Norfolk – Autumn in the Broads

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Norfolk Broads.
Day 2	Norfolk Broads.
Day 3	Winterton Dunes & depart for home.

Departs
September to November.

Focus
Birdwatching & general natural history.

Grading
Grade A – easy day walks.

Dates and Prices
Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR267).

Highlights:

- Explore the Norfolk Broads & adjacent coastline
- Migrant warblers, chats, flycatchers, finches, thrushes & waders
- Chance of something unusual such as Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike or Yellow-browed Warbler
- Common Crane, Avocet, Bearded Tit, Bittern & Great Egret all possible
- Includes an evening visit to a raptor roost in search of Marsh & Hen Harriers, Merlin & Barn Owl
- Based in a delightful guesthouse overlooking the Norfolk Broads
- Led by an expert Naturetrek naturalist







From the top: Wryneck, Common Crane & Marsh Harrier

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Introduction

Norfolk in autumn is all about bird migration and the return of its wintering species. The marshes, wet meadows, dunes and woodlands that edge the county's coastline from Kings Lynn to Great Yarmouth are justly famous for the sheer variety and number of birds they attract throughout the year. In the autumn, especially if the wind is blowing from the east, an exciting range of waders, waterfowl and passerines – including regular rarities – stop to rest and feed here, whilst as the season advances, huge flocks of geese, ducks and wild swans arrive to winter, along with mixed flocks of finches, thrushes and other birds.

On this 3-day birdwatching break we will be based in a delightful guesthouse in the heart of the Norfolk Broads close to the Calthorpe Broad National Nature Reserve between the villages of Hickling and Sea Palling. From here, we will enjoy the best of east Norfolk's autumnal birding highlights, focusing on the wetlands of the Broads and the adjacent coastal marshes and migrant traps, including visits to such iconic reserves as Hickling Broad and the Winterton Dunes National Nature Reserve.



Hickling Broad

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1 Arrive Norfolk Broads

Your tour leader will meet you at our guesthouse between the villages of Hickling and Sea Palling at 3pm. Once settled in, we will head out for a walk nearby and begin our exploration of the Norfolk Broads before returning for dinner. There may also be time after dinner for another quick trip out, perhaps in search of Barn Owls or to look for Cranes returning to their roost. Indeed, Cranes are regularly seen from the grounds of our guesthouse!

Day 2 Norfolk Broads

After an early morning walk for those who wish, we will begin our full day in the Norfolk Broads with a walk from the church at Potter Heigham. Here the reedbeds that edge Hickling Broad are prime habitat for Reed Warblers, Water Rail, Bittern and parties of Bearded Tits. Freshwater scrapes and wet meadows provide habitat for Avocets, Black-tailed Godwit and Redshanks, plus the chance of a few migrant waders too such as Green and Wood Sandpipers, Ruff, Spotted Redshank and Curlew Sandpiper. The variety of wader species is likely to be higher in September, but from October onwards wildfowl numbers start to increase. Marsh Harriers patrol throughout the area, whilst later trips might catch sight of a returning Hen Harrier or perhaps a Merlin speeding past. All day, we shall be savouring the special landscapes of the Broads, with their wide-open skies, vast swaying reedbeds and numerous windpumps.


Bearded Tit

The Broads region is justly famous for its large gatherings of wintering wildfowl and this is a truly international meeting place, as Pink-footed Geese from Greenland and Iceland rub shoulders with Wigeon, Shoveler and Teal from Scandinavia and Russia. With them come many other wetland species – including large flocks of Lapwing and Golden Plover – whilst Redwings and Fieldfares feed on berries in the hedgerows. There are plenty of areas to enjoy such as Hickling Broad, Buckenham Marshes and Horsey Mere and your guide will decide where to go subject to the weather and recent sightings.

Towards the end of the day (before or after dinner depending on the time of sunset), we will head to a local viewpoint that will give us an opportunity to watch birds of prey coming into a communal roost site. Marsh Harriers are by far the commonest species to be seen, but a few Hen Harriers and Merlins are typically around later in the autumn and there's always a good chance of both Barn Owl and Short-eared Owl too. Common Cranes and Chinese Water Deer are now a familiar sight in this area and usually grace us with their presence as the sun draws down in the western sky.

Day 3 Winterton Dunes & depart for home

This morning we will make the short drive to the coast and will spend the morning exploring the dunes, scrub and other habitats of the Winterton Dunes National Nature Reserve. This section of the Norfolk coastline faces out into the North Sea and is the first landfall for tired migrants after their long sea crossing from mainland Europe. In September and October, a wonderful variety of birds stop over to rest and feed here on their way south (especially if the wind is from the east), whilst others will be arriving to spend the winter. The grassy dunes and bush-dotted fields often hold Wheatear and Yellow Wagtails, whilst Whinchats dot the fence lines. In September we will be looking for migrants such as Common Redstart, Pied and Spotted Flycatchers, a variety of warblers and even, perhaps, a


Wheatear

Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Common Rosefinch or Barred Warbler! Yellow-browed Warblers are regular in October when huge numbers of winter thrushes drop into feed and rest, the flocks often containing the occasional Ring Ouzel. The marram-covered dunes sometimes provide cover for resting Short-eared or Long-eared Owls and the sea is, as always, worth scanning too for skuas, divers and numerous flocks of waterfowl moving south.

The coastline here is also a favoured haunt of Grey Seals which come ashore near Winterton and Horsey later in the autumn to pup.


Grey Seal

We will keep the afternoon flexible to take account of such factors as the weather, recent bird sightings and the advice of our tour leader. We may head back into the Broads or perhaps explore another section of the coastline if there has been a decent fall of migrants.

Our tour will conclude around 4pm at which point we must say our goodbyes to the tour leader and then begin our own journeys home.

Tour grading

There will be no serious or strenuous walking on this tour, with each walk covering no more than two or three miles on mostly gentle terrain.

Reserve entry

There is a charge for entry (£4 at the time of writing) to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust Reserve at Hickling Broad for non-NWT members and a parking charge (hourly rate) at Winterton (please bring membership cards with you if you have them). For more information visit www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation, breakfasts and dinners are included in the cost. Lunches (either in the form of a pub lunch or a picnic) and drinks are not included.

We will be staying for two nights at the delightful Dairy Barns guesthouse close to the Calthorpe Broad National Nature Reserve between the villages of Hickling and Sea Palling. All rooms have private facilities.





The guesthouse also features several deluxe or 'extra special' rooms (see photos below) that are all unique in design and set over two levels with large mezzanines. Each room has its own private courtyard garden, separate spacious lounge and sizeable en suite bathroom. These rooms – of which we only have one or two available per tour – are available at an additional cost of £50 per person.





Clothing and Equipment

Binoculars are essential. Bring a telescope if you have one, since it will be useful for scanning the wetlands. Since it can be muddy and wet underfoot in the Broads, we would suggest you bring waterproof walking shoes/boots. Please check the forecast before travel and dress accordingly.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, or book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk.