

Shetland: Autumn Bird Migration

Naturetrek Tour Report

26th September – 3rd October 2025



Brambling



Siberian Thrush



Wryneck



Common Rosefinch

Tour report by Mark Wood
Photos by Ian Curran



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Tour participants: Mark Wood (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 26th September

We boarded the Northlink ferry in Aberdeen and gathered on the rear deck as we set sail at 7.00pm. As we passed through the harbour, we picked up a few Guillemots, a mix of Great Black-backed, Herring and Common Gulls, Eiders, Oystercatchers and a single Goosander. Once out on the open sea, we added many Gannets and Kittiwakes, and a lone Fulmar. We had dinner, and then settled in for the night crossing.

Day 2

Saturday 27th September

We disembarked in Lerwick after a fairly smooth crossing, welcomed by a stiff breeze and overcast skies; the day remained rain free. We collected the van, dropped our bags at the hotel and immediately headed north, chasing news of a Brown Shrike. This required us to take the ferry across to the island of Yell where we joined many other birders trying to find the shrike among some gardens. After a while, we were able to get some flight views of it overhead, with a bug in its bill. Unfortunately, this bird would later be reidentified from photos as a Red-backed Shrike, but it was still nice to see. We also managed to get reasonable views of a Barred Warbler here.

We then headed north to the top of Yell and had lunch at Gloup Voe. Here, many Golden Plovers and Lapwings were in a nearby field, a flock of Twites flew over, and we scoped some Snipes on the shoreline. On the return journey, we got nice views of a basking Harbour Seal, and we tried briefly for a Greater Short-toed Lark; unfortunately, it seemed to have disappeared.

Returning to the mainland, we had some time to explore the woodland at Brae, where we got decent views of a Tree Pipit, a few flitting Siskins and a brief Chaffinch. We returned to the hotel for our first dinner.

Day 3

Sunday 28th September

The morning started with some cloud and rain, but soon turned to bright sunshine with little wind. We started by heading south to Loch Spiggie, where we occupied the spacious bird hide for a while. The loch held very large numbers of Wigeon, Tufted Duck and Mallard, with smaller numbers of Teal, Mute and Whooper Swans, and singles of Scaup, Pintail, Shoveler, Red-breasted Merganser and Goldeneye. We also had a pair of Red-throated Divers briefly, and some showy Rock Pipits.

From here, we ventured down to Quendale, where by now the sun was beaming. We had a short walk up the road, where we got excellent views of a Wryneck posing on a post, many Twites, a few Bramblings on the fences and overhead wires, and some nice Willow Warblers and Blackcaps, and a female Pied Flycatcher by the farm.

We then headed over to the Sumburgh sea-watching hide, where we had our lunch. We picked up many Gannets, Fulmars and Shags, and one lucky client saw a dolphin fin briefly. We walked up to the dramatic cliff tops where we found several Wheatears, a Chiffchaff and, in the rose bushes, many Goldcrests and a Song Thrush.

Most of the group then went to visit the amazing historic ruins at Jarlshof, but a couple of us went to the beach at Grutness, where we found a Purple Sandpiper among many Sanderlings, Turnstones, Ringed Plovers and Redshanks. We then examined a nearby garden, where we found a Chiffchaff, a very showy Lesser Whitethroat and many Goldcrests, and had a brief view of a Common Rosefinch. When the rest of the group showed up, we were able to relocate all these birds except the Purple Sandpiper. It was a good end to a productive day.

Day 4

Monday 29th September

The day began with more bright, warm sunshine and we travelled the short distance to the shrubby woodland that borders Loch Clickimin. Here, we located a Barred Warbler that had been found the day before, but could only manage glimpses as it moved through the leaves. We had a walk along the loch shore, but only added a few Red-breasted Mergansers.

We travelled across to Loch Tingwall where, after a short wait, we were able to get good views of the Ring-necked Duck that had been hanging out there with some Tufted Duck. We headed on to the small island of Burra, connected to the mainland by a bridge. Here, we walked down to the beautiful white sand crescent that is Banamin Beach and had lunch. Not many birds were evident except a Black Guillemot, but the views were wonderful. On a nearby pool, we found good numbers of Wigeon, a few Dunlins, Redshanks and Curlews.

From here we continued south, stopping at the beach at Levenwick where we had some Ringed Plovers and Turnstones, and some very close Kittiwakes feeding over the water. A Merlin flew by quickly, but could not be refound.

Then we crossed to the west side of the island and visited the wonderful, sandy isthmus that leads to St Ninian's Isle, where we visited the remains of the twelfth-century Kirk. On the beach here we got excellent views of the waders, including Bar-tailed Godwit, Sanderling, Turnstone, Ringed Plover; back at the van we had four Twite on the fence. On the sea, Guillemots came in close and Ravens and Fulmars flew overhead. We still had a little time to round off the day, so we had a look along the Burn of Sound at Lerwick, getting good views of Siskins, Redpolls and a Grey Wagtail.

Day 5

Tuesday 30th September

Late yesterday, news had come through of a very rare Siberian Thrush, so we headed up to Scatsta first thing to see if we could find it. Upon arrival, it appeared that it was no longer present; we only found many Goldcrests, a few Robins and a calling Yellow-browed Warbler that remained hidden. From here we went to Hillswick, mainly to visit the toilets, but we also spotted a pair of Otters feeding offshore, and we were able to watch them at length through the scopes.

We continued out west to Eshaness, an area of dramatic coastal cliffs and short maritime grassland. We walked the area for a while, but came up short on new birds. It was beautiful, but windy, so we retreated to Hillswick to eat our lunch, during which we watched a Red-throated Diver.

We then had a report of another Common Rosefinch around a ruin at Ollaberry, but the bird seemed to have moved on; we finished the day by checking the wooded gardens of scenic Voe. Here we found more Grey Wagtail and a few Blackcaps, and Grey Seal.



Willow Warbler



Glossy Ibis



Pied Flycatcher



Bar-tailed Godwit

Day 6

Wednesday 1st October

Today was largely a day of incessant rain and wind, but initially it was dry. We started off in the relative shelter in the woods at Kergord where we wandered for a time, finding a few Bramblings and Grey Wagtails, and many

Goldcrests. We then stopped at the large wooded garden at Tresta, but the rain had picked up and we struggled to find much, only adding the Shetland Rooks to the trip list. We then crossed the bleak moors to reach the sheltered bays at Sandness. Here, we found a drenched Wheatear feeding on a dung heap, and some more Ringed Plovers, Sanderlings and Turnstones, on the beach with Gannets, Shags and Kittiwakes over the water. We crossed the moors once again, seeing Wigeons and Whooper Swans on roadside lochs, and then stopped at Bridge of Walls; the resident Otter was not around, although we did see Grey Heron and Curlew.

We stopped at Hellister briefly, where some people visited the Shetland Jewelry Shop. We finished the day by visiting the sunken garden in Scalloway, but only found Goldcrests. Out in the bay, there was a small flock of Eiders.

Day 7

Thursday 2nd October

The sun was back this morning, and the wind had eased. We visited the Seafield shoreline in Lerwick, where we managed to find a Purple Sandpiper among the Ringed Plovers and Turnstones. We then made the short journey to Quarff, where we found many Goldcrests and a Yellow-browed Warbler in a garden; then news came through of the Siberian Thrush again. It had been relocated nearby, so we returned to the van and dashed north. We were soon there and so were all the other Shetland birders. We got brief views of it (a new species for the Naturetrek British list!) shortly after arriving, but after a long wait, it remained hidden. We decided to move on but one client stayed and was rewarded for his perseverance with good views of the elusive beast.

The rest of us went down to Hoswick, where we ate our lunch overlooking the sea, followed by a walk up a lovely wooded burn. Along here we found Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, a showy Garden Warbler, Goldcrests and a Black Guillemot on the sea.

A powerful ex-hurricane, 'Storm Amy', was going to hit Shetland tomorrow during our scheduled sailing back to Aberdeen. The crossing had been cancelled, and we needed to return this evening. So we picked up our solo Sibe Thrush watcher, returned to the hotel with just enough time for packing and dinner, and were at the ferry terminal by 6.15pm. We departed in the growing dark at 7.00pm, and as we sailed out, the rain began again. We retired to do our final checklist together.

Day 8

Friday 3rd October

The crossing had been a little bumpy, but not too bad, and we arrived in Aberdeen at 7.00am in high spirits, despite having had to cut the tour a little short. It had been a little challenging at times during the week, with poor weather and unfavourable winds impeding our ability to locate birds, but it had still been a very enjoyable trip with some excellent scenery and locations, good company and some memorable bird sightings like Wryneck, Common

Rosefinch, Yellow-browed Warbler, Red-backed Shrike, Ring-necked Duck, the ultra-rare Siberian Thrush and (perhaps the leader's favourite) a very showy Lesser Whitethroat; while not spectacularly rare, it just showed marvellously in good light.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

E=endemic		September-October 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓				
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓				
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>				✓			
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>			✓				
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>			✓				
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>			✓				
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	✓						
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			✓	✓	✓		
Red Grouse - E	<i>Lagopus scotica</i>							✓
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>						✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓				
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓		✓	✓		H
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			✓	✓			
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓				
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			✓	✓		✓	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓	✓		✓	
Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>			✓				✓
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓					
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓	✓		✓	
Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			✓		✓		✓
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

E=endemic		September-October 2025						
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29	30	1	2
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			✓				
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>			✓				
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓		✓		
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>		✓					
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>						✓	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓				✓		
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	✓			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓				
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>					H		✓
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			✓	✓			
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓				✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>							✓
Barred Warbler	<i>Currucula nisoria</i>		✓		✓			
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Currucula currucula</i>			✓				
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Siberian Thrush	<i>Geokichla sibirica</i>							✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>					✓	✓	
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>			✓				✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			✓		✓	H	H
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			✓				
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓		✓			
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		H		H	✓	✓	
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			✓			✓	
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>			✓				
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>		✓	✓	✓			
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>				✓			
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓		✓			
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓			

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	September-October 2025						
		26	27	28	29	30	1	2
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>			✓				
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>			✓				
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Harbour (Common) Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>		✓				✓	✓
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>					✓		

Insects

Common name	Scientific name	September-October 2025						
		26	27	28	29	30	1	2
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓			✓	✓
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			✓				✓
Angle Shades (moth)	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>							✓
Devils Coach-horse	<i>Ocypus olens</i>			✓				