

RSPB Langford Lowfields

Newsletter December 2018

Langford has seen some great visitors recently. We have had a great grey shrike (also known as the butcher bird), which was present for a few days in late November – this is a first for the reserve. They catch small mammals, birds and insects and stick them onto the thorns, creating a larder of delicious snacks!?

There are two semi-regular great white egrets in the local area which are moving around between the various wetland sites including Langford and Besthorpe. Up to 9 bearded tits have been recorded, which are being seen most regularly from the boardwalk and floating bridge feeding on reed seed, although they can be quite elusive particularly on windy days when they tuck themselves down in the reed. If you are lucky you might spot either of the two bitterns skulking through the reeds, or waiting patiently, swaying in the breeze to mimic the movement of the reed as it keeps an eye out for fish to swim past. The best chance of seeing one is often at dusk as they fly from where ever they've been feeding to their chosen roosting spot for the night.

There are goldeneye ducks, which have come to Langford for the winter to escape the bitter cold of Northern Europe; up to 6 stonechats, which if they're around are often perched on fence posts or isolated bushes on the lookout for food. They can also be identified by their hovering fluttering flight as they pop up and pause in the air and up to 10 roe deer, a new high count for the site. We now have over 200 species of bird recorded at Langford!

The volunteers have been very focused recently on removing willow from the reedbed. If this isn't done then during the reedbed's early-establishment phase the willow would quickly colonise and take over the site. It would out-compete the reed, dry out the reedbed and make it unfavourable for the key priority species we are aiming to attract; bearded tits, bitterns and marsh harriers. Some willow is ok, but it's all about balance and with reedbeds being such threatened habitats, we need to ensure that those we have, are managed and maintained in as optimal a condition as possible. We have also been carrying out some reed cutting recently, for conservation purposes reed is generally cut on a 7-10 year cycle and it allows areas of the reedbed to be refreshed. The old leaf litter can be raked up and removed to prevent the soil level increasing (as this can dry out the reedbed), piles of cut reed are great for insects, small mammals, birds and reptiles, the cut areas provide excellent feeding opportunities for species such as bearded tit and water rails and the hidden channels and pools created are great for bitterns and other heron species to skulk through as they look for small fish and amphibians to feed on. Our cutting essentially mimics what would traditionally have happened when large herbivores moved through the reedbed feeding on and trampling the reed.

Langford will be providing a Christmas Trail for children – available even when the Beach Hut is closed – please come and enjoy the scenic routes as your children follow the trail.

The Beach Hut continues to supply a limited range of snacks and drinks, and we are still looking for more volunteers on the reserve – if interested please apply via Langford.Beckingham@RSPB.org.uk.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!