

Norfolk:

Honey Buzzards & Nightjars

Mon 27th-Thu 30th June 2011



Photos (clockwise from top): **Common Crossbill** © Gary Elton • The combination of a black back and yellow bill identify this bird as a juvenile male **Bearded Tit** © Stephen Daly/www.andalucianguides.com • **Banded Demoiselle** at the RSPB's Lakenheath Fen reserve © kind permission Grant Brooke • **Firecrest** at Lynford Arboretum © kind permission Steve Nicklin

report compiled by tour leader:
Gary Elton

Trip Diary

Tour Leader: Gary Elton

with Bob & Isabel Burn, Dave & Sue Egerton, Charles Gordon, Dave Johnson, Steve & Judy Thompson

Day One

After a very enjoyable evening meal, we made the first of our trips out to look for Nightjars - and with a perfect still cloudy evening it wasn't long after we arrived we heard our first bird. A roding Woodcock flew over calling, the first of two seen, and a Song Thrush sang from a nearby tree top. Several more Nightjars started both churring and flight calling, with our first bird seen flying over the path by several of the group. This was quickly followed by a second seen by us all, which briefly landed in a nearby treetop, where it announced its presence before flying off. Several Roe Deer called as we walked back to the bus and several pipistrelles plus a much larger bat species, thought now to be Noctule, were also seen.

Day Two

We woke today to find the forecasted heavy overnight rain had not materialised, though the grey overcast skies made us think it could arrive at any moment; as luck would have it, we largely avoided getting wet mainly due to timing and an element of luck!

After breakfast we set off for our first destination, Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve, but stopping en route to admire a family of Little Owls in some roadside trees and a smart male Yellowhammer in a nearby hedgerow. Arriving at the reserve we made our way to the visitors centre and after a short introductory talk about the reserve by a member of staff, we made our along the woodland track out towards the furthest watchpoint. Reed and Sedge Warblers were immediately obviously, along with Whitethroats and Reed Buntings. Cuckoo, Hobby and Marsh Harrier were soon added to the list, and a distant large bird picked up flying towards us was identified as a Bittern which then gave us fantastic views as it flew around and over us, before disappearing from view. This being the first of two birds seen. As we approached the watchpoint we enjoyed good views of a Cuckoo and Great Spotted Woodpecker in the same pathside tree, and at least two Cetti's Warblers made themselves known - but as usual stayed hidden from view. Three young Bearded Tits showed well, although sporadically, at the base of the reeds at the watchpoint pool, and at least eight Marsh Harriers including young birds were constantly on view. With the clouds appearing to darken we hastily made our way back to the visitors centre, thankfully receiving only a light dousing in a fortunately brief thunderstorm.

After lunch we moved on to Cavenham, a small heathland reserve managed by Natural England, where the track gave us a good view out over the roadside heath and grassland. Dave spotted the first Stone-curlews, which gave us a nice but fairly distant view, with others soon found nearby, and at least 10 seen in total. Other species added here included Green Woodpecker, Curlew and Skylark.

Our final destination for the day was Lackford Lakes, a Suffolk Wildlife Trust reserve, which boasts a number of hides over looking a series of lakes. The weather had now taken a turn for the worst and with heavy rain now falling we spent the remainder of our time here sheltering in the hides. Birds seen included a showy Kingfisher (which used a variety of perches as it seemingly caught one fish after another), two Hobbies, three Green Sandpipers (yes three!!), and a tricky female Garganey in amongst a group of Teal that eventually everyone got to grips with. A brief look at the feeders near the entrance track produced a fine male Bullfinch and a male Blackcap, after which we made our way back to the hotel for the evening.

Day Three

A bright sunny start to the day saw us taking a short pre-breakfast visit to nearby Lynford Arboretum. As we disembarked from the bus a Firecrest could be heard singing close by and, after several minutes searching, it was located, eventually rewarding us with good views. We continued through

the arboretum and added birds seemingly every time we stopped, noting several Treecreepers, Spotted Flycatchers, Goldcrest, Coal Tit and Siskin to name a few. With our appetites sharpened, the clock ticking and time quickly passing, we returned to the hotel for a welcome breakfast.

After breakfast, we headed off towards the Norfolk coast, making a brief stop just outside Swaffham to add Tree Sparrow to our list. The birds breed here alongside House Sparrows in the roofs of several old farm buildings, with a healthy population ensuring birds were constantly on show. Our first stop on the coast was Thornham Harbour, where commoner waders such as Oystercatcher, Curlew and Lapwing were seen, plus other expected species such as Herring Gull and Shelduck; a single Brent Goose was slightly more surprising in June! A distant Common Buzzard plus several Kestrels and Marsh Harriers were noted over the field and woodland edges, and several distant Avocet were seen flying over the Holme Marsh NWT reserve.

After lunch we moved on to nearby Titchwell RSPB reserve, to spend an hour or so enjoying the large selection of birds on show for us on the freshmarsh. Species present included some splendid summer plumaged Ruff and Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Little Ringed Plover and several hundred Knot, and Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits. A variety of wildfowl was present on the pathside pool and a search through these produced two Red-crested Pochard, a female and young bird.

Our journey back to the hotel was broken by two stops: one at the raptor watchpoint at Swanton Novers, which sadly produced little of note, although Yellowhammer and Linnet were easily seen and a Common Spotted Orchid found at the roadside was a nice diversion. The second stop was an exploratory one in Thetford Forest, where we stumbled upon a flock of c40 Crossbills. The flock consisted of mainly young birds that were sat initially in the treetops, before dropping down beside the puddles in front of us to drink.

After our evening meal we went out to look for Nightjars again; a different spot was chosen from the previous night and birds were heard almost immediately on our arrival. Unfortunately during our stay only one was seen, which was glimpsed in flight by one member of the group. A calling Tawny Owl was heard by everyone.

Day Four

We woke to a bright, sunny morning and, after breakfast, made our way to our first destination, East Wretham NWT reserve. With a choice of routes there, we decided to take the more scenic one through the forest. This was to prove fortuitous as, after several speculative stops to check clearings for Woodlarks, one was heard singing. We climbed out the bus and had great views of it perched in the top of a tree. Whilst we watched, a bird flew in and landed on a nearby telegraph wire - which was to prove to be our second target species, Tree Pipit.

Pleased with our success we moved on and spent the next couple of hours walking around the NWT reserve. A brief flyover Turtle Dove was seen near the entrance, and the walk around the woodland trail gave us nice views of Nuthatch and Marsh Tit, though a calling Redstart remained hidden from view in the base of a Hawthorn bush. Returning back to the car park via the small ponds, we were treated to great views of a hunting Hobby, which flew past us on several occasions as it searched for dragonflies.

A short drive took us to our next destination: Santon Downham, where we parked in the St Helens picnic area for lunch, then took a circular walk from there, along the side of the railway track, across to Santon Warren, then back along the river bank. Two more Tree Pipits were seen, along with a nice selection of commoner butterflies, and three different Kingfishers along the river. The weather had by this time taken a turn for the worst and it had started raining, but as luck would have it not until we had returned to the bus.

With the tour due to conclude, this appeared to be timed perfectly (it was of course!). We returned to the hotel and said our goodbyes after an enjoyable three days birding. *Gary Elton*

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED
(Total number of species recorded by the group: 112)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

A single bird was seen near Choseley drying barns.

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 *Brant bernicula*

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

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Seen daily at all wetland site.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

At least six were seen at Lackford Lakes.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

One at Lackford Lakes, was followed by larger numbers at the coast.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Noted daily at all wetland sites.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Shoveler

Anas clypeata Small numbers were seen at all wetland sites.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

A tricky female bird at Lackford Lakes in amongst its commoner cousins, gave us an identification challenge.

Teal *Anas crecca*

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

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*

A female and young bird were seen on the pool west of the footpath at Titchwell.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Noted at all wetland sites.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Noted at 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*

Two enviable views were had of birds in flight at Lakenheath, the first flying around and over us.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers were seen at various sites.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Single birds were seen at Thornham and Titchwell.

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 distantly at Lakenheath, with two more obliging birds seen by several of the group at Lackford Lakes, with a further bird seen well over the pool at East Wretham NWT reserve.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

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

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

At least three individuals were seen at a variety of sites on the 29th.

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 at least ten birds at Cavenham Heath NNR.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Easily seen at coastal sites

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A roadside bird was a bit of a shock for the minibus passengers near Titchwell, with larger numbers noted on the reserve, and others seen distantly on Holme Marsh.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Noted daily, with larger numbers seen near the coast.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

A single bird on the freshmarsh at Titchwell proved tricky to see.

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.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

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

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Noted at Cavenham Heath, Thornham and Titchwell RSPB.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Noted at Thornham Harbour and Titchwell.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

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

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

A least two were noted on the rear of the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Three were seen at Lackford Lakes.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

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

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

At least six birds were noted in amongst the above species.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

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

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common, easily seen each day.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

A third year bird was found roosting on one of the islands on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

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.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Small numbers were seen at Lakenheath, Lackford Lakes and 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 briefly in flight at East Wretham, by several of the group.

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

At least three different birds were seen at Lakenheath, with one perching for us on a path side tree.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

One was heard during our second evening trip in search of Nightjars.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

A family party of at least three birds, showed well for us in a roadside field.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

There were three churring birds at our first site with two seen, one choosing to sit high in a bare tree for us. The second trip out to another site again produced at least three churring birds, but only one of these was seen briefly by one of the group.

Swift *Apus apus*

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One at Lackford Lakes gave us a great display as it caught fish from the perches in front of the hide, three more were seen in flight on the river at Santon Downham.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Seen and heard at Lakenheath and East Wretham

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Birds were heard at Lackford Lakes and East Wretham, with birds seen at Cavenham (2) and Lynford Arboretum

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

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Singles were seen at East Wretham and Santon Downham.

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*

12+ were seen over the Fen at Lakenheath and others were noted at Titchwell.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily at various sites

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Seen daily at various sites, mainly around suburban areas.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily.

Woodlark *Lullula arborea*

A perched singing bird was found as we travelled along one of the forest tracks.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

At least two individuals were heard at Lakenheath RSPB reserve.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

Several were heard at Lackford Lakes and Santon Downham

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Heard daily at various sites, with several seen.

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 suitable sites

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Heard at various sites, but none were seen.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Common and easily seen and heard at suitable sites.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Three young birds were seen well at Lakenheath RSPB, with two more seen at Titchwell RSPB.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

A singing bird at Lynford Arboretum eventually showed well for us.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Singles were heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum and East Wretham.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Two were seen well at East Wretham.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Easily seen at Lynford arboretum, where at least four were seen.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common, noted daily,

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard daily, with birds seen at Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

1-2 birds were seen daily.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Common, seen daily

Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

One heard constantly calling during our visit to East Wretham, refused to show itself.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Two were seen 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*

Noted daily

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Several were heard and seen at Thornham harbour.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Singles were seen at three different sites near Santon Downham.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Seen daily.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Seen and heard daily over and around the hotel.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily at various sites.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Seen in small numbers at Titchwell, Thorham harbour and East Wretham

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

A nice surprise find during a speculative woodland drive, with a flock of forty birds comprised mainly of young birds, coming down to a puddle to drink.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Male birds were 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*

Stoat *Mustela erminea*

Pipstrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Noctule Bat *Nyctalus noctula*

BUTTERFLIES

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

Green-veined White *Artogeia napi*

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*

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*