

Trip Report – Dissertation project at RSPB Rainham Marshes

I applied for the Expedition Fund Award 12/13 in order to fund travel to and from locations for my dissertation. This included the main location in Purfleet, Essex, alongside two others in London Borough of Havering and Bexley, east London. The study was set out to record lapwing breeding success in RSPB Rainham Marshes, Purfleet and compare the results with two other local areas which are known (unrecorded) to have had breeding lapwing in previous years (personal communication).

The pilot studies provided valuable information for the scope of my project. The two pilot surveys in Bexley were to highlight positive visual provision of habitat mosaic but unfortunately only 2 pairs of lapwing during the preliminary breeding period. For this reason the location was withdrawn from the study. Additionally the farmland located in Havering that neighbours Rainham Marshes was also surveyed twice, leading to no observations of lapwing individuals and assessment indicated poor habitat provision. This meant that all additional visits were to RSBP Rainham Marshes only. Fortunately, initial lapwing sightings were plentiful and secondary data could be acquired from additional sites for comparison in my project.

Due to health and safety regulations, each journey required me to have an additional person to accompany me. I had planned to minimise the travel costs through the use of pushbikes. This meant I needed to motivate and encourage my friends and colleagues to travel in this way too. Fortunately I was able to purchase a low cost bicycle through Gumtree, as some of my friends do not have bicycles.

Some of the journeys to and from the study locations were to be quite a challenge. The initial pilot survey to Bexley was on a particularly cold and windy day. With little in the way of windbreak on the floodplain and periods of hail, we found walking on foot quite hard work. Fortunately my fieldwork friend was not too put off by this trip and continued to accompany me on subsequent journeys.

Additionally, on the return journey from a survey at Rainham Marshes, I realised I had a puncture in my front tyre. Unfortunately this meant I had to ride my bike to the train station and the repair shop in London in this state, making the journey much longer and further damaging my tyre.

Surveys at Rainham Marshes were conducted through the lapwing breeding season, early, middle and late. The site was divided into two sub-sites which had varying management for lapwing. A number of RSPB staff and I used binoculars and tripod secured scopes to scan each sub-site for lapwing adults, offspring and breeding behaviour. During the second survey for each sub-site a substantial difference in breeding numbers was highlighted, with the managed site possessing more lapwing. Alongside conclusions from my literature review, I was able to make solid conclusions from my results with regard to the methods used to manage lapwing populations. In addition to the surveys, an objective of my project was to produce a GIS for Rainham Marshes. With provision of a handheld GPS device from the QMUL Geography department I was able to record points of reference and produce a representative GIS.

The dissertation project is a fundamental part of my course, being the most unique piece of work I will have produced for my degree. It holds great influence for my personal reference for future employers and my own personal development. From conception to completion, I have had to formulate a feasible project that has both solid grounds in current literature and provides novel insight into the field of study.

Travel expenses to the sites over a period of three months would have limited the feasibility of my project. If I had not had financial support from Queen Mary I would have had to resort to a less exciting project that required less travel. As I live and study in an inner-city urban environment, I would be particularly limited for projects that fulfil my interest in nature, ecology and environmental science.