

Autumn in the Broads

Naturetrek Tour Report

13th – 15th October 2025

Tour report by John Williamson



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Tour Participants: John Williamson (Leader) with six Naturetrek clients.

Day 1

Monday 13th October

The group assembled at the Dairy Barns, Hickling at 15.00pm. After checking-in to our rooms we took tea and cake with our hostess Hannah before heading out for the remainder of the day.

Our first stop was at Waxham where we climbed the dunes to look at the sea. Fortunately a few seabirds were on the move and a northerly passage of wildfowl included 16 Eiders, 50 Common Scoter, eight Pintail, around 20 Wigeon, three Teal and two Dark-bellied Brent Geese. On the sea two Razorbills were feeding inshore and a large gathering of Cormorants were roosting on the coastal defence posts. A total of about 10 Red-throated Divers flew south, with another flying north, and seven Gannets also flew south. Gulls noted included small numbers of Black-headed Gull moving north with a few Common Gulls and a single adult Little Gull. A single Lesser Black-backed Gull flew south and around 20 Herring Gulls were on the offshore reefs along with a single Great Black-backed Gull. Waders included two Bar-tailed Godwits flying north and a few Oystercatchers flying south.

On the way back to Hickling we took a short diversion down the track leading onto Brograve Levels where numbers of corvids were gathering in the fields and on telegraph wires including Jackdaws, Rooks and Carrion Crows. A few Pied Wagtails frequented the track and adjacent concrete pads and several small flocks of Starlings heading south in the gathering gloom to night-time roosts in the reedbeds were attended by up to five Marsh Harriers. A single crane was seen briefly and distantly in flight before others began calling nearby, frustratingly out of view behind adjacent woodland. At least three Kestrels hunted over the grazing marshes and a small flock of Lapwing flew overhead along with a few small groups of Mallard. Throughout the time we spent on the track several sizeable flocks of Pink-footed Geese flew south overhead before whiffing down onto nearby feeding grounds; around 3,000 birds in total.

The first day came to an end as the evening gloom gathered and we headed back to the Dairy Barns for dinner at 19.00pm.

Day 2

Tuesday 14th October

A Tawny Owl was heard calling overnight and small waves of migrating Redwings were also calling as they came in from the sea, and the distant Red Deer rut was underway before first light. A 07.00am pre-breakfast trip to Waxham for more sea-watching produced a Great Skua north along with 7 Dark-bellied Brent Geese and a few Common Scoter, Eider and Wigeon. Two Red-throated Divers flew south. Along the shoreline gulls present included Herring, Black-headed and around 40 Mediterranean Gulls. Small groups of Redwings were arriving in from the sea and continuing inland across the arable land. A brief roadside stop on the return journey to the Dairy Barns for breakfast produced a Yellowhammer, several Linnets and four Meadow Pipits on the wires.

Post breakfast, following a brief visit to Brograve Levels which produced good views of several Yellowhammers, Reed Buntings and a single Stonechat, we departed for the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Hickling Broad. On arrival we headed straight for the raptor watchpoint where we saw several Marsh Harriers quartering the marshes with at least two Kestrels also present. In the gloom of several drizzly spells we heard two Cranes calling but they were hidden behind trees and were unfortunately not visible. Wildfowl over the area included a few small skeins

of Pink-footed Geese, a few Mallard, around 20 Wigeon and a flock of 10 Shoveler dropped distantly onto Horsey Mere. A small group of Redwings were in the hawthorn bushes nearby and two Kingfishers dashed past us in a flash of electric blue as a group of Long-tailed Tits foraged in the hedgerow behind us.

We returned to the Visitor Centre to check-in and headed off onto the reserve via a brief look at the feeders. Here we saw Coal, Blue and Great tits, as well as Chaffinch and two House Sparrows. Walking the paths through the reedbed area we heard Water Rails and Cetti's Warblers calling and encountered a small group of three Bearded Reedlings which climbed to the top of the reeds before flitting nervously away across the wavering seed-heads.

We soon arrived at the viewpoint over the Broad where Mute Swan, Great Black-backed and Lesser-Black-backed Gulls were seen. Continuing along the path a Great Spotted Woodpecker flushed from a small birch tree and another party of Long-tailed Tits passed us along the tree-line before a Great Egret flew very close ahead of us giving excellent views. A pair of Common Buzzards was soaring over adjacent woods in a now improving sky. Continuing along the path we spent some time in the raised observation hut to avoid another squall where we saw a flock of Gadwall on the Broad, plus Grey Herons, and a Bittern which took a short flight before dropping back into the reeds just in front of the hut. Another Bearded Reedling flew across the path ahead of us as we left to continue along the path. Presently we arrived at Bittern Hide where a short period saw at least another three Bearded Reedlings fly across in front of the hide and a lovely male Marsh Harrier passed close by.

Leaving Hickling we took a detour to Thurne to try and find some Cranes. Ultimately this was unsuccessful but did offer us an opportunity to see a covey of Red-legged Partridges and a Red Kite and Kestrel hunting over fields. We then departed for the high-tide roost at Breydon Water, Great Yarmouth. Arriving an hour before the top of the tide allowed us to watch over the area known as 'the lumps' as the rising water brought waders and wildfowl closer to us. Waders seen included an impressive 650 Golden Plover, 245 Black-tailed Godwit, 220 Redshank, 110 Curlew, 75 Dunlin, 22 Bar-tailed Godwit, several Oystercatcher, two Knot and single Grey Plover and Avocet with the Golden Plover in particular offering up the aerial spectacle of a large, fluid flock of airborne waders. Wildfowl present on the water included 240 Wigeon, 210 Shelduck, smaller numbers of Teal and Mallard and a group of four Pintail. At least seven Little Egrets stalked the shallows of the saltmarsh creeks.

Departing Breydon Water we stopped briefly at the Trinity Broads complex to overlook both Rollesby and Ormesby Great Broads. Here we added Great Crested Grebe, Coot and a group of Tufted Duck to our growing species list, whilst another Marsh Harrier hunted over nearby marshes and a Great Egret stalked the reed fringe. On return to Hickling we made one last, brief visit to Brograve Levels where the highlight was another Stonechat fly-catching in the gloom as several Rooks, Jackdaws and a few Carrion Crows gathered pre-roost. We returned to the Dairy Barns at 17.30pm for dinner at 19.00pm.

Day 3

Wednesday 15th October

On arrival for a pre-breakfast sea-watching session at Waxham two Turnstones were on the beach. Sea-watching produced highlights of an Arctic Skua and two Common Scoter north, three Gannet and five Red-throated Divers south. Small numbers of Wigeon were also moving north and the usual dawn movement of gulls saw two Little Gulls north with the usual Black-headed, Common and Mediterranean Gulls. A Song Thrush was in the dunes and 12 Fieldfares arrived from the sea before heading away inland.

Post-breakfast our first destination was Horsey where we were able to watch c.425 pregnant Atlantic Grey Seals hauled out on the beach, with two Harbour Seals amongst them. Birds were few and far between here and other than a collection of Great Black-backed and Herring Gulls. Seven Dark-bellied Brent Geese flew north close to the shore and a Stonechat was in the dune scrub.

Moving onwards to St Benets Levels, Ludham an Egyptian Goose flew over the road before we found our access route blocked by a closed gate and cattle movement priority signs. Not deterred we headed to nearby Coldharbour where we walked along the river flood bank to view St Benets Levels. Here we saw a flock of 175 Lapwing and two Marsh Harriers and two Common Buzzards hunted the grazing marsh. Scanning across the river to Thurne we located a flock of at least seven Cattle Egrets feeding amongst a group of cows. Views were distant but we all managed to see the Cattle Egrets before another two were located flying towards us over St Benets Levels. These birds eventually offered up good telescope views as they fed amongst a second herd of cattle.

Our next destination was the Trinity Broads complex once again, but this time we explored the walkway through to overlook Ormesby Little Broad where a group of 20 Fieldfare passing west was the highlight, despite the briefest of views of a Kingfisher. Around 80 Coots were present on the Broad with two Great Crested Grebes. We then returned to the car park where a Great Spotted Woodpecker was calling from the trees before we crossed the busy road to view over Filby Broad. Here we saw a further 200 Coot, three GC Grebe, c.30 Tufted Duck and three drake Pochard. Another Kingfisher was well seen as it flew low over the Broad.

By now it was 13.30pm and we retired for a leisurely late lunch at Rollesby Waterside Café.

Following lunch we headed north again to Horsey Mere. Here a few Pied Wagtails flitted about the car park area as we walked to view the Mere. Another Kingfisher was again well seen as it flashed over the water and two Marsh Harrier hunted distantly with a few Gadwall and Mute Swans on the water. On our return to the vehicle a lovely male Stonechat was beside the path.

We returned to Hickling with a successful trip almost complete but with only the tour leader having seen any of the local Cranes. All seemingly very unsatisfactory - however, the trip was suitably concluded when we located a minimum of 11 Cranes feeding on fresh plough less than a mile from the Dairy Barns, at Hickling. Telescope views were enjoyed by all before we drove the short distance to the Dairy Barns to collect clients' vehicles at 16.15pm.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced		October 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>	2	7	10
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	3000		✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓
Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>			5
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		210	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		10	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	250	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	8	4	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			3
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	✓
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	17	6	
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	50	✓	✓
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	6		2
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		H	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	280
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	1+	H	11
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		11	5

I=Introduced		October 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓		
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		1	
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓		175
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		650	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		1	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		2	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		110	
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	2	22	
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		245	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			2
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		2	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		75	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		220	
Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>	1		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		40	25
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	1	1	
Great Skua	<i>Stercorarius skua</i>		1	
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>			1
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	2		1
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	10	2	5
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	7		3
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>		1	
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>			9
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		2	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		7	✓
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	5	10	✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		5	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		2	3
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1	2
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3	5	✓
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		2	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	

I=Introduced		October 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H	H
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			1
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		25	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			32
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		3	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		4	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		2	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		50	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		6	12
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	

Others

		October 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	13	14	15
Mammals				
Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>			1
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			5
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	1		
Reeves's Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	1	1	
Chinese Water Deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>	10		✓
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		5	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		H	
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus gryppus</i>	1		425
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			2
Butterflies				
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		1	
Dragons & Damsels				
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>		2	
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>		✓	