

The Best of Rutland's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

19th – 22nd August 2021



Osprey

Report and images by Neil Glenn



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Tour participants: Neil Glenn & Tim Appleton (leaders) with six Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Thursday 19th August

During the afternoon, the group converged on the well-appointed Barnsdale Lodge Hotel, our base for this weekend tour, and met up at 6pm. We convened in a private room for an introductory talk from Rutland Water Nature Reserve's creator Tim Appleton MBE. Tim is also co-founder of British BirdFair and the instigator of the Rutland Osprey Project. The very interesting slideshow covered the creation of this huge reserve and reservoir, the introduction of Ospreys onto the reserve and a whistle stop whisk through some of the highlights of the much-missed International Birdfair (cancelled again this year because of Covid-19).

After the talk and a run through of the itinerary for the weekend, we filtered through to the restaurant for the first of our delicious evening meals at Barnsdale. The group seemed to gel immediately and I could tell this was going to be a fun weekend with fellow lovers of wildlife.

Day 2

Friday 20th August

After a delicious breakfast, we headed out in our comfortable minibus to buy sandwiches for lunch. We met Tim Appleton and his partner Penny at Lyndon Reserve on the south side of Rutland Water. This dynamic duo was going to show us around their home patch today!

At the visitor centre, we were greeted by an Osprey Project volunteer who gave the group an introductory talk about the Ospreys. Neil interrupted the talk when he found an Otter casually swimming past the window!

We all headed out onto the reserve. It was a muggy, overcast day so dragonflies and butterflies were not in evidence. Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers were vocal but playing hard to get. We called in at one hide to see if the Otter was passing by, but no luck. An Osprey was flying in the far distance but we hoped for better views than that!

Further along the trail, we entered another hide. Two Great Egrets were on view and another flew by the hide right in front of us. Better still were at least three young Ospreys sitting in trees and posts near the nest tree. One youngster gave superb telescope views as it struggled with a large fish. It finally settled on its perch (not the species of fish!) to eat the large trout.

A Great Crested Grebe, carrying three stripy grebelets on its back, threatened to steal the show from the fishy raptors. Plenty of wildfowl was on show on the water, including Wigeon, Gadwall, Shoveler and Tufted Duck (just a few thousand of the latter species!). Waders included two Green Sandpipers and a Redshank. An old tree in the water decorated with roosting Cormorants was especially evocative of Rutland Water.

In the last hide along the track, we saw more Ospreys and heard a Water Rail. A Water Vole put in an extremely brief appearance. We set off back towards the car park. As we emerged from the hide, the sun came out, which brought out the dragonflies and butterflies.

Green-veined White, Speckled Wood and Brimstone were seen, along with Brown Hawker and Migrant Hawker dragonflies. A mixed flock of feeding birds contained Long-tailed, Great and Blue Tits, along with Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps.

We followed Tim and Penny back to their house on the north bank of the reservoir. It was here we ate our picnic lunches whilst scanning the water and skies for birds. Two or three Red Kites circled the woods in the distance, with a Kestrel and a Common Buzzard or two for company. And, of course, an Osprey flew past, right

on cue! The Buddleia bush by the garden's seats hosted an array of colourful butterflies (mostly Red Admirals and Peacocks, but some Small Tortoiseshells) and the bird feeders attracted Chaffinches and Greenfinches.

After we had eaten, Tim and Penny showed us the other half of their garden, complete with 'The Girls': three large pigs truffling about in the wild area. More feeders attracted a Nuthatch and more finches and tits, and the wildflower meadow attracted Marmalade Hoverflies and more Green-veined White butterflies.

It was hard to tear ourselves away from this idyllic garden but it had to be done: we had another part of the huge reserve to explore! Tim took us to the Egleton Reserve, where we saw another handful of Great Egrets and a nice array of wading birds.

The group was able to sit in the hide at leisure and compare species such as Green Sandpiper, Ruff, Little Ringed and Ringed Plovers, Black-tailed Godwits and Common Snipe all feeding on the scrape a few yards in front of us. We also managed to pick out three Yellow-legged Gulls from the roosting larids on mud bank.

It was then time to heartily thank Tim and Penny for sharing their expertise (and garden!) at Rutland Water and head back to the hotel for a freshen up before dinner. We compiled the day's extensive bird list after another fine meal before retiring to bed in readiness for tomorrow's adventures.

Day 3

Saturday 21st August

Over breakfast in the hotel, we all compared notes from various Apps and TV weather forecasts and came to the undeniable conclusion that we were going to get very wet at Frampton Marsh RSPB today! We dressed accordingly and set off north east.

The journey was surprisingly traffic free, so we made good time. We arrived at the packed car park at about 10.15am. Judging by the line of telescopes all pointed in the same direction, it was obvious that the rare Black Stork was showing from the car park, so we all scuttled out of the van to take a peek.

The famous rarity visiting Frampton was some way off in a field, partially obscured. In fact, unless the bird moved, it was hard to tell it was actually a bird. However, it wasn't long before the huge stork lifted off and gave us a fly-past before landing out of sight again. What an excellent start to our day in Lincolnshire!

We next scanned the scrapes and lagoons outside the visitor centre to see what we could find. Twenty or so Spoonbills stole the show. Some fed, some preened but most were fast asleep: the typical pose of a Spoonbill.

Hundreds of Black-tailed Godwits were roosting on the scrape with many Dunlin and Snipe mixed in. One or two Green and Common Sandpipers joined the throng and it was sometimes hard to know which birds to look at next!

We moved around the reserve, pausing regularly to scan the waders from different angles from the viewing mounds. At one such stop, we saw the Black Stork heading our way. It gave a couple of fly-bys before settling out of sight again. It really was an impressive sight.

With rain threatening, we decided to move to the other car park in the minibus. Everyone was feeling a tad peckish but we made the decision to head for the seawall while the going was good. On the short walk to the bank, we stopped to admire two delicate Little Stints feeding on a close pool with some Dunlin.

I kept an eye on the throng of birders on the seawall: no doubt they were watching the other star visitor at Frampton: the Pacific Golden Plover. On one such check, I found the watchers had turned to look the way we were standing. The PGP had flown our side of the grass bank. I scuttled to where they were watching and found the Pacific Plover very close to the path! I signalled for everyone to join me at my viewing point.

I was quickly joined by Anita and Janet who saw the very attractive plover very well. It was then chased by a pesky Lapwing and flew before the rest of the group arrived! We joined the other birdwatchers on the seawall for a more raised view of the area. Sure enough, the birders on the seawall had followed the star bird in flight and

knew where it had landed. Eventually, everyone in our group had seen the bird through telescopes, though these latter views were more distant than the earlier ones. It was our second BBRC Rarity of the morning!

Once we had had our fill of the plover, it was definitely time to fill our stomachs. We ate our sandwiches near the van, as rain was threatening once more. Reed Bunting and Reed Warbler appeared in the reeds and bushes next to where we were parked and we also picked out the lone juvenile Brent Goose among the resident Canadas and Greylags.

Now the two star birds were 'in the bag', we set off again in a more leisurely fashion. As we reached the seawall, we had a squally shower, but it didn't stop us scanning the scrapes and marshes for birds. There were many waders on the scrape, including our one-and-only Spotted Redshank of the day and a couple of Bar-tailed Godwits. Many Yellow Wagtails fed around us and a Wheatear was hunting for insects on a rocky part of the marsh.

We retraced our steps along the raised bank and thought it would be a good idea to spend half an hour or so looking out for raptors to end our visit. Sure enough, one or two Marsh Harriers were quartering the marsh towards The Wash, but even better were the two Short-eared Owls that sat on posts in the long grass. Although distant, in dull conditions, we could still make out their piercing yellow eyes through telescopes. What an end to a thrilling visit to this five-star RSPB reserve.

As we left the reserve at about 4pm, the heavens opened, and the journey home was taken in very heavy rain. We had been incredibly lucky to stay dry. And what superb birds to read out at the after-dinner bird log.

Day 4

Sunday 22nd August

After yesterday's excitement, today was to be a more leisurely day. Everyone was packed and ready to go: this was farewell day for the group. Before the sad goodbyes, we had some wildlife watching to do.

Our first port of call was Ketton Quarry, a mere five miles from Barnsdale. This Leicestershire Wildlife Trust site is famous for butterflies and wildflower meadows, though it was a tad late in the season. Conditions weren't favourable for insects, either, but we thought we would pay a call nonetheless.

Our visit was very quiet. Butterflies consisted of a few Gatekeepers and Green-veined Whites and not the hoped-for Marbled Whites and Dark Green Fritillaries. The meadows still looked beautiful, with Knapweed, Wild Marjoram, Teasels, Ragwort and Agrimony still showing colour. Further into the old quarry, we saw a nice stand of Purple Crown Vetch and in the woods, we found Nipplewort. A Common Darter and a couple of Brown Hawkers were the only dragonflies of note.

We moved to Eyebrook Reservoir, where we ate our sandwiches overlooking the narrow end. We were now experiencing heavy showers, so we kept having to shelter in the minibus in between bouts of scanning the sky and water.

These scans produced a distant Osprey being mobbed by two Red Kites. The mud was home to many Common Teal, mostly asleep, making picking out the reported Garganey a difficult task. The resident Little Owl wasn't in its usual perch either! Our main consolation was an Osprey flying through carrying a fish in its talons.

A careful study of the reservoir's muddy edges revealed a Green Sandpiper, a few Snipe and a Little Ringed Plover. While we were searching the hedgerows for Tree Sparrows, Bullfinches and Yellowhammers, the rain really set in and we decided to call it a day.

After dropping people back at their vehicles at Barnsdale, I dropped off Janet at Oakham train station before making my way home. The journey was strangely quiet: this is my least favourite part of a tour when I am left feeling 'empty' after the group has dispersed. Here's to next year.

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Checklist

Birds

			August		
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22
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 20201) 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	Brent Goose (dark-bellied)	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		1 Juv	
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	x	x	x
3	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	x	x	x
4	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	x	x	x
5	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptaca</i>	x		
6	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	2	x	x
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	x	x	x
8	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	x	x	x
9	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	x		
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	x	x	x
11	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	x	x	x
12	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	x		
13	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	x	x	x
14	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	x	x	x
15	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		x	
16	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		x	x
17	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	x		
18	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	x	x	x
19	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			x
20	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H		
21	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	x	x	x
22	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	x	x	x
23	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	x	x	x
24	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	x	x	x

			August		
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22
25	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	1	x	
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	x	x	x
27	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis dominica</i>		2	
28	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>		1 Adult	
29	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	4	x	x
30	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	1	3	2
31	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		H	
32	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	2	x	
33	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		2	
34	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	1	x	
35	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	x	x	x
36	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	4	x	2
37	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		2	
38	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	x	x	x
39	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1	x	
40	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	x	x	1
41	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	1	x	
42	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		1	
43	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	x	x	x
44	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	x		
45	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	x	x	
46	Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	3		
47	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	x		
48	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	x		x
49	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>		1 Juv	
50	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	x	x	x
51	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		29	
52	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	x	x	x
53	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	At least 9		
54	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	x	x	x
55	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	9		1
56	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		2 or 3	
57	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	3 or 4		2
58	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	x		x
59	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>		2	
60	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	x		
61	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	x		H
62	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1	x	2
63	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	x		
64	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	x	x	x
65	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	x	x	x
66	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		x	
67	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	x	x	x
68	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	x		x
69	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	x		x
70	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	x	x	x
71	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	x	x	x
72	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	x	x	
73	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H		
74	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	x		x

			August		
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22
75	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	x		x
76	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	1		
77	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	x	x	
78	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	H	H
79	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	H	H
80	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	1		
81	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1		
82	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	x	x	x
83	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	x	x	x
84	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	x	x	x
85	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1	
86	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	x	x	x
87	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	x		
88	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>		x	
89	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	x	x	x
90	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		1	
91	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	x		x
92	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	x		
93	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		2	
94	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	x	x	x
95	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		1	
96	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		x	

Other Wildlife

			August		
	Common name	Scientific name	20	21	22
Mammals:					
	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	x	x	
	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	x	x	x
	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		1	
	European Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	1		
	Short-tailed Field Vole	<i>Microtus agrestis</i>	1		
	Water Vole	<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>	1		
Butterflies					
	Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	x	x	x
	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>	x		x
	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		x	x
	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	1		
	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	x	x	x
	Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>	x		
	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	x	x	x
	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	x		x
	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	x	x	
OTHER SPECIES					
	Marmalade Hoverfly	<i>Episyrphus balteatus</i>	x		x
	Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	x		x
	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	x		x
	Brown Hawker	<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	x		x
	Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	x		

SELECTED PLANTS
Sea Aster
Amphibious Bistort
Wild Marjoram
Purple Crown Vetch
Knapweed
Water Mint
Hemp Agrimony
Agrimony
Nipplewort
Purple Loosetrife