

# Norfolk Coast

## Autumn Migration

Fri 12th-Mon 15th October 2018



*The wonderful spectacle of Bar-tailed Godwits and Red Knot on our Norfolk break. © tour participant John Groom*

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

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### 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

We awoke to a fine though blustery start, with this unfortunately the forecast for the remainder of the day. Unperturbed, we started the day by foregoing any pre-breakfast activities, favouring a prompt start and heading off to our first stop of the day, Snettisham RSPB reserve. Whilst loading and boarding the van at the hotel, evidence of some visible migration could be seen. Chaffinches, Meadow Pipits and Skylarks were expected but two House Martins and a Swallow less so and a welcome surprise. On arriving at Snettisham, we were immediately treated to our first aerial display by the tens of thousands of waders assembling on the shoreline. The birds were rising up in unison and wheeling around in front of us before settling back into a tight flock along the shoreline. Predominately Red Knot (numbers estimated by RSPB staff to be in the region of 80,000 birds), their numbers swelled with smaller numbers of Eurasian Curlew, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Dunlin and Sanderling. The birds took flight on several occasions with both Marsh Harriers and a Peregrine identified as agitators. The tide wasn't quite as high as we had hoped, the wind working against us, pushing the rising water away from the shore. As the tide started to turn, the level appeared to drop rapidly and birds followed quickly behind it onto the freshly exposed mudflats to feed. With a few drops of rain appearing, we decided to shelter in one of the nearby hides overlooking the lagoons. Scanning across the water, large numbers of Greylag Geese were immediately obvious with single Canada and Barnacle Geese amongst them. Shorebirds on nearby islands included Redshank and Turnstone with subsequent scanning producing four Spotted Redshank and thirteen Greenshank, plus a Common Snipe found by Vince as it rooted around in some bankside vegetation. Lunch was beckoning so we finished by checking the small gulls on one of the roadside lagoons. This proved a good move with two adult Mediterranean Gulls found in with the more numerous Black-headed and Common Gulls. Lunch was taken at Titchwell RSPB reserve, in the car park, where we once again managed to see some hirundines - four House Martins and a Swallow.

After lunch, we headed east along the coast to Holkham, parking at Lady Anne's Drive then walking west along the southern edge of the pines. Large numbers of Pink-footed Geese were present and easily seen in the adjacent fields as we walked along. The wind was still blowing strongly, though with the temperature in the low 70s, almost making it feel like a summers day! A Peregrine flew high over us heading inland and both Marsh Harrier and Red Kite were seen. Several of the group decided to rest at the first hide whilst others carried on to the second, where we were treated to some nice views of two Great Egrets. We left the hide and decided to walk a short way further along the path to the west, soon encountering several people stood by the path peering up into the trees there. We joined them, noting Blue Tit, Great Tit and Long-tailed Tit, then a nearby birder called "Yellow-browed Warbler at the top of the tree!" Sure enough there it was, choosing to perch long enough for us to see it. Quality of views were unfortunately varied, though everyone did catch sight of it, before it flew off over the path and into the trees, immediately disappearing from view. We stood waiting to see if it would return, it didn't, but another treat was in store for us. Suddenly from nowhere a young Hobby swept down into the clearing next to us at breath taking speed, breaking its dive at the last minute before returning to cruise over the pines next to us. Dragonflies were clearly visible around the clearing and the Hobby appeared several more times, giving a mouth-watering display of its aerial ability as it rocketed through the clearing beside us.

We returned along the track, collected the rest of the group from the first hide then headed back towards the hotel. There was still one more stop planned which was a bit of a long shot, with some Shorelarks having been reported late in the morning from a section of the beach near Hunstanton. We walked down through the saltings and onto the beach, walking west along the dune edge. Several Rock and Meadow Pipits flew around us calling and skylarks were equally vocal, but there was no sign of any Shorelarks. Other birders had been searching the area and we noticed they had all drawn together and were intently peering through their telescopes. We moved towards where they were looking and soon found two of the Shorelarks hunkered down on the edge of the dunes. Great views followed before we walked back round to the watching birders and joined them to enjoy the birds further. Six birds was our final tally and they performed admirably in front of us, unperturbed by our presence and giving us some great looks through the scopes.

### Day Three

In total contrast to yesterday we woke to a grey start to the day with our plan being a short, pre-breakfast 'viz mig' session at the rear of the hotel. We met at 7.15 waiting for things to start but our plans were curtailed almost immediately when the first spots of rain began to fall! An early breakfast became Plan B, after which we headed to nearby Hunstanton sea front to look for waders. Arriving at the first promenade car park we scanned the shore edge, immediately noting Turnstones both on the beach and the concrete walkway. After a short while, a distant bird was found, almost certainly a Purple Sandpiper but a long way off and asleep! The group moved along the promenade whilst Gary moved the bus to a closer car park and, by the time he had returned, the bird had come to life, head up and moving around and was indeed a Purple Sandpiper! After a short while children and dogs disturbed the birds and they flew along the beach. With another viewpoint further along, we re-parked and searched for the bird again. We relocated the bird, in the company of Turnstones and Ringed Plovers, but it was clearly 'that time of day' as more children disturbed the birds and they flew off back along the beach. A small group of Sanderlings flew past which were a nice bonus, before we made a short drive to the holiday chalets at Heacham. A breeding site this year for Black Redstart we were hopeful there may still be birds around and within minutes of arriving we had found a smart male. He sat on the apex of a nearby roof, occasionally sing and allowing views through the telescope.

The rain had now become more incessant and we headed to Holme Dunes. We walked out along the route we had taken the previous evening to view the Shorelarks stopping to look out onto the western edge of the shingle ridge. A long line of Cormorants and a large gathering of Oystercatchers were immediately noticeable and further searching revealed Curlew, Redshank and Great Black-backed Gulls, though distance restricted any decisive views of anything else. With the rain again starting to fall, this time heavily, we returned to the bus and drove to the NOA car park and hide that overlooks Broadwater. The rain continued to fall and the hide offered us both shelter and some birds to look at, with tea and coffee an added luxury! Ducks were the main fare; nothing out of the ordinary, but a good opportunity for everyone to get nice views and reinforce the birds we had already seen. That said, a head sticking out from the edge of the vegetation belonged to a female/1<sup>st</sup> winter Common Scoter, which did the decent thing and swam out into open water for us. This was short lived, though as the bird took flight and headed back out to sea. Our next stop was Titchwell RSPB Reserve, via a slightly convoluted route in the hope of finding some farmland species. This proved a good move with a covey of Grey Partridges, several groups of Red-legged Partridge and a single Stock Dove being the results of our venture!

Arriving at Titchwell, we made our way to the first hide via the boardwalk and "Patsy's Pool", the latter producing Common Pochard and Lesser Black-backed Gull, both new for the trip. The rain had again started falling and we were grateful of the shelter when we arrived at the hide; within a few minutes we had found a Jack Snipe 'bouncing' up and down in front of the hide. Great views followed, heightened by the presence of a Common Snipe for comparison. An added bonus was a Water Rail, which picked away in full view at the base of the reeds, while other new additions included Black-tailed Godwit, Avocet and Grey Wagtail. The cold and wet had now understandably started to take its toll and several of the group returned to the visitor centre for a well-earned hot drink. The rest of us carried on to the next hide, though little of note was added during the visit. The sea seemed, at the time, the next obvious port of call, though with conditions deteriorating, several of the remainder of our group realised the error of our ways and also headed for the visitor centre! The remaining few peered out over the dunes towards the sea, noting a selection of waders and gulls along the shoreline, but a 'white topped' sea with zero visibility made us realise enough was definitely enough! Returning to the centre, we added Tufted Duck to the list then more hot drinks and a short shopping spree for some, followed by our last stop of the day at Thornham Harbour. The rain had at least stopped and we managed views over the saltmarsh where we found our first Brent Geese of the trip and both Greenshank and Spotted Redshank were found in the harbour itself. A seemingly fitting skein of Pink-footed Geese flew over us to end to nicely round off the day.

### Day Four

Our last day and as such packing was seen as a priority, so no pre-breakfast but off out as soon as we were ready. This proved to be a good move, as the rain and wind from yesterday was still persisting. Seawatching was our first thought with a favourable wind direction, but unfortunately visibility was appalling, so a trip to the nearby observatory was made with the pine belt hopefully giving us some shelter. As luck had it the rain started to ease as we arrived and drove along the gravel entrance track. We crawled along scanning the marsh, several ducks, geese and a Marsh Harrier were seen, then Gary picked up a Bittern in flight at the back of the marsh. We ground to a halt but unfortunately the bird had disappeared from view. We climbed out of the bus and spent some time viewing the marsh. This proved to be a worthwhile exercise with a Green Sandpiper flying out from the muddy pool in front of us, then a Ring Ouzel shot past and into the dunes the other side of the track. Clearly an encouraging sign! Redwings could be seen moving around in the nearby bushes and, whilst watching these, both Brambling and Blackcap also appeared. We walked to the observatory where we were made very welcome and were invited in to watch a Goldcrest being ringed. This proved very interesting and was followed by a

second bird, a Robin, being processed as well. A short look at the sea from the beach and seawatching hide was disappointing and revealed little other than a solitary Great Crested Grebe and a few Cormorants. With the morning having passed amazingly quickly we returned for drinks and lunch, taken as yesterday in the hide overlooking Broadwater.

After lunch, the weather cleared slightly so we decided to risk a walk along the coastal path to view the sea from the edge of the dunes. Once again the sea was devoid of birds but the beach held a reasonable-sized flock of about 500 Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ringed and Grey Plover, Curlew and Oystercatcher. Looking back over the marsh behind us we could see at least six Marsh Harriers in the air together and a large skein of pinkfeet was noted by Vince, heading in to land on the marsh. We returned to the bus where we deposited our scopes and took a short walk along the riverbank path to utilise the last twenty minutes of the trip. Ironically we added two new birds, a Cetti's Warbler and a Chiffchaff, though both views were rather brief. We returned to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes and started our various journeys home.

### ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED (103 Species)

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

Eight were on the saltmarsh at Thornham Harbour

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

A single bird at Snettisham with Greylags was surprisingly the only one seen,

**Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis***

One of questionable origin was amongst the large flock of Greylag Geese at Snettisham.

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Large numbers at Snettisham and Titchwell.

**Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynhus***

Noted daily with largest numbers at Hollkham and Holme.

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

A pair at Snettisham.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Around ten at Snettisham.

**Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Small numbers noted daily.

**Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

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.

**Common Teal *Anas crecca***

Easily seen, numerous at Snettisham, Holme and Titchwell.

**Common Pochard *Aythya ferina***

A single male on Patsy's Pool, Titchwell.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

A single bird on the pathside lagoon at Titchwell.

**Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra***

A female/1<sup>st</sup> winter was a surprise find on the Broadwater at Holme, with small numbers of birds seen distantly offshore during our return visit there.

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

Roadside coveys were noted on two days.

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

A roadside covey of at least ten as we drove out of Holme *en route* to Titchwell.

**Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Recorded daily.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

Noted at all the sites we visited.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

A single offshore at Holme on our last day.

**[Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*]**

One seen in flight by Gary was unfortunately a 'leader only bird'.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Up to four were noted daily.

**Great Egret *Ardea alba***

Two performed admirably for us at Holkham as we sat in the Joe Jordan hide.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Easily seen and noted at all wetland sites visited.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted daily.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

A single bird was seen early morning by John and Janet outside the hotel on the second morning.

**Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Seen at all sites, maximum of six at Holme.

**Red Kite *Milvus milvus***

A distant bird over the Marsh at Holkham.

**Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Seen daily, again at various sites.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

One found by Jean was seen extremely well by us all at Titchwell, working its way along the reed edge.

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Noted daily

**Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted daily

**Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

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

**Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Six were seen at Titchwell

**Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Recorded on two days in small numbers.

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

Noted daily at various sites, largest numbers as expected at Snettisham.

**Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

Small numbers at Hunstanton, Thornham Harbour and on the beach at Holme.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Noted daily, largest numbers at Snettisham.

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

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

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

Noted on the freshwater lagoon and along the shoreline at Titchwell.

**Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

Noted daily along the shore at various sites, with largest number and best views at Hunstanton Promenade.

**Red Knot *Calidris canutus***

Massive numbers at Snettisham with RSPBs official count 80,000 birds! Smaller numbers, around 500, at Holme with two also seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

**Sanderling *Calidris alba***

Around 50 were seen in a tight group amongst roosting Knot and Bar-tailed Godwits at Snettisham and 15 in flight along the shoreline at Hunstanton the following day.

**Dunlin *Calidris alpina***

Several hundred at Snettisham and four at Titchwell.

**Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritime***

A sleeping bird eventually woke up and was seen well through the scope on the beach at Hunstanton and briefly again as we moved to the nearby 'Ski slope' to try for a better view.

**Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus***

Great views of a 'bouncing' bird at Titchwell RSPB at times alongside a Common Snipe giving us a great opportunity to compare the two.

**Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

Seen well at Titchwell, with others noted at Snettisham and Holme.

**Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus***

One in flight at Holme over the marsh on our last day.

**Common Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Common, recorded daily.

**Spotted Redshank *Tringa tetanus***

A group of four from the hide at Snettisham and two in the tidal creek at Thornham Harbour.

**Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***

Thirteen on the lagoon at Snettisham and singles at Titchwell, Thornham Harbour and Holme.

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

Common, noted daily.

**Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaetus melanocephalus***

Two adults at Snettisham offered a nice comparison with its commoner cousins.

**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.

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

Six adults at Titchwell.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

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

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

One was seen in a roadside field at Ringstead on our drive from Holme to Titchwell.

**Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus***

Common, seen daily

**Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

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

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Recorded daily.

**Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

A contender for bird of the trip giving us a breath-taking display of its aerial agility.

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus***

A distant bird at Snettisham was followed by a closer, though briefer, bird at Holkham.

**Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Just one at Holkham on our first day.

**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 with Jackdaws in roadside fields near Ringstead.

**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

Singles Holkham and Holme.

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Several were heard during our visit to Holkham with nice views of one on the feeders at Titchwell.

**European Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

As above, noted daily.

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Noted daily, in small numbers

**Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Noted daily, primarily overflying, calling birds.

**Shore/Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris***

A flock of six in the dunes at the western end of Holme was a great finish to our first day.

**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Singles outside the hotel and at Titchwell on our first full day.

**Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

Two past the hotel and four at Titchwell, all in the company of the aforementioned Barn Swallows.

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

Heard and seen albeit briefly, in the closing ten minutes of the trip at Holme.

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

Small, noisy flocks were encountered daily.

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

Luck took a hand at Holkham as we strolled up to a gathering of birders to have one pointed out to us in the top of a nearby tree only minutes after we had arrived!

**Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

Our second warbler species, seen in the closing ten minutes of the trip in the next bush to the Cetti's!

**Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

A least two were in the bushes near the observatory car park at Holme

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Seen at Holkham, though this view was eclipsed by the 'in hand' bird at Holme.

**Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Recorded daily at various sites

**Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***

A 'heard only' at Holkham was the best we could do.

**Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Seen daily in small flocks.

**Common Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Noted daily, easily seen around the hotel grounds.

**Ring Ouzel *Turdus torquatus***

Brief views of a presumed female flew past and over us as we stood on the entrance track at Holme.

**Redwing *Turdus iliacus***

Around 20 in the bushes adjacent to the Observatory Car Park at Holme.

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Noted in small numbers throughout the weekend.

**European Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Seen and heard daily

**Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros***

A rather smart singing male in and around the holiday chalets at Heacham.

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily.

**Dunnock *Prunella modularis***

Noted daily.

**Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea***

One showed nicely for us in front of the Island Hide at Titchwell.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

Birds were noted at Snettisham and Hunstanton.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Noted daily, largely overflying birds.

**Eurasian Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus***

As above, largely overflying calling birds.

**Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Common, recorded daily.

**Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla***

Heard at Titchwell and Holme with a nice perched bird seen well in bushes by the Observatory Car Park.

**European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Two on the feeders at Titchwell and a single in flight at Holme.

**Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Noted daily, largest numbers Snettisham and Holme.

**European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Noted daily at various sites.

**Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Single birds seen on both visits to Holme.

**Mammals**

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*  
Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*  
Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

**Butterflies**

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*  
Peacock *Aglais io*

**Dragonflies**

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*  
Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*