

RSPB Pagham Harbour e-update February 2015

Renewal of Pagham Harbour's Local Nature Reserve designation

West Sussex County Council, as the designating authority, for Pagham Harbour LNR, in partnership with the RSPB is holding a **drop-in event from 2.00pm to 8.00pm on Tuesday 24th February at the Pagham Harbour Visitor Centre in Sidlesham** to provide information on the renewal of the existing LNR designation.

Following changes in landownership or landowner aspirations, it is important to re-declare the Local Nature Reserve (LNR) boundary for Pagham Harbour. This is a renewal of the existing LNR designation to reflect such changes on the ground.

Since the transfer of the day to day management of the nature reserve from West Sussex County Council to the RSPB three years ago, both parties have been in discussions with landowners and occupiers over drawing up agreements to include their land within the LNR. There has been a great response and WSCC and the RSPB would like to thank all landowners for their support and willingness to be part of one of the finest wildlife sites in the UK.

The benefits of the LNR designation include the potential to secure external funding, the ability through landowner agreements to undertake environmental monitoring and management, and the protection of wildlife through the enforcement of bylaws.

Everyone is welcome and there will be maps, literature and displays providing information on both the Reserve and the re-designation, which is expected to be concluded later in the year.

Wildlife Sightings

With mild weather and wind from the south there seemed little chance that anything unusual from the east would turn up. But nature has a way of surprising everyone! On the 28th Oct a text alerted us that a Pallas's Leaf Warbler had been seen at Oak Copse. Although elusive in the high branches, those who made the walk down Church Norton beach were rewarded with excellent views of this pretty warbler.



Towards the end of the week there was a more wintery feel to the sightings. A Snow Bunting on Pagham Spit, out on Breach Pool a Water Pipit, and 2 Bearded Tits were seen in the reeds, complimenting the 12 in Yeoman's Field earlier that week. A Short-eared Owl made regular tours of the fields.

Mild weather at the end of October and winds from the south resulted in the migration of a number of butterfly species. Clouded Yellow, Red Admiral and Painted Lady have all been in good numbers around the Reserve. Red Admirals were even trapped in our moth trap along with another rarity, Flame Brocade.

Weather turned autumnal in November but remained relatively mild. Stormy weather with occasional sunny intervals led to dramatic views across the Harbour. Birds of prey dominated at the beginning of November. Joining the regular Kestrels and Sparrowhawks was a magnificent Red Kite over Ferry Field.



Around the harbour at least 2 Merlin were reported terrorising the waders on the saltmarsh, whilst Short-eared Owls have been reported from a number of places around the Reserve. In the fair weather a number of

Buzzards drifted across; amongst them a probable Rough Legged Buzzard.

Winter finally arrived at the end of December bringing many of our regular winter visitors. The 2000+ Brent Geese from Russia continue to fly between the harbour and the surrounding fields, amongst them to the patient observer, a single Black Brant from the States and a Pale Bellied Brent which could have come from Greenland or Canada. Also there is one grey goose which is possibly a juvenile European White Fronted Goose. The 3 Spoonbill have now come together and spend a great deal of time snoozing on Tern Island, whilst the 2 Ruddy Shelduck continue to follow their Common Shelduck hosts around the harbour leading many a birder on a merry dance.

The winter is also time to keep an eye out for some of our northern raptor species which flee the frozen moors for the coastal harbours. A magnificent male Hen Harrier patrols the new marshes at Medmerry looking for some un-expecting Meadow Pipit or Yellowhammer feeding on the seeds of the marsh. The Merlin can be seen speeding over the spit at Church Norton after the small birds feeding along the strand line.

On the sea it is quiet with many of the regular winter birds hiding in the turbulent waters behind waves, but patience will reveal a Slavonian or Great Crested Grebe. Whilst the odd Great Northern or Red Throated Diver will make a welcome appearance.

Ferry Field has provided exceptionally good birdwatching over the last few weeks. The first noticeable species as you approach is that distinctive calling of the Lapwing as they continually chatter to each other, over 1000 now reside on the field. This spectacle is enhanced as they simultaneously take to the air and wheel around as they try to confuse a predator. Amongst the Lapwing a few Golden Plover accompany them. By the water's edge at high tide many of the harbour's waders will while away the hours with head tucked under the wings. Black-Tailed Godwit (up to 400), Redshank (up to 50) and occasionally Avocet (12-15) will all be there knowing that the Lapwing will alert them to danger.

Feeding on the field there are a wide range of waterfowl; 400 Wigeon constantly whistling at each other in order to know where they are. This whistling is interspersed with the chatter of the Brent Geese (up to 400) and honking of the Canada Geese (80). The Tundra Bean Goose which frequented Ferry Field up to New Year as been periodically reported with the Canada's on the North Fields. Also a Spoonbill dropped in.

A Little Owl has been delighting visitors as they come down the track to the Salthouse. They are then greeted by the stunning Red Breasted Mergansers near the sluice or amazed by the Kingfisher that has taken up residence in the area. Other birds of prey to watch out for in the harbour are a Short-eared Owl, Marsh Harrier and Merlin. It also seems that our resident Spoonbills have taken a liking to Medmerry with recent sightings from the breach area.

Out in the harbour the flock of Brent geese has grown to 2500 so there are an estimated 3000+ birds around the reserve. In the harbour an over wintering Whimbrel and Greenshank still present a challenge for the avid birder to locate. Whilst at sea, those who are willing to put in the time, will be rewarded with Slavonian Grebe (up to 12 offshore), Red Throated Diver and Red Breasted Merganser.



Events

We run events for all ages and interests year round. This half term we are running some great family events:

Thursday 19th Feb - Wild Goose Chase

1pm-3pm at the Pagham Harbour Visitor Centre

Wrap up warm and join the 'Pagham Harbour Crime Unit' following family friendly clues around the Harbour and learning about native wildlife as you go - will *you* solve the mystery of the Wild Goose Chase? Drop in family event. £3.50 per child (£3 RSPB members). Wear warm clothes and stout shoes. For more information call 01243 641508 or email Pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk

Saturday 21st Feb - Who Eats Mud Pies?

1pm-3pm at the Pagham Harbour Visitor Centre

Does your family enjoy nature walks? Join us for a walk with a twist! From the edge of the harbour we will spot wildlife (binoculars provided). What are they eating? Surely not mud pies?! Dissect a mud pie to find out what's lurking within. Gloriously gloopy fun for big and little kids alike! £5 adult (£4 members), £2.50 child (£2 members, under 5's free) Wear warm clothes and stout shoes. For more information call 01243 641508 or email Pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk

Seeking volunteer event leaders!

We're always looking for people with great people skills to help us to deliver fantastic public events for all ages and interests... Call us on 01243 641508 or email Pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk.

Pass on the news: If you know of anyone who would welcome receiving these news updates, do please urge them to send us an email to get onto the e-mail list.

If you have an issue or question, please email us on pagham.harbour@rspb.org.uk, or ring 01243 641508. If you would like to be removed from this e-update list, please send us an email.