

## Norfolk:

Honey Buzzards & Nightjars (3)

Mon 11th-Thu 14th July 2011

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*Trip photos (clockwise from top): A juvenile Avocet stretches its wings at Titchwell • This female Montagu's Harrier put on a great show for our group on the north Norfolk coast • With young in the nest, July is a terrific month to see Bitterns - as demonstrated by this bird, flying right past our group at Lakenheath Fen! © tour participant Simon Smith*

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

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## Trip Diary

### Tour Leader: Gary Elton

*with Raymond Cruise, Graham Davies, Elizabeth Hammond, Steve Niklin, Shelagh Ross, Simon Smith, and Paul & Heather Salvidge*

#### Day 1: Mon 11th July

After a very enjoyable evening meal, we made the first of our trips out into Thetford Forest to look for Nightjars, and with a perfect still evening it wasn't long after we arrived that we heard our first bird. A fly over Grey Heron, and several singing Song Thrushes were also noted as we waited for the star of the show to appear. As dusk fell, we were rewarded with a brief but good view of a Nightjar as it crossed the path in front of us, before disappearing from view over the top of the conifer plantation. This was to be our only sighting tonight, although at least one other Nightjar was heard both calling and wing-clapping. As we made our way back to the bus a calling Woodcock flew across in front of us, and both Noctule and Pipistrelle Bats were also seen.

#### Day 2: Tue 12th July

With today's forecast being the best of the coming three days we headed for the coast, stopping en route at Great Cressingham. Here we had good views of Tree Sparrows at a breeding site, with birds seen perched on the roofs of several buildings and seen flying to and from the nearby hedgerows. Two Green Woodpeckers - an adult and juvenile - were found perched in a dead tree, affording a nice comparison on the plumage differences, and a Turtle Dove flew over, albeit briefly, which fortunately the majority of the group at least glimpsed.

Our next stop was the raptor watchpoint at Great Ryburgh, although the promised sunny weather had not materialised and the skies were quieter here than hoped, with birds of prey represented in the form of a single Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard and Kestrel. We decided our time would be spent better elsewhere and we continued on towards the coast, stopping just outside South Creake at a previously discovered Little Owl site. As luck would have it, as we pulled up a Little Owl flew across the field in front of us, landing in the centre of a nearby tree. But unfortunately, our searching failed to relocate it in amongst the dense foliage. We moved on to the coast to search for one of our target species, Montagu's Harrier. We made several circuits of the area before we came across a female bird, perched on a farm track. The bird realised we were there and took off, but stayed in the immediate area, enabling us to enjoy good prolonged flight views.

With our stomachs telling us it was lunch time we continued to Thornham Harbour, where we looked out over the harbour mouth as we ate our sandwiches. A flock of fifty or so Golden Plover were present, as were Bar-tailed Godwits, Shelduck and a large number of gulls and Sandwich Terns, with fly over Little Egret, Turnstone and Whimbrel also noteworthy. The increasing wind strength meant we cut short our post-lunch walk along the sea wall there, opting for the comfort and shelter of the hides at nearby Titchwell RSPB reserve. A brief stop at the pool adjacent to the footpath on the way out to the hides produced two Red-crested Pochard and a selection of commoner wildfowl, plus a fly over Spoonbill, first noted by Steve. We then spent the next hour and a half sifting through the birds present on the freshmarsh, viewing it from both the Island hide and the futuristic new Parrinder hide. Waders were well represented with over 500 Knot, and at least a hundred each of Avocet, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, with smaller numbers of Greenshank, Spotted Redshank and Ruff. A Hobby was a nice bonus, swooping down over the marsh and scattering everything in front of it, breaking the wader spell and prompting us to return to the minibus for a cup of tea prior to returning to the hotel.

Our journey back was broken by a short detour into the forest, where we were fortunate to stumble across three Common Crossbills, all streaky juveniles, perched nicely in a roadside birch with a Siskin along side them for comparison.

After our evening meal, we went out to try for Nightjars again. A different spot was chosen from the previous night and birds were heard almost immediately on our arrival. We were soon rewarded with brief views of one or possibly two birds, then Simon spotted one settled on the track. This was shortly followed by extended views of a bird perched in the top of a conifer, before we watched it briefly in flight and it finally disappeared from view. Mission accomplished!

#### Day 3: Wed 13th July

Our destination today was the RSPB's Lakenheath Fen reserve, though the almost customary short detour along the way rewarded us with good views of a Little Owl perched out on a fence post beneath its nest hole, and a Spotted Flycatcher, flycatching from its perch further along the same fence.

After arriving at Lakenheath, we were given a short presentation about the reserve by one of the volunteers at the visitor centre, then made our way along the path to the watchpoints. Birds seen along the way included Reed and Sedge Warblers, and several Common Whitethroats, although the brisk breeze made viewing conditions difficult, with many of the smaller birds choosing to stay hidden. On reaching the main viewpoint, Marsh Harriers were soon in evidence, with several family groups seen hunting over the reedbed; the dark young birds with their bright ginger crowns easily picked out. A Cetti's Warbler could be heard singing from a nearby stand of elder, but typically remained hidden from view. Several Bearded Tits were glimpsed, but a male, found by Heather, showed well for all of us as it perched out on the top of a reed stem. The long walk to the watchpoint was deemed worthwhile though by the fantastic views we had of Bitterns, with three different individuals watched and photographed flying past us, as they made flights to or from their nesting sites. Having had our fill of Bitterns, we returned to the minibus and took lunch in the picnic area.

After lunch, we had a look out over the fen before moving on to our next stop, at Cavenham. Driving along the sandy track, it wasn't long before we saw the first of our Stone-curlews. We stopped and enjoyed good 'scope views, and on checking the surrounding area a further four birds were found. Green Woodpeckers were also very much in evidence, with at least four individuals seen during our visit. Our final destination of the day was Lackford Lakes, a Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve, where we visited a selection of the hides that overlook the lakes (former gravel workings) there. Noteworthy species included five Green Sandpipers, Egyptian Goose and Common Tern, while a perfectly lit juvenile Grey Heron gave great photos opportunities as it searched for food in front of the hide.

#### **Day 4: Thu 14th July**

This morning we made an early start and headed to Lynford Arboretum for a pre-breakfast walk. Almost as soon as we arrived, it started to rain. Fortunately, this quickly passed, although it didn't deter a very vocal Song Thrush that was singing from its perch, and was still singing when we left an hour and a half later. Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Green Woodpecker and a brief Spotted Flycatcher were seen, with Blackcap and Nuthatch heard.

We returned to base for breakfast, then departed to spend the rest of the day exploring the local forest. The unseasonable windy and cloudy weather meant that the more exposed forest clearings were relatively quiet, with only Swallow, Yellowhammer and Common Whitethroat noted at these. But we finally came up trumps at the last site, which was more sheltered and held all our hoped-for species. The area had been cleared in the traditional way of piling all the old root stock in lines down the length of it, which provide breeding habitat, shelter and perches for birds. Searching along the tops of these afforded views of Mistle Thrush, and more Yellowhammers and Whitethroats. A fine male Stonechat was also seen perched in full view, quickly followed by our first Tree Pipit, one of several individuals present. We walked around the clearing, and it wasn't until we started to return to the main track that we spotted our first Woodlark: a group of four birds firstly seen in flight, with two landing together on the top of the old roots, allowing us good 'scope views. We returned to the bus adding Small Skipper to our butterfly list on the way, before making the short drive to Santon Downham for lunch.

After lunch, we took a walk along the Little Ouse. Interesting species included a young buck Roe Deer, lots of Banded Demoiselle damselflies and a hotly debated and photographed Essex Skipper (you have to look at the underside of the antennae remember!). Just as we started to head back along the riverside path to the bus, a calling Kingfisher flashed past - a great final species for the trip! A last cup of tea was followed by the short drive back to the hotel where the break concluded with farewells and journeys home.

Gary Elton

### **ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED**

*(Total number of species recorded – 113 )*

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

Noted at Choseley, nr Fakenham and Thetford.

#### **Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

A roadside covey was seen near Ringstead, with a single bird seen at Choseley.

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

Noted daily.

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

Noted at Titchwell and Lackford Lakes, with c20 at each site.

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

At least 30 were seen at both Titchwell and Lackford Lakes.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Seen at all wetland sites, with large numbers at Lakenheath Fen.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

At least six were seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Noted in large numbers at the coast.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen daily.

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

At least twelve were seen at Titchwell.

**Common Teal *Anas crecca***

Seen at Titchwell (c20) and Lackford Lakes (c10)

**Pochard *Aythya ferina***

At least twenty were seen on the boating lake at Lackford Lakes, with several others noted at Titchwell.

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

Two were on the pool west of the main path at Titchwell

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Noted at all wetland sites visited.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Noted at Titchwell, Lakenheath and Lackford Lakes.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Noted at Titchwell, with lots of young birds noted at Lakenheath.

**Bittern *Botaurus Stellaris***

Three enviable views were had of birds in flight at Lakenheath.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Small numbers were seen at various sites.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Two birds were seen at Thornham, with a single at Titchwell.

**Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***

One spotted in flight by Steve was a nice addition for us all.

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted at Titchwell, Thornham and Lackford Lakes.

**Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily, primarily over the roadside verges.

**Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

Good views of a bird over the freshmarsh at Titchwell as it scattered everything below it.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

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

**Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus***

A female bird initially seen on a roadside farm track, gave us prolonged flight views.

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

Single birds were seen at Great Ryburgh and Lakenheath Fen.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Eight birds were seen in total over the three days.

**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Common noted at all wetland sites.

**Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus***

Good views were had of five birds at Cavenham Heath NNR.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Easily seen at Thornham and Titchwell RSPB.

**Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Easily seen at Titchwell, where over a hundred birds present.

**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Noted daily, with larger numbers seen near the coast.

**Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria***

At least fifty were present at Thornham, feeding in amongst the sea lavender.

**Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Two were seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius***

Three birds on the freshmarsh at Titchwell were seen well from the Parinder hide.

**Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola***

A single bird was seen well on our first evening outing, with a second seen poorly on the second visit.

**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, a single bird was also seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica***

A mixed flock of hundred or so of this species and Knot were on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus***

A single calling bird flew over us at Thornham, with two more noted at Titchwell.

**Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Noted at Thornham 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.

**Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***

A least ten were noted on the the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB.

**Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus***

Five were seen at Lackford Lakes.

**Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

Three summer plumage birds were seen in flight at Thornham.

**Knot *Calidris canutus***

A mixed flock of c500 hundred this species and Bar-tailed Godwit were on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

At least ten birds were noted in amongst the above species at Titchwell, with one in flight over the watchpoint at Lakenheath Fen.

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

At least 15 birds present at Titchwell, with several supporting complete ruffs.

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

Common easily seen each day.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

At least ten were noted at both Thornham Harbour and Titchwell RSPB.

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

Several were noted on the beach at Thornham.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Noted in small numbers on our day at the coast.

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

Noted at several inland sites during our travels and also at the coast.

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

Small numbers were seen at Lakenheath, Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

**Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis***

At least a hundred were noted mainly on the beach at Thornham, with 10+ seen at Titchwell.

**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.

**Turtle dove *Streptopelia turtur***

One was seen in flight at Great Cressingham.

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around suburban areas.

**Little Owl *Athene noctua***

At South Creake one was seen briefly in flight, with another in a roadside field near Lakenheath proving more co-operative.

**Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus***

Two were heard and one seen on our first evening out, followed by a more successful second visit, with at least two birds heard and four sightings in total - including a vocal perched bird.

**Swift *Apus apus***

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

**Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

One in flight along the river at Santon Downham, was virtually the last bird of the trip.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Seen well and heard at Lakenheath Fen

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

Recorded daily, with at least ten birds seen in total.

**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Recorded daily in small numbers

**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

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Seen and heard at Lynford Arboretum and Santon Downham

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Recorded daily

**Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Recorded daily

**Sand Martin *Riparia riparia***

Noted in small numbers at Lakenheath and Lackford Lakes.

**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 small flock near Holme, was largely ignored whilst we watched the Montagu's Harrier

**Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Seen and heard daily.

**Woodlark *Lullula arborea***

Four on our last day was a good find, with two perching out in full view for us.

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

One was heard at Lakenheath RSPB reserve, but in typical fashion remained hidden from view.

**Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus***

Seen and heard briefly at Cavenham Heath.

**Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

Heard daily at various sites.

**Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus***

Seen and heard at Lakenheath Fen RSPB .

**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

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Common and easily seen and heard at suitable sites.

**Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus***

Several young birds were glimpsed before an adult male bird sat out in full view for us at Lakenheath Fen.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Several were heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum

**Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Seen and heard daily.

**Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***

One was heard calling at Lynford Arboretum on our early morning walk.

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Common, noted daily,

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen daily

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Heard daily, with a very vocal bird seen well at Lynford Arboretum.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

1-2 birds were seen daily.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Heard daily, though only one was seen.

**Stonechat *Saxicola torquata***

A male bird showed well for us on our last day.

**Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata***

Single birds were seen at the Lakenheath Little Owl site and at Lynford arboretum.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas.

**Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***

At least a dozen birds were noted at the breeding site at Great Cressingham.

**Duncock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

Easily seen at Titchwell RSPB, with several also noted on our last day.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Several were heard and seen at Thornham harbour.

**Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis***

Several were seen well at the forrest clearing on our last day.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Seen daily.

**Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris***

Seen daily.

**Siskin *Carduelis spinus***

Easily seen around the hotel, also noted at Lynford Arboretum.

**Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Seen daily at various sites.

**Linnet *Carduelis cannabina***

Seen in small numbers at Titchwell, Thorham harbour and in the Brecks.

**Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra***

Three juveniles were seen well at a previously discovered site in the forest, with other sightings of three over the hotel and two over one of the forest clearings.

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella***

Seen throughout the three days at various sites.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Easily seen and heard at Lakenheath, Thornham and Titchwell RSPB.

**MAMMALS**

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Stoat *Mustela erminea*

Pipstrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Noctule Bat *Nyctalus noctula*

**BUTTERFLIES**

Large White *Pieris brassicae*  
Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*  
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*  
Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*  
Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*  
Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*  
Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*  
Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*  
Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

**DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES**

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*  
Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*  
Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*  
Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*  
Brown Hawker *Aeshna grandis*