



## The Sanctuary News Report Winter 2004

2004 was an amazing year for The Sanctuary, and the first since construction work ceased. The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP, Secretary of State for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs, officially launched the site on a sunny afternoon in mid-July, amidst a riot of flowers from the recently hydra-seeded ground and specially planted pools. She joined the Mayor of Derby, Cllr Ruth Skelton, in opening the site. Here are just some of the things Mrs Beckett said:

- *“I think it’s a real feather in the cap in the City of Derby. For people to have the foresight and imagination to prepare and construct a site like this is tremendous.”*
- *“It is part of the urban renaissance which is happening in the City at the moment”*
- *“it’s...pleasing to see an example of something that can be done on what is, by anybody’s standards, undisputedly a brownfield site - with the emphasis heavily on the brown!”*



She spoke warmly about the way The Sanctuary took forward so many elements of the Government’s agenda on biodiversity, especially the protection of Skylarks. She recognised how wildlife conservation and development came together here, and how regeneration can be done in ways that improve the quality of people’s lives.



Back on the site, as expected, **Skylark** and **Meadow Pipit** nested in open grassland areas next to the County Football Stadium, just as they have done for the past few years. But their calls fell from the summer skies almost unnoticed against our other, newer successes. . . .

**Sand Martins** surprised us all by taking immediately to the new artificial nest bank, which had been generously built for us by Melbourne Developments. By July well over 20 pairs had raised at least two broods here. And so it was that, just before the official opening, over 170 young birds were seen flocking together on the fencing and the floor of the public car park A fantastic sight! By September the nest bank was deserted and now needs to be cleaned out and fumigated ready for next year's arrivals from Africa. A preliminary investigation showed that some of the birds had excavated back a further 30 to 40cm into the huge sand reservoir.



A pair of **Little Ringed Plover** remained at The Sanctuary for over a week during May, and even a **Tern** mocked us by flying low over our islands one afternoon. By next year we hope to have done enough to encourage them to stay and breed.

**Lapwing** loitered around the site for much of the summer. One pair raised a brood on top of the waste mound itself, and one lone bird was a frequent sight around the lake and islands. Other birds seen here included **Lesser Black-Backed Gulls, Black-headed Gulls, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Pied Wagtail, House Martin and Linnet**.

Many of our bird boxes were sponsored by local natural history groups. These have been successfully used by species as diverse as **Blue Tits** and **Kestrels**. One kestrel was often seen sitting on top of a tit box mounted on a pole near the lake, and sometimes even on the face of the sand martin bank itself. Of course, this caused some consternation to the nesting sand martins.

The big surprise visitor was an immature **Curlew Sandpiper** which stayed for a few days in early September, and could be seen feeding along the edge of the new lake. We understand that only three or four of these migrant birds are normally seen in Derbyshire each year, so it's very gratifying that The Sanctuary can offer valuable



Curlew Sandpiper at The Sanctuary – also visible as a small blob in front of reedbed in top photograph!

habitat at such an early stage. One mystery visitor still remains unidentified. Its call was recorded on tape near the Sand Martin bank in mid August. Local and national experts have varied in their views as to its identity – from immature juvenile **Black Headed Gull to Collared Pratincole!** We are still hoping someone will recognise it for certain. It's also pleasing that a number of local ornithological experts have made enquiries about accessing the site for recording or bird ringing purposes; a sign that The Sanctuary may fulfil a scientific role too.

Another surprise was the discovery of a dead **Harvest Mouse** on the cycle path by the River Derwent, just outside The Sanctuary. It was found by Steve and Liz Lonsdale

in August, and strongly suggests that this tiny mammal is present at The Sanctuary – we just have to look for its nests to prove it!

In April 2004 we planted a range of aquatic vegetation. Three out of four large patches of **reedbed** have successfully established themselves, though only that on the lake edge itself has really taken off. Other species planted around the dragonfly pools have flowered and seeded, though it was disappointing to see how easily these pools dried out, especially as summer 2004 was so wet. April also saw the completion of fencing around The Sanctuary. This should reduce vandalism and disturbance, but obviously means the site can now only be viewed from within the Pride Park park-and-ride car park along the 400m of fencing. This still gives excellent views of most features, albeit obstructed by the chain-link fencing itself. This is now being addressed – see below.



Now our first breeding season is over, there is much to do. We must identify all essential winter tasks, including clearing out and fumigation of the sand martin bank. We shall start preparing a management plan, and intend to form a team of volunteers to help carry out these jobs, and hope to involve staff from local businesses at Pride Park.

We recently started to talk to a local quarry company, which expressed an interest in helping us achieve some of our habitat creation goals. In the longer term we are hopeful of gaining enough sponsorship to install features of public art within The Sanctuary site and possibly around the Park-and-Ride car park.

However our current priority is to improve viewing access for visitors, and to create new bird nesting habitat. To this end, we recently applied to English Nature's Aggregate Levy fund for a grant of £84,000 to help us provide the following:

- Viewing Platforms and Screens
- Interpretation Boards and Sign
- Promotional Leaflet
- Little Ringed Plover habitat
- Floating Raft for Common Tern
- Calcareous grassland area

Finally, we must thank Debbie Court from Derbyshire Wildlife Trust for all her help with The Sanctuary Project Team. Debbie left the Trust this autumn to work as Biodiversity Co-ordinator for the Lowland Derbyshire Biodiversity Action Plan based at Derbyshire County Council. She will still have a personal input to the project, but we also look forward to working with her replacement in the months ahead.

It's incredible to think that construction work at The Sanctuary only began in October 2003, and that before that time there was no lake and no sand martin bank. Our thanks go to ARUP, AWG and Alpheus for their incredible achievements, and to the many other organisations and individuals who have helped and supported us. Thanks, too, to Origination, without whose support this website and report could not be brought to you, and for their help in making the launch of The Sanctuary such a success.

We'll bring you news of all developments and new arrivals in our next report in 2005.

Nick Moyes, Derby Museum  
for The Sanctuary Project Team