

# Norfolk

## Nightjars & Rare Breeders

Mon 2<sup>nd</sup> - Thu 5<sup>th</sup> July 2012

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*Early July is a terrific time to see Stone-curlew in the Brecks © Janos Olah*

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

## Trip Diary

**Tour Leader: Gary Elton**

*with Betty Allison, Margaret Miller, Ann Sansom and Malcolm Smith*

### Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> July

After a very enjoyable evening meal and a chance to get to know each other, we made the first of our trips out to look for Nightjars. A Song Thrush could be heard singing as we arrived at the site, and a calling Woodcock flew over us in the fading light. After a short wait, the first Nightjar was heard churring, and as dusk fell several others started up. After this rather promising start, with up to three birds heard throughout our stay, we sadly saw none.

### Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July

We started this morning with a pre breakfast walk to nearby Lynford Arboretum, where we got off to a slow start with the forest surprisingly quiet, although as we walked along birds started to appear. Birds seen during or short time here included both Spotted Flycatcher and Nuthatch. After returning for breakfast we set off for our first destination, Lakenheath RSPB reserve, stopping *en route* at a previously discovered site for Little Owl. We were to be successful having good scope views of a single bird perched out in the open for us.

Arriving at the reserve, we made our way to the visitors centre and after a short introductory talk about the reserve by a member of staff, we made our way along the woodland track towards the first watchpoint. As we walked along we gained nice views of the commoner warblers, namely Reed and Sedge plus several Common Whitethroat, and arriving at the first watchpoint we settled down to view the area of reeds and fen in front of us. Almost immediately we logged our first Marsh Harrier, a species we were to see in the air almost continually during our stay, with the reserve holding at least a dozen breeding pairs with recently fledged young helping to swell this number. The reed-fringed pool again gave us good views of Reed Warblers, though by comparison views of several Bearded Tits were frustratingly brief, as was a fly-through Kingfisher, unfortunately only seen by part of the group. A vocal Cuckoo in the top of a nearby dead poplar was not so shy, attracting the attention of two Great Spotted Woodpeckers and enabling us to get good looks at both species together.

With the sun at times trying to break through, we continued our walk along the main track, adding several butterflies and damselflies to our growing species list along with a vocal juvenile Green Woodpecker. At this point our luck was to prove to be 'in' as they say; as we stopped to have a conversation with two people on the edge of one of the poplar plantations, a Golden Oriole could be heard singing nearby. We scanned the trees and Margaret found the bird sat in full view on a dead branch on the edge of the wood! A telescope was quickly put on the bird and good looks were had by all. The bird then flew out of view, though again as luck would have it after a short while we refound it, sat out in the open for us singing. The views this time were more prolonged, with the bird more interested in pronouncing its presence than worrying about the excited group of birders viewing it.

We continued onto the furthest watchpoint, where we sat and viewed the extensive reedbed that stretched out in front of us. Again Marsh Harriers were easily seen and several noisy Bearded Tits glimpsed, new species for us included Cormorant, Common Tern, a distant Egyptian Goose and a vocal Cetti's Warbler, which largely remained hidden from view, which was unsurprising for this species. We returned along the path by the river to a late lunch in the picnic area by the car park, adding Hobby and Whooper Swan to the day list *en route*, the latter an injured bird that had remained from the winter and now seemingly happy in amongst the resident Mute Swans. After lunch, we made our way to our next destination, Cavenham Heath Nature Reserve. We drove in along the entrance track discovering two more Little Owls sat on some nearby farm buildings. With the habitat ideal for Stone Curlews we drove along the track searching the adjacent heath and it was not long before we found our first birds. We stopped the bus and enjoyed good scope views of a group of six birds before rain stopped play and we boarded the bus to head onto the last destination of the day, Lackford Lakes.

Here we made our way round the reserve, visiting several of the hides over-looking the lakes, where a selection of commoner wildfowl were seen, along with Lapwing and Shelduck, both new birds for the trip. The drive back to the hotel gave us a surprise sighting of another Stone Curlew, with a flying bird noted at height alongside the minibus. After dinner we again went out in search of Nightjars, this time trying a different site in the forest. Great views were had this time with at least four birds seen, including several displaying males and a confident perched bird, plus several roding Woodcock.

### **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> July**

With rain falling as we woke this morning, the pre-breakfast walk was cancelled, and after breakfast we headed north to the coast and hopefully some better weather. Our first stop *en route* was in search of Tree Sparrows, which seemingly had more sense and remained hidden from view avoiding the heavy rain. A speculative look over some nearby fields proved productive with at least six Stone Curlews noted in amongst twenty or so Lapwings. A Buzzard flew down and landed in amongst them obviously in search of an easy meal, though it quickly attracted the attention of several Stone Curlews that immediately ensured everyone was aware of its presence.

We drove on, entering Fakenham, detouring slightly to drive down the bypass and round past the football club. Turtle Dove was our target here with birds having bred in the area for the last few years, and as luck would have it we quickly located a bird sat by the roadside. Moving on, we visited an area of farmland in search of partridges, which again proved productive with both Grey and Red-legged seen well. We headed onto towards the coast, stopping in Wells for a 'comfort break' before driving along the coast road past Holkham freshmarsh, where a distant large raptor proved on closer inspection to be a Red Kite, which gave us nice views as it flew towards us. We arrived at our next destination which was just to the west of Wells; here we spent the next half an hour searching for a female Montagu's Harrier that had been seen in the area. Sparrowhawk and Lesser Whitethroat found their way onto the list, but we drew a blank with the harrier.

Unperturbed we drove round to the to view the area from a different vantage point, which was to prove a good move with the bird appearing almost immediately, although the views were brief as it flew backwards and forwards on half a dozen occasions between gaps in the trees. We boarded the minibus and headed toward Titchwell RSPB reserve, stopping and checking roadside wires on the way, which eventually gave us views of our first Corn Buntings. Lunch in the reserve car park at Titchwell was followed by a walk out through the reserve down to view the sea. Our first stop was to view the freshmarsh from the island hide, where large numbers of Black-headed Gulls were immediately obvious; with closer inspection Avocets and Black-tailed Godwits could be found amongst them. Other species noted from here included two Little Ringed Plover, a moulting male Ruff and a distant group of eight Bar-tailed Godwits with a single Knot amongst them.

We walked down to view the beach and the sea, where good numbers of large gulls and Oystercatchers could be seen roosting on the shore, and several Turnstones and Curlews were noted on the rocks in front of us. A group of Gannets of various ages were seen flying out over the sea and passing Sandwich and Little Terns could be seen fishing just off shore. We walked back through the reserve stopping to view the fresh marsh from the state-of-the-art Parrinder Hide, before returning to the hotel via the Tree Sparrow site, where two birds were at least seen briefly this time. After our evening meal, we again went out in search of Nightjars, visiting a site near to the hotel. On arrival we noted several roding Woodcocks and, as dusk started to fall, Nightjars started to churr. We then enjoyed excellent views of both flying and perched birds, with several displaying males showing particularly well.

### **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> July**

With a mixed bag of weather once again forecasted, we decided to forego our early morning walk and have an earlier breakfast instead. Our first destination today was a return visit to the nearby Arboretum and a walk around the grounds, giving us several new species such as Goldcrest and Coal

Tit with a Little Grebe also found on the small lake. Two Firecrests were also heard and seen, and both eventually performed well for us, which was particularly rewarding.

After a quick tea break, we headed into a lesser known part of the forest in search of some of the more specialised species for the area. A singing Garden Warbler, the first of two to be found today, and with the sun now out several Large Skippers and Speckled Woods were noted. We parked the minibus and waked along the forest edge to a large clearing, where we searched the tops of the uprooted tree stumps for birds. Several Yellowhammers and Whitethroats could be seen and heard and after a short while one of our target species, Woodlark, was found. Good, though slightly distant, 'scope views were had of a perched bird with several others also noted nearby. Whilst we were watching for these, our second target species, Tree Pipit, began to sing nearby. The singing bird parachuted down from a large conifer to land on the top of a lower slightly more distant tree, which again allowed the telescope to be trained on it, giving everyone nice views. Pleased with our success we returned to the minibus and headed onto to St. Helen's car park where we stopped for lunch.

With today being a shorter day we planned to walk a short distance along the river before returning to the Hotel, which in the now sunny weather seemed like a good idea. We started our walk gaining good looks at a singing Willow Warbler before the path we were following, which had been passable only a few months earlier, became difficult to walk along due to the dense vegetation. This it turned out was to be a godsend, with us turning back to face approaching grey clouds and a very real threat of rain. The first spots of rain started to fall as we hurried back, with unfortunately the heavens deciding to open on us for the rest of the walk back.

We returned to the hotel with the rain well and truly settled in for the foreseeable future, then after a change of clothes we all said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

Gary Elton

### ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(a total of 112 species recorded by the group)

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

Ones and twos were seen regularly at various places on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix***

Three were seen well as we drove along a farm track near Fakenham on 4th

**Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus***

Noted daily in small numbers

**Greylag Goose *Anser anser***

Birds were recorded at Lakenheath RSPB, Lackford Lakes and Titchwell RSPB

**Canada Goose *Branta canadensis***

Four were noted at Lakenheath RSPB and 50+ at Titchwell RSPB

**Mute Swan *Cygnus olor***

Seen daily at all wetland sites.

**Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus***

An injured bird remaining from the winter at Lakenheath RSPB looked happy in amongst the resident Mute Swans.

**Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus***

Seen at three sites on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Lakenheath RSPB, Cavenham Heath (two) and Lackford Lakes.

**Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna***

Family parties were noted at Lackford Lakes and on the main road at Holkham, the latter birds doing their best to stop the traffic.

**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

Noted at Lackford Lakes and Titchwell.

**Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos***

Common, seen daily.

**Shoveler *Anas clypeata***

A single bird at Titchwell RSPB was the only one seen.

**Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula***

Noted at all wetland sites visited during the three days.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis***

A calling bird on Lynford Lake was the only one seen.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus***

Seen at Lakenheath RSPB, Lackford Lakes and Titchwell RSPB.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***

Small numbers were seen at various sites.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

Three birds were seen at Titchwell RSPB

**Gannet *Morus bassanus***

At least six birds of various ages were noted over the sea at Titchwell.

**Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***

Noted daily at various sites.

**Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***

Noted daily, primarily over the roadside verges.

**Hobby *Falco subbuteo***

Two were seen at Lakenheath RSPB

**Red Kite *Milvus milvus***

A roadside bird at Holkham was a nice surprise on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***

Easily seen especially at Lakenheath and Titchwell, with recently fledged young birds now boosting the numbers.

**Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus***

A ringtail was seen briefly on several occasions on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***

A single bird was seen at a coastal site on the 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Buzzard *Buteo buteo***

Four were seen in total at Lakenheath RSPB (2) and Burnham Thorpe (2).

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

A squealing bird was heard calling from the reedbed at Lakenheath Fen.

**Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Common, noted at all wetland sites.

**Coot *Fulica atra***

Noted at all wetland sites.

**Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus***

One squealed close to the path as we returned back to the car park at Lakenheath.

**Stone-curlew *Burhinus oediconemus***

Good views were had of six birds at Cavenham Heath NNR which was followed by single bird in flight later in the day, with six more seen at a roadside stop the following day.

**Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus***

A single bird at Lackford Lakes and several hundred at Titchwell RSPB.

**Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta***

Present in large numbers at Titchwell, with at least 50 birds there.

**Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus***

Only one seen on day two at Lackford Lakes, though recorded at various sites on day three.

**Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius***

Two were seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB.

**Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola***

Roding birds were seen well on all of our Nightjar sorties

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

40+ birds were present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB

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

A group of 35 were noted roosting on an island on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB, with several others noted on the beach there.

**Curlew *Numenius arquata***

Birds were seen on both the beach and freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB.

**Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Easily seen at Titchwell RSPB.

**Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus***

A summer-plumaged bird was seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell RSPB.

**Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

Several were picked out feeding amongst the rocks on Titchwell beach.

**Knot *Calidris canutus***

At Titchwell a single bird on the freshmarsh, with two more noted on the beach

**Ruff *Philomachus pugnax***

A partial summer-plumaged bird was on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

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

Common easily seen each day.

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

A third year bird was noted on the beach at Titchwell.

**Herring Gull *Larus argentatus***

Noted in small numbers on our day at the coast.

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

Seen daily at various sites and locations.

**Little Tern *Sternula albifrons***

Several fishing birds were noted offshore at Titchwell.

**Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis***

Easily seen offshore at Titchwell

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

Noted at Lakenheath RSPB, Lackford Lakes and Titchwell RSPB.

**Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia***

Noted daily

**Stock Dove *Columba oenas***

Noted daily in small numbers

**Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus***

Noted daily and easily seen.

**Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur***

A rarity now days with only one seen, on a roadside perch near Fakenham.

**Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***

Easily seen around suburban areas.

**Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus***

Several were heard at Lakenheath RSPB with one seen well.

**Barn Owl *Tyto alba***

A bonus bird on our third nightjar sortie

**Little Owl *Athene noctua***

Our first at a nest site near Lakenheath, followed by good views of two on farm buildings at Cavenham Heath

**Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus***

Two sites were visited, with the views at the second site being arguably the best ever, which included a perched male and several displaying birds.

**Swift *Apus apus***

Seen daily, with large numbers noted over the hotel.

**Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***

One over the reedbed at Lakenheath RSPB was glimpsed by some of the group

**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major***

Two were seen well mobbing a Cuckoo at Lakenheath RSPB.

**Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis***

Birds were noted at Lakenheath RSPB, Holkham and Lynford Arboretum.

**Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus***

A singing male at Lakenheath RSPB showed incredibly well for us, with a second bird heard.

**Jay *Garrulus glandarius***

Two at the woodland clearing on day four were the only ones seen.

**Magpie *Pica pica***

Recorded daily in small numbers

**Jackdaw *Corvus monedula***

Common and easily seen.

**Rook *Corvus frugilegus***

Noted daily in good numbers

**Carrion Crow *Corvus corone***

Seen daily

**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris***

Two were seen albeit poorly on the edge of a woodland block on day four.

**Coal Tit *Periparus ater***

Common in the forrest, with birds heard and seen regularly

**Great Tit *Parus major***

Recorded daily

**Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus***

Recorded daily

**Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Seen daily at various sites

**House Martin *Delichon urbicum***

Seen daily at various sites, mainly around suburban areas.

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

A family party performed well for us at Lackford Lakes.

**Skylark *Alauda arvensis***

Seen and heard daily.

**Woodlark *Lullula arborea***

A presumed family party of at least four birds were seen well on our last day.

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

One was heard and glimpsed in flight at Lakenheath RSPB reserve, with another heard at Titchwell RSPB.

**Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia***

A reeling bird at Lakenheath RSPB remained hidden from view.

**Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus***

Several were heard, with birds seen at Titchwell and Santon Downham.

**Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita***

Heard daily at various sites, with several birds seen.

**Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus***

Seen and heard at both Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB reserves.

**Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus***

Seen and heard at both Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB reserves.

**Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla***

Seen and heard daily at various suitable sites

**Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin***

Two birds were heard and seen well on day three.

**Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca***

A singing bird was noted at Burnham Thorpe.

**Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis***

Common and easily seen and heard at suitable sites.

**Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus***

Several were seen at both Titchwell and Lakenheath Fen.

**Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus***

Two birds heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus***

Several were heard and seen at Lynford Arboretum.

**Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***

Seen and heard daily.

**Nuthatch *Sitta europaea***

Seen on both visits to Lynford Arboretum

**Starling *Sturnus vulgaris***

Common, noted daily.

**Blackbird *Turdus merula***

Seen daily

**Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos***

Heard daily, though only one was seen.

**Robin *Erithacus rubecula***

Easily seen at Titchwell RSPB, with particularly tame birds around the car park

**Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata***

One was seen well at Lynford Arboretum on our first early morning walk

**House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***

Noted daily around suburban areas.

**Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***

Two were seen briefly at a nest site near Great Cressingham.

**Duncock *Prunella modularis***

Recorded daily.

**Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii***

Noted daily at various sites.

**Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis***

Several were heard and seen along side the footpath at Titchwell RSPB.

**Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis***

A singing bird was seen well on our last day.

**Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs***

Seen daily.

**Greenfinch *Chloris chloris***

Seen daily.

**Siskin *Spinus spinus***

Easily seen around the hotel, with others noted at Lynford Arboretum.

**Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis***

Seen daily at various sites.

**Linnet *Linaria cannabina***

Seen in small numbers daily.

**Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra***

Several were seen on the roadside wires on farmland near Titchwell.

**Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella***

Seen throughout the tour at various sites.

**Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus***

Easily seen and heard at Lakenheath and Titchwell RSPB.

**MAMMALS**

**European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus***

**European Hare *Lepus europaeus***

**Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi***

**Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus***

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*  
Pipstrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

#### BUTTERFLIES

Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus*  
Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*  
Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*  
Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*  
Large Skipper *Ochlodes venata*  
Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*  
Comma *Polyommata c-album*  
Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

#### DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES.

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*  
Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*  
Common Bluet *Enallagma cyathigerum*  
Azure Bluet *Coenagrion puella*  
Common Blue-tail *Ischnura elegans*

#### REPTILES

Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*