

# Norfolk & Suffolk

## Goshawks & Hawfinches

Fri 10th-Mon 13th March 2017

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*Male Common Crossbill at Lynford and Common Redpolls enjoying free hand-outs © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays*

**Report compiled by tour leader:  
Gary Elton**

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**Tour Leader:** Gary Elton

**Participants :** Shelia Bennett, Elizabeth & Mike Griffin, Dave Johnson, Barbara Palmer, Ann & Terry Smith, Maureen Wale.

### Day One

After checking in at the hotel and meeting up in the bar, we all enjoyed a very nice evening meal together after which we retired to bed looking forward to the three days birding ahead.

### Day Two

We woke to a cloudy and a bit of a damp start with the majority of the group making it to our first pre breakfast walk. Meeting by the minibus we noted several Siskins around the neighbouring trees as we boarded. A short drive took us to our destination, nearby Lynford Arboretum. Again Siskins were on show as we disembarked from the bus and a short walk from the car park into the arboretum itself gave us almost immediately our first views of one of our target species, Hawfinch, with three seen perched high in a nearby tall, bare tree. Seen by everyone, we then walked on slightly further to be rewarded by much better and closer views of more, this time a flock of eight, again perched in the top of a nearby tree. Several Bramblings were feeding in amongst the leaf litter and our first Woodlark and Crossbills were heard as we made a circular walk through the trees. Other Birds noted included Nuthatch, Redwing, Treecreeper, Goldcrest and Coal Tit, though best of the bunch was undoubtedly a pair of Firecrests, with the male heard singing and seen particularly well.

We returned to the Hotel for breakfast (which included the usual comic routine with the breakfast chef!) after which we headed towards our first destination, with some local pig fields proving a useful diversion en-route. Here we added a selection of the commoner gulls, Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Little Egret, a pair of Grey Partridge and a Red Kite to our trip list. Next stop, the hoped-for Goshawks. With the weather still slightly cloudier than we had hoped we never the less arrived at our roadside viewpoint fuelled with enthusiasm and it wasn't long before the first birds of prey were seen, several Buzzards and a Sparrowhawk. As luck would have it the weather had now started to improve and our first pair of Goshawks appeared, somewhat distantly, but clearly Goshawks, with everyone managing to see them. Over the next hour or so we were treated to a variety of sightings, including several closer ones, though it was difficult to know quite how many birds were involved. Buzzards featured strongly with at least ten birds in the area, with two Red Kites also appearing. Other birds seen during our stay included two Curlew, several Yellowhammer, Fieldfare, Brambling and Linnet, plus lots of singing Skylarks and a distant singing Mistle Thrush and Woodlark. We continued to a section of the forest near Swafham (the local facilities here proving useful and arguably overdue!). Our target was a Great Grey Shrike that had been in the area over the last few weeks. After lunch and coffee, we walked down one of the main tracks, noting Brimstone and Small Tortoiseshell Butterflies; spring had really arrived! We found the shrike on the edge of a large clearing, which allowed us fantastic scope views. Woodlark had been heard but seeing one was proving more of a challenge. We searched the area with no luck, a calling Tawny Owl and a Green Woodpecker our best additions. Returning to the bus we boarded and started our journey back to Lynford Arboretum, which was to be our final destination of the day. A brief stop at feeders in a local garden gave us nice views of Siskin and Redpoll and two more Red Kites were noted en-route.

Taking a slightly different route to the arboretum produced a singing Marsh Tit and it wasn't long before we were enjoying views of our first Hawfinch. The visit was to prove particularly good for these, with birds seen very well over the next hour or two, the majority males, looking particularly smart perched up in the late afternoon sun. We walked along the large paddock area, enjoying nice views of Brambling and Nuthatch with a drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker also heard. We continued on down to a nearby bridge, the water here proving a draw for the finches especially with scatterings of seed on the bridge pillars. The seeds gave us our first views of Marsh Tit and at the water edge some amazing views of Crossbills. The Crossbills were seen initially perched in the nearby alders before dropping down to drink, the brick red males as always looking particularly smart. A slow walk back along the paddock saw us again enjoying more Hawfinches, with one scope view involving a Hawfinch flanked by a pair of Crossbills, a memorable conclusion to the day!

### Day Three

A dull start to the day and our pre-breakfast walk saw us visiting a series of local forest clearings. On arrival Yellowhammers could be heard singing and a quick scan found several 'lemon-headed' males sat on elevated perches. A pair of Crossbills flew in and landed in full view on nearby conifer tops. Our walk over the next 45 minutes gave us a selection of species, including Redpoll, Siskin, Reed Bunting and a vocal Green Woodpecker.

After Breakfast we drove to Santon Downham for a walk along the banks of the Little Ouse. A stop en-route for

Woodlark proved successful with a pair flying over us, their distinct 'tailless' and almost bat-like appearance very obvious. Our walk along the river proved both productive and at times frustrating. Our first singing Chiffchaffs of the trip, a calling pair of Mandarins that flew along the river, a pair of Grey Wagtails and an active bee's nest in a dead tree stump by the path were interesting diversions. As we approached the woodpecker area, we could hear one calling with it, or another, flying across in front of us. A frustrating 30 or so minutes followed as we caught glimpses of the birds, but eventually some good views were had as we watched the female in our telescopes as it moved around nearby trees. Pleased with our success we returned along the riverbank noting a calling Water Rail in a nearby wet meadow. Lunch was next taken in true birding fashion at a trading estate near Thetford; an area where there had been a series of unusual gulls reported. Our visit was very quiet, though and we saw no more than a handful of the commoner species.

Lackford Lakes, which is a Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve, was our next destination - a series of old gravel pits complete with hides and a visitor centre. A pleasant walk followed with the habitat affording us a different range of species for our trip. Goldeneye, Shoveler, Teal and Gadwall were amongst the wildfowl on the main sailing lake, while the lake and scrape viewed from the main hide held Oystercatcher, Snipe, Shelduck and Cormorant. A pair of Long-tailed Tits was watched in front of the hide, with Terry discovering their nest tucked in just below us, the birds appearing with feathers to presumably complete the lining of it. Tea and Coffee at the bus was followed by a short walk to a series of feeders, a Tree Sparrow having been seen there earlier, again we had a piece of good fortune as the bird was spotted almost immediately, sat in the centre of a nearby Blackthorn bush.

We returned to the bus then retraced our journey towards our final destination of the day, Lynford Water, a site situated close to the arboretum and comprised of two large flooded gravel pits. We scanned the first large pit, noting two drake Goldeneyes, Tufted Ducks, Canada and Greylag Geese and Mute Swan, then the bird that was hoped for, a Goosander, was found by Ann appearing from behind one of the small islands. Large numbers of vocal Siskins were also nearby and a flock of around 100 Fieldfares could be seen in some distant poplars. The second gravel pit unfortunately held no further surprises so we returned to the bus. Our timing had been perfect as the rain which had been forecast as heavy and prolonged for the day, finally arrived, we weren't complaining, far from it, having had a dry and very productive birding day!

#### **Day four**

Our last day meant bags packed, a slightly earlier breakfast and then departure. Several local sites were on the agenda, one of our main goals being better views of Woodlark, a bird we had only seen in flight up until now. A short drive took us to our first site, which was followed by a walk along a forest track to view a series of clearings. Calling Crossbills, Siskins and Bramblings were amongst the birds seen, with singing Yellowhammers and Skylarks greeting as we entered the first of the cleared areas. Unfortunately the conifers had grown up considerably in the area and our best chance of Woodlark was the field edges at the end of the last plantation. As we approached, the distinct 'tacking' of a Stonechat was heard. The bird was quickly found in the company of two more, with all three showing well on the track in front of us. Whilst watching these, a Woodlark was heard; two birds took flight, passing us and unfortunately disappearing from view. We returned to the bus, heading to another site that we viewed from a small pull in at the side of the road. A scan of the area proved unsuccessful with no sign of any Woodlark, though a pair of Mistle Thrushes spotted by Dave was the first seen on the trip. They say third time lucky and our next site was to prove just that. Initially things didn't look too hopeful but, thanks to sharp spotting by Elizabeth, a bird she had seen walking through the grass under nearby pines proved to be a Woodlark. Seemingly carrying nesting material and in the company of a second bird, the pair performed admirably for us for the next fifteen minutes, allowing prolonged scope views for everyone. A change of scenery next and Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve, where a walk through the reserve centre and up onto the elevated watchpoint soon saw us adding new birds to our already impressive species list. A pair of Garganey tucked into the reeds on the far side of the wetland area was a pleasing addition, with Wigeon and Redshank the other new additions for the trip. With time ticking by a drive down to the New Fen viewpoint for lunch gave us an opportunity to sit and enjoy the view out over the first of the sections of extensive reedbeds on the site. The wind was slightly stronger than we would have liked, but eight Snipe and a Water Rail, the latter seen in flight, were the birding highlights. We returned to the bus, with Anne spotting our last new bird for the trip, an arguably long overdue Grey Heron! Returning to Munford we made our way to Lynford Arboretum for one last short walk round. Birds were as the previous visits: Nuthatch, Crossbill, Siskins, plus masses of bird song with Goldcrests seemingly very vocal. Two Comma butterflies were the last notable sightings as we returned to the bus. A short drive to the hotel followed with us saying our goodbyes and starting our individual journeys home.

**SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED***(Total number of species recorded –95)***Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa***

Roadside birds were noted daily.

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

A pair in a roadside pig field near Great Cressingham.

**Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Noted daily.

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Small numbers at Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Seen at Lynford Arboretum and Lackford Lakes.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Water, with a single bird over the hotel on the morning of the 12th.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***Only one seen, a roadside bird on 11<sup>th</sup>.**Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Seventeen were counted on the pig fields near Great Cressingham, with three more at Lackford Lakes.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Noted at Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen daily.

**Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope***

Eight was the best we could manage seen from the washland viewpoint at Lakenheath Fen.

**Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Six at Lackford Lakes and around thirty at Lakenheath Fen.

**Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca***

Seen at Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

**Garganey *Anas querquedula***

A pair at Lakenheath Fen

**Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Noted at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen reserve.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Easily seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.

**Mandarin *Aix galericulata***

A pair in flight along the river at Santon Downham.

**Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula***

Six at Lackford Lakes, and two at Lynford Water.

**Goosander *Mergus merganser***

A redhead (seemingly a young male) on the Lynford Water

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

One at Lackford Lakes.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Recorded at Lakenheath Fen, Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

The last new bird of the trip at Lakenheath Fen.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Singles noted daily.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Ten at Lackford Lakes.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily.

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

Singles were seen at Great Cressingham, Cockley Cley and Lackford Lakes.

**Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis***

Good views of at least two, possibly as many as four, at a popular roadside site.

**Red Kite *Milvus milvus***

Five individuals were a good total for the trip.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

As is the case now days, easily seen at various sites during the trip.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

Heard along the river at Santon Downham with one seen in flight at Lakenheath Fen.

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily in all suitable habitat.

**Common Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted at all Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Two near Great Cressingham and four at Lakenheath Fen

**Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Pairs at Great Cressingham, Lynford water and Lackford Lakes.

**Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Seen at Cockley Cley, Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

**Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

Three at Lackford Lakes and eight at Lakenheath Fen.

**Common Redshank *Tringa Totanus***

A single bird at Lakenheath Fen reserve.

**Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus***

Noted daily.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

Noted daily in small numbers.

**Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus***

Noted at Great Cressingham, Thetford and Lackford Lakes.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Noted daily, primarily overflying birds.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Recorded daily.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Seen daily, with some nice perched views had.

**Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Noted daily and easily seen ( at times in impressive numbers!).

**Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around suburban areas.

**Tawny Owl *Strix aluco***

Day calling birds were heard at Cockley Cley Wood and Lynford Water.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor***

At least one pair seen and heard at Santon Downham. .

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Several heard, with one seen well by the bridge at Santon Downham.

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

Heard daily at numerous sites, but not seen.

**Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor***

Good views of one at Cockley Cley Woods.

**Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Recorded daily in small numbers.

**Common Magpie *Pica pica***

Recorded daily.

**Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***

Common and easily seen.

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Noted daily at various sites

**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

Seen daily in small numbers

**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***

Birds were seen at Lynford Aboretum and Santon Downham.

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Easily seen and constantly heard in suitable woodland habitat.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Recorded daily

**Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Recorded daily

**Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus***

Recorded daily, with a nest also found at Lackford Lakes.

**Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Seen and heard daily.

**Woodlark *Lullula arborea***

Several were heard and two pairs seen in flight, with great prolonged views of a pair collecting nest material at a site near Santon Downham.

**Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti***

Heard at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen.

**Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

Three singing birds along the river at Santon Downham and two at Lackford Lakes.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Heard and seen at various sites during our visits to the forest.

**Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla***

A pair were heard and seen on our first pre breakfast walk.

**Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Seen and heard daily.

**Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***

Recorded daily, seen particularly well at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham.

**Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

Several heard with one seen well on our first morning walk at Lynford Arboretum.

**European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Noted daily, primarily in and around the villages.

**Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen and heard daily.

**Redwing *Turdus iliacus***

Noted daily with some nice views had.

**Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris***

Noted daily with the largest number, c100, in treetops at Lynford Water.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Heard daily, with several seen well.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

Heard singing at Cockley Cley, with a pair seen at Santon Downham..

**European Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Common, seen daily

**Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola***

Three, including a colour ringed male, were seen near Grimes Graves, with another seen at Lakenheath Fen.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.

**Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***

One at the field side feeders at Lackford Lakes.

**Dunnock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea***

A pair along the River at Santon Downham.

**Pied/White Wagtail *Motacilla alba/yarrellii***

Noted daily.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Noted at Cockley Cley and Grimes Graves.

**Eurasian Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Common, Seen daily.

**Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla***

A good winter for this species with numbers high around the forest, enabling us to get very nice views.

**European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris***

Seen daily, particularly easy to see around the hotel.

**Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*.**

Common in the area, particularly numerous around the hotel and at Lynford Arboretum.

**Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea***

Regularly noted overflying calling, with perched birds also encountered regularly. Seen particularly well at some roadside feeders near Cockley Cley Wood.

**Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Small numbers at Cockley Cley and Grimes Graves.

**European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Seen daily at various sites.

**Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra***

Seen and heard daily, with best views of birds dropping down to drink at a small stream at Lynford Arboretum.

**Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula***

A pair were seen by Shelia at Lackford lakes.

**Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes***

At least eight seen well on our first pre-breakfast walk, with great views later in the day near their roost site.

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella***

Lots seen and heard at various sites.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Seen at a variety of suitable sites visited.

**Mammals**

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Roe Deer *Capreolus Capreolus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

**Butterflies**

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Peacock *Aglais io*