

# Norfolk Coast

## Autumn Migration

Fri 7th-Mon 10th October 2016

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*Trip highlights from our Norfolk coast adventure: Incoming Brent Geese, feeding Hummingbird Hawkmoth, winter-plumaged Black-tailed Godwit and well-focused Little Egret. Photos © tour participant Jo Latham*

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

## Norfolk | Autumn Migration

### Tour Leader: Gary Elton

with Wenda Badger, Sergio Conetti, John and Anne Hodgkinson, Jo Latham, Tony Jones

#### Day One

The group arrived and assembled safely at our North Norfolk hotel, where after introductions and a relaxing evening meal we retired to bed looking forward to the forth-coming days ahead.

#### Day Two

Our first full day saw us gathering at the front of the hotel for a brief seawatch and look out over the beach. Enthusiasm had got the better of us though as the daylight was still not really sufficient, resulting in us spending the first ten minutes concentrating on the calls of migrant birds in the nearby conifer woodland and bushes. These were predominately Song Thrush, Redwing, Goldcrest, Brambling, Chaffinch and Robin, all species that had been arriving along the east coast in good numbers over the preceding days. As the light improved, expected species such as Oystercatcher and Redshank could be seen on the beach and Brent Geese, Great Crested Grebe and Common Scoter were picked out on the sea. Breakfast quickly followed, after which we headed west to our first destination, Holme Nature reserve. We climbed onto the sea wall and our route took us west along the edge of the saltmarsh then on to briefly view the sea and beach, before returning back along the main approach road to the minibus. Birds seen included Wheatear and Stonechat on the saltmarsh, a distant Great Skua and several Gannets over the sea. Four Sandwich Terns were found on the beach amongst a selection of commoner gulls and waders, the latter including several Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Turnstone. Goldcrest and Robins were seemingly everywhere with Goldcrest especially confiding, a reflection on the remote areas they are likely to have originated from and the condition they had arrived here in.

A short drive to Titchwell and lunch followed, though on arrival, the car park was found to be packed with people everywhere so after lunch we moved along the coast to Holkham, which proved to be less busy. We walked west along the track on the south side of the pines adding common species such as Jay, Little Grebe and Swallow to the list, with a Great Egret seen from the first hide being the most interesting addition. We travelled back along the coast, returning to Titchwell to finish the day where we hoped things had quietened down. Fortunately they had and, with news that the Pectoral sandpiper that had been there for several weeks was feeding in front of the first hide, we quickly made our way along the main path to view it. We met with mixed success with the bird feeding in amongst dense vegetation alongside the path, which resulted in good views for those able to pick it out, which unfortunately wasn't everyone. A return trip was planned to the reserve on our last day so with time now ticking by we returned along the main path to the minibus then on to the hotel. Whilst walking back, a Yellow-browed warbler was found and a second heard which, as with the sandpiper, proved elusive and frustratingly difficult to see with only Gary and Wenda achieving very brief views.

#### Day Three

After yesterday we decided to forego the pre-breakfast activities, making a prompt departure and heading first to nearby Hunstanton to look for any late Fulmars on the cliffs. There was no sign of any but the nearby shoreline gave us nice views of species such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Turnstone, Curlew and Brent Geese. We then headed east along the coast to our next stop Warham Greens where, once again, Goldcrest and Robins were abundant, with the odd Chiffchaff noted in amongst them too. We walked along a section of the coastal path, again noting the commoner migrant species as seen over the following day. Golden Plovers and Little Egrets were seen out on the saltmarsh and a large female Peregrine and a ring-tailed Hen Harrier were both good finds. We returned to the minibus and continued east along the coast to Cley and lunch. We had lunch at the visitor centre before moving on to the nearby NOA reserve at Walsey Hills to view the adjacent large marshy pool. At least four Jack Snipe had taken up temporary residence at the site and over the next 30 minutes or so we were treated to a variety of views, including their strange almost comical 'bobbing' behaviour when feeding. A walk of the east bank of Cley followed with highlights including another Jack Snipe found on one of the nearby islands, several flighty calling Bearded Reedlings seen along the path edge and Gannets and Razorbills noted on the sea. Returning to the bus we made our way back along the coast, stopping at Stiffkey Fen. Two Greenshank in the harbour creek were new additions and the fen itself hosted good numbers of duck such as Wigeon and Teal. In Blakeney Harbour there were large numbers of birds, with Oystercatchers and large gull species particularly easy to see and the Grey Seals could also be seen distantly on the sand bars off Blakeney Point.

Returning to the minibus we made our way back along the coast again stopping briefly at Stiffkey Campsite wood which proved quiet with a Great Spotted Woodpecker seen in flight over the entrance road the best bird. The journey back gave us a few more new species, the first a small covey of three Grey Partridges in a roadside field, the second a Barn Owl spotted by Jo sat on a roadside post. Which of the two were the best is probably for you all to decide!

**Day Four**

A wet start to the day saw us doing our pre-breakfast packing and then making a prompt departure from the hotel with our destination a return trip to Holme, this time to visit the Bird Observatory there. With the rain still falling we decided to take shelter in one of the reserve hides overlooking the Broadwater. Initially quiet, things quickly picked up with a showy Common Snipe appearing in front of us, several Stonechats followed and then a Kingfisher was noticed, perched on a fence post the other side of the water with Tufted Duck also seen, another new bird for the trip. The rain had now stopped so we walked down to the observatory where several mist nets had now been opened, resulting in the capture of a Goldcrest and Meadow Pipit. These were then ringed and processed by the observatory staff with the ringing process and reasoning behind it explained to everyone, which proved both interesting and informative. Whilst standing outside the observatory building a Hummingbird Hawkmoth was noted on the buddleias there, which for once stayed faithful to one spot and allowed Jo to get some nice photos.

Our next port of call was a return visit to Titchwell RSPB reserve. Rather than taking the main path out to the reserve we walked around to the East trail that leads to the area known as Volunteer Marsh. On arrival there almost the first bird noted was a rather smart Common Redstart, which perched conveniently on several small fence posts in front of us. A male Ring Ouzel was found next, feeding on blackberries with several Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, while an adult Mediterranean Gull was found in amongst its commoner cousins. As we walked round to join the main track, a Yellow-browed Warbler appeared briefly but unfortunately gave far from ideal views. We then viewed the freshmarsh from Island Hide, where we saw once again a nice selection of waders and wildfowl, which included a rather smart juvenile Little Stint. We walked along the main path and spent ten minutes playing 'hunt the Jack Snipe' with an elusive bird hidden in the undergrowth below us. We did all manage to see it, though the majority of time it was fast asleep. A fly over Great Egret was a real surprise find here, flying low over the main path; still an unusual bird in Norfolk, though sightings are definitely increasing. With time having slipped by, we returned to the minibus and then to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

**ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED**

(Total number of species recorded by the group, 114 )

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

Noted daily with largest numbers as expected at Holkham.

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Noted in good numbers, with largest numbers at Cley, Stiffkey Fen and Titchwell.

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Noted daily, with largest numbers at Home, Titchwell and Cley.

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

Seen daily primarily along the shoreline or in flight over the sea.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Recorded daily.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Two at Holme and Cley.

**Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Small numbers noted daily.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Easily seen at all water bodies visited.

**Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope***

As above, again noted at all water bodies.

**Northern Pintail *Anas acuta***

Seen at Cley, Stiffkey Fen and Titchwell.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen at all wetland sites visited.

**Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

Noted at Titchwell and Cley.

**Common Teal *Anas crecca***

Easily seen again at water bodies visited, particularly numerous at Titchwell.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Several on the Broadwater at Holme.

**Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra***

Around fifty noted on the sea from Holme.

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

Roadside coveys were noted on all three days.

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

Three on the way back along the coast road from Wells-next –the-sea on the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Recorded daily.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Noted at Holkham, Titchwell, Cley and Holme.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Three on the sea on our first day from the view point at the hotel.

**Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia***

Two at Titchwell, seven on the saltmarsh at Thornham and an impressive 28 at Stiffkey Fen.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Ones and twos were noted daily.

**Great Egret *Ardea alba***

One at Holkham and a second surprise bird in flight over Titchwell.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Easily seen and noted at all wetland sites visited.

**Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus***

Small numbers noted out over the sea, though some more distant than others.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted daily.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

A single bird at Holkham

**Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus***

A ringtail was seen at Warham Greens.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Two-three seen daily, at various sites.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Seen daily, again at various sites.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

Heard at Cley, Walsey Hills and Titchwell.

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily.

**Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted daily.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Common, seen daily.

**Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Up to four noted at Cley and Titchwell.

**Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Recorded daily in small numbers.

**European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria***

Several hundred noted at Titchwell, Thornham Harbour and on the saltmarsh at Warham Greens.

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

Noted daily at various sites.

**Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Noted on the beach at Hunstanton, Warham Greens and Titchwell.

**Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

At least nine in total at Holme, with others seen at Warham Greens, Cley and Titchwell.

**Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus***

An exceptional number of sightings with four on the marsh at Walsey Hills, one on a small island viewable from the east bank at Cley and another on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

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

Seen at Titchwell and Cley..

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

Seen along the coast at various spots.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Noted daily.

**Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus***

A bird heard calling on several occasions at Titchwell was never located, a late record.

**Common Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Common, recorded daily.

**Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***

Two in the harbour creek at Stiffkey Fen.

**Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus***

A single bird at Stiffkey Fen.

**Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos***

One from the East Bank at Cley and one at Stiffkey Fen

**Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos***

A long staying elusive bird at Titchwell showed well to some of us on the edge of the freshmarsh in amongst vegetation by the main footpath.

**Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

Noted daily, along the shoreline at various sites.

**Red Knot *Calidris canutus***

Seven were in amongst Bar-tailed Godwits on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Sanderling *Calidris alba***

Several on the beach at Holme.

**Little Stint *Calidris minuta***

A juvenile bird was on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

Seen in small numbers, primarily at Titchwell and Cley.

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

Easily seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

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

Common, noted daily.

**Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus***

An adult was on the volunteers pool at Titchwell.

**Common Gull *Larus canus***

Again seen daily.

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

Noted daily at all coastal sites visited.

**European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

As above noted daily.

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

At least two adult birds on the freshmarsh at Titchwell on our first visit

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

Seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis***

Four on the beach at Holme, with two more seen on our early morning visit to Hunstanton Cliffs.

**Great Skua *Stercorarius skua***

One distantly from the dunes at Holme.

**Razorbill *Alca torda***

Four on the sea from the end of the East bank at Cley.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

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

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

One seen well by the group in a roadside field in Holme village.

**Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Common, seen daily

**Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

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

**Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba***

One spotted from the minibus by Jo was seen by everyone on the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

One on a post on the far side of Broadwater at Holme, with another briefly in flight the same day at Titchwell.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

One seen by the front passengers of the bus at Stiffkey Fen.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Several seen daily.

**Peregrine *Falco peregrinus***

A large female bird was seen distantly at Warham Greens.

**Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

At least three were seen at Holkham Pines.

**Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica***

Seen daily in small numbers

**Western Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula***

Seen daily in both fields and around village roof tops

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Several 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 in the conifer stands at Holkham and also seen in the conifer block near the hotel.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Noted daily, in small numbers

**European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

As above noted daily.

**Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus***

We did quite well for this species, with our first along the east bank at Cley (3), then Stiffkey Fen (6), Holme (2) with others heard at Titchwell.

**Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Noted daily, primarily overflying calling birds.

**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Seen daily in small numbers.

**Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

At least one seen in with Barn Swallows at Holkham.

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

Heard daily at various suitable sites.

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

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

**Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus colybita***

Noted and seen daily at various sites most numerous at Warham Greens.

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

One seen and another heard at Titchwell on our first visit, with it or another seen again on our second visit there, both views were unfortunately brief.

**Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

A male was seen at Warham Greens.

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Singles at Choseley Barns and Burnham Overy.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Undoubtedly the most numerous bird of the trip, with large numbers having recently arrived from Scandinavia.

**Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Recorded daily at various sites

**Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Seen daily in small flocks.

**Common Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Noted daily, easily seen around the hotel grounds.

**Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris***

Two from the East bank over the reedbed at Cley.

**Redwing *Turdus iliacus***

Noted daily in small numbers, mainly flyover calling birds.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

As with Goldcrest easily seen and heard with a recent arrivals from Scandinavia boosting local numbers.

**Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***

Three at Holme on our first day and with another en route to Ringstead on day two.

**European Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Seen and heard daily

**Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus***

A rather showy and much appreciated first year male at Titchwell on our second visit to the site.

**European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola***

Three birds on both visits to Holme and a single at Holkham.

**Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe***

Three on our first visit to Holme and one near the East Bank at Cley.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily.

**Dunnock *Prunella modularis***

As above, noted daily.

**Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea***

Singles at Holme and Holkham.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

Recorded daily, with largest numbers at Titchwell.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Noted daily with some nice views had at Titchwell.

**Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Common, recorded daily.

**Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla***

Seen and heard at several sites on our first full two days, with a particularly showing female bird seen by everyone on our first full day at Holme.

**European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Noted in small numbers at Holme and Titchwell.

**European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Noted daily at various sites.

**Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Seen at Holme, Titchwell and Cley.

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella***

Two near the hotel in local farmland and a single at Warham Greens.

**Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Noted daily.

**Mammals**

**European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus***

**Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus***

**Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis***

**Grey seal *Halichoerus grypus***

**Stoat *Mustela erminea***

**Chinese Water Deer *Hydropotes inermis***

**Butterflies**

**Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta***

**Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera***

**Dragonflies**

**Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum***

**Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta***