

The Best of Rutland's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

12th – 15th June 2026



Variable Longhorn



Purple Hairstreak



Bee Orchid var. *atrofusus*



Bee Orchid var. *trollii* (Wasp Orchid)

Tour report by Matthew Capper



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Summary

We enjoyed a thoroughly enjoyable weekend exploring England's historic smallest county, seeking out orchids and butterflies, while also spending time at one of the UK's premier nature reserves, which is home of the famous Osprey reintroduction project. Although not every target species cooperated, the excellent company, wonderful weather and wealth of wildlife made for a memorable few days.

By the end of the tour we had recorded eighty-one bird species, fifteen butterflies and eight orchids, along with two nationally scarce forms of Bee Orchid. It was an excellent illustration of the remarkable diversity that can be found across Rutland and its surrounding limestone landscapes.

Day 1

Friday 12th June

Roberts Field – Bloody Oaks Quarry – Empingham

We assembled at the hotel before heading out for a short introductory excursion to whet our appetites for the weekend ahead. Our first stop was Roberts Field, a Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserve just over the county border.

The limestone grassland was looking superb, and provided an excellent introduction to the flora of the area. Bee, Pyramidal and Common Spotted Orchids were all in flower, while the highlight was a lone Greater Butterfly Orchid which, although just past its peak, still looked magnificent. Equally photogenic were several spikes of Knapweed Broomrape, their rich colours making them irresistible photographic subjects. Insects were also beginning to appear in good numbers. A handful of Marbled Whites floated gracefully across the grassland, while a splendid Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn Beetle showed beautifully.

We then continued to Bloody Oaks Quarry, where our principal target was one of Britain's rarest orchid forms. The Wasp Orchid, *Ophrys apifera* var. *trollii*, occurs at only a handful of sites in the UK, and Bloody Oaks remains a reliable place to see it. It didn't take long to locate our first specimen and we later found a couple more plants that had been helpfully marked with small sticks by previous visitors. A Viviparous Lizard was basking near the entrance, making the most of the afternoon sunshine, while a Great Spotted Woodpecker, perched prominently at the top of a dead tree, gave us superb views.

Our final stop was brief, at a damp field on the edge of Empingham, where we tracked down a single Southern Marsh Orchid growing among Soft Rush and Ragged Robin. With that, it was time to return to the hotel, freshen up, and enjoy dinner together.

Day 2

Saturday 13th June

Rutland Water

We began our first full day with a pre-breakfast visit to the garden of Tim Appleton and Penny Robinson, the driving forces behind the Global Birdfair. Tim, who managed Rutland Water Nature Reserve from its creation in

the 1970s, welcomed us warmly, and over mugs of tea and coffee we chatted about the reserve, watched the birds from the garden and examined the previous night's moth trap.

Although it had been a rather cold night, there was still plenty of interest, even if the hoped-for hawk-moths failed to appear. Around the garden we enjoyed Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker and Greenfinch, while it seemed as though almost every Swift in Rutland was feeding low over the nearby water.



Burnished Brass



Large Skipper



Common Twayblade



Knapweed Broomrape

We then spent the remainder of the morning exploring the Eggleton Reserve, making our way first towards Lagoon 4. Along the paths, the birdlife was immediately apparent, with calling Green Woodpecker, singing warblers and a nice Jay. Once we reached the lagoon, we watched breeding Avocets, Sand Martins hawking low over the water, and a distant Marsh Harrier.

At Lagoon 3, a Cetti's Warbler exploded into song from deep cover, while Reed Buntings perched prominently in front of us and Reed Warblers gave much more fleeting views as they skulked through the reeds. The raptor spectacle here was particularly good. Marsh Harrier drifted over the reedbeds, Red Kites and Buzzards were almost

constantly in view, up to three Ospreys circled overhead, and an equal number of Hobbies scythed across the sky, catching insects. At times, nearly all of these species could be seen in a single sweep of the binoculars. Things got even better when we heard a distant Cuckoo calling, and moments later, no fewer than four birds flew across together: an unexpected and sadly all too rare a sight these days.

Elsewhere, we admired the globally-rare Willow Blister Fungus, before eventually making our way back to the visitor centre for a well-earned ice cream and drink. Even from the café we continued to enjoy birds of prey overhead, alongside the reserve's ever-present wildfowl. There was still time left in the afternoon for a wander around Oakham, where we explored the historic castle and enjoyed a glimpse of life in England's smallest county town.

Day 3

Sunday 14th June

Glaphthorn Cow Pastures – Burghley House – Barnack Hills and Holes – Swaddyswell Pit - Stamford

Our pre-breakfast excursion took us to Green Bank, overlooking the main reservoir. It wasn't long before our first Osprey of the morning appeared, and we enjoyed excellent views of Great Crested Grebes, Mute Swans and numerous geese on the water, while Common Terns dipped and twisted gracefully in front of us. The trees opposite held impressive numbers of egrets, with both Great and Little Egrets glowing brilliantly in the early morning sunshine.

The nearby woodland was full of birdsong. Garden Warblers and Blackcaps sang from close range, Cetti's Warbler called from dense cover, and one tree held an active feeding flock of Chaffinches, Reed Buntings and Goldfinches, making the most of the sunny woodland edge.

The main objective for the day, however, was Black Hairstreak: one member of the group was hoping to complete their ambitious quest to see every British butterfly species. With the weather forecast suggesting the best sunshine would be during the morning, we headed first for Glaphthorn Cow Pastures, making a brief roadside stop in search of Little Owl. Although we were unsuccessful, the surrounding farmland produced Yellowhammer, Red-legged Partridge, Common Whitethroat and Skylark.

Despite an extensive search, the Black Hairstreaks stubbornly refused to appear. Fortunately, a very kind couple approached to tell us they had discovered a Purple Hairstreak feeding unusually low down, and were happy to lead us directly to it. We enjoyed wonderful close views of the butterfly, even watching it open its iridescent purple wings, before it eventually spiralled back into the oak canopy. The walk also produced our first Ringlet of the year, freshly emerged and immaculate, together with Yellow-and-black and Variable Longhorn Beetles, and an impressive variety of bees feeding amongst the dewberry flowers.

A late lunch at Burghley House gave us an opportunity to admire both the magnificent surroundings and the large herd of Fallow Deer grazing in the parkland.

Sadly, Barnack Hills and Holes no longer lives up to its former reputation for orchids. We managed only a couple of small Chalk Fragrant Orchids before we moved on, pausing briefly to enjoy Yellowhammers and a passing Red

Kite. Fortunately, Swaddywell Pit proved far more rewarding. Matthew recognised a local orchid expert and stopped for a chat, discovering he was following up reports of an exceptionally rare dusky form of Bee Orchid. Better still, he had already found it, and kindly gave us precise directions.



Man Orchid



Scarlet Tiger

Following his instructions, we explored the lower part of the reserve, first encountering a basking Viviparous Lizard, before discovering a wonderful display of orchids. We enjoyed a carpet of Common Spotted Orchids, alongside numerous Pyramidal Orchids, a couple of Common Twayblades, around ten Man Orchids, and a superb cluster of Bee Orchids, including the sought-after dusky form, *atrofuscus*. Birdlife included excellent views of Linnet, Common Whitethroat and Garden Warbler, while a Lesser Whitethroat sang repeatedly from dense scrub but steadfastly refused to show itself.

With the day drawing to a close, we made one final stop in Stamford to watch the nesting Peregrines on All Saints' Church. Both adults were perched high on the spire, one directly above the other, allowing prolonged telescope views. We returned to the hotel for a well-earned cup of tea before dinner.

Day 4

Monday 15th June

Rutland Water – Ketton Quarry

Having checked out and collected lunch for the day, we headed to the Lyndon Reserve, on the southern shore of Rutland Water. The centre team gave us a warm welcome and the latest news from the Osprey nest before we set off towards the viewpoint. As the cool, cloudy start gradually gave way to sunshine, butterflies began to appear. A Lesser Whitethroat was feeding young close to the path, while a Sparrowhawk flew past carrying prey.

The Tufted Duck Hide failed to produce the hoped-for Otters, but there was still plenty to enjoy. Little Egrets fed at close range, Moorhen chicks busied themselves along the margins, and a pair of Great Crested Grebes performed a rather half-hearted display.

At the Osprey viewpoint we chatted with one of the volunteers before settling in to enjoy superb views of 'Maya' and her three well-grown chicks. Reed Buntings sang around the hide, while a Sedge Warbler crept through the vegetation immediately beneath the viewing flap. Further out, a pair of Marsh Harriers drifted over the reedbeds, before being joined by two Hobbies hawking insects.

After a picnic lunch back at the visitor centre, we made our way to Ketton Quarry, passing what can only be described as Rutland's own Grand Canyon. The huge limestone workings were an impressive, if entirely man-made, landscape. The old original quarry is now a delightful nature reserve. We wandered through the flower-rich grassland, finding plenty of Common Twayblades and enjoying more Marbled Whites. We were hoping to add Dark Green Fritillary to the trip list and, although one particularly bright Comma briefly raised our hopes, it proved to be as close as we came.

Peter and Rita departed to catch a train to London. Alison, however, was staying for another night, and we decided there was just enough time for one final, unscheduled attempt at Glapthorn Cow Pastures. Surely this time? Nope: still no Black Hairstreak.

The good news was that Alison finally completed her butterfly quest the following day, after following up another lead on her journey home. So she had her happy ending to a wonderful weekend after all.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026			
		12	13	14	15
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓		✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓	✓
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		✓	✓	✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓		✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓	✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓		
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	✓	✓
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓		H
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓	✓
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓		
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓		✓
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓		
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓		✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓		✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
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>		✓		✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		✓		✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026			
		12	13	14	15
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓		✓	✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓		
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H	H	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		✓	✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		✓	✓	✓
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		✓	✓	✓
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>			✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		H	H	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓		✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</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>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026			
		12	13	14	15
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓		✓	✓
Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>			✓	

Reptiles

Common name	Scientific name
Viviparous Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	June 2026			
		12	13	14	15
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>	✓		✓	✓
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	✓			
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓		✓	✓
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			✓	
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>				✓
Purple Hairstreak	<i>Favonius quercus</i>			✓	
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	✓	✓		
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓			
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa Atalanta</i>	✓			
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglaia urticae</i>		✓		
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>				✓
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	✓	✓
Common Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	✓			✓
Common Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>			✓	✓
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

Moths

Common name	Scientific name
Common Swift	<i>Korscheltellus lupulina</i>
Buff Mompha	<i>Mompha ochraceella</i>
White-plume Moth	<i>Pterophorus pentadactyla</i>
Green Oak Tortrix	<i>Tortrix viridana</i>
Yellow Oak Button	<i>Aleimma loeflingiana</i>
Marbled Orchard Tortrix	<i>Hedya nubiferana</i>
Cock's-head Bell	<i>Zeiraphera isertana</i>
Rusty-dot Pearl	<i>Udea ferrugalis</i>
Olive Pearl	<i>Udea olivialis</i>
Rush Veneer	<i>Nomophila noctuella</i>
Little Grey	<i>Eudonia lacustrata</i>
Garden Grass-veneer	<i>Chrysoteuchia culmella</i>
Small Eggar (caterpillars)	<i>Eriogaster lanestris</i>
Dwarf Cream Wave	<i>Idaea fuscovenosa</i>
Blood-vein	<i>Timandra comae</i>
Barred Straw	<i>Gandaritis pyraliata</i>
Common Pug	<i>Eupithecia vulgata</i>
Mottled Beauty	<i>Alcis repandata</i>
Snout	<i>Hypena proboscidalis</i>
Buff Ermine	<i>Spilosoma lutea</i>
Orange Footman	<i>Eilema sororcula</i>
Scarlet Tiger	<i>Callimorpha dominula</i>
Mother Shipton	<i>Callistege mi</i>
Burnished Brass	<i>Diachrysia chrysis</i>
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>
Mottled Rustic	<i>Caradrina morpheus</i>
Uncertain	<i>Hoplodrina octogenaria</i>
Treble Lines	<i>Charanyca trigrammica</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Dark Arches	<i>Apamea monoglypha</i>
Marbled Minor agg.	<i>Oligia</i> agg.
Shoulder-striped Wainscot	<i>Leucania comma</i>
Heart and Dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>
Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>

Damselflies & dragonflies

Common name	Scientific name
Common Bluetail	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
Common Bluet	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>
Azure Bluet	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>
Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>

Other insects

Common name	Scientific name
Grasshoppers	
Roesel's Bush-cricket	<i>Metrioptera roeselii</i>
Bees	
Tree Bumblebee	<i>Bombus hypnorum</i>
Buff-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus terrestris</i>
Vestal Cuckoo Bee	<i>Bombus vestalis</i>
Red-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus lapidarius</i>
Early Bumblebee	<i>Bombus pratorum</i>
Common Carder Bee	<i>Bombus pascuorum</i>
Beetles	
Golden-bloomed Grey Longhorn	<i>Agapanthia villosoviridescens</i>
Variable Longhorn	<i>Stenocorus meridianus</i>
Black-and-yellow Longhorn	<i>Rutpela maculata</i>
Swollen-thighed Beetle	<i>Oedemera nobilis</i>
Red-headed Cardinal Beetle	<i>Pyrochroa serraticornis</i>

Fungi

Common name	Scientific name
Giant Puffball	<i>Calvatia gigantea</i>
Willow Blister Fungus	<i>Cryptomyces maximus</i>

Orchids

Common name	Scientific name
Common Twayblade	<i>Neottia ovata</i>
Greater Butterfly Orchid	<i>Platanthera chlorantha</i>
Chalk Fragrant Orchid	<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>
Common Spotted Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>
Southern Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza praetermissa</i>
Common Spotted × Southern Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza x grandis</i>
Man Orchid	<i>Orchis anthropophora</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Pyramidal Orchid	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>
Bee Orchid	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>
Wasp Orchid	<i>Ophrys apifera</i> var. <i>trollii</i>
Dusky Bee Orchid	<i>Ophrys apifera</i> var. <i>atrofusca</i>

Selected other plants

Common name	Scientific name
Pasque Flower	<i>Pulsatilla vulgaris</i>
Ragged Robin	<i>Silene flos-cuculi</i>
Red Campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>
White Campion	<i>Silene latifolia</i>
Bladder Campion	<i>Silene vulgaris</i>
Common Milkwort	<i>Polygala vulgaris</i>
Common Rockrose	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>
Common Mallow	<i>Malva sylvestris</i>
Hairy St John's Wort	<i>Hypericum hirsutum</i>
Perforate St John's Wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>
Dropwort	<i>Filipendula vulgaris</i>
Agrimony	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>
Wild Strawberry	<i>Fragaria vesca</i>
Creeping Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla reptans</i>
Dyer's Greenweed	<i>Genista tinctoria</i>
Common Bird's-foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
Black Medick	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>
Tufted Vetch	<i>Vicia cracca</i>
Crown Vetch	<i>Securigera varia</i>
Poison Hemlock	<i>Conium maculatum</i>
Hedge Bindweed	<i>Calystegia sepium</i>
Bittersweet	<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>
Yellow Wort	<i>Blackstonia perfoliata</i>
Common Centaury	<i>Centaurium erythraea</i>
Lady's Bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>
Hedge Bedstraw	<i>Galium mollugo</i>
Wild Thyme	<i>Thymus serpyllum</i>
Marjoram	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>
Selfheal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>
Dark Mullein	<i>Verbascum nigrum</i>
Knapweed Broomrape	<i>Orobanche elatior</i>
Hoary Plantain	<i>Plantago media</i>
Clustered Bellflower	<i>Campanula glomerata</i>
Ragwort	<i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>
Greater Knapweed	<i>Centaurea scabiosa</i>
Goatsbeard	<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>