

# Norfolk & Suffolk

GOSHAWKS & HAWFINCHES

LIMOSA HOLIDAYS | TOUR INFO PACK



*Male Hawfinch and Grey Squirrel foraging for seeds beneath the trees at Lynford Arboretum, Norfolk © Gary Elton/Limosa*

- 2019**      **Fri 15th - Mon 18th March (4 days)**  
                 **Fri 5th - Mon 8th April (4 days)**
- 2020**      **Fri 13th - Mon 16th March (4 days)**  
                 **Single-centre, small group tour with Gary Elton**

*Early spring is the very best time to look for the specialities of East Anglia's unique Breckland region, when its extensive heaths and woods are home to some of Britain's most difficult-to-see resident birds. Displaying Goshawk, Common Crane, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodlark, Firecrest, Crossbill, Brambling and Hawfinch have been among highlights on our past tours here - and Great Grey Shrike is occasionally about, too. Based at a tucked away village inn on the edge of Thetford Forest - close to all the key birding spots.*

- Early spring birding on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk
- Forests, heaths and wetlands of East Anglia's unique Breckland
- Best time of year to search for some of Britain's scarcest resident birds
- Goshawk, Crane, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Woodlark, Firecrest, Hawfinch
- Two superb wetland reserves: Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen
- Goldeneye, Goosander, Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Kingfisher, Bearded Tit
- Small group - maximum of 8 participants
- Friendly and informal - as much help with bird identification as you need
- Single-centre tour expertly led by our resident Norfolk guide, Gary Elton

## What's Included?

- Limosa Tour Leader
- Hotel - 3 nights at a traditional Norfolk village inn, with good old fashioned hospitality
- All main meals included - breakfasts and dinners at the hotel, packed lunches in the field
- Minibus transport
- All excursions, entry fees, tour based tips and taxes
- Free pick-up and drop off at Norwich station for rail travellers

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## Outline Itinerary

- Day 1:** Evening arrival at our hotel in time for dinner and overnight. Mundford (3 nts)
- Days 2-3:** We enjoy two full days of guided birdwatching in Thetford Forest and the Brecks
- Day 4:** After a final day of birding the break concludes at our hotel around 2.30pm this afternoon for farewells and departure for home. <sup>\*1</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup> *Option to stay an extra night at the hotel before or after the break is available at extra cost (B&B basis or DB&B) for those that wish to extend their stay in the Brecks or allow time for a more leisurely journey home after breakfast the next morning. Please ask for a quote and availability at time of booking.*

## Tour Overview

Stretching from Swaffham in the north to Bury St Edmunds in the south, the area known as Breckland lies at the very heart of East Anglia. One of the driest parts of Britain, this fascinating region was once a wilderness of windblown sand and heath, where droves of Great Bustards roamed! The nation's demand for timber following the Great War led to extensive Forestry Commission planting during the 1920s and the creation of Thetford Forest - Britain's largest lowland pine forest - a mosaic of coniferous woodland, clearfell and remnant heathland that nowadays forms one of the most important wildlife areas in Britain. Some of the country's scarcest resident birds occur here - and we visit at the optimum time to seek them.

The fine, bright days of early spring are enough to stir Breckland's early breeders into song. The first Woodlarks will be singing, and (in years when these highly nomadic birds are about) troops of 'chipping' Crossbills may already be settling down to nest. The Brecks also preserve some fine areas of broadleaved woodland. With the trees yet to break into leaf, this is the ideal time to search for two of Britain's most elusive

resident birds: Hawfinch and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. The secretive Goshawk is another Breckland speciality best looked for at this time and we will visit one or two favoured spots, hoping for a sighting of this impressive bird of prey rising up above the treetops in territorial display.

Four of eastern England's loveliest rivers meander quietly through the Brecks: the Thet, Wissey, Little Ouse and the Lark. Fed by the latter, the Suffolk Wildlife Trust's excellent Lackford Lakes reserve is well worth a visit. Kingfisher, Water Rail and Tree Sparrow are usually about and this is a noted haunt of Goosander and Goldeneye in winter. The thousands of gulls and Starlings that regularly gather here to roost on winter evenings can provide a thrilling wildlife spectacle at the end of the day.

Not far away lies one of the UK's premier wetland sites: the RSPB's remarkable Lakenheath Fen. This impressive manmade wetland is perhaps the finest example of habitat creation anywhere in the British Isles. Sought after specialities such as Bittern, Little Egret, Marsh Harrier, Crane, Cetti's Warbler and Bearded Tit are resident and, in March and early April, we could also be lucky to see Peregrine.

Other localised Breckland specialities to try for in early spring include Firecrest, Stonechat, Siskin and Brambling. The recent run of mild winters has even encouraged the odd Stone-curlew to over-winter in the forest - who knows, we could strike lucky this year, as we did in 2018! The predatory Great Grey Shrike is an irregular late winter visitor to clearings within the forest, and if one is about this year we may have time to try for that, too.

We stay at a tucked away village inn on the northern edge of Thetford Forest, within an easy drive of all the key birding spots. Guide Gary Elton lives in west Norfolk and is a frequent visitor to the Brecks. We have an excellent track record finding the more difficult species on our birdwatching tours to Norfolk / Suffolk, but please keep in mind that weather is a factor and of course none of the specialities can ever be guaranteed - nor are they always easy to find!

## Daily Itinerary

Our early spring birding tours to the Norfolk / Suffolk borders commence with arrival at our hotel on the evening of Day 1, where we gather at around 7.00pm for an informal get-together in the bar prior to enjoying dinner. The next two days are spent in the field, with packed lunches and flasks of tea and coffee available on demand. We return to the hotel each evening in time for a delicious dinner. After enjoying a final morning of birding and a packed lunch on Day 4, the break concludes back at the hotel at around 2.30pm that afternoon to allow good time for farewells and departure for home.

The following itinerary is intended only as a guide and we may decide to vary this to take best advantage of weather, local conditions and what birds are about at the time of your visit - or to substitute some spots with visits to other sites not mentioned below. Most of the key Breckland specialities are best looked for on fine bright mornings in early spring, so the prevailing weather will play an important role in determining where and when we go, and what we look for...

### Day 1

#### ARRIVAL AT MUNDFORD

Evening rendezvous at our hotel to the north of Brandon, where we gather for an informal get-together in the bar around 7.00pm, followed by dinner. *Night Crown Hotel, Mundford*

### Days 2 – 3

#### THE BRECKS: THETFORD FOREST, LYNFORD & LACKFORD LAKES

Lynford Arboretum is one of Thetford Forest's most productive spots. Conveniently located within a mile of our hotel, it makes a great place to begin our winter birdwatching break. Best known as a regular haunt of Hawfinch in winter, Britain's largest and most powerful finch is best looked for during February, March and early April, before the leaves are out and when these shy and undemonstrative birds are at their most vocal.

Lynford's fine mix of coniferous and broad-leaved specimen trees in an open, park-like setting is also attractive to a trio of key

Breckland breeding species: Siskin, Common Crossbill and Firecrest. Although finding the latter is a lot like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack (usually, there are only two or three pairs), we have been lucky on many previous visits. If Crossbills are about – they are an irruptive species that may be common one year but absent the next - they often give themselves away by their tell-tale 'chipping' calls. Siskins can sometimes be numerous in late winter and we may hear the male's peculiar song, its fast chattering interrupted by an unexpected mechanical wheeze. Great Spotted Woodpecker, Marsh Tit, Nuthatch and Treecreeper are resident, and a late winter visit to nearby Lynford Water could reveal Great Crested Grebe, Goldeneye and Egyptian Goose.

Corridors of alder and poplar woodland beside Breckland's clear rivers and streams are an ideal habitat to look for the much-declined and ever-elusive Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - adults are barely the size of a sparrow. Encouraged by fine weather from mid-February onwards, like the Hawfinch, these diminutive tree-climbers are also at their most vocal in late winter, indulging in bouts of active 'drumming' and calling, making this an ideal time to search for them. We often find the exotic Mandarin Duck here, too.

The Woodlark is one of the UK's finest avian songsters and has a major stronghold in Thetford Forest's sprawling coniferous woodlands, which support around a quarter of the British breeding population. Fine, bright mornings during March and early April are the best time to hear this amazing little bird, whose far carrying, fluting voice is outstanding for its clarity. Given in circling song flight, the sound seems to come and go as the birds drift across the clear-fell.

In late winter, the same conditions also stimulate one of Britain's most secretive and powerful birds of prey, the Goshawk, to indulge in aerial display over the forest. A few pairs are resident in the Brecks and we may be lucky to see this impressive raptor, perhaps swooping and diving at great height over the trees or patrolling its territory in flapping, harrier-like flight.

Unlike the Woodlark and Goshawk, Coal Tits and Goldcrests are numerous and widespread

throughout the extensive pinelands, with Red-legged Partridges and Yellowhammers common in the fields. A late winter visit adds the prospect of flocks of Redwing, Fieldfare and Brambling, too.

Breckland is home to a number of other species that are generally scarce in East Anglia and we will be checking likely haunts for some of them: Common Buzzard, Gadwall, Grey Partridge, Grey Wagtail and Stonechat are possible. The recent run of mild winters has even encouraged the odd Stone-curlew to return early to the Brecks (both our groups were lucky in 2018), while Great Grey Shrike, a nomadic and erratic visitor to the UK, occasionally appears here in late winter. The latter favours areas of young plantation and clear-fell broken by avenues of pine stumps and brashings, where several of our previous groups have been lucky.

Set beside the River Lark, Lackford Lakes have been transformed by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust from unattractive worked-out gravel pits into a wonderfully diverse wetland reserve with meadows, woodland, reed beds and streams. A superb site for wildfowl in winter, Lackford regularly attracts Teal, Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Pochard and a few sleek Goosander. Cormorants are often to be seen fishing or 'hanging out to dry' in the tall trees by the river, and this is one of the best places in the region to see Kingfisher. There is a large winter gull roost (which can hold as many as 28,000 birds), and variable numbers of Starlings sometimes gather to perform aerial ballets over the reserve before dropping down to roost, making a late afternoon visit to the reserve especially rewarding. Common Buzzard and Sparrowhawk are often about, Tree Sparrows are present year-round at the bird feeders and Water Rail is regularly spotted from the hides. *Nights Crown Hotel, Mundford*

#### Day 4

##### LAKENHEATH FEN

Where the westernmost of the elevated heaths fall away into the valley of the Little Ouse and the poor sandy soils of Breckland meet with the darker and much more fertile soil of the intensively cultivated Fenlands, the RSPB has created its magnificent Lakenheath Fen reserve.

Twenty years ago, the land that is now one of Britain's finest nature reserves was largely carrot fields, with little to offer in the way of wildlife interest. Now it is a superb patchwork of bird-rich reed beds, grazing marshes and lagoons! Classic reedbed species such as Bittern, Marsh Harrier and Bearded Tit are firmly established, along with the furtive Cetti's Warbler, a bird whose spontaneous, loud shouted song may be heard at anytime during the late winter months. Grey Heron and Little Egret are likely beside the river. Common Cranes have also bred at Lakenheath in recent years and, on settled days from February onwards, we may be lucky to hear their evocative bugling calls echoing across the marshes - although for all their size these great grey birds are seldom easy to see!

All in all, our visit to Lakenheath should make an exciting finale to our birding tour to Norfolk and Suffolk's Breckland. The break concludes with a return to our hotel at around 2.30pm this afternoon, for farewells and journeys home.

## Trip Information

**Group Size** Max of 8 participants & 1 leader

**What To Expect** Led by *Limosa's* friendly expert guides, these holidays are ideal for birdwatchers of all levels of ability, interest and experience. Just bring your bins and enthusiasm for birds - we'll do the rest!

**Birds:** 80-100 species

**Accommodation** 3 nights accommodation at the Crown Hotel in Mundford, a comfortable and traditional Norfolk village inn at the edge of Thetford Forest, and perfectly situated for easy exploration of this unique region. All rooms are en suite.

**Meals** All main meals are included in the price, commencing with dinner on arrival at the hotel on the evening of Day 1 and concluding with lunch on Day 4. Portions are generous and the food is good. Breakfasts and dinners will be taken at the hotel. Lunches will be picnics in the field to help maximise our birding time.

**Walking** Easy walks (approx. 1-3 miles) at a gentle pace over good trails and mostly flat terrain. Sturdy waterproof walking shoes or boots recommended. Wellies will be useful in wet weather and can be handy first thing, when the grass can be damp after overnight.

**Weather** The UK climate is famous for its unpredictability. Late winter temperatures at Thetford, in the heart of the region, are typically in the range of 0-9C (32-48F). Breckland is one of the driest parts of the UK, but rainfall is of course possible at any season in the UK, so do bring rain wear just in case.

**Ground Transport** By minibus

**Photos** Can be some good incidental photographic opportunities.

## What You Say...

*“Gary was excellent and looked after us very well. We found this an excellent trip. We saw many birds and were particularly pleased about seeing Goshawks and Hawfinches. The Crown Hotel is in the perfect location so we did not have to travel too far to get anywhere and were able to go out early morning for an hour before breakfast.”*

**I&GM, Norfolk & Suffolk Tour**

*“It was so nice to be with Gary again. His skill at finding the birds and his relaxed, cheerful personality made for a happy group!”*

**BP, Norfolk & Suffolk Tour**

*“I very much enjoyed this weekend and was sorry when it came to an end. I did not want to go home!! Well done Gary.”*

**JM, Norfolk & Suffolk Tour**

*“Gary's local knowledge was a significant factor in the success of this weekend. He made sure we all got to see the target birds.”*

**RK, Norfolk & Suffolk Tour**

*“What can I say about Gary? Absolutely great as usual. As good if not better than any I have met ever!!!”*

**TC, Norfolk & Suffolk Tour**

*“Gary had great knowledge of the area and up-to-date information on where to find the target species. He had very good hearing. As a result we found nearly all the birds I had hoped to see.”*

**JP, Norfolk & Suffolk Tour**

*“It was a pleasure to be served by very pleasant staff who couldn't do enough for us. Gary undertook his role without fuss, found the birds and always very pleasant. Very approachable.”*

**JN, Norfolk Tour**

## How To Get There

Participants arriving in Norfolk **by car** will be sent a map and joining instructions for the hotel. We meet for an informal get-together in the hotel bar at around 7.00pm on the first evening.

For those without their own transport, **we pick up at Norwich railway station at 4.45pm on the Friday afternoon** (most routes arrive into Norwich by about that time), and are able to drop off there again by about 4.45pm on the Monday evening. *There is no extra cost for pick-up and drop-off at Norwich railway station as outlined above.*

**Please note:** if you intend to travel by rail and wish to spend an extra night at the hotel, we are unable to offer return transport to/from the station. Instead, it will be necessary for you to arrange a taxi between the station and the hotel - for this reason you might look into travelling to/from Brandon or Thetford stations, which are ca. 15 minutes journey by taxi (rather than travelling to Norwich, about an hour away).

**Tour Cost** \*1**2019** (4 days):

£625 from Mundford (or Norwich) \*2

Deposit: £150

Single Supp: £75

**Cost includes**

- Services of our expert guide
- 3 nights hotel accommodation
- All main meals (from dinner on the evening of Day 1 through to and including a packed lunch on Day 4)
- Minibus transport
- All entry fees/permits at the reserves, tour based tips and taxes
- Limosa checklist of birds
- Pick up/drop off in Norwich as above

**Cost excludes**

Insurance, drinks, snacks & other items of a personal nature.

\*1 **2019 tour costs shown. Please note costs for our 2020 tour TBA (available summer 2019)**

\*2 *There is no additional charge for pick up and drop off at Norwich railway station, as outlined.*

**About Your Guide**

**Gary Elton** Gary is a principal Limosa guide who lives in Norfolk, where he divides his time between guiding for Limosa and working at Holme Bird Observatory, on the Norfolk coast. A former Herts Bird Club committee member and warden of a local nature reserve in north London (where he lived and birded for over 35 years), he is a qualified ringer with a particular fascination for studying bird migration in the eastern Mediterranean. In addition to leading most of Limosa's Norfolk breaks over the past 10 years, Gary's growing repertoire of overseas destinations includes Greece, Spain, Iceland, Sri Lanka, Gambia, Borneo, Florida, Mexico and Panama. He often joins our guided *BirdWalks* in Norfolk and regularly pops up on TV wildlife programmes, having featured on everything from *Springwatch* to *Bill Bailey's Birdwatching Bonanza*. Gary is great fun and his enthusiasm for birdwatching is infectious. He rates Norfolk

as one of his all-time favourite places to watch birds - and you rate him as one of Limosa's most popular guides!

**Financial Security**

Limosa Holidays is a fully bonded Tour Operator and a member of the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). We hold an ATOL (Air Tour Operators Licence) granted by the CAA, providing for your protection in the event of Limosa Holidays' insolvency. Our ATOL licence number is ATOL 2950.

For tours not including the cost of a flight from the UK or for holidays booked by you as 'Land Only', all payments made to us are fully bonded through the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT). Our ABTOT membership number is 5230. For details please see our brochure or website: <http://www.limosaholidays.co.uk/financial-protection>

**Limosa Loyalty Discount**

We are proud of the number of loyal customers who travel regularly with us. As our way of saying 'thank you', we offer a **Frequent Travel Discount**. Under the scheme, everyone who takes four trips with us is entitled to claim a 5% discount on their 5th trip. \*3

\*3 **Conditions:** *This offer applies to the basic tour cost only and excludes certain commission-based trips, extra costs such as additional flights or accommodation, private extensions and cancellations.* • *Discounts cannot be given in lieu of tour deposits or off the cost of single room supplements.* • **Please note discount must be requested at time of booking!**

**How To Book**

Check availability on our website or with our office. We are happy to hold Provisional Reservations for up to 7 days. After this, we do require a Booking Form and deposit to confirm your place on tour. Any unconfirmed space will be released.

### Book Online, by Phone or by Post

You can book and pay the deposit simply and securely **Online** via our website, using the '**Book This Tour**' button on the relevant tour page or the **Booking** tab at the top of the page.

Telephone bookings must be confirmed in writing by completion of a Booking Form (there's one tucked inside every brochure or as a PDF download from our website), which can be mailed to us in the time honoured way.

Be sure to read our **Booking Conditions** and **General Information** (found at the back of our brochure, on our website or available from our office on request) prior to booking.

### When to Book

Early booking is advised since flights and accommodation are much more easily secured well in advance. To encourage early booking, we are pleased to offer an **Early Bird Discount** - see our current brochure or website for details.

All our tours are limited to small group sizes. So they can fill up quickly - sometimes even before our new brochure comes out! Single rooms in particular can often be in short supply and among the first to go, so do try to plan well ahead if you definitely require one of these.

**Last-minute Bookings:** We inevitably receive a few unexpected cancellations over the course of a season so it is always worth enquiring about vacancies on any tour - even for those departing in just a few weeks!

### Payments

**Deposit:** The amount of **booking deposit** per person is shown alongside every tour. We accept deposit payments by **electronic bank transfer** (please ask for our bank details), **UK debit card** and **cheque** (made payable to *Limosa Holidays* and drawn on a UK bank in GBPounds Sterling).

We also accept Visa and MasterCard credit cards for payment of Booking Deposits only.

**Balance:** Full payment of the **tour balance** is due not later than 12 weeks prior to departure (20 weeks in the case of certain tours such as cruises or those involving rail travel). We will send you an invoice before the balance is due.

We accept balance payments and any additional payments (e.g. interim flight deposits, flight upgrades, extra hotels etc) by **electronic bank transfer (BACS), UK debit card or cheque.**

### Payment by overseas customers

These must be in GB Pounds Sterling and may be made by electronic transfer direct to our bank (*please ask for our bank details*).

We do **not** accept cheques on US Banks in US Dollars, or cheques in Euros or Eurocheques.

### Credit cards - please note:

(i) **We do NOT accept credit cards or overseas debit cards for balance payments** (including any additional or interim payments) from customers living within the UK or European Economic Area (the EEA is the EU countries plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

(ii) For customers living in North America, Australia and all other areas outside of the UK and the European Economic Area **we are able to accept payment by Visa and MasterCard credit cards or overseas debit card but with a charge of 2.5% of the transaction amount to help offset card company charges.**

**Late Booking Payments:** In order for us to guarantee your airline seats, hotels etc., full payment is required at time of booking for all late bookings (*i.e. bookings made within 12 weeks of departure*).

### Other Things You Need To Know

#### Travel Insurance

Good travel insurance is **essential** before setting off on any overseas trip - and is to be much recommended for UK tours as well.

Your travel insurance should cover against cancellation, curtailment, missed departure, delay, personal accident, death, loss of baggage and valuables (see note below ref optics), personal liability and legal expenses.

**We recommend that you obtain travel insurance as soon as possible after booking** your holiday to ensure you are protected right from the word go in the event of unexpected cancellation prior to departure due to accident or illness. You must inform your insurers of any pre-existing medical conditions (including those of persons not necessarily travelling but upon whom your holiday may depend) that may require treatment during a period of overseas travel or might cause you to cancel the trip.

**Once you have arranged your insurance, please be sure to send us the following essential details:** name and contact details of your insurance provider, your policy number, expiry date and your insurers 24hr Emergency Assistance number.

### **Important Things to Note about Insurance**

- Travel Insurance does **not** normally provide sufficient cover for valuable optical equipment, which is often best protected under your own household insurance policy. If in doubt ask your insurers for advice prior to travel.

**Arranging Your Insurance:** due to UK Government legislation, under Financial Services Authority (FSA) regulations, we are not allowed to offer or recommend travel related insurance to customers. Premiums can vary widely according to your age, needs, health, choice of destination and other factors, while many people nowadays have Annual Travel Insurance cover. For these reasons, we leave you free to shop around and pick your own policy, one best suited to your own individual needs.

## **General Information**

***www.limosaholidays.co.uk***

Our website gives easy access to detailed tour itineraries (Tour Info Packs), trip reports, trip photos and the latest Limosa News.

### **Special Diets & Other Requests**

We pass on all such requests to the airlines, hotels and other suppliers, and do our best to ensure (but of course cannot guarantee) that your needs will be met. Please be sure to tell us about these (in as much detail as possible) at the time of booking, to allow good time to make the necessary arrangements.

### **Smoking**

Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. For the enjoyment and comfort of all, we ask that smokers refrain from smoking in proximity to the group and respect our NO SMOKING policy in the vehicle, at meal times and when watching wildlife.

### **Any Questions?**

If you have any questions at any time, you'll find our office staff friendly, efficient, approachable - and just a phone call away, eager to assist you in every way.

Our office is open 09.00-17.00 hrs Mon-Fri, and can also be reached by fax and email. In the event we are unable to take your call, please leave a message on our answerphone (24 hrs) and our office will contact you as soon as we can.

***Thank you for your interest in our tours.  
We do hope that you will be able to join us  
- and we look forward to hearing from you  
again!***

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