

Norfolk in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

26th – 28th May 2023



Turtle Dove



Little Tern



Family of Pochard

Tour report and images by Brian Small



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Tour Participants: Brian Small (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 26th May



A slightly earlier arrival meant that we had time before dinner to head out for some late afternoon birding. With the tide way out at Hunstanton and busy with dogwalkers, Titchwell seemed a good choice and the light would be behind us as we looked east. Walking north along the path from the reserve centre, we saw and heard Sedge and Reed Warblers, Long-tailed Tits and Jays in the trees and bushes.

The first patch of water held a nice surprise in the form of a drake Garganey – almost the closest bird to the footpath, though in fact it was probably surpassed in the eyes of some by the female Pochard with six ducklings in tow. On the islands of the freshmarsh, plenty of Avocet, Black-headed Gulls and Common Tern were nesting – indeed a lot of the gulls and Avocet already had cute youngsters in the nest or wandering about. A pair of Little Ringed Plovers were also seen, as were two Little Stints, plus a Common Sandpiper and Black-tailed Godwit. A Brent Goose flew over as we strolled back.

We headed back to the hotel at Hunstanton for a very nice early dinner, then set off to Dersingham Bog whilst it was still light for a crepuscular walk. It was good to see several families of Stonechat, plenty of Linnet – including immatures begging for food – as well as a Hobby perched in a tree and two Goshawks flying lazily across the heath; a small herd of Fallow Deer ventured onto the heath.

As it began to get dark, a couple of Woodcock flew over roding, and then the first of at least three Nightjars began to churr. As it was not quite dark, once the Nightjars began to display, we could still see the males twisting and turning, fanning their tails showing off the white flashes. It was a magical moment and (ignoring the midges) was very much enjoyed.

Day 2

Saturday 27th May

Despite the late (ish) finish yesterday, it was a full contingent that woke early for a pre-breakfast sojourn to Holme reserve. A couple of Hares bounced along the approach track ahead of us, before we parked at the entrance and walked along the Peddar's Way footpath into the dunes. The bushes and suaeda bushes were busy with birds and over the next hour we gained views of Lesser Whitethroat, Sedge and Cetti's Warblers, lots of Linnet, Stonechat, Dunnock and Meadow Pipits, their beaks crammed with food for young in the nest.



Looking towards the sea we saw Oystercatcher and Curlew on the beach, plus Grey Plover and Sandwich Terns flying past; out over the fields we picked up Marsh Harriers and a Red Kite, Muntjac and Chinese Water Deer; families of Greylag Geese walked about noisily. However, easily the highlight of the walk was the ghostly white Barn Owl that hunted for voles and mice. Initially seen drifting away, it did the decent thing and eventually came back fairly close offering nice views as it hunted.

After breakfast, we drove east along the coast road to Burnham Overy and, having parked at the staithe, walked along the eastern harbour wall footpath. A pair of Little Grebes with 'grebe-lings' fed in the dyke along with Tufted Duck and in the vegetation, it was nice to see Wall Brown butterflies. Looking east over the newly flooded habitat at Holkham, a blue-lore and pink-legged, breeding plumaged Great Egret was watched flying, then perched precariously on a bare tree from which it broke sticks and flew to the nest site. In the harbour several Little Terns fed and argued amongst themselves, as did two Common Tern; in the muddy creeks both Redshank and Black-tailed Godwits fed before flying off east.

Driving further east, having passed through Stiffkey and Blakeney, we reached the visitor centre at Cley from which we walked to the famous East Bank. Many Sand Martin flew about in the fair breeze blowing from the sea and it took patience before we heard, got brief views and finally got good views of Bearded Tits in the reeds to the west of the bank. On the Serpentine to the east, the pools held many Avocet, Shelduck and geese, plus a pair of Little Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Knot, four Little Stint and a Bar-tailed Godwit.

However, the star turn (and top marks for effort) was that of a male Redshank which displayed excitedly to a female close to East Bank. Starting with the usual calling, he landed close to the female and with wingbeats increasing in intensity and slowly edging towards her on tiptoes he built himself up to a crescendo. It was getting rather heated, but just as the deed was about to be done, with perfect timing the female walked off – a true anti-climax. After all his effort, we felt sorry for the male and dissected what he might have done wrong...

After lunch in the shelter and a quick look at the sea, we walked back to the centre, where some enjoyed a cream tea and others the Marsh Harriers and Spoonbills flying over against a deep blue sky.



En route to the hotel we called in at Titchwell again, for a walk out to the beach. Most of the birds from yesterday were still on the freshmarsh, though we saw six Little Ringed Plover today, whilst out on the saline tidal lagoons we found three Turnstone and a first-summer Little Gull. The large sandy beach was nicely devoid of people and on the water's edge were numerous breeding-plumaged Sanderling scuttling about feeding before their flight north to Arctic breeding grounds; Oystercatcher, four Bar-tailed Godwit and a lone Dunlin joined the mix. Back on the reserve, white-winged three Mediterranean Gull bathed in the late afternoon light.

Day 3

Sunday 28th May

Our morning started with another early excursion, this time to Snettisham, with one very special target: Turtle Dove. Within five minutes of arriving, we had heard and found one purring atop a flowering Hawthorn; it was quite emotional to stand and listen to this diminutive dove – now severely threatened with extinction as a British bird. Another joined it, then another, until we had counted four in total heard with the atmosphere filled with the soft sound. Other species also noted here were Lesser Whitethroat, Meadow Pipit and plenty of fine Greenfinches feeding on seeds; out on the Wash were large numbers of Oystercatcher, a handful of Curlew plus (having said we would only see one) over 160 Brent Geese.

After breakfast and with lunches bought, we drove south against the tide of traffic that included many classic cars (a 'pageant' at Castle Rising), arriving at Lakenheath RSPB as the cloud cleared and it began to warm up. Greeted by a singing Willow Warbler, as we stood discussing the reserve by the centre's pond a Bittern did the decent thing and flew in at close range, circled but sadly then flew away. Hairy Hawkers, Scarce Chasers and both Variable and Azure Damselflies skittered about the reeds and path. Common Whitethroats, Reed and Sedge Warblers sang from the path-side vegetation as we continued, and Blackcaps sang from deep in the trees.

Walking west through the reeds and poplar plantations, it got progressively warmer and (a rare event this spring) layers were peeled off. The first very nice bird we found was a Spotted Flycatcher both feeding and visiting its nest on a broken off poplar trunk; it made various feeding sorties when you could sometimes see it perched and hear the snap of the bill as it caught its prey. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was also seen in the trees and numerous Marsh Harriers floated over the reeds, the females coming out from the nest to collect the prey from a male in a quick food pass. A pair of Great Crested Grebes with two stripy young showed well in a small pool, which caused the inevitable debate which was the cutest young bird we had seen: various contenders such as Avocet and Black-headed Gull fell by the wayside, leaving Shelduck and the grebes, but it is possible that the Shelducklings won!



From the lookout, we sat and viewed across Joist Fen, finally seeing a Hobby catch dragonflies plus another two Bittern moving to feeding areas or back to the nest; Lapwing and Cuckoo added to the mix as did Red Kite, yet more Marsh Harrier, Cuckoo and Cetti's Warbler. One of the Hobbies finally came closer, giving a fine flypast as it headed to the trees. Taking the riverbank path, we returned to the centre and consumed our lunch, picking up Stonechats, Reed Buntings and a nesting Great Crested Grebe en route. The Willow Warbler sang as we ate, sometimes adding a bit of Chiffchaff to its song...

Our afternoon walk was taken at a very busy Bank Holiday Brecklands location, Lynford Arboretum, where we walked the plantation and small opening in search of Firecrest and Woodlark. Though we missed these in the quiet part of the day, we did find a family of Nuthatch, heard Goldcrest and Willow Warblers singing and finally another

Spotted Flycatcher was 'scoped, but "time" was called, and we sauntered back north to our base at Hunstanton late afternoon, where the wind had picked up and was dragging in cold air off the sea.



Thanks to you all for a great weekend and for being such fun and interested in the special birds of North Norfolk; I am sure the Nightjar and Woodcocks, Bearded Tits plus Turtle Doves will be remembered for quite some time.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced		May 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓	✓	✓
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓
Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓	✓
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	✓		
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>			✓
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	✓		
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			✓

I=Introduced		May 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓	✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓	
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	✓	✓	
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	✓		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>		✓	
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		✓	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		✓	
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>			✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	✓		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		✓	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓		✓
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	✓		✓
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓

I=Introduced		May 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>			✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>			✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓	✓
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>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		✓	✓
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓	✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

Mammals	
Red Fox	<i>Canis vulpes</i>
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>
Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>
Chines Water Deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>
Bank Vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>

Invertebrates

Butterflies	
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Brown Argus	<i>Plebejus agestis</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
Dragon- & Damselflies	
Variable Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>
Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma najas</i>
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>
Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>
Hairy Hawker	<i>Brachytron pratense</i>
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>
Scarce Chaser	<i>Libellula fulva</i>