

East Yorkshire – The Magic of Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

3rd – 6th October 2021



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: Steve Gater (Leader) and David Spivack (Co-leader) with 12 Naturetrek Clients

Day 1

Sunday 3rd October

Our short visit to watch migration on the coast of East Yorkshire began at the homely Dunedin Hotel in Patrington with a cheery welcome from staff and a delicious late Sunday lunch that had to include Yorkshires, of course!

All clients had travelled under their own steam and that was no mean feat with severe fuel shortages, particularly in the South. Both guides arrived in the minibuses used throughout the trip, with heartening news of empty but operational petrol stations in and around Hull. After our meal, Steve and David shared an outline of plans which were subject to the weather that was forecast to be mostly dry, but without much prospect of the easterly winds that tend to push migrants onto the east coast – well we would see what happened.

Day 2

Monday 4th October

An enjoyable breakfast was followed by a short drive to Kilnsea for a special treat at the Spurn Bird Observatory. We were looking forward to learning about moth trapping and bird ringing and were well rewarded by two excellent demonstrations. Gregg was first up with a collection of egg packaging, each tray complete with one or more moths captured the night before in two light traps. Clear and windy conditions were not ideal for 'mothing', but his small find was interesting and varied. Perhaps the Angle Shades took the eye most, but all were attractive.

Paul followed by telling a little of the long history of ringing at Spurn, its importance and methodology. We had close views of Tree Sparrow, Dunnock and a Robin that Paul demonstrated how to age. On our way out, we noticed another bird caught in a mist net, a juvenile Chiffchaff on the move. We later had an aerial view of the gardens in which the Heligoland trap is set to realise why it attracts so many birds that are captured are then ringed. It also traps dragonflies - plenty of Common Darters today.

Coffee and cake were enjoyed at the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) Discovery Centre and so were the many Tree Sparrows on the feeders and trees. The Centre was also the convenient stepping-off point for a walk around the Warren, taking in birds on the River Humber and opposite, the North Sea side of the Spurn peninsula. Nestled on top of Sea Buckthorn were Stonechat, Starling, Linnet, while small flocks of Goldfinch flitted about. The yellow/orange fruit of Sea Buckthorn was judged to be an acquired taste, with plenty of gin required in that process. Shelduck, Curlew, various gulls and Little Egret were on the mud and river. Twelve of the latter species were seen over the day.

Across the road, flashing along the dunes, some of the party had fleeting views of a Merlin scattering Meadow Pipits along its way before it disappeared. Sea watching was quiet, with Cormorant, Gannet, Guillemot, Lesser Black-backed Gull and a small raft of Wigeon. A few Eider duck were appreciated, as were several Grey Seal that bobbed along southwards.

After lunch we ambled northwards, looking at the sea again before taking to Beacon Lane that was alive with dragonflies and butterflies. A good number of Common Darters, males and females, were most obliging for the

photographers. Several Migrant Hawker dragonflies were more active, so identified in flight. Red Admiral, Small White and Speckled Wood butterflies were also taking advantage conditions in this mild and sunny alleyway.

The lane led to open fields and a Grade 1 listed building, Kilnsea Sound Mirror, a unique relic of World War I coastal defence. Not far beyond, in a small reed-edged pond, we had distant and distinctive views of Jack Snipe, bobbing its head up and down. A Mute Swan was on the water nearby. A screen overlooking Kilnsea Wetlands provided views of Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Greenshank and Teal.

A Bank Vole was found in the long grass, prey for the Little Owl that unfortunately did not show for us. Moorhen was seen on the road towards the Crown and Anchor pub, then a Great Skua was spotted over the Humber on our walk back to the buses, putting up Shelduck and others in its wake. Saltmarsh plants such as Eel Grass were pointed out. So ended our first visit to Spurn. We returned to enjoy dinner at the hotel and an interesting review of what we'd seen and heard (Tawny Owl overnight) – a good list.

Day 3

Tuesday 5th October

We enjoyed breakfast and headed north to Flamborough Head, driving along quiet twisting country roads to each a semi-busy carpark next to the lighthouse. Coffee and toilets were in demand before we walked along the road to admire the magnificent chalk cliffs and quite calm North Sea. We chose a circular walk, cutting inland along Danes Dyke, then returning on the coastal path to the carpark.

Small flocks of Linnets, Sparrows (House and Tree) and Tits (Great and Blue) flitted in and out of the Gorse bushes and Hawthorn, but our searching didn't reveal a rarity. On and over the sea were Gannet, Wigeon, Great Cormorant, Guillemot and Red-throated Diver. We watched a Grey Seal swimming north, its head bobbing over the waves in a steady rhythm. Starling were on the telephone wires, Magpie on roofs, Common Crow and Jackdaw in the fields. A Kestrel took advantage of the up-current at the cliff edge to hover effortlessly.

Red Admiral and Small White butterflies were on the wing but no dragonflies. However, we followed up Matthew's tip from yesterday to look for Common Nettle-tap moth. This is a day-flying moth, as its name suggests, commonly found on nettles (its larval host plant). On this occasion, this pretty micro-moth was found on the large white flowers of Bindweed. We later chose White Dead-nettle to demonstrate how to identify a wild plant using a floral key.

Time flew, and we did likewise, to reach the RSPB reserve at Bempton Cliffs for lunch. No sooner had we settled on the picnic benches to eat when the urgent cry 'Merlin' brought everyone to their feet. Some in our party savoured a fleeting view, others had to be satisfied with savouring their food. The reserve cat provided another fleeting view, this time a Wood Mouse which it suddenly ate, then promptly fell asleep.

We were privileged to have a short, guided tour to the first viewing platform atop the towering cliffs with Dave, Centre Manager. His most interesting overview of the reserve was interrupted several times by colleagues updating on sightings and our attention immediately refocused from him to the sea when we heard over the radio 'Minke Whale'. The magnificent individual was spotted under a cloud of Gannet that were circling overhead. We had wonderful views as it surfaced, revealing its great length and curved-back dorsal fin. We were

amazed. Then we were amazed even more when a second individual surfaced, and the pair swam together in a sweeping arc. Wow!

Of course, it was a wrench to move off, but Dave had to leave, and we walked along the cliff top to two more viewing platforms. The ledges of the cliffs below were awash with colourful and well-groomed adult Gannets, still aggressively protecting their precarious nesting spots, some with a juvenile alongside. There were masses of Gannet on the sea, in flight near the cliffs or on migration. The juveniles had already left and it was suggested that the long-resident Black-browed Albatross might have flown with them. It didn't show - shame!

It wasn't long at the furthest viewing platform before a Peregrine Falcon was picked up flying low over the sea towards the cliff. It was tracked until it settled on a ledge where it was admired for some time through an array of telescopes. This was more than adequate compensation for those who missed an earlier view of a Peregrine in flight over the fields and a joy for all.

Sadly, we had a drive and dinner to consider, so our day trip to this birding Mecca ended. On our journey back to Patrington we called into Hornsey Mere where Common Scoter was reported. The lakeside trees were dotted with Common Cormorant and Heron. A Great Egret flew into the trees. Plenty ducks were on the water – Gadwall, Tufted Duck, Teal, Pochard, Mallard were seen with lots of Greylag Geese and Little Grebe. A great day ended with a great dinner and a most satisfying checklist.

Day 4

Wednesday 6th October

East-south-easterly winds were predicted after overnight rain and the day started clear but cooler than previous days. Our first port of call was to view the mudflats on the edge of the Humber at Sammy's Point, a more Northern vantage point than used earlier. On the way we saw Roe Deer in the fields. We quickly got our eye in, spotting plenty Shelduck, Redshank, Curlew and various gulls. Saltmarsh plants were pointed out - Sea Wormwood, Sea Purslane, Sea-milkwort.

But within minutes we were off! A Red-breasted flycatcher had just turned up in a small copse of mostly Hawthorn trees next to the YWT Discovery Centre. Soon we joined a calm, yet expectant, gang of birders huddled in a small grove with binoculars and cameras ready for action. We had missed great views by a few minutes, as the treasured photographs showed. We joined in the synchronised swaying from side-to-side, and lowering to the ground of the birding group as the bird teased its audience and had to be content with snatched glimpses as it flitted between and within the trees. Never mind, this was a great find and a great start to our final day! We kept looking as we returned to the Centre for lunch and for a final farewell.

Coffee and cakes were enjoyed along with excited chatter, and we decided to decamp to the hide at Kilnsea Wetland rather than return to Sammy's Point. We looked for again Little Owl in the neighbouring farm, but to no avail. However, our visit was rewarded with great views of Black-tailed Godwit, our first and only Lapwing, Redshank and Dunlin. Plenty of ducks were on the water, including a male Pintail in sparkling plumage, Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler and Mallard. Little Grebe, Coot, Heron, Greylag Geese added to the tally and a Short-eared Owl, hidden in the grass, suddenly flew off. A good decision, a good session!

We took advantage once more of the excellent café at the Discovery Centre before saying goodbye to one of our party who was leaving early. We had timed it well to meet Adam at the reserve gate and climb aboard the YWT ‘unimog’ 4-wheel-drive safari vehicle. Converted from Army use, it was an ideal mode of travel along to the end of Spurn Point, saving time and energy. We reached the RNLi and ex-army buildings without too many jolts where Adam explained the fascinating background to the Point and the key conservation role of YWT.

Behind the buildings and radar tracking station lies the bulbous end of Spurn Point, the Point, a veritable wilderness composed of sand dunes that are initially consolidated by Marram, succeeded by Sea Buckthorn, Elder, Hawthorn, Bramble, Gorse and other tough plants. The resulting scrub is ideal habitat for migrating birds to rest, feed and hide – so is an ideal place for birders to search for them. The remains of gun emplacements make good viewing platforms and from there we were delighted to see Ring Ouzel, Brambling, Chiffchaff, Siskin and Redwing. Jelly Ear fungus was found on the branches of some Elder trees but the Elder fruit was already decimated. Sea Buckthorn, Hawthorn and Bramble were laden with berries – but not for long once the winter thrushes arrived in numbers (we had only seen the vanguard).

A short walk took us to the Lighthouse, now redundant and open for visits – a great work-out climbing the steps and a great viewing point at the top. A pair of Stonechat was on territory nearby, a Kestrel was using thermals to search for food and a friendly Fox paid us a visit (thank you for the food!) Pink flowers, together with some bleached ones, of Common Stork’s-bill stood out in the grass, along with Restharrow, Autumn Hawkbit and Wall Rocket. The dry, faded fruit of Common-spotted Orchid were a reminder that Bee Orchid can be found earlier in the summer – a plant that is spreading North as global warming impacts. This phenomenon will surely also impact on bird and invertebrate migration patterns – another good reason for continuing detailed research through ringing, disciplined observations and surveys. Spurn Point will be the focus of such study for some time to come.

Our three-hour safari came to a close and our intention was to drive back to the hotel for final farewells. But the lingering Red-breasted Flycatcher was too great a lure for our still species-hungry birders, a Yellow-browed Warbler was calling and a Water Rail was inspecting a small scrape that had just been dug that morning. So, we stayed as long as we could and fitted in a final coffee and cake as best we could. Eventually though it was time to drive back to Patrington, past the church (nicknamed by mariners as ‘The Queen of the Humber’), where we would say our farewells.

It had been an excellent trip, with migration seen in action and its unpredictability appreciated. We had seen birds coming in, birds leaving and others mixing with residents so making it impossible, without ringing, to tell apart migrants from home birds. Some rare sightings were hoped for and granted, yet the two Minke Whales were a complete and wonderful surprise. Moths, butterflies, dragonflies and plants added to a great tally of species sighted. The magic of migration was clearly on show in East Yorkshire for our all too short a trip, leaving some wonderful memories of a most successful and enjoyable holiday. It’s a place to return to for more migration magic.

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Checklist

Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	October			
			3	4	5	6
Our tour checklist follows the names and taxonomy (including species order) of the International Ornithological Congress list of the birds of the world (version 11.2, July 2021) which seems destined to become the global standard in future. The species included are based on those thought most likely to be recorded together with what has been seen on previous tours.						
1	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>				X
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			X	X
3	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		X	X	X
4	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>				X
5	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		X	X	X
6	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		X	X	X
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		X	X	X
8	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		X	X	X
9	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		X	X	X
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		X	X	X
11	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		X		X
12	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		X	X	X
13	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			X	
14	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			X	X
15	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		X		X
16	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		X	X	X
17	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		X	X	X
18	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		X	X	X
19	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		X	X	X
20	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			X	

	Common name	Scientific name	October			
			3	4	5	6
21	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				X
22	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		X		X
23	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			X	X
24	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		X		X
25	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			X	
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			X	X
27	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		X		
28	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		X		
29	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		X		X
30	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		X		X
31	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		X		
32	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>				X
33	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		X		X
34	Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>		X		
35	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		X		X
36	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		X		X
37	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>			X	
38	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			X	X
39	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>			X	X
40	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		X		X
41	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		X	X	X
42	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			X	X
43	Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		X		
44	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			X	X
45	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			X	
46	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		X	X	X
47	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		X	X	X
48	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			X	
49	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			X	
50	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		12		X
51	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		X		
52	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>				X
53	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H		
54	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				
55	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		X	X	X
56	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		X	X	
57	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			X	X
58	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		X	X	X
59	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		X	X	X
60	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>			X	X
61	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		X	X	X
62	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		X	X	X

	Common name	Scientific name	October			
			3	4	5	6
63	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		X	X	X
64	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		X	X	X
65	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		X		X
66	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		X	X	X
67	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H		
68	Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>				H
69	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		X	X	X
70	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		X		
71	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		X	X	X
72	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		X	X	X
73	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>				X
74	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		X	X	X
75	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>				X
76	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		X	X	X
77	Red-breasted flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>				X
78	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola ruberta</i>		X		
79	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>		X		X
80	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		X	X	X
81	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		X	X	X
82	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		X		X
83	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		X		X
84	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		X	X	X
85	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		X		
86	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		X		X
87	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>				X
88	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		X	X	X
89	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>				X
90	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		X	X	X
91	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				X
92	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			X	X

Common name	Scientific name	October			
		3	4	5	6
Mammals					
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		X		X
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>				X
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		X	X	X
European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		6	X	X
Bank vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>		X		
Minke whale	<i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i>			2	
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>			X	

Common name	Scientific name	October			
		3	4	5	6
Field mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>			X	
Invertebrates					
Moths					
Beaded Chestnut	<i>Agrochola lychnidis</i>		X		
Angle Shades	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>		X		
Lunar Underwing	<i>Omphaloscelis lunosa</i>		X		
Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>		X		
Square-spot Rustic	<i>Xestia xanthographa</i>		X		
Large Wainscot	<i>Mythimna pallens</i>		X		
Common Nettle-tap	<i>Anthophila fabriciana</i>		X		
Lackey (larval webs)	<i>Malacosoma nuestria</i>		X		X
Butterflies					
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			X	X
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			X	
Speckled Wood	<i>Parage aegeria</i>			X	
Others					
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>		X		
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>		X		
7-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella septempunctata</i>		X		
A crane-fly			X		

Plants

Common name	Scientific name	Location	Date
Sea Buckthorn	<i>Hippophae rhamnoides</i>	Spurn peninsula	D2 D4
Marram	<i>Ammophila arenaria</i>	Spurn peninsula	D2 D4
Common Cord Grass	<i>Spartina anglica</i>	Spurn peninsula	D2 D4
Common Reed	<i>Phragmites australis</i>	Discovery Centre	D2 D4
Bullrush	<i>Typha latifolia</i>	Bird Observatory	D2 D4
Glasswort	<i>Salicornia europaea</i>	Warren (Humber)	D2
Common Sea Lavender	<i>Limonium vulgare</i>	Warren (Humber)	D2
Prickly Ox-tongue	<i>Helminthotheca echioides</i>	Discovery Centre	D2 D4
Autumn Hawkbit	<i>Scorzonoides autumnalis</i>	Discovery Centre	D2 D4
Sea Mouse-ear	<i>Cerastium diffusum</i>	Bempton Cliffs	D3
Sea Rocket	<i>Cakile maritima</i>	Lighthouse	D4
Greater Sea Spurrey	<i>Spergularia media</i>	Lighthouse	D4
Sea Wormwood	<i>Artimesia maritima</i>	Sammy's Point (Humber)	D4
Sea-milkwort	<i>Lysimachia maritima</i>	Sammy's Point (Humber)	D4

Sea Kale	<i>Crambe maritima</i>	Discovery Centre	D2 D4
Sea Purslane	<i>Atriplex portulacoides</i>	Sammy's Point (Humber)	D2
Sea Arrow-grass	<i>Triglochin maritima</i>	Warren (Humber)	D2
Long-stalked Orache	<i>Atriplex longipes</i>	Lighthouse Point	D4
Common Stork's-bill	<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Lighthouse	D4
Thrift	<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Bempton Cliffs	D3
Perennial Wall Rocket	<i>Diploxys tenuifolia</i>	Lighthouse	D4
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Spurn peninsula	D2 D4
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Point	D4
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	Point	D4
Gorse	<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Point	D4
Fungus			
Jelly Ear	<i>Auricularia auricula-judae</i>	Lighthouse	D4