

# Norfolk & Suffolk

## Goshawks & Hawfinches

Mon 2nd-Thu 5th March 2015

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*Cranes are always a highlight at Lakenheath – often flying over the reed beds; Reed Buntings are not as rare, but are nonetheless always enjoyed at close range on the feeders © Keith Suffling*

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

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## Trip Diary

**Leader: Gary Elton**

**with Robert & Pauline Blewitt, Tony Jones, Geoff Margison, David Richardson, John & Christine Savidge and Richard Truscott**

Another really lovely few days in the Brecks were highlighted by some excellent sightings

- Singing Woodlarks on a couple of days
- Good views of Hawfinches at Lynford
- Lesser Redpolls and Siskins at a number of spots
- A fly-past by a couple of Common Cranes at Lakenheath
- Great Egret, Water Rail and Marsh Harriers there too
- A Stoat in ermine at Lackford

### Day One

After a very nice evening meal and opportunity to get to know each other, we discussed the trip plans before retiring to bed full of expectations for the days ahead.

### Day Two

We woke to a bit of a damp start but, unperturbed, the majority of the group made it to our first pre-breakfast walk at nearby Lynford Arboretum. We parked and walked down to view the area of reclaimed gravel pits known as Lynford Water using the tree canopy en route to shelter from the rain. Siskins and Redwings were in and below the trees near the large hide and Song Thrush and Goldcrest could be heard singing around us, though the water body itself held little of note. We walked back to the car park and spent a short while viewing the lawn of the large walled garden watching mainly finches dropping down to feed. The large majority of these were Chaffinches, though patient scanning eventually produced something different in the form of several Bramblings, which included at least one male. Returning to the hotel we enjoyed a welcome breakfast.

Heading off for the day, a short drive took us to nearby Grime Graves, where a Great Grey Shrike had been reported; unfortunately there was no sign of it for us. As always though there was plenty to see, with birds including a singing Yellowhammer, a pair of Stonechats, at least two Woodlarks and a vocal Green Woodpecker. With the weather improving we moved on in search of one of the trips hoped-for species, Goshawk. Another short drive took us to a roadside pull-in where we scanned the tops of the woodland edge in front of us. We were in luck with the next 45 minutes producing views of at least three birds, along with at least four Buzzards and two more Woodlarks. Pleased with our success we headed back towards Lynford Arboretum, stopping en route to view an area of ploughed fields and pig pens. Smaller gulls and Corvids were plentiful, and scanning the area produced several Red-legged Partridge, Stock Dove, plus a small flock of around 30 Shelduck.

We spent the remainder of the day at the Arboretum, first viewing the feeding area that had been set up at the bottom of the walled garden. This area is traditionally favoured by Hawfinches with a small collection of Hornbeam trees the main attraction for them, though the provision of food for the other birds has now seemingly made them less wary. The unfortunate by-product of this has meant a growth in the site's popularity, which has seen photographers, especially, camped, seemingly for days in hope of that 'special picture', invariably blocking viewing for everybody else. After a brief altercation, space for us to view the site was duly made and we all enjoyed views of at least two Hawfinches, up to eight Bramblings and a nice selection of commoner expected species such as Nuthatch and Coal Tit as they visited the feeders.

A walk around the grounds of the Arboretum followed, with Robert finding a 'bonus' Hawfinch sat in full view in the top of one of the many tall trees. Our route took us down to view a small lake and

stream. Several Little Grebes were noted on the lake and the vegetation hanging down into the stream gave ideal drinking spots for Siskins, with Lesser Redpoll and Marsh Tit also seen. The afternoon concluded with a walk to the area where the Hawfinches are known to roost, with two birds found sat out in the afternoon sun on the treetops prior to disappearing off to roost.

### **Day Three**

Today took a slightly different format, with the pre-breakfast walk being extended in length to allow us time to walk along the river at Santon Downham. This area is rapidly (and sadly) become the last reliable place in the Brecks to look for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Aware of time constraints and the odds of finding a bird not exactly in our favour, we did set off with at least a degree of optimism. A brief Kingfisher and Grey Wagtail were nice additions to the trip list, as was a confiding Treecreeper. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was seen and several heard drumming, but we then heard the distinct longer, higher pitched drumming of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker! We quickly made our way towards the area - surely it was in the bag! Unfortunately this was not the case, as the both the woodpeckers suddenly stopped drumming and remained totally hidden from our view. A period of searching followed to no avail and we reluctantly admitted defeat and returned along the footpath to the minibus and then onto the hotel for breakfast. After breakfast we returned back to the forest and walked some areas of clear fell in hope of more Woodlarks, achieving success at both sites, the latter giving us some nice views of birds on the ground through the telescopes.

Our final destination today was Lackford Lakes, a well-maintained Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve, with a visitor centre and a selection of hides that look out over the reclaimed Gravel Pits and sailing lake. This change in habitat gave rise to some new, albeit expected species, such as Goldeneye, Egyptian Goose, Shoveler, Teal and Snipe. We spent several hours exploring the site, finishing the afternoon watching the gulls coming into roost on the sailing lake.

### **Day four**

A shorter local pre-breakfast trip today to Lynford Arboretum, primarily to search for Firecrest, a species we had, unusually, struggled to find. Unfortunately we again drew a blank, which was somewhat surprising given the healthy population in the forest, but had consolation in the form of a selection of expected woodland species such as Siskin and Nuthatch.

After breakfast our destination for the remainder of the day was Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve. The weather forecast was as promised and with the wind having dropped in strength and the sun out, we couldn't have picked a better day. Arriving at the reserve, we visited the centre then made our way to the Washland watchpoint a short distance away. We couldn't have timed it better. Literally as we arrived, at the top of the raised bank, a pair of Common Cranes flew across in front of us, called several times then turned and flew back past again. Pleased with our success we scanned over the Fen in front of us and encountered the next surprise, a Great Egret, its large size even more evident alongside its smaller cousins. As expected Teal and Wigeon were easily seen and a single Whooper Swan in with the Mute Swans was a wild bird, being seen in flight later in the morning.

We returned to the main path and made our way out to the furthest watchpoint pausing on occasion to view the reserve from various spots. Species encountered included a briefly confiding Water Rail spotted close to the visitor centre feeders by Pauline; good numbers of Reed Buntings, again primarily near the feeders; and several vocal Cetti's Warblers which, as expected, stayed hidden from view. A Stoat in ermine was a smart find as it ran across the path in front of us, reappearing on several occasions before finally disappearing from view. On arrival at the furthest watchpoint we sat and watched the Marsh Harriers displaying with at least two vocal sky-dancing males seen. We retraced our steps and sat at the picnic tables near the car park to enjoy our lunch.

Arriving back at the hotel with 30 minutes to spare, a quick revisit to the Arboretum was suggested to finish off the trip. We walked down again to the feeding area and in fitting style ended the trip with final views of Hawfinch. We then returned to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

**SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED***(Total number of species recorded – 89)***Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa***

Several were seen on the first two days of the trip.

**Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Noted daily.

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Easily seen at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath RSPB reserve.

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Noisy and again easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford Arboretum and Lackford Lakes.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Again as expected, seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford and Lackford Lakes.

**Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus***

A single bird at Lakenheath RSPB was a recently arrived wild bird.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Five at Lackford Lakes, were followed by two more Lakenheath RSPB the next day.

**Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Around 30 were seen on the pig fields near Great Cressingham, with four more seen at Lackford Lakes

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Our first at Lynford, was followed by others at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath RSPB

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen daily.

**Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope***

20+ birds were seen from the washland viewpoint at Lakenheath RSPB.

**Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Recorded at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath RSPB.

**Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca***

Around 50 were seen at Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes.

**Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Nine were counted at Lackford Lakes,

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford and Lackford Lakes.

**Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula***

13 were seen at Lackford Lakes, which included some displaying males.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Two were noted on the lake at Lynford Arboretum.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Recorded at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Seven were present on the edge of the main reserve pool at Lackford Lakes.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Our first, spotted by Richard in flight at Lackford Lakes, was followed by three at Lakenheath RSPB and one near the main road at Mundford !

**Great Egret *Ardea alba***

A bird at Lakenheath RSPB allowed nice comparisons with several of its smaller cousins.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily, and easily seen.

**Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

At least eight birds were seen at Lakenheath RSPB including some displaying males.

**Red Kite *Milvus milvus***

Two roadside birds were seen near Great Cressingham.

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

Singles were seen on Day one and two.

**Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis***

Up to three were seen at times very well at a roadside watchpoint in the forest.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

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

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

A showy bird near the bird feeders was a good find by Pauline, at Lakenheath RSPB

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily in all suitable habitat.

**Common Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Common Crane *Grus grus***

Our timing was perfect as two flew past us as we arrived at the wash land watch point at Lakenheath RSPB.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Three were seen at Lakenheath RSPB

**Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Two pairs were seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Seen at Cockley Cley, Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes.

**Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

Two were eventually seen well at Lackford Lakes.

**Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus***

Noted daily.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

Noted daily in small numbers.

**Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus***

Four adults were seen at Lackford lakes.

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

Noted on the pig fields near Great Cressingham, with around 40 also seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Around six, the majority 1<sup>st</sup> year birds, were noted in the evening gull roost at Lackford Lakes.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Undoubtedly overlooked, and not recorded until day three.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Seen daily in small numbers.

**Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Noted daily and easily seen.

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around suburban areas.

**Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

One was seen briefly at Santon Downham on our pre breakfast walk.

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor***

Frustratingly a drumming bird remained hidden from view during our visit to Santon Downham.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Seen at Stanton Downham and heard at Lakenheath Fen.

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

Heard daily, with at least one seen at Lackford Lakes..

**Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Heard at Grimes Graves, with several seen at Santon Downham.

**Common Magpie *Pica pica***

Recorded daily in small numbers

**Western 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 daily, with birds at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham seen particularly well.

**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 at various sites.

**Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Several were heard, with birds seen well at Grimes Graves and Cockley Cley.

**Woodlark *Lullula arborea***

Eight birds in total at four sites, with the last birds at Santon Warren showing particularly well.

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

At least three individuals were heard at Lakenheath RSPB.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

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

**Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Seen and heard daily.

**Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***

Recorded daily, seen particularly well on the feeders at Lynford Arboretum.

**Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

Several singing birds were heard, with one seen well at Santon Downham.

**European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Noted daily, primarily around Mundford village.

**Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen and heard daily.

**Redwing *Turdus iliacus***

Several were seen well at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham.

**Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris***

A flock of 11 birds were seen in a roadside field near Lakenheath RSPB

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Heard daily, and seen well at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

Again heard daily, with four birds seen in total.

**European Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Common, seen daily

**European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola***

A pair near Grimes Graves on our first morning, was followed by another pair nearby on Day three.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.

**Duncock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea***

One was seen over the river at Santon Downham.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

A single on fields at Great Cressingham was the only one seen.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Common, Seen daily.

**Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla***

Several were seen amongst the larger numbers of Chaffinches at Lynford Arboretum.

**European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Seen daily at various sites.

**European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Seen daily, particularly easy to see around the hotel.

**Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*.**

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

**Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

A distant flock of around 20 birds were seen near Cockley Cley.

**Lesser Redpoll *Acanthis flammea***

Recorded daily, three at Lynford, two at Santon Downham and one at Lakenheath RSPB

**Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula***

A small flock of six birds were seen by some of the group, prior to our pre-breakfast walk, near the hotel on the last day.

**Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes***

Great views of at least three birds were had in the feeding area at Lynford Arboretum on two dates, with two more seen latter in the day prior to going into roost.

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella***

Our first a singing male near Grimes Graves, was followed by several more near Lakenheath RSPB.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB, with another heard at Lackford Lakes.

**Mammals****European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*****Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*****Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*****Stoat *Mustela erminea*****Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*****Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis***