

# Norfolk Coast

## Wild Geese & Waders

Mon 30<sup>th</sup> Sept – Thu 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct 2013



*(Trip photos, clockwise from top left): A wader fest! Juvenile Curlew Sandpiper at Titchwell • A first-winter Spotted Redshank also at Titchwell • A Common Snipe a little distant and not as good as the Jack • A young Bar-tailed Godwit, showing its short legs and beige plumage • A Jack Snipe busily feeding • A fine male Bearded Tit © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays*

report compiled by tour leader:  
Gary Elton

## **Trip Diary**

**Tour Leader: Gary Elton**

**with Ray Burgess, Dave & Sue Egerton, Jennifer Harley, Doris Kingsford and Jon Reveley**

Autumn in Norfolk is a time of transition, when birds are moving south for the winter. Some are simply passing through, whilst others are arriving on the rich coastal wetlands to spend the winter months.

### **Day One – 30<sup>th</sup> Sept**

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

### **Day Two – 1<sup>st</sup> Oct**

We woke to find a breezy but dry day, which was very much to be the norm during our stay. We met up for some pre-breakfast birding from the back of the hotel car park that over looks the nearby beach and sea, where a good selection of commoner wader and gulls were on show. A distant Peregrine was noted as well as some slightly closer Gannets though the highlight was very much a dark-phase Arctic Skua, watched chasing a Sandwich Tern along the near shoreline.

After breakfast we walked from the back of the hotel along the side of the nearby beach huts and along the footpath to Hunstanton Golf course. A stop en route to view the beach gave us closer views of some of the commoner waders such as Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit, and several young Gannets could also be seen over the sea. The wind meant that searching for smaller birds over the next few days was going to be tricky, though Song Thrushes were very much the exception, with recently arrived birds present in good numbers and easily seen and heard. A covey of four Grey Partridges on one of the golf course greens was an unexpected surprise, and after viewing them we started to retrace our steps back to the hotel. We passed several areas of sheltered bushes and checking these produced a fine male Redstart, though unfortunately views were brief allowing only three people to see it. As we approached the lifeboat station the distinct strident call of a Yellow-browed Warbler could be heard from one of the nearby gardens, unfortunately viewing into them was not possible, and this was to be the first of a total five birds we were to hear only over the next few days.

Returning to the bus we made the short journey to nearby Thornham Harbour, looking over the harbour and saltmarsh whilst enjoying a welcome cup of coffee. Here we noted our first Wigeon of the trip, more Brent Geese, several Little Egrets and a rather smart breeding-plumaged Grey Plover in one of the tidal creeks.

A drive east along the coast to our next destination Burnham Overy Staithe followed, where we parked in the harbour car park and walked out along the raised harbour sea wall. Several dozen Dunlin and Redshank, plus several Ringed and Grey Plovers were seen, along with mixed flocks of geese including several Egyptian Geese and a noisy flock of Pinkfeet. We had headed to the site in hope of seeing a Cattle Egret that was in residence and had been viewable from our now elevated position overlooking the marsh, unfortunately for us the farmer had recently moved the cattle from the short grazed grass they had been feeding on for the last few days into an ungrazed field, more than capable of hiding a Cattle Egret! After a tense 15 minutes the bird appeared wandering into view feeding in true fashion in amongst the cattle. After an equally tense few minutes the group viewed the bird through 'scopes and it was on everyone's list.

We returned to the car park, enjoying great views of an overflying female Peregrine en route, and made our way back along the coast to Titchwell RSPB reserve, where we had a slightly late lunch after which we made our way through the visitor centre and out onto the reserve. Next, we decided to walk through the relatively new section of the reserve, first past the fen hide and onto the new trail, which leads eventually to the back of the fresh marsh which passes by several small pools. As we paused to view the pools a passing birder informed us of a Yellow-browed Warbler with a tit flock further down the path. We decided to come back to the pools and look for the warbler first,

unfortunately it had moved on, though in true Yellow-browed fashion it was heard calling by us as we walked back a bit later but again didn't show. Looking out across the pools we added several new birds to our increasing day list: Pochard, Little Grebe and Common Snipe to name a few. A strange-looking snipe feeding amongst the vegetation opposite the view point grabbed Gary's attention, and closer inspection revealed it was a Jack Snipe with a second bird also found nearby. We continued round the reserve spending the last hour so of our visit looking out over the fresh marsh from the Island hide, birds seen here included Red-crested Pochard, Avocet, Curlew Sandpiper and Yellow-legged Gull.

### **Day Three – 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct**

Today's pre breakfast walk was similar to the day before, with a quick look out over the sea and beach, with three of us walking further on down to the area where we had seen the Redstart the day before. As luck had it, the bird was still there and showed well albeit very briefly perched fully out in the open for us. We returned to the hotel for breakfast, and after reassembling the rest of the group we headed for our first destination of the day, Warham Greens. We took a rather convoluted route stopping to search local fields for birds and were rewarded with a covey of Red-legged Partridge and nice views of Stock Doves. A brief stop at Choseley Barns was rather disappointing with a handful of Greenfinch and Chaffinch on the wires, but little else other than a rather stiff breeze, which no doubt contributed to the lack of small birds on show.

A short stop at Brancaster Staithe was next, where we enjoyed extremely close views of Turnstone in the car park, plus a selection of birds on view on the exposed mud edges and harbour. Moving on again we drove through Wells-next-the-sea and arrived at Warham Greens, parked and walked down to view the coastal fresh marsh. Several small groups of feeding Brent Geese greeted us, plus several Little Egrets, and we walked along the coastal path a short way finding a small sheltered area where a large flock of mixed finches were feeding, mainly Linnet and Greenfinch, Reed Bunting could also be heard calling; searching through the large flock revealed one or two in amongst them. A coffee break back at the minibus, was followed by a drive east along the coast to our main destination of the day, Cley Nature reserve, where we stopped and parked in the small car park at the southern end of the east bank.

During the next two hours or so we walked out along the east bank, viewing the sea and Arnold's Marsh, returning back to the bus and walking along the reserve edge to view Pats Pool from the southern most hide. Highlights included two Red-throated Divers on the sea, a Little Stint, several singing Cetti's Warblers, squealing Water Rails and a pair of extremely confiding Bearded Tits, which sat perched at the base of some path side reeds preening, allowing us all to have fantastic telescope views. A brief visit to the visitor centre followed whilst Gary walked back and collected the minibus, then we headed back along the coast to our last destination of the day Stiffkey Fen. This is a small private reserve, to some degree under-watched, and access involves a short walk out along a riverside path to view the fen from the raised harbour wall. We looked out from this viewpoint, noting a feeding Spoonbill almost immediately, which was a good start plus hundreds of Teal and Wigeon which were also present; searching through them revealed Shoveler and Pintail as well. Nine sleeping Greenshank could be seen in the southeast corner, plus several Ruff and Black-tailed Godwits, with the raised view point also allowing us to look out over Blakeney Harbour and Blakeney Point, where the shapes of dozens of Grey Seals could be seen hauled out on the sand there. We then returned to the minibus adding yet another calling Yellow-browed Warbler to the species growing heard only list.

### **Day Four – 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct**

Pre-breakfast again this morning involved us walking around the edge of the pine belt by the hotel, seeing a Sparrowhawk almost immediately, no doubt drawn to the area by the numbers of Song Thrush still present. Another elusive Yellow-browed Warbler was heard calling from the pine belt but unfortunately didn't choose to join the more confiding mixed tit flock present.

After breakfast we again headed east along the coast to Holkham fresh marsh, parking along Lady Anne's Drive, where we walked out along the largely sheltered path in front of the extensive pine belt. Several calling Coal Tits could be heard along with a Treecreeper, which was briefly seen. We walked

along to the first hide, stopping en route to watch four Little Grebes on the path side pool, though the main pool in front of the hide unfortunately revealed little of interest. We then heard a familiar sound coming from the trees alongside the path, as a Yellow-browed Warbler started calling, this time the bird flew across the path, landing back in the tree cover on the other side where it continued to call. Well at least we had seen it!

We then headed back along the coast to our final destination of the trip, a return visit to Titchwell. A lack of time on the previous visit had meant we hadn't managed to get to the beach, or view the far edge of the fresh marsh and brackish marsh. A return visit to view the feeders outside the visitor centre also gave us our first Brambling of the trip, a female, after which some of us walked down to view the beach and sea, and some choose to spend the time sat in the state-of-the-art Parrinder hide. Those heading to the beach enjoyed fantastic close views of confiding, feeding Spotted Redshank and Greenshank adjacent to the main path and good numbers of feeding shorebirds along the beach; those visiting the hide enjoyed repeat views of Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stint.

We then made the short drive back to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes before making our return journey's home.

Gary Elton

### ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(total of 108 species recorded by the group)

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

A roadside covey of six birds showed well for us on day three.

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

A surprise find on day two, with four birds discovered feeding on the green of nearby Hunstanton golf course.

**Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Recorded daily.

**Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus***

Several hundred were noted daily at various locations.

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Ten were noted in amongst other geese at Burnham Overy Staithe.

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Easily seen at Titchwell, Burnham Overy Staithe and Cley.

**Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla bernicla***

Noted daily, seen well at Titchwell and Hunstanton.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Noted daily, with birds seen at Titchwell, Stiffkey Fen and Cley.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Noted at Titchwell (five) and Burnham Overy Staithe (six)

**Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Noted daily in small numbers at various sites.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Seen at Titchwell, Cley and Stiffkey Fen.

**Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope***

Noted daily primarily at Titchwell, Cley and Stiffkey Fen

**Pintail *Anas acuta***

Seen at Titchwell, Cley and Stiffkey Fen.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen at all wetland sites visited.

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Noted daily in small numbers.

**Teal *Anas crecca***

Easily seen at all wetland sites visited, again in large numbers.

**Pochard *Aythya ferina***

Noted at Titchwell in small numbers.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Nine were seen at Titchwell.

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

A female bird was present on one of the pathside pools at Titchwell.

**Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata***

Two were seen from the end of the east bank at Cley.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Seen daily at Titchwell, Cley and Holkham.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Singles were seen on the sea on our first morning and third mornings.

**Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***

A single immature bird was at Stiffkey Fen

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Singles were noted at Titchwell, Cley and Stiffkey Fen, with another seen coming in off the sea during our second mornings prebreakfast walk.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Noted at all wetland sites visited.

**Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis***

One in amongst cattle at Burnham Overy Staithe proved frustratingly difficult to see with the farmer moving the cattle from a well-grazed field to an ungrazed, long-grassed one shortly before we arrived. Patience rewarded us though, with the bird eventually wandering into view allowing us all to see it.

**Gannet *Morus bassanus***

Seen daily out over the sea, the majority of the birds being juveniles.

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted daily.

**Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily, generally single hunting birds.

**Peregrine *Falco peregrinus***

A very distant bird over the sea on our first morning, was followed later in the day with nice views of a presumed female at Burnham Overy Staithe.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Seen at four sites with the maximum, six, at Titchwell where birds were seen coming into roost.

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

Single birds were seen albeit briefly on our last mornings prebreakfast walk and at Titchwell.

**Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Singles at Burnham Overy Staithe and Titchwell, with two more over Holkham Park.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

Two squealing birds were heard along the reserve footpath at Cley.

**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily

**Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted daily

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Common, seen daily in large numbers.

**Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Seen well at Titchwell (four) and Cley (two)

**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Recorded daily in small numbers.

**Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria***

Our first birds at Cley (50+) were followed by larger numbers (200+) at Titchwell.

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

Easily seen at coastal sites particularly Hunstanton beach, Thornham and Blakeney Harbours, with some smart breeding plumaged birds seen.

**Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Seen daily at various coastal sites.

**Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus***

Surprise find of the trip, with two feeding birds found on the newly created volunteers marsh at Titchwell.

**Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

Noted at Titchwell, Cley and Stiffkey Fen.

**Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa***

Easily seen at Titchwell and Cley, with good opportunities to compare with the next species.

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

Seen daily along Hunstanton Beach and also at Cley and Titchwell.

**Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Seen and heard at all suitable sites visited.

**Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus***

Two confiding birds alongside the footpath at Titchwell enabled good instructive views to be had.

**Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Common, recorded in all suitable habitat.

**Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***

Singles were seen at Burnham Overy Staithe and Titchwell, with nine roosting birds also seen at Stiffkey Fen.

**Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

Noted daily at all coastal sites visited.

**Knot *Calidris canutus***

A small group of four were seen on the beach at Hunstanton on our first morning, with several hundred noted on the beach at Titchwell.

**Sanderling *Calidris alba***

Seen daily along the coast.

**Little Stint *Calidris minuta***

Our first, a single bird at Cley, was followed by two at Titchwell the following day.

**Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea***

At Titchwell a single juvenile bird was seen on our first visit, with two seen on the second.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

Seen in small numbers at all wetland sites visited.

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

Easily seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, where 50+ birds were present, with smaller numbers also noted at Cley.

**Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus***

Common, seen in numerous locations.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

Common, easily seen.

**Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyophaga melanocephala***

An adult bird was seen in flight at Burnham Overy Staithe.

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

Noted daily at all coastal sites visited.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

As above, noted daily.

**Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis***

An adult bird was present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

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

Up to a dozen were seen at Titchwell and Cley.

**Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis***

Several seen along the shoreline at Hunstanton and Cley.

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

A single juvenile bird was noted at sea on our visit to Cley.

**Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus***

Single dark phase birds were seen on two of our pre-breakfast walks.

**Feral Pigeon *Columba livia***

Seen daily, primarily around the hotel building.

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Good views were had of several individuals during the tour.

**Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Common, seen daily

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

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

**Tawny Owl *Strix aluco***

One was heard calling during the night from the conifer belt outside the hotel.

**Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

One was seen briefly by Jennifer outside the Fen hide at Titchwell.

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

One was heard at Holkham on our last morning.

**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

A single at Stiffkey Fen was followed by three at Holkham.

**Magpie *Pica pica***

Seen daily in small numbers

**Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula***

Seen daily in both fields and around village roof tops

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Several birds were noted as travelled around, plus two seen well at Cley.

**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

Small numbers were noted throughout the trip at various sites

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Heard at Holkham and around the hotel pines on our last day.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Noted daily, in small numbers

**Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Noted daily in larger numbers than the above, with birds encountered in many of the coastal stretches we visited.

**Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Small numbers were noted on two days during the trip

**House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

Ten over the car park at Titchwell on our last day were the only ones seen.

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

Small noisy flocks were encountered at several sites during the trip.

**Sky Lark *Alauda arvensis***

Seen and heard daily,

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

Singing birds were noted at Titchwell and Cley

**Chiff chaff *Phylloscopos collybita***

Ones and twos were noted daily at various sites.

**Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus***

Seemingly everywhere on this trip, though frustratingly difficult to see. We recorded six in total, managing only to glimpse one briefly in flight. Birds were present in the Conifer belt near the hotel (two dates), a private garden near the hotel, Titchwell, Stiffkey Fen and Holkham.

**Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

Two, singles at Hunstanton and Titchwell were the only ones recorded.

**Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus***

Seen and heard at Titchwell and Cley, with particularly good views had of a pair at the latter site.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Heard daily at suitable sites, but unfortunately none were seen.

**Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Recorded daily at various sites

**Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

One heard and seen briefly at Holkham was the only one recorded.

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Seen daily in small flocks.

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Noted daily, easily seen around the hotel grounds.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Suitable winds had meant a good passage of this species and we encountered them continually, with birds regularly disturbed from coastal scrub and watched coming in off the sea.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

As with the above species, lots present and birds were constantly seen and heard.

**Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus***

A smart male bird was seen in bushes near the hotel on two dates.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Seen daily in small numbers

**Duncock *Prunella modularis***

Noted daily.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

Recorded daily, with largest numbers at Titchwell and Cley.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Noted daily, the majority flight views.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Common, recorded daily.

**Brambling *Fringilla montfringilla***

A female bird was seen well on the feeders outside the visitor centre at Titchwell.

**Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Noted in small numbers daily

**Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Several flocks were noted during the tour.

**Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Noted daily at variety of sites.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Several were noted at Warham Greens and on our last pre-breakfast walk.

**Mammals**

**Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus***

**Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis***

**Grey seal *Halichoerus grypus***

**European Hedgehog *Erinaceus europaeus***

**Brown Hare *Lepus europeaus***

**Butterflies**

**Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta***

**Small Tortoiseshell *Aglaia urticae***

**Comma *Polyommatus icarus***

**Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria***

**Dragonflies**

**Common Darter *Symetrum striolatum***

**Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta***

**Southern Hawker *Symetrum striolatum***