12.15pm start)
Friday : **Beginners Birdwatch** (10am start)

Monthly: **Rangers Ramble** (1pm start) on the first Sunday of each month

Wildlife Explorer Group (10.30am-12.30pm) and **Kids Birdwatching Club** (10.00am-12.30pm):

February: both Saturday 14. **March:** Saturday 7 and 14 respectively

For more information about the events, RSPB and Wildlife Explorer Group

Phone : 01708 899 840 Email : rainham.marshes@rspb.org.uk Web : www.rspb.org.uk/rainham

