

East Yorkshire: The Magic of Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 20th October 2021



Redwing ringed and ready for release



Red Fox



Ringling demonstration by Warden Paul Collins

Report and images compiled by Alan Miller



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Summary

The ‘magic of migration’ was witnessed throughout the tour. We witnessed birds heading south from their breeding grounds to their wintering areas; we saw the masses of waders which flock together to winter on the Humber estuary mudflats; we saw species which move around to avoid bad weather and find better food stocks; and we saw a ‘mega’ rarity, a Two-barred Greenish Warbler, which breeds on the central and eastern Siberian taiga and was very lost! From our base at a boutique hotel in Patrington we spent two days around the Spurn area and on another visited coastal areas at Bempton and Flamborough. The weather can be unpredictable at this time of year and we did get wet a couple of times, but spirits were high and the sightings more than made up for the rain, which was probably responsible for the amazingly close views of Snow Bunting and Brambling. Thanks must go to ‘Group’ members for working together to make it a productive, enjoyable and rewarding few days in a lovely area.

Day 1

Sunday 17th October

Arrival at Patrington, East Yorkshire

Group members from all over England met at our boutique hotel in Patrington, located about 12 miles from Spurn Point, for the start of our tour to explore East Yorkshire’s coastal areas and hopefully experience the Magic of Migration. In the autumn many birds head south from their breeding grounds further north and across in Scandinavia. When the winds are right many cross the North Sea and travel down the east coast heading for warmer climes. Others gather together in their thousands to winter on the rich feeding grounds provided by the Humber estuary. All this provides an annual spectacle in this part of the country.

We met at 6pm and got to know each other over dinner. Afterwards we moved to the function room where Alan and Stuart welcomed everyone to the tour and talked about the plans for the next few days. After the briefing many adjourned having had a long day travelling, and with the prospect of an early start in the morning.

Day 2

Monday 18th October

Spurn area including Ringing demonstration and Moth trapping

After a warm night for the time of year, the day started grey and overcast with a southerly wind. We had breakfast at 7am over which some group members reported hearing a Tawny Owl during the night. After breakfast we set off for Church Field at Spurn, arriving around 8am. At the ringing station we met Observatory Warden Paul Collins together with colleague Greg Lee. After being welcomed, Greg opened two moth traps which had been ‘on’ overnight and showed us the contents, which included 12 moth species, some Caddis Flies and an Ichneumon species. We were able to get a good luck at the moths as they rested on egg cartons and species included Large Wainscot, Lunar Underwing, Beaded Chestnut and Setaceous Hebrew Character.

Next Paul explained about bird ringing and its importance in monitoring bird species and distribution. We saw a Dunnoek in the hand that had been previously ringed, and watched him measure, weigh and ring a Redwing and a female Blackbird before they were released. We also had a look at the Heligoland trap before giving thanks and moving on.

We drove to Blue Bell car park from where we walked south along the coastal path. Unfortunately visibility out to sea was only moderate so sightings were limited to gulls. We crossed to the Canal Scrape Hide where we settled in to see what was about. We had good views of Teal, Moorhen, Little Grebe and Mallard, and Water Rail was heard.

Moving on we walked south to the Warren area where we were able to scan the Humber mudflats as the tide was out. We quickly added more species including Curlew, Redshank, Golden Plover, Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Dunlin, Brent Goose and Little Egret.

Walking back towards the Discovery Centre we made a deviation on the path alongside the Canal where the best sighting was a male Stonechat which posed on the top of a Hawthorn bush. As we approached the Discovery Centre a large group of 'twitchers' were staring at bushes next to the Centre entrance where a Two-barred Greenish Warbler, a rare migrant from Eastern Europe, had been found. The bird was favouring a pollarded Sycamore tree and with a little perseverance, most of the group eventually had good views as the bird fed around the base of the tree.

We had lunch in the Centre café before walking back to the vehicles and driving to Kilnsea Wetlands. As we walked to the hide a Little Owl was viewed on a nearby pile of pallets. From the hide we added more species but crucially enjoyed good views of Shoveler, Pintail, Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit and Mediterranean Gull. Some stayed in the hide whilst others walked to the back of the wetlands where we could also see Beacon Ponds. We spent some time studying the six species of gull present, and identified a single Bar-tailed Godwit which flew in and landed near some Black-tailed so the differences could be seen.

Our last stop of the day was at Sammy's Point. With the tide coming in birds were getting pushed towards the shore. We enjoyed a spectacle as around a thousand Golden Plover took to flight and circled over our heads. We also spotted two Whooper Swans in a field and as we were watching them we saw two Roe Deer madly chasing one another, including cleanly jumping at speed over an irrigation channel.

Once back at the hotel we had time to freshen up before some met at 6.45pm for 'lists' and then at 7pm everyone enjoyed a tasty dinner and talked over the day's experiences.

Day 3

Tuesday 19th October

Bempton Cliffs and Flamborough Lighthouse

Today the rain started at dawn and continued until midday. Over breakfast we noticed that many wasps were asleep on the outside of our breakfast room windows. At 8am we set off for a wet drive to Bempton Cliffs RSPB Reserve. En route a flock of 20 Whooper Swans appeared out of the gloom and flew over the vehicles. We

stopped at Hornsea to buy lunch makings before arriving at the reserve, which was not only wet but there was a sea mist which greatly reduced visibility and we couldn't see the sea!

We put off getting wet by having a coffee break in the Visitor Centre café but by 10.30am we had to make a decision. A few decided to stay in the café whilst other intrepid group members set off in the mist and rain to find the coastal path. At the path we headed northwards to Jubilee Viewpoint where, to our delight, a Snow Bunting was on the access ramp. It was focussed on hunting insects on the ground and as we watched it worked its way to within six feet of us, totally oblivious to our presence. Returning south we had another treat at Mosey Downgate Viewpoint where a Brambling was on the access ramp and again we had excellent views.

With two excellent sightings in the bag we walked to New Roll Up Viewpoint to look at the Gannetry. After adding Shag, Kittiwake and Grey Seal to our list and with the rain easing, we headed back to the Visitor Centre for lunch.

Once refreshed we looked at the feeding station and around the Dell where we added Tree Sparrow, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Chaffinch to our list of sightings.

With the rain having stopped and the visibility considerably better we headed to Flamborough Lighthouse. We parked in the car park and walked to the lighthouse point. We found a Common Toad on the path and it was gently removed to safety. The bay under the lighthouse held a single Eider duck. At the point we checked an inlet and enjoyed seeing numerous Harbour Seals and a few Grey Seals. Scanning the sea we also spotted Guillemot, Razorbill and Red-throated Diver, and as we walked back to the vehicles a Merlin gave us extended flight views.

On the return journey we added Buzzard to our trip list and got back to the hotel at 5pm. At 6.45pm we met again to check our sightings before our last evening meal together, which was accompanied by much chatter.

Day 4

Wednesday 20th October

Spurn area including Unimog tour to the Point

Today the weather forecast was mixed with the prospect of bands of rain. We set off after breakfast with enthusiasm and our fingers crossed. We arrived at Kilnsea Wetlands at 8.15am just as shafts of sunlight cut through the clouds over the Humber estuary, illuminating a large flock of Golden Plover and smaller flocks of Redshank. The field opposite also held good numbers of Curlew and seven Roe Deer.

We walked to the hide where we enjoyed many of the species regularly seen and added two Spotted Redshank in winter plumage and compared them to the more numerous Common Redshanks. A Brown Hare also passed by on the rear shore of the lagoon. Next we continued our walk to Beacon Ponds. In the path-side bushes we watched Reed Buntings, a single Greenfinch and a charm of Goldfinch. The view back to the wetlands also gave us a better view of the gulls and we spent time identifying the Mediterranean Gulls amongst the Great and Lesser Black-backed, Herring, Common and Black-headed Gulls. As we returned to the vehicles we added a party of Linnets sat on wires giving good views.

As we drove to the Spurn Discovery Centre area it started to rain so after parking we headed to the Canal Scrape Hide. Although crowded it was dry! Whilst the birdlife was quiet, we did get several views of two Water Rail in a ride cut into the reeds.

With the rain forecast to pass through by late morning, some set off for a walk whilst others retreated to the Discovery Centre café. The walkers headed to the coastal side and walked down to the Seawatch Hide from where a distant Red-throated Diver was found on the sea. With the rain stopping and the sky clearing we then crossed through The Warren to view the Humber estuary where the tide was out and we checked the waders on the mudflats.

Lunch was taken at the Discovery Centre café and at 1.30pm we met Rob from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust who was our guide for a three-hour excursion to Spurn Point. The Point was accessible by road until eight years ago when the road along the 3.5 mile sandbank was breached during a storm and washed away. Access is only available by vehicles capable of crossing sand and our transport was an aged but ideal ex-Russian military Unimog. After a briefing which included avoiding the many Brown-tail moth caterpillar bivouacs on the Sea Buckthorn which can cause skin irritation, we set off. During the 20-minute journey there were a few birds migrating south in ones and twos on the sea side, keeping low over the beach and dunes.

We stopped at the lighthouse which is now de-commissioned and a tourist feature. We were able to climb the 144 stairs to the light platform for fantastic views in all directions. With the clouds having rolled back the light was lovely. Next we moved to the lifeboat staff houses to walk around the point. We added Sanderling to our tour list before Rob gave another briefing, which was interrupted by a Red Fox which walked up to us to check us out before wandering off. Whilst the birding was quiet, we were fascinated by the natural history and military importance of the area.

As we drove back along the point the sun was shining and the tide was almost in, pushing the birds off the extensive Humber estuary mudflats and we were treated to flocks of Redshank, Knot, Godwits, Golden Plover, Ringed Plover, Dunlin and Sanderling moving along the water line, which was an awesome spectacle to end our tour.

At the parking area thanks were said to Rob and the Magic of Migration tour came to an end.

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Species Lists

Key: ✓ - recorded but not counted; H – heard

Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2021		
			18	19	20
1	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	8	1	10
2	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	2	20	
3	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓
4	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	3		10
5	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓		✓
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓		✓
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	2		
8	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓		✓
9	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓		✓
10	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓		✓
11	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		✓
12	Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		1	
13	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
14	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		3	1
15	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	10		✓
16	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	10	✓	
17	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	2	✓	✓
18	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓
19	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓		✓
20	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	2		
21	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1	1	
22	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	2	1
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2	
24	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
25	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1	
26	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H		2
27	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	2		4

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2021		
			18	19	20
28	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓
29	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	3	2	
30	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1		✓
31	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	3		7
32	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	6		✓
33	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	1000+		1000+
34	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>			✓
35	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			✓
36	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓		✓
37	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓		✓
38	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	1		✓
39	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓		✓
40	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	2		
41	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓		✓
42	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>			2
43	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		2	
44	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyophaga melanocephalus</i>	10		✓
45	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
46	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	5	1	✓
47	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓		✓
48	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
49	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓
50	Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		4	1
51	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		2	
52	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	
53	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	5		
54	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
55	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	3	✓	✓
56	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	1		
57	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H	H	
58	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	2		5
59	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓		
60	Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	1	1	
61	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		2	
62	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	1	1
63	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓
64	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	H	H	2
65	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	1		3
66	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	3	✓	✓
67	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓		2
68	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2021		
			18	19	20
69	Two-barred Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus</i>	1		
70	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	
71	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	
72	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
73	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
74	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓
75	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
76	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
77	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		✓
78	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓	
79	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		2	
80	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		1	
81	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			1
82	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		10	20
83	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			2
84	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			6
85	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			6
86	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>		1	

Other species

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2021		
			18	19	20
	Mammals				
1	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>			1
2	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			1
3	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓
4	Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓	
5	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	3		7
	Moths				
1	Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>	✓		
2	Light Brown Apple Moth	<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>	✓		
3	Garden Rose Tortrix	<i>Acleris variegana</i>	✓		
4	Angle Shades	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>	✓		
5	November Moth agg.	<i>Epirrita sp.</i>	✓		
6	Beaded Chestnut	<i>Agrochola lychnidis</i>	✓		
7	Large Wainscot	<i>Rhizedra lutosa</i>	✓		
8	Lunar Underwing	<i>Omphaloscelis lunosa</i>	✓		
9	Red-line Quaker	<i>Agrochola lota</i>	✓		
10	Pink-barred Sallow	<i>Xanthia togata</i>	✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2021		
			18	19	20
11	Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	✓		
12	Setaceous Hebrew Character	<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>	✓		
13	Brown-tail (caterpillar bivouacs)	<i>Euproctis chrysorrhoea</i>			✓
	Other Species				
1	Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>		✓	
2	Wasp sp.			✓	
3	White-lipped Banded Snail	<i>Cepaea hortensis</i>		✓	✓
4	Brown-lipped Banded Snail	<i>Cepaea nemoralis</i>	✓	✓	✓
5	Common Darter dragonfly	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓		
6	Caddis Fly sp.		✓		
7	Ichneumon sp.		✓		
8	Devil's Coach-horse beetle	<i>Staphylinus olens</i>	✓		

