

# Norfolk & Suffolk

## Goshawks & Hawfinches

Mon 3rd-Thu 6th March 2014



*Trip photos: The women and men of Goshawks & Hawfinches 2014 © photos tour participants Frances and Roger Aldridge*

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

## Trip Diary

**Leader: Gary Elton**

**with Roger & Frances Aldridge, Joan Lee, Andrew & Lois Patterson, Simon Patterson, Alison Watson and Steve Wilcox.**

### Day One

After a very enjoyable evening meal and opportunity to get to know each other, we discussed the trips plans before retiring to bed full of expectations for the days ahead.

### Day Two

A cold misty start greeted us today, as we made our way to nearby Lynford Arboretum for a short pre breakfast walk. The sun quickly broke through the mist, encouraging the local Song Thrushes to sing from the treetops and these were joined by the sounds of other species such as Chaffinch, Siskin and Nuthatch. All these species were also seen well, along with several fly over Crossbills, Treecreeper and Marsh Tit, though the highlight of the visit was undoubtedly a rather smart male Firecrest.

We returned back to the hotel for breakfast, after which we made our way to several local sites, the first of these a large pig farm where, by scanning the local area we added species such as Red-legged Partridge, Oystercatcher, Shelduck and the expected large numbers of noisy corvids. A short drive to a known Tree Sparrow breeding site enabled, with a little effort, the species to be seen well by everyone. With the sun having now burnt through the mist, a fine sunny day was evolving so we positioned ourselves with a view over a large expanse of woodland, in the hope of views of one of our target species, Goshawk. We were rewarded with our first bird almost immediately flying over the woodland canopy. This was followed over the next hour or so with views of a pair plus several more sightings of single birds. Other birds in the area included large numbers of Buzzards and three Red Kites, with the nearby fields producing a single Curlew and numerous vocal Sky Larks.

Pleased with our success we moved onto our next destination, Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve, where a speculative look en route at a Little Owl nesting site proved unsuccessful. Lunch was taken in the picnic area on arrival at the reserve, and after a short introductory talk by reserve staff we walked through the reserve viewing the various reed-beds from the strategically placed watchpoints. Both Water Rails and Cetti's Warblers were heard, the latter glimpsed by one member of the group, and at least six Marsh Harriers were noted. The wash land bank viewpoint gave us the expected wetland species, though a distant hunting Barn Owl was a nice surprise addition. With the day now drawing to a close we decided to return to the Little Owl site, a good move as a roadside side Barn Owl greeted us as we drove along the road towards it. The Little Owls had appeared, and the first, perched on a fence post was followed by good views of a second bird perched out in the open on a nearby tree.

### Day Three

Once again we woke to a cold frosty start, with nearby Santon Downham achieving a low of -4C, the lowest in the country! Wrapped accordingly we made our way again to nearby Lynford Arboretum for an hour long pre-breakfast walk, which produced a selection of species similar to the day before. After a welcome hearty breakfast we boarded the minibus and drove to our first destination of the day, Mayday Farm, a nearby forestry area, which led to a very pleasant walk in the now glorious morning sunshine. Highlights here included excellent views of a pair of Wood Larks, with several other singing, though more distant birds seen. Four flyover Lesser Redpolls were additions to the list, as was a Hawfinch, which was found in a mature area of primarily beech woodland at the edge of one of the forest clearings, though the views were far from ideal. After lunch and coffee back at the car park drove back towards Lynford stopping at the river car park near Santon Downham. Here the hoped for Brambling was difficult to find, with the wintering Chaffinch flock that had been about having diminished considerably, though after some effort at least one bird was seen by everybody.

Some nearby feeders were proving attractive to the local birds, with a more unconventional feed container being a white basket at which a male Great Spotted Woodpecker was busily feeding, with its head appearing occasionally above the basket edge. We finished the day at Lynford Arboretum, first visiting the reclaimed gravel pit area called Lynford Water, which was quiet with Great Crested Grebe and several Tufted Duck being the only species of note, though a flyover Grey Wagtail was seen by several of us. A walk round the Arboretum followed, with a distant perched Hawfinch arguably the highlight; other species included Little Grebe and Redwing, plus some nice views of several perched Crossbill, a species that is particularly active around the area this year.

#### **Day four**

A grey start to our last morning and our last pre-breakfast visit to the arboretum and realistic chance of obtaining better views of Hawfinch. The slight change of weather had seemingly increased activity around the area with our regular look at the feeding site producing the expected Nuthatch, Coal and Marsh Tits. We scanned the nearby area searching for our quarry, when 'bingo' Alison spotted a bird sat in the tree canopy. Quickly everyone was directed to the bird, though in typical fashion the bird flew off as soon as the telescope was trained on it. We walked on pleased with our success, encountering a second bird shortly after that flew across in front of us unfortunately landing in the centre of the bush which made viewing difficult and it quickly disappeared from view. Nice views of a pair of Green Woodpeckers and several Crossbills followed, concluding a very successful pre-breakfast walk.

With this being the last day, we checked out of the rooms, placed our bags in the vehicles before making our way onto our first destination of the day, the river walk at Santon Downham. A pair of Grey Wagtails were noted almost immediately on the bank edge on our arrival, chasing each other from one side to the other. Our target species at this site was Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, a species that has declined tragically over the last few years, and sites like this have unbelievably become one of the few local areas where the birds are still known to be present. We walked along the river edge pausing to listen to a singing Treecreeper and Yellowhammer, increasing our pace when a drumming woodpecker was heard ahead of us. Bumping into several birders, we heard the fateful words "you should have been here earlier", as they said at least two birds had been active on both sides of the river.

Several Great Spotted Woodpeckers had started drumming, with one of these found on the side of a poplar on the opposite bank. Whilst watching this it was flushed noisily by several other birds, and a Lesser Spotted was also heard to call and appeared to be with them. After a short interlude it or another bird started drumming nearby, the longer seemingly higher pitched drum of the species very obvious with the short deeper drumming of the nearby Great Spots for comparison. Despite intensive scanning of the tree line opposite we could not find the bird, it seemingly being in a row of trees that were largely out of sight. We reluctantly called it a day, with time unfortunately largely against us, re-tracing our steps back along the river pausing briefly to admire several male Crossbills.

The last destination of the trip was the Suffolk Wildlife trust reserve at Lackford Lakes, where an impromptu diversion had meant our visit was unfortunately shorter than we would have liked. We still managed to visit the main hides and lakes here though, that were positioned close to the visitor centre. The change in habitat at the site gave us several new species for our list, these included Goldeneye, Shoveler and Pochard on the main sailing lake, and several Snipe on the shallower scrape area, where a group of 15 Grey Herons were also noteworthy. Returning to the minibus we drove back to the hotel where the trip concluded, and after saying our goodbyes we all started our journeys back home.

*Gary Elton*

## SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded – 86)

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

Good views were had of birds at several sites on our first full day.

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

Noted daily.

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

Easily seen at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath RSPB reserve.

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

Noisy and again easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford Arboretum and Lackford Lakes.

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

Again as expected, seen at Lakenheath, Lynford and Lackford Lakes.

### **Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Two at Great Cressingham were followed by a single bird at Lakenheath RSPB.

### **Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Five were seen at Great Cressingham and a pair at Lackford Lakes.

### **Gadwall *Anas strepera***

This under-rated duck was recorded at Lackford Lakes and Lakenheath RSPB

### **Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen daily.

### **Wigeon *Anas Penelope***

16 were counted from the bankside viewpoint at Lakenheath RSPB.

### **Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

At least ten were seen at Lackford Lakes.

### **Teal *Anas crecca***

20+ were seen at both Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes.

### **Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Eight were noted at Lackford Lakes,

### **Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Easily seen at Lakenheath Fen, Lynford and Lackford Lakes.

### **Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula***

Four drakes and two redheads were seen well at Lackford Lakes.

### **Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Two pairs were noted on the lake at Lynford Arboretum.

### **Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Recorded at Lakenheath RSPB, Lynford Water and Lackford Lakes.

### **Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Three during our visit to Lakenheath RSPB was followed by an impressive count of 15 stood together on the edge of the main reserve pool at Lackford Lakes.

### **Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Three were noted during our visit to Lakenheath RSPB, with one noted as we approached Lackford

### **Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted at all wetland sites.

### **Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily, with one particularly showy bird seen at Lynford.

### **Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

At least six birds were seen at Lakenheath RSPB including some displaying birds

### **Red Kite *Milvus milvus***

Three distant birds were seen at Cockley Cley, with a very close roadside bird seen as we drove to Lackford Lakes.

### **Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis***

Seen well though distantly on day two, with a pair seen together and a further five sightings made of individual birds.

### **Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Seemingly still increasing in Norfolk, with at least 15 in the air together whilst we were watching the above species, with others noted at Mayday farm (6+) and Lackford Lake (3)

### **Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

Heard at Lakenheath RSPB (4+) and Lackford Lakes (2)

### **Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily in all suitable habitat.

### **Common Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted at all wetland sites.

### **Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

One was heard and seen briefly at Cockley Cley, with seven seen by Roger our visit to Lakenheath RSPB.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Four at Great Cressingham were followed by a pair at Lackford Lakes.

**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Seen at Cockley Cley, Lakenheath RSPB and Lackford Lakes.

**Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

Three were seen, tucked well away in the vegetation at Lackford Lakes.

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

Noted daily.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

Noted daily in small numbers.

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

Noted on the pig fields near Great Cressingham, with a single also seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Feral Pigeon *Columba livia***

Noted daily.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Seen daily in small numbers.

**Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Noted daily and easily seen.

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around suburban areas.

**Barn Owl *Tyto alba***

A distant bird from the bankside viewpoint at Lakenheath RSPB was followed by a roadside bird an hour later which showed very well for us.

**Tawny Owl *Strix aluco***

A day calling bird was heard briefly at Mayday Farm.

**Little Owl *Athene noctua***

A return dusk visit gave us nice views of a pair near Lakenheath RSPB

**Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor***

Frustratingly a calling and drumming bird remained hidden from view during our visit to Santon Downham.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Seen daily, with one seen particularly well in a 'feeder basket' at Santon Downham.

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

Heard daily, with best views had of a pair at Lynford Arboretum.

**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Seen at Lynford Arboretum and Mayday farm.

**Magpie *Pica pica***

Recorded daily in small numbers

**Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***

Common and easily seen.

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Noted daily at various sites

**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

Seen daily in small numbers

**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***

Seen daily, with birds at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham particularly well.

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Easily seen and constantly heard in suitable woodland habitat.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Recorded daily

**Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Recorded daily

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

Recorded at virtually all sites visited, with several showy birds seen outside the hide at Lackford Lakes.

**Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis***

Several were heard, with birds seen well at Cockley Cley.

**Wood Lark *Lullula arborea***

Heard at Cockley Cley, with at least four singing birds at Mayday Farm, one pair seen particularly well.

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

At least four individuals were heard at Lakenheath RSPB reserve with one seen, another was heard at Lackford Lakes.

**Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus***

Nice views were had of one at Lynford Arboretum during our first pre-breakfast walk, with a singing bird also heard at Santon Downham.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Heard and seen at various sites during our visits to the forest.

**Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Seen and heard daily.

**Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***

Recorded daily, seen particularly well on the feeders at Lynford .

**Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

Several singing birds were heard, with one seen well at Lynford Arboretum on our first pre-breakfast walk.

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Noted daily, primarily around Mundford village.

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen and heard daily.

**Redwing *Turdus iliacus***

Several were seen well at Lynford Arboretum.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Heard daily, seemingly particularly common at Lynford Arboretum.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

Again heard daily, with birds seen particularly well on some ploughed land at Santon Downham.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Common, seen daily

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas, including the hotel.

**Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***

At least six birds were seen in hedgerows near a local breeding site.

**Dunnock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea***

A fly over bird at Lynford Water, was followed by a pair on the river at Santon Downham.

**Pied/White Wagtail *Motacilla alba/yarrellii***

One or two birds were noted daily at various sites

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* .**

Two were seen at the roadside near Cockley Cley.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Common, Seen daily.

**Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla***

At least one bird was seen amongst a small flock of Chaffinch at Santon Downham.

**Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Seen daily, particularly easy to see around the hotel.

**Siskin *Spinus spinus*.**

Common in the area, seemingly seen and heard everywhere.

**Lesser Redpoll *Acanthis cabaret***

Four fly over calling birds were seen at Mayday Farm.

**Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Seen daily at various sites.

**Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Thin on the ground with only ones and twos noted, though on a daily.

**Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra***

Easily seen and heard throughout the forest, with nice perched views had of birds by everyone.

**Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula***

Heard at Mayday farm, though a pair at Lynford Arboretum were unfortunately leader only birds.

**Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes***

Distant views of what was thought to almost certainly to be a Hawfinch at Mayday Farm, was followed by better though still distant views of a tree top bird at Lynford Arboretum. Perseverence for this species paid off with a nice view had of bird again at Lynford on our last morning, with a second seen briefly a few minutes later.

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella***

A stunning male was appreciated by all at Mayday Farm, with a singing bird also seen at Santon Downham.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Easily seen at Lakenheath RSPB, with another seen on the paddock edge at Lynford Arboretum.

### **Mammals**

**European Rabbit** *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

**Muntjac** *Muntiacus reevesi*

**Roe Deer** *Capreolus capreolus*

**Eastern Grey Squirrel** *Sciurus carolinensis*

### **Butterflies**

**Red Admiral** *Vanessa atalanta*

**Brimstone** *Gonepteryx rhamni*