

Norfolk & Suffolk

Goatsuckers & Golden Orioles

Mon 30th June – Thu 3rd July 2014



*Photos (from top): A male **Marsh Harrier** floating above the reeds at Lakenheath is always a magical sight... • ...whilst below a **Reed Bunting** proclaims its territory with its simple but evocative song © all photos from Lakenheath Fen RSPB by Keith Suffling/Limosa Holidays*

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

Trip Diary

Leader: **Gary Elton**

with Alan Burrows & Liz Laverick, David Laurent, Margaret Miller, Jon & Judy Moore, Jon Reveley and Richard Swinbank

Day One

After arriving on our first evening, we enjoyed a pleasant evening meal and a chance to get to know each other, before making our first trip out in search of some reported local breeding Long-eared Owls. On arriving at the site the birds could be heard calling almost immediately, something they were to maintain throughout our visit, though hidden initially from view in a nearby conifer plantation. After a frustrating 20 minutes we finally managed to find a small path that ran through the centre of the trees, here we were treated to views of at least two young Long-eared Owls, with a third calling bird also present. They flew back and forth over the path and on occasions landing on it, with one bird also perching in full view for us on a dead branch on a nearby tree. A fantastic start to the trip, with several roding Woodcocks and churring Nightjars also noted, plus an impressive sight, as the light was falling, of a flock of a thousand or so corvids that flew low and noisily over us on their way to roost.

Day Two

Our first morning's pre-breakfast walk was to a local forest clearing a short drive from the hotel. The area was disappointingly quiet from a sightings perspective, though a low flying female Marsh Harrier was a bit unusual for the area. Breeding Garden Warbler, Blackcap and Willow Warbler were all heard and several male Yellowhammers were heard and seen.

Our plan today was to head for the North Norfolk coast and our drive included a stop mid way, where suitable habitat produced the hoped for Stone-curlews, several Buzzards, Red-legged Partridge and Skylark. Another stop en route closer to the coast gave us views of two roadside Little Owls, with a third calling bird remaining hidden from view in the nearby hedgerow. Another tip off had implied that contrary to local belief a pair of Montagu's Harriers had once again returned to breed on the North Norfolk coast. With details on their whereabouts a little sketchy, we drove around the reported area looking for a suitable area. Stopping at what we considered a good viewing point we disembarked from the bus, immediately noting another Little Owl perched on some old derelict buildings nearby.

Coffee and tea followed (and an early sandwich for at least one of us!) whilst we scanned the area. Then 'bingo' an adult male was picked up flying low over a large cabbage field. The bird initially flew away from us, though everyone managed to see it and have reasonable views, then to our surprise the bird turned and flew back towards us, flying low over the field and road in front of us giving fantastic views. We boarded the minibus continuing our journey to the coast stopping close to Titchwell to view a singing Corn Bunting on some roadside wires. Our destination for the remainder of the day was Titchwell RSPB Reserve, where lunch in the car park was followed by an afternoon spent walking through the reserve viewing the freshwater and brackish marshes and finally the sea. Highlights during our visit included three pairs of Red-crested Pochard, two unsurprisingly sleeping Spoonbills, an adult Mediterranean Gull in amongst the loafing Black-headed gulls, and at least ten Spotted Redshank, the majority still in their summer finery.

After the evening log and dinner we went out to search for Nightjars, visiting a site a short drive from the hotel. After a slow start and very little activity at least one Nightjar started to sing, clearly changing its position, but the failing light made it impossible to see the bird when it flew against the trees. Fortunately the bird switched to the clearer side of the path using a dead tree to perch on, finally giving us some nice albeit silhouetted views.

Day Three

Our pre-breakfast walk today took us to nearby Lynford Arboretum, where a selection of commoner woodland birds were found during our visit which included Marsh Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldcrest and Siskin. After breakfast we went in search of the more typical Breckland species to be found in the forest clearings at this time of year.

With the sun already out bird activity was already little slow; we walked along the edge of the clearing seeing lots of Whitethroats and Yellowhammers on the nearby cut and overgrown tree roots. We located our first Tree Pipit, which unfortunately quickly disappeared from view, though was promptly refound by Margaret as it perched motionless against a nearby tree trunk. A pair of Stonechats appeared nearby, the male looking particularly smart, with a second singing Tree Pipit found further along the track a short while after. We continued our walk around the area, cutting back through one of the cleared areas to complete a circuit. There was no sign of the hoped for Woodlark, though glancing back along the route we had taken revealed a likely looking candidate on a cut stump. Sure enough it was a Woodlark, which gave a far from ideal view, largely down to the heat haze that had now appeared, but all the salient details could be noted and it transpired a second bird was also present nearby.

A long-overdue comfort/tea/coffee stop was next on the cards, which we made at nearby Santon Downham, spending 20 minutes at the small church here. Nuthatch and Marsh Tit were on view, along with a Spotted Flycatcher found by Liz as it sat largely motionless in a small bush in the corner of the churchyard. The final destination today was Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve with a short detour again taking us to another Little Owl site, where one bird was seen. We lunched in the car park before walking out onto the reserve for the afternoon. Dragonflies and damselflies were abundant as we walked along, with Black-tailed Skimmers and Brown Hawkers easily seen, as were butterflies mainly Large Skippers and Ringlets, this latter species seeming particularly common everywhere we visited.

Birds seen during the afternoon as we walked out to the main watchpoint included lots of Marsh Harriers, with plenty of young birds now on the wing, a fleeting Kingfisher, and good numbers of Bearded Tits, although the views of these at times were very brief. Arriving to view the main reed bed, things again seemed quiet so we walked to look over the farmland from the nearby riverbank hoping maybe to find some feeding Cranes. We were in luck with one bird found feeding out in the open on a leafy field, with a second bird also present though largely out of view. Whilst we watched these a Grasshopper Warbler started reeling nearby, but unsurprisingly remained hidden from view. A shout from Allan and Liz revealed a Bittern flying low over the reed bed, which disappeared from view almost immediately, with the majority of the group unfortunately missing it.

An evening visit again for nightjars followed the log and dinner. This trip was more successful than the previous night, with a bird seen in flight over us in good light and several others noted later in the evening. Roding Woodcock were also seen, and with this site once again close to the young Long-eared Owls they were also easily heard.

Day Four

After breakfast this morning we made a return visit again to Lynford Arboretum, where once again we enjoyed a good selection of woodland species, plus another brief Kingfisher along the lake edge there. We also visited nearby Lynford Water, a reclaimed area of old gravel pits complete with a large hide, which unfortunately has a mass of vegetation growing in front of it, but a nice hide all the same! A juvenile Cuckoo was our best find here, initially spotted by Judy as it flew silently over the water in front of us.

A lunchtime visit to Cavenham Heath followed, where we spent a pleasant lunch hour, obtaining nice views of eight Stone-curlew, plus several Green Woodpeckers, Skylarks, an adult Cuckoo and a Hobby. The afternoon was spent at nearby Lackford Lakes, a Suffolk Wildlife Trust Reserve, with a visitor centre and a well-marked series of paths and hides. One of these hides afforded us a prolonged view of a fishing Kingfisher, plus a selection of the expected commoner waterside species.

After the log and dinner this evening we again went out, taking a longer drive than the previous nights to another hoped for breeding Long-eared Owl site. Unfortunately despite searching no sign could be found, but again consolation came in the form of a perched churring Nightjar in one of the forest clearings.

Day Five

Our last morning started after breakfast with a local walk in search of Woodlark - unfortunately, this proved unsuccessful with a calling Cuckoo bird the only bird of note. Our next destination was the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at East Wretham an area of mixed habit, with large areas of grassland, an area of woodland and two meres. The water levels are interestingly fed and regulating by rising ground water and are overlooked by a large well-positioned hide.

Green Woodpecker and Mistle Thrush were added to our day list shortly after we arrived, and our visit to the hide gave us family parties of Egyptian Geese, Little Grebe and Pochard, plus a single Little Egret, several Tufted Duck and Oystercatcher. The woodland walk whilst pleasant was disappointingly quiet, with the timing and rising heat not helping. A coffee break on our return to the minibus was followed by a drive back towards the hotel with a stop at Mayday Farm en route. Again relatively quiet, though a pair of path side Whitethroats entertained us, giving us the run around as we tried to gain Allen a decent view of them. Returning to the minibus we had lunch adding a high flying Hobby to the list before returning to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes and started our journey's home.

Gary Elton

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded – 115)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*.

At least 15 were seen on the second day, with four on the 3rd.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily in small numbers

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Noted daily at all wetland sites visited

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

As above, noted daily at all wetland sites visited.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Again seen daily at all wetland sites, which include several family parties.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*.

Three birds were seen from the minibus on our return journey from the coast, with a family group seen on our last day at East Wretham.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Easily seen during our visit to Titchwell.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen daily in small numbers, with highest numbers at Titchwell and Lackford Lakes.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Easily seen at Titchwell.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Ten plus at Titchwell, were followed by at least eight at Lackford Lakes.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Recorded at Titchwell, Lackford Lakes and East Wretham.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Seen at Lynford Water, Lackford Lakes and East Wretham.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A pair with five young were seen well on Thornham pool during our visit to Titchwell, with two more pairs seen in flight over the freshmarsh. Another pair was also seen during our visit to Lackford Lakes.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Recorded daily.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen at Titchwell, Lackford Lakes, Lynford Water and East Wretham.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

One was seen briefly in flight at Lakenheath Fen RSPB.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Seen daily, with a maximum of two at Titchwell and Lackford Lakes.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Three at both Titchwell and Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserves, with a single at East Wretham.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two largely sleeping birds were on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily at various sites.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, primarily over the roadside verges.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Seen at Titchwell and Lakenheath (2), Cavenham Heath, Mayday Farm.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

A surprise early morning bird on 1st, followed with others easily seen at Titchwell and Lakenheath RSPB reserves.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*

Very much a bonus bird, with a cracking male seen during our visit to the coast.

Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

An increasingly common sight in Norfolk with up to six birds seen on three dates.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

A squealing bird was heard on several occasions at Lakenheath Fen.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common, noted at all wetland sites.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

One was found feeding in a field the other side of the river at Lakenheath Fen, with a second largely hidden bird also present.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus*

A roadside pair found en route to the coast, were followed by eight at Cavenham Heath.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Noted at various sites during the trip.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

At least 40 were counted at Titchwell.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded at various sites and roadside fields during the trip.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

At least four was seen on the fresh marsh at Titchwell .

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Roding birds were seen well on our Nightjar sorties

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Several hundred birds were present on the fresh marsh at Titchwell .

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Four were noted on the beach at Titchwell.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

Several were seen on the beach at Titchwell.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Recorded at Titchwell

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Heard at Titchwell but unfortunately not seen.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

At least ten, the majority in breeding plumage were seen at Titchwell .

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

At least 20 were seen at Titchwell .

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Three males at Titchwell had varying degrees of their ruffs still remaining.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common, easily seen each day.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*

An adult was found in amongst a small group of Black-headed Gulls the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Two adult birds were on the beach at Titchwell.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Several distant birds were seen on the beach at Titchwell.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Noted in small numbers on our day at the coast and around Norwich city centre!

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Two in roadside fields were noted on the way to Lackford Lakes, with several others also noted around Norwich city centre.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Singles were seen at Lakenheath Fen and Titchwell .

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

Easily seen flying along the shoreline at Titchwell.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Easily seen flying along the shoreline at Titchwell.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Noted daily

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Noted on all days in small numbers

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Noted daily and easily seen.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Singles were seen at Lynford Water, a juvenile, Cavenham Heath and heard at Santon Downham on our last morning.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Three at a site near the north coast were followed by a single bird at a second site later in the day, with our final one noted at a nesting site near Lakenheath Fen.

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*

Three young were seen near a nesting site on our first night, with the birds heard again at the same site two days later, with an adult heard briefly then as well.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Recorded each evening at a variety of sites, with some nice perched views had of mainly silhouetted churring birds.

Swift *Apus apus*

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Singles were seen briefly at Lakenheath Fen and Lynford Arboretum, with an adult seen very well at Lackford Lakes.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Birds were seen and heard at Lynford Arboretum, Cavenham Heath and East Wretham.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

At least five were seen at Cavenham Heath with a single also seen at East Wretham.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Up to two birds were seen at various sites.

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*

Several at Lynford Arboretum, were followed by one at Santon Downham Churchyard.

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 was seen in the car park at Lakenheath RSPB.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily, recorded at a variety of sites.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

A brief singing bird at Cockley Cley was followed by views of two at Santon Downham the following day.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard at Lakenheath Fen, Titchwell, Lynford Lakes and Lackford Lakes, with one seen briefly by Liz at this latter site.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

A reeling bird at Lakenheath Fen, was heard but unfortunately not seen.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Only recorded once, on our first morning's pre-breakfast walk.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Heard daily at various sites, with several seen.

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Seen and heard at Titchwell, Lakenheath Fen and Lackford Lakes.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Seen and heard at both Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB reserves.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen and heard daily at various sites

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Heard on our first pre breakfast walk and at Lakenheath Fen.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

A vigorously singing roadside bird, remained hidden from view unfortunately on the wrong side of the hedge!

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Common and easily seen and heard at suitable sites.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Heard at Titchwell RSPB, with several seen and heard at Lakenheath Fen.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Several were heard and seen noted at Lynford Arboretum, Santon Downham, East Wretham and Mayday Farm.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Birds were seen at Lynford Arboretum, Santon Downham Churchyard and East Wretham.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

One was seen on our first visit to Lynford Arboretum.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common, noted daily.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard daily, with several seen.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

At least one was seen during our visit to East Wretham

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Noted daily and easily seen at Titchwell RSPB, with particularly tame birds around the car park there.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

A pair were seen well in an area of clear fell near Santon Downham on our third day.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

One posed nicely for us in the churchyard at Santon Downham.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One on a roof top near the Forestry commission offices was a surprise find.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Birds were noted at various sites during the trip.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Several were noted at Titchwell RSPB reserve.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Two were seen well on our visit to an area of clear fell near Santon Downham.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily.

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Seen daily.

Siskin *Spinus spinus*.

Easily seen around the hotel, with some nice views had of birds at Lynford Arboretum.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily at various sites.

Linnet *Lanaria cannabina*

Seen in small numbers daily.

Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra*

A singing bird was seen well on wires near Choseley Drying barns.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Seen throughout the trip at various sites.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Seen and heard daily at all suitable sites visited.

Mammals

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Chinese Water deer *Hydropotes inermis*

Munjac Deer *Muntiacus reevesi*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Wood Mouse *Apodemus sylvaticus*

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

Butterflies

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Large Skipper *Ochlodes venata*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Comma Polygonia c-album

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*

Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*

Dragonflies and Damselflies.

Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*

Brown Hawker *Aeshna grandis*

Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Common Bluet *Enallagma cyathigerum*

Azure Bluet *Coenagrion puella*

Common Bluetail *Ischnura elegans*

Large Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*