

Norfolk & Suffolk Nightjars, Brecks & Coast

Mon 27 June-Fri 1 July 2016



While the weather could have been a little more helpful at times, our East Anglian break enjoyed some great birds, including this adult Mediterranean Gull and male Redstart © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays

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

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Tour Leader: Gary Elton

Participants : Claire Benians, Marylee Bomboy & John Van de Graaff, Bill Branford, Phil Dronfield, Stefan Hoerandl & Ray Woolley

Day One

After a very enjoyable evening meal, the majority of us boarded the minibus and headed off to a nearby woodland clearing in search of Nightjars. Our timing, it transpired, was 'spot on' and as the last of the evening songsters, Robin and Song Thrush, started to fall silent the first of our target species could be heard in the distance, starting to churr. As we stood listening, the explosive contact call of a Woodcock was heard with the bird flying directly across in front of us. This was to be the first of a steady stream of these birds we were to see during the next 45 minutes with some great views had as birds flew over at times directly above us. During our visit, Nightjars also put on a fantastic show with around six churring birds heard and both male and females seen well. These were watched in display flight, wing clapping and at times perched for several minutes on their tree branch song posts.

Day Two

After breakfast, we departed for our first full day's birding, which was to start a short distance away in an area of typical Breckland Woodland. We parked and walked along a forest track towards a large clearing. A distant Woodlark could be heard singing and our first butterflies, Large skipper and Ringlet, were noted flitting amongst the undergrowth in the early morning sun. As we approached the clearing, several Common Whitethroats and Yellowhammers were noted singing and feeding young along the overgrown cut stumps that dissected the area. As we continued on along the path, a Woodlark flew up ahead of us followed by a second, one of which landed and perched briefly in view for us. A male Stonechat appeared next and, as we came to the end of the clearing, we speculatively took a small path off to the left. We climbed a small stile and a short walk took us to a bush-lined hollow where a bird could be heard calling incessantly. Our thoughts were of Redstart and sure enough after a few minutes' searching a stunning male was found, followed by the first of what transpired to be at least two juveniles. The male repeatedly appeared and was watched feeding the juveniles and some great looks followed. We returned to the main path to continue our walk, stopping to listen and glimpse a singing Goldcrest in the top of a tall scots pine. A singing Tree Pipit was then heard a short distance further on. Good views followed as the bird was watched in display flight, returning back to land on the upper branches of a tall Silver Birch.

We returned back to the minibus, making a short drive to make use of some nearby facilities. A bonus here was a Firecrest heard singing as we disembarked and eventually showing well for the majority of the group. Our lunch destination, Cavenham Heath, was now beckoning so we headed straight there, driving along the bumpy entrance track in search of our hoped-for target species, Stone-curlew. The season's mixture of rain and sun meant viewing was difficult with the grass in places very long. Several Stock Doves showed well and a seemingly suitable viewing spot saw us stop and scan the area, then Bingo! Not one but three birds tucked down in the grass. Lunch followed with us watching the birds, which on occasion showed well walking around and calling. Other birds noted during our stay included Woodlark, Red Kite and Linnet.

Lackford Lakes was to be our final destination of the day, where we enjoyed a walk around the lakes and hides closest to the visitor centre. A good selection of commoner species was seen, adding to our day list considerably with the most notable species being Garden Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, Green Sandpiper and Kingfisher. This latter bird, a juvenile, was particularly well received and we were treated to fantastic views as it periodically fished and returned to its favourite perch.

Day Three

A pre-breakfast walk started the day with a short drive taking us to nearby Lynford Arboretum. Always a nice way to start the day, and species recorded included two singing Firecrests, a showy male Goldcrest, a pair of Garden Warblers carrying food and a Nuthatch. Our main destination today was the North Norfolk coast with a short detour en route to again view several more Stone-curlews. We arrived on the coast late morning, timing our arrival perfectly to coincide with the predicted rain! Our first stop at Holme was decidedly brief as a chat with some local birders revealed that our hoped-for target species, a vagrant Great Knot, had left the beach and returned back to the nearby RSPB

reserve at Titchwell. With Great Knot being such a rare bird in the UK, it was felt that 'nailing' this was a priority so we drove on to Titchwell. Weather conditions were poor to say the least but we wrapped up and walked out to the hides, stopping at the first of these. The Great Knot it appeared was unfortunately hidden from view in the large flock of several thousand Red Knot on the freshmarsh in front of us. We spent the next 15 minutes running through the selection of other birds on show, which included Avocets, both species of godwit, Spotted Redshank and Dunlin before moving on to the Parinder Hide.

On arrival at the Parinder hide we quickly took up position adjacent to the hide under a covered viewpoint and started scanning the large knot flock. At this point a very helpful lady offered to put the scope on the bird for us as she had just been watching it. This she did, which enabled us all to get a variety of views of the bird though the majority were rather poor as the bird was tucked in at the back of the flock. We decided to return to the car park for lunch and return back to the freshmarsh for hopefully better views of the Great Knot and to spend time looking through the rest of the birds there. Over lunch the weather deteriorated even more which resulted in some of the group taking (some would say) the sensible option of spending the next couple of hours in the café and shop. The rest of us returned to the reserve to find unfortunately that the Great Knot and the majority of Red Knot had departed. There was still plenty to see though and we spent an enjoyable couple of hours working through the birds on show. More notable species included Spoonbill, Ruff, Marsh Harrier, Little Gull, Mediterranean Gull (a smart adult) and Bearded Tit.

Day Four

Pre breakfast this morning took us to a local forest clearing where we enjoyed good views of another Tree Pipit, several Yellowhammers and heard and glimpsed several Willow Warblers. A brief Great Spotted Woodpecker appeared flying over the track in front of us and a Marsh Tit at the end of our walk was to transpire to be the first of at least five today. After breakfast we headed off to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at East Wretham. Here we enjoyed a leisurely walk, first out across the large area of grassland heath, then stopping at the hide to view the large mere, taking a circular route back through the ancient woodland. Again, noteworthy birds included a Spotted Flycatcher, Green Woodpecker, Treecreeper and Marsh Tit, with a selection of expected Wildfowl on the mere.

Lunch was taken back in the main part of the forest close to Santon Downham and was followed by a walk along the river there. Standing on the road bridge, a singing Firecrest could be heard and a smart male Grey Wagtail was watched flycatching from a pile of dead branches in the centre of the river, eventually catching a male Banded Demoiselle. A walk along the river was cut short by the high water level with our chosen route completely flooded, so a quick about turn took us back over the road to walk the other direction along the river. Clouds of Banded Demoiselles above the reed-fringed bank accompanied us along the way and at least one Large Red Damselfly was seen. From a bird perspective things were quiet with us having to wait until the end of the walk for views of three more Grey Wagtails on and around the footbridge spanning the river.

Our final destination today was a return visit to the arboretum. Largely due to the time of day, things were rather quiet though the sun was out and we all enjoyed a pleasant couple of hours exploring the area. The open expanses of water there held, interestingly, several Greylag/Canada Goose hybrids, a subject we had discussed the day before. The best sighting in the arboretum though was a Grass snake spotted by Ray as it slithered through the grass. The snake was well aware of our presence as we encircled it, finally passing us and heading off into the longer grass. With us finally achieving a second dry evening, we set off again in search of Nightjars revisiting the site we had been at, at the beginning of the week. Whilst Nightjars and Woodcock were seen and heard, the former especially were not as active as the previous night. It was felt possibly this was due to the rock concert taking place several miles down the road, with most of our thoughts directed at the people living anywhere near it, they certainly wouldn't be having an early night!

Day Five

After breakfast, we headed off to our final destination of the trip, the RSPB reserve at Lakenheath Fen. A stop en route for a hoped for Little Owl drew a blank, but on the plus side a Turtle Dove feeding in a field was a real bonus and a new bird for the year for most of the group. Arriving at the reserve we were welcomed by Emma who had by prior arrangement agreed to run a moth trap for us. On opening the trap we were met with a small selection of moths, which included Dark Arches, The Flame and Large Yellow Underwing. A walk through the reserve followed and from the two watchpoints we

gained nice views of Marsh Harriers and Reed Warbler, with Sedge Warbler and Bearded Tit also seen. We returned back along the main path encountering our first surprise, a Great Egret that decided to take flight from the reed-fringed dyke just as we walked past. Our second surprise was a hoped-for Bittern as we revisited the first watchpoint, taking off and flying across in front of us. Lunch followed, after which we returned back to our hotel at Lynford where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded – 115)

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Noted at all wetland sites visited.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

As above, noted at the majority of wetland sites visited.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

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

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Two at Lackford lakes, and en route on 29th.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Four at Lackford Lakes and at least 50 at Titchwell.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Noted at Lackford Lakes, Titchwell and East Wretham.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Noted at Lackford lakes and Titchwell.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Noted at Lackford Lakes, Titchwell , East Wretham

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Three at Titchwell and c10 at East Wretham.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Around 15 at Titchwell.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Noted at all wetland sites visited during the trip.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Several en route to the coast and heard at Cavenham Heath.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily in small numbers.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Seen daily at various wetland sites.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen at Lackford lakes, Titchwell and Lakenheath Fen.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Three in flight at Titchwell.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Seen well in flight at Lakenheath Fen.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Three at Lackford Lakes, two over the hotel and one at Lakenheath Fen.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

One seen well in flight at Lakenheath Fen

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Noted at Lackford Lakes, Titchwell and Lakenheath Fen.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Eight were seen on the Freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lynford Water, Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Singles at Grimes Graves and Lackford Lakes.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Several were seen at Lakenheath Fen and at and near Titchwell.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Singles at Cavenham Heath, Great Cressingham, Fakenham and East Wretham.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

An increasingly common sight in Norfolk with birds seen daily.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common, noted at all wetland sites.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Three at Cavenham Heath and three more the following day en route to the coast.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Noted at Lackford Lakes, Titchwell and East Wretham.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Numerous and easily seen at Titchwell

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded at various sites and roadside fields during the trip.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Roding birds were seen well on both our evening sorties.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Easily seen on the fresh marsh at Titchwell.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Noted in small numbers on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Two seen at Titchwell.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Two early returning partial breeding plumaged birds were at Titchwell.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Two at Lackford Lakes and easily seen at Titchwell.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

One at Lackford Lakes.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

At least four on the Freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Several thousand were on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, some still largely in breeding plumage.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*

Certainly the rarest bird we saw, the fifth national record, though views could have been better!

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Three on the Fresh marsh at Titchwell, which were still in a degree of breeding plumage.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Seen daily.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

A 1st summer bird was present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus*

A smart showy adult poised nicely for us at Titchwell.

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Noted in small numbers.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Noted daily in small numbers.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Four on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Noted daily at suitable sites.

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.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

A single near Lakenheath Fen on our last day.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

At least three on our first local mornings birding, including a bubbling female.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

A calling bird on our second nightjar evening.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Seen well on our first and last evenings, with the best and most views had on the first.

Swift *Apus apus*

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Seen very well perched at Lackford lakes, with others noted at Lynford Lakes, Lakenheath Fen and strangely one seen by Bill flying through the grounds of the hotel at 05.30 one morning!

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Only one seen on our second pre breakfast walk, with another heard on our first.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Seen at Cavenham Heath and Lynford, heard and seen by several of the group at East Wretham.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, at a variety of sites.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Singles noted daily.

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.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Five at four sites, all on the 30th.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

What appeared to be a juvenile was seen at the base of reed stems on the edge of the freshmarsh at Titchwell, with all other views being flight-onlys views at both Titchwell and Lakenheath Fen.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

A pair seen well in the forest on our first morning, were followed by a brief singing bird at Cavenham Heath and another at Lynford.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Around fifteen were at Lynford Water on the afternoon of the 30th.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily at various sites

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Seen daily at various sites, mainly around suburban areas.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard at Lakenheath Fen and Titchwell.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Family parties were seen at Great Cressingham, Titchwell and Lakenheath Fen.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Heard and seen at several local sites.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Heard daily at various sites, with several seen.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Seen and heard at Lakenheath Fen.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Seen and heard at both Lakenheath Fen and Titchwell reserves.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen and heard daily at most sites

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Heard at initially at Lackford lakes, with a pair seen well carrying food at Lynford Arboretum.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

A family at Lackford Lakes and one heard at Titchwell.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia Communis*

Common, seen and heard daily in suitable habitat.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

One seen well at Santon Downham, with a second heard nearby and two more singing birds at Lynford Arboretum.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

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

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Heard and seen well on our first visit to Lynford Arboretum.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

One was seen well at 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*

A flock of seven in roadside field on our trip to the coast.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

One at East Wretham was seen well.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Noted daily .

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A male feeding two juveniles was a nice sight on the edge of a clearing on our first morning.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

A showy male on our first morning.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

At least three along the river at Santon Downham.

Pied/White Wagtail *Motacilla alba/yarrellii*

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

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

A singing bird seen well at Titchwell.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

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

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

The briefest of views had of one at Lynford Arboretum on our first morning.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Seen daily.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Seen in small numbers each day.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily at various sites.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Easily seen and heard around the hotel, also noted at Lynford Arboretum.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Seen throughout the trip at various sites, with some nice views had at times.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Seen and heard daily with nice views had of singing males.

Mammals

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Reeves's Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Butterflies

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Large Skipper *Ochlodes venatus*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Green-veined White *Artogeia napi*

Dragonflies and Damselflies.

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*

Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

Others

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*