

# Norfolk

## Norfolk Broads in Spring

Mon 22nd-Thu 25th May 2017

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*Swallowtails provided a wonderful highlight to this year's tour © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays*

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

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### Day One

After a very enjoyable evening meal and an opportunity to get to know each other and discuss the trip, we retired to bed full of expectations for the coming days ahead.

### Day Two

A fine start, to what was to be an equally nice day, saw us taking a short walk locally before enjoying our first ample breakfast of the trip (Waffles spring to mind!). Our first destination was nearby Hickling Broad, where we parked at Potter Heigham church and took the footpath to the Weavers Way. Almost as soon as we climbed the bank, we could hear Common Cranes calling at the far end of the broad. Shortly after, we were also enjoying views of our first Bearded Reedlings at the edge of a nearby reed-edged pool. Two Hobbies appeared above us next, giving some nice flight views. The morning and early part of the afternoon was spent walking along the Weavers Way, passing through alder carr and marshland areas further along the path. The birding was very enjoyable and a great start to the trip. Birds included a singing Savi's Warbler which, whilst heard by everyone, was unfortunately only seen by Gary - though early morning return visits by David over the next two mornings ensured he saw it very well! A Common Crane appeared over the trees and circled in front of us, gaining height as we stood watching it. More avian highlights during the morning included three more Hobbies, a staggering total of five Bitterns including three in the air together, circling above the reeds with a fourth bird booming below! Two Cuckoos, Marsh Harriers singing Cetti's, Garden, Reed and Sedge Warblers were all seen or heard as we walked along as well. The marshes produced a flyby, calling Black-winged Stilt, nine Spoonbills, plus several pairs of breeding Avocets. Non-avian highlights included 10 species of butterfly, which included two of the hoped-for Swallowtails, plus good numbers of dragonflies, particularly Four-spotted Chasers.

Returning to the minibus we had lunch before heading off to Breydon Water, stopping en route to view Rollesby and Ormesby Broads. The tides at Breydon Water were far from ideal but the best we were going to achieve so worth a look at the very least. Best birds were calling Whimbrel and Curlew with a supporting cast of the expected commoner estuarine species. We finished with visits to two more broads, firstly Little Ormesby, where Treecreeper and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were heard and a flying kingfisher was followed by two more even briefer sightings at nearby Filby Broad. At this latter site we had the most bizarre sighting of the trip with a soaring Fulmar picked up by David as it flew over the edge of the water in front of us! After dinner this evening we went for a local walk in search of a Barn Owl. A very pleasant stroll after an enjoyable evening meal was topped off with our target bird, with nice views had of one perched and then in flight over the nearby fields.

### Day Three

We awoke to another fine day, so before breakfast, we drove the short distance to Sea Palling for a look over the sea. The stone reefs held small numbers of largely immature, non-breeding Herring Gulls with the first Little Terns for the trip also present, fishing offshore. A short drive to nearby Waxham revealed a nice pair of roadside Grey Partridges. Viewing the sea from the dunes again produced fishing Little Terns but also some distant Gannets and several Grey Seals. The surprise of the morning, though, was a calling Turtle Dove that unfortunately remained tucked away in the coastal bushes.

We returned for breakfast then headed out to Hickling Broad for our planned boat trip. Arriving at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust centre slightly early, we concentrated our efforts on car park birds. The most obvious was a showy male Marsh Harrier which flew repeatedly over us and a singing Lesser Whitethroat, the latter giving the group a range of views which was based largely on a degree of luck. Before heading off to meet the boat we were treated to a quick peak at some of the moths caught in the moth trap, which included several Eyed and Poplar Hawk-moths, plus some rather smart smaller species such as White Ermine and Pale Prominent. Arriving at the boat, we enjoyed an entertaining few minutes as everyone put on their life jackets, resulting in a performance Bruce Forsyth and his Generation Game team would have been proud of!

Heading onto the broad, the boat gave us an opportunity to visit several areas that are only accessible this way. A very pleasant two hours followed, with new birds seen that included a Little Ringed Plover, a mixed flock of nine Ringed Plover and two Dunlin and again more nice views of Bearded Reedlings, seven high flying Common Cranes and three Spoonbills. Our last port of call on the boat was the impressive tower hide, which gave fantastic views over the countryside around from its position poking out through the top of the woodland canopy.

Lunch back at the minibus was followed by a walk around the NWT reserve. Four-spotted Chaser and Hairy Hawker were easily seen and several Hobbies were exploiting this situation over the reedbeds. Our highlight this afternoon was two extremely confiding, freshly-emerged Swallowtail butterflies that at times were viewed down to just a few feet, allowing for some great photographic opportunities. After an enjoyable but hot afternoon and with an evening trip on the agenda today, we returned to the Dairy Barns slightly earlier to give us all a chance to recharge our batteries.

After dinner we ventured back out in search of Nightjars. We visited a coastal site with the remaining daylight allowing near-perfect views of several birds, the differences between the males and females clearly discernable. A Noctule bat was a surprised addition flying over us, its call picked up on Gary's bat detector. A Tawny Owl was heard calling and two birds seen flying over the scrub towards us on closer inspection turned out to be a Barn Owl being chased by a Nightjar!! The drive back in the now half light proved just as productive, with a roadside Tawny Owl perch on some telegraph wires giving us good looks and, whilst attempting to re-find this, a small herd of seven Red Deer were seen in a nearby field clearly nervously concerned at what we were doing!

#### Day Four

We woke again to a fine sunny day. Our plan today was to revisit the wetland area we had hoped to visit on our first day, distance having caused us to turn back earlier than we had hoped. A phone call the evening before had revealed another option to gain access to the site which proved priceless as we more than halved our time needed to visit it and importantly freed time up for a visit to Strumpshaw Fen later in the morning. The wetland area was near Potter Heigham and was reminiscent on arriving of a wetland area in southern Spain, teeming with birds including Little Egrets and Spoonbills, plus Avocets, Redshanks, Lapwings and a selection of geese and wildfowl. Displaying Meadow Pipits were a trip addition and our walk round the area, largely to get the sun in a favourable position behind us, also produced several Cuckoos and another Swallowtail. Singing Reed and Sedge Warblers also gave Gary an ideal opportunity to test Sue's ability to separate the two; needless to say she passed with flying colours! The highlight here though was undoubtedly a pair of Black-winged Stilts seemingly having made the area their home for the summer, more trip additions included a rather smart breeding plumage Ruff, Greenshank and Teal. A hoped-for pair of Garganey was picked up in flight over the reedbed though only a fortunate few managed to latch on to them.

Our final destination of the trip was Strumpshaw Fen RSPB reserve where a coffee break started the proceedings before we sat and looked out from the main visitor centre hide, then walked around to the nearby Fen hide. Azure and Red-eyed Damselflies were admired on the dipping pools and a nicely perched Cuckoo and a rather smart (albeit Australian!) Black Swan provided the birding highlights. Lunch back at the van signalled the end of the trip, with us returning back to the Dairy Barns to collect our bags, load our cars, say our goodbyes and start our journeys back home.

### SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded 101)

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

Noted at several sites in small numbers.

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

Noted daily.

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

Seen daily, at various sites.

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

Small numbers seen daily.

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

Again noted daily with larger numbers at Breydon Water.

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

Seen daily, invariably present at most wetland areas visited.

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

Common, noted daily.

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

Up to five seen at Potter Heigham Marshes, with a male also seen at Hickling Broad.

#### **Garganey *Anas querquedula***

Two in flight at Potter Heigham that unfortunately disappeared into the reeds and out of view.

**Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca***

A male at Potter Heigham Marshes.

**Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***

A pair at Hickling Broad, were followed by six at Rollesby Broad.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Noted at Rollesby, Ormesby and Hickling Broads and Potter Heigham Marshes.

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

Noted daily in small numbers.

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

A roadside pair at Sea Palling were a nice surprise.

**Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Noted daily.

**Northern Fulmar *Fulmaris glacialis***

The most bizarre find of the trip, one seen soaring over Filby Broad!

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Singles recorded on both visits to Potter Heigham Marshes.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Seen daily, with most pairs now seemingly with young.

**Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***

Three were seen overhead on our boat trip, with at least ten present at Potter Heigham.

**Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris***

Five was a good day totally on our first full day, all in flight with, at one stage, three in the air together! Birds were also heard at Hickling Broad on both visits.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Recorded daily.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Seen on both visits to Hickling, Potter Heigham and Breydon Water.

**Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus***

Groups of seven and five distantly offshore at Waxham.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted at Breydon Water and Potter Heigham.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

One over us as we ate lunch at Hickling Broad visitor centre.

**Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Easily seen throughout the trip.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

A maximum of four seen at Ormesby Broad, with several others noted largely as we travelled around.

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Recorded daily in small numbers.

**Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted daily.

**Common Crane *Grus grus***

Heard calling as we arrived at the weavers way, Hickling, with one seen later in the day. Seven distant soaring birds were seen from one of the second hide during our boat trip.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematops ostralegus***

Noted daily in small numbers.

**Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

At least six daily at Hickling Broad and Potter Heigham.

**Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus***

A single fling over us at Hickling Broad was later followed by the summering pair at Potter Heigham.

**Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Easily seen, with several young birds also noted.

**Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

A flock of nine flew in to the scrape in front of the first hide during our boat trip.

**Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius***

A single bird, again on the boat trip from the first hide.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Several on the mud at Breydon Water.

**Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus***

As above several vocal individuals noted at Breydon Water.

**Common Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Easily seen at Potter Heigham Marshes.

**Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***

A single at Potter Heigham Marshes.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

One viewed from the first hide on our boat trip.

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

A smart brown and black breeding-plumaged bird.

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

Common, easily seen each day.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

A second summer bird at Hickling Broad was the only one.

**European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Recorded daily at most sites visited.

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

Small numbers at various sites and easily seen at Breydon Water.

**Little Tern *Sterna albifrons***

Several seen well offshore at Waxham and Sea Palling.

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

Seen daily at all suitable sites visited

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Noted daily, easily seen at Waxham Great Barn.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Seen daily, some nice views of this at times under-rated pigeon.

**Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Noted daily and easily seen.

**European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur***

Very much a surprise find, a calling bird at Waxham unfortunately remained hidden from view.

**Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around suburban areas.

**Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus***

Easily seen and heard during our time at Hickling Broad.

**Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba***

Noted on the first two evenings near the Dairy Barns, with another being chased by a Nightjar on our evening visit to Winterton!

**Tawny Owl *Strix aluco***

One heard at Winterton and a roadside bird at dusk on the drive back from Winterton.

**European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus***

At least two pairs at Winterton, with some great showy individuals!

**Common Swift *Apus apus***

Recorded daily

**Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

Birds were seen briefly at Little Ormesby and Filby Broads.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major***

Heard calling at Little Ormesby Broad and Strumpshaw Fen.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Several were seen daily as we travelled around.

**Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

Noted daily with good views had of several birds at Hickling Broad and Strumpshaw Fen.

**Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

One at Little Ormesby Broad and another en route on our last day.

**Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica***

Noted daily.

**Western Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***

Common and easily seen.

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Noted daily in good numbers.

**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

Recorded daily, though in smaller numbers than the above species.

**Coal Tit *Parus ater***

Seen and heard at Hickling Broad.

**European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

As above, recorded daily.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Recorded daily.

**Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus***

Seen daily, with some great views had by all.

**Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Seen and heard daily.

**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Easily seen and noted daily.

**Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

Several were seen around suburban areas during the three days.

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

Heard throughout the trip, with some also seen at times.

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

Family parties were noted daily.

**Willow warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus***

Recorded daily, with several seen well at Hickling Broad.

**Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

As above, recorded daily

**Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus***

Recorded daily, with nice views of singing birds at Hickling Broad.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus***

Recorded daily at all suitable sites.

**Savis Warbler *Locustella luscinioides***

A reeling bird at Hickling Broad was heard by all. Return visits by David the following two mornings ensured he had nice views.

**Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

Recorded daily

**Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin***

A singing bird in the top of a dense Hawthorn unfortunately refused to show itself.

**Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca***

A singing bird at Hickling Broad gave a variety of views.

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Seen and heard daily.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

A singing bird was heard on our walk out to the Weavers Way.

**Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Recorded daily.

**Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

Heard at Hickling and Ormesby Broads.

**Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Noted at a variety of sites during the three days.

**Common Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen daily.

**European Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Seen daily at a variety of sites.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas.

**Dunnock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

Noted daily.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Several singing displaying birds were seen at Potter Heigham.

**Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Seen and heard daily in good numbers.

**European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris***

Seen daily in small numbers.

**European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Common, seen daily.

**Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Noted daily in small numbers

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella***

Several were seen and heard during the three days

**Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Easily heard and seen at all suitable sites visited.

**Mammals**

Chinese Water Deer *Hydropotes inermis*  
Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*  
European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*  
European Hare *Lepus europaeus*  
Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*  
Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*  
Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*

**Butterflies**

Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*  
Small White *Pieris rapae*  
Large White *Pieris brassicae*  
Orange tip *Anthocharis cardamines*  
Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*  
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*  
Comma *Polygonia c-album*  
Peacock *Aglais io*  
Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*  
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

**Dragonflies and Damselflies**

Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*  
Azure Bluet *Coenagrion puella*  
Common Bluetail *Ischnura elegans*  
Hairy Hawker *Brachytron pratense*  
Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*