

RSPB Langford Lowfields – September 2019

Bitterns: we had 3 ‘boomers’ recorded at Langford this year, the highest ever number and excitingly we also had a nest in the middle of Phase 2. This is the first time bitterns have bred at Langford and as such this is a historic moment for the reserve. Whether the youngsters fledged or not is unknown, but from speaking to RSPB colleagues it sounds like it’s unusual to ever see the young bitterns and so we can’t rule out the fact that the breeding attempt was successful. The female was seen carrying out feeding flights over a number of weeks, catching fish and frogs for her children. With good bittern habitat increasing on site and the amount of bittern food increasing, we hope that breeding will now be an annual event.

Grass snakes: There have been at least 3 recent records of grass snakes on site, they aren’t a rare species, but this is exciting news for Langford as they are a key part of a healthy wetland habitat and these are the first records of a live snake on the reserve ever. We have also had another first record for the site; a bullhead swimming in the brook that flows under the metal woodland bridge.

Outfall sluice: A few people have mentioned this recently, but it is working and a couple of elvers have been seen on site recently, indicating that the fish pass built into the structure is working. Eels are critically endangered and so it’s brilliant if Langford can provide a home to them. The little elvers will stay on site for 20 years or more, by which time they’ll have got a lot bigger and become silver eels, at this point they’ll head back into the river to start their journey back across the Atlantic to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. We had a recent meeting with the EA talking through a few adaptations that could be made to the structure to make it even more fish friendly. Water levels on the reserve tend to mimic the natural fluctuations, so high in winter, low in summer, the recent un-seasonally high levels on the reserve are linked to the heavy rainfalls bringing the river up and we can only get rid of water if the river is at a lower level than the reserve.

This year....

- 16 pairs of avocets bred during 2019, this is the highest number ever recorded on the reserve and by far the largest avocet colony in Nottinghamshire.
- 3 male bitterns were ‘booming’ throughout the spring, with the noise carrying almost a kilometre to be heard in the public car park.
- Langford saw lots of painted lady butterflies this summer. Every 10 years there is a boom which creates an influx of painted lady butterflies from North Africa and they make their way across Europe.
- Two new water control sluices were installed during October 2018 linking the Main Lake to the rest of the reserve. The Main Lake acts as our header tank and so we now have the ability to raise water levels on the reserve when required.
- A new pond dipping station has been created and the pond dipping platform modified to make reaching the water easier. Children can now borrow a net and empty the creatures they catch into water filled trays at the dipping station, looking at the colourful ID chart to work out what they’ve caught. The star catch to-date is a small pike caught by a very proud member of the local Cub pack.
- A new seasonal trail was opened. This takes visitors into the heart of the Phase 2 area, from where a wealth of wetland wildlife can be seen. It also allows them to get up close and personal with Olaf, our ancient oak tree, which had lain buried for thousands of years under a deep layer of sand and gravel, prior to Tarmac digging it up during their quarrying operation.

Other sightings at Langford Lowfields

Otters

Pintail

Osprey heading back south to spend winter in west Africa

Hobbies

Wheatears

Winchat

Great white egret

Marsh harrier

A good range of different wetland loving wading birds including five wood sandpipers, whimbrel, green shank, turnstone, black tailed godwit, green sandpiper and dunlin.

The volunteers have been reed planting. The aim is to plant out 10,000 reed seedlings per year so we are in the midst of planting these this year. All reed seedlings have to be protected by mesh cages to stop the gobbling geese from eating them up.

The area we cut for hay each year has been cut and baled up. We do this each year to benefit the wildflowers that grow there. Cutting the grass removes the build up of nutrients in the soil and benefits the wildflowers.

Part of the avocet flock



Female bittern flying back to her nest



Can you help?

Do you have a few hours over a weekend that you could spend at Langford? We would love to hear from you if you would like to volunteer with us at the RSPB – we continue to search for Visitor Welcome Team Members who are happy to spend some time at the Beach Hut meeting and greeting visitors, but also enjoying the reserve. Give us a call on 01636 893611.