

Rainham Marshes May 2017

It was a joyful day, exceeding expectations of many who came along. Our aims were to further our understanding of nature and wildlife habitats close to home; travel together to a place unfamiliar to most of us; and share expertise – several members of the group turned out to have all sorts of previously unshared knowledge and wisdom.

It is some time since I went to Rainham Marshes and I had forgotten how beautiful it is; I like the eerie, haunted feel of it, the wind in the reeds, and the distant, slightly threatening industrial buildings in the distance, the function of which one can only guess at.

A totally different sound-world from the city: no traffic noise, no snatches of conversations; simply the wind rustling the reeds and a wonderful variety of bird song.

My special memory was of a reed bunting coming in to land on a reed waving in the breeze, at an expertly judged angle, firmly clasping the moving reed which then bent further with its weight and near the horizontal then flapping its wings to jump on to another waving reed, only to repeat the game a third time and then swoop off for more fun elsewhere on Rainham Marshes.

On a day teeming with life in the marshes my highlights were the long and lanky redshanks standing on fenceposts keeping an eye on their territory (even though they're wading birds), and the reed buntings clinging on as their reeds blew about madly in the wind.

Some delightful sights - a great white egret catching a fish, darting fluorescent blue dragonflies - but most of all a sense of being out of time and place: so near London yet worlds away.

A grasshopper warbler, little grebes, reeds swishing in the wind - peace and quiet and all within sight of Canary Wharf.

Visiting Rainham Marshes was like adding an extra dimension to normal hearing, being surrounded by the exuberant songs of reed warblers (and all sorts of indistinguishable other warblers) in every part of the extensive, swishing reed beds and the lovely, plaintive mewing of redshanks, peewits calling, and all kinds of unusual ducks - not to mention the hawks soaring gracefully, but somewhat ominously, overhead.

A reflective liminal space with contrasting worlds of motorways and marshes.