

Norfolk in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th – 14th May 2026

Tour report by Kevin Elsby



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Tour participants: Kevin Elsby (leader) with five Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Tuesday 12th May

The group met at the very well-appointed Caley Hall Hotel at Old Hunstanton, handily placed for exploring the reserves of the north Norfolk coast. We departed at 3.30pm for the short drive to the nearby Holme-next-the-Sea reserve, for our first encounters with the nature of Norfolk.

As soon as we arrived, a Cuckoo made known its presence, calling for a short period. It was not, however, located. Once we were assembled, we started our walk east towards the reserve reception area, along a raised bank which gave views over the tidal marsh on one side and wet meadows on the other. It was a blustery day to say the least, and this would prove challenging: but we were up for it!

The wind conspired to keep the birds generally quiet and low down in vegetation, but we soon found our first Meadow Pipits, some of which showed very well feeding on the short turf. A good number of Linnets was present, and we managed scope views of a couple of handsome males. Then we found one or two sprightly male Stonechats, perched sentinel-like on top of bramble bushes. Looking over the tidal marsh, we picked out a few Shelducks, which were easy to pick out given their unmistakable black and white plumage. Nearby, in one of the brackish pools, was a single Little Egret, walking in the shallows and looking for a meal. We then found a single Greenshank in the same area, but it didn't prove easy to get in the scope and was soon lost behind some vegetation.

Several Oystercatchers were seen, including a single bird perched on a post on the beach, which afforded good views in the telescope. Then, one of the group spotted a party of eight Sanderlings on the beach, some in darker summer dress, others in silvery-grey winter plumage, and all behaving like clockwork toys, running along the sand, then pausing at intervals to consume some morsel.

We retraced our steps to the minibus, finding a pair of Gadwalls as we did so, and a couple of Reeve's Muntjacs and a single Chinese Water Deer. A single female Marsh Harrier was quartering the marsh, as buffeted as we were by the wind.

After dinner, we drove to the bog at Dersingham to try for Nightjars. The weather suggested it would be a waste of time, but in fact the wind dropped enough for us to hear three or possibly four males, and two birds were seen in flight: a male and a female. We also heard another Cuckoo. We had made the best of the challenging weather, and had been duly rewarded for our efforts.

Day 2

Wednesday 13th May

We began the day with a pre-breakfast look for birds on the cliff and shore at Hunstanton. The wind was blowing strongly again, but at least it was dry. The first birds we saw were a group of nine Brent Geese, feeding on weed growing on the exposed rocks near the water's edge. There were several Oystercatchers nearby, together with a few Turnstones, in their attractive summer plumage. A single Collared Dove was also feeding on the beach. Walking to the north from the town brought us to the cliff, which is composed of a white layer of chalk overlying red iron rich rock, and is famous among geologists. We managed to pick out two Fulmars here, one on a nest and the other giving excellent flight views on its stiff wings, the profile quite unlike that of a gull.

After breakfast, we made our way to the famous Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Cley, this year celebrating its hundredth birthday. We paused briefly to purchase lunch at a delicatessen, and then proceeded to the beach car park. We walked east along the shingle beach for four hundred metres or so to a new (mobile) hide overlooking a scrape. We endured a heavy shower of rain, but dried out quickly in the hide.

Unfortunately, the waders we wanted to see were somewhat distant and in the sunshine after the shower, were in high-contrast glare. However, we got a brief glimpse of a Bittern in flight, as well as some Ringed Plovers and Dunlins feeding on the mud, before we retreated to the reserve visitor centre, observing Yellow Horned-poppy, Sea Campion and Sea Beet as we did so. We purchased our permits and walked to three of the main hides overlooking another part of the reserve. We were able to get much better views of the birds on offer, including a group of sixty or so Black-tailed Godwits, some Gadwalls, many Shelducks and Avocets, as well as a party of Dunlins and Ringed Plovers. On a couple of occasions, a Marsh Harrier put the godwits up, and we were able to clearly see why they are called 'black-tailed'. Swallows provided entertainment: they were nesting inside two of the hides we visited. A single Spoonbill, now a regular breeding bird in Norfolk, was showing well, and we all enjoyed excellent scope views. We were able to compare the songs of Sedge and Reed Warblers, but neither species was seen. We also saw a single Viviparous Lizard, sunning itself on the wooden boardwalk.

By now, the weather had improved immensely, and we returned to the visitor centre for a drink before moving back west to our last destination today, the RSPB reserve at Titchwell.

Looking at the approaching weather, we made a fast walk to the first hide overlooking a large freshwater pool, arriving just in time to beat a strong windy squall, accompanied by rain. From the hide we had excellent close views of more Avocets, Black-headed Gulls (many of which were nesting on the hide roof) and a variety of other birds, including more Brent Geese and Shovelers.

When the rain shower had cleared, we walked to the next hide, about three hundred metres away. The sun came out and we were treated to some excellent birding. We obtained good, close views of Little Ringed Plover, Redshank, Mediterranean Gull and, best of all, a Wood Sandpiper and a Temminck's Stint, both of which had paused their northward migration to stock up on food.

We then walked the last leg to end up on the lovely, unspoiled, sandy beach, where we had fantastic views of more Turnstones, as well as close views of a feeding group of Sanderlings, many in summer attire. We then beat a retreat back to the van to avoid an approaching heavy shower. It had been windy most of the day, but the forecast persistent rain hadn't materialised, and we were able (more or less) to dodge the showers. It had been a great day, with some lovely birds.

Day 3

Thursday 14th May

Today, our last day, was spent in Breckland, an area of East Anglia to the south of Kings Lynn, which afforded a different landscape and habitats where we could see new birds. We left straight after breakfast for the drive to Weeting Heath Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve. The journey took just over an hour, and when we pulled into the car park we were in one of the latest heavy showers we had been experiencing. However, after waiting in the minibus for a while, the rain stopped and we made our way to the West Hide, about a hundred metres from the car park. We were greeted with excellent views of our number one target: Stone-curlews. In the sunshine, we saw

a group of four birds in excellent light, interacting with each other on a ridge. We all saw them very well in the telescope. Next, we saw two Woodlarks. Although they were closer to the hide, not all clients were able to get on to them due to vegetation blocking their view, before they flew off together.

Next, we headed west, for the short drive to the RSPB reserve at Lakenheath. Twenty minutes from leaving Weeting, we arrived at this large bird reserve which has abundant reed beds, freshwater pools and lots of poplar trees. Having checked in at reception, we started our walk out to the observation platform overlooking a large reedbed. Our first port of call was to check out a pool a couple of hundred metres along the main track, where we saw a splendid male Common Pochard, a couple of Canada Geese, a single Little Grebe and several Coots and Moorhens, all the time listening to a vocal but hidden Cuckoo. Moving along the track, we could hear several Reed Warblers in song.

The next stop was at the Fen Hide, and here we obtained views of these birds, as well as two or three Sedge Warblers, coming down from the reeds to take a drink of water at the base of the plant before disappearing. We were fortunate enough to spot a male Kingfisher, which spent some time at the top of the reeds on the other side of the pool, looking down for fish. After a couple of failed dives, he eventually succeeded in catching a minnow before flying off, presumably to feed one of his offspring in a nest elsewhere on the reserve. A female Reed Bunting put in a brief appearance, as did a couple of Canada Geese, and at least two Water Rails called to each other on either side of the pond, but remained hidden.

We continued to the furthest part of the reserve and had a well-earned rest and ate our lunch at the observation platform. We saw the first of two Hobbies here, and admired the agility of these aerial masters, recently arrived from their wintering grounds thousands of miles to the south. Some of the group then caught a brief look at a Bittern as it flew over the reeds, then dropped down out of view. Despite the weather forecast, we had managed to dodge most of the rain over the last couple of days, and although the wind had dropped slightly from yesterday, we still had rain to contend with. Working our way back to the reserve centre, we listened again to the Cuckoos singing out of sight in the poplar plantation, and then had our first glimpse of a Whitethroat, singing on the top of a flowering elder bush.

We revived ourselves with a well-earned warm drink in the reception centre, before making our way back to the hotel in Hunstanton, where the group broke up and participants went on their way home. It had been a very enjoyable short break with many excellent sightings: the highlights had been Bittern, Hobby, Stone-curlew, Woodlark, Wood Sandpiper and Temminck's Stint.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
			12	13	14
	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		60	
	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			4
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		5	8
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		3	
	Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>			2
	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	5	40	
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		10	
	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	2	2	
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1	6	5
	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		1	1
	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	1	1	2
	Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	2		
	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	4		
	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	2	8	4
	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1		3
	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	1		
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			1
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	6	10	
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		1	
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			2
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		2	2
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		3	8
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			1
	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>			4
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	6	100	
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	1	120	
	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		25	
	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		2	
	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	1	2	1
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	2	1	
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		60	
	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>		1	
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	3	15	
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1		
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		25	
	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>		1	
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	8	40	
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		15	
	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	1	1	
	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		5	
	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		4	
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	7	250	2
	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyophaga melanocephala</i>		3	
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	2	5	
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			20
	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		2	

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
			12	13	14
	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		2	
	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>		2	1
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1	2	
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1	2	2
	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		2	
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	1
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			1
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	
	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			2
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	1		
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	2	6	2
	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		4	4
	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	2		4
	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		3	
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			1
	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>			1
	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			2
	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	2	2	
	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		8	
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	4	10	3
	Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		4	
	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	2	2	2
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	2		
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	1	2	2
	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		3	3
	Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		3	5
	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1	1
	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>	2		
	Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>			2
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		2	2
	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		2	
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			1
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			1
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		3	1
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1	5	2
	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	2		
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		2	
	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	1	1	1
	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		4	
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	5	6	
	Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			1
	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		1	
	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	8		
	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	3	5	
	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		2	1