

East Yorkshire: The Magic of Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

25th – 28th September 2023



Scenic by Bryan Flynn



Pied Wagtail by Selena Flynn



Oystercatcher by Bryan Flynn



Gannet by John Garrett

Tour report by David Spivack



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Tour participants: David Spivack (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 25th September

Arriving from all parts of the UK (and further afield) at the lovely Dunedin Country House Hotel late afternoon, we met as a group in the bar area for tea & coffee and all introduced ourselves.

We then headed to the dining room at 7pm for what was the start of a delicious meal. After dinner we met as a group and we went through the broad itinerary for the following three days.

Day 2

Tuesday 26th September

Spurn area

After meeting for a filling breakfast at 7.30am and with a watery sky overhead, we departed the hotel at 8.30am for our first full day in the Spurn Point area. However, before we had even left the car park we started the tour's list with a fly-over Great Spotted Woodpecker along with a Wren, Robin and Woodpigeon being added to the list soon after.

On the way to spurn we added further to our list as we saw six Roe Deer, Grey Heron, Pheasant and Jackdaw. Our first stop was the ringing demonstration at Church Field laid on for us by Paul, Warden at Spurn Bird Observatory. As we parked up a Sparrowhawk flew across the road while Meadow Pipits flew in alarm overhead. Paul gave us an excellent introduction to the work of the Observatory and then went off to see what delights the nets held for us. We were not to be disappointed as during our time with Paul he ringed two Goldcrests, a Lesser Redpoll, two Great Tits and a Blackcap.

Paul had also set out his moth trap overnight which we went through and a list of the moths caught is towards the end of the checklist. Whilst at Church Field we added Reed Bunting, Black-headed Gull and Magpie along with a steady stream of Meadow Pipits flying overhead. The star bird of our time in Church Field was a Marsh Harrier that flew south. As we departed an excellent ringing demo the rain started, and we headed to the shelter of the hide overlooking the Canal Scape.

Regardless of the heavy rain we were still able to add a few more species to the list that included two Little Grebe or Dabchick, Moorhen, Shelduck, a number of departing Swallows, two Pied Wagtails and a Kestrel. We were also led a merry dance by two very well-hidden Snipe which everyone managed to see along with a Cetti's Warbler that as usual was only heard.

The next planned stop was to be the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Kilnsea Wetlands but with the rain still heavy we decided that an early lunch was the order of the day. With that decision made we then headed to the excellent YWT Spurn visitor centre for a good lunch.

By 1pm and after lunch the rain has ceased, the sun had appeared and so we headed back to the hide at the YWT reserve at Kilnsea Wetlands. Here we spent time adding even more species to the day's tally that included the rarest bird of the tour - a single American Wigeon, a new bird for most on the tour. In addition, we saw a range of

waterfowl that included Mallard, Wigeon, Gadwall, Pintail, Shoveler, Teal, Shelduck, Greylag Geese and four Pink-footed Geese. Gulls were also well represented with Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, Black-headed, Common and Herring Gulls all present along with three Mediterranean Gulls. Also at Kilnsea Wetlands we also added on two Spoonbill along with Little Egret, Avocet, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Bar-tailed Godwit and three Pied Wagtail.

With the rain gone and the sun out we left the hide at Kilnsea Wetlands and headed along the track towards Beacon Ponds, a large area of brackish lagoon between Kilnsea Wetland and the sea. Here we saw a number of the same species but did add two Ringed Plover, four Cormorant with wings out drying in the wind along with three Roe Deer. The rough ground here with lots of thistles also provided a good feeding area of a range of small birds that included a nice flock of Goldfinch, Linnet and two Greenfinch.

Departing the Kilnsea Wetlands area we then headed to the old Bluebell Café that is now the base of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trusts marine team & operation at Spurn. Here a member of YWT's marine team gave a fascinating talk about the restoration of oysters and seagrass on the Humber. It was great to see behind the scenes at the work being delivered, the sea water tanks at the lab and to see the filming that was taking place of oysters filter feeding.

As the first day was drawing to an end we had a look around the bushes at the Warren and viewing screen overlooking the Humber. Here we saw a range of birds on the estuary that included Curlew, Dunlin, Knot, Golden & Grey Plover along with Shelduck, whilst in the scrub we saw a number of Linnets, Goldfinch and Woodpigeon. We rounded off the day briefly at Sammy's Point where we added to the list by seeing our first Wheatear of the tour along with three more Roe Deer. With a great first day despite the rain at lunchtime we then headed back to the hotel for a superb evening meal after which we ran through the day's sightings.

Day 3

Wednesday 27th September

Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs

Our second full day took us an hour or so north towards the very different terrain of Flamborough Head and the RSPB reserve at Bempton Cliffs.

We arrived in lighthouse car park in sunshine although it was breezy. Once assembled, we headed past the lighthouse and along the northern path of the headland to view the sea and an area known as the "Bay Brambles". From here we viewed our first seabirds that included our first Gannets – always a delight to see. In addition, we saw Herring Gulls on the sea along with Cormorant and a number of Shags. We then took a slow walk along the cliff top to look down on the bay brambles and rocky shore from above. A range of species in this area included Oystercatcher on the shoreline while the scrub provided us with views of Woodpigeon, Blue Tit, House Sparrow along with chattering Starlings above us on the phone wires whilst the occasional Skylark and Swallow flew overhead.

A short walk along the road took us past the historic chalk tower, before we headed down the Old Fall Hedge footpath that would eventually lead us to the southern clifftop of Flamborough Head via Old Fall Wood. This walk along Old Fall Hedge can be a magnet for birds heading off or just arriving on migration. Alas on this occasion it turned out to be rather quiet with only three Blue Tit, a single Robin and a few distant Swallows. Over the

ploughed field we also saw a single Kestrel along with Skylark, Woodpigeon and Carrion Crow. Old Fall Wood was also very quiet with just a single Robin providing company. We left the wood and headed towards the clifftop via a flock of around 250 Herring Gulls feeding in the adjacent stubble field.

Once at the clifftop we then headed back towards the headland and our fortunes started to change. As we headed along the cliff we soon saw to everyone's delight our first pod of around six Bottlenose Dolphins. With our sprits raised the walk back to the car park along the cliff top provided good views of two Little Egrets, a Common Tern, Oystercatchers, Shag, further Gannets and Cormorants, whilst at sea we saw Guillemot and Razorbill and around 45 Grey Seals hauled out on the flat rocks below. The walk ended with a lovely flock of around 40 Goldfinch in the thistles near the car park.

We then boarded our mini bus for the 15 minute drive to the RSPB reserve at Bempton Cliffs where we had lunch in the café.

After lunch we the strolled the reserve paths, heading first to the reserve's bird feeding area. Here we were treated to wonderful views of Tree Sparrows, a scarce bird now in many parts of the UK but in the Bempton area numbers are holding up. Also in the feeding area we caught up with Pheasant, Blackbird, Great & Blue Tit, Dunnock, Chaffinch, Robin, Woodpigeon and Greenfinch.

Departing the feeding area we then headed down to the clifftop path where from the various viewing platforms we viewed hundreds of Gannets both in the air and on the cliffs. On the sea there were Guillemots & Razorbills whilst the occasional Great Black-backed Gull quartered the clifftop. There were even some adult Gannets on the cliff still with young, which was nice to see. On our walk we saw flocks of Jackdaws along with feeding Feral Pigeons and Herring Gulls in the ploughed fields. As one field of wheat was being harvested close to the path a single Hare was seen trying to avoid the harvester. After another great (and dry) day in the field we headed back to the hotel for another lovely meal and a review of the day

Day 4

Thursday 28th September

Spurn area

Our final day of the tour started dry, sunny and a bit breezy as we headed from the hotel back to the Spurn area. On the way to our first stop, the YWT Kilnsea Wetlands Reserve, we saw a number of Collared Doves and Pheasants. However, as we entered Easington village we were treated to the wonderful sight of around 400 newly arrived Pink-footed Geese, winter visitors to the UK that breed in Greenland, Iceland and Svalbard.

As we were due to board the large 4x4 Unimog to the point at 11am we made a relatively short stop at Kilnsea Wetlands to see if any new birds had arrived overnight. Just after leaving the mini-bus we were treated to a great view of a hunting Barn Owl. With a silent swoop it caught a vole, flew gently past us and into a barn where no doubt the vole met its fate. Interestingly a Kestrel followed the Barn Owl to the entrance of the barn but thought that trying to steal the owl's vole was not a good idea and remained at the entrance. Once at the hide overlooking Kilnsea Wetlands we once again caught up with many of the species we saw on our first visit but in addition to our first visit we did see Stock Dove, one Knot and one distant Little Stint.

After a brief stop at the YWT visitor centre we then headed down to the gate at the end of the road to meet Rob from YWT for our introduction and to board the Unimog. Along the way, we saw a number of Grey Seal offshore as well as a flock of another winter visitor, 39 Brent Geese, plus Knot and Curlew on the estuary side of the track down to the point. Along the way we saw Meadow Pipits flying alongside us on our way to the lighthouse. Once at the lighthouse (owned by YWT) we parked up and were treated by Rob to an insightful talk about the lighthouse and some of the military history of the area. Rob then opened up the lighthouse and we climbed to the top of the tallest lighthouse in north east England. Amazing views from the top were had by all who made it to the top.

Once back on the Unimog we then completed the five minute drive to the end of the road which is about a fifteen minute walk from Spurn Point itself. A walk to the point is always a memorable moment in an area that can hold large numbers of migrant birds. However, whilst enjoyable it turned out to be rather quiet on the bird front. We did add Stonechat to the list plus we also saw on the point walk one Sandwich Tern, Linnet, Reed Bunting, Dunnock, Starling, Kestrel, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull and Robin along with three Grey Seal, one Rabbit, one Roe Deer and two Migrant Hawks. We then boarded the Unimog once again for the return trip back along the track to the YWT centre for lunch.

After lunch and with the end of the tour in sight we struck out along the canal walk from the YWT centre along the estuary toward Cliff Farm. This walk provides wonderful views of the estuary, Spurn Point and the southern shore of the Humber and the Lincolnshire Wolds in the distance. As we strolled along the estuary we saw lots of waders that included Knot, Redshank, Curlew and Dunlin as well as large numbers of Shelduck and four Little Egret. In the fields we saw Carrion Crows, Magpies and in the scrub we heard yet another elusive Cetti's Warbler and ended the tour with a number of Goldfinches feeding in thistles once again.

Returning to the mini bus after another great day at Spurn and a wonderful three days on the East Yorkshire coast we headed back to the hotel from where the group headed home.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I = Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	September 2023		
			26	27	28
	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			✓
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	3		✓
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓		✓
	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓		✓
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓		✓
	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓		✓
	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓		✓
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓		✓
	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓		✓
	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓
	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓		✓
	Rock Dove (Feral pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓		✓
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓		
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓		✓
	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓		✓
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			✓
	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓		✓
	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			✓
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	✓		✓
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	
	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	✓		✓
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓		✓
	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			1
	Jack Snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>	✓		
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓		
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>	✓		✓
	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓		✓
	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓

I = Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	September 2023		
			26	27	28
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓		✓
	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	
	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓		✓
	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	
	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓	
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	2		
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1		
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1		
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	
	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>			✓
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓		
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	
	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	
	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	
	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	
	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓		✓
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	
	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓		✓
	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H		H
	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		
	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓		H
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	H
	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	
	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓		
	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓	
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		✓
	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			
	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	
	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		✓

I = Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	September 2023		
			26	27	28
	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>	✓		
	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	✓

Others

Common name	Scientific name	September 2023		
		26	27	28
Mammals				
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓		✓
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		✓	
MOTHS				
Lunar Underwing	<i>Omphaloscelis lunosa</i>	✓		
Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	✓		
Lesser Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua comes</i>	✓		
Light Brown Apple Moth	<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>	✓		
Setaceous Hebrew Character	<i>Xestia c-nigrum</i>	✓		
Vines Rustic	<i>Hoplodrina ambigua</i>	✓		
Brown-spot Pinon	<i>Agrochola litura</i>	✓		
Other Insects				
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	✓		✓
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓	✓	
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>		✓	