

# Norfolk & Suffolk

## Nightjars, Brecks & Coast

Thu 5th – Mon 9th June 2014



*Photos (clockwise, from top left): A lovely jewel-like Bee Orchid • A Garden Tiger at our mothing session at Lackford... • as was this Swallow Prominent • The group being entertained at Lackford as they check the night's 'catch' • Southern Marsh Orchid is a feature of wet marshes – sadly declining • This young Tree Pipit was lovely, but sadly also in decline © Gary Elton, Limosa*

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

## Trip Diary

Leader: **Gary Elton**

with **Ray Burgess, Sasha Foreman, Tim & Barbara Horsfield and Janet Read**

Straddling the borders of south Norfolk and west Suffolk, the dry sandy heaths and coniferous woodlands of Breckland are at their best for birding in summer. We saw many of the local specialities, including Nightjars and roding Woodcock, plus Woodlark and a surprise Nightingale. Nearby Lakenheath produced Hobbies and Cranes. Our visits to the north Norfolk coast and Titchwell provided excellent views of waders and other wetland species, plus at Burnham a male Spectacled Warbler.

### Day One

After a very enjoyable evening meal and a chance to get to know each other, we retired to bed looking forward to the days ahead.

### Day Two

Our first morning's pre-breakfast walk was to a local forest clearing a short drive from the hotel. On arrival, both singing Garden Warbler and Yellowhammer could be heard - the latter species proving somewhat easier to find and see than the first. A Woodlark appeared singing high over the clearing showing well for us and several Tree Pipits sang from nearby song posts, with a recently fledged bird found perched near the path which gave us great views through the telescope.

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 - a pair, plus four Red Kites, several Buzzards, Red-legged Partridge and Skylark. Our first destination at the coast was at Burnham Overy, where after parking we made our way out along the footpath towards the dunes and an area known as Gun Hill. Our main target here was a vagrant Spectacled Warbler, a species more at home in the Mediterranean than Norfolk, with a male bird having taken up territory and nest building in the hope of being joined by a female. The bird performed admirably for us and for the small line of 50 or so birders that were there with us. The walk to and from the site gave us views of Marsh Harriers, two more Red Kites and a high flying Spoonbill, with a second bird found feeding on the edge of the large reed fringed path side pool, showing well before wandering out of view.

A short drive followed on our return to the bus, where our lunch stop included the addition of Little Owl to our list, after which we headed for our final destination of the day, Titchwell RSPB reserve. Highlights during our visit included two pairs of Red-crested Pochard, a first summer Little Gull, a Bittern seen briefly in flight just as it disappeared into the reed bed, and a well hidden Little Ringed Plover, this latter bird found by Janet. A brief visit to nearby Thornham Harbour on the way back to our Breckland base, concluded our time at the coast, which had been a most enjoyable and productive day.

After the evening's log and dinner we went out for the first of our Nightjar sorties. On arrival, a Cuckoo could be heard and shortly after, our first roding Woodcock was seen, the first of three. Traffic for some bizarre reason was rather heavy through the site, with only a dirt track for cars to drive along and cars appeared to drive down and ten minutes later return, which was most annoying! Several Nightjars could be heard calling though, although we had to wait until almost the last minute before two birds flew over the path in front of us, giving good views and making the waiting worthwhile.

### Day Three

After a late finish the night before and forecast heavy rain for the morning, we had a slightly later start, foregoing the pre-breakfast walk. Our first stop after breakfast at nearby Lynford Arboretum was cut short by the rain, in fact the visit only lasted ten minutes! We added Great Spotted Woodpecker

and Nuthatch to our list though as they frequented some garden feeders, with the decision quickly made to try and escape the weather. We headed south to Cavenham Heath and fortunately to better weather, with the rain virtually stopping on our arrival. We drove along the main path, noting both female and young Great Spotted Woodpeckers on the fence posts, and as we disembarked from the minibus our second Woodlark of the trip was seen. We scanned the area for Stone Curlews, with Ray finding the first, which was reasonably close and without the previous day's heat haze our views were good. Two more birds were found further out on the heath, with two more seen on our journey back along the track.

The threat of rain still hung over us, so Lackford Lakes with its selection of hides was chosen as our next port of call. As ever we were made to feel very welcome at this Suffolk Wildlife Trust Reserve and we walked round enjoying nice views of mainly commoner species, though a real bonus came in the form of a Nightingale. Initially noted by Janet as it sat motionless in the base of a nearby tree, it quickly became apparent that the bird was on territory there. We were able to watch it out in the open as it foraged on a nearby log pile and in amongst the leaf litter, a real treat for us all.

Lunch was taken back at the visitor centre, after which we returned to our original starting point of the day, Lynford Arboretum. With it now mid afternoon and the sun out, birds were far from active, though a strangely dressed individual sat in the car we parked next to took our minds off things momentarily; an individual who was seemingly to appear everywhere we went, making it difficult not to stare as he tottered around in his short skirt and high heels! A walk around the grounds though did prove surprisingly productive, with views of several Treecreeper, Nuthatch, Marsh Tit and several mobile and vocal Siskins. A Spotted Flycatcher was spotted perched on a distant conifer tree, allowing 'scope views for all, though a closer one a short while later unfortunately didn't stay long for us.

An evening visit again followed for Nightjars, with great views again had, this time including several perched individuals plus more views of roding Woodcock.

#### **Day Four**

With the weather now settled and forecast sunny and dry, our first planned destination today was Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve. Stopping on the bridge just before the reserve we looked out along the river, where after a few minutes a Kingfisher appeared perching on a nearby branch, an encouraging start to the day. The visit to Lakenheath was to start with an opportunity to do something a little different, with Catherine the resident moth-expert having agreed not to open the previous evening's moth trap until we arrived. An interesting and enjoyable 45 minutes followed, with moths such as Garden Tiger, Figure of Eighty, Swallow Prominent and Buff Ermine present in the trap, moths that were as impressive to look at as they sounded!

The following few hours were spent walking through the reserve looking out from the various watchpoints. Several views were had of Common Cranes, which included views of a bird feeding in the ditch on the opposite side of the river and a pair flying high above us. Other birds of note included another Kingfisher, several Bearded Tits and a distant Hobby, with the hoped for Bitterns announcing their presence 'booming' from the reed-beds, but remaining hidden from view. A roadside stop at a known Little Owl breeding site gave us nice views of a confiding bird as we headed back towards the hotel and our afternoon destination, Santon Downham.

The plan here was a riverside walk, with the site traditionally good for the hoped-for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Several routes were open to us and we started off planning to do a circular walk around the area. Unfortunately, things occasionally don't go to plan with the path starting off clear and accessible, eventually deteriorating to an impassable nettle bed. Consolation though came in the form of a confiding Woodlark and fine drake Mandarin, which made the walk worthwhile. Walking further down river, we attempted to approach the area from a different access point, looking out initially along the river from the road bridge. A female Mandarin and six young were on the water, along with a pair of Mute Swans with their young. Things started well, though a large bees' nest in the base of a path-side tree some 200 yards or so into our walk made us rethink things and turn back. With time now

ticking by, a short walk around the wooded area near the bridge was followed by a brief return visit to Lynford Arboretum, before returning back to the hotel. After dinner we went out looking for Nightjars and Woodcock, which again was to prove successful.

### Day Five

Our last day started with a visit to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at East Wretham. Arriving at the reserve we walked out over the heath to view the small lake or mere, which is controlled by the rising ground water level.

Birds seen from the hide included Egyptian Goose, Little Grebe, Tufted Duck and Pochard, and a single Curlew. We continued on through the reserve adding Green Woodpecker and Stock Dove to our list, and a Hobby, which surprisingly was only the second of the trip. One of the hoped-for birds at the site was Common Redstart, with the area being one of the only accessible places for this species in the Brecks. Initially searching proved fruitless, then a singing bird was heard nearby in the tree canopy. Frustratingly the bird could not be located, choosing to sing off the main path high in the tree tops and try as we might we just could not find it, eventually causing us to accept defeat and walk away. A short drive took us to our lunch stop at Santon Downham Churchyard, after which we spent the remaining few hours of the trip walking around an area of clear fell. Once again Woodlark and Tree Pipit were seen, along with our first Stonechat of the trip.

We then returned back to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

**Gary Elton**

### SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

*(Total number of species recorded – 114)*

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*.

At least six were seen on the first full day.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily in small numbers

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Noted at all wetland sites visited

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

As above, noted 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*

Two single 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*

Small numbers were noted at all wetland sites visited.

Mandarin *Aix galericulata*

A male, female and six young were seen at Santon Downham.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen daily in small numbers, with a maximum of 15 at Lackford Lakes.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Ten birds were noted at Titchwell RSPB.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Three were seen at Titchwell and two at both Lackford Lakes and East Wretham.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Recorded at Titchwell, Lackford Lakes, Burnham Overy and East Wretham.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Noted at all wetland sites visited during the trip.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Two pairs were seen well on Thornham pool during our visit to Titchwell.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Noted at Lynford Arboretum, Titchwell and East Wretham.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen at Lakenheath Fen, Titchwell, Lackford Lakes and Lynford Water.

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Two distant adult birds were seen out over the sea from Thornham Harbour.

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

A brief bird in flight at Titchwell was followed by two booming birds that unfortunately stayed hidden from view at Lakenheath Fen.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Seen daily, with a maximum of four at Lakenheath Fen.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Singles were noted at Titchwell RSPB and Lakenheath Fen RSPB

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two, one in flight and a feeding poolside bird, were seen at Burnham Overy.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily at various sites.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, primarily over the roadside verges.

Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

A distant single at Lakenheath Fen was followed by better views of another at East Wretham.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Four near Cockley Cley on our first full day, were followed by two later in the day at Burnham Overy.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Several were seen at Lakenheath Fen, Burnham Overy and Titchwell.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Surprisingly scarce with only two seen.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

An increasingly common sight in Norfolk with birds seen daily.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common, noted at all wetland sites.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Two distant birds initially high over Lakenheath reserve, were followed of good views of at least one feeding bird on the other side of the river. Final and better views were then had of presumably the first two birds returning back over us later in the morning.

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus*

A roadside pair found en route to the coast, were followed by five 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.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Five were on the fresh marsh at Titchwell.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One was seen on the fresh marsh at Titchwell RSPB.

Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Roding birds were seen well on all of our Nightjar sorties

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

100 or so birds were present on the fresh marsh at Titchwell RSPB.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Around 30 were on the fresh marsh at Titchwell.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Birds were seen at Thornham Harbour (three), as we travelled on day three (two), and a single at East Wretham.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Easily seen at Titchwell RSPB.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Two were on the fresh marsh at Titchwell RSPB

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Three summer-plumaged birds were on the fresh marsh at Titchwell.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common, easily seen each day.

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

A 1<sup>st</sup> summer bird was present at Titchwell RSPB

Common Gull *Larus canus*

A single 1<sup>st</sup> summer bird at Lakenheath was the only one seen.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

A distant 3<sup>rd</sup> summer bird on the beach at Thornham was the only one seen.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

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

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

100 or so in roadside fields were noted on the way to Lackford Lakes, with a single bird also seen at this site.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Noted at Lakenheath Fen RSPB and Titchwell RSPB.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

Great views were had of close fishing birds at Burnham Overy, with several others noted at Titchwell.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Noted daily

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Noted on three 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*

Heard daily, with several seen.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Single birds were noted at breeding sites near Burnham Overy and Lakenheath RSPB.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

Two sites were visited, with great views had at the second site, with several perched birds and silhouetted flight views had, plus one bird in flight very early in the evening.

Swift *Apus apus*

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Two at Lakenheath, one along the river the other over the reedbeds.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

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

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Heard at Cavenham Heath and a female bird seen at East Wretham.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Singles were seen at various sites.

Common 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*

Four at Lynford Arboretum, were followed by two at Santon Downham.

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*

Several family parties were seen.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

Single singing birds were seen daily, with our best views had at Santon Downham of a confiding bird on the ground.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard at Lakenheath Fen, Titchwell and Lackford Lakes reserves, with one glimpsed in flight at this latter site.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Heard and seen at several local sites.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Heard daily at various sites, with several seen

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

Seen and heard at both Burnham Overy and Lakenheath Fen.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Seen and heard at both Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB reserves, with nice views had of confiding birds at Lackford Lakes.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Seen and heard daily at various suitable sites

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

A singing bird was seen on our first pre-breakfast walk, with other birds noted daily.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia Communis*

Common and easily seen and heard at suitable sites.

Spectacled Warbler *Sylvia conspicillata*

A male bird that had taken up residence at Burnham Overy was a real pleasure to watch, as it collected nest material and sang continually, giving us all nice views.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Several were seen briefly in flight at Lakenheath Fen.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Several were heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum, with several heard at Santon Downham.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Two pairs were seen well at Lynford Arboretum, with others heard at Santon Downham and East Wretham.

Treetreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Several were seen well on our visits 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*

Several were seen at Cockley Cley, Great Massingham and East Wretham.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Noted daily and at Titchwell RSPB particularly tame birds seen around the car park

Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*

Very much a bonus, with Janet initially spotting what transpired to be a very confiding individual that gave us some great views.

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A singing bird at East Wretham frustratingly remained hidden from view in the tree canopy.

Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

One a female, was seen in an area of clear fell near Santon Downham on our last day.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

A distant bird at Lynford Arboretum, was followed by closer but briefer views slightly later at the same site

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily around suburban areas.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

A pair at Lynford Arboretum and a single at Lakenheath Fen were a nice surprise.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Birds were seen at Burnham Overy, Titchwell and East Wretham.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Seen daily at various sites.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

At least four, including a juvenile were seen on our pre breakfast walk on our first morning, with at least one more seen near Santon Downham on our last day.

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.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Single male birds were seen at Lackford Lakes and Santon Downham.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Seen throughout the trip at various sites.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Easily seen and heard 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*

Short-tailed field Mouse *Microtus agrestis*

BUTTERFLIES

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Peacock *Aglais io*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Large Skipper *Ochlodes venata*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Small White *Pieris rapae*

Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES.

Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella*

Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*