

# Norfolk Coast

## Autumn Migration

Fri 9th-Mon 12th September 2016

---



*Two trip highlights of our Norfolk coast adventure: Spotted Redshank at Thornham and Curlew Sandpiper at Titchwell © Gary Elton/Limosa*

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

## Norfolk | Autumn Migration

**Tour Leader:** Gary Elton

**with Wenda Badger, Jennifer Harley, Shirley Newbold, Tim Saunders, Rhona Wallace**

### 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 days ahead.

### Day Two

With the forecast predicting rain for the day we woke to find they had got it right, so unfortunately there was no pre breakfast birding. After breakfast we started with some local venues, the first at the cliffs at Hunstanton, then on to Heacham North and South beaches that allowed us to stay in the van and avoid the now heavy rain. Viewing a selection of the expected waders and gulls along the shoreline was a good start to the trip, with three late Fulmars seen around the cliff face where they breed in good numbers. On arrival at Titchwell RSPB reserve the rain had stopped so we decided to make the most of the opportunity and head out along the Fen trail. An enjoyable couple of hours birding followed with the highlights being showy Whinchat and Water Rail, a brief Kingfisher, calling Bearded Reedlings, rather smart juvenile Ruff and Curlew Sandpipers and our first Spoonbill of the trip. The morning also allowed Jennifer to impress everyone with her Snipe finding skills something she carried on with throughout the trip! The rain had now unfortunately returned so we made our way back to the minibus for both shelter and some now welcome lunch.

After lunch we ventured back out to the reserve, spending the afternoon dividing our time between the two hides and finally, when the rain had stopped, the beach. As usual Titchwell didn't disappoint, with an impressive list of birds amassed by the end of the visit. More noteworthy species included two Little stints and two more Curlew sandpipers, all juveniles, four Spotted Redshanks, Greenshank, Swift, Wheatear, three Black Terns and some stunning breeding plumaged Grey Plovers. Our last destination of the day was an opportunistic visit to nearby Holme to view the grazing Marsh and the small NOA reserve at Redwell Marsh. Unfortunately this time the rain got the better of us so we returned to the hotel to dry off. The day had been very successful though, despite of the weather, with a total of 85 species seen by the group.

### Day Three

In complete contrast to yesterday we woke to a bright sunny morning, which turned out to be the start of a beautiful sunny day. A short sea watch from the rear of the hotel garden gave us a nice selection of expected terns, gull and waders plus some distant plunge-diving Gannets. Two new species for the trip were Little Tern and two, (some would say) rather distant, Arctic Skuas. A short walk along the nearby coastal path revealed a small trickle of Swallows heading west along the coast and Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails on the nearby golf course greens.

After a welcome breakfast we started our journey east along the coast, taking initially a rather convoluted course searching the local fields and hedgerows for farmland birds. We met with mixed success, encountering several large coveys of Red-legged Partridge and accompanying Pheasants but little else. A stop at Choseley Barns though proved productive with both Whitethroat and Goldcrest found in the roadside hedge and a very nice showy Marsh Harrier, which was particularly appreciated by one member of the group! We continued on along the coast driving through Wells-next-the-sea to our first destination, Warham Greens. Parking, we walked down to the coastal path, noting first several Stock Doves on the wall of a nearby derelict barn. A pleasant walk followed, though birds seemed a bit thin on the ground especially the passerines with several Chiffchaffs, a pair of Blackcaps and Reed Bunting the best seen. The saltmarsh in front of us revealed a flock of several hundred Golden Plovers, many still sporting the remains of summer plumage and looking particularly impressive in the sun. With the morning slipping by we returned to the minibus and continued to our next destination Cley, the famous Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve.

Lunch followed, sat on the benches in front of the visitor centre, which gave us a nice vista to view the pools and marsh. A walk along the iconic East Bank was next, where we had views over the extensive reed beds to the west and the open flooded grassland and Arnold's Marsh to the east. A pleasant afternoon's birding followed and sightings included two Hobbies, Whinchats and Wheatears and an elusive Common Sandpiper first seen by Shirley in a small creek, running out across the marsh. Searching for the sandpiper produced another foraging Water Rail. Our final destination of the day was the small private nature reserve at Stiffkey Fen that was to prove a good choice. Walking onto the elevated position on the sea wall we had great views of the fen with the large number of Spoonbills present immediately obvious. Twenty-eight birds were counted in total, which proceeded to appear to wake up and take flight in small groups, heading off east during our stay. The other species at the site in notable numbers were Black-tailed Godwit along with the expected ducks and geese, more interesting species found included two more Pintail, Greenshank, Green and Common sandpiper and another brief Kingfisher.

**Day Four**

Another nice day but with it being our last it was decided to fore-go a pre breakfast walk for a prompt departure after breakfast; this we achieved and we were soon heading east again along the coast. A brief stop at Thornham Harbour proved a good move with three Spotted Redshanks and a Greenshank found among the waders in the muddy creeks. Our next destination was Burnham Overy Staithe where we parked and made our way up onto the sea wall, scanning the adjacent bushes for passerines. A small flock of House Sparrows were easily and immediately seen with some diligent searching also revealing single Reed Warbler, Chiffchaff, Common Whitethroat and Blackcap. We continued walking along the raised bank enjoying views of many of the commoner waders we had seen the previous days and periodically scanning the fields to the east. The fields had large numbers of Greylag and a few Canada Geese and it wasn't long before Wenda picked out the first of half a dozen Egyptian Geese that were in amongst them. We continued along the path until we reached the large reed-fringed pool on the east of the site, which again had attracted a large flock of geese and a single Grey Heron. A distant Hobby could be seen flying low over and in front of a much further away reed bed with several distant Marsh Harriers also seen. The wind had now picked up so we decided to retrace our steps and, after boarding the minibus, we made our way to Holkham. Here we parked at Lady Anne's Drive to walk out between the pines and the fresh marsh. After a short distance we stumbled on a noisy Long-tailed Tit flock finding Goldcrest, Blue and Great Tit in amongst them plus a Treecreeper - though unfortunately this was only seen by Shirley. A tip off from another birder saw us heading to the further Joe Jordan hide in search of a pair of Great Egrets, pausing en-route briefly at a small saline pool where some calling large falcons flew in above us, flying rapidly over and around us. The birds were Peregrines, seemingly an adult female and a young bird, the views were unfortunately brief with the birds disappearing as quickly as they arrived. We continued our walk to the hide, climbing the steps to look out over the grazing marsh. After a brief search a white egret was picked out among the reeds on the edge of the large pool off to our right with a second, which was clearly the Great, raising its head and neck clear of the reeds nearby. The first bird, it had now transpired, was a Little Egret, the second the Great, trying its best to play hide and seek with Tim as he struggled (as had become the norm!) to get scope views of it! Eventually Tim achieved acceptable views as did everyone else and we retraced our steps to the minibus. We then returned back to the hotel where we said our goodbyes before making our journeys home.

**ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED**

(Total number of species recorded by the group, 107)

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Noted daily, with largest numbers at Titchwell and Cley.

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Noted in good numbers, with largest numbers at Cley, Stiffkey Fen and Burnham Overy Staithe.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Recorded daily.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Seen on our last day at Burnham Overy (6), and Holkham.

**Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Small numbers at Titchwell, and Cley.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Easily seen at all water bodies visited.

**Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope***

Noted at both Titchwell and Cley.

**Northern Pintail *Anas acuta***

Two from the East Bank at Cley and two at Stiffkey Fen.

**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.

**Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***

A single female type at Stiffkey Fen.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Several were noted at Titchwell and Cley.

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

Roadside coveys were noted on all three days.

**Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Recorded daily.

**Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis***

Three around the cliff face at Hunstanton.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Noted at Holkham, Titchwell, Cley and Burnham Overy.

**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 on our last day.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Easily seen and noted at all wetland sites visited.

**Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus***

Noted daily, though some more distant than others.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted daily.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Two-three seen daily, some showing better than others!

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

10-15 were seen on our second and third full days.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

We did surprisingly well for this species with two seen at Titchwell and one at Cley, with another heard at Burnham Overy.

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily

**Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted daily

**Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

Common, seen daily.

**Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Around 50 were noted at Titchwell.

**Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Recorded daily in small numbers.

**European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria***

Several hundred noted at Titchwell and on the saltmarsh at Warham Greens, many still in breeding plumage.

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

Noted daily with some particularly smart breeding plumaged birds noted.

**Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Noted on the beach at Hunstanton and Titchwell, with two more on the freshmarsh at the latter site.

**Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

At least eight in total at Titchwell, with another seen from the East Bank at Cley.

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

Seen at Titchwell, Cley, Thornham and Stiffkey Fen, particularly numerous at the latter site.

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

Seen along Titchwell beach and from our hotel beach viewpoint, with several still retaining breeding plumage.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Noted daily.

**Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus***

Four seen at Titchwell, feeding at the rear of the fresh marsh, with three more much closer birds in Thornham Harbour.

**Common Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Common, recorded daily.

**Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***

Three sites, Titchwell, Stiffkey Fen (2) and Thornham Harbour.

**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

**Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

Noted daily, along the shoreline at various sites.

**Red Knot *Calidris canutus***

Around fifty on the beach at Titchwell.

**Sanderling *Calidris alba***

Seen on 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.

**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.

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

Seen at Titchwell and Cley.

**Little Tern *Sternula albifrons***

Three were seen on the beach in amongst the other species of terns on the beach at Hunstanton on our first mornings hotel birding.

**Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis***

Seen daily along the coast.

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

As above easily seen along the coast.

**Black Tern *Chlidonias niger***

Three were seen well from the beach at Titchwell

**Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus***

Two distant birds on our first mornings seawatch.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

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

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Two on a derelict building at Warham Greens.

**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 seen from the minibus en route by Rhona as we travelled back to the hotel on 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Swift *Apus apus***

One seen over the coastal path at Titchwell.

**Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

Singles at Titchwell, Stiffkey Fen and Thornham Harbour.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Several seen on both our dry days, generally single hunting birds.

**Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

One watched over the reeds at Cley was followed later by it, or a second, which gave fantastic views as we stood on the East Bank. Two more were seen distantly at Burnham Overy and Holkham the following day.

**Peregrine *Falco peregrinus***

Two birds, seemingly a female and a young bird flew over us as we stood by Salts Pool at Holkham.

**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 belt near the hotel and also at Holkham as we walked along the conifer lined footpath there.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Noted daily, in small numbers

**European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

As above noted daily.

**Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus***

Seen well at Titchwell especially from the Island Hide, also heard at Cley.

**Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

One seen from the East bank at Cley.

**Sand Martin *Riparia riparia***

Several were noted in amongst the hirundines moving over us along the coast on Saturday morning.

**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Seen daily.

**Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

As above noted daily.

**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 at Holkham and Warham Greens.

**Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus***

Several seen at Titchwell

**Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus***

Several were seen at Titchwell, with another seen well at Burnham Overy.

**Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

A pair were seen in the large pit at Warham Greens and a female at Burnham Overy.

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Singles at Choseley Barns and Burnham Overy.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Heard daily in the conifer belt by the hotel, with a showy bird at Choseley Barns a surprise find and seen by most of the group.

**Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Recorded daily at various sites

**Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

One was seen by Shirley along the pine-lined path at Holkham

**Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Seen daily in small flocks.

**Common Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Noted daily, easily seen around the hotel grounds.

**European Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Seen and heard daily

**Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra***

One at Titchwell and two at Cley.

**Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe***

One on the beach at Titchwell and two on the East bank path at Cley.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily.

**Dunnock *Prunella modularis***

As above, noted daily.

**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.

**Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula***

Heard in the car park at Titchwell by Gary and Shirley but unfortunately not seen.

**European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Noted in small numbers daily

**European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Noted daily at various sites.

**Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Seen at Titchwell, Stiffkey Fen and Burnham Overy.

**Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Noted daily.

**[Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*]**

Undoubtedly escapes but included here for completeness. Two rather smart individuals were found amongst the Greylag Geese at Cley.

**Mammals**

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Grey seal *Halichoerus grypus*

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

**Butterflies**

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Small White *Artogeia rapae*

**Dragonflies**

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*

Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea*