Northumberland & the Farne Islands

Naturetrek Tour Report

5 - 10 June 2016





Great White Egret

Roseate Tern







European Shag

Report and images by Tim Dean



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Tour participants: Tim Dean (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Sunday 5th June

Some of the group met at Newcastle Railway Station at 2pm. We boarded our minibus and set off onto the A189 past St. James Park and travelled north-east to our first stop at Cresswell Pond. More clients joined us there and we were soon in the hide where two Pied Avocets became the main focus, this being one of their most northerly breeding locations in the UK. A singing Eurasian Reed Warbler proved elusive in front of the hide but it gave us the opportunity to listen to its 'up & down' song. A selection of common species were noted before we moved on to Druridge Pools.

At Druridge Pools there was much more activity as winter rain had led to an extensive wetland with a large area of mud for feeding ducks and waders. Immediately on entering the first hide looking south an egret was noted feeding quietly next to a Grey Heron. The fact that they were of similar size made everyone realise we were watching a rare Great Egret which is still very scarce in Northumberland and a major rarity to start the tour. Three male Ruff in full breeding plumage were admired, together with a selection of wildfowl. The nearby hide had a view to the north and gave us an unusual opportunity to see a female Gadwall and her brood of eight ducklings at one of their few breeding sites in the county. We moved on to the renowned 'budge screen' where a dilapidated open hide give a wide view of the marsh and a roosting drake Garganey which we enjoyed watching through the telescope.

Time was passing all too easily and we departed to join up with the A1 and head north to Belford where we were welcomed at the Blue Bell Hotel. Dinner was suitably scrumptious and after a quick bird list, everyone was happy to enjoy an early night, especially after a long travelling day.

Day 2

Monday 6th June

We started the day by spotting a Peregrine Falcon which was found on an early morning walk at Belford. Then after a suitably full English breakfast we were ready for the off and the short drive to Holy Island, one of the few inhabited offshore islands in the UK which is completely cut off by the tide. Luckily the tide was low and we were able to drive across the causeway and on to the island. A walk north-east involved traversing one of the better named tracks; the Crooked Lonnen! This brought us out to the coast where we watched the Northern Gannets fly past on fishing trips from Bass Rock. Walking along the coastal path brought us to the Holy Island lough and a new plush hide. Apart from a Little Grebe and a male Gadwall it was quiet. Some of the group opted for a walk out to Emmanuel head at the far north-eastern point of the island, whilst others walked past the towering Lindisfarne Castle to spend time in the village and to look round the Priory ruins.

We left the island at 1pm to avoid being cut off by the tide. Lunch was taken at the Barn at Beal restaurant with panoramic views of Lindisfarne. A Western Yellow Wagtail flew over the car park, unsurprisingly the only one of the week for this fast declining species.

The afternoon was spent firstly with a stop at Budle Bay, where a pair of Red-breasted Merganser was noted in the channel. Only the odd pair breeds in Northumberland so this was a definite bonus. Also two Little Egrets were avidly feeding, a now frequent sight along the coast. Then it was on to Bamburgh for photographs of the

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imposing castle and a look at the sea where our only Common Scoter of the week were offshore with four males and a female present. A contrast in habitat was next and we went just inland to Spindlestone where a walk along riverside woodland gave us many new species. Everyone enjoyed the contrast between the busier coast and this quiet area.

The weather had been superb all day and after returning to the hotel, several of the group took advantage of this and made use of the paths from Belford village.

Day 3

Tuesday 7th June

This morning we went to Newton and parked at Links House car park just to north of village. We had an easy walk just in from the sand dunes along a flower-filled track. In fact the flowers proved to be a diversion with many impressed by the profusion of Purple Milk Vetch, Bloody Cranesbill and Crosswort. Towards the bridge we had views of the wonderfully named Long Nanny Estuary. A viewpoint from the dunes gave us views of the Little Tern colony. We had telescope views of these together with a single summer-plumage Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling; late migrants even in mid June. We continued with another short walk over the dunes to the National Trust warden's hut next to the tern colony. There we had close views of the Arctic Tern colony with at least 1,200 adults present. They all lifted into the air when a lone paraglider went over the colony. We enjoyed excellent photographic opportunities and it was hard to leave this area, the only mainland breeding site in Northumberland. On returning to the car park we were re-united with Steve who had stayed by the car park. His morning had been enlivened by a rather brazen naturist strolling through the dunes; certainly a match for our view of a Painted Lady butterfly!

Next we had a short drive to Low Newton where we walked to the scrape north of Newton Pool. This marvellous stretch of flooded field is testament to one birder's efforts to install a sluice and keep water in this field all year. Today we managed good views of four Black-tailed Godwits in summer plumage plus a variety of common wetland species. This scrape has seen Terek Sandpiper, Stilt Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs in recent years amongst many other wader species. We walked through to view from the dunes and whilst admiring the ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle to the south, an Arctic Skua was seen offshore hassling the Sandwich Terns before moving off north.

Once back on the minibus we had a half hour journey to Amble where most of us were glad of a cup of tea and a snack at the local tea shop by the quay. Our boat trip to Coquet Island could not have been in more placid conditions with a calm sea enabling the boat to get close to the island, allowing excellent views of several Roseate Terns. Landing is not allowed on this lone RSPB reserve in the county to help the 73 pairs of Roseate Terns which are nesting this year in England's only colony. Although the emphasis was on the Roseate Terns, it was hard not to ignore the thousands of Atlantic Puffins and Arctic Terns in view.

After returning to harbour we had a short drive to East Chevington, where this old mining area has been transformed into a major reserve of the Northumberland Wildlife Trust. High water levels this year meant that little mud was available for waders, but the Great Crested Grebes and Common Terns were admired from the hide. Finally we made a short stop at Druridge Bay Country Park to admire the Bee Orchids. It had been a long day but again superb weather had made it hugely enjoyable and another delicious dinner awaited us at the Blue Bell Hotel.

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Day 4

Wednesday 8th June

The highlight of the week for many of us was the opportunity to visit the Farne Islands and this day was much anticipated. After another satisfying breakfast to set us up, we drove to Seahouses where we boarded one of Billy Shiel's Glad Tidings boats to take us out to Staple Island. It has to be said that we were exceptionally lucky to be able to land as this was the first boat for 11 days to disembark people as low tides and heavy swell had previously prevented any landings. Once safely off the boat, we soon made our way over the island to view the massed ranks of Common Guillemots; just some of the 50,000 individuals on the Farne Islands this year. In amongst them were Razorbills plus extremely close European Shags and Black-legged Kittiwakes. We traversed the island to meet the boat as it was unusually unable to moor at the landing point due to the swell.

We then had a short trip to Inner Farne where landing is always easy in a sheltered bay. A bonus was a welcome from Iolo Williams who was presenting for BBC's Springwatch programme from the Farne Islands. He was happy to accept another 'selfie' from a visitor and to tell us about an Arctic Tern that has been proven to have travelled 90,000 kilometres in its 12 years. Everyone was grateful for the advice to wear a hat as the Arctic Terns bombard people along the first boardwalk. Once on to the main part of the island, life is more peaceful and there was a chance for everyone to 'coo' over puffins. The population of Atlantic Puffins is doing well and 40,000 pairs now nest on the islands. The full mix of seabird species is seen on Inner Farne with unrivalled photographic opportunities at close quarters. The boardwalk expands all around the island and it was possible to find a hidden nook to peacefully enjoy the stunning vistas and soak in the atmosphere of this very special place. Although the sun was muted, it was a still, dry and windless day to enjoy this truly internationally renowned seabird colony.

Day 5

Thursday 9th June

Today was a complete contrast; away from the coast and a day in the Cheviot Hills, starting at the prime upland site of Harthope Valley. We journeyed west from Belford, through Chatton and into Wooler where we headed up to Middleton and the start of the uphill stretch to the valley. Once over the crest of a hill, the valley opened out and this prime stretch of upland could be appreciated. On the way through we had excellent views of a White-throated Dipper from the minibus with several others seen later on. We parked at Langleeford and walked south-westerly to Langleeford Hope. It was a gorgeous day and the valley gleamed in the sun. The first of several Common Cuckoos was singing and upland specialities such as Northern Wheatear and Tree Pipit were noted, along with close views of Spotted Flycatcher. A lost Goosander duckling was calling madly and hopefully got reunited with its mother. Once through the woodland area we came to the base of The Cheviot itself; the highest county peak at 800 metres towering upwards. The walk back in bright sunshine gave everyone perfect views of this pristine valley where a few Red Grouse were found on the hillside. A short stop at the Carey Burn revealed a family party of six Northern Ravens on the hill top.

Sustenance was required in the middle of the day so we visited the cafe in the Ingram Valley. This lovely spot in woodland gave us excellent views of a Eurasian Oystercatcher with her young and close views of a Common Sandpiper. Once refreshed we drove the short distance to Branton Gravel Pit. At this mature gravel pit we spotted Little and Great Crested Grebes plus an assortment of other waterbirds.

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Next we went to Tim and Janet Dean's bungalow in Rothbury. Many were hugely impressed with the scenery around Rothbury, with the village nestled in the Cheviot Hills and only visible when almost upon it. We walked along the River Coquet where the picturesque Thrum Mill was admired. Common Sandpiper and White-throated Dipper were feeding along the river. We went into Rothbury where the busy village and its assortment of local shops were fully appreciated with butchers, grocers and bakers etc almost indicative of another age in this world of supermarkets. Leaving the Cheviot Hills, we cut back to the A1 via Alnwick Moor and then back to Belford for our last evening meal

Day 6 Friday 10th June

Today was our last day and a chance for some final birding in Druridge Bay. We started at East Chevington where a female Western Marsh Harrier was the first bird seen as it flew over the entrance track. Only in recent years has this raptor settled in Northumberland to breed. At another stop at Druridge Pools we saw that the Great Egret was still present. At Cresswell Pond we saw a Little Egret, and a brief sea watch at Snab Point was exciting as four Manx Shearwaters flew north, luckily through a succession of flags enabling us to use them as markers and keep up with their progress. The breeding Northern Fulmars were popular as close views were obtained on the cliffs.

At our last stop we walked down to Wansbeck Estuary from North Seaton Colliery. Happily the rarity that Tim knew about was still present so an unexpected bonus was a first-summer Bonaparte's Gull, our 119th species of the week and the last! This dainty North American species is only the ninth sighting in Northumberland and a fitting end to a very successful tour.

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'Bridled' Common Guillemot

Species Lists

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

			June							
	Common name	Scientific name	5	6	7	8	9	10		
1	Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
2	Greylag Goose	Anser anser		✓	✓		✓	✓		
3	Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	✓				✓	✓		
4	Common Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
5	Eurasian Wigeon	Anas penelope	1							
6	Gadwall	Anas strepera	✓	1	5	3		7		
7	Eurasian Teal	Anas crecca	3		1			1		
8	Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
9	Garganey	Anas querquedula	1							
10	Northern Shoveler	Anas clypeata	3			2		1		
11	Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
12	Common Eider	Somateria mollissima		✓	✓	✓				
13	Common Scoter	Melanitta nigra		4						
14	Common Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula					4			
15	Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator		4						
16	Goosander	Mergus merganser		20	1		1			
17	Red Grouse	Lagopus lagopus					2			
18	Common Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus	✓		✓		✓			
19	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis		1	1	1				
20	Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus	2		4	1		2		
21	Northern Fulmar	Fulmarus glacialis			10	1		2		
22	Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus				-		4		
23	Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus		2		3		<u> </u>		
24	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	✓	<u>-</u>	√	✓		✓		
25	European Shag	Phalacrocorax aristotelis		2	2	✓				
26	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		3	_			1		
27	Great Egret	Ardea alba	1					1		
28	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	· ·	✓	✓	✓	✓	· ·		
29	Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus						1		
30	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus		1				<u> </u>		
31	Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo		1	1		2	-		
32	Common Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus		1	1	1	2	2		
33	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus		1	ı	'				
34	Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	/		✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Eurasian Coot	Fulica atra		✓	▼	✓	✓	∨		
35 36	Pied Avocet	Recurvirostra avosetta	2	V	V	_	•	-		
	 		<u> </u>	✓	✓	✓	✓	3		
37	Eurasian Oystercatcher	Haematopus ostralegus		V			•	_ v		
38	Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	/		3	1	✓			
39	Northern Lapwing	Vanellus vanellus	V	√		V	•	✓		
40	Sanderling	Calidris alba			1					
41	Common Snipe	Gallinago gallinago	1					1		
42	Black-tailed Godwit	Limosa limosa			4		_	-		
43	Eurasian Curlew	Numenius arquata	Н	1			3	1		
44	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos					1			
45	Common Redshank	Tringa totanus	2					1		
46	Ruddy Turnstone	Arenaria interpres			1	2				
47	Ruff	Calidris pugnax	3							

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			June							
	Common name	Scientific name	5	6	7	8	9	10		
48	Arctic Skua	Stercorarius parasiticus			1					
49	Black-legged Kittiwake	Rissa tridactyla			✓	✓				
50	Bonaparte's Gull	Chroicocephalus philadelphia						1		
51	Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
52	Common Gull	Larus canus			1					
53	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus		2	2	✓		1		
54	European Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
55	Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
56	Little Tern	Sternula albifrons			2					
57	Sandwich Tern	Thalasseus sandvicensis	1	12	✓	✓				
58	Common Tern	Sterna hirundo			3	1		1		
59	Roseate Tern	Sterna dougallii			3					
60	Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea			✓	✓				
61	Common Guillemot	Uria aalge		✓	✓	✓				
62	Razorbill	Alca torda				✓				
63	Atlantic Puffin	Fratercula arctica			✓	✓				
64	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Columba livia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
65	Stock Dove	Columba oenas						2		
66	Common Wood Pigeon	Columba palumbus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<u>∠</u>		
67	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto		√	√	✓	✓	✓		
68	Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus					Н			
69	Common Swift	Apus apus	2	3	2		1			
70	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Dendrocopos major		1	2		'			
71	Eurasian Skylark	Alauda arvensis	Н	Н	∠ ✓		Н	✓		
72	Sand Martin	Riparia riparia	11 ✓	11 ✓	· /	✓	11 ✓	· ✓		
73	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	✓	✓	→	✓	· /	✓		
74	Common House Martin	Delichon urbicum	✓	✓	· ·	,	· ·	→		
75	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis	•	•	•		1	-		
76	Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	✓	1	✓			✓		
77	·	-	•	1	•	1	•	_		
	Rock Pipit	Anthus petrosus Motacilla flava		4		1				
78	Western Yellow Wagtail			1						
79	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 ✓	✓		
80	Pied Wagtail	Motacilla alba	V	V	V	•		V		
81	White-throated Dipper	Cinclus cinclus					4			
82	Eurasian Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes		Н	Н		√	✓		
83	Dunnock	Prunella modularis	1	1	√		√			
84	European Robin	Erithacus rubecula	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
85	European Stonechat	Saxicola torquatus	2		1		1			
86	Northern Wheatear	Oenanthe oenanthe					2			
87	Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	✓	√	√		✓	✓		
88	Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos		✓	✓		✓	√		
89	Mistle Thrush	Turdus viscivorus			1		✓			
90	Sedge Warbler	Acrocephalus schoenobaenus	Н	1	2					
91	Eurasian Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus scirpaceus	Н	Н	2			Н		
92	Eurasian Blackcap	Sylvia atricapilla	Н	Н	Н		✓	Н		
93	Garden Warbler	Sylvia borin			Н		Н			
94	Common Whitethroat	Sylvia communis	1	✓	Н	Н	Н	Н		
95	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita		Н	Н	Н	Н	Н		
96	Willow Warbler	Phylloscopus trochilus	Н	Н	Н	Н	Н			
97	Goldcrest	Regulus regulus		1			1			
98	Spotted Flycatcher	Muscicapa striata					5			

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	Common name	Scientific name	June							
			5	6	7	8	9	10		
99	Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus					5			
100	Eurasian Blue Tit	Cyanistes caeruleus		1			1			
101	Great Tit	Parus major		1			2			
102	Coal Tit	Periparus ater					1			
103	Eurasian Treecreeper	Certhia familiaris					Н			
104	Eurasian Magpie	Pica pica	✓		2		✓	✓		
105	Western Jackdaw	Corvus monedula	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
106	Rook	Corvus frugilegus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
107	Carrion Crow	Corvus corone	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
108	Northern Raven	Corvus corax					6			
109	Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
110	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
111	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus	✓	✓						
112	Common Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
113	European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris					2			
114	European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
115	Eurasian Siskin	Spinus spinus					Н			
116	Common Linnet	Linaria cannabina	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
117	Lesser Redpoll	Acanthis flammea cabaret					2			
118	Yellowhammer	Emberiza citrinella			3		✓			
119	Common Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		

Mammals

Roe Deer Atlantic Grey Seal European Brown Hare

European Rabbit

Butterflies

Painted Lady Small Heath Orange-tip

Other Fauna

Moon Jellyfish Comb Jelly

Flowers

Bee Orchid Amsinckia Bloody Cranesbill

Purple Milk Vetch



Arctic Tern

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