

Norfolk Coast

Autumn Migration

Fri 6th-Mon 9th October 2017



Thornham Harbour is becoming a regular spot for a late Spotted Redshank © Gary Elton/Limosa Holidays

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

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Tour Leader: Gary Elton

Participants : Warwick and Anne de Ste Croix, Brian Morris, Jean Withall, Margaret Miller

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

Our first full day saw us collecting at the front of the hotel for a brief seawatch and look out over the beach. With daylight just breaking and a high tide, viewing was tricky, though large numbers of waders - particularly Oystercatchers - could just be made out on the beach at nearby Gore Point, Holme. Brent Geese and Wigeon were seen flying past and a distant flock of Common Scoter could be seen on the sea. Breakfast followed, after which we headed east to our first destination, Holme NR. The small NOA reserve called Redwell Marsh was our first port of call, accessed by a boardwalk and viewed from a small hide. On our way in we noted Goldcrests calling and a flyover Grey Wagtail. Water levels looked ideal, but the best we could manage from the hide was eight feeding Black-tailed Godwits. As we walked back to the minibus, a Fieldfare flew over and landed briefly in the top of a nearby tree. This was followed by a Swallow, a Great Spotted Woodpecker and three fly-over Snipe; the latter species was recorded continually flying over the various sites we visited during the day.

Our next stop was by the main entrance of the NWT reserve, where we walked onto the sea wall, our route taking us east along the edge of the saltmarsh then on to briefly view the sea and beach. Birds seen here included Reed Bunting and Stonechat on the saltmarsh and the expected commoner waders such as Sanderling, Ringed Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit on the shoreline. Several thousand Common Scoters could again be seen over the sea and our walk back to the minibus produced two distant, perched Marsh Harriers. Our last stop at Holme was the car park hide overlooking the Broadwater, again owned by the NOA. Several hundred Teal were lined up along the banks with the only other noteworthy birds here being several Tufted Ducks and Little Grebes. Thornham Harbour was our next stop and, as we drove in, a brief glimpse of a probable Spotted Redshank caused us to stop. The bird was indeed a Spotted Redshank but unfortunately quickly disappeared from view and as we stood waiting for it to appear we heard the piping call of a Kingfisher, which flashed past - followed by a second! We moved on to the main car park to view the harbour channel and marsh with a flock of around 500 Golden Plover immediately noted. As we stood looking out, the distinct chattering call of a Lapland Longspur was heard with the bird flying over us and disappearing into cover nearby. We searched with no success, until Jean noticed it had actually walked out onto the muddy track in front of us; frustratingly though as quick as we could lift our binoculars the bird was off calling as it went. We boarded the bus and drove out, noting that the Spotted Redshank had reappeared in the company of a second, which enabled finally good views of the species. Our next stop was at Titchwell, noting several coveys of Red-legged Partridge and a flock of around 15 Mistle Thrushes en-route.

Lunch followed at Titchwell RSPB Reserve, with us spending the remainder of the day there. We walked round to view the area to the east called Patsy's Pool which gave us a selection of the expected Wildfowl, then we returned to the footpath, our plan being to visit the beach then return back to the hides. A friend of Gary's had chatted as we walked along and, as luck had it, he broke off to visit the Island Hide as we walked on. On arriving at the hide he had realised a Water Rail was on the scrape edge literally feet from the hide! He came back out and called us, enabling us all to gain good views before the bird took flight back across the marsh. We continued to the beach, with the sea giving us views of several close Common Scoter and Great crested Grebes and, with the tide now out, the expected selection of waders. Parinder Hide was our next stop; looking out over the fresh marsh, a good number of birds were present, with more notable species including Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, a large flock of Golden Plover (Thornham birds?), Dunlin and a juvenile Little Stint. We returned to the main path and headed for Island Hide. With a degree of luck we walked into the hide just as a pair of Bearded Reedlings had appeared at the base of the reeds opposite, a seeming habit of this species at this time of year. Great views followed and provided a fitting end to our first full day.

Day Three

Our first destination after breakfast was nearby Heacham, following a report of a Rose-coloured Starling there. A suitable vista was found to search the nearby wires and fields but there was no sign of the bird, though by consolation a covey of Grey Partridges and a Stock Dove were useful trip additions. Today's destination was the eastern half of the north coast and our first roadside stop was to overlook the marshes at Burnham Overy. The fields in front of us were filled with geese, largely Pink-feet with smaller numbers of Greylags and around fifty

Egyptian Geese. An estimate 5000 birds in total, making an impressive sight when they took off, flying noisily around and over us. Our next stop was Holkham Hall and lake, where the woodland area enabled us to catch up with species such as Green woodpecker, Nuthatch and Coal Tit. We arrived at the lake, finding a reported Great Egret on the opposite bank almost immediately. A reported Osprey proved trickier, though, with the site directions seemingly not adding up. A friend of Gary's was present nearby and when Gary asked him if he'd seen it, he directed us to a distant tree at the far end of the lake where the Osprey was perched.

We headed further along the coast to Kelling Water Meadows and walked down the track to the flooded meadow. Red-necked Phalarope was our target bird here, a juvenile/1st winter bird having been present for several days and, on our arrival, the bird performed perfectly. We walked up to the shingle ridge to overlook the sea with at least three Stonechats noted on the way. The sea produced three male Eiders and several Brent Geese in flight plus a Red-throated Diver, which was on the sea and enabled everyone to get a scope view of it. We returned, managing some brief views of a Lesser Whitethroat that had been found and was considered to perhaps be of the eastern races.

A long overdue lunch followed at the visitor centre at Cley, after which we made the short drive down to Walsey Hills and the East Bank. A quick look in at Walsey Hills proved very quiet, so we headed off for a walk along the East Bank. A Water Rail flew across an area of clear water in the reedbed on the left of the path, a brief view but the bird choosing to 'squeal' as if to confirm its identity! It's not often you manage a 'two phalarope' day and that was what we had today with a juvenile Red (Grey) Phalarope showing well on a small area of water by the path! Arnolds Marsh was, as usual, teeming with birds, including a good selection of waders, a flock of around 500 Black-tailed Godwits and a Greenshank. With the day largely over we decided to work our way back along the coast, with thoughts of perhaps finding a Barn Owl. After driving past Burnham Norton there was a shout from the back of the bus that one had been seen sitting on a fence! The van was quickly turned round and, on finding a place to park, we enjoyed great views of the bird hunting and perched.

Day Four

A short walk along the coastal path for some of the group started the day today, with calling Song Thrushes and Redwings heralding a small arrival over night. A fly-over Grey Wagtail and a Sparrowhawk were noted, after which we returned for breakfast. With bags packed we made a prompt departure, a visit to the high tide wader roost at Snettisham RSPB Reserve our objective. We arrived at the shoreline in good time, the noise from the gathering birds the first sign that they were present and a massive flock of largely Knot was admired, wheeling around over the now flooded mudflats. We made our way along the pits, hoping to find space in one of the hides. The first two hides were full, so we made our way to the third, the furthest but the one likely to give us best views. We were fortunate; whilst the hide was busy, there was plenty of room for us and we settled down to enjoy the birds. Immediately obvious were the Oystercatchers, roosting all along the edges in large groups, with a partially melanistic bird in front of us immediately standing out. At first glance they appeared to be roosting on bare shingle, then closer inspection revealed that the shingle on all the islands and edges were actually birds, mainly Knot, huddled up and shuffling up and down the islands and banks! A Rock Pipit and Kingfisher both landed in front of the hide whilst we watched and as the tide started dropping, the roosting birds started wing stretching and taking off to head back onto the Wash to feed. We walked back the way we had come, enjoying the spectacle of the birds flying over us and landing back on the mudflats as the tide continued dropping. People had started to leave so we were able to get into one of the previously full hides and search through some of the birds that remained. A Little Stint was the best bird, found amongst a group of Dunlin. A brief return to Heacham produced a large flock of Starlings but no Rose-coloured, though the visit enabled an excuse for a tea and coffee break! Heading back towards Titchwell we decided to visit a less popular area called Gypsy Lane, a footpath leading down to the marshes and reedbeds east of Titchwell. A flock of six Siskins flew out of the conifers as we disembarked and the walk down to the reeds revealed several Goldcrests and Coal Tits. A Marsh Harrier and a large flock of Pink-feet flew over us and, arriving at the area of reeds, we were greeted by a small flock of Bearded Reedlings. A scan of the area also revealed a distant Red Kite. With time ticking by, it was decided to make a quick return visit to Thornham Harbour. On arrival, a Rock Pipit was found perched on the barn, though a scan of the area generally produced little else of note. We re-boarded the bus and just as Gary climbed in he heard a loud 'schreep' call and a large pipit flew over, appearing to land the other side of the sea wall – Richard's Pipit!! The group quickly disembarked and made their way to the raised bank to look. Needle in a haystack sprung to mind and, after a few minutes searching, we accepted defeat and made our way back along the coast to the hotel. Back at the hotel, we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla bernicla*

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

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Small numbers seen at Holme, Titchwell and Cley.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Noted daily in good numbers.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Noted daily with largest numbers at Burnham Overy.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Recorded daily.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Around fifty at Bournham Overy, with others noted at Holkham, Cley and Snettisham.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Small numbers noted daily.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen at all water bodies visited.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

As above, again noted at all water bodies.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen at all wetland sites visited.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Noted at Titchwell and Cley.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Six, including two males were seen from the East Bank, Cley.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

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

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Around twenty on Patsy's Pool, Titchwell.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Several on the Broadwater at Holme and at Titchwell.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

Three males were seen flying over the sea off Kelling.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Large numbers distantly offshore at Hunstanton and Holme with several closer birds seen off Titchwell.

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Roadside coveys were noted on all three days.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Eight were seen at Heacham.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Recorded daily.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellate*

One seen well offshore at Kelling.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Noted at Holkham, Titchwell, Cley, Holme and Snettisham.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Noted on the sea at Hunstanton, Titchwell, Holme and Snettisham.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Ones and twos were noted daily.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

One on the lake at Holkham

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Easily seen and noted at all wetland sites visited.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

A juvenile perched in a dead tree at Holkham was a nice bonus, though finding it proved a tad challenging!

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A single bird early morning at Hunstanton.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Two-three seen daily, at various sites.

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

A distant bird over the dunes at Gypsy Lane, Titchwell.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Seen daily, again at various sites.

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

One seen extremely well at Titchwell with a second seen briefly from the East Bank at Cley.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Noted daily

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted daily

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common, seen daily, with large numbers at both Gore Point Holme and Snettisham.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Six at Titchwell and two at Snettisham. One of these birds was colour-ringed and appears to have originated from a scheme in Cambridgeshire.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Around 500 noted at Titchwell and Thornham Harbour, quite possibly the same birds.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Noted daily at various sites.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Noted on the beach at Holme.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

A seemingly constant stream of overflying birds recorded throughout the day at coastal sites on Saturday. In comparison, only recorded at Cley after that, with six in flight over the East Bank.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Large numbers at Titchwell, Cley and Snettisham.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Seen daily along the coast, large numbers seen at Snettisham.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Noted daily.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

Two in the harbour channel at Thornham Harbour eventually showed well for us.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Common, recorded daily.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

One on Arnold's Marsh Cley, viewed from the East Bank.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Noted daily, along the shoreline at various sites.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Seen offshore at Titchwell, with tens of thousands seen at the high tide roost at Snettisham.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Seen on the beach at Holme, Titchwell and Snettisham.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

At least one juvenile was at Titchwell, with a second found in the high tide roost at Snettisham.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Seen in small numbers, primarily at Titchwell and Snettisham.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Easily seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell and Arnold's Marsh, Cley.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A juv/1st winter bird showed well for us at Kelling Water Meadows.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

A 1st winter individual showed well for us at Cley, viewed from the East Bank.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common, noted daily.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaeetus 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*

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 and Arnold's Marsh, 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 at Heacham.

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 well on our return along the coast from Cley.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Two in flight at Thornham Harbour and a perched bird at Snettisham.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

A vocal bird in flight at Holme.

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One heard then seen in flight at Holkham.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Recorded daily.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Several seen on days two and three.

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 Kelling, Cley and Heacham.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Small numbers were noted throughout the trip at various sites.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Several were heard and seen during our visit to Holkham and also seen in the conifer block near the hotel.

European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

As above, noted daily.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Noted daily, in small numbers

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

A showy pair at the base of the reeds at Titchwell, were followed by an irrupting group of six at Gypsy Lane, Titchwell.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Noted daily, primarily overflying, calling birds.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Noted on day one but none subsequently.

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.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia Curruca*

A bird at Kelling Water Meadows was mooted as being a bird from one of the eastern subspecies.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Birds were seen and heard daily.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Recorded daily at various sites

Eurasian Nuthatch *Certhia familiaris*

At least three were heard at Holkham with two seen.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen daily in small flocks.

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Noted daily, easily seen around the hotel grounds.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

Just one, in flight then perched at Holme.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Several flyover birds were noted on our last mornings pre breakfast walk.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard calling from the conifer wood by the hotel on our last morning.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

One at Holme on our first day, about 20 on wires near Thornham village and one at Heacham.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Seen and heard daily

European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

Two at Holme and at least four at Kelling.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

As above, noted daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Singles at Holme and on our pre breakfast on our last morning.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Recorded daily, with largest numbers at Titchwell.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted daily, largely overflying birds.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

Nice views were had of perched birds at Thornham Harbour and Snettisham.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common, recorded daily.

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Noted in small numbers daily.

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Seen at Holme, Titchwell and Cley.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Noted daily at various sites.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Six flushed from the tops of the conifers as we parked at Gypsy Lane, Titchwell.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Noted daily.

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*

A calling bird landed briefly at Thornham Harbour before flying off east.

Mammals

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Chinese Water Deer *Hydropotes inermis*

Reeves's Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Butterflies

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Dragonflies

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*