

Norfolk & Suffolk

Goshawks & Hawfinches

Fri 6th-Mon 9th April 2018



Mandarin Ducks are now an established part of the Breckland scene © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays

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

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Daily Diary

Day One

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

Day Two

With a promising weather forecast ahead for the weekend, we started our trip with the somewhat customary pre-breakfast visit to Lynford Arboretum, a pair of Long-tailed Tits entertaining the group outside the hotel beforehand. At Lunford, we walked down to the small bridge and paddocks at the southern end. A nice selection of birds was seen, which included singing Marsh and Coal Tits, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Redwing (a flock of eight) and several Siskins. On arriving at the paddocks, we searched for our main target species, Hawfinch. Almost immediately, two birds flew over, seemingly out from the top of Hornbeams in the centre of the paddock but away from us. On a positive note, at least we had seen them! Undaunted, we carried on searching, a strategy that paid off as a female was found feeding under one of the trees. Scope views followed and we started the walk back to the minibus pleased with our success. The morning wasn't over yet though, as a brief snatch of song revealed a Firecrest in some path-side trees. The bird was fortunately quite active and proceeded to give everyone nice views as it flitted through the treetops.

Our first stop after breakfast was at some pig fields near the hotel - proper birding some would say! A Red Kite *en route* was a good omen and the pig fields proved equally productive, with our hoped for target here, Stone-curlew, found almost immediately, with a pair stood motionless in an old maize strip. Red-legged Partridge, Skylark, Common Buzzard, Oystercatcher and Shelduck were noted, Ken found a third Stone-curlew and at least two pairs of Tree Sparrows were in the nearby hedgerow. At our next stop, a flock of finches attracted our attention, again feeding in a flattened maize strip. They transpired to be mainly Chaffinch, but Goldfinch, Linnet and several hoped-for Bramblings were found amongst them. With our breakfast coffee taking its toll we headed on to Swafham for a 'convenience' stop before returning on a different route and incorporating a brief woodland stop. A smart male yellowhammer greeted us as we disembarked, followed by a Woodlark.

Our lunch stop was at a now well-known roadside stop, hoping for Goshawk. Again our luck continued and over the next hour we were treated to some great, albeit at times distant, views of at least two birds. Common Buzzards were particularly numerous here as well and another Red Kite was also seen. The remaining few hours of the day were spent back at the arboretum with a walk alongside Lynford water, a result of redundant gravel pit workings. A selection of the commoner ducks greeted us, with our first Treecreeper and a flock of sixteen Fieldfares also seen. The path took us along a small area of heathy habitat, where several Skylarks and a Meadow Pipit posed nicely for us. Three woodlarks weren't quite so obliging, seen well in flight but quickly disappearing from view. We continued to where one of the Woodlarks had dropped down. Arriving at the large area of replanted plantation, 'needle in a haystack' was the initial thought that sprang to mind! But again, perseverance paid off, as the bird was eventually found and we enjoyed good scope views of it. We returned to the paddocks where we had started our day, seeing several Nuthatches around the small bridge nearby. The strategy of searching under the base of the large hornbeams again paid off, as another Hawfinch, this time a smart male, was quickly found and viewed through the scopes. We returned to the bus, adding another Firecrest and a Goldcrest to our sightings before heading for the hotel.

Day Three

Unsurprisingly it now seems the somewhat favourable forecast we had seen for the weekend had mysteriously disappeared from our weather apps, replaced with two days of rain! We woke to rain as forecast and a somewhat depleted group assembled for a pre-breakfast trip, though to be fair to the ones that remained behind, the previous evening's instruction was pre-breakfast was off as it would be raining! We drove to a nearby forest clearing and, as luck had it, the rain eased and stopped. The walk was a pleasant start to the day, with an almost spring-like feel, as at least four singing Willow Warblers were seen and heard. Other birds included several Yellowhammers, Goldcrests, Coal Tits and a brief pair of Bullfinches. Our morning's destination was Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve and, as always, we were made to feel welcome on our arrival. A brief stop by some roadside pools on the way in had started the day well with both Cetti's and Sedge Warbler heard and our first Swallows noted flying past, in the now murky conditions. We walked a circular route around the reserve, returning along

the river. With conditions to some degree against us, the birding was on the slow side, a booming but unseen Bittern, squealing Water Rails and a flying Great Egret arguably the highlights. Other birds seen included four Sand Martins, several more Swallows, at least two Green Woodpeckers, seven Little Egrets, Redshanks, Teal and Wigeon. Lunch in the car park produced a small flock of Bramblings and a fly over Sparrowhawk.

Cavenham Heath was our next stop, an extensive expanse of heathland managed by Natural England with access restricted to roadside viewing at this time of year. The reason for this is to protect the small breeding population of Stone-curlews at the site and we drove the track, finding at least three birds hunkered down amongst the heather. A bonus here was a male Grey Partridge, seen well as it was relatively close. Our last stop for the day was the Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Lackford Lakes where again we were made to feel very welcome. A Lesser Redpoll on the feeders outside the reserve centre started us off and we followed the path round the reserve, visiting the hides that overlook the Sailing Lake and scrapes, then took the path through the woodland area to view the edge of the line of pits there. Sightings included a brief male Pochard, which was the only one of the trip, two fly-over, calling Curlews, several vocal Blackcaps, a pair of Bullfinches and a Grey wagtail, which was somewhat of a surprise on a strip of water that had flooded the path.

Day four

Although rain was forecast again for early morning, we decided to throw caution to the wind and set off on a repeat visit to yesterday's pre-breakfast site for those that had missed out. This proved a good move as we stayed dry and largely repeated yesterday's birds with the whole group now having managed views of Willow Warbler. As this was our last day, bags were packed and placed in the vehicles and after breakfast we headed off to the river at Santon Downham. The area is a good spot for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and we set off along the path to search for them. Unfortunately, although a newly laid path along the first 400 yards made going very easy, when this ended, we faced an impassable flood. Disappointed, we retraced our steps, continuing over the bridge to walk the path on the other side. The walk itself was very pleasant and productive and a fallen tree across the path gave ample opportunity to show how lithe and adventurous a Limosa group can be! Birds seen included at least four pairs of Mandarin Ducks with some nice close views, Lesser Redpoll and Siskin together at the water's edge, a pair of Marsh Tits around a potential nest hole, Brambling, Redwing, Green Woodpecker and a singing Woodlark. A Kingfisher, seen by the majority of the group in Gary's absence, is always a nice addition to any trip.

A tea and coffee stop at a nearby churchyard produced another Nuthatch, after which we drove to a forest track to walk out to a clearing. Once again, we had a pleasant walk with a confiding perched Woodlark the highlight, plus several more Yellowhammers that showed well. With time now slipping away we made a very short return visit to Lynford Arboretum, where the newly-replenished feeders gave us last views of the commoner tit species plus Chaffinch, Nuthatch and Treecreeper. The trip had now come to an end and Jim's comment that 'he didn't want to go home' summed up how good a trip we'd all had! And, as promised, Gary has put in writing his statement that the group was the best he'd ever had! (Though I distinctly feel most people thought this wasn't the first time he'd made that statement out loud to a group!)

On returning to the hotel we said our goodbyes and started our individual journeys home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded- 96)

Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>	Seen at Lynford Lake and Water and Lackford Lakes.
Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i>	Seen daily with small numbers at Great Cressingham, Lynford Water, Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>	Seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Santon Downham.
Egyptian Goose <i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>	A pair at Great Cressingham and two roadside birds near Cavenham Heath
Common Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Noted in the Pig fields at Great Cressingham and <i>en route</i> to Lackford Lakes and at Lakenheath Fen.
Mandarin Duck <i>Aix galericulata</i>	At least four pairs along the river at Santon Downham and a fly over presumed pair on our first pre-breakfast walk.
Northern Shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i>	Four at Lackford Lakes and around forty at Lakenheath Fen.
Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i>	Noted daily at Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen.
Eurasian Wigeon <i>Mareca penelope</i>	Around twenty at Lakenheath Fen.
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Common, seen daily.
Eurasian Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	Noted at Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

- Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*** . A male briefly at Lackford Lakes.
- Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*** Easily seen at Lynford Water, Lakenheath Fen, and Lackford Lakes.
- Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*** Roadside birds were noted daily.
- Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*** A male at Cavenham Heath was a nice surprise. A pair were seen shortly after as well but quickly disappeared from view.
- Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*** Noted daily.
- Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*** One at Lynford water and two pairs at Lakenheath Fen.
- Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*** A pair at Lynford Water and others at Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.
- Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*** One was heard booming at Lakenheath Fen.
- Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*** Three at Lakenheath Fen and a single at Lackford Lakes.
- Great Egret *Ardea alba*** One was seen briefly at Lakenheath Fen before flying off along the river.
- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*** At least eight at Lakenheath Fen.
- Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*** . Noted at Lynford Lakes, Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*** One over the car park at Lakenheath Fen.
- Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*** Good, albeit distant views of at least two individuals during our lunch break on day on day two.
- Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*** At least three at Lakenheath Fen
- Red Kite *Milvus milvus*** Two seen during the trip.
- Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*** Numbers easily into double figures at our roadside stop on day two and noted daily from then on.
- Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*** Heard 'squealing' at Lakenheath Fen.
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*** Noted daily in all suitable habitat.
- Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*** Noted at all Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen.
- Eurasian Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*** Three on the pig fields on our first morning and at least three at Cavenham Heath.
- Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*** Noted throughout the trip in small numbers.
- Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*** Noted daily.
- Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*** Two calling birds over Lackford Lakes
- Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*** Six at Lakenheath Fen.
- Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*** Easily seen at Lakenheath Fen.
- Common Gull *Larus canus*** Noted at Lakenheath Fen.
- Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*** Noted daily.
- European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*** A 4cy bird at Lakenheath Fen was the only one seen well.
- Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*** Recorded daily.
- Stock Dove *Columba oenas*** Seen well at numerous sites.
- Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*** Noted daily and easily seen.
- Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*** Easily seen around suburban areas.
- Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*** .A welcome addition to our last day at Santon Downham.
- Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*** Heard or seen daily.
- European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*** Two birds seen at Lakenheath Fen and Santon Downham.
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*** Noted daily at various sites.
- Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*** Seen and heard daily.
- Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*** Recorded daily.
- Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*** Common and easily seen.
- Rook *Corvus frugilegus*** Noted daily at various sites.
- Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*** Noted daily in small numbers.
- Coal Tit *Periparus ater*** Easily seen and constantly heard in suitable woodland habitat.
- Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*** Seen daily with a particularly confiding pair at Santon Downham.
- Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*** Recorded daily
- Great Tit *Parus major*** Recorded daily
- Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*** Recorded daily.
- Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*** Heard and seen daily.
- Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*** At least four singing birds on our last two pre breakfast walks.
- Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*** Several were seen well at Lackford Lakes.
- Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*** At least four singing birds at Lakenheath Fen.
- Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*** Four over the last watchpoint at Lakenheath Fen.
- Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*** Around ten seen at Lakenheath Fen
- Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*** Heard daily with nice views had of a pair at Lynford Water.
- Woodlark *Lullula arborea*** One briefly in Swafham Forest was followed by a three at Lynford Water on our first full day. On our last day we had a singing bird at Santon Downham and confiding perched bird later on our walk.

Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>	Heard at Lakenheath Fen and seen and heard at Lackford Lakes.
Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>	Seen well at Lynford Arboretum and our second pre-breakfast walk.
Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	Two obliging birds were seen on our first day at Lynford Arboretum.
Eurasian Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Seen and heard daily.
Eurasian Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>	Seen well at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham.
Eurasian Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Seen well at Lynford Water and Arboretum.
Common Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Noted daily, primarily in and around the pigs fields where large numbers were present and around the villages.
Eurasian Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>	Seen and heard daily.
Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Eight at Lynford Arboretum and six at Santon Downham.
Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>	A flock of sixteen flew over us at Lynford Water.
Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Heard and seen daily.
Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Seen and heard daily.
European Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Common, seen daily
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.
Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>	Two pairs in a roadside hedgerow were a nice addition.
Duncock <i>Prunella modularis</i>	Recorded daily.
Grey Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	One at Lackford Lakes and two pairs at Santon Downham.
Pied Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	Noted daily.
Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Seen well at Lynford Water and Cavenham Heath.
Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Two seen at Lakenheath Fen.
Common Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Common, Seen daily.
Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	At least ten in a mixed finch flock on our first day and nine in the car park at lunch at Lakenheath Fen.
Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	A female and then a male showed well for under Hornbeams at Lynford Arboretum, with two also seen in flight.
Eurasian Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	A pair on our second prebreakfast walk and another pair at Lackford Lakes.
European Greenfinch <i>Chloris chloris</i>	Seen daily, particularly easy to see and hear around the hotel.
Common Linnet <i>Linaria cannabina</i>	Recorded daily in small numbers.
Lesser Redpoll <i>Acanthis cabaeret</i>	One on the feeders at Lackford Lakes and another by the river at Santon Downham.
European Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Seen daily at various sites.
Eurasian Siskin <i>Spinus spinus</i> .	Seen well, often around the hotel also seen at Lynford Arboretum, Lackford Lakes and Santon Downham.
Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Easily seen and noted daily.
Common Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Santon Downham.

Butterflies

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Mammals

Reeves's Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Western Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*