

Norfolk & Suffolk

Goatsuckers & Golden Orioles

Mon 1st – Thu 4th July 2013



*Trip photos (clockwise, from top left): A fly-over **Bittern** at Lakenheath was one of our highlights • Though in decline in many places, **Cuckoos** are still quite numerous over the reedbeds of Suffolk and Norfolk • A **Reed Bunting** at the feeders at Lakenheath... • ...and one in more typical habitat singing from the reed tops • We saw five **Hobbies** at Lakenheath RSPB • A male **Marsh Harrier** floats above the reeds © all photos from lakenheath Fen RSPB by Keith Suffling/Limosa Holidays*

report compiled by tour leader:
Gary Elton

Trip Diary

Tour Leader: Gary Elton

with **Ralph Cole, Mayreen Ince, Dave Johnson and Richard Rigby**

Limosa groups have been regular visitors to the Brecks over the past 28 years, so it is an area we can justly claim to know well. Straddling the borders of south Norfolk and west Suffolk, the dry sandy heaths and coniferous woodlands of Breckland are host to a great variety of birds in summer. We saw many, with the highlights including Red-crested Pochard, Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Red Kite, Hobby, Stone-curlew and Wood Lark - not to mention great views of breeding Nightjar and Redstart.

Mon 1st July - Day 1

After a very enjoyable evening meal and a chance to get to know each other, we made the first of two trips out to look for Nightjars. After a short drive we parked up and walked along a short sandy track to wait for dusk. Singing Robins and a Song Thrush could be heard, and it wasn't long before the first roding Woodcock appeared, calling as it flew past us. Just as the light was beginning to fade the first Nightjar started churring, which took off shortly afterwards, flying directly over us and giving us great views. Several briefer views followed of it or other birds, with at least three churring birds thought to be present in the area.

Tue 2nd July - Day 2

Our first morning's pre breakfast walk was to a local forest clearing a short drive from the hotel. Singing Yellowhammers greeted us, as did Green Woodpecker and several Coal Tits. These were shortly followed by our first singing Tree Pipits, with singing Garden Warbler and Marsh Tit also present, but unfortunately not seen.

Our plan today was to head for the North Norfolk coast and our drive included several speculative stops along the way, the first at a Tree Sparrow breeding site, which revealed several birds present. A second stop to search for Wood Lark proved unsuccessful, but consolation came in the form of a surprise pair of Stone-curlews. Other species recorded included several Stock Doves, a small flock of six Mistle Thrushes and a Curlew. We moved on getting closer to the coast, stopping just outside South Creake to search a small field for Little Owl. Initial searching proved unsuccessful until some alarm calling by a Blackbird drew our attention to the far side of the field where a Little Owl was found perched in a Hawthorn Bush. Good 'scope views were had by all and bonus birds here included a fly-over Red Kite and a Grey Partridge, which was to be the only one of the trip.

We returned to the bus and made a short drive to our next site, where upon disembarking from the bus we scanned the area, almost immediately picking up a large raptor, which was quickly joined by a second and closer inspection revealed them to be Red Kites, an increasingly seen bird in the area. The surrounding fields were alive with Sky Larks and their song, and the impressive display of Poppies coupled with the sunshine made for the perfect setting. A short walk to the highest viewpoint gave us a perfect view out across the nearby countryside, which enabled us to add a female Marsh Harrier to the trip list.

With lunchtime approaching it was decided we head for Titchwell RSPB reserve to have lunch, then walk out to view the freshwater lagoons on the reserve. Titchwell proved a good move, our visit timed with a high tide, which had encouraged several thousand non-breeding Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit to roost on the lagoons. This time of year is arguably the best to view wading birds in their breeding plumage, with early returning birds invariably still in their summer finery. We enjoyed great views of a selection of wading birds that included 'black' Spotted Redshanks and Ruffs with ruffs! Other birds of note included a male Ruddy Duck, a first summer Little Gull and a Red-crested Pochard with six young, along with large numbers of Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits.

Wed 3rd July - Day 3

With the weather forecast being wet over night and early morning, the 'nightjaring' the previous evening and pre-breakfast walk this morning had been cancelled, and surprisingly it turned out they were right! We had a slightly earlier breakfast then set off to a local site in search of Wood Lark. Shortly after arriving at the site, a perched bird on the edge of the woodland edge drew Gary's attention, a scope was quickly put on the bird, it was a WoodLark. Surely it wasn't going to be this easy! It wasn't. Richard quickly looked in the 'scope seeing the bird, at which point it took off and promptly disappeared from view. Try as we might we couldn't relocate it, though it or another was heard to sing nearby, again frustratingly hidden from view. We accepted defeat and decided to move on to our main destination of the day Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve, stopping en route to look at another Little Owl.

Our time at Lakenheath was spent walking along the main track, stopping at both of the large raised watchpoints to view out over the extensive reed beds, and with the sun out butterflies were active all around us; Large Skipper, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral were amongst those noted. Birds during our visit included Bearded Tits, which were regularly heard and seen flying across the top of the reeds, a Kingfisher, Cuckoo, and Hobbies - with birds initially distant but eventually moving closer and flying right over our heads. Very much the highlight of the walk was a Bittern that flew right over the top of us, with Ralph fortunately paying attention and shouting enabling us all to look up and see it.

Our next stop today was Cavenham Heath where the grass had unfortunately grown quite vigorously during the early part of the year which was to make the task of finding Stone-curlews more of a challenge, but the birds were fortunately vocal which confirmed they were at least present and it wasn't long before we were viewing several birds. Our last stop was at Lynford Arboretum, which was very quiet - a combination of time of day and the hot weather, with a Treecreeper being the only noteworthy addition, though a Firecrest was heard singing on several occasions but unfortunately could not be located.

With the forecast for the evening fine we featured out again for Nightjars, having been recommended a new site nearby. The recommendation had come from another birder who was staying at the hotel, who said he had arrived at the site as it was getting dark, but had still had good views of birds the previous night, and he had also seen a Long eared Owl perched on top of a dead tree! Gary knew exactly where he meant so we walked to the dead tree first, mainly as we had arrived at the site early in good time for dusk. We all peered at the top of the aforementioned dead tree, the top of which clearly had an 'owl-shaped' look to it, complete with two protruding pieces of bark at the top of it, a bit too much of a coincidence? Somewhat disappointed we returned to the lower part of the site to wait for Nightjars. As with the previous night we had several roding Woodcock, and as the light started failing a Nightjar eventually started to chur. The bird took off and flew straight over the top of us to land and spend the rest of our visit frustratingly hidden from view perched in the canopy of a nearby conifer.

Thu 4th July - Day 4

Our last pre-breakfast walk saw us returning to the Wood Lark site from the day before, which unfortunately was very quiet with another Treecreeper the only real bird of interest. After breakfast we returned to the forest, this time heading for a clearing that has always been a reliable spot for Wood Lark in the past. Fingers crossed we walked along a large track leading to the clearing and it wasn't long before the distinct flutey song of a Wood Lark was heard. We walked towards the sound searching the tree tops and suitable perches for the bird, eventually finding it singing high above us, we stood watching and listening as a second bird started singing in the distance. Pleased with our success we continued our walk round the site adding nice views of Sky Lark and Yellowhammer, and hearing Cuckoo. Our journey to our next and final destination for the day, East Wretham NWT reserve, included a stop near Santon Downham, which enabled us to get nice views of a pair of Nuthatches and a further stop for Tree Pipit.

Arriving at the reserve we walked down towards the hide overlooking the mere, where the sun had encouraged dragon- and damselflies to emerge; searching the water's edge revealed large numbers of Red-eyed Damselflies, Four-spotted Chasers and Black-tailed Skimmers. Birds on the water here included our first Little Grebes for the trip, and several Egyptian Geese were also present. We left the hide and followed the main track through the reserve, noting Mistle Thrushes on a large grassy area and a Green Woodpecker, before entering the main wood and following the path until we reached a T junction. On checking the map it was decided time would be tight to complete the circular walk so we started to retrace our steps to the bus. This it turned out was to be a very good move, as a rapid Robin-like ticking call drew our attention to a bush near the path. Closer inspection revealed a female Redstart, which was joined shortly after by a cracking adult male bird. The birds continued to call and it soon became apparent they were in fact a family party with at least two young birds present and being tended to by the adults.

A perfect end to the trip, and we returned back to the minibus for lunch, before returning back to the hotel to say our goodbyes and start our journey home.

Gary Elton

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(a total of 111 species recorded by the group)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*.

Noted at Cockley Cley and South Creake on day 2

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Only one seen, a single bird at South Creake on day 2

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily in small numbers

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB and Titchwell RSPB

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

20 or so birds were seen at Titchwell RSPB and East Wretham NWT reserve

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Seen daily at all wetland sites, which include several family parties

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

A single bird at Burnham Thorpe was followed on day four by three at East Wretham NWT

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Small numbers were noted at Titchwell RSPB

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Easily seen at Titchwell RSPB

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

At least six birds were noted at Titchwell RSPB

Teal *Anas crecca*

A single male bird was seen at Titchwell RSPB

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

At least four were noted at Titchwell RSPB, with a family group seen at East Wretham NWT

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Noted at all wetland sites visited during the trip

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A female plus six young were on the path side pool at Titchwell RSPB

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

A male was seen well at Titchwell RSPB

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Two at East Wretham NWT were the only ones seen

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen at Lakenheath RSPB and Titchwell RSPB

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

A welcome addition to the list with great views had of a fly over bird at Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Seen at Titchwell RSPB and Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Singles noted at Titchwell RSPB and Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily at various sites

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, primarily over the roadside verges

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Five were seen at Lakenheath RSPB, with another seen over the hotel by Dave

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Nice views of a bird at South Creake, followed by a pair near Burnham Market

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Easily seen especially at Lakenheath and Titchwell, with recently fledged young birds now boosting the numbers

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A total of four were seen during the trip

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

An increasingly common bird in Norfolk, with seven seen in total

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

A squealing bird was heard briefly from the reedbed at Lakenheath Fen

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common, noted at all wetland sites

Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted at all wetland sites

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus*

A roadside pair found whilst searching for Woodlarks was a nice find, with three more seen later in the day at Cavenham Heath

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Birds were noted at Titchwell RSPB and East Wretham

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Present in large numbers at Titchwell, with at least 100 birds noted

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded at various sites and roadside fields during the trip

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One was seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Roding birds were seen well on both of our Nightjar sorties

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

30+ birds were present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB, with a flock of 25 also noted at Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Several hundred, some still in breeding plumage, were at Titchwell RSPB.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Several thousand on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB, alongside the above species, again a small percentage still in breeding plumage

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Birds were seen at both Titchwell RSPB and Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

At least six were present at Titchwell RSPB, the majority still sporting their breeding plumage

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Easily seen at Titchwell RSPB

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Brief views were had of one bird by some of the group at Titchwell RSPB

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

At least six were on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB, the majority still sporting ruffs

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common, easily seen each day

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

A first summer bird was present at Titchwell RSPB

Common Gull *Larus canus*

A first summer bird was at Titchwell RSPB

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Noted in small numbers on our day at the coast and several inland sites

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Seen daily at various sites and locations

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Noted at Lakenheath RSPB and Titchwell RSPB

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.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Heard daily, though the only one seen was at Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Single birds were noted at breeding sites near South Creak and Lakenheath

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Two sites were visited, with great views at the first site, with at least three males present. The second site only produced one bird, which was seen well in flight then promptly decided to sit high in a conifer canopy for the remainder of our visit

Swift *Apus apus*

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One over the reedbed at Lakenheath RSPB was seen by some of the group

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

One was seen at Lakenheath RSPB on occasion visiting the feeder by the visitor centre, another was heard at East Wretham

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Single birds were noted daily

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Four were seen in total at Titchwell RSPB.

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

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Only heard with a singing bird noted on our first pre morning walk

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Common in the forest, with birds heard and seen regularly

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily at various sites

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Seen daily at various sites, mainly around suburban areas

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

A family party performed well for us at Titchwell RSPB

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily

Wood Lark *Lullula arborea*

One seen unfortunately only by Gary and Richard at our first attempt for the species.
Fortunately followed by excellent views the next day with a singing bird watched high above us

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

One was heard at Lakenheath RSPB reserve

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A singing bird on our first pre breakfast walk was the only one recorded

Chiff Chaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Heard daily at various sites, with one seen at Titchwell RSPB

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Seen and heard at both Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB reserves

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Seen and heard at both Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB reserves

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen and heard daily at various suitable sites

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Singing birds were heard on our first pre breakfast walk and at Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Whitethroat *Sylvia Communis*

Common and easily seen and heard at suitable sites

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Seen and heard at Lakenheath Fen

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

Heard briefly at Lynford Arboretum but unfortunately not seen.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Several were heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum, with several others heard at other sites

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

A pair were seen near Santon Downham church on our final day

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Single birds were seen on two days

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common, noted daily

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard daily, though only one was seen

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Small flocks of at least six birds were seen at Cockley Cley and East Wretham NWT

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Easily seen at Titchwell RSPB, with particularly tame birds around the car park

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Very much a highlight of the trip with a male and female watched feeding two recently fledged young at East Wretham NWT

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Two were seen well at a nest site near Great Cressingham

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily

Pied/White Wagtail *Motacilla alba/yarellii*

Noted daily at various sites

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Several were heard and seen along side the foot path at Titchwell RSPB

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Two on our first mornings walk, were followed by single birds on the remaining two days

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Seen daily

Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Easily seen around the hotel, with others noted at Lynford Arboretum

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily at various sites

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Seen in small numbers daily

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

One was heard and seen briefly in flight at Choseley drying barns

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Seen throughout the trip at various sites

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Easily seen and heard at Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB

MAMMALS

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Pipstrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Water Vole *Arvicola amphibius*

BUTTERFLIES

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Large Skipper *Ochlodes venata*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES.

Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*

Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella*

Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*