

Lakenheath Fen newsletter December 2019

Hello from a slightly soggy Lakenheath Fen! We've had a few lovely sunny days recently though, so we shouldn't complain! We finally got some much needed rain in October, and have had plenty since, which have made the reedbed water levels look a lot better! We've been holding back raising water levels in some areas to allow access for winter work, but for now it's just nice to see some decent water levels!

We welcomed our new Visitor Experience Officer, Heidi, in mid-August and she has settled into the team, and her three-day a week role really well.

Reserve management

Having low water levels was a bit of a bonus when it came to cutting the reeds at the viewpoints and Mere Hide as it meant access to the reedbeds was a little easier – wellies rather than waders! It also meant we could get access to most of the kingfisher perches to either renovate or replace. A few new grit tables for bearded tits were also installed at various points. All of the cutting at the viewpoints, Mere Hide, plant bays and plant pools is now finished for the year – hurray!

We've finally finished cutting another area of reed and sedge in Botany Bay at the far western end of the reserve. This area has not been cut or grazed for probably over 40 years, so the vegetation is really dense and sometimes quite difficult to get through. But the results so far have been really promising, with more yellow loosestrife flowering than I've seen before, and lots of other fenland plants coming up too. This is the fourth plot out of five that have been cut so far, with the final one due to be cut next year.

Reed cutting has started in earnest in the last few weeks, with the digger cutting the reeds in New Fen South (reedbed on the left before you get to Joist Fen viewpoint) again this year. He's also cut a small area in Norfolk Fen at the western end of the reserve. We've also got another digger on-site, who will be carrying out some ditch maintenance work, as well as building up and levelling off some banks that have become particularly bumpy over the years!

Our volunteers have also been busy tidying up around the visitor centre, trimming back some pine trees and replacing some rotten fencing.

Solar car ports

In November we had some car ports with solar panels installed in the car park. These are essentially solar panels 'on legs', designed so that cars can park underneath and we don't lose any parking capacity. It also means minimal disturbance to wildlife. It is hoped that the panels will generate enough electricity to power the visitor centre, with enough left over to sell back to the grid, hopefully making us a bit of money, whilst saving some at the same time!



The newly installed solar car ports by Dave Rogers

Events

The annual Race for Wildlife on 13 October was well attended, with 90 runners across the two distances (5K and 10K). Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves and were very pleased with their

goody bags and medals. Event fees raised about £1500, cake and coffee sales on the day raised a further £150, and over £300 was donated by local businesses.

Wildlife

It has been a quiet couple of months in terms of birds. The washland levels finally came back up to normal in September, which did pull in few waders, with up to five **ruff**, 15 **snipe**, one **dunlin**, one **turnstone** and over 500 **lapwing**. Bird of September was a very brief **cattle egret**, which was seen on the washland amongst the cattle on 28th. On the same day, another reserve Lakenheath Fen rarity was seen on the vc feeders – a reserve first record of **house sparrow**! This bird has been seen fairly regularly since, and we're hoping it sticks around!

Hobbies were around until the end of September, while the first **redwing** started arriving about 3 October. **Fieldfares** started arriving a week or so later, we have had flocks of up to 400 passing over. Up to 240 **whooper swans** are currently roosting on the washland. Up to four **tawny owls** (male and female) have been heard and seen regularly around the visitor centre and car park area. Up to five **great white egrets** are being seen daily, and are often seen heading to roost late in the afternoons. Also roosting on the reserve are up to 17 **marsh harriers**. **Peregrine** and **merlin** have also been seen recently.

In September we had a real rarity in the moth trap in the form of a stunning **Clifden nonpareil** (*pictured - Photo by Katherine Puttick*). This rare migrant doesn't turn up very often on our shores, but there was a small influx of them in September, so we were really chuffed to record one here!

Another mammal reserve first record was a **polecat ferret** seen near Mere Hide on 1 December.

For more information about the reserve including up-to-date sightings and forthcoming events, please look on the website at www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/lakenheath-fen/, email us at lakenheath@rspb.org.uk or phone the office on 01842 863400.

Hope to see you on the reserve soon!

Cheers,

Katherine Warden 12/12/2019

