

Norfolk & Suffolk

Goshawks & Hawfinches

Fri 4th-Mon 7th March 2016



Despite some damp spells, birds always managed to entertain us on this break. Local feeders gave ample opportunity to enjoy birds such as this Marsh Tit and Long-tailed Tit © Jo Latham, wildlifephotocards

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

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Tour Leader: Gary Elton

Participants : Sheila Bennett, Jo Latham, Geoff Margison, David Miller, Jenny Ross, Mick and Jeanne Rowell, Dominic Turnbull.

Daily Diary

Day One

After checking in we all enjoyed a very nice evening meal together, where we got to know a little bit about each other and discussed the plans 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, meeting by the minibus, noting Siskins around the neighbouring trees as we boarded. A short drive took us to our destination, nearby Lynford Arboretum, where we gained good views of the commoner expected species such as Coal Tit, Goldcrest, and Nuthatch, though the best of the bunch was a showy Treecreeper. A quick look at nearby Lynford Water revealed six Goldeneye and the walk back to the bus gave us our first surprise, a singing Woodlark, over a large clearing by the path (which interestingly also lead to the first of Jean's uncanny impersonations of the bird's song!). Returning to the hotel we enjoyed a welcome breakfast, then headed off for the day. With the rain still falling a decision was made to head for Lackford Lakes where the hides would at least offer some shelter. En route we diverted briefly to Cavenham Heath in hope of an early Stone Curlew; perhaps a tad optimistic, one Eurasian Curlew and a pair of Stonechats was the best we could manage.

Ironically, on arriving at Lackford the weather had improved (well, to a degree) and we managed to keep dry as we walked between the hides. The best bird was undoubtedly a female Long-tailed duck, and the most challenging definitely the Common Snipe, though with a bit of effort we all got on them in the end! Lunch followed in and around the visitor's centre, a Marsh Tit the best bird on the feeders. After lunch we made a return visit to the arboretum, this time primarily to search for Hawfinch. Small numbers spend the winter in the area and are known to roost locally, so our plan was to wait for birds to arrive to do just that. Unfortunately the birds that did arrive didn't want to stay on show, disappearing as quickly as they came. This resulted in us missing the first bird and only half the group (well actually technically 25%, complicated to explain!) seeing the second. Consolation birds came in the form of several showy Marsh Tits coming to food placed on the nearby bridge pillars and a Kingfisher and Oystercatcher on Lynford Water.

Day Three

A brighter start to the day, our pre breakfast walk saw us again returning to the arboretum in search of Hawfinches. The usual, commoner species were noted as we walked through the area, noting Little Grebe on the lake, while a Grey Wagtail was also seen by several of the group. As we scanned the treetops for Hawfinches, the distinct 'chip chip' call of Crossbills was heard and a small flock of five appeared, flying right over the top of us. Our luck was obviously changing as the next bird to appear was in fact a Hawfinch, found perched in the centre of a nearby Hornbeam. Scope views followed, though a degree of patience was required to wait for the branches to move with the wind to give complete views of the bird. Pleased with our success we returned back though the arboretum, discovering another flock of Crossbills, this time 10, at the top of a large pine. Several males could be seen but in true style they flew off noisily as we approached for better views.

Our first destination after breakfast was a forest area close to the hotel and it wasn't long before we were heading out along one of the forest tracks, this time with sunshine trying to appear through the clouds. Woodlarks could be heard singing along with their commoner cousin the Skylark and it wasn't long before we were enjoying good views of both. A pair of Stonechats was found perched up on the tops of the small emerging conifers and a degree of luck again (right place, right time) saw us adding Goshawk to our list with a pair seen interacting over the distant woodland canopy. We returned to the minibus and made another short drive to a woodland clearing near Santon Downham to search for a Great Grey Shrike that had been seen in the area. We unfortunately drew a blank, though added Meadow Pipit and Yellowhammer to the list. Our final destination saw a change of habitat as we made the drive south to Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve.

Lunch on the picnic tables near the car park was followed by a walk out onto the reserve. Our first stop was at the washland area, viewable from a small-elevated watch point. Here we enjoyed great views of our first Kingfisher of the visit and also noted Little Egret and Wigeon, the latter present in good numbers. We then took the main track through the centre of the reserve with our final destination the Joist Fen watch point, which overlooks the largest section of reed bed (and is unfortunately also furthest away!) A Bittern in flight spotted by Geoff, was very much a bonus *en route* and on arrival at the watch point we scanned the large vista in front of us. Three Marsh Harriers quartered the reed bed and, as Gary and Jean went off to check the neighbouring arable fields for Cranes, a pair of the very same flew past the group, TYPICAL! A phone call from Jo announced their presence, with a return phone call from Gary announcing a Barn Owl and another Bittern, a real 'birders and technology' moment!

The group then split with several returning along the path we had arrived on whilst the rest took the (slightly more challenging) route back along the river. This group enjoyed views of two Barn Owls, a pair of Oystercatchers and more Kingfishers, while the others were treated to views of the Cranes on the ground and Kingfishers again from the washland view point, having arrived back there a good 15 minutes before the others. We boarded the minibus and headed back towards the hotel, planning a stop *en route* in the forest. Time though was always going to be tight and as we neared the hotel the light rain we had encountered as we left Lakenheath had started to harden, so a quick show of hands decided a return to the hotel and a nice warm shower, bar and restaurant!

Day Four

After the change of plan the eve before we had decided to make our way back to the forest this morning, our destination Grimes Graves, in search of another Great Grey Shrike wintering in the area. We couldn't have hoped for a nicer morning, chilly, but bright and sunny. We parked at the roadside and made our way through the trees to re-join the main path to view the large adjacent open area. Another birder could be seen a few hundred yards ahead peering intently through his scope and as we approached he announced the shrike was present, sitting on the edge of a small bush in the clearing. We enjoyed great views before returning back to the hotel for a well-earned breakfast! With the weather perfect before breakfast we set off after it full of optimism for more of the same. They say things don't always go to plan and as we approached the outskirts of Swaffham the skies started to get very grey and cloudy. Our first destination was an area of conifer woodland where we walked several of the rides in search of birds. Flyover Redwings and Siskins and calling Coal Tits were noted and on returning back to the area close to the bus we scanned the line of mixed deciduous trees on the edge of the field margin. A mixed finch and tit flock could be seen in the trees, appearing to be dropping into a nearby garden, presumably to feed. Closer inspection of the flock revealed several Bramblings and Redpolls, with two Green Woodpeckers also discovered nearby.

We returned to the bus pleased with what we had seen, only to find, as we drove back along the road, the aforementioned birds at feeders in a garden in full view from the roadside! At least twenty Bramblings, many of which were males, could be seen feeding on the ground with their commoner cousins and, in amongst the siskins, there were several Redpolls, including some really pink-chested males. By now the weather had deteriorated considerably with sleet/snow falling so we made our way to our next destination, a roadside viewpoint where we were hoping to search for birds of prey over the woodland canopy. We sat hoping (and praying!) the snow (which was now a blizzard!) would stop. Eventually we admitted defeat and made our way back to the arboretum, hoping the trees would give us some shelter. This plan worked to a degree, though the birds were also trying to avoid the weather as well so things were quiet, though a pair of Bullfinches was a nice addition.

With lunch now overdue and the weather improving, the decision was made to head to the edge of the forest for the last hour or so of the trip. Parking up, we surveyed the area of ploughed field in front of us as we ate, discovering to our surprise that the field was alive with birds! Several hundred Fieldfares, Starlings, Skylarks and Chaffinches made up the bulk of the species along with around 50 Redpolls, these latter birds not really expected in this number or behaving in this way. After lunch we returned back to the hotel where we finished the trip, saying our goodbyes and starting our journeys home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED*(Total number of species recorded –90)***Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa***

Roadside coveys were noted daily.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

A pair in a roadside pig field near Great Cressingham.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Seen daily with most seen at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath RSPB reserve.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford Arboretum and Lackford Lakes.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

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

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Singles at Cavenham Heath and Lackford Lakes, were followed by five at Lakenheath RSPB.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

One Cavenham Heath, two Lakenheath RSPB and two on the pig fields near Great Cressingham,

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

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

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Around 200 birds were seen from the washland viewpoint at Lakenheath RSPB.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Two pairs at Lackford Lakes and a male at Lakenheath RSPB.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Around 50 were seen at Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Eight were counted at Lackford Lakes,

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford and Lackford Lakes.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Several at Lackford Lakes, and six at Lynford Water.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

A female on the Sailing Lake at Lackford was a nice surprise for the group.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Noted on the lake at Lynford Arboretum and at Lakenheath RSPB.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Recorded at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Two in flight at Lakenheath RSPB.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Two on the first day, with four at Lakenheath RSPB on day two.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Six around the washland and along the river at Lakenheath RSPB.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, and easily seen.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Three were seen at Lakenheath RSPB.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Singles were seen on day one at Lynford and Lackford Lakes.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Two, presumably a pair, were seen distantly though well on the morning of day two.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

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

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Heard at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen RSPB.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Noted daily in all suitable habitat.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted at all Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen RSPB.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Two flew past us as at the wash land watch point at Lakenheath RSPB and where also seen later on the ground by several of the group.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

One at Cavenham Heath and four at Lakenheath RSPB

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

One Lynford water and a pair at Lackford Lakes.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Seen at Cockley Cley, Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Five in total at Lackford Lakes.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Noted daily.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Noted daily in small numbers.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Noted daily, primarily overflying birds.

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

As above, primarily overflying birds.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Seen daily in small numbers.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Noted daily and easily seen (at times in impressive numbers!).

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Two showed well for us hunting along the river bank at Lakenheath RSPB

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One at Lynford Water, followed by at least four different sightings/individuals at Lakenheath Fen.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Seen at Lynford Arboretum and Lakenheath Fen.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Noted daily, with best views had of two at Drymere.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Worth the wait, with great views had early morning at Grimes Graves on the last morning.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

Common 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*

Seen daily in small numbers

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Birds were seen at Lynford Arboretum, Lackford Lakes and Drymere.

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*

Seen and heard at Cavenham Heath and Grimes Graves area.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Our first was a nice surprise on our first morning's walk at Lynford, with up to six in and around the Grimes Graves area, with some great views had.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath Fen .

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

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

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Recorded daily, seen particularly well at Lynford Arboretum.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Nice views of two on our first morning at Lynford Arboretum.

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Noted daily, primarily in and around the villages.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen and heard daily.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Small numbers were seen at Lynford Arboretum and Cavenham Heath.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Initially seen at Cavenham Heath, with an impressive flock, well into three figures, found on a nearby ploughed field during our last lunch stop.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard daily and seen well at Lackford Lakes and Lynford Arboretum

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Again heard daily and seen at Lynford Arboretum.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Common, seen daily

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Pairs were seen at Cavenham Heath and near Grimes Graves.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One briefly on the bridge at Lynford Lake.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Noted daily.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Singles at Cavenham Heath and Santon Downham.

Eurasian Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common, Seen daily.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Several distant birds at Drymere, were followed by fantastic views of around 20, many of which were males visiting roadside bird feeders.

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.

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

Our first included some incredibly bright males at the bird feeders at Drymere, with at least fifty in the same ploughed field as the Fieldfares during our last lunch stop.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily at various sites.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Our first were five overflying birds at Lynford Arboretum, followed by a further ten, including at least two red males, seen later in tree tops at the same site.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A male at Lackford Lakes and a pair at Lynford Arboretum.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Poor distant views of one for some of the group were followed by excellent views of a single closer bird the following morning for everyone.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Only one, a male at Santon Downham.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB.

Mammals

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Reeves' Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*