

Norfolk:

Autumn & Winter Breaks

Mon 4th-Fri 8th October 2010



Photos (clockwise from top): **Bearded Tits** - including this handsome male - showed brilliantly along the boardwalk at Cley • 'Bird of the trip' was this cracking **Wryneck** showing well in the garden at Hunstanton lighthouse • Two species of phalarope were an unexpected bonus this week too, including this confiding **Grey Phalarope** on a small pool at Burnham Overy • We had great views of at least three **Lapland Buntings**, lurking in the glasswort at Holkham Bay © Gary Elton

report compiled by tour leader:
Gary Elton

Trip Diary

Tour Leader: Gary Elton

with Ray & Maureen Burgess, Bernard & Jen Ducker, Jakki Foote, and Alan & Sandra Woodward

After a very enjoyable evening meal, we retired to bed full of anticipation over what birding surprises the next few days would hold for us...

The following morning (Tuesday) saw us meeting as we would every day, for a short pre-breakfast sea watch, which as always was an optional but fully attended event. The sea was relatively quiet but the visible migration of passerines was spectacular to say the least! Large numbers of Chaffinches and Starlings were immediately obvious, passing in front and over our watchpoint, along with small numbers of Brambling and Siskin. Indeed, a staggering 15,000 Chaffinches was counted by observers at the nearby lighthouse over the next two hours.

After breakfast we also made our way to the lighthouse, now a private residence, in search of a Wryneck that had been seen in and around the garden there for the last few days. Our luck was in as we located the bird on the corner of the lawn, and enjoyed great views of it. This was to be the first of some of the more unusual species we were to see over the coming days, which included two species of phalarope - Red-necked and Grey - along with Firecrest, Stone-curlew, Hen Harrier and Little Stint.

With three days of birding a head of us, we next headed west along the coast, stopping first at Kelling Water Meadows and then continuing on to Cley NWT reserve. Observations of note included several Bearded Tits (that fed unaware of our presence on the board walk in front of us), several distant Spoonbill and the aforementioned Red-necked Phalarope. Although seen distantly from the hide, the latter was unmistakable as it typically continually swam rapidly round in circles! Our final destination for the day was a walk along the edge of the saltmarsh at Warham Greens.

The weather forecast next morning (Wednesday) showed the whole of the south of England covered in cloud and rain, and looking out the hotel window quickly confirmed this. This did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of the group, however, as to their credit (and the leaders disbelief!) they all gathered for the pre-breakfast seawatch. In an effort to avoid the weather, after breakfast we set off inland to Thetford Forest. A visit to Lynford Arboretum and nearby gravel pit gave us a nice selection of woodland species, including a vocal but obliging flock of Common Crossbills - among them several red males, which afforded everyone good telescope views, though a male Firecrest here proved a little less co-operative. With the weather improving by late morning we made our way back to the coast, stopping en route to look for Stone-curlews. The birds that breed in the nearby Breckland traditionally assemble prior to migration in flocks that can approach three figures. We soon located several birds, with it quickly becoming apparent that there was at least fifteen more birds in the ploughed furrows nearby, and very probably even more hidden from view!

We arrived back at coast and with the sun now out, had lunch and then walked out across the freshmarsh at Burnham Overy, where the second and more confiding of our two phalarope species was found. After enjoying the spectacular sight of the sea and beach from the dunes there, we returned to the minibus. No trip to Norfolk at this time of year would be complete with out seeing a Barn Owl - and we weren't to be disappointed, with the first bird showing just before we boarded the bus. A second bird was soon discovered nearby, and pleased by our success we headed on to Thornham Harbour. Here the high tide had flooded the road, forcing us to look over the harbour and nearby fields from an elevated viewpoint. To our amazement, a further two Barn Owls were found quartering the field edge, and with a third along the roadside on the way out, we had observed no fewer than five different birds in just three-quarters of an hour!

On day three (Thursday), we woke to a fine sunny morning and, after our now customary ritual of a seawatch and breakfast, made our way back to Thornham Harbour. With the tide now out, it all looked very different; the channels and harbour mouth held good numbers of birds, the more unusual being a single Spotted Redshank and Red-breasted Merganser. From here, we made the short drive to Choseley barns, where the fine weather and light winds presented ideal viewing conditions. A marauding Sparrowhawk made an appearance, flushing small birds ahead of it, and highlighting the good numbers finches and buntings present.

Stiffkey Fen was our next stop, a privately owned reserve on the edge of Blakeney Harbour, where Grey Seals could also be seen loafing on the beach at Blakeney Point. Large numbers of gulls, geese and waders could be

seen in the distant harbour, with a further selection of wildfowl and waders, including Greenshank and Common Sandpiper, present on the Fen itself.

At nearby Holkham, we walked out into the bay to look for birds feeding on the edge of the saltmarsh. The first challenge was to find our way across the tidal channel, a task which resulted in people having either dry, slightly wet or very wet feet depending on their level of patience in finding a suitable place to cross! A large pipit and wagtail flock could be seen in the distance and appeared to hold nothing different... until some closer birds were checked and found to be Lapland Buntings, at least three.

Pleased with our success we returned to the minibus and headed west to the newly re-opened Titchwell RSPB reserve for lunch (unfortunately again, the latter slightly overdue). With coastal erosion being a constant problem at Titchwell, a large amount of re-profiling work has been recently carried out - and the change appeared quite dramatic! But the large number of birds present demonstrated this had been carried out in a sympathetic manner as we walked down to the sea, stopping en route at the large hide overlooking the fresh marsh. Our final birding stop was at Thornham Harbour to enjoy the last ten minutes of the day, before returning to the hotel for welcome showers and a farewell dinner.

Friday morning saw us meeting for one last seawatch before breakfast and farewells at the conclusion of another enjoyable four-day birding break.

Gary Elton

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED
(Total number of species recorded by the group 113)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Recorded daily, the majority in roadside coveys.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Poor views were initially had of two at Warham Greens, with a covey of ten eventually seen well at Choseley.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Noted daily

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Seen daily with flocks at times in excess of a 1000 birds.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Seen daily at various sites.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Seen daily in small numbers

Brent Goose *Branta bernicla*

Small numbers were noted at various coastal sites

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Noted daily at various wetland sites visited.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Six birds were seen in roadside fields near Cley

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Noted daily at all coastal sites visited

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Recorded daily at most wetland sites visited

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Noted in good numbers at all suitable wetland sites visited.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen daily.

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Seen at all wetland sites visited

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Small numbers were noted at Cley, Stiffkey Fen and Titchwell

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

Easily seen at all wetland sites visited

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Ten at Lynford Water and two at Titchwell were the only ones recorded.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Small numbers were recorded daily distantly at sea, though a flock of 200-300 birds on the sea at Titchwell was slightly more cooperative.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

A single redhead on the edge of a tidal creek was a good find at Thornham.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Surprisingly scarce, with birds only recorded at Titchwell

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Recorded daily in small numbers at various sites.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Two distant birds were seen on the North scrape at Cley.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Noted daily in small numbers at a variety of sites

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Easily seen at all suitable wetland sites visited

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Four 1st year birds east past Cley, and a 2nd year bird east past Titchwell.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Small numbers were noted throughout the trip.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Noted daily

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Birds were seen at Cley (2), Warham Greens (4) and Burnham Overy (3).

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Single female/immature birds (ringtails,) were seen at Titchwell and Burnham Overy.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Four were seen in total, two at Burnham Overy and singles at Choseley and Siffkey Fen.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

A single bird noted from the minibus on the 6th was the only one seen.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common noted daily.

Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted in all wetland habitats

Stone-curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

A flock of 20+ plus birds were seen in a roadside fields, on our return journey back to the coast on the 6th.

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common, easily seen at all suitable coastal sites

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Small numbers at Cley and Titchwell, with larger numbers noted at Thornham Harbour.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded daily, at times in large numbers.

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

Flocks in excess of 500 birds were seen on several occasions, with one over flying flock at Burnham Overy being quite spectacular.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Recorded at all coastal sites in small numbers, with several retaining traces of breeding plumage.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Noted at all coastal sites visited.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Four were seen at Cley, with several more noted at Titchwell.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Over a hundred were noted at Cley, with smaller numbers at Stiffkey Fen, Titchwell and Thornham.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Recorded daily, primarily whilst seawatching.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

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

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Common, seen at all coastal sites visited.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

A single bird heard and seen in flight at Thornham Harbour was the only one recorded.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Our first, single bird in a tidal creek at Stiffkey Fen, was followed by three more at Titchwell.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Two were at Stiffkey Fen on 7th.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Seen at all coastal sites visited.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

Small numbers were seen at Thornham Harbour on 7th.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Noted at all suitable coastal sites.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

A juvenile bird was present on the North scrape at Cley on 5th.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Recorded in small numbers at all wetland sites.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Easily seen at Cley and Titchwell.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A juvenile bird was seen well, albeit distantly, at Cley

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Closer views were had of this species, on a small pool adjacent to the footpath at Burnham Overy.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Noted throughout the three days

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Recorded at various coastal sites in good numbers

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

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Several were noted during our seawatches, with a single bird also at Cley and three at Holkham Bay.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Small numbers were noted during the trip

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Several were seen in flight at Burnham Overy.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Seen in large numbers throughout the trip

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Easily seen especially around more urban areas.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Amazingly five different individuals were seen in three quarters of an hour on 6th.

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Arguably 'bird of the trip' for many, a showy individual at Hunstanton on 5th.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Three seen during the tour, all singles, at Hunstanton, Choseley and Thornham.

Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One was seen briefly at Lynford Arboretum

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Seemingly seen every few minutes over the three days!!

Magpie *Pica pica*

Recorded daily.

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*

One, possible two birds were seen and heard at Lynford Arboretum.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Heard at several sites, then finally seen in the small conifer copse outside the hotel.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Recorded daily

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

Recorded daily

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Several flocks of c50 birds were recorded on the first two days.

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Two noted on the 6th, were the only ones recorded.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Small flocks were noted daily at a variety of sites.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Noted daily.

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Birds were heard at both Titchwell and Cley.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

A bird showed briefly at Warham Greens.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Excellent views of several birds feeding on the boardwalk in front of us at Cley, with others heard and briefly seen at Titchwell and Burnham Overy.

Firecrest *Regulus ignicapillus*

Brief views of a male bird at Lynford Arboretum.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Good views of a confiding bird at Lynford Arboretum.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen and heard daily.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Common, noted daily. Large numbers recorded heading west over Hunstanton on the morning of the 5th.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen daily

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Small numbers were noted at Kelling Water Meadows and Lynford Arboretum.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Noted daily, with large numbers having arrived on the Norfolk coast over the previous few days.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Seen daily in small numbers.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Common, seen daily

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*

A single at Warham Greens on 5th, followed by two at Burham Overy on 6th.

Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

Four birds were seen well at Cley on 5th.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

A total of thirteen birds, with six on 5th, three on 6th and four on 7th.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted daily

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

Recorded daily.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

A fly over bird was noted on the 5th, during our morning seawatch.

Pied/White Wagtail *Motacilla alba/yarrellii*

Recorded daily, with large numbers noted in Holkham Bay and at Titchwell.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted daily at variety of sites, with large numbers noted at Holkham Bay.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Seen daily, with 15000 birds passing in just two hours over Hunstanton early on 5th.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Several were noted flying over us on the morning sea watches of the 5th and 6th.

Greenfinch *Carduelis chloris*

Seen daily.

Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

A large flock, c50 birds, were seen albeit distantly at Lynford Arboretum, along with smaller overflying groups. Small numbers were also noted during our early morning sea watches.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Seen daily in small numbers.

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

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

Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

A confiding flock of c10 birds were seen well at Lynford Arboretum.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

Seen daily, with several particularly stunning male birds at Choseley Barns.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Recorded daily at various wetland sites.

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*

Great views of at least three birds on the saltmarsh at Holkham Bay.

Mammals

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Brown Hare *Lepus europaeus*

Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

Butterflies

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Dragonflies

Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea*

Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta*

Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*