

# Norfolk in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th May – 1st June 2025

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Great Crested Grebes



Shelduck



Buff-tip



Wall

Tour report by Duncan McNiven. Photos by Peter and Rita Cooper

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Tour Participants: Duncan McNiven (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Friday 30th May

After a mid-afternoon check-in at our comfortable North Norfolk hotel and quick introduction we made the most of the beautiful sunny weather and headed out to explore our surroundings. Pausing briefly only to admire the antics of the House Martins busily building their mud nests under the eaves of our hotel, we drove east a short distance to RSPB Titchwell.

At Titchwell, on our short walk from the car park through the woodland we were serenaded by the melodic songs of Eurasian Blackcap, Common Blackbird, Song Thrush and Eurasian Wren. Then, as we emerged into the reedbed zone, this gave way to the harsher chatter of Sedge and Reed Warbler songs, whilst Cetti's Warblers shouted loudly from various bushes in the marsh.

Several members of the group were keen to see Bearded Tits, and although there were some distant calls emanating deep in the reeds, none seemed close enough to warrant a sighting. There was some brief excitement when one call seemed to be coming from a patch of reeds close to the path. However, it was quickly discovered to our frustration that this was merely a Reed Warbler, an accomplished mimic, that was incorporating a bearded tit 'ping' into its repertoire of song!

Further along where the reeds gave way to open water the raucous sound of the nesting Black-headed Gull colony on an island was the dominant sound, but some of the birds were even rearing their young precariously on the roof of the hide. A good selection of wildfowl were swimming about including Canada Goose, Greylag Goose, Mute Swan, Egyptian Goose, Common Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Common Pochard and Tufted Duck mixed in with smaller numbers of Eurasian Coot and Common Moorhen. The breeding season seemed to be well advanced for Pied Avocet as several pairs had very cute but tiny chicks feeding along the margins and we also noted Eurasian Oystercatcher, Common Redshank and Northern Lapwing. The presence of both Little Ringed Plover and Common Ringed Plover allowed us to compare the distinguishing features of these two very similar small waders through the scope. A solitary Black-tailed Godwit close to the footpath was all that remained of the excitable flocks of this elegant species that pass through here earlier in the spring.

Feeling satisfied with our introduction to North Norfolk's birds we retraced our steps to the car park and returned to our comfortable hotel for our first evening meal together, flushing an unexpected Little Owl off the coast road on our way. No rest for the wicked though, as shortly after we had finished our meal we climbed back in the minibus and headed out to explore more of West Norfolk.

Dersingham Bog is a 400-acre Site of Special Scientific Interest that contains three distinct habitats - acid mire, heath and woodland. This interesting mix of habitats in a relatively small area harbours some special inhabitants and we spent the last few hours of the day waiting to see if we could see them. One of the inhabitants that we could happily have missed were the hordes of voracious midges but due it being a lovely, calm evening we weren't going to get the benefit of any nice breeze to blow them away. However, with the aid of various repellents and in one case a midge net, we managed to tough it out and enjoy the other wildlife on offer.

As we scanned the heathland in the fading light, we heard the familiar sound of a Common Cuckoo calling, Red Kites and Common Buzzards soared overhead, whilst out on the heath a couple of attractive Common Stonechats perched on prominent sprigs of heather. Mammal interest was provided by the presence of a group of attractive Fallow Deer that ventured out in the open in the gathering gloom. But it was the special birds of twilight that we were really here for and sure enough before too long the rhythmic churring of European Nightjars filled the air. We eventually glimpsed three Nightjars flitting along the edge of the trees bordering the heath as well as hearing the rather odd squeaking call of a roding European Woodcock somewhere over the canopy. As we made our way back to the vehicle in the near darkness the final part of our dusk chorus was completed by a Tawny Owl hooting somewhere off in the distance.

## Day 2

## Saturday 31st May

We rose nice and early the next morning to a nice sunny day with a gentle breeze and set off for a pre-breakfast stroll round Snettisham Country Park. Our main target here was the delightful, but now sadly much declined, Turtle Dove. Luckily for us, before too long we managed to track three birds down in the extensive scrub here by listening for their gentle purring call. The bushes and brambles were alive with the songs of spring, and we picked out Common Chiffchaff, Sedge Warbler, Common Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat, European Greenfinch, Common Linnet and European Goldfinch. We walked back through the dunes where there were a few perky Common Stonechats perched up. A quick check of the beach revealed little apart from some late staying Sanderlings running along the tideline, so we headed back to the hotel for a hearty breakfast.

After breakfast we decided to head east to the nature reserve at Cley Marshes where we took a walk out along the famous East Bank. With extensive reedbeds to our left and wet grazing marshes to our right we had plenty of interesting habitat to look at. The wet grasslands and ditches held a nice variety of wildfowl including Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Eurasian Wigeon and Eurasian Teal. Further along, the pools out towards Arnold's Marsh had good numbers of Common Shelduck along with several species of wader which were well into their breeding cycles including Northern Lapwing, Pied Avocet and Eurasian Oystercatcher. A Grey Plover however was a solitary lingering remnant of the large numbers of Arctic waders that spend their winters in North Norfolk. The species that captured our attention the most though were Common Redshanks who were carrying out their noisy displays across the marshes. One particularly confiding pair close to the footpath allowed us to watch the whole ritual in intimate detail as the male stealthily approached the female with his quivering wings raised, then briefly hovered above her in a flurry of white and brown feathers before quickly consummating the act.

After inspecting the Yellow Horned Poppies on the shingle beach and scoping a distant Common Kestrel and a Little Tern fishing in one of the beach pools, we turned round and headed back to the visitor centre, stopping occasionally to listen to songs emanating from the reeds. We glimpsed Reed Warblers, Sedge Warblers, Cetti's Warblers and Reed Buntings, but whilst we heard the 'pings' of a group of Bearded Tits, they steadfastly refused to shuffle to the tops of any reed stems so that we could see them. A Eurasian Bittern was glimpsed heading out on a fishing expedition over the reed bed and a few Norfolk Hawker dragonflies patrolled the ditches. Overhead we had regular sightings of Little Egrets, Great Egrets, Grey Herons and Eurasian Spoonbills.

We enjoyed a tasty lunch on the veranda of the Cley Visitor Centre overlooking the marshes after which we headed back westward along the coast road. On the way back we had a quick look at North Point Pools where some Egyptian Geese, Greylag Geese and Canada Geese were loafing in one of the fields and Western Marsh Harriers

were quartering the reeds. Titchwell RSPB reserve is always worth another look, so we called in there again for a pleasant evening stroll. The same variety of waders and other water birds as yesterday were present on the lagoons with the addition of some smart Mediterranean Gulls that dropped in to join the Black-headed Gulls briefly. On our way back to the car park through the woodland some lucky group members glimpsed a Spotted Flycatcher sitting on a snag, before we all returned to our excellent hotel which put on a splendid dinner for our final night's stay.

## Day 3

## Sunday 1st June

Our final day in Norfolk dawned bright and breezy, so we went for a pre-breakfast walk at Holme Dunes nature reserve. As we drove down the entrance track, we noticed a gamebird crossing the road ahead of us which on closer inspection proved to be a lovely Grey Partridge, now sadly a much rarer bird than the introduced Red-legged Partridges which are much commoner in these parts. We had a lovely walk through the dune vegetation where Common Whitethroats, Common Linnets, European Goldfinches and Common Reed Buntings were singing, and a variety of orchids tested our identification skills. The sunny weather also brought out a nice selection of butterflies, the best of which was the localised Wall Butterfly. Returning to our vehicle we noticed some deer out on the grazing marshes which turned out to be both Chinese Water Deer and Reeves's Muntjac.

After our final breakfast at the Le Strange Arms we headed off inland for a change of scenery to the extensive wetlands of the Fens and the dry heaths of the Brecks. Our first call was at RSPB Lakenheath which back in the day was a huge area of carrot fields but is now a wonderful mixture of reedbed, wet grassland and wet woodland. After checking in at the visitor centre, we made our way past some dense willow scrub where a Garden Warbler was singing and emerged at a shelter overlooking a reed-fringed lagoon. We sifted through the regular ducks on the mere such as Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, Eurasian wigeon, Common Pochard and Tufted Duck and were delighted to pick out a drake Garganey that was in the process of moulting into his 'eclipse' plumage. Little Grebes were 'whinnying' in the reeds as we pushed on along a path that revealed lots of dragonfly activity in the sunshine including Four-spotted Chaser, Scarce Chaser and Black-tailed Skimmer, as well as Blue-tailed Damselfly. A Common Cuckoo was belting out its song somewhere and some nifty scope work eventually picked it out sitting in a large poplar tree. Overhead, that beautiful little falcon the Eurasian Hobby was hawking the numerous dragonflies that were emerging from the wetland in the sunshine.

Further on we decided to drop into one of the hides concealed amongst the reeds and this proved to be a good choice as a pair of Great Crested Grebes were feeding their delightful stripy-headed young at point blank range. We kept hearing the high-pitched call of a Common Kingfisher somewhere to the left of the hide, but we couldn't see it, until it suddenly flew past the hide apertures so close that we could hear the 'whirr' of its wings!

A stroll up to the Joist Fen lookout resulted in a close encounter with a Eurasian Bittern that flew right over our heads and at the lookout itself we could hear the bugling of some Common Cranes deep in the reedbed, but today they had decided not to show themselves. We returned to the visitor centre along the riverbank where a Common Tern was fishing in the river and enjoyed our picnic lunches in the picnic area which we shared with a Common Lizard sunning itself in a flower bed.

All too soon our late spring weekend in Norfolk was coming to an end. Sue and Sheryl, who were in their own vehicle, were leaving early so it was hugs all round in the car park and then the rest of us headed to nearby Weeting

Heath in the minibus. This dry heath is famous for its breeding Stone Curlews but this year the birds had failed quite early due to their nest being predated. Consequently, none were visible from the hides although we did hear the distant calls of Common Curlews that also breed here. Nearby, we discovered that a pair of Spotted Flycatchers were nesting in the woodland belt, so we sat at a picnic table and watched the sylph-like male bringing food to his nest. An apparent dead birch twig lying on the bench turned out to be an exquisitely camouflaged Buff-tip Moth, which was lucky that it wasn't inadvertently sat on!

Now it really was time to bring to a close our weekend exploring the wonderful wildlife of Norfolk, so we headed back to Hunstanton in our minibus where we said our fond goodbyes and headed our separate ways.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I = Introduced		May - June 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	30	31	1
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	1		
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Barnacle Goose - I	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		1	
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>			1
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		1	
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>			1
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓
Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	3		
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>		3	
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>			H
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>		1	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓	✓	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			H
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	1	1	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		2	
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	H		
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>		✓	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓

I =Introduced		May - June 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	30	31	1
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>		1	
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>		1	2
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Little Owl - I	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1		
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H		
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			1
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			2
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	H	H	1
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>	✓	H	H
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>			H
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		✓	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		1	1
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>		✓	

I =Introduced		May - June 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	30	31	1
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	✓

## Others

### Mammals

Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
European Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>
Chinese Water Deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>
Reeves's Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>

### Reptiles

Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>
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### Butterflies

Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Peacock	<i>Aglaid io</i>
Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>

### Moths

Buff-tip	<i>Phalera bucephala</i>
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### Dragonflies

Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
Norfolk Hawker	<i>Aeshna isocles</i>
Scarce Chaser	<i>Libellula fulva</i>
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>