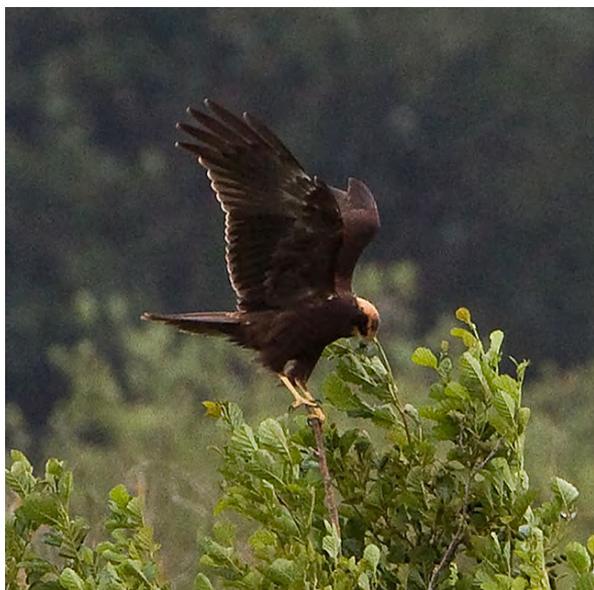


## Norfolk:

Honey Buzzards & Nightjars (2)

Mon 4th - Thu 7th July 2011

---



Photos (clockwise from top): Juvenile **Marsh Harrier** at Lakenheath Fen © kind permission tour participant Simon Smith • Juvenile **Grey Heron** waits patiently at Lakenheath Fen • A **Hedge Brown** (or Gatekeeper) settles beside the path at the Lakenheath • We were successful with **Nightjars** in Thetford Forest • And the elegant **Banded Demoiselle** © Gary Elton

report compiled by tour leader:  
Gary Elton

## Trip Diary

### Tour Leader: Gary Elton

with Paul and Sue Daunter, John & Irene Harper, Margaret Miller, and David & Lynn Smith

#### Day One

After a very enjoyable evening meal at the Crown, we made the first of our trips out to look for Nightjars. A Song Thrush could be heard singing as we arrived and a distant Yellowhammer and fly over Kestrel were also noted. After a short wait, the first Nightjar began *churring*, and as dusk fell several others started up. After this rather promising start, we drew a blank with up to three birds heard throughout our stay but unfortunately none were seen.

#### Day Two

With the forecast today being the more favourable of the three days, we opted to visit the planned coastal sites. After breakfast, we headed off towards the coast, making a brief stop just outside Swaffham for Tree Sparrow. The birds breed alongside House Sparrows in the roofs of several old farm buildings, with a healthy population ensuring birds were constantly on show. Several Greenfinches, Goldfinches and Linnets were also seen here.

Our next stop was the “raptor watchpoint” at Great Ryburgh, in search of Honey Buzzards - although they are proving exceptionally difficult this year. The short climb up the elevated field edge gave us a good view over nearby Senowe Park and an equally good view over the neighbouring farmland. Good numbers of Skylarks sang around us and several Stock Doves were noted, while non-avian interest came in the form of several Emperor dragonflies patrolling over the field in front of us. Common Blue damselflies were also numerous along the field edge. Raptors seen over the next 45 minutes included three Common Buzzards, two Kestrels, a Sparrowhawk and a Hobby, the latter putting on a good show for us as it hunted dragonflies overhead. As we returned to the bus, a pair of Common Terns seemed slightly out of context as they jostled with each other high in the sky.

After a short refreshment break we continued on our journey to the coast. We took the more scenic route across country, where a speculative look for Little Owl in a ‘suitable looking’ field just outside the village of South Creake proved successful with one found sitting in the sun at the base of a nearby dead tree. Our next stop was for lunch at Choseley drying barns, where we parked the bus and walked west along the footpath to view the surrounding fields whilst we ate our sandwiches.

Arriving at Titchwell RSPB reserve, we made our way out towards the freshmarsh. The pool to the west of the path was our first stop, where a selection of waterbirds included a female and juvenile Red-crested Pochard. We spent the next hour in the Island Hide, enjoying the fine selection of birds on show. Waders included Ruff and Spotted Redshank - the majority of them still retaining various stages of breeding plumage - along with several hundred Black-tailed Godwits, while the local Avocets appeared to have had a successful breeding season, too. Three Little Ringed Plover were found by Margaret on one of the islands, and a juvenile Ringed Plover nearby presented a nice comparison. Bearded Tit was on several “wish lists” and searching the base of the waterside reeds we soon found a young bird, which remained on show for everyone, eventually being joined by a second. We then returned to the visitor centre where we told there was a possible Icterine Warbler in the trees. As luck wouldn't have it, the bird was proving particularly difficult to see, remaining high in the woodland canopy and singing occasionally. Although we did manage to hear it, sadly our views of the bird were poor.

Thornham Harbour was our final destination of the day, where we enjoyed the perfectly lit surroundings, which we viewed from the elevated sea wall. Several Marsh Harriers were noted plus a Kestrel; a singing Meadow Pipit also showed well for us from its song post near the car park. We returned to the minibus and drove back to our hotel for dinner.

Later that evening, we again ventured out looking for Nightjars - but grey clouds and threat of forecasted rain made us wonder how successful we would be. We needn't have worried, however, for as we walked down from the minibus to the viewing area, a bird started *churring*... and bingo, there it was sat on top of a small conifer! Everyone saw the bird before we then watched it flying off over the tree tops. We had further flight views on three more occasions, possibly of two different birds. As the light finally started to fade, the rain arrived - timed perfectly for our return to the hotel!

### Day Three

With an unsettled day forecast and any wet weather expected to arrive later in the day, we decided to spend the morning at the RSPB's Lakenheath Fen reserve. We set off directly after breakfast, but stopping along the way at a previously discovered site to look for Little Owl, where we were to be successful having good views of two birds perched out in the open for us.

Arriving at Lakenheath Fen, we made our way to the visitors' centre and, after a short introductory talk about the reserve by a member of staff, headed out along the woodland track towards the furthest watchpoint. A stiff breeze was blowing which made viewing the smaller birds difficult, although Reed Warblers and Reed Buntings could both be heard. We stopped briefly at the first watchpoint: two Bearded Tits flew over the top of the reeds and quickly disappeared from view. Up to four Marsh Harriers were also on show, three of which were juvenile birds. With bright sunlight appearing on occasion through the clouds, a selection of butterflies and dragonflies could be seen beside the paths, and new ones for us included Comma and Brown Hawker. As we approached the main watchpoint, our first Bittern flew over us heading for the main reedbed; this turned out to be one of five sightings, of at least three birds. A Cetti's Warbler sang briefly and a Cuckoo called from nearby woodland, but both refused to show. Margaret also heard a snatch of Golden Oriole song, but this was only to be the once. A distant Hobby was flying over the adjacent farmland as we climbed on to the raised river bank to make our way back to the minibus.

After lunch in the picnic area we drove on to our next destination, Cavenham Heath Nature Reserve. The habitat is ideal for Stone-curlews and it wasn't long before we found our first birds. A total of six was seen along with a nice Little Owl (found by Paul) perched on a grass mound, and a Green Woodpecker that obligingly appeared in the same 'scope view as one of the Stone-curlews.

Our final destination of the day was Lackford Lakes, a Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve. We made our way around a section of the reserve, visiting several of the hides overlooking the lakes. A selection of commoner wildfowl was present, along with two Egyptian Geese and a Little Egret. A visit to the Tree Sparrow feeder produced only one bird today - but a female Sparrowhawk appearing from the tree above the feeder went some way towards explaining the lack of birds there this afternoon!

### Day Four

With yet another mixed bag of weather forecast, we decided to make an early start for a pre-breakfast walk at Lynford arboretum. On arrival, the woods were surprisingly quiet with only the familiar sound of Song Thrush and Blackcap heard. As we walked through the arboretum, however, we could hear Coal Tit and Goldcrest singing; amongst them, we picked up the sound of a singing Firecrest - but unfortunately the bird remained hidden from view. With time ticking by we made our way back to the minibus, adding two Spotted Flycatchers and a calling 'fly over' Crossbill before returning to the hotel for a slightly later than planned breakfast.

Our birding today was to be reasonably local, targeting the more specialised forest species. After our early frustrations with Firecrest this morning, a second site was visited, being only a short drive from the hotel. Once again, a singing bird was heard... and once again the bird refused to show. We were beginning to think seeing one was not to be!

We drove back on to the Thetford road, then after a mile or so took one of the unmade forest tracks, stopping occasionally to listen out for Tree Pipit and Woodlark. After a while, the first Tree Pipit was located and we disembarked to enjoy good views of a singing bird perched on the top of a small conifer. Walking further on revealed a small forest clearing, where we found a further two singing birds, plus had rather nice views of a family of recently-fledged Swallows, sitting out on a nearby branch. Our next stop was another woodland clearing which produced a nice selection of pine and open country birds including Skylark, Mistle Thrush, Yellowhammer, Coal Tit, Stonechat and another singing Tree Pipit. Two Woodlarks were spotted in flight, dropping down into an area further around the clearing. As we made our way towards the birds, they took off but fortunately landed again, one choosing to perch out in the open and enabling us to get 'scope views of it. The grey clouds were now gathering in earnest and it was deemed wise to make our way back to the bus - which was to be a good move, as the heavy rain started just as we were climbing back in!

Lunch was taken in the minibus as the weather now had truly taken a turn for the worse. However, after half an hour or so it began to clear. As the rain stopped, we drove to a third Firecrest site and finally gained good views of a singing bird there. Some would say all good things come to those that wait!

For our final birding of the trip, we continued to the nearby river bank and walked a circular route along a section of it. A confiding flock of twenty or so Siskins was present in a pathside birch, with Blackcap, Common Whitethroat and Reed Warbler also present in the nearby scrub. Treecreeper and Marsh Tit were found in the more wooded area, and the walk back beside the river produced a surprise in the form of a family of Mandarin Ducks, comprising a female and seven young! A Kingfisher bolted from its riverside perch but took a route out through the trees, enabling only the fortunate few at the front to see it. With the sun now doing its best to appear, we paused at the bridge and looked out over the water; various species were fly-catching, including several Chaffinches, Blackcaps and a Garden Warbler.

Returning to the bus, a short drive took us back to the hotel where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

Gary Elton

### ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded by the group: 108)

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

One was seen in a roadside field from the back of the bus on the 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Noted daily.

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Noted at Lakenheath and Lackford Lakes.

**Brent Goose *Branta bernicla***

A single bird on the salt marsh at Thornham was a bit of a surprise.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Seen daily at all wetland sites.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

At least four were seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Easily seen at the coast, with five also seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen daily.

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Small numbers were seen at all wetland sites.

**Teal *Anas crecca***

Small numbers of birds were noted at all wetland sites visited.

**Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Small numbers were seen at Titchwell and Lackford Lakes.

**Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina***

A female and juvenile bird were on the west bank pool at Titchwell.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Noted at all wetland sites visited.

**Mandarin *Aix galericulata***

A surprise find was a family party, a mother and seven young, on the river at Santon Downham.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Noted at Titchwell, Lakenheath and Lackford Lakes.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Noted at all wetland sites visited, with lots of young birds noted at Lakenheath.

**Bittern *Botaurus stellaris***

A good year for Bitterns! Five sightings of possibly three different birds was a good total.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Small numbers were seen at various sites.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Birds were seen at Thornham, Titchwell and Lackford Lakes.

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted daily at all suitable sites.

**Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily, primarily over the roadside verges.

**Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

A single bird was seen at Great Ryburgh, with two more at Lakenheath Fen.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

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

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

Singles were seen at Great Ryburgh, Choseley Barns, Lakenheath Fen and Cavenham Heath.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Three at Great Ryburgh were followed by singles near Lakenheath and at Cavenham Heath.

**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Common, noted at all wetland sites.

**Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

A squealing bird was heard calling from the reedbed as we returned to the car park for lunch at Lakenheath Fen.

**Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus***

Good views were had of at least six birds at Cavenham Heath NNR.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Easily seen at coastal sites

**Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Present in large numbers at Titchwell, where they appear to have had a good breeding season.

**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Noted at several sites, with larger numbers seen near the coast.

**Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria***

A small flock of twenty birds, the majority still in breeding plumage were seen at Thornham Harbour.

**Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

A single immature bird was seen at Titchwell offering a nice comparison with the following species.

**Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius***

Three were present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola***

Two roding birds were seen well on our first evening.

**Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa***

Over a hundred were present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, with a large number still in varying stages of breeding plumage. Seven also noted at Lakenheath Fen.

**Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Noted at Thornham Harbour and Titchwell RSPB.

**Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Noted at Thornham Harbour and Titchwell.

**Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus***

At least six birds were present at Titchwell, the majority still in breeding plumage.

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

Again at least ten birds present at Titchwell, with several supporting complete ruffs.

**Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus***

Common easily seen each day.

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

An adult bird at Thornham harbour was the only one seen.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Noted in small numbers on our day at the coast.

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

Noted in/near several roadside pig fields during our travels, with two more seen at Thornham Harbour..

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

Two high over Great Ryburgh watchpoint and four at Lackford Lakes were the only ones noted.

**Feral Pigeon (Rock Dove) *Columba livia***

Noted daily

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Noted daily in small numbers

**Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus***

Noted daily and easily seen.

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around village areas.

**Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus***

One was heard at Lakenheath Fen.

**Little Owl *Athene noctua***

Four seen in total, with roadside birds at South Creake and Lakenheath (2), and at Cavenham Heath

**Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus***

After only hearing birds on our first evening out, we were rewarded with a variety of views of possibly three different birds - including one perched out in full view for us!

**Swift *Apus apus***

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

**Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

One perched briefly for us on our river walk before darting off.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Seen and heard at Lakenheath and St Helens car park, Santon Downham

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

Birds were noted at Lakenheath Fen, Cavenham Heath and Santon Downham

**Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus***

One was heard briefly in song by Margaret at Lakenheath Fen

**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Noted at Lakenheath and Lackford Lakes

**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***

Two were seen on our river walk at Santon Downham

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Recorded daily at suitable sites

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Recorded daily

**Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Recorded daily

**Sand Martin *Riparia riparia***

Six were seen over the fen at Lakenheath

**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***

Two small family parties were noted.

**Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Seen and heard daily.

**Woodlark *Lullula arborea***

Two birds were seen well on our last day in the forest.

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

One was heard briefly at Lakenheath RSPB reserve.

**Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia***

A distant reeling bird at Lakenheath was heard occasionally, presumably as the bird turned its head towards us.

**Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

Heard daily at various sites.

**Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina***

Surprise bird of the trip, although we managed only poor views of a singing bird at Titchwell.

**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 sites

**Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin***

One was watched flycatching over the river at Santon Downham.

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Common, easily seen and heard at suitable sites.

**Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus***

Several were seen at both Titchwell and Lakenheath Fen.

**Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus***

Three birds heard at three different sites, with the last bird finally showing for us.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Singles heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum.

**Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Seen and heard daily.

**Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

Heard at Lynford arboretum, and seen on our river walk.

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Common, noted daily,

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen daily

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Heard daily, with several seen.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

One was noted carrying food in one of the forest clearings on our last day.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Heard and seen daily

**Stonechat *Saxicola torquata***

One was seen by Margaret perched out on a tree stump in one of the forest clearings.

**Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata***

Two were seen at Lynford arboretum

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas.

**Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***

A scarce and declining bird, so good to see at least a dozen at their breeding site near Great Cressingham.

**Duncock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

Noted daily

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Several were heard and seen at Thornham harbour.

**Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis***

Four individuals were recorded, with three of these at the same site.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Seen daily.

**Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris***

Seen daily.

**Siskin *Carduelis spinus*.**

Easily seen around the hotel, with a riverside flock of c20 birds showing well for us at Santon Downham.

**Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Seen daily at various sites.

**Linnet *Carduelis cannabina***

Seen in small numbers daily.

**Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra***

One flew over us calling at Lynford Arboretum.

**Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula***

Males seen at the feeding site at Lackford Lakes, and at Great Cressingham perched out on a telegraph wire.

**Corn Bunting** *Emberiza calandra*

One was seen briefly on the roadside wires at Choseley drying barns.

**Yellowhammer** *Emberiza citronella*

Seen throughout the three days 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*

Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Pipstrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

**BUTTERFLIES**

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*

Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Large Skipper *Ochlodes venata*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Comma *Polytonia c-album*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Peacock *Inachis io*

**DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES**

Emperor *Anax imperator*

Brown Hawker *Aeshna grandis*

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*