

East Yorkshire: The Magic of Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

5th – 8th October 2020



Common Redstart



Long-eared Owl



Jack Snipe



Great White Egret

Report compiled by Matthew Capper

Images by Tim Melling, Matthew Capper, Jacob Spinks, Sheelagh Hill and Jason Middleton



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Tour participants: Matthew Capper (Leader) plus Jason Middleton & Tim Melling (Co-leaders) with five Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Monday 5th October

Patrington

Having checked in, the moth trap was assembled in the garden and switched on. There was a small wedding celebration underway in the hotel and apparently they all laid bets on just what was going on. Eventually, the curious bride came out to enquire and confirmed that none of the guests had guessed correctly!

With that out of the way, our group met in the dining room for an introductory chat and evening meal before retiring to bed, eager to see what the morning would bring.

Day 2

Tuesday 6th October

Kilnsea, Spurn and Sammy's Point

We assembled early to check the moth trap and found slim pickings – just four moths of three species. However, Jason rose to the occasion, engaging the group with an introduction to moth trapping and some of the techniques, identification guides and kit involved.

After a hearty breakfast we were on our way to Spurn and a ringing demonstration with Paul, the Observatory warden. But of course, the best laid plans are soon changed and breaking news of a Dotterel in the field behind Kilnsea Wetlands was too tempting to resist and we were soon parked up and heading round to the spot where it had been reported.

The Dotterel was hunkered down in the middle of a ploughed field but we were on it quickly and it gave excellent views for all of the group – a great bird to start the trip and a 'lifer' for some. Birds were clearly on the move and we added a nice Wheatear along with a range of small birds such as Linnet and Greenfinch along with plenty of waders and wildfowl commuting between the wetlands and surrounding fields.

Our late arrival for the ringing demonstration turned out to be a great move. As we walked up, Paul was just returning from checking the nets, laden with bags, each with an occupant ready to be processed. He appeared with the first bird, a tiny Goldcrest. Superb we all thought. What a bird. And then, with a face that would win any poker contest, he produced the second, a stunning Firecrest. Wow! A real privilege and total surprise.

Paul proceeded to show us several different species, along with a range of fascinating facts and figures about why we ring, the data it provides and the birds themselves - their plumage, behaviour and the journeys they undertake. A truly humbling experience and great to see just how fascinated he remained despite having ringed birds numbering into the hundreds of thousands.

As we were ready to leave, a nice surprise flew over in the form of two Ravens, an unusual bird on this part of the coast. Having thanked Paul and said our goodbyes, we moved on, down to the Canal Scrape to check out a report of Jack Snipe. We were not disappointed and had amazing views of a bird, bobbing up and down in the

characteristic Jack Snipe way and feeding on the water's edge, up against the reeds. We were seeing plenty of birds and things were moving south – small parties of Meadow Pipit, a few finches and the odd Skylark. The tide was now a long way out and the Humber was alive with waders. Swirling Knot out on the water's edge, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Ringed Plover dotted about and Dunlin constantly probing the mud like little sewing machines. And closer to us, Redshank and Curlew on the edge of the saltmarsh.

As we headed back to the Discovery Centre, our eyes were immediately drawn to a Grass Snake, winding its way across the road. It was carefully picked up and allowed great views (even if it did make a mess on my hand!) before being gently returned to the long grass to continue on its way.

With lunch completed, we walked along to Well Field and found it to be full of Stonechats. Our two leaders proceeded to try and outdo each other with ever higher totals and we settled on a somewhat inflated 37..! However, what became apparent at this point was that a significant fall of thrushes (largely Redwings) had started to occur. Birds were coming in high off the sea and spiralling down into the cover of the Warren and Canal Scrape, seeking food and shelter after their long and arduous journey across the North Sea. There must have been several hundred in just a few minutes, a superb reminder of just how good this place is for visible migration.

Next, we decided to have a walk along Sammy's Point and on arrival, we found an obliging Redstart and Jason tracked a party of Redwings dropping in and picked out a male Ring Ouzel amongst them that landed briefly in a hawthorn by the car park. What a start we thought, now let's get walking and have a proper look.. Not so fast... the radio crackled into life..."l... ed.... owl... ch..... field... ten minutes..." Hmm, did anyone get that? Nope! Luckily one of the locals was stood on the sea wall and relayed the news that a Long-eared Owl had been caught in a mist net and if we could get back to the ringing station in the next ten minutes, we'd be able to see it. Challenge accepted and it was back in the vehicles and back to where we had just come from. Would we get there in time and would we beat the rain cloud we could see ominously heading our way? Well yes and no, not quite. The bird was duly shown but the views were shortened by the heavy rain drops that started to fall and understandably, the welfare of the bird took priority. But what a bird, cryptic plumage and those deep orange eyes. An experience that would not be forgotten easily.

By now it was belting it down and we took the opportunity to return to Sammy's Point. Having sat out the last of the rain, we headed back out and enjoyed a nice flock of Yellowhammer and a large party of several hundred Golden Plover out on the Humber. The light was now superb, with a clarity and sharpness that so often follows a rain shower - silver shafts bouncing off the rippling mud and pools of water out on the estuary. Our walk was pleasant, if a little muddy and we added plenty more waders including a close Bar-tailed Godwit and a brief Whimbrel. Roe Deer were now very apparent and we counted 13 at one point. The Redstart showed again in the first paddock and Stonechats were still numerous. And now that the rain had cleared, Redwings and the odd Fieldfare started to stream through again – the passage of thrushes definitely being a highlight of the day.

All too soon though, it was time to stroll back to the vehicles, bid farewell to Jason and head to the hotel to reflect on a superb first day.

Day 3

Wednesday 7th October

Flamborough Head and RSPB Bempton Cliffs

Today we were joined by Tim Melling, our co-leader for the final two days. We kept him waiting though after a road closure saw us take the scenic yet tractor abundant route north to Flamborough Head. The good news was that he had had time to stake out our first good bird of the day, a nice juvenile Red-backed Shrike, perched in the bay brambles. We gave the sea a bit of time adding birds like Guillemot, Shag, Kittiwake and Puffin, although a Peregrine dived beneath the cliffs before anyone could get on it. Birds were making landfall on the cliff top and a few migrants were about, including a nice Brambling working its way inland over the golf course.

North Landing was next on the list of sites – Holmes Gut and Thornwick Bay Pools. We were following up a report of a long staying Barred Warbler but drew a blank. Instead we got a good range of other species such as Tree Sparrow, Long-tailed Tit and more tiny Goldcrests. Quite how a bird so small manages to cross the North Sea is a miracle! The Siberian Stonechat of the previous day was also absent from Thornwick but we did see more European Stonechat and a few waterbirds on the pools including our only Little Grebe of the trip.

Bempton Cliffs is one of the best-known RSPB reserves and for very good reason. With dramatic cliffs, stunning views and Gannets still nesting on the cliffs we stood and soaked up the views and had an interesting discussion about the seabird colony, its history and the threats that it faces. After satisfying ourselves with views from the cliffs we returned to the visitor centre and found a good vantage point to watch for Short-eared Owls. It seems tales of Short-eared Owls are just like the classic fisherman's "it was this big" stories as everyone we spoke to seemed to add one to the previous days tally and take half an hour off the time they had started to show. And of course, we didn't see a single one! The blue skies and brisk wind were sadly not in our favour but we didn't mind too much. Nothing could beat the Long-eared Owl of the previous day anyway.

Day 4

Thursday 8th October

Kilnsea and Spurn Point

Our last day started with rain and northerly winds, making for a slightly damp start. But things calmed down as the morning progressed and by the afternoon, we had still and dry conditions to end the trip. Today, we returned to the Spurn area, starting by meeting Tim back at Kilnsea Wetlands for a proper look at the pools. With the tide just reaching its peak, there was plenty to see. Duck included Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and plenty of handsome Pintail. Waders included Black-tailed Godwit with a single Bar-tailed in amongst them, a couple of Ruff and a juvenile Curlew Sandpiper was a nice surprise. In amongst the gulls were plenty of Mediterranean Gulls although a single Caspian Gull flew before we could get anyone else on it.

We were not due on the Unimog until 11am and so made the Canal Scrape our next stop. Tim had stopped in earlier to scout things for us and thankfully, the Great Egret that he had found was still there, giving incredibly close views alongside its smaller relative, a Little Egret. Also present were three lovely Greenshank hunkered down, facing into the wind and rain.

We wandered down to the Unimog and enjoyed the sight of thousands of waders on the Humber, swirling and landing close by on the receding tide. We were amused by the arrival of one of the full-time lifeboat crew who had driven up from the point to meet the Tesco delivery van and amazed at just how much of their rations

seemed to consist of crisps! Once Rob from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has given us a briefing, we were off down the point and climbing to the top of the lighthouse, an amazing experience with panoramic views of the point and wider landscape. Rob was full of knowledge and brought to life some of the fascinating war time history of the Point.

A few birds were on the move and swallows and thrushes were again evident. Tim picked out a scandinavian Rock Pipit which was new but the best moment was when a Merlin belted through, momentarily chasing a Redwing, flying straight over our heads and out across the Humber and across into north Lincolnshire.

With the rain having stopped, it was a much more pleasant trip back up the peninsula, adding Turnstone and more Grey Seal to the list. Rob had kindly contacted the Discovery Centre to reserve us some tables and we enjoyed a well-deserved hot drink and food while enjoying the egret which was still on the canal scrape and visible from the café windows.

Warmed and refreshed, we were pondering where to finish the day when news came through that a Yellow-browed Warbler had been seen in Syke's Field. Decision made! And what a good decision it turned out to be with the whole group enjoying excellent views of a bird that had arrived all the way from Siberia. Other species included a very confiding Redstart, Blackcaps, Goldcrests and a Stonechat with a white rump that should have been something rare but wasn't.

We decided the Yellow-browed was the perfect way to end what had been an excellent trip, saying farewell and thanks to Tim before returning to the hotel, some to stay on for a further night and others to begin the journey home.

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	trip	October 2020		
				6	7	8
1	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓		15	8
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	2+		✓
4	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓			✓
5	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓		✓	
6	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓		✓
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓		✓	✓
8	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓		✓
9	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	3		✓
10	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓	2		✓
11	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓		✓
13	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓		1	
15	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓		✓	
16	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓		5	
18	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓		✓
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	1		
20	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓			1
21	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	1	1	
22	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	1	4	2
23	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	✓			1
25	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	✓		1	
26	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓		1	
27	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	2	2	2
28	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓		✓
30	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓	✓		✓
31	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓	✓		
32	Dotterel	<i>Charadrius morinellus</i>	✓	1		
33	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	✓	✓		✓
34	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	✓			1
35	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓	✓		✓
36	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	✓			3
37	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	1		
38	Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>	✓	1		

	Common name	Scientific name	trip	October 2020		
				6	7	8
39	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	2		✓
40	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓	1		1
41	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	✓	1		
42	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓		✓
43	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓			3
44	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓		✓
45	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓		1	4
46	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓		✓	
47	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>	✓			
51	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓			1
53	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓		✓	
55	Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	✓		1	
56	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	2		
58	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	✓	1		
61	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓		
63	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	4+	✓
64	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓		✓
65	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓			1
67	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	1		1
68	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓	1		
74	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓	2		1
75	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	✓	1		
76	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

				October 2020		
	Common name	Scientific name	trip	6	7	8
79	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	2	1	4+
80	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	2	2	2
81	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	1	✓
82	Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	✓			1
83	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	✓	1		
85	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓		✓	
86	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
88	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	✓		1	
89	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
90	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	2		
94	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	✓	h	1	4+
99	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
101	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓		3
102	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓		h	
104	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓	✓	
105	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mammals						
1	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	2	1	2
2	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	13		4
4	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓		2+	3
Reptiles						
1	Grass Snake	<i>Natrix natrix</i>	✓	1		
Butterflies/Moths						
1	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓		1	
2	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>	✓		1	
5	Black Rustic	<i>Aporophyla nigra</i>	✓	✓		

				October 2020		
	Common name	Scientific name	trip	6	7	8
6	Beaded Chestnut	<i>Agrochola lychnidis</i>	✓	✓		
7	Lunar Underwing	<i>Omphaloscelis lunosa</i>	✓	✓		
8	Setaceous Hebrew Character	<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>	✓	✓		
Dragonflies						
1	Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓	1		
2	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	✓	1	1	



Spurn Unimog and Lighthouse



Grass Snake



Firecrest



Knot on the Humber