

Norfolk – Autumn in the Broads

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th – 30th September 2021

Tour report by Kevin Elsby



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Tour participants: Kevin Elsby (Leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Tuesday 28th September

The six clients in the group met with Kevin, at 4pm at the delightful Dairy Barns near Waxham in the north Norfolk Broads. Many of us had tales of having to avoid blocked roads or difficulties finding fuel for our vehicles, due to panic buying of fuel due to a shortage of delivery drivers.

However, we soon put this behind us as we settled in for our stay. After a welcome by our hostess, Hannah, followed by a welcome cup of tea or coffee and some delicious home made cake, we ventured out on our first excursion.

Dairy Farm has access to a private track just opposite the premises, which leads deep into the grazing marshes of the Broads. This is a private area and normally out of bounds to visitors, so we were indeed privileged to be able to visit.

Our main target this afternoon was to see Common Cranes. Over the last 40 years or so, numbers of this scarce British breeding bird have gradually increased in Broadland, but normally the birdwatcher gets a fleeting glimpse as the birds fly to roost in the evening, dropping into thick vegetation out of sight.

We were unlucky in this pursuit, as no Cranes were found. We did find a flock of twittering Linnets, including some splendid males still with a rosy-pink hue on the breast. A single Goldfinch was resting on a barbed-wire fence. A pair of Mute Swans was visible in the distance swimming on the water of the narrow channel, and many Stock Doves were in the area. It is likely that this species uses the two run-down old wind pumps as a breeding site.

A couple of Kestrels were hovering, pointed towards the wind, in pursuit of a meal and at one point we witnessed one of them being chased very closely by a Carrion Crow.

As the afternoon progressed, we heard the distinctive call of a Green Sandpiper which stayed hidden in long grass. This is likely to be a migrant bird, moving south to warmer wintering areas, passing through Norfolk on its way from breeding grounds much further north in Europe.

We retraced our steps and carried on to the main coast road and parked at Brograve Farm, another regular place to see Cranes. We were to be disappointed again, though, but did have great views of over 1000 newly arrived Pink-footed Geese in a large field nearby. We also picked out a single Barnacle Goose in the flock. This is quite likely to be a genuine wild bird as it was consorting with the Pink-feet. At one point, a single Roe Deer was spotted which then seemed to race headlong into the flock of Pink-footed Geese, but why we could not even speculate. On our way back to Dairy Barn we saw two or three Common Buzzards in the increasing blustery wind.

It had been a great start to the trip!

Day 2

Wednesday 29th September

After breakfast we set off for Strumpshaw RSPB reserve in the southern half of the Norfolk Broads.

After checking onto the reserve reception, we started to make our way around the reserve, and slowly walked around the path to Tower Hide which is near the River Yare. On the way we heard several Robins giving their characteristic “tick” call but, like most of the small birds which were undoubtedly present, were keeping their heads down in the strong westerly breeze. We did, though, manage to hear a couple of brief calls from Bearded Tits but, sadly, just like the Robins, they were very elusive.

However, when we reached Tower Hide things perked up. There were a good number of ducks feeding on the pond and many were close to the hide. As a result, we had excellent encounters with Shoveler, Gadwall, Teal and Mallard. A single Grey Heron was standing at the reed’s edge fishing. In the far corner of the lake a Little Grebe was busily diving for food. Several Moorhen were in the vicinity. Many of the ducks were males in their much drabber eclipse plumage compared to breeding dress, and this was a fun challenge to identify individuals at times.

Then a Water Rail was identified on the edge of the reedbed and, although a long way off, all the group got to observe this bird which initially was resting motionless. It subsequently slunk off into the reeds and was lost to view. Two feeding Snipe nearby were not so retreating, and were observed feeding along the reed edge.

No Marsh Harriers were on view but after returning to the reception centre we ate our lunch there, while birds visiting the bird feeder included a Marsh Tit – never an easy bird to find these days.

With the weather blustery but still dry, we chose to move to Waxham to take a walk onto the North Norfolk Coast Path and, after walking east for about half a mile, we climbed up over the sand dunes onto the beach. The tide was high, and we had excellent views of numerous Grey Seals which were hauled out on the beach nearby. Many others, likely males, were present in the sea just offshore. Whilst we entertained ourselves watching the behaviour of the seals, and taking lots of photos, we then turned our attention to the birds and saw a good number of Gannets, while a flock of Brent Geese was making its way along the coast on their arrival into the country from their breeding grounds. A couple of Guillemots were swimming on the sea, as was an adult Red-throated Diver. A flock of eight Lapwing flew in from the sea, again possibly migrants.

We hadn’t seen Cranes at this point, and so we made a determined effort to see them along the track near the accommodation. We were richly rewarded with excellent views of a flock of 13 Cranes which flew close to us, circling around and then landing in a field in the mid distance. The flock consisted of 10 adults and 3 juveniles, and we were able to pick out the more subdued plumage of the juveniles very easily. We felt well pleased with ourselves and made our way back to base in good spirit.

We were not finished yet though, as we walked to a field nearby where there was a tractor ploughing the field. This activity had attracted many gulls, including at least 50 Mediterranean Gulls and we had great fun watching their action and photographing them.

Day 3

Thursday 30th September

Although the weather was pleasant enough at breakfast time, it deteriorated rapidly thereafter, with very strong, gale-force wind and some heavy showers, which made trying to find any birds a major challenge. However, we gathered ourselves together for this task and began our day with a walk from Potter Heigham church out to the Weaver's Way footpath and overlooking the Hickling Broad and Swim Coots.

It was hard going since most of the birds were sensibly sheltering from the conditions. We took a break in one of the hides along the route where we saw our first Marsh Harrier and a selection of ducks.

Further on we came to another stretch of water in which several Black-tailed Godwits and a single Snipe were feeding. On the next part of our route, a single Bearded Tit, a male, was calling and being severely buffeted by the gale, before flying bravely to another part of the marsh.

We lunched at our vehicle having walked a circular route. From there we moved to the Brograve level and this time we succeeded in getting excellent views of a flock of 16 Cranes, three of them being juveniles.

Shortly afterwards there was a heavy shower, and we sought a respite at the Horsey Mill café where a hot drink cheered us up. Our final visit was to the 1200 or so Pink-footed Geese in a field at Brograve Farm. We ended on a high, having re-found the single Barnacle Goose in the flock.

All in all, it had been a very successful end to the tour and there were lots of happy faces when we returned to the Dairy Farm where we said our goodbyes.

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Checklists

Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	Spetember		
			28	29	30
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	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		5	
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			10
3	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>	1		1
4	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	1200	1200	1200
5	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	1		6
6	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	2	6	2
7	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		30	
8	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		30	
9	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		20	4
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		30	40
11	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		50	20
12	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	2	3	
13	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		1	
14	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	20	30	2
15	Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	20	30	20
16	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		1	
17	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		6	1
18	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		13	16
19	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		1	
20	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		8	
21	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		1	
22	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			6
23	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		2	1
24	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	1		
25	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		50	100
26	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		50	
27	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		3	
28	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		2	
29	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		1	
30	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		20	
31	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		3	6
32	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		3	1
33	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			1
34	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			2
35	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	2	6	1
36	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	4	2
37	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1		1
38	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		1	1
39	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	20	20	4
40	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	20	40	20
41	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	6	2	3
42	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		2	

	Common name	Scientific name	Spetember		
			28	29	30
43	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		2	
44	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		4	3
45	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		4	3
46	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		1	2
47	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		12	
48	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		3	3
49	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			1
50	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			1
51	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	20	20	
52	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		1	1
53	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		3	3
54	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		12	1
55	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			1
56	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		1	
57	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	20	12	
58	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	1		
59	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		2	
1	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	1		
2	Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		100	
3	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		2	