

Norfolk in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th – 30th May 2021



Turtle Dove



Sedge Warbler

Report and images by Brian Small



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Participants: Brian Small (Leader) with five Naturetrek clients.

Highlights

- Nightjars and Woodcock on Dersingham Bog
- Flighty Bearded Tit, plus Cetti's, Reed and Sedge Warblers
- Cuckoo, Yellowhammer and brilliant male Yellow Wagtail at Cley
- Sandwich and dainty Little Terns offshore
- Purring Turtle Doves and seething mass of Red Knot at Snettisham
- Dragonflies, Hobby and a delightful Treecreeper in the Brecks

Day 1

Friday 28th May

With the group gathered at 6pm, given our cold spring it was nice to have our introductory talk at Le Strange Arms in Hunstanton *en plein air*, where it was almost warm.

After a very nice dinner, we headed south to the atmospheric and haunting Dersingham Bog for dusk and a chance of Nightjar and Woodcock – the drive producing Hare and Muntjac. Parking up and walking to the top of the steps, we could hear first one then three Nightjar calling out over the bog, followed quickly by the grunt-and-squeak of a roding Woodcock that flew along the ridge. Down amongst the short pines on the bog itself, we were then treated to a fine display of churring, calling and feeding Nightjars. Twisting and turning, rising and falling, they flashed the white in their wings and tails; we even watched one through the 'scope as it perched. A great start.

Day 2

Saturday 29th May

Setting out at 6am for a pre-breakfast visit to Holme reserve, the skies were clear and the light crisp, perfect for a brief stroll in the dunes. For the next hour we enjoyed a gentle introduction to some of the species typical of the coastal marshes. As Sedge, Reed and Cetti's Warblers sang, we stood on the bank trying to see them - the former showing well and the latter not at all. Never mind, we were soon occupied with seeing Cuckoo, Common Whitethroat, Stonechat and Linnet, plus a Marsh Harrier floating about over the cattle and Greylags in the fields. On the saltmarsh, Gadwall and Shelduck swam in the pools, joined by Avocet, Redshank and Oystercatcher. Meadow Pipits were busy feeding their young and territorial Reed Bunting sang and fed amongst the *Suaeda* – a typical plant of salty habitats. It was hard to tear ourselves away, but breakfast and coffee beckoned...

The rest of our day was taken with a tour of the north Norfolk coast as far east as Cley, Salhouse and Kelling Heath, but our first port of call was to be Titchwell RSPB. Arriving early meant the hides and footpath were relatively quiet and we managed to see some nice species amongst the reeds and on the pools. Large Red Damselfly was picked along the path, before we emerged into the sun and the open view across the reeds to the east and marshes to the west. Bearded Tits called and zapped across the reeds, with just the occasional pause for a stationary look; Cetti's Warbler called explosively and we again saw them as they surged from bush to bush; however, Sedge and Reed Warbler were more obliging and we saw them well plus one or two Hairy Dragonfly.

On the pools, wildfowl included numerous Pochard, Tufted Duck and a nice family of Gadwall; Marsh Harrier and Cormorant flew about, and we were lucky to see a hulking Great Egret take flight and head away towards Brancaster. Amongst the shallows and islands (even on the roof of the hide), breeding Black-headed Gulls would occasionally lift as one to chase off the odd Marsh Harrier. Shorebirds included a group of six Black-tailed Godwit - one sporting leg flag and ring, four dapper and black-bellied Dunlin, two Little Ringed Plover – one in display, plus Lapwing, Avocet and Oystercatcher.



limosa race Black-tailed Godwit

Further still along the footpath, on the tidal lagoon, over 10 Ringed Plover and 15 Turnstone had come onto the reserve to roost and were joined by a couple of Common Tern. Walking back to the car park, we tried to see Bearded Tit perched (again in vain), but were rewarded with a Bittern in flight. Time had raced by and so we headed east.

Having picked up lunch at the seafood hut at Brancaster, we stopped again quickly in Burnham Deepdale for a few more provisions and did so just as a fine Red Kite sailed over. Then it was onto Cley, where we ate lunch at the visitor centre, sat on benches overlooking the reserve. Truth be told, the cool ENE breeze coming in off the sea was a little too 'cool' and those that wore shorts began to regret their choice.



Yellow Wagtail

Refreshed and replete, we walked along the famous East Bank at Cley, which offers a fine view across the reeds and flooded fields. It was not long before we saw one of the highlights of the day, a dazzling male Yellow

Wagtail singing from the grass. Though a little distant, he stood out like a shining dot in the field as he fed and sang amongst the tussocks. This was then followed by Bearded Tit, this time perched just a little longer and allowing most to see it do so before it reverted back to being flighty and elusive in the strengthening breeze - I think by now, most were wishing they had worn some extra clothes!

The flooded fields held Lapwing with large young, several Redshank, some in full breeding dress and looking quite dark, and wildfowl included three Eurasian Wigeon and plenty of Shoveler. A Meadow Pipit entertained us as it gathered food along the path, though eventually, we found the sea and were treated to small groups of terns heading past. Little Tern did so in small dashing groups, though one pair were busy courting with a male feeding a female that sat on the beach giving lovely views; much larger Sandwich Tern flashed by, shining white in the sun.

In an attempt to warm up, we drove up onto the heath at Kelling, where it was indeed warmer if a little quiet for birds. Our avian highlights as we walked the ridges through the heather and gorse (now tall and old) were Yellowhammer and Garden Warbler (a briefly heard singing Woodlark stayed a leader-only), but we really enjoyed a glistening Green Hairstreak, plus Green Tiger Beetle and a Viviparous Lizard.

Time had marched on and we headed back west towards Hunstanton, but not before a quick roadside stop found plenty of Hares and couple of Red-legged Partridge. At Choseley Barns we walked the road picking up numerous Hares, great views of Yellowhammer, Stock Dove, more Red-legged Partridge (sadly, not the hoped-for Grey) and a fly-past Mediterranean Gull. Our birding day complete, we enjoyed a nice meal and dwelt upon a beautiful day 'in the field.

Day 3

Sunday 30th May

We gathered again at 6am for a pre-breakfast jaunt, this time south to Snettisham Coastal Park, where we hoped to find Turtle Dove. We were not to be disappointed as on arrival the sound of one purring in the pines by the car park was the first thing we heard. Manoeuvring ourselves, we managed to find one perched and all gained views through the 'scope as it preened then purred softly in the early morning light. This was a real treat and we reflected on the precarious hold this species has as a British species.

Strolling up onto the sea bank, really just for a look over the Wash, we were surprised and delighted to find a superb flock of c. 2000 Red Knot on the rising tide, joined by 20 Bar-tailed Godwit, several Curlew and 12 Grey Plover. Through the 'scope you could pick out the odd brick-red bird in full breeding plumage, but in reality, the true spectacle was when they took flight and the flock wheeled about almost as if it was one living being. The only word is "awesome" and we realised how lucky we were when they then flew off. Buzzing with our luck, we had 'seconds' of the Turtle Dove, with Ian finding one perched in the Blackthorn.

After breakfast, we drove south to Lakenheath Fen RSPB reserve – thankfully going against the tide of cars heading to the coast for the day. On arrival we were met by a Willow Warbler and a very friendly RSPB member of staff, before we entered the reserve proper. The 'usual culprits' of Common Whitethroat, Sedge, Reed and Cetti's Warbler joined the welcoming party as we walked the trail through the Poplar and Willow. At the New Fen lookout point, we enjoyed a pair of Marsh Harriers food passing, many Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting

chasing insects and each other, but two close Bearded Tit again were flight only – nice though in the sun. Cuckoos and Garden Warbler sang close by, their song drowned out a little by the cawing of the Rooks.

As we walked, our eyes turned to dragon- and damselflies that were emerging *en masse*: Azure, Common Blue and Variable Damselflies; Scarce and Four-spotted Chaser and more Hairy Dragonflies were all seen well. Butterflies included a handful of fine male Orange-tip and Red Admiral. A female Cuckoo sat in a Poplar surveying the land, perhaps watching the Reed Warblers in readiness for egg-laying. Eventually we reached Joist Fen lookout, to be greeted by the phrase “you should have been here 10 minutes ago” when Crane and Bittern had been seen. Of course, we had no such luck, but did witness up to 35 Hobby flying high above the distant reeds looking like a loose flock of Swift. Two Egyptian Geese flew by as did a dashing Kingfisher, flashing blue as it went.



Reed Bunting

Our long walk back felt like it was in a blizzard as the fluffy seeds from the Willow blew into our faces. Lunch was picked up in Lakenheath and eaten in the shade back at the reserve, a very pleasant spot as the Willow Warbler continued to sing from the trees about us.

Following a quick stop at Weeting, where we were told there was a long queue for the Stone-curlew hide as they could not be seen, a decision was made to head for Santon Downham and a walk in the forest. After 20 minutes we were walking a track into a clearing near Grime's Graves, seeing more Willow Warbler, flying and singing Siskin and Mistle Thrush. However, it was wonderful to end with a delightful Treecreeper calling and feeding in an old Oak, its fresh green leaves just emerging in the warm sun.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



www.twitter.com/naturetrektours



www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays

Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted)

Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris rufa*

Seen in pairs in open fields from Holme and Choseley east to Cley

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Small numbers at various places

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Large post-breeding flocks, firstly at Holme then also at Titchwell, Cley and Lakenheath

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*

Seen in low numbers at Titchwell, Cley and Lakenheath

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Noted at Titchwell and Cley and in flight at Lakenheath

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*

Two flew by at Joist Fen, Lakenheath

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Many in the coastal marshes, from Home to Cley

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Almost the most common duck now, with many groups in flight at Titchwell, Cley, and Lakenheath with a nice family group of very small ducklings at the former

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

Three, two males and a female at Cley from East Bank

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Noted at various places along the coast

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Seen well at Titchwell and Cley, with close flypasts at East Bank

Common Pochard *Aythya farina*

At least ten at Titchwell and one at Cley



Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Several seen at Titchwell and Cley, plus two at Lakenheath

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Two flew past the hotel early morning just before we set out for our pre-breakfast walks

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Four on the sea from the hotel and one at Titchwell, one at Lakenheath

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

Heard at Titchwell, before one flew above the reeds heading towards us; also heard at close range at Lakenheath

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

One hauled itself from the reeds at Titchwell, before flying east

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Ones or twos seen at Holme, Titchwell, Cley, Snettisham and Lakenheath and the odd fly over at various spots

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

One at Holme on our first morning, then others at Titchwell, Cley and also at Snettisham

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Fly pasts at the hotel each morning, then lower numbers at Titchwell (perched on dead trees) and also at Cley

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

It is amazing to think these are still quite rare (c. 625 pairs in UK) as we see them so frequently in coastal marshes and fields. Seen at Holme, Titchwell, Cley and Lakenheath with food passes seen on occasions

Red Kite *Milvus milvus*

Two were seen along the north coast as we headed east: firstly at Burnham Deepdale

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

Numerous often soaring high over Blakeney Ridge

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Ones or twos at various places

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Though a little distant (some came closer) it was neat to see at least 35 high above the reeds at Lakenheath RSPB chasing insects

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

One seen well at Titchwell, but others heard at Cley and Lakenheath

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Seen well at Titchwell, with young, plus at Cley and Lakenheath

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

First seen on or over the saltmarsh at Home, then at Titchwell and Cley; up to 100 along the Wash off Snettisham on the rising tide

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Several pairs at Holme on our first morning were just the beginning of many pairs along the coast: seen at Titchwell and Cley and on passing pools at Holkham, Stiffkey, etc.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Low numbers at flooded fields along the coast as they are on territory – often seen accompanying Marsh Harriers, Crows or large gulls that enter them

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

12 on rising tide off Snettisham

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

15 or so at Titchwell on the tidal pools

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Two, with one displaying nicely from Parrinder Hide, Titchwell

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*

Always great to see, we enjoyed a couple at least roding above Dersingham Bog

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Six were at Titchwell, with one sporting a colour flag and ring; this bird interestingly is a nominate *limosa* ringed as a chick on the Nene Washes in 2018. He tried to breed this year, but his nest was abandoned hence he was at Titchwell and we were lucky to see him

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

15 or so along the shore off Snettisham, their short legs and dumpy appearance visible even at distance

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Three at Snettisham then one at Weeting

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Several often in full breeding plumage at Holme, Titchwell and Cley – heard at Lakenheath

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

15 were found roosting on the tidal pool at Titchwell

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*

Easily a highlight of the weekend, as a flock of c. 2000 were discovered on the rising tide off Snettisham. Tough neat to see feeding, with a fair number of red birds, it was great to see a wheeling mass as they flew over the Wash

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Four black-bellied birds from Parrinder Hide at Titchwell, sporting black bellies

Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyophaga melanocephala*

An adult was a surprise at it flew past at Choseley Barns; two flew by at Snettisham

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Very common breeder along the coast; it was interesting to see them breeding on the roof of the hide at Titchwell

Common Gull *Larus canus*

One at Titchwell and three at Snettisham – all first-summer

European Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*

A good group at Titchwell, but we did not see huge numbers

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*

Just the one second-summer bird at Titchwell

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandwicensis*

Seen well at the north end of East Bank, Cley

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

A lovely small tern, we enjoyed over 20 off Cley, with one female on the beach being fed by its mate

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Two at Titchwell and one at Lakenheath was the sum total

Feral Dove *Columba livia feral*

Noted reluctantly at various places about towns

Stock Dove *Columba oenas*

Seven were seen on the deck at Choseley Barns and one flew over at Lakenheath

Common Wood Pigeon *Columba palumbus*

Very common, with vast numbers at Hunstanton

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*

Perhaps the true highlight for some, with at least three seen near Snettisham Coast Park; purring, preening and displaying in flight this may become a thing of the past if things do not improve

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Ones or twos in various places, e.g., Holme

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

The first one or two were seen and heard at Holme on our first morning, though there was also one heard from the hotel even earlier; heard at Titchwell and also at Lakenheath, where a female sat high in a tree looking for food or nests to parasitise

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

On our evening at Dersingham, we saw at least four over the bog, but heard others so a total of up to eight

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Common, with screaming flocks in many places, e.g. quiet country villages like Hockwold

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

At Lakenheath, one zapped past at New Fen – blink and you missed it – then it or another did the same at Joist Fen, but was seen a little longer as it flew down a cut in the reeds

European Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*

One calling at Lakenheath and another on the ground at Weeting

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Seen in flight at Keeling then at Santon Downham

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Small numbers along the coast and en route

Western Jackdaw *Coloemus monedula*

Likewise, small numbers seen en route at various places, with many at Lakenheath

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

A common bird that fed in open fields; the noisy rookery at Lakenheath was especially busy

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Seen along the coastal marshes often accompanied by Lapwing

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Seen and heard at Santon Downham

Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*

A handful of birds at Holme, Kelling and Lakenheath

Great Tit *Parus major*

First seen at Lakenheath then also at Santon Downham

Bearded Reedling *Panurus biarmicus*

Fair numbers of flighty pairs, but a lot harder to pin down in the reeds; a lucky few saw one through the 'scope at Titchwell, whilst another sat out briefly at Cley also. A close flyby in good light at Lakenheath

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Seen and heard along the coast from Holme to Kelling, also inland at Lakenheath and Santon Downham

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Only seen over the reeds at Cley

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Scattered pairs seen at various places: the hotel, Holme, Titchwell, Cley Lakenheath, etc.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Good views of nesting birds about the hotel, plus smaller numbers seen elsewhere

Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*

Heard but only briefly seen at Holme, Titchwell, Cley and Lakenheath



Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*

We were welcomed by Willow Warbler whilst watching at Lakenheath, getting nice views at it gave its mellifluous song from the tops of the Alders; several also seen and heard at Santon Downham

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Seen and heard at many places, from around the hotel and elsewhere

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

A fine mimic, this was seen and heard frequently about any patch of scrub or reedy ditch

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

A true reedbed dweller, seen and heard from Holme, Titchwell, Cley and Lakenheath

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*

The rich song was heard at various places, but we only saw them at Lakenheath

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Seen and heard at Kelling Heath also hear at Lakenheath

Common Whitethroat *Curruca communis*

Common indeed, once learned the rich scratchy warble is very distinct

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

In a contest for loudest song to body size ratio then Wren is surely in with a fighting chance; seen and heard at various places

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Heard at Weeting, but then our final new bird was one seen near Santon Downham in a close Oak tree

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Seen in small groups, some with numbers of well-grown young

Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*

Seen and heard at various places, the first being at Holme on the first morning

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

Heard at Holme, but seen in flight at Santon Downham – a secretive species in summer

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

A couple seen in flight in the Brecks, with one at Santon Downham the best

European Robin *Erithacus rubecula*

Seen and heard at various places

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

One was heard in the Brecks, but would not show; sadly we had to walk away...



European Stonechat *Saxicola rubicola*

A male at Holme was the only one seen

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Noted at various places, e.g., near the hotel, Holme, etc

Dunnock *Prunella modularis*

First seen at Holme then at other places

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

A small spot of yellow in the grass of the fields east of East Bank at Cley transformed into a cracking male Yellow Wagtail; singing at times it also perched in the reeds

Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba yarrellii*

Small numbers at various places

Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*

Seen at Holme on our first morning, then others elsewhere; one with a large beakful of food on the East Bank

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common but in small numbers

European Greenfinch *Chloris chloris*

Just ones or twos in a couple of places, e.g. Holme

Common Linnet *Linaria cannabina*

Seen well at Holme, Titchwell and Kelling – a smart and underrated bird

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Many at various spots

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Heard at the hotel pine belt, then seen in flight at Santon Downham

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citronella*

We found a richly coloured male singing at Kelling, then several more at Choseley; heard at Santon Downham

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Common in all reedbeds along the coast and at Lakenheath

Butterflies (n=13)



Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Small White *Pieris rapae*

Green-veined White *Pieris napi*

Large White *Pieris brassicae*

Common Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*

Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*

Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*

Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*

Peacock Butterfly *Inachis io*

Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*

Dragonflies & Damselflies (n=8)

Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>
Variable Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrhosoma nymphula</i>
Hairy Dragonfly	<i>Brachytron pratense</i>
Scarce Chaser	<i>Libellula fulva</i>
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>



Damselflies - clockwise (from top left): Variable, Azure, Blue-tailed and Common Blue



Scarce Chaser

Various other beasts

Green Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela campestris</i>
Girdled Mining Bee	<i>Andrena labiata</i>
European Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>
Viviparous Lizard	<i>Lacerta vivipara</i>
Muntjac Deer	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>