

# The Best of Sussex in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Report

13th – 16th January 2022

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Little Bunting by Matt Eade

Report by Philip Thompson



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Tour Participants - Philip Thompson (Leader) with five Naturetrek clients.

## Day 1

Thursday 13th January

After our mid-afternoon 'meet and greet' at our comfortable hotel, with all the group participants having arrived safely from their various destinations, we drove the short distance to Arundel where we positioned ourselves overlooking the River Arun alongside the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve. Here we waited patiently scanning the level grazing meadows and surrounding woodlands for birds coming in to roost within the reedbeds of the centre. The expected Marsh Harriers arrived singly, coming across the valley and river some way south of our position giving good silhouetted views. A total of five were seen. A Kingfisher put in a brief appearance below us on the river, perching on the tall reeds before shooting away. A couple of large flocks of Pied Wagtails similarly arrived to roost in the safety of the reeds. A splendid male Peregrine passed close overhead, catching the last of the evening sun giving a rosy flush to its breast. On the river a single each of Little and Great Crested Grebes continued fishing as the day drew to a close, joined by a Great Cormorant, several of which had been passing in small groups to roost elsewhere upriver.

We enjoyed the tranquil end to the day listening to the last of the nearby songbirds calling and singing before heading back to our hotel for a splendid evening meal and comfortable nights sleep.

## Day 2

Friday 14th January

Today was spent south of Chichester with a visit to Pagham Harbour. Our first stop was at Sidlesham Ferry and the reserve visitor centre. We walked the short distance to overlook the pool. The morning sun of a glorious day was illuminating the birds present beautifully as we scanned through the throng. The water level was high limiting the birds present to predominantly ducks, with none of the expected waders on show. We had great views of numerous Wigeon, Mallard, Shoveler and Teal. At the rear of the pool a Buzzard sat on a number of different posts, waiting for the frost to clear. A brazen Roe Deer grazed unconcernedly in an open field.

We walked on to check the main tidal creek behind us finding a few Redshank and Teal within the saltmarsh vegetation.

We then drove on to Church Norton where we walked out to the harbour edge and on to the sea and beach. The tide was just beginning to drop from its high mark which kept the waders in view. A good variety of wader species were present, the highlight being a lone Whimbrel which had remained to spend its winter in the harbour. After a relaxing time carefully going through and admiring the birds present we walked onwards across the beach to scan the sea offshore. Here we were rewarded with distant views of a pair of Long-tailed Duck, several Red-throated Divers and Slavonian Grebes, one of which obligingly popped up beneath our noses close inshore giving some splendid views.

Returning to the vehicle we drove on down to Selsey Bill where we ate our picnic provisions in the sun, scanning the sea as we chatted. Very little was passing so after a brief walk and spotting of the distant landmarks we returned to Pagham and Sidlesham Quay. In beautiful tranquil conditions we set out on a very muddy path

around the northern edge of the harbour aiming to reach the North Wall. Unfortunately the mud got the better of us and we soon returned having failed to reach our destination, but not before a major scare had put up the many hundreds of birds present in the harbour allowing us to appreciate the importance of this site as a refuge for birds, also allowing us to pick up the flock of Avocets and numerous Golden Plovers among the swirling mix of species.

We opted next to drive around and approach from a different side, but unfortunately we were thwarted once more by the limited parking available, necessitating a further change of plan and a visit to Pagham Lagoon in the hope of a sheltering diver or sea duck. Pochard and Tufted Ducks were present alongside the usual gulls. A fine view of the distant large flock of Brent Geese was had as they rose from their grazing fields. The day was drawing to a close when we continued with a short walk through the banked and vegetated shingle of the area before we made our return to the hotel.

### Day 3

### Saturday 15th January

In contrast to yesterday we headed away from the coast inland to visit one of the Sussex lowland heaths in search of Dartford Warblers! The morning began with frost and a little light mist making bird activity initially slow. However we were very soon alerted to the presence of a Dartford Warbler by its churring call. It was not long before we were admiring this delightful bird at close range as it crept amongst the gorse with a few perches in the open to appraise us as posing any threat.

After this wonderful encounter we continued our walk out onto the misty atmospheric heath. A few small groups of Reed Buntings raised our pulses as we checked them over as there were reports of a long-staying Little Bunting – a rarity - associating with them. As we continued our walk we arrived at an area of open grassy heath with scattered Silver Birches where numerous Reed Buntings were present plus the rather surprising presence of our Naturetrek tour manager! He was soon able to find the Little Bunting, with the whole group able to obtain a view through one of our ‘scopes. Whilst we chatted a further Dartford Warbler was seen associating with a pair of Stonechats, followed by a single Meadow Pipit and a small flock of Redwing feeding among the birches.

We moved on to complete our circuit spotting a few other woodland birds, but not the hoped for Redpolls reported from near the car park.

After a successful morning's walk we drove on to enjoy a pub lunch at an historic inn tucked within the folds of the South Downs well away from any major road. From here we remained within the Downs, moving a short distance to the West Dean Estate where after a short walk we stopped to scan the prominent trees on the top of nearby ridges in the hope of picking up any local Hawfinches heading to roost. As we waited, we were rewarded with a number of Brambling among a small Chaffinch flock. Also present was an obliging Marsh Tit, Nuthatch and more Redwings. Drawing a blank at our first location we moved to an area within the forest where a line of Beech trees sit prominently on the Hawfinch's flightline that are often utilised as a stop-off point. Unfortunately our best efforts were not rewarded and we eventually began our walk back to the vehicle in the failing light and onward to the hotel at the end of an enjoyable day.

## Day 4

## Sunday 16th January

For our final day we returned to Arundel for an exploration of the Arun valley. We started with a circular walk around Swanbourne Lake during which we connected with a number of attractive bird species. On the lake the waterfowl included numerous Gadwall, Mallard, Tufted Duck and Shoveler and a large number of roosting and washing Common Gulls loafed apart from the familiar Black-headed and Herring Gulls. The highlight of the walk was finding an obliging Firecrest that hawked for insects and preened within a leafless Alder for all the group to see. Next we found a small flock of Siskin feeding on the cones in the top of a group of Alders. After some careful scanning of the overhanging tree branches on the surface of the lake we were successful in picking out a couple of sleepy, but nonetheless stunning, Mandarin Ducks, that took a little hard work pointing out to everyone. A final surprise of this first leg of our day was the finding of a lone Mediterranean Gull within the Common Gull flock on the lake.

On the return leg of our walk as we neared the minibus we were lucky to spot a group of five Cattle Egrets feeding in the wet meadows alongside the path below Arundel Castle. After a good eyeful for all through the 'scope we drove a short distance to Offham Farm where it was felt worthwhile, whilst in the area, to scan the meadows at a favoured traditional spot in the hope of finding the small group of Bewick's Swans wintering in the valley. Optimism paid off with the birds just barely visible through the screening trees and above the rooftops of the farm. With our lunch booking fast approaching we opted for a rapid walk down the lane for a better and closer view. This paid off handsomely with a wonderful view of these declining wintering birds in their favourite meadow.

We were then promptly back in the bus for a drive north to Amberley and another fine pub lunch, arriving spot on time for our reservation. We enjoyed fantastic panoramic views across the Wildbrooks from our table with many hundreds of ducks and waders periodically taking to the air after being spooked by sources unknown. Also present were several herds of Fallow Deer resting and grazing in the open meadows.

Having enjoyed our lunch our final port of call was a visit to the Burgh high on the downs. Our time was running short but during our walk we encountered a couple of mixed flocks of finches in the game cover strips alongside the hedges that included further Bramblings, a couple of which perched up well for us to admire. Passing raptors included several Red Kites and Buzzards that were generally always in view. Our target species were members of the healthy population of Grey Partridge that thrive here in the Higher Level Stewardship farmland of the Norfolk Estate. Hearing some calling birds, we scanned from a convenient gateway and succeeded in finding a bird concealed within the base of the opposite hedge. Convincing members of the group that they were indeed looking at it through the 'scope was the hard part!

Unfortunately our time all too soon came an end and we needed to head back to the hotel to collect the various cars and drop off at Chichester Rail Station to allow members of the group to return home after a fantastic four days of glorious weather in West Sussex.

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## Species Lists

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

			January 2022			
	Common name	Scientific name	13th	14th	15th	16th
1	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓		
2	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓		✓
3	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓		
4	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>		✓		
5	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓		
6	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				✓
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓		
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		
9	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓		✓
10	Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>				✓
11	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓			✓
12	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓			✓
13	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		✓		
14	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>				✓
15	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓		
16	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>				✓
17	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓		✓
18	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓		✓
19	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓			✓
20	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓		H
21	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓		✓
22	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	January 2022			
			13th	14th	15th	16th
23	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓		
24	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓		✓
25	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>		✓		
26	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓			
27	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓
28	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓	✓
29	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓		
30	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	✓			
31	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓	✓
32	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>				✓
33	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓		✓	✓
34	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓		✓
35	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓		✓
36	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓		
37	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓		
38	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓		✓
39	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓		
40	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓		✓
41	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				✓
42	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		✓		
43	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓		
44	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓		
45	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓		
46	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓		
47	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓		✓
48	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓		
49	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓		✓
50	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓		
51	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>		✓		✓
52	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>				✓
53	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba l. 'feral'</i>		✓		✓
54	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓	✓
55	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓
57	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓			
58	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	H		✓	✓
59	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	
60	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	✓			
61	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			H	✓
62	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓		✓
63	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	H	✓	✓	✓
64	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>			✓	
65	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	H		✓	
67	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	✓
68	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			H	H
69	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H			
70	Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>			✓	
71	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>				✓
72	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		H	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	January 2022			
			13th	14th	15th	16th
73	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			✓	
74	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓
75	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓
76	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓	
77	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	✓
78	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
79	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓	✓
80	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓	✓
81	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		✓
83	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓		✓
84	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		✓
85	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓
86	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			✓	✓
87	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	✓
88	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				✓
89	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	✓
90	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>				✓
91	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	✓	
92	Little Bunting	<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>			✓	

## Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name	Trip
1	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓
2	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓
4	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓
5	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓





