

Lakenheath Fen news March 2018

Hello and welcome to the latest news from Lakenheath Fen! I have now returned from my maternity leave, and it's hard to believe that my wee boy, Ewan, who was born at the start of March last year, is a year old, and walking, already! After a year away, it's nice to be back on the reserve, especially when the weather is all blue skies and sunshine (like yesterday). It's the kind of day which makes you think spring is on its way, especially hearing all the birdsong.

Reserve management

Reed cutting - The third and final year of reed cutting in New Fen North was carried out towards the end of last year. Previous years have concentrated on the eastern and western sections, so attention turned to the middle section. The contractors turned up on the 18th Dec, and overall just over five hectares of reed was cut. As always, our merry team of volunteers were more than happy to set fire to the large heaps left by the excavator!

Poplar woods - Another major job for the winter would have been to fell selected poplars within the west wood, to create a more diverse structure and encourage the growth of existing bands of alders within the wood. Most of this work has now been done, but not by us! The very strong winds in mid-January felled about 20 percent of the poplars in West wood (photo credit: Dave Rogers), as well as several on the outer edges which fell across paths.



It does look fairly drastic, but actually will be very beneficial for wildlife. The open canopy will allow more of a scrub layer to form, which could provide habitat for nightingales or spotted flycatchers. Fallen poplars will stay where they fell and in time the dead wood will provide plenty of habitat for various invertebrates and fungi. Any standing dead wood could in time provide habitat for lesser-spotted woodpeckers.

Admittedly this is a bit of a wish list for nesting birds, but they have all nested on the site before, and with a bit of tweaking the habitat could be right for them to nest again. Fingers crossed! We are also planning to create a bit more open water within the wood by blocking some of the ditches and adding a sluice so we have a bit more water control. Planting some more native wet woodland trees such as alder, birch and willow should help to diversify it further.

It is hoped that by diversifying the woods, we will have created habitat for a wider selection of wildlife, whilst still keeping it suitable for any potentially returning orioles.

Wildlife

A group of four **cranes** were present on and off since December, five were present on 20 Jan, seven on 29 Jan, and nine were around in the first couple of weeks in February. We currently have one

pair on site, but Little and Large are still being very elusive and we're not really sure what they are up to!! Fingers crossed they settle down soon and we have a successful year.

The first **bittern** listen was carried out last week with three boomers being heard. Up to five **great white egrets** were roosting on site through February, and at least three are still around. Early wader passage on the washland has included a single **dunlin** on 1 Mar and 25 Mar, **green sandpiper** and **golden plover** on 4 Mar, and **black-tailed godwit** on 25 Mar. Spring highlight so far has been a **spoonbill** present along the washland from 18 Mar to at least 26 Mar.

Towards the end of December up to 460 **whooper swans** were roosting on the washland, possibly due to lower water levels on the Ouse Washes, though numbers reduced to less than 100 through January. Up to eight **Bewicks swans** were on the washland through most of February. Good duck numbers on the washland with up to 114 **shoveler**, 22 **wigeon**, 12 **shelduck** and 38 **tufted duck** being present on one date in mid-March.

Marsh harrier roost numbers were good in Jan, with 20 recorded on 9 Jan, with a male hen harrier present between 2 and 15 Jan. **Merlin** and **peregrine** have both been recorded regularly throughout, and a **red kite** was recorded on 17 Jan.

A **willow tit** was recorded near the car park on 16 Jan.



A **Chinese water deer** (photo credit: Lee McCarthy) was seen around the vc pond on 8 Mar and again on 9 Mar. Up to nine **roe deer** can be seen regularly in the poplars alongside the entrance track.

Events

Stargazing with Jonathan Shanklin **Wed 18 Apr** **7.30pm til late**
Adults £10, Children £5 (non-members), Adults £8, Children £4 (members)

Going Batty **Fri 4 May** **7.45pm – 10pm**
Adults £10, Children £5 (non-members), Adults £8, Children £4 (members)

Dawn Chorus **Sun 6 May** **4.45am – 7.45am**
Adults £15, Children £7.50 (non-members), Adults £12, Children £6 (members)

For more information about these events and other events at Lakenheath Fen, 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) 27/3/18