

# East Yorkshire: The Magic of Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

3rd – 6th October 2022



Bempton Cliffs



Goldcrest



Common Snipe



Roe Deer

Report and images compiled by Matthew Capper



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Tour participants: Matthew Capper (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients.

## Summary

Spurn and Flamborough are both very special places. Both are unrivalled as locations to see migration in action and look for rare and scarce birds, but the chalk cliffs of the Flamborough headland with its seabird colony at Bempton and the unique history and geography of Spurn combine to make this a great all-round trip. On this occasion, the winds were not conducive to large falls of migrants, but we still saw nearly 100 species of bird and were able to get a real feel for how they travel across this landscape, especially from the viewing tower in the Observatory garden at Spurn. The waders, ducks and geese were probably the stars of the show but it is also hard not to mention the Spoonbill, Yellow-browed Warblers, close up views of the Snipe and the magic of the two Roe Deer as we ended day three at Kilnsea Wetlands. One of the joys of watching wildlife is those special unexpected moments and this trip delivered from start to finish.

## Day 1

**Monday 3rd October**

### Patrington

We assembled on Monday evening at 6pm. We had used a range of transport modes to arrive, with some combining the trip with visits to other places 'up north' to make the most of having made the longer journey. Those picked up from the station in Hull enjoyed a few birds as we drove east to Patrington and saw some Fallow Deer which are unusual in this part of the world. We had the opportunity to get acquainted over dinner and Matthew went through some introductory information and logistics. The forecast was for gale force winds on the Wednesday so the itinerary had been arranged to allow us be in the relative comfort of the Unimog and the lighthouse during the worst of the weather and hopefully maximise our chances in the field.

## Day 2

**Tuesday 4th October**

### Flamborough Head and RSPB Bempton Cliffs

For our first day, we were heading north to Flamborough, a huge chalk headland sticking out into the North Sea. We made good time, seeing a range of farmland birds on the way and a few parties of newly arrived Pink-footed Geese.

Our first stop was at the outer headland, admiring the two lighthouses and wonderful scenery. There were a few Grey Seals down in the bay and a Cormorant hauled out on the beach. The bird observatory volunteers had planted an area of seed plants for birds and there were flocks of finches commuting in to feed. Mostly, they were Goldfinch and Linnet but any efforts to scrutinise them further were scuppered by a marauding Sparrowhawk that nipped up and over the hedge in an unsuccessful ambush effort.

We went down to the hide and everyone had a chance to get to grips with sea watching. The hide gave good shelter and there was a decent amount to see. Gannets were the most common, with birds in view most of the time. Grey Seals were also plentiful out in the water off the headland. We added both Razorbill and Guillemot, with the latter allowing views through the telescope. Kittiwake were moving offshore along with a few duck and we managed views of at least four different Red-throated Diver.

We walked back to the car park, checking the set-a-side field again. Plenty of Linnet and Goldfinch again along with a few Skylark going south, making their distinctive flight calls.

South Landing is a lovely spot and we walked down to the beach where there was a Curlew along with a few Black-headed Gulls. There was also a Stonechat on the edge of the beach and couple of Rock Pipit in amongst the seaweed. Their cryptic plumage perfectly matched the background so it took a while to get everyone a view.

The woodland walk offered a degree of comfort from the wind and Matthew took everyone through the ID features and most importantly, the call of Yellow-browed Warbler. This paid off a few minutes later when one and then two were picked up close by, calling repeatedly. Sadly all we got by way of views were a couple of quick glimpses, but a great pair of birds to record nonetheless. There were a few other woodland birds about and Chaffinches were on the move. As we rounded the corner and headed back towards the car park, we could hear one of the Yellow-browed Warblers again and reflected on how such a small bird could make such a long journey to the UK.

Our stop for the afternoon was the stunning Bempton Cliffs reserve. First things first though – time for lunch and a hot drink. Duly satisfied, we headed back out to admire the Tree Sparrows on the feeders along with a range of other small birds. The much hoped for Goldcrest was hiding from the wind though and so we gathered some extra bits from the vehicle and headed off down to the cliffs.

We took the walk to Staple Newk, adding Corn Bunting and Reed Bunting on the way. The Feral Pigeons here are still relatively close in appearance to their wild Rock Dove cousins and there were plenty of them zipping back and forth, using the wind to assist them.

We spent a good while at Staple Newk, admiring the many Gannets, some of which were just a few feet away. Most of the chicks had left the cliffs but we counted five young ones of various ages that were still to fledge. We talked for a while about the status of the seabird colony and some of the threats that they face. Pink-footed Geese could be heard just over the rise in the field behind us and a couple of skeins came in to join them whilst were there. However, our best sighting was of a couple of Harbour Porpoise that surfaced briefly from time to time. With patience, most of the group got on to them at least once.

With the afternoon drawing on, we dragged ourselves away, although we did stop on the way back for a last look at the view and to take a couple more photos. The Pink-footed Geese bade us farewell with another fly by and a couple of Meadow Pipit were heading south.

As we left the car park, we noticed a Sparrowhawk sat in the field to the right of the vehicle. It seemed to have caught a small bird as it was hopping with something in its left foot. We got excellent views and admired it for a while before sadly having to move as there was another car coming.

The drive back to Patrington was uneventful and we had an hour to relax and unwind before meeting for dinner and the evening log.

## Day 3

Wednesday 5th October

### Spurn Point and Kilnsea area

Our second full day started with a short drive down to The Warren for a look over the Humber Estuary. On route we stopped to watch a large party of Pink-footed Geese in a field and several Roe Deer nearby. On arrival, the tide was well and truly out and the promised gale was certainly evident. We found a little shelter but it wasn't easy to keep the telescope steady. Nevertheless, there was a nice range of waders to be seen such as Redshank, Grey

Plover, Dunlin and Ringed Plover. There were several Little Egrets, a few Reed Bunting and hundreds of Shelduck feeding on the estuary mud.

We headed to the Discovery Centre and checked out the hide at Canal Scrape. We were hoping for a Snipe but despite scanning, only one of the group managed the briefest of glimpses of one disappearing behind some reeds. Instead we were happy to watch the Wigeon, Mallard and Teal and a couple of Dunlin that dropped in as we were about to leave.

We were due at the Unimog at 10.30 and so made use of the Centre's facilities before walking back down to meet Rob from the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The wind was still blowing but it wasn't raining yet so we headed down the point with the side panels on the Unimog rolled up. On the way down there was a flock of Brent Geese close by so we stopped to watch them. Dotted in amongst them were Curlew, Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit, Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover. We also picked up a Whimbrel that flew off with a Curlew.

At the lighthouse, we talked about the Brown-tailed Moth cocoons that we could see and spoke about the interesting lifecycle and Latin name. Once inside, we made our way up to the top and could take in the splendid views. However, out to the west we could also see rain closing in. It duly hit as we got to the Point and so we took some cover for a few minutes. It wasn't easing though so we decided there was nothing for it and headed off for a short wander. The birds were hiding from the wind and rain so we only added a few Starling, Dunnock, Blue Tit, Chaffinch and Meadow Pipit. The Point is normally a good area for fungi but it looked as if the dry summer had had an effect and there wasn't anything to be found.

While we were away, Rob had given all the seats a wipe with a towel and put the side panels down. It meant the journey back was dry but lacked the views and birds of the journey down; a Turnstone was the only new addition.

Rob had kindly contacted the café ahead of our arrival and we were glad of the chance to sit and relax for a while in the warmth. It also allowed the rain to blow over, allowing us to get back out and give the Canal Scrape hide another try. Still no Snipe but plenty more duck and more Dunlin.

High tide was late afternoon and so we decided to end the day at Kilnsea Wetlands. The hide was quite crowded when we arrived so we found space where we could. With a bit of time though, it gradually thinned out until we had it all to ourselves.

The rising water had pushed a lot of birds up off the Humber. And there was lots to see. Black-tailed Godwits were dotted everywhere and a large flock of Redshank contained a much scarcer Spotted Redshank. At the back of the lagoon was a lone Avocet and there were small flocks of Dunlin working their way round the muddy edges.

There was a good selection of gulls including some very smart Mediterranean Gulls and ducks included Pintail, Wigeon and Shoveler.

Further back there were flocks of Pink-footed Geese and Golden Plover. The latter were feeding on a recently tilled field. New birds kept on coming and a Spoonbill was probably our bird of the day, allowing everyone a great view through the telescope. The weather had turned to sunshine and the wind had dropped so it was a lovely way to end the day, just soaking up the view and seeing small parties of birds fly back out to the Humber as the tide receded. It all culminated with a pair of Roe Deer that walked out across the mud and stopped in front of the hide. We stared at them and they stared back. One of those wildlife moments that stay with you. It felt like the perfect way to end the day but we were not quite done. As we walked back to the vehicle there was a large flock of Curlew in the grassland opposite and the Golden Plover gave us a flyby as they headed back out to the Humber. It had

been a great day that mixed the history, heritage and landscape of the Point with the fantastic spectacles of the waders and geese on the Humber and on the Wetlands.

## Day 4

Thursday 6th October

### Kilnsea/Beacon Ponds area and Sammy's Point

The final day of the trip started windy but it died down as the day went on and we saw some more sunshine.

Our first stop this morning was Church Field, the main base for the Observatory's ringing efforts. Pink-footed Geese were again out in the fields as we drove down and we were met by Paul and two helpers who had put the nets out, in the hope of catching something to ring. Bright sunshine and wind are not the ideal conditions for mist nets though and the first net round produced just two Dunnocks. However, it was still a huge privilege to be able to see them in the hand and to hear from Paul all about the work and the valuable data that it produces. A second check of the nets produced a third bird and this one was one of the most wanted for one the group – a diminutive Goldcrest weighing only a little more than a ten pence piece.

Birds were passing over and we saw Lesser Redpoll and heard Siskin with their distinctive call. Our only Chiffchaff of the trip called its distinctive "hueet" call from cover and the sun had brought out a few dragonflies - Migrant Hawkers, Common Darter and a single Ruddy Darter.

Paul checked both of the moth traps and there were a few late season moths for us to inspect – Feathered Ranunculus, Large Yellow Underwing, Lunar Underwing and a Brown Spot Pinion.

We thanked Paul for a fascinating talk and walked from Church Field to the Observatory Garden, taking in the Heligoland Trap on the way and releasing a Migrant Hawker in the process. In the Obs garden, we walked up the viewing tower which allowed us to have a superb view of the area and a real feel for how migrants move south and are funnelled down to the point. Having crossed a large area of open farmland, you could really see how the habitat in church field and the observatory acts as a magnet for tired migrants. Even though they were not classic conditions, from the tower we were able to watch migration unfolding before us. Pink-footed Geese and Golden Plover flocks were up in the distance and Wood Pigeons were making their way south in a loose flock. And every minute or so there would be a small flock of passerines appear from the north and fly over our heads – mostly Goldfinch, but also small parties of Tree Sparrow, Chaffinch, Linnet, Lesser Redpoll and Siskin. Visible migration is a real feature of Spurn so it was nice for us to experience it from such a good vantage point.

We stopped by the Bird Observatory to look at the sparrows on the feeders. There was a veritable cloud of both House and Tree Sparrows in the same flock, dropping down on to the floor and the feeders and diving back into the hedge whenever they were spooked. It was sight that brought back memories of how common both species used to be and was rather poignant as a result.

Our next destination was Sammy's Point. The sun was shining but the wind was coming straight off the estuary and made things a little challenging. We got a good look at a flock of Golden Plover out on the mud, allowing us to compare the plumage with nearby Grey Plover. Birds were spaced out on the low tide but there were still plenty of assorted waders to sort through. Battling in to the wind there was a party of Swallow, some of several that we picked up over the course of the trip. We walked back towards Kilnsea and once we got to the third paddock, we took the path through the hawthorns in order to get some shelter. Here, there were a few dragonflies in the sunny spots and a few common birds appeared.



We bumped into a fellow birder who had seen a Stonechat so gave it a few minutes to see if we could find it but without success. Instead, as we headed back, we had one of those lovely moments as a Peregrine sped past over our shoulders and away along the base of the sea defences, hoping to catch an unsuspecting wader by surprise.

We had another excellent lunch in the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Discovery Centre and decided that we were not going to be defeated by a Snipe and so paid our third visit of the trip to the Canal Scrape Hide. It was a smart move. This time, there was a cryptically camouflaged Snipe feeding in amongst the cut reed, providing everyone with a telescope filling view as it probed with its long bill.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in the Kilnsea / Beacon Ponds area. Hide tide was again in the afternoon so once again we were able to make the most of the spectacle. Kilnsea Wetlands again contained a selection of gulls, wildfowl and waders with three Avocet and yesterday's Spoonbill probably the main highlights.

Over on Beacon Ponds there were some new waders to be seen with Ruff and Little Stint of note. The wildfowl all went up at one point and the Pintail were distinctive as they circled us a couple of times. We had been chatting to Steve Exley, one of the local birders and he kindly came back to tell us that a Barred Warbler had been seen in the hedge a short distance away. We decamped but the warbler wasn't playing ball. It showed only briefly in the back of the hedge to just a couple of the group. Still, we were not too worried, there was lots to see as we wandered back to the vehicle. Our last birds before we headed back to the hotel all made a fitting and atmospheric end to the trip. The Curlew were back in the field opposite, Golden Plover were again commuting past us in a tight flock and lastly, the Pink-feet got up close by, banked and came right over our heads, filling the air with their distinctive 'wink wink' calls.

On the journey back, there was one more treat with our second Peregrine of the day that flew in front of us and landed on a pylon in the adjacent field. We stopped so that everyone could enjoy it before continuing to the hotel where we said our final farewells and began the onwards journeys, reflecting on a superb few days in a unique part of the world.

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## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	trip	October		
				4	5	6
1	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	3	3
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓		✓	✓
3	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓			1
4	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	✓		55	
5	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓		✓	✓
7	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓		✓	✓
8	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	10+	✓	✓
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓		✓	✓
11	Wigeon	<i>Mareca Penelope</i>	✓		✓	✓
12	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	✓		✓	
13	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓			✓
15	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	✓	4		
16	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓			3+
17	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓		
18	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓		
20	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓		✓	✓
21	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		1	1
22	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓		1	1
23	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	2+	4	2
24	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	1	1	1
25	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	1	✓
26	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓			2
27	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	2	✓	✓
28	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	1
29	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓		1	3
30	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓		✓	✓
31	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓		1	
32	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	✓			2
33	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓		✓	✓
34	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓		✓	500+
35	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	✓			✓
36	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓		✓	
37	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓		✓	✓
38	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	✓			1

	Common name	Scientific name	trip	October		
				4	5	6
39	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓		✓	1
40	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓		✓	✓
41	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓		✓	
42	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	6+	✓	✓
43	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	✓		1	
44	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓		✓	✓
45	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓		1	
46	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓		1	
47	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓		
48	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓		✓	✓
50	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	✓		✓	✓
52	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓		
55	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	✓	✓		
56	Feral Pigeon / Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓		1	2
58	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	3+		✓
61	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓		2	✓
62	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	2	✓	✓
63	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓	2		
64	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓		✓
66	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	1		
69	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓		✓
71	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	2		
72	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓		
73	Barred Warbler	<i>Curruca nisoria</i>	✓			1
74	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓			h
75	Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	✓	2h		
76	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	h		1
77	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓		✓
79	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓		



	Common name	Scientific name	trip	October		
				4	5	6
80	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>	✓			1
86	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓		✓
87	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓	✓		✓
88	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓		✓
90	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>	✓			✓
93	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓			✓
94	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		✓	✓
95	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>	✓	1		
96	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	✓	1		

## Mammals

1	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	1		
2	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	1		
3	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	15+		
4	Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>	✓	2+		
5	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	1	9	10+
6	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	✓		
7	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓		1	

## Moths

1	Feathered Ranunculus	<i>Polymixis lichenea</i>	✓			1
2	Brown-spot Pinion	<i>Anchoscelis litura</i>	✓			1
3	Lunar Underwing	<i>Omphaloscelis lunosa</i>	✓			6
4	Large-yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	✓			4

## Dragonflies

1	Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓			✓
2	Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>	✓			✓
3	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	✓			✓