

Norfolk:

Autumn Break

Wed 30 Sep-Mon 5 Oct 2009



Jack Snipe at Titchwell, October 2009 © Gary Elton. For a more extensive selection of photos taken on our Norfolk tours see our online Gallery feature at www.limosaholidays.co.uk

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

Trip Diary

Over dinner on the first evening, our conversation largely revolved around the birds we may see - and the heavy rain forecast over the next four days! Fortunately, the weathermen had got the forecast wrong, with the strong winds at times bringing very little rain. As for the birds, once again Norfolk didn't let us down; even with the wind direction far from ideal for migration, we nonetheless managed to find a very respectable total of species, including a selection of the more unusual.

Though always optional, our pre-breakfast seawatches were well attended and sightings over the four days included a range of the more common seabirds, such as Gannet, Kittiwake, Common Scoter, Manx Shearwater, Arctic Skua and Bonxie. The high, early morning tides meant a large selection of shorebirds was always on show, being constantly disturbed by the rising sea - and occasional dog walker - before gathering to roost on nearby Gore Point. Our first morning's seawatch saw the calm shattered as a Peregrine dashed through, sending everything into blind panic but eventually flying off empty handed. This was to be the first of two birds seen.

After a hearty breakfast, we concentrated on several nearby sites during the course of our first day, including Thornham Harbour and Titchwell. A selection of the birds recorded here included Spotted Redshank, Red-crested Pochard, Pintail, Eider and a confiding flock of sixteen Snow Buntings. These were watched from a distance before an approaching pair of walkers unintentionally drove the birds slowly closer and closer to us, until we had excellent views of the birds on the edge of the dunes.

The following morning saw us again not venturing too far, choosing to concentrate primarily on the areas in and around Holkham, where the highlight was very much the sight of thousands of Pink-feet arriving noisily on the freshmarsh. Other species seen included Treecreeper and Goldcrest, singing and displaying Chiffchaffs, as well as our first Redwings of the winter - late arriving this year - perched high in an oak tree in the centre of Holkham Park. A speculative look for Barn Owl on the way back to the hotel that evening rewarded us with nice views of a bird hunting along a field edge at Thornham, and an earlier stop also produced a bonus in the form of a Green Sandpiper flying over, calling.

With the forecast for Saturday being strong winds on the coast, we decided to head inland to Breckland. On arrival, we climbed out of the bus to be met with a sight more reminiscent of the Sahara, as the wind whipped up the dust on the nearby dry ploughed fields. We made several stops as we tried to locate our target species, Stone-curlew; Colin located the first, which was sat quietly in a furrow, well hidden, as it blended in with its earth and stone background. The bird took flight and moved to another section of the field, closely followed to our surprise by nine others! We repositioned ourselves and then had good, if somewhat distant, telescope views of the birds.

Our next stop was Lynford, which was slightly more sheltered - and where the sun had also tentatively started to put in an appearance! We walked around the arboretum and nearby reclaimed gravel pit, Lynford Water. Crossbills and Siskins were in evidence throughout our visit, and we enjoyed good views of Crossbills, with at least one 'red' male in amongst them. Other highlights included unexpected singing Firecrests, Marsh Tit, Canada Goose (for those who were missing them!), and two Hobbies that hunted together over a corner of the gravel pit.

The benefits of modern technology became apparent when a report of two Jack Snipe at Titchwell reached us. Initially met with some scepticism by the leader, the continued reporting strengthened their case and we decided to try and see them on the way back to the hotel. After enjoying our second Peregrine and two more Common Buzzards on the way back to Titchwell, we arrived at the reserve and made our way to Fen hide. *Bingo!* The two Jack Snipe were feeding in front of the hide, showing amazingly well along with several of their more common cousins for comparison.

Our last full day saw us visiting three more easterly sites on the coast: Stiffkey Fen, Kelling Water Meadows and Cley NWT reserve. The first of these, Stiffkey Fen, which is owned and maintained by Lord Buxton, produced a good selection of the more common waterfowl, whilst several small groups of waders were identified as predominantly Greenshank and Ruff. We walked to the northern edge of the fen and the sea wall, for elevated views over the fen and Blakeney Harbour. Here, distant Brent Geese and various shorebirds could be seen, along with a group of Grey Seals that were basking on an exposed sand bank. Kelling was our next stop, where a female Great Spotted Woodpecker looked decidedly out of place perched in the pathside trees, many of which were no more than 6ft tall.

Cley was our final stop, with lunch eaten in the East Bank car park whilst we listened for Bearded Tits and had distant views of a Stonechat, well found by Dave. After lunch, a walk along the bank provided an opportunity for much better views, while the hides afforded views of a fine selection of wildfowl and waders, plus a surprise in the form of three fresh plumaged juvenile Curlew Sandpipers.

The break concluded after breakfast at the hotel on Monday morning, where we said our goodbyes and started our journeys home.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded - 121)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

A covey of eight birds were seen on the first day, with birds noted at various sites daily thereafter.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

A covey of c12 birds were seen at Thornham on the 1st & 2nd, with four more noted at Titchwell on the 2nd.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Numerous, with flocks numbering several thousands seen arriving at Holkham, with smaller numbers noted at, and over, various other sites throughout the four days.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Seen daily at various sites.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Small numbers, c10 were seen at both Lynford Lake and Salhouse

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

Small numbers were noted at various coastal sites

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Noted at various wetland sites visited.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Easily seen at Holkham Park and in roadside fields at Cley

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Noted daily at all coastal sites visited

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Recorded daily at most wetland sites visited

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Easily seen with large numbers noted at Holkham and Cley

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Seen at all wetland sites visited

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Small numbers were seen at all wetland sites visited

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

Easily seen at all wetland sites visited

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Two were seen at Titchwell, with ten also seen on the lake in Holkham Park

Red crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A single bird was in amongst the Coot flock at Titchwell

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

At least fifteen were on the sea at Titchwell, in a variety of plumages.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Small numbers were noted daily, with the largest flock of ten birds seen at Holkham Gap.

Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*

A single bird was seen at Titchwell.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Distant birds were noted whilst sea watching most days.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

One was seen by Dave on the morning sea watch on the 1st.

Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*

At least one distant bird was seen whilst sea watching on the 1st

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Recorded on three of the four days at a variety of sites

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

A flock of ten were seen over the sea on the 1st, with other birds noted on the 2nd at Holkham Park, and 3rd at Lynford Water.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Noted daily at a variety of sites

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Seen daily at all wetland sites visited

Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Seen in good numbers on the first morning sea watch, with smaller numbers noted thereafter.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Small numbers were noted throughout the trip.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Two were seen well at Lynford Water

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

Single birds were seen on our first morning at Hunstanton whilst sea watching, and on our journey back from the Brecks on 3rd.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Birds were seen at Titchwell (3), Burnham Norton (2) and Cley (3).

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Only two were seen, one over Wells on 2nd, and a second whilst en route to the Brecks on 3rd.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Two birds were seen well over the wood at Thornham, with two more seen on the journey back from the Brecks

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common, easily seen

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted in all wetland habitats

Eurasian Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedipnemus*

A flock of ten birds were seen in a ploughed field in the Brecks, blending in amazingly well with the stones and earth, making them very difficult to find.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common, easily seen at various coastal sites

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Only four were seen, two at both Titchwell and Cley

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded daily

Eurasian Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Two were seen at Titchwell on 1st, with two more seen on the field by Thornham Post Office on 2nd.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Noted at both Titchwell and Thornham Harbour, including some smart summer plumaged birds. A single bird was also seen at Cley.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Several were seen on the beach at Gore Point and Holkham.

Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus*

Two showed amazingly well alongside their commoner cousins in front of the Fen hide at Titchwell.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Recorded at a selection of wetland sites on all four days.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

A single bird was at Stiffkey Fen, with an estimated 200+ at Cley.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Recorded daily, primarily whilst sea watching.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Easily seen, recorded daily both on the coast and on inland fields.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Common, seen at all coastal sites visited.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Recorded at Titchwell, Thornham Harbour (2) and Cley (4)

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Fourteen were at Stiffkey Fen, with a single bird also noted at Cley

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

A calling bird flew over us as we were parked by the road at Burnham Overy on 2nd.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Seen at all coastal sites visited

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Small numbers were seen well on the beach at Gore point, with large distant flocks also noted on several occasions whilst sea watching from the hotel.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Noted at all suitable coastal sites

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Three freshly plumaged juvenile birds at Cley

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Recorded in small numbers at all wetland sites

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

An estimated 70 birds were seen at Titchwell, with smaller numbers noted at Stiffkey Fen and Cley

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Noted throughout the four days

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Recorded at various coastal sites in good numbers

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

Recorded at all coastal sites

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Noted daily in small numbers

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Common, seen throughout the trip

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Two first winter birds were seen on our first mornings sea watch

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Several were seen distantly from both Titchwell and during our morning sea watch on the 2nd.

Great Skua *Stercorarius skua*

Several were seen well during our morning sea watch and at Titchwell, both on the 1st.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Several, including a group of seven, were seen whilst sea watching on the 1st.

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Several distant unidentified auks were seen during our morning sea watch on the 1st, and from Salthouse on the 4th

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Small numbers were noted during the trip

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Noted in small numbers daily

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Seen in large numbers throughout the trip

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen especially around more urban areas.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

One was seen late afternoon along the field edge at Thornham Harbour on 2nd.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Single birds at Holkham Pines and Kelling, the latter bird, a female, was seen very well.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One was seen briefly as it flew over the hide at Lynford Water.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Easily seen throughout the four days.

Common Magpie *Pica pica*

Recorded daily.

Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*

Easily seen throughout the trip.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

As above, with large roadside flocks noted on several occasions.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Recorded daily.

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*

Single birds were recorded at Holkham Park and Lynford Arboretum

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Noted at all woodland sites

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Noted at Thornham on 1st (6) and 2nd (9) with two others seen the next morning outside the hotel.

Northern House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Two were noted outside the hotel on the morning of the 2nd.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Small flocks were noted daily at a variety of sites.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Noted daily.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Birds were heard at both Titchwell and Holkham.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Birds were recorded at Titchwell and Holkham, with the later site producing at least six birds, some of which at times were singing and displaying.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

One was noted with a large tit flock at Holkham

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

Heard throughout our visit to Cley, although windy conditions meant our views were restricted to several brief flying birds.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

Good views were had of two vocal birds at Lynford Arboretum.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Birds were seen at Holkham and Lynford Arboretum.

Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Birds were heard briefly at Holkham and Lynford Arboretum

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Easily seen at Holkham, with a least one heard at Lynford Arboretum

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common, noted daily.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Five birds were noted in treetops at Holkham Park

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Surprisingly scarce, with the only one seen, in flight over the hide at Lynford Water.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

As above, surprisingly scarce, with the only birds recorded being a small flock of six in a roadside field at Thornham, and three in Holkham Park.

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Common, seen daily

European Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

A pair showed well along the east bank path at Cley

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Several were noted at Wells, Heacham and Stiffkey Fen.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Fly over birds were recorded on the 1st, during our morning sea watch and later at Gore Point.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Recorded daily

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted daily at variety of sites, with large flocks noted at Holkham Gap and Kelling Water Meadows.

Rock/Water Pipit *Anthus petrosus/spinoletta*

One flying over, calling, at Titchwell could not unfortunately be specifically identified.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily.

European Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Seen daily.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Easily seen at Lynford arboretum, with birds constantly seen and heard throughout our visit.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily in small numbers.

Common Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

Several flocks were noted during the trip at a variety of sites.

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

Easily seen at Lynford Arboretum, with birds heard and seen throughout our visit.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Several birds were heard during the trip, with only one seen briefly at Stiffkey Fen

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Recorded daily at various wetland sites.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

A flock of 16 birds seen very well on the beach at Titchwell, with two more in flight over the East bank at Cley.

Escapes

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*

One in flight with Canada Geese at Salthouse was undoubtedly of questionable origins.

Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis*

Two sleeping in amongst Greylag Geese at Cley were also more likely to be of captive origin rather than genuine wild birds.

Mammals

European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

European Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus*

Eastern Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Bank Vole *Clethrionomys glareolus*

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

Butterflies

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Dragonflies

Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea*

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*