

# East Yorkshire: The Magic of Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

26th – 29th September 2021

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Rustic Bunting



Bempton Cliffs



Pied Flycatcher



Whooper Swans

Report compiled by Matthew Capper  
Images by Matthew Capper and Chris Jones



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Tour participants: Matthew Capper and Steve Gater with 13 Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

The east coast of Yorkshire once again proved that it is one of the best places to experience the natural phenomenon that is migration. Even with westerly winds, traditionally the worst for migrants on the east coast, we saw over 100 species of bird and where else could you literally pull a Rustic Bunting out of the bag apart from Spurn Bird Observatory! Watching seabirds and ducks battling with the winds offshore during an autumn storm, exhausted Whooper Swans sleeping in a field having just pitched down after a flight from the arctic, 18 species of wader out on the Humber and even moths crossing the North Sea: the trip certainly delivered the magic of migration.

### Day 1

**Sunday 26th September**

#### Patrington

Despite the fuel shortages affecting the Country, everyone assembled on time for Sunday dinner and an introductory chat. The forecast wind and rain led to a slight tweaking of the itinerary with Flamborough pencilled in for the next day - hopefully allowing us to avoid the worst of the early bad weather that had been predicted.

### Day 2

**Monday 27th September**

#### Flamborough Head, RSPB Bempton Cliffs and Hornsea Mere

After breakfast, we were out on the road nice and early and heading up the coast to our first stop – Flamborough Head. On arrival, we wandered down to the seawatching hide, admiring the lighthouses and several Grey Seals on the way. Sadly, our cunning plan didn't work out quite as planned, as the weather, which had been largely dry up to that point, now broke and became somewhat biblical with horizontal rain and winds that we later learnt blew the roofs of houses further south of us! Luckily, despite the code for the hide having been changed, a couple of equally foolhardy birders were inside and took pity on us. The sight of 15 soggy birdwatchers, literally falling through the door, will probably stay with them for a long time!

With the wind shaking the foundations and rain driving straight in through the open hide flaps, we all found as dry a spot as we could and began to peer tentatively out into the gloom. There wasn't space to put up the scopes and Steve was tucked away in the corner without a view of the sea. However, one of the local birders – Brett Richards – was suitably scoped up and he provided something of a running commentary, picking out an assortment of divers, auks, Scoters, Wigeon, Arctic and Great Skuas and even a flock of Snipe at one point.

Thankfully the storm was short lived and gradually, things began to ease, the visibility improved, and we were able to reflect on what had actually been a pretty good introduction to the art of seawatching and migration. Brett waved us off with news that there were half-a-dozen Whooper Swans resting on the headland near Old Fall Plantation, so we headed back up to the car park with a view to finding them. A Peregrine zoomed past a couple of times as we prepared to leave, although was only seen by a couple of people.

The swans were still in the same place and gave us excellent views through the scopes; they were a new species for several in the group. They had clearly arrived from further north and were resting up, five of them getting much needed sleep whilst one took on sentry duty.

Our next stop was Bempton Cliffs where we took the opportunity to grab a sandwich and hot drink. By now, the weather had improved markedly, with blue skies, if still somewhat blustery. A post-lunch walk to The Dell provided us with one of the birds of the day – a nice Pied Flycatcher that posed for everyone and we then took in the bird feeders where the number of Tree Sparrows was a welcome tonic for many of the group – this species now being sadly absent from many parts of the UK.



Gannet

Our walk along the cliffs was a little bracing but the views were spectacular and the Gannets superb. We took some time to watch and enjoy them at the Staple Newk viewpoint and talked a little about this internationally important seabird colony and some of the threats that it faces. A summer-plumaged Red-throated Diver was a real treat through ‘scope and then news then reached us that there had been a report of the Black-browed Albatross that had graced the reserve on and off since June. Having last been seen on the 24th, apparently it had been seen on the sea off Spurn and was now heading north. Plans to walk back were put on hold and we waited a while to see if it would put in an appearance. There being no sign, we eventually headed back to the visitor centre, only to be told that if it was going to appear, we’d probably have to wait another hour or two. What to do...? A little debate followed, and we all decided that with the news being rather sketchy, the extra time would not be worth the later finish and very cold hands and feet.

On the way back, we stopped at Hornsea Mere. The wind was still blowing, and the weather had definitely chilled, so we didn’t dwell for long. There was no sign of the juvenile Red-necked Grebe which had been present for a few days previously but there was a good selection of wildfowl, including the only Tufted Duck and Pochard of the trip and also a distantly singing Cetti’s Warbler.

Dinner was preceded by the usual wildlife log and the inevitable question – did the albatross return to the cliffs in our absence? A short drum roll and the answer... No. Good call on our parts. And we found out the next day that the report had been erroneous after all. Phew!

## Day 3

Tuesday 28th September

### Spurn Point, Kilnsea and Sammy’s Point

Our second full day started with a visit to the Bird Observatory for moth-trapping and bird-ringing demonstrations. Paul, Kieran and Greg met us, and Greg removed the cover from the moth trap to reveal a decent haul. There were plenty of moths made up of 13 species and the egg trays were handed round so that people could get a good look and take photos if they wished.

Next up it was the ringing demo and whilst we were looking at the moths, Paul had done the rounds and came back with three cloth bags, each containing a bird. First out was a lovely male Blackcap and we were told all about the important value of ringing and how it helps not just with tracking bird movements, but also bird populations too. Then, as we were watching, more and more people started to arrive, and it became clear something was going on. With a face that would win any poker tournament, Kieran drew the next bird out of the bag and revealed a female Rustic Bunting. Wow! By far the best bird of the trip and one that we clearly were not expecting. Kieran took everyone through the finer details of identification and allowed a few photos to be taken before the bird was released, joining a party of Reed Buntings and heading off south.

A quick toilet stop at the Bluebell carpark produced a few birds on the sea – Gannet, Red-throated Diver and Guillemot, for example – and the neighbouring pond had Gadwall and Little Grebe. And then we were off to Kilnsea Wetlands to see if the high tide had moved anything of note off the Humber.

On arrival, we could see a few Curlew feeding out in the fields and as we walked to the hide, a quick scan of the nearby farm buildings revealed a Little Owl, sitting out in the open, giving good ‘scope views for everyone.

We settled into the hide and Steve picked out a distant Marsh Harrier whilst a juvenile Arctic Tern, stood in amongst the gulls, was a nice surprise. One of the requests for the weekend was to see godwits – purely because of the amazing migration journeys that they are capable of and here, we saw our first species – Black-tailed Godwit.



Our well disguised Snipe!

Other waders included Ruff, Dunlin and Redshank and an incredibly close Snipe that was so well camouflaged it took a while for everyone to see it. Sometimes you just can't see for looking so eventually we resorted to using the scope, resulting in one of those lovely eureka moments when the bird was finally spotted.

With the morning getting on, we decided to move on, taking a while to scan the adjacent ploughed field for a reported Wheatear. No sign sadly, although there were a few Linnets and Skylarks on the move. The next port of call was the Warren and views out over the inner estuary. Curlew and our second Godwit – the Bar-tailed – were still roosting on the saltmarsh but Redshank, Knot, Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Knot were already out on the mud in numbers. No sign of a marauding Merlin but we did have a hunting Kestrel and several Little Egrets. Matthew gave a bit of an introduction to the estuary and some of its conservation challenges and Steve followed that up with an introduction to the saltmarsh plant community.

By now we were ready for a lunch time stop and the nearby Spurn Discovery Centre fitted the bill nicely. We stopped at the vehicles to organise ourselves and a bird flew up on to the telegraph wire next us – having missed the one earlier, it was, of course, a nice Wheatear! On the way in to the centre we bumped into Yorkshire Wildlife Trust employee and fellow Naturetrek guide Dave Spivack, who took the time to talk to us about the work of the Trust and some of their plans for Spurn. After lunch we headed into the hide overlooking the canal

scrape. Nothing out of the ordinary but the two Little Egrets that dropped in looked stunning in the afternoon sunshine.

Sammy's Point was picturesque, but the wind was still causing issues and there were very few small birds to be seen. Still, we could enjoy the waders feeding on the mud and the distant spectacle of Pink-footed Geese arriving and pitching down on the wetlands. A scan across the farmland picked out 13 Roe Deer and the gulls that were following the plough contained a single Mediterranean Gull. Steve continued to pick out some of the specialist plant species such as Sea Rocket, Greater Sea Spurrey, Sea Wormwood and Sea Purslane (you can spot the maritime theme here!).

The weather forecast was predicting heavy rain to end the day and as we could now see the dark grey clouds approaching, we decided that discretion was the better part of valour and finished slightly early to ensure that we stayed dry.

## Day 4

Wednesday 29th September

### Kilnsea and Spurn Point

Our last day together started rather grey and damp, but the rain that had hit overnight had now thankfully cleared the east coast. We started with a walk around the Crown and Anchor Pub, Observatory and Church Field. Out on the Humber, the morning light was much more conducive to watching waders than the previous afternoon and we were able to enjoy great views in the scope of birds such as Grey and Golden Plover, Dunlin and Oystercatcher. The wind was still making birding tricky but in the sheltered spots were able to pick up a few bits and bobs such as Chiffchaff, Blackcap and autumnal Robins, 'ticking' away in the bushes. A climb to the top of the platform in the Observatory garden brought us more Roe Deer, Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and several fly-past Tree Sparrow. Church Field was quiet, but the shelter meant that both Common and Ruddy Darter and Migrant Hawks were all flying and there was a nice flock of Linnets too.

Another quick stop at the Bluebell toilets and we were back round to Kilnsea Wetlands for high tide. Plenty of birds again today and straight away we were put onto a Spotted Redshank that later became two birds. A Common Sandpiper replaced yesterday's Snipe for views right in front of the hide and interest continued with a Curlew Sandpiper and splendid adult and juvenile Mediterranean Gulls.

By now the morning was gone so we zipped down to the Discovery Centre for some refreshment and then it was time for the Unimog. Andy from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust came to meet us and showed us aboard. Introductions and briefings done, we were soon trundling down Spurn Point, enjoying Grey Seals on the left and a hunting Merlin on the right as we bumped across the breach. On the other side, the track re-established itself and things became a little smoother. A single Turnstone was in amongst the waders on the estuary side and a party of Brent Geese prompted a brief stop to allow us to properly enjoy them.

The lighthouse was a clear highlight for everyone, taking the time to walk to the top and enjoy the panoramic views. Visibility was excellent and we could even see the Humber Bridge several miles to the west. Perennial Wall Rocket was in flower by the road, a Stonechat was the first and only one of the trip, but the Brown-tailed Moth cocoons were plentiful.

Andy drove us on to the Point itself, taking us for a tour of the war-time barracks and defences and through the dense stands of Sea Buckthorn. With winds from the west, small birds were hard to come by and the Brambling that we found in with a few Chaffinches wasn't co-operative at all.

All too soon it was time to board the Unimog again and make our way back along the point and assemble at the minibuses for a final debrief and farewells. Some were straight off to Hull to catch trains, whilst others took a few minutes to pack luggage into cars before heading for home. And a lucky few returned to the hotel for a well-earned cup of tea and piece of flapjack! We hadn't had the classic easterlies that all Yorkshire coast birders dream of, but we'd still seen a range of migration spectacles, some great wildlife and shared a wonderful few days together in this superb part of the world.

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Little Owl



Taking photos from the top of Spurn Lighthouse

## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	September		
			27	28	29
1	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	☐	☐	☐
2	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	6		
3	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	☐	☐	☐
4	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	☐	☐	☐
5	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			Ca. 40
6	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		☐	☐
7	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	☐	☐	☐
8	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		☐	☐
9	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	☐	☐	☐
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	☐	☐	☐
11	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	☐	☐	☐
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya farina</i>	☐		
13	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		☐	
14	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	☐	☐	☐
15	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	☐		
16	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	☐		
17	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	☐	☐	☐
18	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	1		
19	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	☐	☐	☐
20	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		☐	☐
21	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	☐		☐
22	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	☐	☐	☐
23	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	☐		
24	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		☐	☐
25	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1		1
26	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		1	
27	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	1	1
28	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	2	☐
29	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	☐	☐	☐
30	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>			1
31	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1		
32	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	2	☐	☐
33	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	☐		
34	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		☐	☐
35	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		☐	☐
36	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			☐
37	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		1	☐
38	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		☐	☐



	Common name	Scientific name	September		
			27	28	29
39	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		□	□
40	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		□	□
41	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>			1
42	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		□	□
43	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	□	1	
44	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		□	□
45	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		□	
46	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		□	□
47	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		□	
48	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>		□	□
49	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>			2
50	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			1
51	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			1
52	Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius interpres</i>	3		
53	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>	2		
54	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	□		
55	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	□	□	□
56	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	□	□	□
57	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	□	□	□
58	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeus melanocephalus</i>		1	2
59	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	□	□	□
60	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	□	□	□
61	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>		1	
62	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	□	□	
63	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	□		
64	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	□	□	□
65	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		1	□
66	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	□	□	□
67	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	□	□	□
68	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>		1	
69	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		h	□
70	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		2	2
71	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	2		
72	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	□	□	□
73	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	□	□	□
74	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	□		□
75	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	□		□
76	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	□	□	□
77	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>			1
78	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1	
79	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	□	□	□

	Common name	Scientific name	September		
			27	28	29
80	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	0	0	1
81	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	1		
82	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1	1
83	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			2
84	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	1		
85	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>	1		
86	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	0	0	0
87	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	0		0
88	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			1
89	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	0	0	0
90	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	0	0	0
91	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	0	0	0
92	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	0	0	0
93	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	0	0	0
94	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	0	0	0
95	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	0	0	0
96	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	0		0
97	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			1
98	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		0	0
99	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	0	0	0
100	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	0	0	0
101	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citronella</i>	2		3
102	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		0	0
103	Rustic Bunting	<i>Emberiza rustica</i>		1	
Mammals					
1	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		13+	0
2	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	0	0	0
3	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			0
Butterflies/Moths					
1	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	0	0	0
2	Black Rustic	<i>Aporophyla nigra</i>		0	
3	Lunar Underwing	<i>Omphaloscelis lunosa</i>		0	
4	Beaded Chestnut	<i>Agrochola lychnidis</i>		0	
5	Square-spot Rustic	<i>Xestia xanthographa</i>		0	
6	Angle Shades	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>		0	
7	Rosy Rustic	<i>Hydraecia micacea</i>		0	
8	Large-yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>		0	
9	Bright-line Brown-eye	<i>Lacanobia oleracea</i>		0	
10	Light Brown Apple Moth	<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>		0	
11	Dark Sword-grass	<i>Agrotis ipsilon</i>		0	
12	Turnip Moth	<i>Agrotis segetum</i>		0	
13	Vine's Rustic	<i>Hoplodrina ambigua</i>		0	
14	Setaceous Hebrew Character	<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>		0	

		September			
Common name		Scientific name	27	28	29
Dragonflies					
1	Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Notable Plants

Sea Buckthorn	<i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i>	Spurn Peninsula	29 September
Marram	<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>	Spurn Peninsula	29 September
Common Cord Grass	<i>Spartina anglica</i>	Spurn Peninsula	29 September
Common Reed	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Discovery Centre	29 September
Bullrush	<i>Typha latifolia</i>	Spurn Observatory	29 September
Glasswort	<i>Salicornia europaea</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Common Sea Lavender	<i>Limonium vulgare</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Prickly Oxtongue	<i>Helminthotheca echioides</i>	Discovery Centre	29 September
Autumn Hawkbit	<i>Scorzoneroides autumnalis</i>	Discovery Centre	29 September
Sea Rocket	<i>Cakile maritima</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Greater Sea Spurrey	<i>Spergularia media</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Sea Wormwood	<i>Artimesia maritima</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Sea Milkwort	<i>Lysimachia maritima</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Sea Kale	<i>Crambe maritima</i>	Discovery Centre	29 September
Sea Purslane	<i>Atriplex portulacoides</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Sea Arrow-grass	<i>Triglochin maritima</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Long-stalked Orache	<i>Atriplex longipes</i>	Sammy's Point	28 September
Thrift	<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Bempton Cliffs	27 September
Perennial Wall Rocket	<i>Diploxys tenuifolia</i>	Spurn Lighthouse	29 September