

Suffolk in Style

Naturetrek Tour Report

13th – 15th March 2026



Stone-curlew



Black Redstart



Dartford Warbler



White-tailed Eagle

Tour report by Brian Small



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Summary

The attractive coastal town of Aldeburgh is a fine place to stay for a birding tour of the Suffolk coast. Its early history as a port, a shipbuilding and then a fishing town has now been taken over by tourism; though the railway line that brought holidaymakers here for over a hundred years, until the Beeching cuts in 1966, is now long gone. The wide main street and coastal houses are still attractive architecturally and look to the rising sun, as did our hotel at the north of town, which has kept a lot of its old charm, and provides excellent food.

We headed out to various points of the compass: west to Hazlewood Marshes; south to Slaughden and the Martello Tower at the north of Orfordness; but mostly the well-trodden path north to Minsmere RSPB, Westleton Heath and Walberswick. It would take too long to list all of the highlights, but they would certainly include Bittern, Dartford Warbler, Woodlark and Stone-curlew, However, the Adders and White-tailed Eagle at Minsmere vie for top spot: the former was present in good numbers, and the latter was a complete surprise as it soared overhead, then flew up, up and away.

Day 1

Friday 13th March

Arrival at Aldeburgh & Hazlewood Marshes

Having arrived at the Wentworth Hotel, Aldeburgh, and following a quick meet up, we made use of the afternoon by heading to Hazlewood Marshes, a short drive to the west of town. We initially took a path that ultimately ends up at Snape, before angling off to view the new, reclaimed mudflats, and to visit the hide which views the River Alde. In the bushes, with a distinct feeling of spring in the air, Great and Blue Tits sang, whilst Long-tailed Tits, now forming up into pairs, actively flitted through the bushes.

A male Stonechat perched out for good views on the field edges, Skylarks sang overhead and the first of many Marsh Harriers and Buzzards for the weekend flew across the fields. In a small patch of trees, a Treecreeper showed nicely on the trunks; on our return we saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker at the same spot.

On a slowly rising tide, the mudflats were active with many waders, the most numerous being Redshanks, Dunlins and Black-tailed Godwits; Curlews would occasionally call, and as we searched through the flocks we picked out Grey and Golden Plovers, Knot, Ringed Plover and several Snipes in flight and feeding in the reed-fringed mud. The light and viewing were good, and we took our time talking about the salient features of what can be tricky birds to identify. Wildfowl included many Wigeons, Teals and Shelducks, the last in small displaying groups, softly whistling and not so softly pulling at back feathers.

At the hide, out of the slightly nippy breeze, elegant Pintails swam on the shore of the river with Great Crested Grebes out in the middle; a Little Grebe was also seen. As we walked back to the vehicles, Rock Pipits flicked out of the ditch calling, a Grey Heron flew in and a Mistle Thrush perched up.

Day 2

Saturday 14th March

North Warren RSPB & Minsmere RSPB

A cold and clear morning failed to produce the dramatic sunrise for which several early risers had hoped, but a pre-breakfast walk north to the southern part of North Warren was very much enjoyed. With the sun behind us and a frost on the ground, we strolled past the scalloped sculpture by Maggi Hambling and bushes that held a Song Thrush, and both Greenfinch and Goldfinch. Many Linnets were skittering about too. We looked west over the flooded fields by the hides. Against the reeds were Great Egret and Grey Heron (providing a good comparison size comparison), and later Little Egrets too. Skylarks sang in the crisp and golden light, probably trying to warm up, while Cetti's Warblers and the first Chiffchaff sang in the marsh-side bushes. The highlight of the walk was a Bittern which lifted from the reeds and flew north quite a distance; having dropped back into the reeds, it then boomed a little, just for us! Over the floods Lapwing 'peewit'ed and lapped about in display; Wigeons, Gadwalls, Teals and single pair of Pintails showed very well, often calling. However, as a good-sized flock of White-fronted Geese flew in to land on the field, breakfast and coffee called, and we headed back to the hotel.

After a fine breakfast, we drove north to Minsmere, via Eastbridge, to spend our day on the rightly-famous RSPB reserve. With such a diversity of habitats, Minsmere is always host to an amazing array of birds, and we left with almost ninety species from our visit.

Having parked and checked in with the reserve staff, we initially headed east along the North Wall, not before pausing to look at a black Adder sunning itself among the bracken and brambles. Four Marsh Harriers flew about the reeds north of the bank, with Reed Buntings to the south and several Mediterranean Gulls calling overhead, the sun shining through their all-white wings. Checking the scrape from East Hide took a little while: there were many Teals, Wigeons, Gadwalls, Pintails and single Goosander, with Ringed Plovers, Black-tailed Godwits and Lapwings among them; a Kittiwake stood on the 'goalposts' in front of the hide, and yet more Mediterranean and Black-headed Gulls were pairing up on the islands.

Once out of the hide, we detoured a little along the top of the dunes, to check for more Adders, and we had hardly got onto the beach when we found one out in the open. Over the next fifteen minutes or so we saw up to eight others (some of them young and gingery brown) as they warmed up in sheltered spots among the gorse, their fiery eyes glowing in the light. As we neared the sluice, we were sadly disappointed to hear but not see Cranes bugling as they flew south somewhere; however, we did manage to see one of our birding highlights of the day: a 'proper' male Black Redstart, with black face and white flashes on the wing, perching on the concrete blocks and posts. A little south of the sluice, while checking over Sizewell Levels and seeing Red Deer, many Cormorants and more wildfowl, we noticed a disturbance among the ducks, something often caused by a Sparrowhawk or Peregrine. Yet despite searching low down, we could not find its cause; then we looked up, and there, just above us, was a juvenile White-tailed Eagle! Unbelievably, it then soared over us, gaining height and drifting out to sea until it became almost invisible: next stop Holland, we believed. Such views enabled some detailed photos, which showed it to have metal rings on both legs, but investigations revealed it was not a radio-tagged bird from the reintroductions on the Isle of Wight. In many ways, it did not matter where it had come from: the encounter was astonishing.

The walk back to the centre via the reedbed gave us a chance to calm down a little, but not for long, as calling Bearded Reedlings delayed us: some of the group got brief views. Near South Hide, a Water Pipit was flushed and

called before dropping onto a patch of reed stubble; we retraced our steps and found it quickly, but peering through the sunny reeds made viewing less than optimal. With patience, we all managed to pick out the salient features. A male Marsh Harrier in full display was another delay, as was a quick check from West Hide, where two Goosanders were seen. Finally, we pressed on for lunch: not even a calling Marsh Tit could stop us!

After eating our own food, we gathered by the bird feeders: some saw a male Siskin (honest!), but all saw Marsh Tit. We then walked to Bittern and Island Mere hides through the south belt of trees. Though Bittern hide was bitternless, we had prolonged views of Marsh Harriers carrying sticks and getting ready to nest. We hoped Island Mere hide would produce the goods: nope, although Great Crested Grebes in display, Tufted Ducks, Pochards and a high-flying Peregrine Falcon were some compensation. Minsmere is such a rich place for birds: as we walked up onto Whin Hill to get views across the extensive reedbeds, two Woodlarks flew past, calling and then dropping to the ground, where we had nice views through the scopes. Then we checked back over the reeds: first, a pair of Cranes was found, and while the leader helped all the group get onto them, two male Bitterns were seen chasing about. We had seen three key species in five minutes, making a fine end to our visit.

Back at Aldeburgh, a few of us drove the bumpy track to the Martello Tower, south of Slaughden, which looks towards the antennae and 'pagodas' on Orfordness and Orford Castle. Rock Pipits sat atop the old building, and were joined by a Pied Wagtail; Turnstones perched on the sea defences, and out to sea Nathan picked out a Gannet and a Red-throated Diver.

Day 3

Sunday 15th March

North Warren, Thorpeness Meare, Westleton Heath & Walberswick

The 'Sunshine Coast' produced this morning, with a fine orange display over the sea. A small group headed out for some early birding, first taking the Sluice Cottage footpath which leads across the fields to the old railway line. A flock of 133 White-fronted Geese was quickly seen, with close views showing the heavy black bars on the bellies of adults; Skylarks song-flighted, and Chiffchaffs and Cetti's Warblers again sang from the bushes, this time joined by a squealing Water Rail. All the species from the previous day were noted, though the Bittern was heard only, so we quickly visited Thorpeness for a check of the meare. Met by a family of Egyptian Geese, we looked over the lake, which was busy with Mute Swans and other wildfowl, including another Goosander, Coots and Moorhens.

Following breakfast, we again headed north, to a sunny (if chilly) Westleton Heath. Despite having a busy day yesterday, we had not had time to see any of the heathland habitat of the Suffolk Sandlings, and we put that right this morning. It was lovely to park up and start walking across the heath in the sun, and it was not long before we heard and saw the first of several Woodlarks, high above us singing their beautiful song, and joined by others later; a Skylark also sang, offering a nice comparison in song and flight. A pair of Stonechats was found, and then we picked out the low 'buzzy' song of a male Dartford Warbler: on such a morning surely it would be perched up? And it was, it was quickly pointed out on a low gorse bush, and telescopes put on it for most to get views: it dropped down, then came back up to allow more people to see it. Typically, it was a brief sighting, but we were lucky and found another one perched up a little later. This time, everyone saw it well.

As good as the Woodlarks and Dartford Warblers were, we still had one more target species, so pressed on to a 'special' spot where, over thirty minutes of watching, we had views of up to eight Stone-curlews in the heather.

They were a little wary, but with patience we had good views of them in the heat haze, their cadmium-yellow legs and eyes glowing; as we walked back, we watched three through the 'scopes.

Time pressed on, so after a quick pitstop at Dunwich Beach, we pressed on to Walberswick for a walk to the shore pools, back through the reedbed, and most excitingly a check of the gulls at the harbour. By now, with the land warming, a cool breeze had picked up, and bird activity had calmed; though we had several Teals and Redshanks on the pools, the reeds were sadly quiet. At the harbour, with only a couple of families crabbing, the gulls were mostly Herring, with just a single Great Black-backed; the local Turnstones were busy picking about on the shore.

And that was that, more or less. As we drove back to base, a couple of Red-legged Partridges were seen by the road, before we picked up a late lunch in Aldeburgh and sat by the boating lake at Moot Hall, chatting about the birds we had seen, and planning our next trips. Thanks to everyone for making it such an amazing and enjoyable weekend.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	March 2026		
			13	14	15
	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓
	Barnacle Goose - I	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		✓	
	Greylag Goose - I	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	
	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>		60+	133
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</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>		5	
	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		25	3
	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		2	1
	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		2	2
	Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		✓
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		H	H
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓
	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		2 + H	
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	2	
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	1	✓	
	Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>			8
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	✓	✓	
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	✓		
	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	7		
	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		1	
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>	✓		
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		1	
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	March 2026		
			13	14	15
	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		✓	
	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		2	1
	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		1	
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>		3	H
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>			2
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>		1	
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	
	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1	
	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		2	
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓	
	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		2 + H	
	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		2	5
	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	H
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	H
	Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>			4
	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1		
	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		1	
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	1		
	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			5
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>		1	
	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓

I=Introduced		March 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		1	
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		1	✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	✓

Mammals

I=Introduced		March 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓
Reeves's Muntjac - I	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	✓	✓	✓
Red Deer - I	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓
Chinese Water Deer - I	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>		✓	✓

Reptiles

		March 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15
Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>		10	