

December 2019

RSPB Langford Lowfields – November 2019

Water levels on the reserve have dropped by about a metre over the past week, with the River Trent finally allowing us to release water through the big outfall sluice. Parts of the trails are still underwater though and so they remain closed and in fact will remain closed until they've had a bit of time to dry out. We're hoping this will happen before Christmas, but it all depends on the weather and how helpful the river wants to be.

With the flood waters receding, we are currently in a bit of a birdy transition period, with the record breaking wildfowl numbers having departed and the small birds that presumably escaped as the water came up, having not returned yet. Reed buntings, noisy Cetti's warblers and wrens, normally common features of Langford's reedbed are noticeably absent. These flood events have winners and losers at Langford, the ducks loved it, but on the flip-side it has to-date prevented us carrying out our winter reed cutting and willow removal, it has also meant the reedbed hasn't been ideal for bearded tits and bitterns. Looking ahead at predicted sea level rise by 2050, it looks likely that such flooding events will only become more common (red dot on map below is Langford). Map screenshotted from <https://coastal.climatecentral.org/>



Routes around the reserve are improving, but there is still water on low spots around Phase 1, with the pond dipping and boardwalk areas submerged. This means that the only walk available is from the Beach Hut to the 360 Viewing Platform (aka Corfe Castle) and back again. You can no longer do a loop around Phase 1. To get to Corfe Castle a diversion has been put in place from the Beach Hut to keep people away from the water.

We have seen the highest ever count of shoveller and gadwall, and the second highest ever count of pochard and wigeon on site. Other sightings include water pipit, whooper swan, jack snipe, and great white egret.



Shoveller (© Stuart Carlton)



Wigeon (© Stuart Carlton)

Unfortunately, the bird species that like to hide in the reed have had to move elsewhere as the reed has been completely submerged. Numbers of reed bunting and cettis warbler have gone right down, and the wintering flock of bearded tits has gone elsewhere. The bittern has been forced to spend its time in the smaller patch of reed in the lagoon behind the beach hut but hopefully as water levels drop these birds will find their way back to Langford.

The volunteers have continued to work hard: In line with our 10 year Forestry Commission Woodland Management Plan, volunteers have been clearing ash trees from alongside the public footpath to create a more open area next to the footpath which would be colonised by wildflowers. The ultimate aim is to get more of a gradient in transition from the short grass next to the footpath up to the more mature trees. The wildflowers will then create smaller shrubby bushes. The volunteers have also just started doing some coppicing work in the scrub behind the beach hut, as it is part of our annual management plan to make sure we have a variety within the scrub.

The recent Winter Wonderland guided walk went well with record numbers of visitors attending. The group saw marsh harrier, snipe, stonechat, pintail and roe deer even though the walk had to be diverted from its usual route due to the water closures.

The reserve has experienced some beautiful sunsets recently, and you can now walk the 4 mile perimeter of the reserve as this has become accessible again.

If you visit, and you find the car park is full, please park on the grassy area adjacent to the pylon.