

# Norfolk in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

8 - 10 November 2013

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Report compiled by Barry Oxley



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## Day 1

Friday 8th November

After travelling from various locations in the UK we all converged at the bar in the comfortable Shellbrooke Hotel for pre-dinner drinks, discussed the next day's itinerary, and after a convivial chat retired to bed looking forward to the next day's birding.

## Day 2

Saturday 9th November

With a full day planned we ordered our breakfast earlier than the standard 8.30 a.m. and departed at 9.00 a.m., noting flocks of Fieldfare and Starlings flying purposefully west, presumably migrants just arrived and following the coast before heading inland. It was a balmy November morning with a slight westerly and hazy sun which bode well for our first day.

The RSPB's Titchwell reserve was our first port of call and as soon as the shop was opened at 9.30 we were inside to check out the sightings board. We checked out the feeders which were attracting the usual species of bird, and so after noting a lone Coal Tit we made for the long straight path to the sea. The tides dictated our anxiety to get to the sea promptly, however it is extremely hard to walk quickly along the straight as there is always so much to see. A lone Spotted Redshank required our prompt attention as we proceeded and as we scoped it three of its mates appeared to keep it company.

A number of birders were congregated on the beach, a good sign we thought, and we were not to be disappointed as we zoned in on a smart Black-throated Diver which was comparatively close in and gave us all good views. Four Long-tailed Ducks were also bobbing around just off shore; three were males still in breeding plumage. It was a rare treat to get such good views in winter of these rare northern species, which had chosen to over winter on the Norfolk coast. After views of some Common Scoters we reluctantly moved off to visit the new hides.

Marsh Harriers were quartering the reed beds, and water rails and Cetti's Warblers called as we entered the hide. Both Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits were on the lagoons here giving us a good opportunity to compare plumage differences. A few Avocets were roosting among the hordes of Wigeon and Teal and a small flock of Common Gulls gave good views near the hide. Three Knot were found and allowed good views before moving off to pursue agendas unknown.

Returning towards the shop a Merlin gave us a flyby just before we were alerted to the presence of a Short-eared Owl. This bird was quartering the fields to the west of the reserve and eventually perched on a post enabling good scope views. A fitting finale to our Titchwell visit we thought.

After lunch at Titchwell we headed across country to the RSPB's Ouse Washes reserve, stopping on the way to admire a small flock of Pink-footed Geese feeding on sugar beet or the like in a cultivated field. We were only able to spend a short time at the washes because the 3.30 p.m. swan feeding at nearby Welney was imminent. Here also the expected Tree Sparrows on the feeders did not co-operate so we soon departed, arriving during feeding of the swans. The adult Whooper's and their progeny were scooping up beaks-full of corn distributed for their evening meal, greedily replacing body weight after their long migration from their breeding grounds in Iceland.

After a long and fulfilling day we made for home and the comforts of our hotel, enjoyed a tasty evening meal before completing the species check list and making for bed.

## Day 3

## Sunday 10th November

A dramatic change in the weather heralded our day with a bitter easterly blowing and white tops to the ocean waves. We checked out of the hotel and departed as yesterday arriving at Cley NNR about 10.00 a.m., purchased our entry tickets and made for the southern hide. We listened for Bearded Tits on the way but did not really expect a sighting because of the violent swaying of the reeds. A flock of about 50 Black-tailed Godwits were roosting fairly close to the hide and after scanning through the numerous ducks we returned to the van. We then drove down to the beach car park to explore the northern part of the reserve passing a small flock of grazing Brent Geese mixed in with some Greylags.

The incursion of the sea has reshaped the shingle bank here and erased some of the marshland and hides. It was blowing hard so we briefly stood in the shelter of a building to do a mini sea watch but the water was very choppy and so after spotting a Red-throated Diver passing at speed opted for a brisk walk to the remaining hide. Here there were more overwintering ducks and a lone Dunlin foraging in the mud. Returning, we 'scoped a flock of around a hundred Golden Plover which were facing into the wind on the meadow, their attractive golden plumage shimmering in the hazy light. Meadow Pipits and Skylarks were also present nearby, feeding on grubs and insects and constantly calling and fluttering off to another favoured feeding spot.

After lunch in the warmth of the crowded café we took the long drive south east to Horsey Mill on the Broads. Most chose to drive their cars here saving some miles on their onward journey, and after wrapping up well we walked the trail alongside the mere looking for birds. Goldfinches were noticeable, and we came upon a splendid small flock of Common Redpoll feeding on silver birch seeds which allowed good views. The trail was muddy and slippery but we persevered, eventually arriving at a renowned Marsh Harrier roost, we counted ten or so but were informed by a local that over 50 overwintered here.

Returning to the car park our ears were attuned for the cronking of cranes, these decided not to play ball despite the local birder informing us there was now an expanding flock of 34. Cranes can be extremely elusive considering their size, presumably because of past persecution, they also have a large territory, so maybe next time we will hit the jackpot.

It was now nearly dark so we said our farewells and departed for our respective destinations with some great bird sightings to reflect upon.

Many thanks for being such a fun group and I hope to be able to sink a few bebies with you again on another Naturetrek trip.

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## Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; c = approximate count; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	November	
			9th	10th
1	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	20c	20c
2	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		6
3	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓
4	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	50c	100c
5	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	100c	50c
6	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	50c	
7	Brant Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	10	150c
8	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	20c	6
9	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	1000c	
10	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	6	10
11	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	6	6
12	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	100's	100's
13	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	50c	50c
14	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	20	30c
15	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	2	
16	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	100's	100's
17	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	100c	
18	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	4	
19	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	3	4
20	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>	4	
21	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		1
22	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	1	
23	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	3	4
24	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	6	
25	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	h	h
26	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	
27	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	6	
28	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	100c	4
29	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1
30	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	6	10c
31	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	
32	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	6	3
33	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1	
34	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	h	
35	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	6	4
36	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	20	10
37	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	10	20c
38	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	6	
39	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	100c	30c
40	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	5	100c
41	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	6	
42	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1	
43	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	4	50c
44	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	2	
45	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	6	
46	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	4	
47	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	20c	5

	Common name	Scientific name	November	
			9th	10th
48	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	20	3
49	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	3	
50	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	5	1
51	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	15	
52	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓
53	Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	15	1
54	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	1	
55	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓
56	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	6	
57	Rock/Feral Dove	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	✓
58	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
59	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓
60	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		1
61	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	1	
62	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1
63	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1
64	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	
65	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	1	6
66	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓
67	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
68	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	1	
69	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	4	4
70	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	6	2
71	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	6	10
72	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	h
73	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	1000c	1000c
74	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	20	4
75	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	100's	6
76	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	6	
77	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	4	2
78	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	1	
79	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		30
80	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	6	h
81	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	2	
82	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	2	4
83	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	30	
84	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	1	
85	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		30c
86	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	30c	20c

## Mammals

Grey Squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*

Rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Bank Vole ?, *Myodes glareolus*?

Reeve's Muntjac, *Muntiacus reevesi*