

Norfolk Coast: Autumn Migration

Fri 4th - Mon 7th September 2015



From top: Common Kestrels were seen daily, with numbers recovering recently from a slight dip; Eurasian Curlews are a common migrant through North Norfolk, often on tidal mudflats © all photos by John Van de Graaff, birdsbyjohn.com

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

Trip Diary

Tour Leader: **Gary Elton**

with **Marylee Bomboy & John Van de Graaff, Roger & Claire Broom, Phil Clewes-Garner, Hazel Cunningham and David Miller**

Day 1 – Friday 4th

The group arrived and assembled safely at our North Norfolk hotel where, after introductions and an enjoyable evening meal, we retired to bed, looking forward to the days ahead.

Day 2 – Saturday 5th

The following morning saw us meeting at the rear of the hotel, where we spent a short time before breakfast familiarising ourselves with the selection of common shorebirds assembled on the beach below. The weather wasn't too kind to us though, with a stiff northwesterly wind and light rain seeing our activities cut short in favour of an earlier breakfast.

After breakfast, and in an effort to find some shelter from the wind, we headed east along the coast towards Holkham Freshmarsh. We took a rather convoluted route to get there, driving some of the local lanes in search of farmland birds, resulting in a large covey of Red-legged Partridges being found wandering around on the road in front of us. This was followed by a short stop at Thornham Harbour, which produced a confiding roadside Long-tailed Tit flock, a showy Whimbrel in one of the tidal creeks, and a rather brief Greenshank. Further stops followed, the first at Brancaster Staithe where a tame Turnstone posed for pictures then took a liking to the minibus and proceeded to try and run underneath it! We moved onto Burnham Overy Staithe, where an adult and 2nd-summer Mediterranean Gulls were the highlight.

Arriving at Holkham Freshmarsh and parking at the end of Lady Anne's Drive, we walked west along the southern edge of the pine belt, which as was hoped gave us protection from the blowy conditions. Great, Blue and the occasional Coal Tit could be seen and heard in the surrounding woodland, appearing occasionally in the company of both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff and the first of two Treecreepers were also seen. The salt pool further along the track contained at least four Little Grebes, and time spent in the two hides gave us looks at species such as Avocet, Pink-footed and Egyptian Geese, Marsh Harrier and a selection of commoner wildfowl. We walked out across the boardwalk that runs through the pine belt on the way back to look at the sea, which gave us views of two distant immature Gannets but unfortunately little else.

We returned to the minibus then drove back along the coast for lunch and our destination for the afternoon - Titchwell RSPB reserve. After lunch we walked out onto the reserve heading first to view Patsy's Pool, a large pool on the southern edge of the reserve, where an open hide allows views out over the water and small islands there. Here we enjoyed nice looks at several feeding Snipe and a selection of the commoner species present on the reserve. We rejoined the main path and headed north, adding a pair of Red-crested Pochards, which were on the reedbed pool, to our list - the male in eclipse though still sporting a bright pink bill. Our next stop was Island Hide, which is the first of the two hides that overlook the freshmarsh. Here, large numbers of wildfowl, primarily Teal and waders in the form of Avocet and Ruff were immediately obvious. Patient scanning of the area revealed a supporting cast of species such as Black-tailed Godwit, Ringed and Little Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Shelduck, Shoveler and Gadwall.

With the still reasonably strong wind blowing some of the group elected to go straight to Parrinder Hide, the second of the hides overlooking the freshmarsh, whilst the remainder of the group carried on to check out the beach and sea. The sea was disappointingly quiet with literally nothing of note seen, though the shoreline was lined with gulls and waders, with a large wreck of razor clams appearing to be attracting the birds, particularly the gulls. The gulls were mainly Herring, whilst the waders were composed of the expected shoreline species such as Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit,

Turnstone and Oystercatcher, with two Knot also found amongst them. Returning to the reserve we joined the rest of the group in the hide where we enjoyed some nice close views of a variety of wader species plus adding the last new bird for the day, Spotted Redshank, to our list.

Day 3 – Sunday 6th

Pre-breakfast birding was again from the rear of the hotel, standing behind the summerhouse that overlooks the beach. With the tide some way out birds were distant but, as usual, a selection of waders could be seen; other birds along the shoreline included several Sandwich and Little Terns and gliding Fulmars. After breakfast, we drove east along the coast to our first destination, Kelling Quags. Here we parked up and walked along the track leading down to the beach and sea, having views out over the nearby fields and, towards the end of the walk, a large flooded water meadow. Birds seen during our visit included our first views of commoner birds such as Reed Bunting, Whitethroat and Sand Martins, plus two pairs of Stonechat that were watched feeding from a boundary fence line.

Our next stop was Cley, where we enjoyed lunch sitting at the front of the centre looking out over the reserve. The pools held a similar range of species seen the day before at Titchwell, though more interesting fly-over birds included a small group of eight Pintail, a dozen Siskin in the company of a similar number of Goldfinch, and a Peregrine which was unfortunately only seen by David (or fortunately for David). After a short drive, we had a pleasant walk along the east bank, which gave us nice views of several Ruff and a Greenshank. On reaching the end of the bank we looked out over the sea: several loafing gulls were immediately obvious though the best bird, an Arctic Skua, was only seen by Phil and Gary.

The walk back was frustrating as at least one Bearded Tit could be heard calling, but with conditions far from ideal (they don't like wind) the bird remained hidden from view. On returning to the minibus, thoughts of more birding were quickly dispelled as a show of hands indicated a civilised coffee break somewhere nearby. A compromise was reached and a return trip to Titchwell RSPB reserve was the logical destination, having both coffee and, for the trip leader at least, birds! The destination proved a wise move and after coffee in the cafeteria we walked along to the first hide. Birds seen were similar to the previous day, though a lucky few managed distant views of a Bearded Tit feeding at the base of the reeds.

A big plus with the new plan was how close we were to Holme nature reserve, an area we had hoped to visit early one evening, so our close proximity and timing was perfect. We arrived there shortly before 5 pm and stood on the raised path overlooking the large areas of pasture and marsh in front of us. It wasn't long before our hoped-for target species, Short-eared Owl, appeared, with Roger seeing it first someway off but in clear view. We enjoyed great views of it quartering the marsh for at least 30 minutes. A Barn Owl appeared as well, at one stage being harassed by a young Marsh Harrier, and a covey of four Grey Partridges and a fly over Turtle Dove completed a very successful end to the day.

Day 4 – Monday 7th

Pre breakfast this morning took a different format as we met slightly earlier and made the short drive back to the previous evening's destination, Holme. Somewhat foolishly we had been drawn into a false sense of security with the glorious sunny, windless end to the previous day and we arrived to be met by heavy cloud and a brisk wind. The hoped-for reappearance of the owls was clearly not going to happen, but all was not lost as new birds added included a fly over Great Spotted Woodpecker (only seen by those in the front of the 'bus), a Stock Dove and a rather smart Lesser Whitethroat.

After breakfast we headed off, first to Wells-next-the-Sea to search for a Red-backed Shrike that had been found there the previous day. There was no sign of the bird and the wind blowing across the exposed landscape made viewing difficult, with few birds of note seen. We returned to the minibus moving further along the coast to an area known as Warham Greens, where we parked and walked down to join the coastal path that runs along the edge of the saltmarsh. Curlews and Little Egrets were readily seen on the marsh, along with a large flock of around 400 Golden Plover, some of which were still largely in breeding plumage. A large pit viewable from the path offered shelter from the

wind to smaller birds on the marsh and we spent a short while on the edge looking in on the scrub and trees both in and around it. Reed Buntings and Yellowhammers showed well, including a bright male of the latter species, though birds such as Whitethroat and Blackcap proved more challenging to find. We returned to the minibus, for lunch, with one member of the group choosing to take a more unconventional route back, enough said I think!

After lunch we drove back west along the coast making a short repeat visit to Thornham Harbour before returning back to the hotel. Here we said our goodbyes then made our return journeys home.

Gary Elton

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded by the group 109)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Roadside coveys were noted on all three days.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Four showed well for us on our afternoon/evening visit to Holme.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Recorded daily.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Six were seen at Holkham, either early returning birds or possibly birds that summered there.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

A single bird in amongst Greylags at Holkham was followed by nine the next day again with Greylags at Cley viewed from the east bank.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Noted in good numbers, with several hundred at various sites during the trip.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Birds were seen at Titchwell, Cley and at the Mill at Burnham Norton.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Seen at Holkham, Kelling Quags and enroute as we passed Burnham Overy.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Noted daily at Titchwell, Cley and Thornham Harbour.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Easily seen at Titchwell and Cley.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

30+ were noted at both Titchwell and Cley.

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Seven were seen in flight over Cley reserve as we sat having lunch.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen at all wetland sites visited.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Noted at Holkham, Titchwell and Cley.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Easily seen at Titchwell and Cley., particularly numerous at Titchwell.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Five were seen at Titchwell.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A pair were seen on the large pool east of the main path at Titchwell.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Several were noted at Titchwell.

Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

One was seen on our second pre breakfast seawatch, with another seen over the hotel grounds shortly after breakfast.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Noted at Holkham, Titchwell and Cley.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two were seen on our first full day at Thornham Harbour and Burnham Overy Staithe.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Ones and twos were noted daily.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Easily seen and noted at all wetland sites visited.

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Two distant 1st-year birds were seen in Holkham Bay.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily, generally single hunting birds.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

One was seen by David at Cley whilst we were having lunch.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Juvenile birds were seen at Holkham and Holme.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Several were noted daily.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Noted daily

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted daily

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common, seen daily in large numbers.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Seen well at Titchwell, with others noted at Holkham and Cley.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Around 400 were present on the saltmarsh at Warham Greens, many still in breeding plumage.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Singles noted at Thornham and Titchwell.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Up to possibly ten were present at Titchwell.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

A 1st-year was found out on the fresh marsh at Titchwell.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Noted at Titchwell (three), Holme (two) and Wells (three).

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Easily seen at Titchwell.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

As expected Seen along Titchwell beach, with several still retaining breeding plumage.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Singles were seen at Thornham and Holkham.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Noted daily.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Four were seen at Titchwell, feeding at the rear of the freshmarsh.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Common, recorded daily.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Our first was a brief bird at Thornham Harbour, which was followed by one in flight at Kelling Quags and then finally good views of one from the East Bank at Cley.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Noted daily, with one particularly confiding individual at Brancaster Staithe.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Two were found in amongst the waders on the beach at Titchwell.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Seen easily along the beach at Titchwell.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Seen in small numbers, primarily at Titchwell.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Easily seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, with smaller numbers also noted at Cley.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common, noted daily.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*

An adult and second-summer were seen at Burnham Overy Staithe.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Common, and again seen daily.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Noted daily at all coastal sites visited.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

As above noted daily.

Lesser Black backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Around 40 were on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, with several also noted at Cley.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

Three were noted flying along the shoreline on our second pre breakfast seawatch.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Noted on both our pre-breakfast seawatches.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

A distant bird was seen by Gary and Phil from the end of the East bank at Cley.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia*

Seen daily, primarily around the hotel building and during our travels.

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Only one seen, from the minibus on our last pre breakfast morning at Holme.

Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Extremely common (!); seen daily

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Noted in and around the villages as we travelled around over the three days.

Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

One flew over us as we stood looking out over the marsh from the raised footpath at Holme.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

One was watched distantly over the marsh at Holme, at times being harassed by a Marsh Harrier.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Arguably the highlight of the trip, one seen well from the raised footpath at the start of the reserve at Holme and watched quartering the marsh for around 30 minutes before we had to leave.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Two were seen on our first full day at Thornham Harbour.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

One was seen in flight, but only by those in the front of the minibus along the approach road to Holme on our last morning.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Three at Holkham were the only ones seen.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Seen daily in small numbers

Northern Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Seen daily in both fields and around village roof tops

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Several large roadside flocks were noted at Cley.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Small numbers were noted throughout the trip at various sites.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Heard and seen at Holkham as we walked along the pine edged footpath there.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Noted daily, in small numbers

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

As above noted daily.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

One was seen feeding low over the water meadow at Kelling.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen daily.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

As above noted daily.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Small noisy flocks were encountered daily, with some nice views had by all.

Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis*

Only one heard at Kelling.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

A singing bird was noted at Titchwell.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

At least one was noted in amongst a mixed tit flock at Holkham.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus colybita*

Noted at Holkham, Kelling and Warham Greens.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

A male bird eventually showed well for everyone in the large pit at Warham Greens.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

One was seen well on our last pre breakfast trip at Holme.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Several young birds were seen at Kelling, with another seen in the pit at Warham Greens.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

One was seen distantly at the base of some reeds on the edge of the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Heard daily at suitable sites, with the only sighting being briefly along the entrance track at Warham Greens.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Recorded daily at various sites

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Two were seen along the pine-lined path at Holkham

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen daily in small flocks.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Noted daily, easily seen around the hotel grounds.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Seen and heard daily

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Two pairs were seen well along the northern fence line at Kelling Quags.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily.

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

As above, noted daily.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Recorded daily, with largest numbers undoubtedly at Titchwell.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted daily, the majority calling over flying birds.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

Over-flying, calling birds were seen at Thornham Harbour and Burnham Overy.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common, recorded daily.

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Noted in small numbers daily

Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Around 12 vocal individuals flew over with Goldfinches whilst we were sat having lunch at Cley.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Noted daily at various sites.

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Largest numbers were seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, with others noted at Kelling, Holme and Cley.

Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Calling birds were noted at Titchwell and Holme, with a bird seen briefly in flight at the latter site.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

At least three, including one 'yellow headed' male present around the pit at Warham Greens.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Several were noted at Kelling, Titchwell and Warham Greens, with birds seen particularly well at the last site.

Mammals

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Butterflies

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Small White *Pieris rapae*

Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*

Dragonflies

Common Darter *Symetrum striolatum*

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*