

Norfolk in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

14th – 16th November 2023



Grey Plover



Curlew



Geese at sunset



Waxwings

Tour report by John Williamson, photos by Mike Uren



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: John Williamson (Leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Tuesday 14th November

After booking into our rooms at the Le Strange Arms Hotel we decided to take a short drive to Thornham Harbour and take a walk along the raised seawall between there and Holme Dunes.

Here excellent close views were obtained of Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank and Eurasian Curlew feeding in the tidal creeks adjacent to the car park. Further out along the seawall we enjoyed 'scope views of a perched Western Marsh Harrier and some close views of a number of Little Egrets.

Small numbers of Dark-bellied Brent Geese were seen flying onto the beach where a large gull roost was forming, containing over 800 Common Gull, 400 Black-headed Gull and smaller numbers of both European Herring Gull and Great Black-backed Gull. A few Common Shelduck and groups of Eurasian Wigeon and Eurasian Teal were feeding on the saltings adjacent to the main creeks.

We saw Meadow Pipit, European Rock Pipit and Skylark on the saltings adjacent to the creeks and as darkness encroached a Common Kingfisher flashed across the top of the seawall and out across the saltings as groups of Common Starlings headed off to roost. We also heard singing Cetti's Warbler and watched a late hunting Common Kestrel hovering over the adjacent grazing marshes as skeins of Greylag Geese headed towards their evening roost at RSPB Titchwell Marsh.

Just before we reached the vehicle we were treated to several skeins of Pink-footed Geese heading out towards the communal roost on the mud and sand of the harbour mouth.

We returned to the hotel in time for the party to settle into their rooms before dinner was taken at 18.45.

Day 2

Wednesday 15th November

Prior to leaving the hotel we had excellent views of a flock of 20 Northern Fulmar on the seas off the Hotel car park, where Red-throated Diver, Goosander, Guillemot and several groups of Eurasian Teal were seen passing. Waders moving west along the beach included Eurasian Oystercatcher and Ruddy Turnstone, with several small groups of Dunlin and Sanderling.

Following a pleasant drive along the coast we arrived at Wiveton to enjoy spectacular views of a flock of 12 Bohemian Waxwings feeding in a cotoneaster bush adjacent to the Bell Inn. A short drive to Cley Marsh NWT followed where we were able to enjoy lots of ducks including Gadwall, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail. Marsh Harriers were hunting over the reedbeds and a flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese fed contentedly in the Eye Field.

Along the East Bank, despite the strong WSW wind, we also had views of Pied Avocets, Eurasian Curlew and Black-tailed Godwits. We spent some time observing the sea at the end of the East Bank where a strong westwards passage of Dunlin and Sanderling was underway with a single group of Red Knot also passing. A European Stonechat hopped from post to post in the strong wind on the landward side of the shingle beach and a close pass by a beautiful drake Goosander was a highlight.

After lunch at Cley NWT visitor centre we drove the short distance to Blakeney Freshes, where we climbed to the top of Friary Hills to overlook the grazing marsh. Here a compact group of 26 Cattle Egrets fed amongst the

grazing cattle. Some of the more common birds we encountered along the track included European Greenfinch, Bullfinch and European Goldfinch. A group of Eurasian Curlew offered close views in the south-western corner of the grazing marsh. We also had brief views of a group of 12 Twite in the south-western corner of the grazing marsh that proceeded to fly across the seawall and onto the adjacent saltmarsh. Despite searching further we only ever obtained distant flight views of the flock on the saltmarsh.

The final destination of the afternoon was the saltmarsh at Stiffkey. Here we had excellent views of both Great and Little Egrets, and a brief encounter with an immature Eurasian Spoonbill. Marsh Harriers quartered over the throngs of Eurasian Curlew and Dark-bellied Brent Geese feeding on the saltmarsh before a ringtail Hen Harrier appeared, quickly followed by a female or immature Merlin harassing the harrier.

Brief and distant views were obtained of the female Pallid Harrier as it came into roost across the saltmarsh, dropping into cover all too quickly near Wells East Hills. All the time small groups of Common Scoter passed distantly west at sea.

As light began to fail we headed back to the hotel for our evening meal at 18.45

Day 3

Thursday 16th November

An early morning departure saw us at Snettisham RSPB before first light. We ate our packed breakfasts before heading off on the long walk from the car park to the pits at the southern end of the reserve.

Our arrival at the southern end of the reserve saw that the tide was already very high and that waders were crowded on the disappearing mudflats. An estimated 3,500 Oystercatcher were massing on the closest section of mud. As the tide flowed and the light gathered it became apparent that c.70,000 Knot were also amassed on the mudflats with c.1,500 Redshank, c.2,000 Bar-tailed Godwits, c.1,500 Curlew and c.850 Golden Plover. Smaller numbers of Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Grey plover, Dunlin, Turnstone and Ringed Plover were also present, occasionally being flushed by attendant Marsh Harriers. The morning light was dull and flat with overcast conditions but fortunately little of the previous days wind was evident.

The amazing spectacle of c.20,000 Pink-footed Geese leaving the mudflats to flight onto adjacent farmland unfolded in waves as regiments of birds took to the air together. Smaller numbers of Greylag and Dark-bellied Brent Geese offered a supporting cast.

Before leaving for the carpark we took a look in the southern most hide and were pleased to see 13 Common Goldeneye and an almost full summer-plumaged Black-throated Diver present on the pit in front of the hide.

As we walked back north to the carpark we took time to enjoy the now dispersing waders on the estuary as the tide ebbed. A surprise was a very late Barn Swallow heading south over the pits. We also encountered a mixed tit flock and good numbers of Common Blackbirds and a few Redwings, and a perched Red Kite offered excellent 'scope views at close range.

We then headed back to Hunstanton to quickly check out the sea from the clifftop vantage point. We immediately located a Great Northern Diver and two Velvet Scoter amongst a flock of Common Scoter exceeding 750 in number, with a drake Goosander nearby.

We then took the short drive to Titchwell Marsh RSPB for lunch before heading to the sea. Over 35 Avocet were feeding on the freshmarsh with small numbers of Black-tailed Godwit on the tidal marsh. Also on the tidal marsh a female Goosander showed very well. On reaching the sea, once again a large flock of almost c.1,000 Common

Scoter held small numbers of Velvet Scoter, this time offering somewhat better viewing than at Hunstanton. Also here Bar-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher, Curlew, Dunlin and Sanderling were seen feeding along the tideline.

With the afternoon closing out we watched double-figure numbers of Marsh Harriers coming in to roost in the reedbed before we returned to the clients vehicles at Old Hunstanton at 16.00 bringing this very enjoyable short tour to an end.



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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only, I = Introduced)

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023		
		14	15	16
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓	✓	✓
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓
Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		✓	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>		✓	✓
Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>			✓
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			✓
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓	✓
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			✓
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓
Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓
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>	✓	✓	✓
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			✓
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓		✓
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</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>		✓	✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023		
		14	15	16
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</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>		✓	
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	✓
Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>			✓
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>			✓
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		✓	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓	
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>		✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			✓
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		✓	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>		✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓		
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023		
		14	15	16
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓		
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	November 2023		
		14	15	16
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Chinese Water Deer - I	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>		✓	
Reeves' Muntjac - I	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>		✓	
European Hare - I	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>			✓
European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>			✓