

Norfolk & Suffolk

Nightjars, Brecks & Coast

Mon 29th June – Fri 3rd July 2015



We had some excellent views of extravagant Ruffs in breeding plumage at Titchwell © Gordon Small, wildlifeimagesgs.com

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

Trip Diary

Leader: **Gary Elton**

with Andrew & Betty Baggett, Robert & Pauline Blewitt, Ray Burgess, Dave Johnson, Hilary Lewton and Vaughan Patterson

Day 1

After an enjoyable first evening meal together, we took advantage of the nice weather and made a short drive to a nearby section of woodland in search of Nightjars. On arrival, several Song Thrushes could still be heard singing and we disembarked from the bus and stood expectantly waiting. A calling Cuckoo was a surprise, which was eventually seen perched on some dead branches on a distant tree, and a Woodcock flew past in the half-light, unfortunately only poorly seen. After a short wait the first Nightjar started churring. We stood listening and, with the bird appearing reluctant to move, we walked down the edge of the ride closer to it. As we did so, we disturbed a second bird from the woodland edge, which quickly flew out of view, and as we approached the first churring bird, it stopped. Fortunately, a few seconds later it flew over and around us uttering its strange 'kerwick' flight call and wing clapping in display before disappearing again into the surrounding conifer woodland.

Day Two

A slightly earlier start this morning saw us foregoing the traditional pre-breakfast walk and making our way directly after breakfast to our destination for the morning, the RSPB reserve at Lakenheath Fen. One reason for the earlier start was to allow us to start the day with something a little different: Catherine, Lakenheath's resident 'moth-er', having agreed not to open the previous evening's moth trap until we arrived. An interesting and enjoyable 45 minutes followed with moths such as Burnished Brass, Setaceous Hebrew Character and Angle Shades present in the trap, moths that were as impressive to look at as they sounded! Catherine had also very kindly bought several hawkmoths in as well from her trap at home for us to have a look at.

Round the reserve, birds seen over the next few hours included a Great Spotted Woodpecker on the feeders by the visitor centre, a Kingfisher - was seen on several occasions from the first seated watchpoint, and several views of Bitterns, which unfortunately did their best to elude several members of the group! Marsh Harriers were easily seen, with one pair watched doing an aerial food pass. Non-avian highlights included some rather smart Four-spotted Chasers and Large Red-eyed Damselflies.

After lunch in the picnic area near the car park we moved onto our next destination of the day, Cavenham Heath. On arrival Dave, quickly spotted a male Stonechat and soon after that we were enjoying 'scope views of a pair of Stone Curlews, our main target species at the site. Other birds seen here included Red-legged Partridge, Green Woodpecker and Linnet and a short walk to the nearby quarry produced a pair of Red-crested Pochards.

Our final destination today was Lackford Lakes, a Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve, with our journey there disturbing a Red Kite that was feeding on some road kill. Unfortunately, time was now short so a welcome cup of tea and comfort break was followed by a short walk to the nearest hides. Here the flooded gravel pits produced a nice selection of the commoner hoped-for species, plus a Little Egret and several Egyptian Geese.

Day Three

A slightly earlier start today with the majority of the group opting for a pre-breakfast walk around the nearby arboretum at Lynford. Today was predicted as being hot - it actually turned out to be the hottest day of the year and hottest July day on record! The heat was already building which appeared to have dulled the birds' activity even at this time of day. Nevertheless, we enjoyed a very pleasant walk before returning back to the hotel for breakfast.

Local birding was very much the theme for today with our first stop being just a short drive from the hotel, in a large woodland clearing near Santon Downham. As we walked along the forest track several Ringlets and skippers were seen, the latter seemingly reluctant to settle for any length of time; a Wood Lark sang briefly and several Sky Larks were both seen and heard. A distant flock of Wood Pigeons appearing to fly rapidly up from the more distant woodland edge caught our attention and closer inspection revealed a large Sparrowhawk shaped bird in pursuit. The accipiter rose above the woodland canopy and proceeded to circle round – “Goshawk!” was the cry, as even at that distance all the salient features could be seen. The bird continued to circle making the occasional lazy wing flap, enabling everyone to see it in the telescopes before it drifted off from view.

We continued our walk, adding a pair of Stonechat, Yellowhammer, Whitethroat and Linnet to our day list, before luck struck again with presumably the same Goshawk reappearing directly over our heads pursued by two Carrion Crows, giving us fantastic views. Pleased with our success, we moved onto a second local site where a confiding Tree Pipit gave us great looks whilst we took the opportunity to have a coffee break. A few more local stops followed, after which we sat and had lunch at the Santon Downham Church. The heat now was becoming somewhat overbearing and half the group had now opted to return back to the hotel. Lynford Arboretum seemed the most obvious choice to finish the day with the trees giving us at least some shade. The woodland was quiet but a fly-over Hobby was a nice addition for us.

We returned to the hotel and after our evening meal we made another sortie out for Nightjars, trying another local site where again at least one Nightjar was heard and also briefly seen.

Day Four

Today started with a local pre-breakfast walk. Two singing Tree Pipits were a nice start to the day along with several Yellowhammers and a Garden Warbler. The highlight here though was a young Grass Snake, no more than six inches long, that slid across the path in front of us.

Our destination today was the coast so after breakfast we started our journey northwards. We made several stops en route, first adding Grey Partridge to our list, then a Little Owl, though this latter bird unfortunately disappeared from view as we disembarked from the minibus to try and get better views of it! Titchwell RSPB reserve was our ultimate destination and after lunch near the visitor centre we made our way out on to the reserve. A quick chat with one of the volunteers revealed the presence of several Red-veined Darters, a species of dragonfly normally found in Southern Europe. We made our way out to the area they were last seen, stopping to view the area of water called Patsy's Pool. At least nine Red-crested Pochards and a Green Sandpiper were immediately obvious, though the best birds here were a small flock of ten young Bearded Tits that perched out in the open on the reed-bed edge allowing us great views.

The Red-veined Darters were located soon after, further along the path with at least three seen. We then continued around the reserve, walking along the main path and visiting both the hides and the sea. The birds, especially the waders, were numerous on the fresh marsh with 100s of Avocet and Black-tailed Godwits with smaller numbers of smart breeding-plumaged Ruffs and Spotted Redshanks. Other birds seen in smaller numbers included Common Sandpiper, Little Ringed Plover, Little and Mediterranean Gulls plus a small group of eight Spoonbills.

After returning to the hotel, dinner again followed after which a final trip was made out for Nightjar. We returned back to the previous night's site but decided to only walk a couple of hundreds yards into the edge of the first clearing rather than continue on as we had done the night before. This proved a good move as, just as the light was fading, a largish brown bird dropping into the grass on the edge of the clearing caught our eye. The bird shortly reappeared, a Long-eared Owl! It continued to fly round the edge of the clearing before disappearing back into the trees, a real bonus and not something we were expecting. Shortly after the Nightjars started churring, with us enjoying some nice flight views and one bird also sitting on the path in front of us for a short while.

Day Five

With this morning our last together we made a relaxed start before departing for our first destination of the day, Mayday Farm. Unfortunately, on arrival we were met with a plethora of closed signs and tape over the forest tracks, not a person or machine in site (unsurprisingly), but seemingly closed to us. Unperturbed, we reverted to plan B and headed onto the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at East Wretham. With the sun out, but the temperature having dropped a degree or two, this proved to be the perfect venue and we enjoyed a pleasant couple of hours walking around the well-marked trail through the site. Birds seen included our first Mistle Thrushes, Green Woodpecker and, best of the bunch, a Spotted Flycatcher an increasingly difficult bird to find these days.

Lunch was taken at St Helen's picnic area which, being close to the river, had attracted a fair number of people, though a walk to the river edge by Robert and Pauline produced our only Grey Wagtail of the trip. We then returned to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes and then all started our journeys home.

Gary Elton

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded – 119)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

A single at Cavenham Heath was followed by lots near Cockley Cley.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

One recorded in a field at Great Cressingham.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily in small numbers.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Noted at all wetland sites visited.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

As above, noted at all wetland sites visited.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Again seen daily at all wetland sites, which include several family parties.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Three at Lackford lakes, and one plus offspring at East Wretham.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Small numbers were noted at Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen daily in small numbers.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Ten birds were noted at Titchwell.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Small numbers were noted at Lakenheath and Lackford Lakes, with c30 at Titchwell RSPB.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Recorded at Titchwell and Lackford Lakes.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Noted at all wetland sites visited during the trip.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A pair at Cavenham Quarry and at least 13 at Titchwell.

Common Scoter

A flock of around 500 birds could be seen distantly offshore at Titchwell.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Seen daily at various wetland sites.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen at Lakenheath Fen, Cavenham Quarry, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Water.

Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Seen in flight at Lakenheath with some of the group obtaining better views than others !

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Noted at Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

Great Egret

An Egret was seen by Dave in flight over the marsh between Thornham and Titchwell which he thought was almost certainly this species. The terrain meant the bird quickly disappeared on landing and could not be re-located.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Several were noted at Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Eight were seen on the Freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, primarily over the roadside verges.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Singles were seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lynford Water, and East Wretham.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

A bird was disturbed from a roadside carcass on the way to Lackford Lakes.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Several were seen at Lakenheath Fen and Titchwell.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Surprisingly scarce with only one seen, as we left the hotel on day five.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

An eruption of pigeons signalled the presence of this species with the bird, a male rising above the canopy and soaring around albeit distantly. As we continued our walk we were fortunate to see presumably the same bird fly directly over us being harassed by two Carrion Crows.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

An increasingly common sight in Norfolk with birds seen daily.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common, noted at all wetland sites.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicanus*

Two were seen well at Cavenham Heath.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Noted at South Creake, Titchwell and East Wretham.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Numerous at Titchwell, presumably signalling a good breeding season locally.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded at various sites and roadside fields during the trip.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Five were seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

A roding bird seen poorly on our first night, which was surprisingly the only one seen.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

One at Lackford Lakes appeared briefly in front of Bill's hide.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

100 or so birds were present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Noted in small numbers on the beach at Titchwell.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Seen in small numbers at Titchwell.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Six early returning breeding-plumaged birds were at Titchwell.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Easily seen at Titchwell.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Two on the freshmarsh and one on Patsy's pool at Titchwell.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

One was on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Five were seen in flight over the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Easily seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, where lots of smart early returning breeding-plumaged birds were present.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Seen most days.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*

A rather smart pair of adult birds were at Titchwell on the freshmarsh.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Two 1st summer birds were present on the freshmarsh islands at Titchwell RSPB

Common Gull *Larus canus*

One noted at the pig fields near Cockley Cley.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Several immature birds were noted on the beach at Titchwell RSPB.

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Noted in small numbers on our day at the coast and several inland sites.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Single over flying birds were noted near the hotel.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Noted at Lakenheath Fen and Titchwell.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Noted flying offshore from the beach at Titchwell.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Noted daily

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Noted daily in small numbers

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Noted daily and easily seen.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Heard daily, with several seen.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

One at a breeding site near the coast, unfortunately flew into cover and out of view as we disembarked from the bus to get better views of it.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Very much the biggest surprise of the trip, as one flew into view for the lucky few who had ventured out in search of Nightjars on the last evening.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Two sites were visited on three occasions, with several birds seen primarily in flight but also perched on the ground. Activity and numbers compared to previous years seemed low.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Seen well both in flight and perched at Lakenheath Fen, with another seen in flight from the road bridge at Santon Downham.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

A juvenile bird was seen well on the visitor centre bird feeder at Lakenheath.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Seen at Cavenham Heath and East Wretham.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Singles were seen at various sites.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Common and easily seen.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Noted daily in good numbers.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Seen daily.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Common in the forest, with birds heard and seen regularly.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily at various sites

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Seen daily at various sites, mainly around suburban areas.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Recorded daily, with several family parties were seen.

Eurasian Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily.

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

A briefly heard singing bird on day three was the only one recorded.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard at Lakenheath Fen, Titchwell and Lackford Lakes reserves.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Heard and seen at several local sites.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Heard daily at various sites, with several seen.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Seen and heard as expected at Lakenheath Fen and Titchwell.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

As above, seen and heard at both Lakenheath Fen and Titchwell reserves, with nice views had of several at Lackford Lakes..

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen and heard daily at various suitable sites

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Heard at Cavenham Heath and several local sites near our base at Munford.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Common and easily seen and heard at suitable sites.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

A small flock of ten juvenile birds at Titchwell, were seen well by everybody, with several more seen later in the afternoon.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Several were heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum, with others heard in other areas of the forest.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Heard or seen daily at various sites during the trip.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Several were seen on our visits to Lynford Arboretum and East Wretham.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common, noted daily.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard daily, with several seen.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

At least two were seen at East Wretham.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Noted daily and easily seen at Titchwell, with particularly tame birds around the car park there.

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

A male at Cavenham Heath was followed by a pair in a woodland clearing on day three.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

One at East Wretham was seen well by several members of the group.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas.

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Several were seen and heard in amongst the above species on the edge of a Maize crop near Great Cressingham.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One was seen by Robert and Pauline at the river edge at our last lunch stop at St Helen's picnic area.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Noted daily, with birds easily seen on the fresh marsh at Titchwell.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted at Cavenham Heath and Titchwell.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Singing birds were seen well on our third and fourth day in two local forest clearings

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily.

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Seen daily.

Siskin *Spinus spinus*.

Easily seen around the hotel, with others noted at Lynford Arboretum.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily at various sites.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Seen in small numbers daily.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Single birds were noted at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

Two were seen well on wires near Choseley Drying barns on our way to the coast on day four.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Seen throughout the trip at various sites.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Easily seen and heard at all suitable sites visited.

MAMMALS

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Munjac Deer *Muntiacus reevesi*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Common Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*

BUTTERFLIES (and moth)

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Large Skipper *Ochlodes venata*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Comma *Polytonia c-album*

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Small/Essex Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris/lineola*

Small copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Hummingbird Hawkmoth *Macroglossum stellatarum*

DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES

Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*

Hairy Dragonfly *Brachyton pratense*

Brown Hawker *Aeshna grandis*

Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella*

Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*

Large Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*