

Norfolk in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 - 26 May 2019

Report by Toby Collett



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Tour participants: Toby Collett (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 24th May

The tour started in an interesting way with Toby feeling unwell as the group met at The Shellbrooke in Hunstanton. After a brief chat with everyone it became apparent that he had heatstroke and was not even going to be able to get through the starters. The group were very understanding when Toby retired early in order to get going in earnest tomorrow.

Day 2

Saturday 25th May

Toby was thankfully feeling much better and met the group downstairs. After proper and lucid (re)introductions we were on our way to Holme. This pre-breakfast wander was excellent, but we had to call it short to scamper back for breakfast. Highlights, alongside the stunning scenery and views, were Turtle Doves, reeling Grasshopper Warbler, Little Terns offshore, Cuckoo cuckoo-ing, Spoonbills in formation overhead and an amazing food pass between Marsh Harriers. As well as all the exciting stuff, we got some great close views of some of the skulky and trickier coastal birds like Meadow Pipit, Linnet, Stonechat, Reed Bunting and Whitethroat. These 'LBJ's' need a bit of extra time and work to identify so was nice to have them close and together so we could go over the differences.

After a hearty breakfast with chat about the mornings list (50+) and highlights, we were off and heading south. RSPB Lakenheath was our first port of call to have a good leg stretch after the drive. The path alongside the track was alive with butterflies, damselflies and dragonflies which kept catching our attention as we headed to the first watchpoint. A distant Hobby was the first of eight we saw that day and we bumped into several groups taking part in the BTO Young Birders camp who told us about a very showy Bittern. With the hide full we had to scan from the boardwalk but with a bit of patience and some VERY specific directions, talking about individual reeds, the group got onto the bird. It was only a stone's throw away, but the camouflage was amazing. A few minutes later, it did pop out to the front of the reeds and gave the group their best Bittern views ever. What a moment. It was getting pretty warm, so we walked back in the shade for some ice-cream at the centre. We caught up with the BTO team again who kindly pointed out a Scarce Chaser in the car park. This was a new dragonfly for the day and was a treat to see it perched up on brambles rather than whizzing around through the reeds.

A pub lunch had well and truly been earned and was a good opportunity to chat over the morning and relive that Bittern moment. Weeting Heath was next for us and soon we were tucked in the hide watching Stone Curlews. We were also lucky enough to pick out a sitting Curlew. These more familiar waders are a common sight in winter but getting ever rarer as a breeding bird. After a good chat with the site staff, it was off to check some of the fire breaks in Thetford forest for a few more treats. Firecrest was top of the list but they were also at the top of the trees so no views afforded. We found the clear fell area and got some glimpses of Tree Pipit and a brief snatch of Woodlark in display flight. On the way back to the van a movement over the path caught our eye and we were all very pleased to be able to enjoy, what we all thought was, a Hummingbird Hawk-moth. As several of us got binoculars on it, it became apparent that it wasn't one and was in fact a new species for everyone in the group, a Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth. It kindly did the polite thing and didn't zoom off allowing all of us to enjoy it.

We had walked up an appetite and it was time to head back. While our day in the Brecks was over, the day for wonderful wildlife experiences still had something in store. We don't usually run these tours this late in the month, so we had the opportunity for a night time visit to Dersingham Bog, one of the best sites in Norfolk for Nightjar, and we very quickly found out why. The car park is located about a 15-minute walk away from the viewpoint which gives elevated views over the reserve. As we approached the lookout, we heard the distinctive 'psssp' of a roding Woodcock over the pines. Another greeted us at the steps as we 'ummed and ahh-ed' about whether to stay at the top or head down into the bog. Several churring birds and sightings over the path tempted us down. Our decision was rewarded with over six birds seen and heard. The midges started to get the better of us as the light faded so we climbed back up the steps. We timed it absolutely perfectly as a male and female chased passed us and then landed about five metres from us just off the path. It was too dark to see it well but to enjoy such an enigmatic species at such close range was amazing. It had been a long day, but well worth the early start and late finish.

Day 3

Sunday 26th May

With the long day we had yesterday the group were excused a pre-breakfast excursion. It would be a day on the coast taking in the excellent reserves of Titchwell and Cley. We started at Titchwell and headed out to the fresh marsh to get our wader fix. The breeding season was in full flow and the islands were packed with elegant Avocets, noisy Black-headed Gulls and the super smart Mediterranean Gulls. Sitting side by side it was easy to pick them apart and compare their plumage. Little Ringed and Ringed Plovers darted around on the mud in front of us allowing more comparisons between these similar cousins. A couple of Little Terns dropped on to the scrapes and afforded better views than the flybys at Holme the previous morning. They really are tiny when seen near other gulls and terns. On the way back to the car park we stopped to check for Bearded Tits and had lots calling but only a few visible, all of which were skimming over the reed tops. We headed around through the fen trail to look for Turtle Doves and the Tawny Owl seen in previous days but our luck was out. Some Red-crested Pochards were the best of the bunch on Patsy's Pool and a Southern Marsh Orchid stood out in all it's purple glory against the lush green grass. We had a mini birdsong workshop, listening to Blackcap, Whitethroat, Cetti's, Reed and Sedge Warbler and working on how to tell them apart, and then it was off for lunch and Cley.

The views at Cley are excellent from the café and give a real feel for the habitats and how special this part of the world is. After the sea breeches several years back, the freshwater habitats are nearing full recovery and the birds are returning in both number and variety. We saw Black and Bar-tailed Godwits together on the scrapes with Greenshank and Redshank feeding behind them. Sanderling and Dunlin were also mingling on the mud, with one of the latter falling to an agile Hobby later in the day. A Little Gull was picked up among the larger and commoner Black-headed Gulls, it's characteristic dipping flight making it easy to follow when on the move.

This would be our bird of the day and while there wasn't the fireworks of a rarity to finish, enjoying birds up close and enjoyed by all is equally rewarding. With varying return to home times, the group slowly filtered away all of us giving once last scan, soaking it in until we return again.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; h = heard only)

	Bird Species	Scientific Name	May	
			25	26
1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	4	
2	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓
3	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓
4	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓
5	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	100+	
6	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓
7	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>		2
8	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	5	6
9	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	3	8
10	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	1	2
11	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		1
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	9	2
13	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	3	7
14	Pochard	<i>Aythya farina</i>	1	4
15	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>		3
16	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	6	2
17	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	1	
18	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	4	3
19	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	2	
20	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	1	
21	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	3	2
22	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	
23	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	3	
24	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	5	6
25	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	3	
26	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	6	
27	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	8	1
28	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	h	
29	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1	
30	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	1	
31	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedipnemos</i>	2	
32	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	4	
33	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	1	80+
34	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	7	
35	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1	5
36	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		3
37	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		5
38	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		7
39	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	3	
40	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	3	
41	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		2
42	Common Sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>		2
43	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		5

	Bird Species	Scientific Name	May	
			25	26
44	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	1	3
45	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		1
46	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	1	
47	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>		1
48	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	1	
49	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	1	
50	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	9	100+
51	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		50+
52	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	6	9
53	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	5	3
54	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	1	14
55	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba l. 'feral'</i>	✓	✓
56	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	4	
57	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
58	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	2	
59	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	2	
60	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	3	
61	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	1	
62	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	5m1f	
63	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	2	1
64	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	
65	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	
66	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
67	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓
68	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓
69	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
70	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
71	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
72	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		6
73	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	h	
74	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓
75	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		20+
76	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓
77	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		20+
78	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	
79	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		6
80	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	2	
81	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	h	10+
82	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	h	10+
83	Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	h	
84	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	h	
85	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	h	
86	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	h	
87	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	h	
88	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
89	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓

	Bird Species	Scientific Name	May	
			25	26
90	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
91	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	1	
92	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	2	
93	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
94	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	1	
95	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	4	
96	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	2	3
96	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	1	
97	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	✓	✓
98	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	7	11
99	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	1	
100	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
101	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓
102	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	3	
103	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	12	6
104	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓
105	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	1	

Mammals

Grey Squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*
European Hare, *Lepus europaeus*

Rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*
Muntjac, *Muntiacus reevesi*

Butterflies and moths

Peacock	Orange Tip	Brimstone
Speckled Wood	Red Admiral	Common Blue
Green-veined White	Small Copper	Large White
Small Heath	Broad-bordered Bee Hawk Moth	Grey Carpet
Garden Carpet		

Notable others

Southern Marsh Orchid	Scarce Chaser	Four-spotted Chaser
Hornet		

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