

Norfolk in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

6th – 8th May 2022

Tour report by Toby Collet



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: Toby Collett (Leader) with seven Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Friday 6th May

We gathered in the comfortable lounge of the hotel to discuss the weekend's plans. A few nice-to-see's were mentioned but, as is customary on these tours, we would rather spend the day seeing 60 birds well than 100 fleetingly.

We usually do a good job of mixing quality and quantity, and this weekend would be no exception. An excellent supper overlooking The Wash got us the right amount of full for our evening excursion.

We headed 15 minutes down the road to Dersingham Bog National Nature Reserve to try for Nightjars. It was a little early in the season so seeing or hearing them was in no way guaranteed but 30 minutes after we got there and just as the light started to go, we heard one! A supporting cast of roding Woodcock, Cuckoo and Stonechat families got the weekend off to a great start.

Day 2

Saturday 7th May

The great thing about birding Norfolk in May is the headline cast is consistently good and you always have the chance of a guest star or two. Today would start with one of these guest stars. Just 10 minutes from the hotel, two Dotterel had been seen the day before. This was a new bird for many in the group and the location would also give us a chance to look for some farmland birds too.

Parking on the side of the road we walked down a hawthorn lined green lane. Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Linnet, Goldfinch and Yellowhammer all sang with gusto on this sunny morning. A recently worked field to our right held a few gulls including a 3rd year Mediterranean Gull and to the left a couple of Wheatear darted up and down the furrows. A sweep of the field the Dotterel were seen in the previous day was fruitless but a scan in the adjacent plot gave up the prize. A little covey of Grey Partridge was a nice bonus. On the way back we picked up Whimbrel, Marsh Harrier and Buzzard moving overhead and with a mile or so under our belt we had all earned our cooked breakfasts.

After recharging with pastries and coffee we headed south to the Brecks and Fens. RSPB Lakenheath is always a treat at this time of year and today was no exception. We had the good fortune of bumping into Dave the Site Manager who gave the group an impromptu history of the reserve. We headed up to the riverbank for a scan over Hockwold Marshes. Four Garganey (three drakes and a duck), were picked out on the fringes along with a few Avocet nests. Heading towards the reedbed found some recently fledged Stonechat being fed by attentive parents and had many opportunities to work on separating Reed and Sedge Warbler on song. Bursts of Cetti's Warbler song were a little easier to pick out. Common Terns casually bounced down the river, their distancing flight separating them from similarly sized Black-headed Gulls.

Arriving at the viewpoint we were treated to a Lakenheath special. Over 30 Hobbies wheeled and dived over the reeds, picking dragonflies, darters and damselflies off on the wing. There was some good Bittern activity though unfortunately we weren't able to clap eyes on them so enjoyed listening to their booming.

After lunch we headed to Weeting Heath for the Stone Curlews. We were able to pick out two birds in the specially cultivated plot. A moving lump of mud turned out to be a recently hatched chick though the heat meant the movement didn't last for long. The more regularly seen Eurasian Curlew was also present in the plot with a handful of Lapwing spread out over the field. A walk in the woodlands held a roaming tit flock and sifting through them we found a few Goldcrests and Coal Tits.

We headed back to the hotel via our dusk destination from the day before. We had a few targets for Dersingham and while we enjoyed a nice variety of singing warblers our Grasshopper target eluded the ears. Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers chipped and yaffled in the woodlands and several Stonechat families chacked away among the ferns and heather. It was great for the group to appreciate the landscape in good light rather than the dwindling half-light of the previous evening. With the late night from Friday on our minds we headed back to the hotel for supper and to tot and tally up the day's sightings.

Day 3

Sunday 8th May

Retiring earlier than we did on Friday meant we could sneak out a little earlier and we made the most of heading to Holme before breakfast. The location here is perfect to describe what makes the Norfolk coast so special. An uninterrupted view along the coastal marshes is always a joy to take in. A walk along the dunes was accompanied by Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, Linnet and Stonechat flicking and singing among the buckthorn. Just before we got to the top we flushed a large bird from the boardwalk. Round wings with an ochre flash gave away the identity of an unseasonal Short-eared Owl. Not all the group got on it as it flew so was great to track it to the fenceline where it sat in the open and allowed us to enjoy it through the telescope.

Moving along we scanned the beach for waders. Sanderling, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Turnstone and Curlew were all feeding on the strandline with a small group of Brent Geese also present. Heading back for breakfast, a large white bird emerged from a tree. A quick reposition of the scope and we were soon enjoying a Great Egret in breeding condition with a dark bill and bright green lores - a great finish to our wander.

After breakfast we headed east along the coast to North Point Pools. This is a not a well-known site and can turn up a few surprises, and it certainly did for us. Arriving in the car park we were treated to a super-smart male Whinchat on the fenceline. In the background a few Brown Hares chased through the fields. The pools are visible from the car park so a quick scan had us enjoying Spoonbill, Little Ringed Plover, Common Sandpiper and Egyptian Goose. With a few tussocks dotted around, it is best to get different angles so we headed down the path. One of our eagle-eyed group picked up some birds of prey in the distance. "What's that smaller bird chasing the Buzzard?". That smaller bird was the Buzzard! The bird being chased was one of the young White-tailed Eagles roaming from its Isle of White release site and it was enormous. The technicality of it being a released bird did nothing to dampen the awe of one flying in a natural state over the coast. We headed off towards the seabank looking for migrants in the scrub and hoping to see the eagle again. No luck with either but on the way back we got lucky with a Wood Sandpiper lifting from one of the pools and circling around before landing out of sight.

A light lunch at Holkham gave us time to catch our breath and rest our legs and relive that mega eagle moment. A circuit along the beach and back through the woods was fruitful with more waders in breeding plumage on the gorgeous sandy beach. We enjoyed Spoonbills flying in and out of their nesting colony alongside Little Egrets, Grey Herons and Cormorants. Red Kites, Marsh Harriers and Buzzards quartered over the expansive reedbeds

occasionally flushing up breeding waders and wildfowl. A trio of Hobby hawked dragonflies high up, mixing in nicely with a drift of Swifts. On the way back Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs sang from the woodlands around us as we bade farewell and moved on to RSPB Titchwell.

The team here had just recently finished some extensive engineering works to the habitats and the results have been incredible and easily the best spring visit we've had there in terms of numbers. There were birds everywhere. The Island Hide gave us some super close views of Black-tailed Godwits, Avocet, Turnstone, Redshank and Whimbrel. Further out, a fistful of Little Terns were moving around with their larger Common cousins. The afternoon light and proximity of birds made it very hard to leave the hide but with some new lagoons and islands created we were enticed around to the Parrinder Hide. A Temminck's Stint seen earlier in the day couldn't be relocated on arrival but we had a good time looking at the differences between Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers. A scan of the new lagoon produced a bobbing Common Sandpiper with a few Dunlin feeding along the edge. A first summer Little Gull flew across our view, pulling our attention back to the other lagoon. After enjoying the gull feeding and preening we relocated the Temminck's Stint to put a cherry on the top of an gorgeous last day and a fantastic weekend.

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Species lists

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	May 2022		
		6	7	8
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		6	
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		2	
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			360
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>			16
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		6	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		20+	8
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		10	4
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>		4	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		3	
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		1	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			4
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>			2
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		2	1
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		1	1
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		2	
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leu</i>			7+
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>		♪	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1	2
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			11
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		3	
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>			1
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		8	7
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		7	5
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		30+	3
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		♪	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		4	6
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		6	7
Eurasian Stone-Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>		3	
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		30+	50+
Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>		2	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		20+	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			25
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			2
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			5
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	10+		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	2		
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa islandica</i>			4
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			5

Common name	Scientific name	May 2022		
		6	7	8
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	2		7
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		2	2
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		12+	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			7
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>			1
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			2
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			350
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris Temminckii</i>			1
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			4
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>			1
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>			1
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		2	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		8	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		4	
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		2	8
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			5
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		9	
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia feral</i>	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		10+	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		6	
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	♫		
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		6	25
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		♫	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		2	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>		♫	♫
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		6	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		4+	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		♫	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		22	18
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		16	10
Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>		♫	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		4	5
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		3	1
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	2	6	6
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		5	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2022		
		6	7	8
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		3	2
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			4
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		14+	3
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>			1
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		2	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		11	3
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		2	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		8	6
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		6	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	✓

Others

		May 2022		
		6	7	8
MAMMALS				
Chinese Water Deer	Hydropotes inermis		1	1
Fallow Deer	Phoca vitulina			400
Reeves Muntjac	Muntiacus reevesi		3	2
Roe Deer	Capreolus capreolus		4	
Brown Hare	Lepus europeaus		3	6
Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus		2	3
Grey Squirrel	Sciurus caolinensis			6
DRAGONFLIES				
Four-spotted Chaser	Libellula quadrimaculata		10+	
Hairy Dragonfly	Brachytron pratense		10+	
MOTHS				
Dewick’s Plusia	Macdunnoughia confusa		1	
Silver-ground Carpet	Xanthorhoe montanata		1	