

Norfolk in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 12th February 2026



Great Northern Diver



Hen Harrier



Greater White-fronted Geese



Slavonian Grebe

Tour report by Brian Small



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Summary

Old Hunstanton is a great base for a winter tour to North Norfolk, with many key localities such as Titchwell, Holme and Snettisham close at hand. Wells, Holkham, and Stiffkey are also only a short drive away. For this trip we stayed at the Caley Hotel, which had friendly staff and very good food. We ‘enjoyed’ some inclement weather, but not enough to stop us from heading out with enthusiasm, and we made the most of our time in the field and deserved the amazing array of species we saw. These included many highlights, though those that will no doubt stick in the memory would include a very neat Slavonian Grebe at Titchwell (so good that we went back for seconds), a feeding Great Northern Diver in Wells Harbour, a lovely Treecreeper in Holkham Wood, a field full of White-fronted Geese at Titchwell, and two Glossy Ibises at Stiffkey. Perhaps the best were the Merlin and male Hen Harrier at Stiffkey Marshes, where after a long and sometimes wet day, the sun came out and lit up the saltmarsh and dunes.

Day 1

Tuesday 10th February

Old Hunstanton – Titchwell RSPB

Having arrived at the Caley Hotel, Hunstanton, and following a quick meet up, we made use of the remaining daylight by heading to Titchwell RSPB. After all the rainy weather recently, it was a little wet underfoot, but along the boardwalk to Fen Hide it was dry, and worth the detour as we watched a roosting rufous-morph Tawny Owl sat deep within an ivy-clad tree.

On the freshmarsh, the usual array of ducks was present: Gadwall, Pochard, Pintail, Shoveler, Teal and Wigeon (the most numerous), all showing at very close range. A tight group of Avocets sat among bathing gulls and a handful of Snipe were picked out feeding in some reed stubble. A noisy flock of Lapwings sat ‘peewit’ing on the bund with hundreds of lovely Golden Plovers; they would occasionally all wheel up and back down, spooked by something unseen, or imaginary. As Marsh Harriers, Brent Geese and Cormorants flew over, we ended at the northern Tidal Pool, where we promptly picked out a female Greater Scaup and a winter-plumaged Slavonian Grebe, the latter performing very well.

Day 2

Wednesday 11th February

Titchwell – Holkham – Wells Harbour – North Point pools – Stiffkey

After breakfast, we drove east towards Wells-next-the-Sea, pausing after only a short distance to see a good-sized, mixed flock of Greylag and White-fronted Geese by the side of the road at Titchwell. The smaller whitefronts were easily picked out with their black-barred bellies; we counted over 150 of them!

After buying lunch at Burnham Deepdale, next up was Holkham, where we made another roadside stop to look across the western floods, seeing our only Great Egret in the process, plus many Grey Herons, Lapwings and wildfowl. We parked at Lady Anne’s Drive, and the rain was at its peak, but we saw some smart Snipes, then braved a walk west, getting a little wet, and were rewarded with a Treecreeper for our efforts; truth be told, most small birds had got their heads down. From the hide we saw a perched Buzzard, a handful of Linnets, many Wigeons

and Lapwings, and by heading north through the trees to look at the sea, we were rewarded with some Sanderlings and a Great Northern Diver feeding close to the shoreline.

At Wells Wood and Lifeboat Station, we made a quick check of the harbour before eating lunch, and were lucky in finding another feeding Great Northern Diver, this time at much closer range and on glass-like water. It dived, staying underwater seemingly forever at times, but always surfaced with either a crab, a scallop or a mussel: we had a perfect view (apart from the rain). Out on the sands, the rising tide was pushing flocks of Bar-tailed Godwits, Knots, Grey Plovers and Oystercatchers closer, and Brian having mentioned that this was a good spot for Red-breasted Merganser, three were swiftly found, including a loose-crested male. A soggy lunch was eaten in the car park, with brief entertainment from a couple of Coal Tits and more wheeling flocks of Lapwings and Golden Plovers. Just east of Wells, we checked out North Point pools, where a good number of bathing gulls included our only Lesser Black-backed, and a distinctive first-winter Caspian Gull, with a characteristic white head and body (not all are this smart!). A single Grey Partridge was seen from the front of the bus as we left.

We ended our day at Stiffkey, where we first tried for some reported Glossy Ibises, and were successful as two flew about. One bird was carrying a stick almost as if it was trying to attract the other. We parked down at the campsite, and having walked west a short distance stood and scanned the saltmarsh for an hour or so. It was a waiting game, but as the sun finally emerged and lit the landscape, we first found a Merlin sat on a *Suaeda* bush, with prolonged 'scope views much appreciated; then, finally, one of the larger raptors was not a Marsh Harrier or a Red Kite, but a lovely male Hen Harrier. It swept about the marsh before suddenly dropping behind some bushes, and that was it. A couple of Sparrowhawks were also seen here.

Actually, Stiffkey wasn't the true end of our day, as we paused briefly at Holme and saw a Barn Owl hunting across the wet fields and reeds; we would try for better views in the morning.

Day 3

Thursday 12th February

Holme NOA – Titchwell RSPB – Choseley – Snettisham

Our day started with a pre-breakfast visit to Holme, and a short walk on the Peddar's Way to watch over the saltings and fields. With immaculate timing, it was not long before a fine Barn Owl was found hunting over the fields; if we had arrived two minutes later, we might have missed it. The bushes were quiet, but the sea and shore was busier. Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers and a single Fulmar flew past (some more distant than others), and on the shore were Oystercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits and the occasional Knot.

After breakfast we returned to Titchwell for a walk out to the sea, though not ignoring the birds on the marshes. On arrival, we saw a neat Firecrest near the centre; although on the marshes nothing was new from our first visit, we still enjoyed having second looks at the Golden Plovers and wildfowl. We had much better views of Reed Bunting singing, and Turnstone, while the Greater Scaup and Slavonian Grebe were still diving on the Tidal Pool. On the beach, Sanderlings scurried about the surf, with Dunlins, Bar-tailed Godwits and Oystercatchers, but in a fair northerly breeze the sea was choppy, and little could be found bar a couple of Great Crested Grebes.

Another quick check for the geese at Titchwell was made: no joy. Then we drove up Choseley Road to the barns and back to the north coast road via Thornham. Pleasingly, the fields played host to numerous Hares and a few (too many) Chinese Water Deer and Muntjacs, plus calling Red Kite and several large coveys of Red-legged

Partridges (again, too many). A check of a couple of cover belts eventually produced a good flock of Chaffinches, and with careful searching a couple of primrose-headed male Yellowhammers, Reed Buntings and a single female Brambling were found.

Lunch was eaten at Snettisham RSPB car park, followed by a good walk, during which we saw a male Goldeneye and couple of Tufted Ducks on the pits. We reached the sea defences by The Wash, from which we scanned the mudflats in a rather cold breeze. As ever, many waders were present, with hundreds or thousands of Dunlins, Oystercatchers, Knots, Avocets, Curlews and calling Grey Plovers, but just a few Bar-tailed Godwits. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was picked out calling on a treetop, while a flock of Lapwings was joined by seven Ruffs. Every now and then, flocks of shorebirds would flush, but the cause was never seen.

We walked back to the car park, warming up as we went, and some of the group departed, though others had one last look at the sea from the beach car park. Initially, just a distant flock of Common Scoters were seen, but as we were about to leave, an immature Spoonbill flew overhead; it was a great bird to end our three days in north Norfolk.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026		
			10	11	12
	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		1	
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>		150	
	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>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	32		
	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	3	1	2
	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	1		1
	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>			20+
	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>			✓
	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			5
	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		3	20+
	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		1	
	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>	✓	✓	✓
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H		
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓		✓
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	2	3	5
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		1	8
	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	1		1
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	10		70
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓	✓
	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		5	✓
	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓	✓
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			2
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026		
			10	11	12
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			1
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		4	8
	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓	✓
	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>			7
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓	✓
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>	1		5
	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>		1	
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		2	
	Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>		2	
	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			1
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		2	
	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			1
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		1	
	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>		2	
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		2	
	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		1	
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>		2	1
	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	1		
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		3	
	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1	
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2	
	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</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>	H	H	H
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			1
	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	1	H	
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			
	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1	1	H
	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	H	1	2

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026		
			10	11	12
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		2	2
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			1
	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		1	
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓		
	Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			✓
	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			1
	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		1	
	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		1	
	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			2
	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	1		5

Mammals

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name
	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
	European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
	Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>
	Common Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>
	Chinese Water Deer - I	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>
	Reeves's Muntjac - I	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>