

Norfolk & Suffolk

Goshawks & Hawfinches

Fri 16th-Mon 19th March 2018



Eurasian Siskins enjoying free hand-outs © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays

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

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Daily Diary

Day One

After all 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 birding ahead.

Day Two

We woke to be greeted by a cloudy and bitterly cold day; the 'mini-beast from the east' was clearly poised to strike! Our first birding jaunt was to nearby Lynford Arboretum for a pre breakfast visit. This gave us a nice selection of commoner woodland birds to start our list off, with the biggest surprise being the number of Treecreepers heard and seen, five in total! After breakfast (and some effort!), we left the warmth of the hotel and started our journey North to a collection of nearby pig fields. On arrival, good numbers of crows and smaller gulls were immediately noticeable, though viewing conditions had deteriorated rapidly, with falling snow and strengthening wind making even climbing out the bus an unattractive option! We instead drove around the area scanning the open ground as we went. As we approached a crossroads, we had our first piece of good luck, as two Stone-curlews took off, flying parallel with us before appearing to land in the next field. We drove along the field edge, scanning with no apparent sign of the birds, so we turned round and drove back, eventually finding them hunched up on the now snow-covered ground, a surreal feeling watching them through the near horizontal falling snow! Nice views were had by all, but as conditions seemingly weren't getting any better we decided to head to another area hoping for some improvement.

Fortune favours the brave as they say and arriving in Great Massingham, the snow had largely stopped, though the wind was still bitter. A flock of Hawfinches had been favouring the churchyard in the village but unfortunately the weather and the exposed nature of the site had encouraged the birds to move elsewhere. Gary knew of a large finch flock on the airfield behind the churchyard though, so it was decided to head there instead. Driving in through what was obviously a recently unlocked gate, Gary decided rather than risk being locked in he would turn round and park outside. What he didn't take into account was the soft ground and the rear wheel drive feature of the van! After several unsuccessful efforts to push the van out a series of phone calls was made. Help in the form of a four-wheel drive with a two rope was arranged and we walked up to look at the finches. The finch flock contained around 500 birds and was a real pleasure to see, equally split between Bramblings and Linnets with many of the former gaining their summer plumage. Gary returned back to the bus as help arrived and within a few minutes the group was reunited with an operational minibus!

A speculative roadside look for Goshawks and a lunch break on the way back to the Brecks was unsurprisingly unproductive and we headed off to look for Woodlark. Patience paid off here, though and we were rewarded with nice views of one on the ground, with a further three birds seen briefly. Our last destination today was a return visit to the arboretum to search for Hawfinches there. We walked down to the paddock, enjoying nice views of species such as Marsh and Coal Tit and Nuthatch coming to the seed that people had placed on the bridge posts. The wind was still blowing and we were a tad early for the finches and, with no sign, we decided to take a look at the area nearby known as Lynford Water. Whilst adding a few new wildfowl species here for the day such as Teal and Great Crested Grebe, things were generally quiet. We returned to the paddock, taking a different route and, after a short while, a Hawfinch was seen to fly in and land beneath one of the Hornbeams there. After some searching the bird was found and telescope views were enjoyed by all.

Day Three

With snow forecast overnight, pre-breakfast activities were aborted and we opted for a slightly earlier breakfast. We woke to find a covering of around an inch or so of snow and bitterly cold winds; it could have been a lot worse! After breakfast we headed again to the arboretum for a brief look for Firecrest, *en route* south to our main destinations for the day. With the weather not really conducive to singing birds it was always a long shot and, unsurprisingly, we met with no success, survival and feeding understandably a priority for birds today! Consolation came in the form of some nice views of some confiding Siskins and a flock of at least a dozen Coal tits feeding together in the top of the pathside trees.

The RSPB reserve at Lakenheath was to be our main site today and, on arrival, Neil quickly added Green Woodpecker to our list. The feeders outside the centre were proving popular with the locals, with Reed Buntings particularly obvious. A brisk, welcome walk to the first viewing point was rewarded with our first Marsh Harriers

and the 'winter path' giving views out into the flooded reedbed producing a Water Pipit and several Snipe. The small hide half way along the main path, whilst having few birds, at least enabled us to warm up again! We walked on, with Great Crested Grebe and Tufted Duck noted in the reedbed pools as we arrived at the main watch point. Scanning the extensive reed bed in front of us we were rewarded with views again of several Marsh Harriers. Then two Common Cranes appeared over the top of the riverbank, unfortunately only briefly, before appearing to drop into the fields the other side of the river. We quickly re grouped and headed up onto the bankside path to see if we could find them. Unfortunately the design of the bank meant the nearer area of field edge was hidden from our view and it appeared that was where the birds were, frustrating to say the least! A fly over Bar-tailed Godwit was an unexpected addition as we walked back and rather unusual in this part of the world. We returned to the centre, having lunch at the minibus before heading up to view the washland area from the raised bank. A Great Egret was the first bird we saw, which flew over the river and quickly disappeared from view behind a large bush, with a sleeping swan in front of the bush turning out to be a Whooper Swan. Around 50 Shovelers were active on the water in front of us and another Water Pipit took off from the margins, calling. Our next stop was a relatively short drive down the road to Cavenham Heath. With access at this time of year restricted we made several stops to view the extensive fenced off area, soon finding a pair of Stone-curlews crouched down on the edge of the heather.

Lackford Lakes was our last destination of the day, offering a visitor centre with facilities and a nice circular walk with several hides. On the sailing lake, the evening gull roost was starting to form but a quick scan through these produced only the expected commoner species, though at least six Goldeneye and some Pochard here were trip additions. On our way to the first hide some pathside feeders gave nice views of Siskin and a Lesser Redpoll, though the latter was only seen by Steve and Kate. The hide gave us a different viewpoint out over a largely flooded scrape that revealed around a hundred Teal, twelve Pintail (the majority smart males), plus two Redshanks and a selection of the commoner ducks and Great Cormorants.

Day four

A change in weather had been promised today but we awoke with a degree of scepticism. Our fears were quickly proven wrong as the sun broke through any cloud cover and bird song could be heard as we walked to breakfast. After breakfast we headed to the arboretum again, hoping the improving weather would encourage more bird activity. This proved to be true and, with Firecrest our main target, we managed to find and enjoy nice views of one. With the paddocks only a short walk further on we decided to look again for Hawfinch. Luck was again on our side with a male bird found almost immediately feeding at the base of the Hornbeams there and some nice scope views followed. Goshawk was our next target and we made our way up towards the coast to a local watch point. Two Stone-curlews *en route* were followed by nice views of several Goshawks, possibly as many as four, both immatures and adults. A surprise here came in the form of a Peregrine, seemingly a bird that has been in the area for a while. A return visit to Swafham Forest again revealed Woodlark, this time two birds seen both on the ground and in flight with one also singing briefly.

The morning had gone amazingly well, could it continue? Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was our next target species - a long shot for several reasons. We arrived at the site, having lunch by the road before making our way along the path by the river. The path, whilst wet and muddy, was perfectly walkable and we made our way to the furthest poplar plantation. We stood listening and scanning the treetops; nothing; then a small movement attracted Gary's attention, " Lesser Spotted Woodpecker" was the cry!!! The bird appeared to be active around a freshly excavated hole, which it remained around for the next minute or so before working its way through some neighbouring trees then disappearing from view. We headed back to the hotel after an extremely successful morning. Here the trip concluded, with us saying our goodbyes and then starting our individual journeys home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded-92)

- Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*** Seen at Lynford Arboretum and Lackford Lakes.
Greylag Goose *Anser anser* Small numbers at Great Massingham, Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen
- Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*** Seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Water
Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* A sleeping bankside bird at Lakenheath Fen only gave away its identity when it lifted its head.
- Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*** Two roadside birds at Great Massingham.
Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* Noted in the Pig fields at Great Cressingham and enroute to Lackford Lakes and at Lakenheath Fen.
- Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*** A calling pair over Lynford Water on the afternoon of the 17th.
Gadwall *Anas strepera* Noted at Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and Lakenheath Fen.
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Common, seen daily.
Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Ten at Lackford Lakes and around 50 at Lakenheath Fen.
Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Twelve at Lackford Lakes.
Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Noted at Lynford water and Lakenheath Fen, with over hundred present at Lackford Lakes.
- Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*** . Five at Lackford Lakes.
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* Easily seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.
Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* At least six at Lackford Lakes.
Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa* Roadside birds were noted daily.
Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* Noted daily.
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* One on the lake at Lynford and two at Lakenheath Fen.
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* A pair at Lynford Water and six at Lakenheath Fen.
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Three at Lakenheath Fen and a single at Lackford Lakes.
Great Egret *Egretta alba* One was seen briefly at Lakenheath Fen by the majority of the group before hiding itself behind a large bush.
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* At least three at Lakenheath Fen.
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. One on the church tower at Great Massingham made an impressive sight. Three at Lynford Water and a count of 38 at Lackford Lakes.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*** One in flight carrying prey over a field near Lakenheath Fen.
Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* Good, albeit distant, views of at least two, possibly as many as four individuals, at a popular roadside site.
- Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*** At least six at Lakenheath Fen
Red Kite *Milvus milvus* Three individuals noted during the trip.
Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* As is the case now days, easily seen at various sites during the trip.
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.
Common Crane *Grus grus* Two in flight at Lakenheath Fen unfortunately seemingly landed behind the raised river bank and could not be relocated.
- Eurasian Stone-Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*** Two on both visits to Great Cressingham and two at Cavenham Heath.
- Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*** Noted in pig fields at Great Cressingham and *en route* to Lackford Lakes.
- Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*** Noted daily.
Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* A roadside bird near Great Cressingham.
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* Perhaps the biggest surprise of the trip, one in flight over us near the first viewing point at Lakenheath Fen.
- Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*** Four at Lakenheath Fen.
Common Redshank *Tringa Totanus* Two birds at Lackford Lakes.
Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* Noted daily.
Common Gull *Larus canus* Noted daily in small numbers.
Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* Noted daily, primarily overflying birds.
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* Noted at Great Cressingham and Lackford Lakes.
Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia* Recorded daily.
Stock Dove *Columba oenas* Surprisingly only heard, at Lynford Arboretum.
Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus* Noted daily and easily seen.
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Easily seen around suburban areas.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor* A female bird was nice find at Santon Downham.

Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Heard or seen daily.
Green Woodpecker <i>Picus viridis</i>	Seen by Neil and heard by the rest of us at Lakenheath Fen.
Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Noted daily at various sites.
Peregrine <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	One at the Goshawk watch point.
Eurasian Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Seen and heard at Lynford Arboretum.
Common Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>	Recorded daily.
Eurasian Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>	Common and easily seen.
Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Noted daily at various sites.
Carrion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i>	Noted daily in small numbers.
Coal Tit <i>Periparus ater</i>	Easily seen and constantly heard in suitable woodland, with a flock of at least a dozen being particularly noteworthy at Lynford Water.
Marsh Tit <i>Poecile palustris</i>	Seen well at Lynford Arboretum
Eurasian Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Recorded daily
Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>	Recorded daily
Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>	Three pairs in total at two sites in Swafham Forest.
Eurasian Skylark <i>Alauda arvensis</i>	A single singing roadside bird on the 19th.
Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti</i>	A 'tacking' bird was heard at Lakenheath Fen.
Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Recorded daily.
Firecrest <i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	A male on our last mornings visit to Lynford Arboretum.
Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>	Seen well at Lynford Arboretum.
Eurasian Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Seen and heard daily.
Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>	Seen well at Lynford Arboretum and heard at Santon Downham.
Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>	A total of five seen on our first mornings pre breakfast walk at Lynford Arboretum, with several others seen daily after that.
European 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.
Fieldfare <i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Noted on our first two days in small numbers.
Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Noted daily with some nice views had.
Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Heard and seen daily, with several seen well.
Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Seen daily, with three being the maximum day total.
European Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Common, seen daily
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.
Dunnock <i>Prunella modularis</i>	Recorded daily.
Pied/White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba/yarrellii</i>	One in a roadside field on our last day.
Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Two at Great Massingham and Lakenheath Fen.
Water Pipit <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Two seen at Lakenheath Fen.
Eurasian Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Common, Seen daily.
Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	An impressive mixed flock with Linnets on the airfield at Great Massingham.
Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	A male under the Hornbeams at Lynford Arboretum showed well for us on both visits.
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, please see above Brambling comment.
Lesser Redpoll <i>Acanthis cabaret</i>	One seen by Steve and Kate on a feeder at Lackford Lakes.
European Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Seen daily at various sites.
Eurasian Siskin <i>Spinus spinus</i>	Seen well and particularly numerous around the hotel and at Lynford Arboretum, also seen at Lackford Lakes.
Yellowhammer <i>Emberiza citronella</i>	A pathside bird at Great Massingham was the only one seen.
Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Arboretum.

Mammals

Reeves's Muntjac <i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>
Brown Hare <i>Lepus europaeus</i>
European Rabbit <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Eastern Grey Squirrel <i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>