

Norfolk Broads

Britain's Wetland Wilderness

Mon 20th-Thu 23rd May 2019



Trip photos: Common Crane and friends at Hickling • Willow Warbler © tour leader Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays

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

Norfolk Broads | Britain's Wetland Wilderness**Tour Leader:** Gary Elton**Day One – Mon, May 20th**

After a very enjoyable evening meal together we retired to bed, looking forward to the next few days ahead.

Day Two – Tue, May 21st

We woke to a fine sunny start to the day, taking a short pre-breakfast walk along the nearby lane and starting the ball rolling by enjoying the sights and sounds of the commoner warblers, such as Whitethroat, Blackcap and Reed Warbler. After an enjoyable breakfast, we headed off to our first destination, nearby Hickling Broad. A stop for fuel *en route* enabled everyone to double check whether they had brought their binoculars with them, which proved a good move as we turned tail and headed back to the Dairy Barns, I will say no more!

We headed off again, noting two Marsh Harriers and a Common Buzzard over the nearby fields before parking at Potter Heigham church. We then followed the path along the field edges, through a small woodland, before emerging on the Weavers Way footpath. On the way we noted two singing Treecreepers and a Green Woodpecker, all of which frustratingly remained hidden from view. We spent the morning walking along the path and seeing a selection of birds and insects. The hoped-for Swallowtail appeared, a pristine individual, which posed nicely for us and was somewhat surprisingly the only one we were to see. Other insects included Hairy Hawker and Broad-bodied and Four-spotted Chasers. Their smaller relatives were represented by Large Red Damselfly, Common Bluetail and Azure Bluet, and butterfly additions included Brimstone, Orange-tip and both Large and Small Whites. More local specialities included bugle-ing Cranes, with several heard before two treated us to a rather impressive flyby. A stop at the small hide over-looking the wetland area called Rush Hill Scrape produced a Great Egret and two Spoonbills and the surrounding reed beds gave opportunities to compare the songs of our two common reed dwelling warblers, Reed and Sedge. Hobby's also appeared, with at least six individuals noted hawking over the reedbeds and trees. A slightly later than planned lunch back at the minibus was followed by a short drive to some nearby marshes. A slightly different spread of species was seen here which included the expected wetland birds and also some that were slightly less expected, such as Sand Martin, Wigeon, Mediterranean Gull, Greenshank, Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Black-tailed Godwit. A last surprise here as we drove out of the site was a Common Crane feeding in an adjacent field and unperturbed with our presence, so we enjoyed a nice prolonged view of it.

Returning to the hotel we had a chance to relax before dinner and the bird list, before heading out again in search of Nightjars. As with every trip of this type there is always a degree of luck and we stood patiently waiting at the site hoping the birds would perform. A Tawny Owl called and shortly after the first Nightjar started to churr, we were half way there! A second bird started churring before a bird flew straight over the track in front of us, bingo! a lifer for John, so well worth the effort. This was unfortunately to be the only view we had of the bird, albeit a good one, though at least three birds were heard during our stay.

Day Three – Wed, May 22nd

After a latish night the day before, we opted for a more relaxed start and after breakfast we headed out to our first destination of the day, nearby Sea Palling. A look out along the beach and out to sea was the plan here, though it quickly became apparent it was an extremely high tide this morning. This meant no beach and activity at sea was limited, so we cut our visit short and continued along the coast. Our next stop was Waxham where we again looked along the beach and out to sea. A dozen Grey Seals were loafing on the sand, while out to sea, several distant Sandwich Terns were noted flying past. We continued our journey along the coast, encountering an impressive Red Deer stag as it crossed the road in front of us. Our next stop was a roadside stop at Ormesby Broad where a scan of the water revealed two Common Sandpipers on a set of nearby pontoons. Breydon Water was next and we parked in Asda's car park and walked out under the bridge, having seemingly timed the tide perfectly with the last exposed part of mud on view in front of us. Although a bit distant, viewing the birds huddled together on the tideline through the scope revealed Grey Plover, Curlew, Dunlin and several Knot, two in breeding plumage, plus nearby Great Black-backed Gulls, another new addition to the trip.

A quick visit to Asda was followed by a drive along the Acle Straight to our next stop, the RSPB reserve at Buckenham Marshes. We took the driving option when we arrived, crossing the manned level crossing. We encountered several Mistle Thrushes along the way before arriving at the main track that runs through the reserve. We drove along the track to a hide where we scanned the marshes surrounding us. Redshank, Lapwing

and Avocet were easily seen and a scan through some nearby Greylag Geese revealed several Egyptian Geese plus a solitary Pink-footed Goose in amongst them. A Cuckoo flew over, largely missed by the group, but a search of some nearby brambles revealed it feeding on Brown-tail Moth caterpillars, which gave us a second chance and some nice views were enjoyed. We walked up onto the bank and scanned more of the marshes, with a distant Little Egret and two Chinese Water Deer the best we could manage. Lunch was now beckoning so we headed to the nearby RSPB reserve at Strumpshaw Fen where we made use of the picnic tables and main reception area, which doubles as a hide. The nearby bird feeders attracted the usual Blue and Great Tits along with a vocal Marsh Tit, enabling us all to see it. After lunch we set off to visit several of the hides around the reserve. Bearded Reedlings were apparently breeding in front of this hide though after 10 minutes or so of waiting we'd seen little proof of this. We went to leave and at this point Roger said he would stay in the hide and see if he could see the birds. The rest of us carried on to the next hide, an elevated one, aptly called the 'tower hide!' A 'booming' Bittern heard *en route* was a bonus, as was a Golden Pheasant, an immature male though of somewhat questionable origins! From the hide we had a fantastic view over the reserve and the large pools in front of us, the best birds on here from a trip perspective being a drake Teal and a drake Mandarin, the latter being something of a surprise! With thoughts of Roger all alone, we headed back to the hide we'd left him in. We needn't have worried, though, as he'd had several views of probable Bearded Reedlings, but the best bird was a Bittern that had flown over the reeds and past the hide, giving him a great view! The day had now come to an end so we headed back to the Dairy Barns for the log and dinner after another successful day.

Day Four – Thu, May 23rd

Pre breakfast birding today saw a somewhat depleted attendance walking the local route we all took on the first day. Once again a nice selection of local birds were seen plus some new additions, namely a singing Lesser Whitethroat and a total of five Yellowhammers. Breakfast followed and as it was our last morning we loaded the cars with our bags and said our goodbyes to the staff before heading off to Hickling Broad, this time to the visitor centre at the northern side of the broad. We arrived to find the centre closed, so we walked down to the first hide over-looking the reed bed and a large pool. A perched Hobby in a nearby tree gave us nice views and on the pool itself there were six Little Egrets and two Mute Swans. A flock of 60 or so Cormorants flew past distantly, two more Hobbys were noted hawking over the reeds and four Great Egrets and two Spoonbills appeared in flight, seemingly flushed from the scrape we had seen them at on our first day. With a boat trip planned this morning, we headed back to the visitor centre to find it now open, so we bought our tickets and walked along the trail to the boat jetty. We birded along the way, a vocal Garden Warbler refused to show itself by the centre, though we had more luck with the pathside Reed Warblers. As we approached the jetty a bird sang briefly by the path "Firecrest!" not what we were expecting and, although mobile, it did show itself to a degree. At the jetty we received the usual health and safety chat, put on our life jackets and climbed into the boat. 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 and more interesting birds seen included a flock of 90 Black-tailed Godwits, three Ringed Plovers and a Dunlin, plus two soaring Sparrowhawks over some nearby woodland. Birds of the morning though were undoubtedly the Bearded Reedlings, with a flock of 3-4 birds on the edge of the reeds giving everyone a chance to see them well. 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. From here we saw several more Hobbys, Marsh Harriers and some distant Great Egrets. Following a walk back via the hides, we had lunch at the visitor centre before concluding the trip and heading back to the Dairy Barns, where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED*(Total number of species recorded 104)***Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Noted daily in small numbers.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Recorded daily, easily seen.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

A single bird in with Greylags at Buckenham Marshes was a surprise find.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Seen daily, at various sites.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Small numbers seen, noted daily.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Again noted daily.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*

A nice drake on show from the tower hide at Strumpshaw Fen.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Seen daily, with several pairs at Potter Heigham Marshes.

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Seen daily, invariably present at most wetland areas visited.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

A drake at Potter Heigham Marshes.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, noted daily.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

A male from the tower hide at Strumpshaw Fen.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Small numbers seen at Potter Heigham Marshes and Strumpshaw Fen.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Pairs noted at Potter Heigham and Buckenham Marshes.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Noted on our first two full days, mainly roadside birds.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Several noted at Potter Heigham Marshes.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Seen daily at all suitable sites visited.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two on both visits to Hickling Broad.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Nice flight views were had by Roger at Strumpshaw Fen, with booming birds also noted. A very brief bird in flight on our boat trip was only seen by Gary, as the bird disappeared quickly from view into nearby reeds.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Several were seen daily.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

One on Rush Hill Scrape from the hide along the Weavers Way on our first day, then four in flight from the Cadbury Hide on our last day.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Seen at Potter Heigham and Breydon Water with six together in front of the Cadbury Hide at Hickling Broad.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted at Breydon Water and Potter Heigham with a flock of around 60 birds seen over Hickling Broad on our last morning.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

One briefly at Strumpshaw Fen and two distantly over woodland during our boat trip.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Easily seen throughout the trip.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

As is increasingly the case, easily seen and noted daily.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted daily.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Several calling birds and two in flight during our walk along the Weavers Way at Hickling Broad, with great views of a feeding bird later in the day in a field by the main track at Potter Heigham Marshes.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematops ostralegus*

Noted at various sites in small numbers on our second two days.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Seen at Hickling Broad, Buckenham Marshes and Potter Heigham Marshes.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Easily seen and noted on all three days.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Eight at Breydon Water, included several birds in full breeding plumage.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Four at Potter Heigham, one at Breydon Water and three on the boat trip from the first hide.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Around 30 on the tideline at Breydon Water.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Seventeen at Potter Heigham Marshes on day one and a flock of 90 on our boat trip at the first hide we visited.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Three at Breydon Water, two of which were in full breeding plumage.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

A single, summer-plumaged bird at Potter Heigham Marshes.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Ten at Breydon Water and one during our boat trip at Hickling Broad.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Two on Pontoons at Ormesby Broad.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Easily seen on our visits to Potter Heigham Marshes, Hickling Broad and Buckenham Marshes.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Three birds at Potter Heigham Marshes.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common, easily seen each day.

Mediterranean Gull *Larus melanocephalus*

A second calendar-year bird at Potter Heigham Marshes.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Several birds seen at Breydon Water.

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Noted at several sites during the first two days.

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Small numbers at various sites.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis*

Several distant birds offshore at Waxham.

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.

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Noted daily and easily seen.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen around suburban areas.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Heard daily, with great views had of a bird feeding on brown-tail Caterpillars at Buckenham Marshes.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

One heard during our nocturnal visit to Winterton.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

At least three churring birds at Winterton, with one seen very well.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Recorded daily

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

A calling bird along the Weavers Way and a drumming bird in the same area during our boat trip.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

Heard calling as we left Potter Heigham and walked towards the Weavers Way.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Several were seen daily as we travelled around.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

At least six birds were seen on our visits to Hickling Broad.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Two on our first day along the Weavers Way, with a single the next day at Strumpshaw Fen.

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.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

One visiting the bird feeders at Strumpshaw Fen.

European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily.

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

Great views of several birds during our boat trip.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

A single bird was seen at Potter Heigham Marshes.

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 daily throughout the trip at various sites.

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.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

Recorded daily

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

A singing bird along the Weavers Way, Hickling, unfortunately refused to show itself.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

A singing bird on our last morning's pre-breakfast walk was logged as a heard only.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Seen and heard daily.

Common Firecrest *Regulus ignicapilla*

A singing male was a surprise find at Hickling Broad just prior to our boat trip.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Singing birds were heard at Buckenham Marshes and Strumpshaw Fen.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Recorded daily.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Heard at Hickling, in a small copse *en route* to the Weavers Way and at Strumpshaw Fen.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Noted at a variety of sites during the three days.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard singing on two of our three days.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

At least two birds seen along the approach road to Buckenham Marshes.

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, with a pair nesting under the roof eaves at the Dairy Barns.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Several singing and displaying birds were seen at Potter Heigham.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen and heard daily in good numbers.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Singing birds by Potter Heigham church and at Sea Palling.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Noted daily in small numbers

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Common, seen daily.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

At least five noted on our last pre-breakfast walk.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Heard and seen daily at all suitable sites visited.

Escapees**Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus***

An immature male at Strumpshaw Fen.

Mammals

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*
European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*
European Hare *Lepus europaeus*
Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*
Reeves's Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*
Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*
Chinese Water Deer *Hydropotes inermis*

Butterflies

Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*
Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*
Large White *Pieris brassicae*
Small White *Pieris rapae*
Green-veined White *Pieris napi*
Orange tip *Anthocharis cardamines*
Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*
Peacock *Aglais io*
Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*
Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*

Dragonflies and Damselflies

Large Red Damsel *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*
Azure Bluet *Coenagrion puella*
Common Bluetail *Ischnura elegans*
Large Redeye *Erythromma najas*
Hairy Hawker *Brachytron pratense*
Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*
Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*