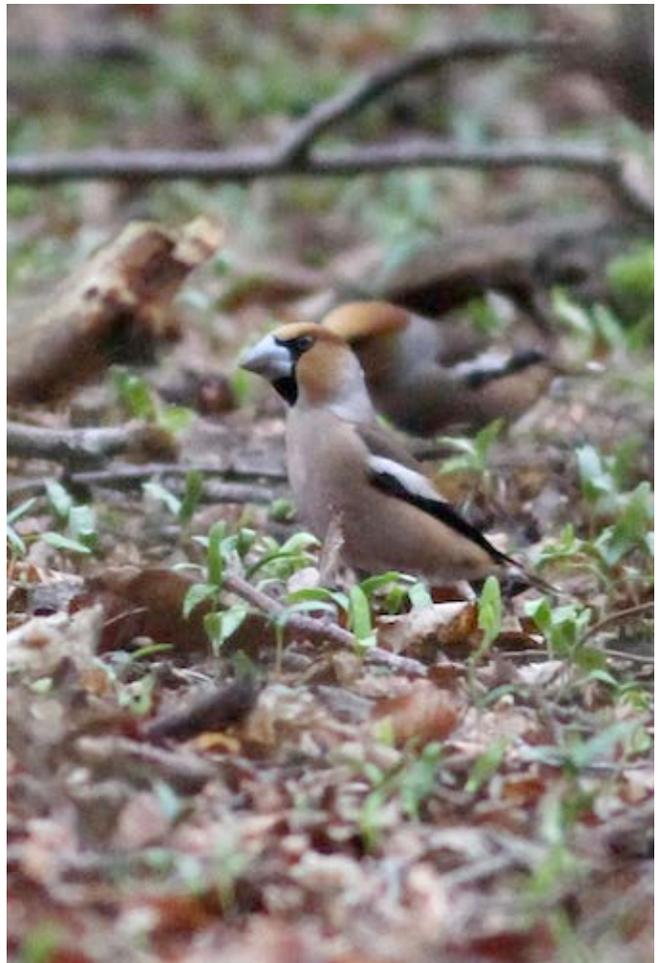


Norfolk & Suffolk

Goshawks & Hawfinches

Fri 17th-Mon 20th March 2017



Eurasian Siskins enjoying free hand-outs and portly Hawfinch in the leaf litter © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays

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

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Tour Leader: Gary Elton

Participants : John Border, Julie Denyer, Paul & Sandy Freedman, Tony Garner, Joan Halfpenny, Simon Roberts, David Whitelaw

Day One

After checking in to our rooms we met up in the bar, then enjoyed a very nice evening meal together, before retiring to bed very much looking forward to the three days birding ahead.

Day Two

With rain forecast at the start of the day we forewent the pre-breakfast walk in favour of an earlier breakfast. We really shouldn't have been surprised though when we woke to a cloudy but dry start to the day! After breakfast we headed for our first destination with some local pig fields proving a useful diversion en-route. Here we started with a small flock of Tree Sparrows, courtesy of John, Shelduck, Oystercatcher, Grey Partridge and a Red Kite. Next stop the hoped-for Goshawks, though the weather was slightly cloudier and windier than we would have wanted. Patience paid off as it brightened and we had a brief view of what appeared to be an adult female and extended views of what appeared to be a young male, this latter bird flying across the road in front of us, causing understandable panic amongst the local birdlife! Lots of Buzzards were also seen, plus a very brief female Sparrowhawk along with Yellowhammer, Lapwing, Skylark and Linnet. We continued on to a section of the forest near Swaffham. Our main target this time was a Great Grey Shrike, though the bird hadn't been reported for several days. Faced with a choice of two favoured areas we walked along the first track drawing a blank, retracing our steps to then try the other. Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers were noted, as was a singing Chiffchaff then a shout from Tony proclaimed a likely candidate sat on the telegraph wires ahead of us and there it was! We all enjoyed views before the bird flew off over a nearby plantation and out of view.

We returned to the minibus, enjoying views of several Woodlarks in a nearby large area clear fell. Lunch followed with several Long-tailed Tits and a Treecreeper watched during the course of it. After lunch we started our journey back to Lynford Arboretum, which was to be our final destination of the day, a brief stop nearby to view feeders in a local garden giving us nice views of Siskin and Redpoll. The weather had now started deteriorating considerably with rain steadily falling and on arrival at the arboretum we donned waterproofs and headed to the hide at nearby Lynford Water. With most of the hide flap clips missing using the flaps and viewing the lake in front of us proved challenging, but we managed, and a scan of the area revealed amongst the commoner ducks, two Great Crested Grebes, two male Goldeneye and a pair of Mandarins. The second stretch of water behind produced another duck species, Gadwall, before we then walked back to the car park, enjoying good views of two Goldcrest in a path side Silver Birch. The rain was still falling as we made our way into the arboretum, but this hadn't hampered bird activity and it wasn't long before we were watching our first Hawfinches along with some rather smart Bramblings. We added several more Hawfinches before the distinct 'chipping call' of a Crossbill was heard, with the birds flying over us and landing in the top of a large conifer. Scope views followed of a family party with the male watched feeding a heavily streaked juvenile, Crossbill being a species that breeds very early in the year. We continued our walk, noting a vocal pair of Nuthatches in a large oak before arriving at a small bridge where seed had been placed. This was attracting local birds and new for the day were Marsh Tit and Reed Bunting. With the light now poor and rain still falling, we decided enough was enough and retraced our steps. We returned past the area we had seen the Bramblings earlier, their numbers now swelled considerably and the noise of calling birds all around us was a memorable finale to the day.

Day Three

A dry and correctly forecast start to the morning saw us returning to the arboretum before breakfast. On arrival we walked a short distance to listen for Firecrest. A singing bird was heard almost immediately and located in the top of a nearby birch. It soon became apparent there were in fact two birds and we enjoyed views of the pair as they moved around and into some nearby pines. We walked into the arboretum to the area we had seen the Hawfinches the night before. It wasn't long before we picked up our first birds in the treetop above us, with it quickly becoming apparent they were visiting the area adjacent to this to feed with Bramblings and Chaffinches in the leaf litter. Some great, prolonged views followed, especially of male birds, with at one point five feeding together. The time flew past as we stood captivated by the birds and we all too early had to return for breakfast.

After breakfast a message on Gary's phone announced some waxwings nearby, ironically en-route to where we were heading for the morning. We were there in ten minutes but after several cruises around the local neighbourhood it was obvious they had flown. We continued to Santon Downham, where we parked by the river and started our walk out along the bank of the Little Ouse. Redwings in a tree by the bridge and a Grey Wagtail started us off, with a pair of vocal Mandarins flying past as we walked along. The bees nest first seen last week

was still active and perhaps the biggest surprise of the morning was an Otter seen well by the majority of the group both in the water and around a large, fallen tree. The search for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker unfortunately proved unsuccessful, a vocal Green the best we could manage. We returned for a loo stop and lunch by means of consolation. A cursory glance over a line of distant conifers revealed a pale-looking large raptor above them, with closer inspection identifying it as an adult Goshawk. After lunch we drove a short way into the forest before disembarking to walk along a series of forest clearings. The wind was still quite strong which meant birding was challenging and the best we could manage was a single male Stonechat and a flyover male Crossbill.

The last stop of the day took us to the RSPB reserve at Lakenheath Fen, which turned out to be slightly more sheltered than we had envisaged and a pleasant end to the day. We walked through the visitor centre and onto the first fenland watchpoint called New Fen. Several Snipe were picked up hidden along the reed edges close to sleeping Teal and Gadwall. Several distant Marsh Harriers were found by John, as they flew over and around the furthest visible reedbeds. Grey Heron and Little Egrets were new additions, but pride of place went to a pair of Garganey first noted by Simon as they appeared from one of the channels that stretched out into the reedbed ahead of us. We continued our walk round, climbing a bank to view a large washland area and noting a selection of commoner wildfowl, plus Oystercatcher, Little Egret and another pair of Stonechat that were actively moving along the reed fringed edge. A female Pintail was noted by John that seemingly had vanished, as we searched in vain for it; obviously we didn't comment or mention it again!!

Day four

A wet start forecast this morning so a lie in, which also allowed for ample time for packing before breakfast and therefore a swift departure afterwards. A revisit to Santon Downham for another stab at Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was our plan, the wind having eased slightly and the rain seemingly holding off. More views of Mandarin, Grey Wagtails, Nuthatch, Siskin and Marsh Tit followed as we walked along. Perseverance paid off when a calling female Lesser Spot appearing briefly on a treetop on the other side of the river. It allowed everyone to see it though views varied from very good to brief, Joan one of the lucky ones, was ecstatic having waited fifty years to see one!!

We retraced our steps then headed on further into Suffolk for a speculative look for Stone-curlews. Arriving at the heath, we met the warden from Lackford Lakes reserve who, it transpired, was watching a Stone-curlew through his telescope! We quickly located the bird and enjoyed nice views, the lack of sun making the image sharp and clear, with heat haze often a problem at this site. During our time watching the bird two more were found, plus a Stonechat and a Woodlark. With the skies now darkening we made tracks to our last destination of the day, Lackford Lakes. After a short coffee break, our walk to the first hide was timed to perfection as the first raindrops started to fall as we walked. A pair of Goldeneye, a fleeting Kingfisher and a vocal Cetti's Warbler were found along the way. We settled in the hide as the first squall of rain came through, plenty of things to look at on the lagoon and scrapes in front of us but no surprises. We walked to the next hide once the rain had eased, locating three Snipe tucked away on the lagoon edge. Time had now beaten us so we returned to the hotel and said our goodbyes before starting our journeys home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded –95)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Several roadside coveys were noted.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Three pairs in total 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 Santon Downham, Lakenheath Fen, and Lackford Lakes.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Seen at Santon Downham, Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Water.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Two near Great Cressingham.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Up to six noted daily.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Noted at Lackford Lakes Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Fifteen at Lakenheath Fen.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Six at Lackford Lakes and around fifty at Lakenheath Fen.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Seen at Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

A female seen briefly by John at Lakenheath Fen.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

A pair seen well at Lakenheath Fen.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Easily seen at Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.

Mandarin *Aix galericulata*

A pair at Lynford Water and Arboretum and seen on both visits along the river at Santon Downham.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Two males at Lynford Water and a pair at Lackford Lakes.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Singles at Lakenheath Fen and Santon Downham.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Recorded at Lakenheath Fen, Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

One at Lakenheath Fen.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

At least four at Lakenheath Fen and one at Lackford Lakes.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Three seen in total.

Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

A large adult female and a young male at a popular roadside site, were followed by distant views of another seemingly adult bird near Santon Downham..

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

At least two distantly at Lakenheath Fen.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Singles Great Cressingham and Cockley Cley Wood.

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 , at Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

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 Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Three at Cavenham Heath.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Heard near Great Cressingham.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Pairs at Great Cressingham, Lakenheath Fen 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 five at Lakenheath Fen.

Common Redshank *Tringa Totanus*

A single bird at Lakenheath Fen.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Noted daily.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Seen on the pig fields at Great Cressingham.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Two adults at Lakenheath Fen and three second calendar year birds at Lackford Lakes.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Noted at Cockley Cley, Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Noted daily.

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.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One seen in flight at Lackford Lakes.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*

After much searching and two visits, one, a female, was seen at Santon Downham.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Several heard, with singles seen at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Seen at Cockley Cley Wood (2) and Santon Downham, with another heard at Cavenham Heath.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

We had to work at it but eventually good views of one at Cockley Cley Woods.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Seen and heard at Santon Downham.

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*

Seen or heard daily with best views had of one coming for food on the bridge pier at Lynford Arboretum.

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 noted at Lackford Lakes.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Good views were had of at least three at Cockley Cley wood, with others seen at Santon Downham and Cavenham Heath.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Heard and seen daily throughout the trip.

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 pre breakfast walk at Lynford Arboretum.

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*

One was seen well at our stop at Cockley Cley Wood.

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.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard daily, with several seen well.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

A pair seen well at Cockley Cley with several others heard.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Common, seen daily

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

A male distantly near Grimes Graves, two pairs at Lakenheath RSPB and one at Cavenham Heath.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

At least four in a roadside hedge at Great Cressingham.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

A pair along the River at Santon Downham.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Noted daily.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted at Cockley Cley, Lakenheath Fen and Cavenham Heath.

Eurasian Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common, Seen daily.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Lots at Lynford Arboretum, great views and some stunning males.

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.

Lesser/Mealy 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*

A pair with at least one heavily streaked juvenile at Lynford Arboretum was a nice surprise. Another over flying male was seen near Grimes Graves.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

At least six seen, with some great views at Lynford Arboretum.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Several at Cockley Cley and at Grimes Graves.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Seen at a variety of suitable sites visited.

Mammals

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Roe Deer *Capreolus Capreolus*

Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Otter *Lutra lutra*

Butterflies

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*