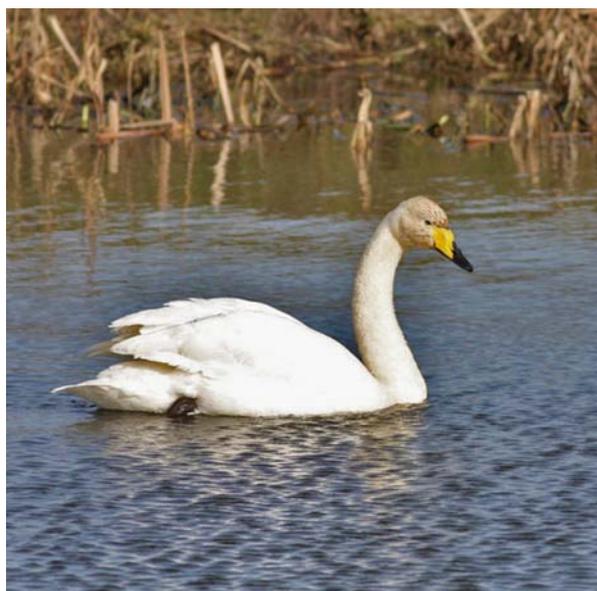
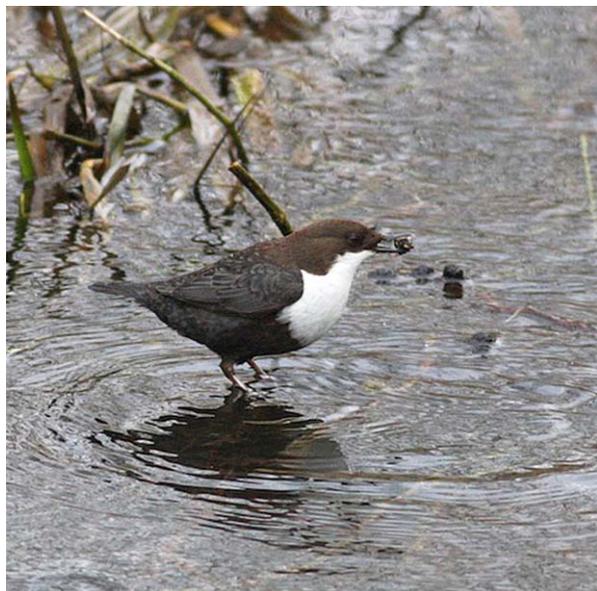


# Norfolk & Suffolk

## Goshawks & Hawfinches

Tue 26<sup>th</sup> Feb – Fri 1<sup>st</sup> Mar 2013

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*Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): One of the highlights of the trip, two views of the very smart and appealing continental form **Black-bellied Dipper** seen at Nun's bridge, Thetford on our first morning • One of three **Goshawks** we saw in the Brecks, with displaying also noted on several occasions • The **Whooper Swan** at Lakenheath Fen, sadly left behind due to an injury to its wing © all photos from the tour by leader Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays*

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

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## Trip Diary

**Tour Leader: Gary Elton**

*with* **John Boulcott, John & Irene Harper, Gerald & Theresa Nicholas and John & Nadine Shearman**

### **Tue 26<sup>th</sup> Feb – Day 1**

After an enjoyable evening meal at our Mundford hotel, and an opportunity to get to know each other, we discussed the trip plans before retiring to bed, full of expectations for the days ahead.

### **Wed 27<sup>th</sup> Feb - Day 2**

We woke to a grey cloudy start to the day (as forecast) and a degree of over enthusiasm by the leader meant we started our pre breakfast walk in the half light, walking out along a small public footpath connecting the hotel and the forest. Robins and Song Thrushes could be heard singing, and as we approached the trees Siskin and Treecreeper could also be heard. Two singing male Marsh Tits competed in close proximity to each other, though the poor light meant we got no more than fleeting glimpses of them. With time ticking by at a seemingly rapid rate, we were soon retracing our steps to the hotel for breakfast, adding two Red-legged Partridges to the list on the way.

After breakfast, we made the short drive to nearby Thetford where we were hoping to see a Black-bellied Dipper, which is an irregular winter visitor to Norfolk from Northern Europe - this particular bird having been in residence there since November 2012. We arrived as directed by the local birdline to find no sign of the bird, but as luck would have it, a second favoured spot was only a short drive away, and on arriving there we located the bird almost immediately, which was very confiding allowing us great views. A small flock of Siskins in the nearby alders and a pair of Goldcrests were also seen well.

Pleased with our success we moved on, hoping for the same success with our next target species, Goshawk. We headed back into the forest to try and view the birds from a popular viewpoint there. A loo stop at Sainsbury's en route proved useful and also allowed John to buy some *Duck Tape* to repair Gerald's car, parts of which he had accidentally dismantled earlier that morning. We arrived at the site with the sun now trying to break through the clouds, and parked and walked along the forest trail full of optimism. Unfortunately, things never seem to go quite to plan and Gary had already commented on the no entry sign across the path, presuming it referred to the nearby road repairs. Surreptitiously ignoring the signs, we carried on round them but after 10 minutes of walking a Forestry Commission van pulled up and told us the site was closed due to health and safety concerns with heavy machinery working on the site, and then unfortunately asked us to leave!

Fortunately, we had a plan B and we returned to the bus and headed off to a less well known site a short drive away. On arrival here we immediately saw Buzzard and a Kestrel, a promising start, with the first Goshawk appearing shortly after. A total of three birds were seen during our stay over the next hour, with us gaining fantastic views of both the birds and their aerial display. Up to seven Buzzards were also seen during our visit, though the singing Wood Lark heard throughout sadly remained hidden from view.

Returning towards Mundford, we stopped briefly at some roadside fields to look through a large mixed flock of Chaffinches and Starling, also adding Roe Deer to the mammal list before stopping for lunch at Lynford Arboretum. With the sun still shining it felt prudent to take the opportunity to return to the forest to look for Wood Lark; after a short drive and walk we were looking over a large clearing in the forest. We walked along the edge of the clearing looking and listening: Redwing and Mistle Thrush were noted, and it wasn't long before we heard the wonderful fluty song of a Wood Lark. Following the sound we stopped briefly to enjoy views of a male Great Spotted Woodpecker found by Gerald on a dead stump, before finally enjoying good views of the Wood Lark singing on the ground in front of us.

Our final stop of the day was a return visit to the Arboretum where we enjoyed views of Marsh Tits and Treecreepers, more Redwings and a selection of commoner birds coming to the bird feeders there. Our target species Hawfinch are far from guaranteed there this year, and several passing birders gave us tales of their failure to find the birds. Unperturbed we walked down, crossing the bridge, hearing a Little Grebe whinnying on the small lake, too view the large paddock. We scanned the Hornbeams and bushes in the paddock a favoured area for the birds, and also the conifer trees behind. After a short while two Hawfinches were found sat high in the conifers, we enjoyed good views before one dropped down into the hawthorns and Hornbeams in front of us, giving us even better views. A mixed flock of birds in some nearby alders nearby revealed a stunning male Lesser Redpoll and as we were watching, the birds alarm called, and a Barn Owl drifted past in front of us, which was a fitting conclusion for a very successful day's birding.

### **Thu 28<sup>th</sup> Feb - Day 3**

The pre-breakfast walk this morning was rather less well supported with only Gary, John and Gerald making a short drive to a local forest clearing. The sun was already shining when we arrived as we walked out along a large gravel track and it wasn't long before a singing Wood Lark flew over us, and new additions for the trip included several male Yellowhammers and a Green Woodpecker.

Our destination after breakfast was Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve, where after passing through the visitor centre we made our way out along the main footpath to the first watch point, noting numerous Reed Buntings as we walked. Arriving at the watchpoint, a Kingfisher was pointed out, though unfortunately the bird flew almost immediately, which meant Gary was the only person to see it. By way of consolation several Marsh Harriers appeared shortly after, drifting over the reed bed and at times interacting with the local Buzzards; a Cetti's Warbler could also be heard singing.

We continued our walk to the furthest watchpoint, where we sat and looked out over the expanse of reedbed, where once again Marsh Harriers were easily seen, with at least five birds present and another Cetti's Warbler could be also be heard nearby. Several flocks of ducks could also be seen periodically flying up from the back of the reedbed, which included Wigeon and Shoveler, and a group of four Little Egret were also seen. We walked back along the riverbank adding Oystercatcher, Whooper Swan (an injured bird that had remained from the previous winter) and a single Snipe flushed from the bank side vegetation to our list.

Lunch was taken sat on the picnic tables near the visitor centre, after which we moved onto our next destination of the day, Cavenham Heath - a 204 hectare site managed by Natural England. With the recent spell of poor weather we were perhaps being a tad optimistic to expect our target species, Stone-curlew, to have returned to the site and this coupled with the dogs and owners that were walking around lessened our chances considerably. We scanned the area from the main track, then Gary spotted a possible Stone Curlew briefly in flight so we decided to cross the heath to search for it. Unfortunately, we could not relocate the bird but seeing a rather nice flock of feeding Fieldfare and several Meadow Pipits was consolation.

Our last destination of the day was the Suffolk Wildlife's Trust reserve at Lackford Lakes, which is the product of former gravel pits and now boasts a variety of habitats and a fine visitor centre. Arriving at the site we were immediately told of a flock of Bewick's Swans that had flown over, with four of the birds, two adults and two juveniles, having settled on the nearby sailing lake. We made our way there and were soon enjoying views of the birds through the 'scopes with Pochard, Gadwall and Goldeneye also noted. We returned to the visitor centre, which shuts at 4pm, for some retail therapy before moving on to view the remainder of the reserve.

A brisk walk to the furthest lakes saw us quickly looking at a pair of Goosander with the male particularly striking, though despite searching a second pair seen by John slightly earlier could not be relocated. Goldeneye were again easily seen, along with a selection of the expected ducks and smaller gulls. We retraced our steps to the main hides over looking Slough lake, where we added Herring and Great Black-backed Gull and Shelduck to our list, which were amongst a nice selection of birds on

show. As we sat watching, the gulls, ducks and Lapwings on the lake all took flight, and a large brown bird flew along the back of the lake. ‘Owl!’ was the shout from the lady sat next to me, an understandable mistake as the bird was in fact a Bittern, which flew on and landed out of sight in the small reed-bed in the corner of the lake. Whilst we sat chatting and reliving the experience another male Goosander flew past in front of the hide, which concluded another successful visit to the reserve.

#### **Fri 1<sup>st</sup> Mar - Day 4**

We woke again to a grey and cloudy start to the day with four of us meeting this morning for a short pre-breakfast woodland walk. The expected species greeted us, with singing Robins and Song Thrushes heard and a noisy Long-tailed Tit flock flitted through the adjacent shrubbery. The reward for getting up early is always the surprise species that might come along, and in this morning’s case it was a single Crossbill that flew over us calling, and as we walked along it or other single birds flew over us on another two occasions.

We returned for breakfast, after which we made the short drive to nearby Lynford Arboretum again, where we searched unsuccessfully for Firecrest, although a calling bird refused to show. The feeders there again produced a nice selection of woodland species such as Nuthatch, Coal and Marsh Tits. Our next destination was the river walk at Santon Downham; our first Brambling was noted as we disembarked from the bus, which was surprising in some ways as they seem relatively common in people’s gardens this year, but perhaps not so surprising in others as the beech mast crop has apparently largely failed. Siskins and Goldfinches were in the treetops around us, and Several Marsh Tits were seen and heard - a species that is seemingly doing very well in the Brecks.

We walked along the footpath by the river hearing several drumming Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and seeing Nuthatch and a mixed flock of Redwing and Chaffinches. A short drive after our walk took us to another nearby picnic site where we had our lunch, after which we discovered several bird feeders placed in a small bush close by. The feeders proved amazingly attractive to the local birds with the bush at one time holding three Coal Tits, two Marsh Tits, two Nuthatch, two Brambling and varying numbers of Blue and Great Tits, plus Chaffinch and Goldfinch.

Our last stop of the trip was to once again look for Firecrest: this time we were successful with a male bird found almost immediately, which showed well for everyone and proved to be a nice finale to the trip. With time having ticked by, we returned to the hotel where we concluded the trip, saying our goodbyes and starting our journeys back home.

Gary Elton

#### **ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED**

*(a total of 88 species recorded by the group)*

##### **Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa***

Easily seen on the first two days with good views of roadside birds.

##### **Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Noted daily.

##### **Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Seen at all wetland sites visited on the first two days.

##### **Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

As with Greylag Goose, easily seen and noted at all wetland sites

##### **Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Pairs were noted on all three days at all wetland sites.

##### **Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii***

Two adults and two immatures were seen at Lackford Lakes.

##### **Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus***

An injured adult bird remaining from last winter was seen at Lakenheath Fen

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Noted on the river at Thetford, Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

**Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

At least three were noted at Lackford Lakes, with a single bird flying over us during our last pre-breakfast walk.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Present in good numbers at Lackford Lakes.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common and seen daily.

**Wigeon *Anas penelope***

A mobile flock of c. 80 birds were seen at Lakenheath Fen.

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Again mobile flocks of 10 and 20 birds were seen at Lakenheath Fen.

**Teal *Anas crecca***

Small numbers of birds were noted at Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

**Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Easily seen on the larger lakes at Lackford.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

As above, with four also seen at Lakenheath Fen.

**Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula***

Easily seen again on the bigger lakes at Lackford Lakes.

**Goosander *Mergus merganser***

Two pairs and a single male were seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Surprisingly scarce with a heard bird at Lynford the only one recorded.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Six at both Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

**Bittern *Botaurus Stellaris***

A real bonus at Lackford Lakes, with a bird seen in flight by all the group.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Several were noted at Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Santon Downham.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Four were seen in flight at Lakenheath Fen, with another seen there along the river.

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily in small numbers, the majority were roadside birds.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

At least eight birds were seen at Lakenheath Fen.

**Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis***

Three individuals seen in total, which included some courtship display.

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

Four different individuals were seen during the trip.

**Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Now easily seen in Norfolk, with at least 15 individuals noted and seen every day.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

Two individuals were heard at Lakenheath Fen.

**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily in suitable habitat.

**Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted at Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Arboretum.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

One was seen along the river at Lakenheath Fen.

**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Small flocks of c. 20 birds were noted on four occasions.

**Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

One was flushed from the riverbank at Lakenheath Fen.

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

Common and noted daily.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

Common and noted daily

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

Small numbers of birds of varying ages were seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Three were seen at Lackford Lakes

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

Noted on several dates, with the largest number seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Noted daily.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Noted at four sites with the largest number being 20, seen in a ploughed field at Lakenheath Fen

**Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Noted daily and easily seen.

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around suburban areas.

**Barn Owl *Tyto alba***

A nice surprise at Lynford Arboretum during our afternoon visit there.

**(Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*)**

A leader-only bird at Lakenheath Fen.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

A male was seen well by everyone during our search for Wood Lark, with other birds noted at Lakenheath Fen and Santon Downham.

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

One was seen on our second pre-breakfast walk, with another heard at Cavenham Heath.

**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

One or two birds were recorded daily.

**Magpie *Pica pica***

Recorded daily in small numbers.

**Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***

Common and easily seen.

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Noted daily, largely at roadside sites.

**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

Seen daily in small numbers.

**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***

Surprisingly common seen and heard at virtually all sites visited.

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Easily seen and constantly heard in suitable woodland habitat

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Recorded daily

**Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Recorded daily

**Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus***

Recorded daily at various sites

**Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis***

Several were heard and seen during the trip.

**Wood Lark *Lullula arborea***

One was seen well on the first day, with at least one other present at the same site. Another singing bird was also seen well on our second pre-breakfast walk.

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

At least two individuals were heard at Lakenheath RSPB reserve,

**Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus***

A singing male was seen well near Santon Downham and was almost the last bird of the trip.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Seen initially at the Dipper site at Thetford, with birds regularly heard and seen thereafter during our time in the forest.

**Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Seen and heard daily.

**Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***

Heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham, seen on bird feeders at both sites.

**Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

Seen on several occasions and seemingly constantly heard during our visits to Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham.

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Common and noted daily.

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen and heard daily.

**Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris***

Two flocks of around 20 birds were seen near Lakenheath and at Cavenham Heath.

**Redwing *Turdus iliacus***

Small flocks were noted on four occasions during the trip.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Heard daily particularly early mornings, with several seen.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

Several were recorded daily.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Common and seen daily.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.

**Duncock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Surprisingly scarce with only two birds seen at Cavenham Heath.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrelli***

Also surprisingly scarce with a flyover bird at Santon Downham the only one noted.

**Dipper *Cinclus cinclus cinclus***

A confiding 'dark bellied' nominate individual was seen well at Nun's bridge, Thetford. The race that breeds in the UK, *gularis*, has a browner belly.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Common and seen daily.

**Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla***

Two at the bird feeders at Santon Downham were surprisingly the only ones seen.

**Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Seen daily, particularly easy to see around the hotel.

**Siskin *Spinus pinus*.**

Common in the area, seemingly seen and heard everywhere.

**Lesser Redpoll *Carduelis cabaret***

A cracking male was seen by some of the group at Lynford Arboretum, with others seen Lakenheath Fen, Lackford Lakes and Santon Downham.

**Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Easily seen and noted daily at various sites.

**Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra***

Very much a bonus bird for those making the last early morning walk, either a single bird seen flying over us calling three times or three different birds seen once.

**Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Two pairs were found in the garden of the hotel on our first morning.

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Two were seen well at the back of the paddock area at Lynford Arboretum.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citronella*

Two bright males were seen on our second pre breakfast walk.

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Easily seen at Lakenheath Fen RSPB, with others noted at Santon Downham.

**MAMMALS**

**European Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

**European Hare** *Lepus europaeus*

**Muntjac** *Muntiacus reevesi*

**Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus*

**Eastern Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis*