

Somerset Levels in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

6th – 8th June 2021



River Warbler



Four-spotted Chaser



Great White Egret



Variable Damselfly

Report and images by Matt Eade



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Tour Participants: Matt Eade (Naturetrek tour leader) and four Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Sunday 6th June

We met in the early evening in the picturesque town of Wells, in Somerset. Our inaugural visit to The Crown at Wells Hotel was the perfect setting to our three-day holiday, and even has its place in fame as it played a key part in the film, *Hot Fuzz*, featuring Simon Pegg. However, the food was excellent and with everyone all clear on the days' plans, we called it a night ready for an early start the next day.

Day 2

Monday 7th June

Two clients joined me at 4.45am outside the hotel to drive the 15-minute journey to Ham Wall RSPB. The dawn chorus, despite being late in the season, was vibrant and we enjoyed listening to Garden, Willow, Cetti's, Reed and Sedge Warblers, Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps. However, our main quarry was a very rare vagrant from eastern Europe which had taken up some form of residence at Ham Wall. The bird in question was a River Warbler, and we all enjoyed superb scope views of this 'mega' as it gave off its 'sewing-machine-like' song. Great Egrets were abundant, and we heard many 'booming' Bitterns during the course of the early morning, but despite not finding any, a calling Cuckoo was seen and provided much compensation.

After an excellent breakfast back at Wells, we all headed back out to the levels and to Westhay Moor. This reserve is predominantly reedbed and this became evident with a couple of 'booming' Bitterns being heard and the usual mass of warblers. We were particularly admiring of the many species of Odonata which were present. No fewer than 11 species were encountered here, and we were thrilled to observe Four-spotted Chasers, Hairy Dragonflies and Broad-bodied Chasers in the telescope; the intricacies between Variable, Common Blue and Azure Damselflies were also noted. We obtained excellent views of Marsh Harriers and Great Egrets and on the various waterbodies were Little Grebes, Moorhens and Coots.

After a lovely café lunch, we walked the area of Shapwick Heath to try our luck yet again for any flying Bitterns; alas none of these, however, we yet again enjoyed the Odonata which was on offer. Additions to our already impressive list comprised a Downy Emerald and a Scarce Chaser. Several Hobbies gave good flight views and Reed Warblers were particularly abundant, while at least four Garden Warblers remained as heard-only. Noah's Lake held many waterfowl species and also a surprise in the form of a Red Kite which was consorting with three Marsh Harriers and a Common Buzzard.

It had been a superb first day on the levels and we retired back to the hotel for a lovely dinner and the checklist duties.

Day 3

Tuesday 8th June

There was no early start today and we all met at 8am for a hearty breakfast, leaving the hotel at 9am. Forty-five minutes later, we arrived at Swell Wood RSPB and walked the short circuit finding a whole host of birds. From the viewpoint, we were delighted to find a couple of Common Cranes and a Great Egret on the levels below. A woodland circuit was relatively quiet until we sat down at the hide and observed the cleared woodland in front of us. A family of Spotted Flycatchers were enjoyed by all, and the heronry was fascinating, as young birds were

particularly 'squawky' and feisty as the adults flew in with food. At the drinking pool, a Goldcrest and many Nuthatches came down to wash provided a fitting finale to this wonderful small woodland reserve.

We had another excellent café lunch on the levels before re-visiting Ham Wall RSPB for an afternoon walk. We had yet to see Bittern, so we headed east along the main track to a hide which overlooks an expansive area of reedbed. Along the way we were all delighted to see the singing River Warbler again. Great Egrets, Marsh Harriers, Long-tailed Tits, Common Whitethroats and Reed Warblers were all seen along the path. Once at the hide, we made ourselves comfy and waited patiently. Thankfully, it didn't take too long for a Bittern to fly past, and when one did, it flew by ever so close to the hide, affording everyone with stunning views of this reed-dwelling species. After calming down from such a superb view, we headed back to the car park, enjoying the myriad warbler sounds coming from the bushes.

Back to the car park, we said our farewells to one another, and looked back on what had been a superb three-day holiday to the Somerset Levels!

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Checklist

Birds & Dragonflies/Damselflies

			June	
	Common name	Scientific name	7	8
Our tour checklist follows the names and taxonomy (including species order) of the International Ornithological Congress list of the birds of the world (version 11.2, July 2021) which seems destined to become the global standard in future. The species included are based on those thought most likely to be recorded together with what has been seen on previous tours				
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	1	
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	1	1
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	1	1
4	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	1	
5	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	1	1
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1	1
7	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	1	1
8	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1	
9	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	1	1
10	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1	
11	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	1	
12	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		h
13	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1	1
14	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	1	1
15	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	h	h
16	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1	1
17	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	1	1
18	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		1
19	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	
20	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	1	1
21	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	1	1
22	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	1	1
23	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	1
24	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	h	1
25	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	1
26	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	1	1
27	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1	1
28	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	
29	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1	1
30	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	1	
31	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	1
32	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	1
33	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1	1
34	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1	1

			June	
	Common name	Scientific name	7	8
35	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	1
36	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	1	1
37	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	1	1
38	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	1	1
39	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	1	
40	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		1
41	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	1	1
42	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	1	1
43	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1	1
44	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	1	1
45	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1	
46	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	1	1
47	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	1	
48	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	1	1
49	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	1	1
50	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	1	1
51	River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>	1	1
52	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	1	1
53	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	1	
54	Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	1	1
55	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		1
56	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	1
57	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		1
58	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	1	1
59	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	1	1
60	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	1	1
61	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	1
62	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		1
63	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	1	1
64	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	1	1
65	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	1	
66	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		1
67	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	1	1
68	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	1	
69	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	1	
70	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	1	1
71	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	1	
1	Banded Demoiselle		1	1
2	Azure Damselfly		1	1

			June	
	Common name	Scientific name	7	8
3	Common Blue Damselfly		1	
4	Variable Damselfly		1	1
5	Red-eyed Damselfly		1	
6	Large Red Damselfly		1	1
7	Broad-bodied Chaser		1	
8	Scarce Chaser		1	
9	Four-spotted Chaser		1	1
10	Black-tailed Skimmer		1	
11	Downy Emerald		1	
12	Hairy Dragonfly		1	1
13	Emperor		1	