



AN EYE ON RYE

The newsletter of Rye Meads RSPB nature reserve

a million
voices for
nature

Issue 2 Autumn/Winter 2010

Kestrel drama grips visitors

Have you heard the saga of our kestrels? This year, for the first time, a pair of kestrels used the nest box in the car park and successfully raised three young – but that wasn't the whole story.

Back in April the female laid her eggs and the pair were doing their thing - the female sitting and the male bringing her food - and all seemed to be going well. Then we noticed that the male was on the grass - not that unusual as they do come down to feed - but the length of time he was there was worrying.

In stepped the Rye Meads Ringing Group (who are experts and have various licences to handle birds) and they managed to get hold of him and found he had an injured wing and couldn't fly.

After some frantic ringing around we managed to contact the Raptor Foundation in St Ives near Cambridge and they agreed to take him. The Ringing Group took him to the centre where a vet found an old injury under his wing that had

started to heal but had become infected and swollen which stopped him flying. The vet put him on antibiotics and the centre looked after him all through his rehabilitation.



Male kestrel being released
Photo Keith Bedford

Meanwhile, the female was still on her eggs in the box until she was forced to leave and hunt - leaving her eggs unguarded for a crow to nip in and eat.

A couple of days later she found herself a new fella, and they managed to raise three young. Visitors to the reserve had great views of the chicks as they grew.

But if you think that was the end of the story - think again.

Remember the original male who was being looked after by the Raptor Foundation? He made a complete recovery and was brought back to Rye Meads and released! So after all the drama we enjoyed a happy ending.

Kingfisher round-up

It's been a very successful year for our kingfishers. Breeding has gone well and they raised three lots of young - exhausting work for diligent parents!

Visitors to the reserve had fantastic views of the adult birds while they were backwards and forwards bringing fish and large aquatic insects for the chicks and sitting on the sticks outside the Kingfisher hide showing off their fantastic colours. And it wasn't just views from the hide as the adults were fishing all over the reserve

So the sight of a flash of blue and orange as the birds sped by on their mission to feed hungry mouths was enjoyed by many people even when the hide was full!

Now we have our fingers crossed for a milder winter to give our young kingfishers the best chance of surviving to breed themselves.

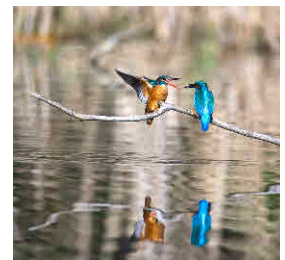


Photo Malcolm Housden



IN THIS ISSUE: what to see at Rye Meads this autumn • focus on the Green Sandpiper and visitors and volunteers interviewed

The RSPB speaks out for birds and wildlife, tackling the problems that threaten our environment
Nature is amazing - help us keep it that way.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity: England and Wales no. 207076,
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Autumn on the reserve

Autumn is a time of movement and change. We see lush green give way to fiery reds, yellows and oranges. Blossoms turn to fruits, nuts and berries. Blue skies change to grey and black and long summer evenings turn to twilight early.

Our summer visitors return to warmer climes, making long journeys, fraught with peril while our farmland and reedbeds become home to winter visitors returning from their breeding grounds in the northernmost parts of the planet.

Even our resident species move, from nests to roosts, from holes in tree trunks to branches and from the depths of the reedbed to more open water.

Here at Rye Meads our hobbies, terns, swifts and swallows have gone south. Our young kingfishers and kestrels have flown the nest and green sandpipers visit the reserve in increasing numbers and are busy feeding at the edge of the lagoons.

The more sharp-eyed among you will spot the snipe lurking in the vegetation at the water's edge, their beautiful brown and yellow stripes glowing in the autumn sunlight.



Snipe. Photo Andy Hay - RSPB Images

The air seems quieter somehow as the dragonflies, butterflies and other insects are no longer flitting across the paths and among the trees.

But autumn at Rye Meads is a magical time. As the leaves fall it becomes easier to see the



small birds among the branches. These birds, paired up over the breeding season, now flit from tree to tree in large mixed

flocks. You hear the scolding calls first then look up and see blue tits, great tits, long-tailed tits, chaffinches and greenfinches in their social groups. Small flocks of starlings gather on the pylons to roost in the reedbeds.

Large numbers of ducks like the gorgeous teal, gadwall and shoveler appear on the lakes and our resident black-headed gulls lose their chocolate brown heads and turn into white gulls.

Keep an eye open for redwings and fieldfares, members of the thrush family who will gather together and search for trees and hedges laden with berries.

And the most colourful and shy member of the corvid family, the jay, is busy gathering and hiding acorns to last through the cold winter months. Admire their beauty as they fly by, with their wash of peach, flash of blue on the wing and black and white heads.

So why not come along to Rye Meads this autumn and watch the world change around you.

Star species - Green Sandpiper

This small plump wader is a migratory bird, wintering in Europe, Africa and of course at Rye Meads!

Passage birds can be seen all year round with the largest numbers in autumn.

It feeds on small invertebrates picked off the mud or water surface as it works steadily around the edges of its

chosen pond and frequently bobs up and down.

This wader, which is about the size of a song thrush, breeds in the forests of subarctic Eurasia, often nesting in old crows nests or even squirrel drays! Rye Meads is one of the best places to see this bird in the UK and with brilliant close up views.



Green Sandpiper. Photo Chris Gomersall - RSPB Images

Visitor views

Eye on Rye caught up with Sir Graham Wynne, former RSPB Chief Executive, and asked him for his memories of visiting the reserve.



Sir Graham Wynne

I started visiting Rye Meads in the early 1980s when I lived in north London, and before I began working for the RSPB.

Visitor facilities have improved immeasurably since then, but it's always been a special place, where nature re-asserts itself at the urban edge.

Whatever the time of year, the reserve manages to pack in a lot of variety, and punches well above its weight - between kingfishers, terns, warblers, passage waders and wintering wildfowl, there's always something to see. A little gem!

RSPB members from the NE London group had a fantastic day on the reserve.

Lesley from Chigwell, on her first visit to Rye Meads, told *Eye* that the best thing she saw was the little grebe with chicks. She also praised the reserve saying it was 'well-managed and the hides are very well maintained.'

Alan from Gants Hill added 'it's a great reserve with different habitats - really good. I especially enjoyed seeing the little grebes posturing which I've never seen before, the kingfishers of course and the juvenile grey wagtail.'



NE London group

Neil from Ilford, who has visited the reserve many times, said he keeps coming back because 'there have been improvements and lots of different habitats. The best thing I've seen today have been the little grebes and the green sandpiper.'

The group enjoyed their visit and *Eye* left them in the hide hoping for more superb views of the magnificent kingfishers.

A great place to visit

Rye Meads is an urban nature reserve that has something for everyone. It appeals to families, walkers, birdwatchers and photographers and is a great place to relax and wind down. Just listen to the birdsong, see flocks of wild ducks and enjoy views of lakes, meadows and marshes. There are plenty of birds, but lots of other wildlife to see too, including muntjac deer, breeding water voles, other mammals, and "the girls", the three water buffalo.

There are nine hides on the reserve as a whole and three trails, Moorhen, Kingfisher and Otter - the longest a mile long. You don't have to be an expert, or even to have your own binoculars as you can hire a pair from us. We have some fun things for children too - pick up an activity rucksack, or have a game of bird bingo. You can get full details at reception.

Entry is free, the reserve is open from 10am-5pm (or dusk if earlier) everyday except Christmas and Boxing days. There is a car parking charge of £2 for non-RSPB members. RSPB members should display their membership cards in their car. We are in Hoddesdon, near Rye House station (trains from London Liverpool Street) and have parking for cars and bicycles. Take the Hoddesdon turn off the A10 and follow the brown duck signs.

Rye Meads in numbers:

83% of visitors said they had a "very enjoyable" time during their visit to Rye Meads and 99% told us they would like to return.

6 second interview

Rye Meads, like all RSPB reserves, relies on volunteers who work with staff to keep things running smoothly. Rye Meads is lucky to have Derrick and Keith, a fantastic double act of enthusiasm, knowledge and experience. The place wouldn't be the same without them.

Derrick Ling and Keith Bedford both have more than 35 year's volunteering experience on the reserve. Their knowledge and experience is second to none and provides continuity between changing staff members.



Derrick manages some of our work parties on Tuesdays and Thursdays and does practical management work himself. At the visitor centre he can often be seen repairing tools, carrying out fire alarm tests and keeping health and safety

paperwork up to date. Derrick can turn his hand to practically any job on the reserve and his is the first name called when someone in the office needs help of any kind!

He volunteers because of his love of nature and to use his skills for conservation. He told *Eye*: 'My proudest moments have been receiving the RSPB President's Award in 1997 and the Volunteer Award of the Year in 2005.'

Keith does practical management too and is chief designer of boardwalks, hides, nesting banks and other structures.

Recently he has been helping out at our holiday playscheme and our Wildlife Explorers club.

Keith's extensive knowledge of the site helps when he takes international visitors round the reserve, impressing them with his knowledge and enthusiasm. You may bump into Keith when you arrive at Rye Meads as, from time to time, he can be spotted helping out at reception.



Keith volunteers to help the birds and for the companionship. His most memorable moments include receiving the RSPB President's Award and the Whitbread Volunteer of the Year 2000 award and as he told *Eye*: 'A kingfisher starting to nest within an hour of me finishing building the kingfisher bank!'

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer at Rye Meads, contact the reserve for a chat.

This October (2010) the Rye Meads Visitor Centre has been open for eight years

Events at Rye Meads

Why not come along and enjoy a special event at Rye Meads. We have a range of things to do for families with special events during the school holidays as well as our monthly Wildlife Explorer Club (third Saturday of the month). In the run up to Christmas, check our website or special leaflets for details of festive fun for all the family and why not give a RSPB membership as a Christmas gift?.

Don't miss

Meet the RSPB SE Herts local group at Rye Meads on Sunday 14 November, 10am - 3.30pm. Watch wildlife films and try your luck at Ted's tombola! Buy your RSPB Christmas cards and enjoy hot soup and drinks. More information from Terry Smith 01992 715634, email: se_herts_rspb@yahoo.co.uk

Big Garden Birdwatch Weekend Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 January

Get ready for the world's biggest bird survey! Find out everything you need to know to do your own bird watch.

To find out what is coming up pick up an events leaflet from the reserve or check out the website.

Booking may be required and there may be a charge (discount for RSPB members). Please contact the reserve for more information.

For further information about Rye Meads:

Telephone: 01992 708383

Email: rye.meads@rspb.org.uk

Open 10 am to 5pm (or dusk if earlier) except Christmas and Boxing day. Entry is free, plus £2 parking charge for non-RSPB members.

EN11 0EH - SatNav postcode

For other directions visit

rspb.org.uk/ryemeads

An *Eye on Rye* is edited by Carol Rawlings and Nathalie Schorbon. Email us at: eyeonrye@gmail.com with views, letters etc.

