

Norfolk in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

16th – 18th January 2026

Tour report by John Williamson



Naturetrek

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Tour participants: John Williamson (leader) with four Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 16th January

The group assembled at 2.30pm at the Golden Lion Hotel in Hunstanton, Norfolk, our base for the remainder of the weekend. A brief introduction was followed by a trip to the nearby RSPB Titchwell. As we boarded the vehicle in Hunstanton the surrounding area held Black-headed Gulls and Herring Gulls, c.150 Feral Pigeons, Collared Doves, Jackdaws and Starlings on the rooftops and a group of c.20 Eurasian Curlews were feeding in a roadside field just outside the town.

On arrival at Titchwell, we were treated to about 2000 Pink-footed Geese whiffling down onto the nearby marshes in preparation for the evening roost. The late afternoon light was wonderful and the dark shapes of some twenty-five Marsh Harriers could be picked out over the reedbeds as they too prepared to roost in the adjacent reedbeds. Wildfowl on the reserve included Shelduck, Mallard, Gadwall, about fifty Shovelers, thirty Pochards, a few Tufted Ducks and Eurasian Teals, and a single female Goldeneye. Around 300 Greylag Geese were noisily bathing, before they flew east just before dusk. A small party of eight White-fronted Geese also flew east.

Waders were in short supply, but a flock of about 300 Northern Lapwings were joined by a few Golden Plovers, a single Black-tailed Godwit flew over the brackish marsh, and a few small groups of Curlews flew low north towards the shoreline.

In the reedbeds either side of the west bank, at least two Water Rails were calling, and two Little Egrets foraged in the failing light on the adjacent saltmarsh. Several Cormorants came in from the sea to roost, and a female Merlin flashed past us and over the reedbed to harry a small group of Starlings gathering above their reedbed roost. We returned to the hotel for dinner at 7.00pm.

Day 2

Saturday 17th January

An early morning walk to the nearby cliffs at Hunstanton produced good views of Purple Sandpiper, Sanderling, eighteen Ruddy Turnstones and numerous Redshanks and Oystercatchers. A couple of flocks of Knots, totalling perhaps a hundred birds, flew distantly south over The Wash. The cliff face held several Fulmars back at their nest sites, with a few birds floating along the cliff face. On the sea, a drake Red-breasted Merganser and a single Great Crested Grebe were the only birds we could find.

Following breakfast at the hotel, we headed to Thornham Harbour, where we watched a Greenshank feeding in the channel, giving good comparison with a couple of Redshanks. A couple of Rock Pipits were on the adjacent saltmarsh, while the grazing marsh held both Skylark and Meadow Pipit. The first Red Kite of the day soared overhead as we departed inland for Choseley Barns.

During a brief stop at the barns, we found several Curlews feeding in the arable fields, with at least four Buzzards noted, either sitting in the fields or perching on top of the hedgerows. Both Pheasants and Red-legged Partridges were seen in the field edges, as were a number of Chinese Water Deer. A group of about ten Yellowhammers was noted in one of the hedgerows, and a small group of Linnets flew overhead.

We moved quickly on to Burnham Overy grazing marshes, where a rather muddy walk down Whincover to the sea wall provided excellent comparison views of flocks of Brent, Barnacle, Pink-footed and Greylag Geese grazing in the adjacent fields. Around 300 Lapwings were also present with hundreds of Wigeons and Teals in the foot drains and floods, and about fifty Golden Plovers flew overhead. At least three Red Kites patrolled the distant sand dunes with a couple of Marsh Harriers, as two Cetti's Warblers sang from the scrub beside the ditches. On the pool adjacent to the floodwall, a Red-necked Grebe was fishing, and the estuary on the opposite side of the flood wall held plenty of Redshanks in the tidal estuary, and a single Grey Plover.

A quick lunch was taken in Wells, where we saw at least twelve Little Grebes feeding in the harbour, before we headed off to Stiffkey Flood, via Warham. The hoped-for Cattle Egrets were absent from Warham, but on arrival at Stiffkey Flood we encountered large flocks of Wigeons, Shovelers and Teals on the pools, with the odd Shelduck also present, and about a hundred Lapwings. Feeding among the plethora of wildfowl was a single Glossy Ibis, its dark form carrying a prehistoric air as it wing-stretched between bouts of feeding activity. A hunch suggested that a return visit to Warham might prove fruitful, as we had not actually managed to locate any cattle. On our arrival, we found a single Cattle Egret feeding in a muddy field with lots of Black-headed Gulls, but strangely it was nowhere near the cattle herd, which was some hundred metres further west.

Pleased with the quality of the return for the day so far, we decided to head to the Stiffkey campsite wood and car park overlooking the saltmarsh. On the approach road, we saw a Chiffchaff in the hedgerow, before a wander through the wood produced Long-tailed Tit, Blue and Great Tits, while a Song Thrush sang from that adjacent campsite. As the sun dropped in the sky, we returned to the campsite car park to overlook the saltings. Here, we were thrilled to see not one, but two male Hen Harriers, an adult and a sub-adult, quartering over the saltings and adjacent beach. The younger of the harriers drifted off to the east, while the adult male returned west, offering very good views as it hunted over the saltings. Also present were several Marsh Harriers, two Red Kites, and a Peregrine Falcon which at one point stooped at one of the Hen Harriers, before dropping down and roosting on the shingle bank beyond the saltings, close to some 5000 roosting Pink-footed Geese. A small number of Little Egrets fed on the saltmarsh and a pair of Ravens put in a timely appearance, landing on some old wooden posts and offering excellent views, just before we decided to head back towards the hotel in search of a Barn Owl in the fading afternoon light.

As we drove through Burnham Overy, a Barn Owl was spotted quartering the grazing marsh to the east, rounding off a very successful day in the field. More Pink-footed Geese were also seen here, and a Buzzard perched in a tree close to the road at dusk.

Day 3

Sunday 18th January

A damp and foggy start to the day provided difficult conditions, and we really needed to be at Titchwell to look at the sea before the tide dropped. However, this was not possible in the conditions, so after breakfast we decided to head east along the coast to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Cley. En route, we passed through Warham and again saw a Cattle Egret in the field adjacent to Garden Drove.

On arrival at NWT Cley, visibility was still not ideal, but we wandered out to Bishop's Hide where we found twenty-one Avocets roosting on the scrape, with small numbers of Lapwings, Teals, Shovelers and Shelducks. A

single male Marsh Harrier appeared from the gloom to quarter the marsh, while a Snipe gave excellent views very close to the front of the hide.

We decided to head further east to try and lose the fog, and made a short visit to nearby Sheringham where the Black Redstart (of the eastern subspecies), which had been present for about three weeks, gave us spectacular views for fifteen minutes as it perched in a nearby bush and then began feeding on the ground less than ten metres from us, before hopping up onto a nearby wall.

As the sun was breaking through, we returned to NWT Cley and walked out on the East Bank, to the sea. Here we saw a pair of Stonechats beside the path, and a Common Scoter, a Great Crested Grebe and a Red-throated Diver were on the sea, while a Razorbill and a further four Red-throated Divers flew east offshore. On the marsh behind the shingle beach a pair of Pintails showed very well, and another pair flew overhead towards the grazing marsh, where there were considerable numbers of Wigeons, Teals and Shelducks, with smaller numbers of Mallards and Gadwalls. Water levels were high on the marsh, and the few waders present included Redshank and Curlew.

We took lunch at the visitor centre at NWT Cley in ever-improving conditions, before heading back west along the coast to RSPB Titchwell. On arrival, we headed straight out towards the sea to look for divers, grebes and sea duck. After locating a lone Lesser Black-backed Gull on the grazing marsh, we then had excellent views of a single Bar-tailed Godwit on the brackish marsh, with two Black-tailed Godwits adjacent for comparison.

On reaching the beach, viewing was not ideal: the distances involved were challenging, with the tide very low. However, we managed to locate a small group of Dunlins and a single Knot flying west along the foreshore, where about fifty Sanderlings were feeding. Further west, some 500 Oystercatchers were on the beach with smaller numbers of Redshank and Bar-tailed Godwit, and considerable numbers of Common, Black-headed, Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls were also present. After some scanning, we managed to locate single Slavonian and Black-necked Grebes, a Red-throated and two Great Northern Divers, about ten Red-breasted Mergansers and three Long-tailed Ducks. On the return walk to the car park, we had brief views of a Reed Bunting beside the path.

With the light fading, we returned to the hotel for clients to collect their vehicles, at the end of another successful day in the field, and a lovely winter break in Norfolk.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	January 2026		
			16	17	18
	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		35	
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	350	✓	✓
	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	2000	10000	✓
	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>	8		
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		30	✓
	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	50	✓	✓
	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	3		5
	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	30		✓
	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓		✓
	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>			✓
	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>			3
	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	1		
	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		1	10
	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	1	✓	✓
	Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓
	Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	150	✓	✓
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	2H		
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓		✓
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		12	2
	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	1		
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓	✓
	Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>			1
	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			1
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		200	500
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			21
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		1	
	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓	✓	
	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	300	300	500
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	25	✓	✓
	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			✓
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	1		2
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		1	

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	January 2026		
			16	17	18
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		18	
	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		100	✓
	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		4	
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		1	50
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			10
	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>		1	
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	
	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			1
	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			1
	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			6
	Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>			2
	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		15	
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	
	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		1	
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		1	
	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>		1	✓
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		
	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		2	
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	25	✓	✓
	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	5	✓	✓
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		1	
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	✓
	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1		
	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1	
	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓
	Carriion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2	
	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>		2H	
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		1	
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		1	✓
	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		✓	
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓

I=Introduced		January 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	16	17	18
(Eastern) Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus phoenicuroides</i>			1
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		1	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		2	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		10	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓

Mammals

I=Introduced		January 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	16	17	18
European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓
European Hare - I	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>			
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓		✓
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>		1	
Reeves's Muntjac - I	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	3	✓	✓
Fallow Deer - I	<i>Dama dama</i>			
Chinese Water Deer - I	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>	4	✓	✓
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	
Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			