

# Crossness Nature Reserve is special

November 2015





## So what does make Crossness so special?

So just what is it that makes Crossness special? It's just a piece of green space in the middle of urbania, isn't it? It's just another piece of land amidst the ever-expanding grey infrastructure. It's grey, it's bleak, and it's wet, cold and damp. It's marshland. It floods. It has no value, right? **WRONG!!** Crossness is *very* special to both people and wildlife. Here are a few surprising facts about Crossness:

- Crossness Nature Reserve and Southern Marsh is the **largest remaining area of grazing marsh** in Greater London. Its sheer size and range (other important habitats here include reedbed, semi-improved grassland, mosaic, wetland and scrub), plus its Thames-side location, makes the site vitally important for the number of species supported by it
- We have the **largest reedbed** in the London Borough of Bexley. This supports breeding Cetti's Warbler, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Water Rail, and a host of reed specialist moths and invertebrates
- Over **200 bird species** have been recorded here, of which 70 are waders and wildfowl species. The nature reserve supports good numbers of breeding Barn Owl, Blackcap, Cetti's Warbler, Dunnock, Kestrel, Lesser Whitethroat, Linnet, Meadow Pipit, Pochard, Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Skylark, Stonechat, Water Rail, Whitethroat and many, many more.

However, anything can, and does, turn up here. A few of the following may surprise you: Arctic Skua, Ashy-headed Wagtail, Avocet, Black Redstart (a London Biodiversity Action Plan species), Blue-headed Wagtail, Bonaparte's Gull, Bullfinch, Caspian Gull, Cirl Bunting, Firecrest (not uncommon, but outside of its usual habitat at Crossness), Gannet, Glaucous Gull, Goldcrest (outside of its regular habitat), Great Skua, Grey Phalarope, Guillemot, Iceland Gull, Kittiwake, Lapland Bunting, Little Egret (currently seen daily), Mandarin Duck, Manx Shearwater, Mediterranean Gull, Merlin, Nuthatch (outside of its regular habitat), Osprey, Pochard (breeding; now on the endangered list), Purple Heron, Red-breasted Merganser, Red-footed Falcon, Red-headed Smew, Richard's Pipit, Ring Ouzel, Gull, Scaup, Snow Bunting, Siskin (outside of its normal habitat), Spoonbill, **Squacco Heron (the first recorded in London for 140 years!)**, Turtle Dove (now on the endangered list), White-winged Black Tern and Wood Sandpiper

- **Barn Owls breed** here in various locations (a Schedule 1 species, usually associated with more rural locations). In 2007, they raised two broods, with five successful fledglings in each! **10 young** in one year!



Little Ringed Plovers (Schedule 1 protected species) mating in the West Paddock in April. **Photo by Mike Robinson**



And the resulting fruit of their labours... a Little Ringed Plover chick in June. **Photo by Mike Robinson**

- Crossness is of **international importance** for migratory birds. BTO bird monitoring has revealed that Reed Warblers are returning from Africa to breed in the Crossness reedbeds year after year
- The **habitat mosaic** (formed through disturbance, and ecologically important in creating or maintaining biodiversity) to the east of the reserve (known as the Cory Fields - not owned by us, but within our gated boundary), is former brownfield habitat that has matured. This has become important for bird species such as Barn Owl (Schedule 1 protected species; breeding 100m away), Goldfinch, Kestrel (amber-list species of conservation concern; breeding within 300m), Linnet (red-list species of concern), **Little Ringed Plover** (Schedule 1 protected species, breeding), Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Ringed Plover (amber species, breeding) and **Skylark** (breeding, red-list species of conservation concern)
- **24 of the borough's 28 butterfly species** are present at Crossness. Aside from Small Heath, which can be seen in grassland habitat as well as heathland, all other species not recorded are woodland specialists and therefore not present at Crossness: White Letter Hairstreak (larval plant is Elm), Purple Hairstreak and Silver-washed Fritillary
- We are the London Borough of Bexley's top site for **dragonflies and damselflies** with 16 species of Odonata present, including Small Red-eyed Damselfly, as well as the regionally important Hairy Dragonfly, and Four-spotted Chaser
- We have the **highest number of mammals in the LB of Bexley**, with 20 species recorded: Bank Vole, Brown Rat, Common Pipistrelle Bat, Common Seal, Common Shrew, Daubenton's Bat, Field Vole, Grey Seal, Grey Squirrel, Harbour Porpoise, House Mouse, Mole, Noctule Bat, Pygmy Shrew, Red Fox, Serotine Bat, Soprano Pipistrelle Bat, Water Vole, Weasel and Wood Mouse. And we are a **Water Vole hotspot**; every water course is packed with Britain's fastest declining mammal
- Grass Snake, Common Lizard, Smooth Newt and Common Frog are among the **reptiles and amphibians** that breed here



One of the Crossness breeding Skylarks. This species is on the red-list due to its rapid national decline

**Photo by Dave Pressland**



Shrill Carder Bee on Red Campion. This rare bee species is only present in seven UK populations, of which Crossness and the Thames corridor is one.

**Photo by Karen Sutton**



Barn Owl chicks. They are a Schedule 1 species on the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981 as amended) due to their declining status nationally. At Crossness, 10 young fledged in just one year!



- There are **253 recorded plant species** and possibly more. Some of the less common species include: Borrer's Saltmarsh Grass (*Puccinellia fasciculata*) (nationally scarce), Brackish Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus baudotii*) (rare in London), Divided Sedge (*Carex divisa*) (rare in London), Giant Horsetail (*Equisetum telmateia*), Horned Pondweed (*Zannichellia palustris*) (nationally declining), Ivy-leaved Duckweed (*Lemna trisulca*), Jointed Rush (*Juncus articulatus*), Mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*), Marsh Sow-thistle (*Sonchus palustris*) (introduced), Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus glaber*) (uncommon in London), Round-fruited Rush (*J. compressus*), Small Pondweed (*Potamogeton berchtoldii*) (nationally declining), Strawberry Clover (*Trifolium fragiferum*) (uncommon in London), Thread-leaved Water Crowfoot (*R. trichophyllus*) (nationally declining) and Toad Rush (*J. bufonius*)
- **241 invertebrate species** have been recorded at Crossness, of which two are Red Data Book species (species of greatest conservation concern) (*Lygus pratensis* – a plant bug in the Miridae family; *Andrena nigrospina* – a scarce solitary mining bee), and 19 are nationally scarce. Many on this list are also regionally scarce, both in a LB Bexley context, as well as in London and/or Kent
- **Two rare bumblebee** species breed here: the Brown-banded Carder bee (*Bombus humilis*) and the Shrill Carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*). The Shrill Carder is present in **only seven UK populations** and is particularly associated with brownfield habitat
- We have **155 moth species** of which 10 are notable or rare with Red Data Book status
- To date (Nov 2015) we have **266 members** of the Friends of Crossness Nature Reserve scheme. Every year we hold a range of well-attended **community events**. These have included events such as bat walks, birdsong identification workshops, dragonfly and damselfly identification, butterfly walks, munching the marshes (culinary and medicinal uses for plants), wildflower identification, moth trapping evenings, barn owl watching, water vole awareness days and many voluntary conservation workdays
- We host numerous **education visits** at Crossness for schools and youth groups within Bexley and beyond
- Not all our visitors are wildlife enthusiasts. Our visitors include walkers, cyclists, joggers and dog walkers, who recognise that open spaces such as Crossness Nature Reserve, can enhance their **physical and emotional wellbeing**
- Celebrity Urban Birder, **David Lindo**, of Vote-for-your-favourite-national-bird fame, formally opened our magnificent two-storey bird hide last year



We are a hotspot for Britain's fastest declining mammal. This Water Vole was seen on the nature reserve on 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov, but they have declined nationally by 90% **Photo by Joe Johnson**



Just a few of Bexley borough's Brownies and Rainbows enjoying a range of education activities on the nature reserve





Posing with the celebrity Urban Birder, David Lindo, who formally opened our bird hide last year, and tweeted about what a magnificent site Crossness Nature Reserve was



Celebrity birder/author, Dominic Couzens, led 26 members of the Friends of Crossness Nature Scheme on a birdsong identification walk in May



*“What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the  
wilderness yet”*

**Gerard Manley Hopkins.  
From 'Inversnaid' 1881**

I hope it is clear that Crossness is so much more than a grey, bleak marshland in the winter months. It is hugely important. All these species are dependent on the integrity of the whole area as it is currently. These communities are present because of the size and range of habitats here. Kestrels, for example, an amber species of conservation concern, only breed here because of the vastness of the area and its subsequent ability to find prey. Barn Owls are present because of the large small mammal population, and they in turn are dependent on the grassland communities present.

We will continue to protect and manage the site for the species that so clearly depend on it.