

North Norfolk Coast: Wild Geese & Waders

Mon 1st -Thu 4th October 2012



*Trip photos (clockwise from top left): The thrilling spectacle of **Knot** at Gore Point © Gary Elton/Limosa • **Little Egrets** were seen at a number of sites throughout the trip © tour participant Heather Coltman • This superb **Snow Bunting** allowed close approach on the beach at Cley © Gary Elton/Limosa • An islandica **Black-tailed Godwit** probes the mud at Titchwell © tour participant Heather Coltman*

report compiled by tour leader:
Gary Elton

Trip Diary

Tour Leader: Gary Elton

with Heather Coltman, Jennifer Harley and Tim Parsons

Mon 1st October

The group arrived and assembled safely at our North Norfolk hotel, where after introductions and an enjoyable evening meal we retired to bed, full of the expectations for the days ahead.

Tue 2nd October

We woke to a breezy but dry day, and met up for some pre-breakfast birding from the rear of the hotel car park, which over looks the nearby beach and sea. With the tide rising, the immediate shoreline was almost birdless, although the last remaining area of beach at nearby Gore Point could be seen to be filling with birds, with clouds of Knot wheeling above the sea, before settling eventually on the point - this spectacle being one of the highlights of the trip. After breakfast we walked along the footpath from the hotel to view the point, and on arrival we enjoyed good instructive views of the commoner wader species, largely Knot, Sanderling, Grey Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit. Several distant first-year Gannets were noted over the sea, along with some flying Red-throated Divers. A Wheatear was present along the nearby dune edge, and a fly-over calling Redpoll was noteworthy.

We returned along the path to the hotel and made the short drive to Thornham Harbour, detouring slightly en route to add six Grey Partridge to our growing day list. On arrival at Thornham Harbour we scanned the creeks and saltmarsh for birds, noting almost immediately a large flock of Golden Plover, a calling Greenshank and small numbers of Curlew and Dark-bellied Brent Geese. A solitary paler looking goose was noted on the beach ahead of us and closer inspection revealed the bird to be a Pale-bellied Brent Goose, the more unusual form of the species in this part of the world, with the majority wintering on the West coast of the country. With time ticking by we moved onto our next destination, Titchwell RSPB reserve.

Lunch in the car park produced a fly-over Sparrowhawk, after which we walked onto the reserve and down to the beach, making several stops to view the marshes from the path and hides. Birds noted during the afternoon included a Little Stint (whose appearance unfortunately was rather brief), though the seven Spoonbills present were more confiding, with one flying rather impressively over the path in front of us. Ruff, Avocet, Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwit were all seen well on the freshmarsh and several Spotted Redshanks were noted alongside Redshank, which was a useful comparison. Wildfowl noted included several Pintail in amongst the larger number of Wigeon and Teal present. We concluded the visit with a last look from the Island hide, which proved to be a good move, with nice views of a Peregrine as it flew low over the marsh in front of us, terrorising the ducks and waders.

Wed 3rd October

A similar day weather-wise greeted us this morning, and after breakfast we once again drove east along the coast, stopping frequently to check the fields for birds. Several coveys of Red-legged Partridge were seen and a group of gulls following a tractor and plough revealed on closer inspection an adult Mediterranean Gull in amongst the Common and Black-headed Gulls present. We stopped briefly at Thornham Harbour and Burnham Overy Staithe, though the high tide meant there was relatively few birds.

We arrived mid-morning at Holkham, parking in Lady Anne's Drive and, after a welcome cup of coffee, made our way west along the track south of the pine belt. Small numbers of Pink-footed Geese could be seen and heard on the adjacent freshmarsh, and the appearance of the sun encouraged several Red Admiral and Comma butterflies to take to the wing. As we walked along birds noted included Coal Tit, Goldcrest and Chiffchaff, though the hoped for Yellow-browed Warbler eluded us.

Lunch back at the minibus was followed by the short drive to the other end of the pine belt and the area known as Wells Woods. We parked and walked in a loop through and round the mixed pine and deciduous trees. This was to prove more productive with nice views of Great Spotted Woodpecker, Nuthatch and Treecreeper. Just as we were completing our circuit a mixed tit flock appeared, containing Long-tailed, Great, Blue and Coal Tits, several Goldcrest and Chiffchaff and, luckily for us, a calling Yellow-browed Warbler. We tracked the bird down and enjoyed reasonable views of this diminutive warbler flitting around the top of a pathside birch. Pleased with our success we returned to the minibus and headed along the coast road towards Holme.

Our last stop of the day was the small, little known Norfolk Wildlife trust reserve in the village there, where we sat in the hide over looking a small pool and the grazing marsh, and concluding our day with nice views of Marsh Harrier and Barn Owl.

Thu 4th October

A somewhat calmer day greeted us today with the wind having dropped overnight, and we started the day by driving a convoluted route through the countryside, stopping to check the fields and hedgerows. A mixed flock of Meadow Pipit, Chaffinch and Yellowhammer were noted on some roadside wires, two more Grey Partridges were found by Jennifer, and a perched raptor spotted on a distant hedge by Tim changed its identity several times before being confirmed as a Common Buzzard.

Our principal destination today was Cley NWT reserve, and on arrival we made use of the facilities then scanned the reserve area in front of us looking for birds. A flock of Bearded Tits could be heard calling and they quickly appeared on the reed tops at the edge of the reedbed the other side of the road; luckily for us two males sat in the sun for several minutes enabling us all to get nice 'scope views. We then made our way along to the eastern edge of the reserve, walking out along the raised footpath to view the extensive reedbeds to our left and grazing areas to our right. Bearded Tits could be heard and occasionally glimpsed as we walked along, with several Reed Buntings giving equally brief views and the first Mute Swan of the trip was seen, which was a somewhat momentous moment for the group! We stopped at the end of the path to view the wet area known as Arnold's Marsh. The expected range of waders and wildfowl were present, with a close Spotted Redshank arguably being the highlight.

We walked back around the northern edge of the reserve, noting several close Guillemots on the sea. A brief look out across the scrape from the hide revealed large numbers of wildfowl, primarily Wigeon and Teal, plus several Dunlin and Ruff, though unfortunately largely silhouetted in the bright sunlight. At this point Gary returned to collect the minibus, with the group taking the shorter route to the nearby beach car park to meet him - and having the good fortune to stumble on a small group of people watching an early and very confiding Snow Bunting on the beach along the way. Lunch in the beach car park was followed by a short seawatch, which produced more Gannets - this time a variety of ages - several close Guillemots and a more distant Razorbill. With the trip concluding mid afternoon back at the hotel in Hunstanton, we boarded the bus and headed back along the coast, stopping for the last occasion at Thonham Harbour, where a confiding Greenshank was a nice finale to the trip.

We then completed the short drive back to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes before making our return journeys home.

Gary Elton

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED

(Total number of species recorded: 106)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Several roadside coveys were noted.

Grey Partridge *Perdix perdix*

Again roadside birds with six on 2nd and two on 4th.

Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Recorded daily.

Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus*

Several hundred were noted daily at various locations.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Two flocks of c. 40 birds were seen as we travelled on 2nd, with others also noted at Cley on 4th.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Easily seen at Titchwell and Cley.

Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla bernicla*

Noted daily in small numbers at Titchwell, Thornham and Hunstanton.

Pale-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*

Although only a subspecies, one at Thornham Harbour on 2nd is unusual enough to warrant a mention.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Only two seen, our first at Cley on 4th, with a second seen in roadside stream on the same day.

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

Noted at Titchwell, Choseley and Cley.

Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Noted daily in small numbers

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Seen at Titchwell, Holkham and Cley

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Noted daily, with large numbers on the North Scrape at Cley

Pintail *Anas acuta*

Six or so were noted at both Titchwell and Cley.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Common, seen at all wetland sites

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Noted daily in small numbers.

Teal *Anas crecca*

Easily seen at all wetland sites visited, again in large numbers.

Pochard *Aythya ferina*

A single bird was noted on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Four were seen at Titchwell.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Distant birds were seen from Gore Point on 2nd and Hunstanton on 3rd.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Again distant birds were seen off Gore Point and at Holkham.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Noted daily at Titchwell, Holkham and Cley

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Noted on the sea at Gore Point, Titchwell and Holkham.

Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Seven largely sleeping birds were present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, with one flying over the path in front of us.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Surprisingly only one seen, at Titchwell on 2nd.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Noted at various sites during the three days.

Gannet *Morus bassanus*

Seen daily out over the sea, the majority of birds being juveniles.

Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Noted daily.

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Several birds were seen on 3rd and 4th.

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*

One showed well for us over the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Up to three were seen daily, including a particularly well seen female bird at Holme.

Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Single birds were seen albeit briefly at Titchwell, Choseley and Wells.

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Two were seen at Thornham on 3rd, with a perched bird seen at Choseley on 4th.

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Noted daily

Coot *Fulica atra*

Noted daily

Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Common, seen daily in large numbers.

Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

c. 15 birds were present on the freshmarsh at Titchwell.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Recorded daily in small numbers.

Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*

c. 600 birds were noted at Thornham on the saltmarsh, with c. 100 birds present at Titchwell.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Recorded in small numbers at all coastal sites, with particularly good views had in Thornham Harbour.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Noted in small numbers at Gore Point and Titchwell.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Two feeding birds seen at Titchwell, with flyover birds seen at Thornham (eight) and Holme (four).

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Seen well at Titchwell, with at least 40 birds present on the freshmarsh.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Noted daily at all wetland sites visited.

Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Seen daily, with good views had of birds at Thornham Harbour.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Confiding birds at Titchwell (two) and Cley enabled good instructive views to be had.

Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Common, recorded in all suitable habitat

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Good views were had of a single bird at Thornham Harbour on the last day, with a vocal flying bird seen at the same site on day one.

Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Noted daily with birds easily seen at Gore Point and Thornham Harbour.

Knot *Calidris canutus*

Noted daily, with arguably the highlight of the trip being a large flock, in excess of 10,000 birds, watched wheeling over the sea before settling to roost at high tide on Gore Point.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Seen in good numbers and well, at Gore Point and Titchwell.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

One seen well on the freshmarsh by Gary and Tim quickly disappeared from view and unfortunately could not be relocated.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

10+ birds were noted at Gore Point, Titchwell and Cley.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Seen on the freshmarsh at Titchwell, where 60+ birds were present; smaller numbers noted at Cley.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Common, seen in numerous locations.

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*

At least one adult bird was picked out amongst the above two species, as they followed a tractor and plough near Ringstead.

Common Gull *Larus canus*

Common, easily seen.

Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*

Noted Daily at all coastal sites visited.

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

As above noted daily.

Lesser Black backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

One at Gore Point and two at Titchwell were the only ones seen.

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

Noted daily with birds seen at Gore Point (12), Burnham Overy Staithe (two) and Cley (two)

Guillemot *Uria aalge*

Six birds were noted close inshore on the sea at Salthouse and Cley.

Razorbill *Alca torda*

One reasonably close bird was noted on the sea at Cley.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Seen daily

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Several were seen in amongst Wood pigeons on roadside fields on our first day, with several others also noted thereafter.

Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*

Common, seen daily

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

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

Barn Owl *Tyto Alba*

One showed extremely well for us, watched hunting outside the hides at Holme.

Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*

One was heard calling mid afternoon at Wells Woods.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Heard outside our hotel and Titchwell, with birds (two) finally seen well at Wells Woods.

Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Lots seen during the three days, at a variety of sites, with immigrant birds of continental origin almost certainly present.

Magpie *Pica pica*

Seen daily in small numbers

Jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*

Common, seen daily primarily in roadside flocks

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Small numbers were noted throughout the trip at various sites

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Seen well at Holkham and Wells Woods, with others heard in the small conifer copse adjacent to the hotel.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Seen daily in small numbers during the trip

Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

As above, noted daily.

Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Small numbers were noted during the trip

House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

As above, with 1-2 birds also seen daily around the hotel

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

Small mixed flocks containing this species were encountered at Titchwell, Thornham and Wells Woods.

Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard daily,

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Singing birds were noted at Titchwell and Cley

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Several were heard, with birds seen well at Holkham and Wells Wood.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

We finally caught up with a vocal bird in amongst a mixed tit flock in Wells Woods.

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus*

Seen and heard at Cley, with two males seen well opposite the visitors centre.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Seen and heard at a variety of sites.

Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Recorded daily at various sites

Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*.

Two were seen well at Wells Woods.

Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

A confiding bird showed well for us at Wells Woods.

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Noted daily, with flocks of several hundred noted at Thornham Harbour and Cley.

Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Easily seen daily.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Several were noted from the village hides at Holme, and during our travels on the third day.

Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Seen daily.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

One on the beach at Gore Point was the only one seen.

Duncock *Prunella modularis*

Noted daily.

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Seen and heard at a variety of sites.

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Noted daily, the majority calling over flying birds.

Rock Pipit *Anthus petrosus*

Calling birds were noted at Gore Point and Cley.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common, recorded daily.

Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Noted in small numbers daily

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Several flocks were noted during the tour.

Lesser Redpoll *Acanthis cabaret*

A single calling fly over bird was noted at Gore Point

Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Noted daily at variety of sites.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

At least four birds were seen well perched on roadside wires at Choseley barns.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Several were noted as we walked along the East Bank at Cley.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

A single confiding bird was seen well by the beach car park at Cley

MAMMALS

Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Grey Squirrel *Sciurus carolinensis*

Chinese Water Deer *Hydropotes inermis*

Grey Seal *Halichoerus grypus*

BUTTERFLIES

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*

Comma *Polygonia c-album*

Small White *Pieris rapae*

Peacock *Inachis io*