

Norfolk in Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd – 24th October 2021



Red Knot Spectacular at Snettisham



Head-to-head Fallow Deer at Holkham



Glittering Golden Plover



Gadwall pair, gleaming in the sun

Report & photos by Mike Crewe



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: Mike & Megan Crewe (leaders) with 14 Naturetrek clients

Summary

In some ways the weather was perfect – overcast but bright and not too warm but not too cold either; in other ways, the weather was not so perfect – persistent south-west winds were not conducive to the appearance of exciting birds from the Continent. But despite this, the weekend was great and, despite a lack of the less common species, both morning periods were blessed with the amazing phenomenon of visible migration – or viz-mig to those in the know! We birded during some spells of impressive movements of Chaffinches, Bramblings, Redwings and Common Starlings, with parties of birds dropping out of the skies into coastal bushes or following the coast in the morning, then the spectacle of many flocks of starlings battling into a head wind and keep low over the waves as they headed towards land from far out at sea.

Snettisham produced the usual spectacle with huge numbers of mostly Red Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit and Golden Plover wheeling around over The Wash, together with a rich supply of various other waders and ducks. At Holme, we were treated to a couple of unexpected surprises in the shape of Eurasian Bittern and Northern Raven, as well as nice views of European Stonechats and Rock Pipits, while Holkham provided a wealth of good birding, including three Great Egrets and two remarkably obliging Snow Buntings; we also enjoyed the cut and thrust of rutting season in the Fallow Deer herds.

Finally, Titchwell provided a great range of waterfowl, waders and other wetland and coastal birds, including a lovely juvenile Little Stint and a manically spinning Grey (Red) Phalarope on the RSPB reserve, followed by a rich collection of waders, busily feeding on the extensive, sandy beach.

Day 1

Friday 22nd October

Our first day really consists of an evening meet up at our hotel and a chance to get to know each other over dinner, but it was clear that some had still managed to get in some birdwatching of their own and already had some good sightings to talk about this evening.

Day 2

Saturday 23rd October

The weather was almost perfect for us today, being lightly overcast and with a light, south-westerly wind. The former made for good viewing conditions, while the latter ensured that we started the day with some great visible migration (or viz-mig!) right from the hotel car park. Indeed, birding from car parks was to become something of a theme over the weekend and provided us with some nice birds! Before breakfast, we wandered the short distance from our hotel to the beach, with a good passage of birds taking place right over our heads.

Chaffinches, Bramblings, Siskins, Starlings and Redwings all appeared in good number, together with a scattering of Skylarks, Pied Wagtails, a Grey Wagtail and a Fieldfare. Offshore, the full range of commoner gull species was to be found, along with a few Great Crested Grebes, Great Cormorants and a Red-breasted Merganser. The beach held a large roost of Oystercatchers.

We drove the short distance to Holme-next-the-sea and walked out along the path, still with parties of various finches, Starlings and Skylarks passing overhead. Long-tailed Tits meandered through the bushes and several

Stonechats were feeding along the saltmarsh edge. Little Egrets and Common Redshanks were out on the saltings and a few Linnets, Reed Buntings and Rock Pipits fed along the muddy tracks. Common Teal, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Wigeon moved through, and two Black-tailed Godwits were resting in a small pool. Parties of Pink-footed Geese busied themselves overhead for much of the morning and up to three Marsh Harriers and a pair of Common Buzzards were out on the grazing marshes. A big surprise came in the shape of a Bittern that made a broad, sweeping pass over the neighbouring nature reserve before dropping into a small stand of reeds, while a passing Raven was also very unexpected and very much appreciated.

It had been an action-packed morning and we headed further east to round the first half of the day off at the Holkham Estate. Walking into the walled park, we were soon enjoying all the cut and thrust of the Fallow Deer rutting season, while Nuthatch, Mistle Thrush and Coal Tit were all new editions for the day. Walking back through the village, we made our way northward, out across the grazing marsh and into the visitor centre for lunch, passing a couple of Red Kites and a smart, male Marsh Harrier on the way.

After lunch we took a fairly long walk out around the beach to see what was happening offshore. Large numbers of gulls fed on the beach, including a second-winter Yellow-legged Gull, while the odd Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit scurried around on the sand. There was an interesting range of birds out on the sea, but mostly a little too far for more than a cursory glance. Red-throated Diver, Common Guillemot, two Common Eiders, two Velvet Scoters and a few parties of Common Scoter were all on the water, while a juvenile Northern Gannet and a few Brent Geese flew by. We began the walk back to the car park by heading along the beach close to the dune line and we were very pleased to chance upon a pair of Snow Buntings, feeding on the nearby dune at almost point blank range.

Day 3

Sunday 24th October

Today was certainly a little different to our usual routine, as we were up and ready for an 06:45 packed breakfast at the hotel, before heading south to the RSPB reserve at Snettisham. Dawn was just breaking as we arrived and we startled a male Sparrowhawk right in the car park. Crowds of Redwings were dropping out of the skies into nearby bramble bushes and ragged parties of Starlings hurtled low over the landscape. Visible migration was again in full flow and groups of Chaffinches, Bramblings, Linnets, Redwings, Starlings and Fieldfares were present for much of the morning. As we walked the trail past the old gravel pits, Little Grebe and Little Egret were noted, masses of Pink-footed Geese were heading off to their daytime feeding spots and our first Canada Geese of the weekend flew by.

Before long, we were up on the raised bank beside The Wash and looking out across the vast, empty space between Norfolk and the distant shores of Lincolnshire. But this was no empty space to us, for it was chock-a-block full of birds! Black lines of Eurasian Oystercatchers were tagging along, low over the water as the still rising tide crept ever further onto their earlier roost site. A great flotilla of Common Shelducks was out on the water, along with a few Northern Pintail and groups of other waders began to join the oystercatchers. As we approached the edge of the advancing tide, ever greater numbers of waders could be seen; dense gatherings of Red Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit were most obvious, with Ringed and Grey Plovers, Dunlins and Eurasian Curlew all scattered around and feeding on the remains of the bare mud. As we watched, great, amorphous blobs of Red Knot and Golden Plover shape-shifted around in the air and gave us a spectacular display as they twinkled in the early morning sunlight.

It was soon time to start heading back to the hotel and get checked out of our rooms. With that all done, we took a route around a few back lanes in search of Grey Partridges, to no avail, though we did find their portly, French cousins. Eventually we headed for the RSPB reserve at Titchwell, arriving nicely in time for an early lunch. Well fed, we headed out along the main footpath, with some of us catching a glimpse of a Cetti's Warbler on the way. Passing the main reedbed, we were soon out onto the open marsh, recently re-landscaped with a series of new islands. The main attraction here didn't take much seeking out, as a juvenile Grey Phalarope was performing a manic series of clockwise spins in front of a very appreciative audience. Masses of Eurasian Teal, Golden Plover and Northern Lapwings were scattered across the marsh, but we decided to head for the beach first and then to work our way back.

With the tide now well out, we took a walk down the beach to get much closer to the birds, which were all crowded onto the mussel beds near the water's edge. We were soon enjoying great views of busy Red Knot, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits (often side-by-side and offering great comparisons), Grey Plover, Ruddy Turnstones, Eurasian Oystercatchers and a great variety of gulls, as well as a few Brent Geese. On the sea itself, Red-throated Divers, Great Crested Grebes, Common Guillemots and a single Razorbill were all found, though mostly a little distantly. We resisted the temptation to track down another Snow Bunting and instead headed back to give the main lagoon a better look from the Parrinder Hide. The massed Golden Plovers looked spectacular as their spangles sparkled in the afternoon sun and the greens and purples of the Northern Lapwings were vibrant and nicely set off by neat, buff tips on the juveniles. A few Pied Avocets fed out in the open water and one or two Meadow Pipits and Pied Wagtails tripped around on the mud. Back at the Grey Phalarope corner, a Ruff and a smart, juvenile Little Stint had turned up.

Time was marching and we decided to finish up with a quick check of the pools over on the east side of the reserve. This proved to be a good move as we found a pair of Common Pochard, some 50 Gadwall (that was a popular find!), two male Northern Pintail and a passing party of Long-tailed Tits. It had been a great visit, but all too soon, we were heading back to base, some to head for home, others to put their feet up for a little while longer on the Norfolk coast and enjoy a little more time in this lovely little corner of the county.

Many thanks to all for making this a wonderful weekend and a real pleasure for us to lead and be a part of; we hope to see you all again soon!

Species Lists

Common name	Scientific name	23/10	24/10
Birds			
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	4	✓
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓	✓
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		4
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	10	10+
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	1	1
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	13	1
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	3	✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		50
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		25+
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		2
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	2	
Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>	2	
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	12+	
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	1	
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	3+	
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	2	2
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1	4+
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		7
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	6	3
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	10	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓	✓
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		20
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	15+	✓
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	2	✓
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		15+
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		2
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	9	20+
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		1
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	6	2
Red (Grey) Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>		1
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓
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>	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	23/10	24/10
Birds			
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	1	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		3
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	2	2
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		1
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	2	3
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	1	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	1	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	6	5+
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	3	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	10+	5+
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	5	5+
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	2	1
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	6+	1
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	h	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	4	3+
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	4+	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	3	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	10+	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	h	1
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	h	1
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	2	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	2	50+
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	1	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	8	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	1
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓
Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓	3+
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	2	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓
Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	2	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	6	3+
Mammals			
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	

Common name	Scientific name	23/10	24/10
Birds			
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓
Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	✓
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	
Chinese Water Deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>	✓	✓
Reeves's Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	✓	
Butterflies			
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓
Dragons & Damsels			
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>		✓
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓	✓

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!