

# Norfolk – Autumn in the Broads

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th Oct – 1st November 2021

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Great Grey Shrike near Waxham



Egyptian Goose at Trinity Broads



Common Cranes near Waxham



Grey Seals loafing at Horsey

Report & photos by Mike Crewe



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Tour participants: Mike Crewe (leader) with 7 Naturetrek clients

## Summary

Despite some testing weather at times, everything turned out rosy in the end with this weekend visit to the far North-east corner of Norfolk. With persistent South-west winds, migratory passerines have been very difficult to come by this autumn, so our main focus had to be on other things and being adaptable was what allowed us to get the best from the weekend. We started with the most spectacular sunset on our first evening, with family parties of Common Cranes and noisy skeins of Pink-footed Geese crossing the skies. Watching the sea periodically produced some fairly close Red-throated Divers and a few passing Northern Gannets, while the local beaches provided us with a chance to view the local Grey Seal colony.

Highlights were many and no doubt included those excellent views of a young Grey Great Shrike, but perhaps the real highlight was that evening sojourn over the marshes near Hickling, as there were so many elements to it. Brown Hares, Koniks and some very close Chinese Water Deer; a gradual build up of Marsh Harriers coming in to roost (with the bonus of a female Hen Harrier joining them), some fabulous twists and turns from the Starling murmuration and, finally, that amazing sunset that formed a backdrop to seemingly perpetual skeins of Pink-footed Geese that stretch from horizon to horizon, until they eventually formed a disorderly queue and all dropped in to roost for the night.

## Day 1

**Saturday 30th October**

With some journeys taking a little longer than others, our meet-up today was a little spread out, but we did eventually all arrive and get things sorted in time for a little late afternoon birding locally. At Waxham, we enjoyed commanding views of the north-east section of the Norfolk Broads, which gave us a feel for the flatness of the surrounding area. Small parties of Pink-footed Geese ferried back and forth and a smart, adult Mediterranean Gull flew by. Offshore, several Red-throated Divers were feeding, with one bird showing particularly well as it fished right in the breakers. A couple of Northern Gannets cruising by were nice to see, as was a relaxed group of three Roe Deer.

Circling back round to a local farm track, we stayed out until the day was done and marvelled at what eventually became an almost full, 360-degree sunset. Against this backdrop, several Marsh Harriers hunted the fields, Rooks and Jackdaws gathered at their pre-roost spots and a Little Owl and Common Buzzard called distantly. Family parties of Common Cranes soon appeared – something we had particularly wanted to see – and slowly made their way towards their night roosts. A male Stonechat was a nice bonus before the light began to dim too much and we headed back for our first wonderful dinner of the weekend.

## Day 2

**Sunday 31st October**

Today was certainly a game of two halves, as the football pundits would say... We started with a pre-breakfast return to Waxham to get a feel for the day, which had started very blustery with heavy cloud. At least one Red-throated Diver was fishing close to the beach and a few Grey Seals were feeding further out, but there was more activity on the inland side, as skeins of Pink-footed Geese headed out to their daytime feeding grounds. We scanned around and located 11 Common Cranes feeding a little too far away, but closer to us, parties of Siskins

were busying south along the dune line. Heading back for breakfast, we made a quick detour and managed to get a closer look at the cranes, though it was still a little tricky getting the frame-filling photos that we may have desired!

As we returned to base, the rain started and continued to come down for much of the morning. A few plans were re-set, but most of us decided to brave it at the National Nature Reserve at Winterton-on-sea and arrived in pretty dreadful conditions. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, we headed from the car park towards the more sheltered, western side and found respite from the wind close to some scrubby birch woodland. Though birds were largely notable by their absence, we filled our time with other things and found a great array of fungi, including some excellent stands of Fly Agaric. A great wealth of mosses and lichens covered the ground, we found plenty of Grey Hair-grass (one of the rarest grasses in the UK) and we compared a number of fern species, including Broad Buckler Fern, Common Polypody and Royal Fern. A few plants of Sheep's-bit were still flowering, as were a number of Cross-leaved Heath plants. The weather had not entirely beaten us!

We made a circular drive back to base before heading out to get lunch, which we took back with us to eat in comfort. Meeting up again at 2pm, things had greatly improved and the afternoon was later mostly clear and sunny – quite a contrast. At the Hickling Reserve, we scanned across the marsh and enjoyed large rafts of Teal, Shoveler, Mallard and Gadwall and found a perched Peregrine, along with a number of hunting Marsh Harriers. Further on, we enjoyed a gathering of Brown Hares and several Chinese Water Deer, along with the local Koniks, while a few Eurasian Curlews fed gracefully. As the sun began to drop lower, we watched ever more Marsh Harriers drifting towards their favoured roost spot and we were particularly pleased to find a Hen Harrier amongst them. A great swirling mass of Starlings gave us a wonderful murmuration to enjoy and three Common Cranes came in to roost over a group of Red Deer, but the real finale came in the form of some 5,000 Pink-footed Geese that stretched right across the orange sky as they 'wink-winked' over head and whiffled down to their roost sites in the dying embers of the day. What a glorious end to what had started out as something of a dodgy day!

## Day 3

## Monday 1st November

The wild and windy front that hit us yesterday was now just a memory as we awoke to much clearer weather today. A short walk before breakfast produced some fine flocks of Pink-footed Geese ranging across the skies to the east, a hunting Marsh Harrier being harassed by two Jackdaws and a Carrion Crow and a selection of passerines that had so far proved elusive, such as Yellowhammers, Greenfinches and Skylarks. A couple of passing Cranes meant that we completed the set and saw cranes on every day of the trip!

After breakfast, we sorted out bags and bar bills then headed over to the nearby dunes, where a Great Grey Shrike had set up territory for several days. After a short walk out, we soon spotted the shrike in typical position, sitting atop a scrubby Sycamore. Walking down closer, we managed very nice views indeed of what proved to be a smart, first-winter bird, with fine, dark fringes to the feathers on its underparts. From here, we travelled a little further around the coast to Horsey and walked out to see how the Grey Seal colony was doing. Although we're just into November, this year's breeding season seems to be a little slow in getting started, perhaps due to the milder weather affecting their seasonality or the seasonality of their food. In the event, we had a rather longer than usual walk as the first pups were starting to appear much further down the beach than expected; however, our walk did at least provide us with great photo opportunities of close-up Stonechats and Common Kestrels.

The beaches were quiet in places, but we did find a nice couple of Sanderlings and some noted a Ruddy Turnstone.

Circling back via our accommodation, some made plans to begin the journey home, while the rest of us set off for the Trinity Broads. These broads are a little deeper and more heavily vegetated with aquatic plants than some of the other broads and therefore tend to attract some of the diving ducks and other bird species that we hadn't yet seen. Here, there were large numbers of Eurasian Coots, at least twelve Great Crested Grebes, a single Common Pochard and quite a number of Tufted Ducks. An Egyptian Goose was being decidedly frosty towards the local Mallards and a Lesser Black-backed Gull was a late addition to the list.

Many thanks to all for helping to make this an enjoyable trip, despite having to put up with some adverse weather at times.

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## Species Lists

Common name	Scientific name	30/10	31/10	01/11
<b>Birds</b>				
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	6	1	
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		10	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	8	✓	✓
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	10	✓	✓
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		6	1
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	10
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		40	
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		20	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			1
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		30	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			1
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		1	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			2

Common name	Scientific name	30/10	31/10	01/11
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	10	14	2
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			12
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			30
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			50+
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		4	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	✓
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓	2
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		1	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	2		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	1	2	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		1	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			1
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	5	1	2
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	2		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	4	2
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		2	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1	1	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	5	15	4
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	h	1	3
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		h	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	h		
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		h	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	h		
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		h	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2	3	5
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		2	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	1	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			1
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		h	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1		10
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		3	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		5	1
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			1
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	1		2
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		h	h
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	3	✓	2
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		1	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	2

Common name	Scientific name	30/10	31/10	01/11
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	15+		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	10	✓	2
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	5
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			3
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		6	1
<b>Mammals</b>				
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	
Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>		✓	
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓		
Chinese Water Deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>		✓	
Reeves's Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>		✓	
<b>Dragons &amp; Damsels</b>				
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>			✓
<b>Also of Interest...</b>				
Common Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>	✓		
Grey Hair-grass	<i>Corynephorus canescens</i>			