

Yorkshire Coast & Moors

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th June – 1st July 2021



Black-browed Albatross



Gannets



Red Grouse



Bell-leaved Heather

Report and images by Keith Clarkson



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Day 1

Monday 28th June

Downe Arms, Wykeham – Wykeham Forest

Our hotel, the Downe Arms, is in a delightful setting overlooking the Vale of Pickering and the Yorkshire Wolds to the south with the Wykeham Forest and North York Moors behind us.

Following pick-ups from Scarborough station, we were able to take a brief circular walk around the hotel. Reflecting the interests of the group we were able to enjoy the architectural riches of William Butterfield's St Helen's and All Saints Church and the fascinating, restored, 18th Century ice-house which in its hey-day would have provided ice throughout the year for the Wykeham Estate. The woodland area adjacent to the ice-house and the disused railway embankment, provided us with an opportunity to get exceptionally close to many Bullfinch, Long-tailed Tits, Treecreepers and both Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff.

After dinner, we headed out to Wykeham Forest via the village of Hutton Buscel, where we managed to obtain brief views of a Little Owl as it returned to its nest/roost site.

Our main quest was to find and observe the behaviour of one of the North York Moors' most enigmatic birds – the European Nightjar. We were not disappointed, as darkness fell we watched and listened to the display flights, contact calls, churring and wing claps of three displaying male Nightjar for a captivating hour. It was a wonderful start to our trip.

Day 2

Tuesday 29th June

Wykeham – RSPB Bempton Cliffs – YWT Flamborough Cliffs – Filey dams (YWT) – Wykeham Forest

We awoke to the news that the adult Black-browed Albatross had returned to the cliffs of the RSPB's Bempton Cliffs nature reserve! Was it tempting fate to hope that this magnificent bird would still be present later in the day?

Following a fine and substantial breakfast we headed out across the Yorkshire Wolds towards the RSPB Bempton Cliffs, slowing down to appreciate the Corn Buntings sat atop the telegraph wires en route.

It was barely 10 o'clock when we arrived at Bempton Cliffs and the main car parks were already full, thankfully we had reserved a place in anticipation of the crowds. Our first question to the team of RSPB staff and volunteers was, inevitably, is the albatross showing? The latest news was that it was sat on the sea, distant and drifting south on the outgoing tide.

We decided that rather than 'chasing' the albatross we would just absorb the sights, sounds and smells of literally tens of thousands of nesting seabirds. The light easterly breeze was providing a rare opportunity to watch the

thousands of Gannets, Fulmars, Puffins, Guillemots and Razorbills literally at eye level as the updraft brought them to the top of the cliffs. It is an extraordinary experience and is one of the UK's wildlife wonders.

After an hour or so we could see a commotion at the next viewpoint, unbelievably, the Black-browed Albatross was gliding near the top of the 300ft chalk cliffs, being harried by a small flock of territorial Herring Gulls. It dwarfed the gulls, and its ink-black, pencil-thin wings, large head and heavy pale salmon bill were noticeably longer than the UK's largest seabird, the Gannet. On slightly arched wings it dodged the gulls twisting and turning to avoid their attentions before gliding past us and out to sea where it spent the next four hours. It was an almost unimaginable magic moment, here on mainland Britain we were watching one of the most iconic birds, a bird that should have been breeding on the Southern Atlantic islands of South Georgia and the Falkland Islands.

Following a sandwich lunch at the Seabird Centre, we headed to the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust's Flamborough Cliffs nature reserve at North Landing. Here, the low chalk cliffs contrast and compliment the high vertical cliffs of Bempton, the network of bays and headlands and lack of formal viewpoints and paths creates a more intimate experience. Here, was time to just be, to sit, watch, listen and soak up this wonderful place.

Together Bempton and Flamborough Cliffs provide the perfect window into the UK's largest mainland seabird colony with over 90,000 Common Guillemot, 30,000 Razorbill, 50,000 Kittiwake and 13,000 Gannet, 4,000 Puffin and a supporting cast of Fulmar, Shag, Cormorant and Herring Gull – time spent here is a time to marvel.

From Flamborough Head we made a brief stop at the Filey Bird Observatory/YWT Filey Dams Nature Reserve. The calm of this wetland reserve made a fine contrast with the vast open vistas and commotion of the seabird colonies.

Amongst the array of waterbirds and songs of Sedge and Reed Warbler we were rewarded with excellent views of a full summer plumage Black-tailed Godwit and an unseasonal male Wigeon in his eclipse plumage.

We were able to enjoy another fine dinner before returning to Wykeham Forest again via Hutton Buscel. Once more we were rewarded with reasonable views of the Little Owl before heading off to the forest. By 9.40pm the first Woodcock were roding. Minutes later three Nightjars were displaying, one of which literally flew over our heads. Somehow when you are watching Nightjars you don't even notice the midges or the time fly-past.

Day 3

Wednesday 30th June

Wykeham – Cropton Forest – Wheeldale Gill – Wheeldale Moor – Rosedale Abbey – Lasingham – Wykeham Raptor Viewpoint – Filey dams - Hunmanby Gap

Following another hearty breakfast, we headed out to Pickering and the southern edge of Cropton Forest where our first stop produced fine views of a Turtle Dove. This species has the unenviable title of the UK's most rapidly declining bird with 98% loss in the Turtle Dove population since 1970. The forests of the North York Moors National Park provide one of the last remaining strongholds of this iconic species. The National Park Authority have funded a Turtle Dove Project Officer who has liaised with farmers and volunteers alike helping

secure grants and offering advice. It was interesting to coincidentally meet the local farmer who was very proud of his Turtle Doves and the dew pond they had created which ensured the doves have access to much needed drinking water.

From Cropton Forest we drove north through constant light rain and gusting north-easterly winds, shocked to see the mid-day temperature was barely 10 degrees centigrade! Not surprisingly most birds were hunkered down. Nevertheless, we managed to connect with many of the birds that inhabit the moorland which covers over a third of the National Park. From the comfort of our minibus, we were able to watch several family parties of Red Grouse, literally at the side of the heather-flanked Wheeldale Roman Road. The heather burns and unimproved upland grassland also gave views of a family party of Curlew, Lapwing and two stunning summer-plumaged Golden Plover whilst Snipe ‘chipped’ from nearby rushy patches.

The heart of Wheeldale Moor is dissected by the Bracken-dominated Bluewath Beck Valley. This magical place, with its mosaic of wetland flushes and regenerating Rowan and Birch woodland, held good numbers of breeding Reed Bunting, Meadow Pipit and a least one pair of both Whinchat and Stonechat. Whilst overhead we were buzzed by Lesser Redpolls.

From here we headed through the grey cold weather to our lunch destination – ‘Graze on the Green’ a superb country café located on the edge of the village green at Rosedale Abbey. The café owners provide an excellent range of lunches and catered for the dietary needs of the party. Immediately outside the café we were entertained by a pair of Dipper still feeding young in the nest and a Grey Wagtail - a heartening re-energising break.

From Rosedale we drove to Spaunton Moor in the hope that we would see a pair of Ring Ouzel but unfortunately for us it looked as though they had fledged their young and moved out of their territory since the weekend – such is birdwatching life.

A brief stop in the village of Lastingham enabled us to harness the skills and expertise of several members of the group who were able to share their insight into the exceptional Norman apse, crypt and the wider architecture and archaeology of St Mary’s Church.

From Lastingham it was a relatively short journey to Wykeham Raptor Viewpoint where we hoped to see the pale male Honey Buzzard. We waited in the hope that he might re-appear, a forlorn quest but one which allowed us to enjoy superb views of a male Siskin who went about his business regardless of our presence and several sightings of Common Buzzard.

After dinner, and England’s confident 4:0 victory over Ukraine, we headed out once more on a quest to find Barn Owl for two of our guests. Alas, despite checking four known sites our attempts came to nought. Nevertheless, we did find Little Ringed Plover and a striking escapee Harris’s Hawk.

Day 4

Thursday 1st July

We decided to return to the Raptor Viewpoint for our last morning here we enjoyed views of a family party of Willow Tit, a pair of Crossbill and more excellent views of Siskin before heading off down into Troutdale, the valley overlooked by the viewpoint.

Here we saw Spotted Flycatcher, a family party of Mandarin Duck and had excellent views of Common Buzzard and parachuting Tree Pipits. As the end of our trip drew close the tranquillity was shattered by the commotion of a family party of Goshawks practicing their first flights. We watched them for over ten minutes, darting into cover, sitting on prominent perches and participating in brief chases. It was a once in a lifetime treat to be able to watch one of our most secretive large raptors behaving as if oblivious of our presence, the perfect way to end our tour of the Yorkshire Coast and Moors.

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Checklist

Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	28-Jun	29-Jun	30-Jun	01-Jul
1	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		*		
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		*	*	
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		*	*	
4	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>				*
5	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		*		
6	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		*	*	
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		*	*	*
8	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		*	*	
9	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		*	*	
10	Red Grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus scotica</i>			*	
11	Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	*	*	*	*

	Common name	Scientific name	28-Jun	29-Jun	30-Jun	01-Jul
12	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	*	*	*	*
13	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		*		
14	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		*	*	
15	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		*	*	
16	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		*		
17	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>		*		
18	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		*		
19	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	*			
20	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				*
21	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			*	*
22	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		*	*	*
23	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		*	*	
24	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			*	
25	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		*	*	
26	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			*	
27	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		*	*	
28	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			*	
29	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		*	*	
30	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	*	*		
31	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			*	
32	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		*		
33	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		*		
34	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		*		
35	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	*	*	*	*
36	Common (Murre) Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		*		
37	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		*		
38	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		*		
39	Black-browed Albatross	<i>Thalassarche melanophris</i>		*		
40	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		*		
41	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		*	*	*
42	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	*	*	*	*
43	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			*	
44	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				*
45	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	*			
46	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	*	*		
47	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	2prs	3 prs		
48	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	*	*	*	*
49	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			*	
50	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	*	*	*	*
51	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			*	
52	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	*	*	*	*
53	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	*	*	*	*
54	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	*	*	*	*
55	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	*	*	*	*
56	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		*	*	*
57	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>				*
58	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	*	*	*	*
59	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	*	*	*	*
60	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	*	*	*	*
61	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		*	*	
62	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	*	*	*	*
63	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	*	*	*	*

	Common name	Scientific name	28-Jun	29-Jun	30-Jun	01-Jul
64	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	*			
65	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	*	*	*	*
66	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	*	*	*	*
67	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		*	*	
68	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		*		
69	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	*	*	*	*
70	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>				*
71	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	*	*	*	*
72	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		*	*	*
73	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	*	*	*	*
74	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	*	*	*	*
75	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	*	*	*	*
76	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	*	*	*	*
77	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	*	*	*	*
78	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>				*
79	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	*	*	*	*
80	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>			*	
81	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			*	
82	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			1 pr	
83	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			*	*
84	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	*	*	*	*
85	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			*	
86	White Wagtail (Pied)	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	*	*	*	*
87	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	*	*	*	*
88	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			*	*
89	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	*	*	*	*
90	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	*	*	*	*
91	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	*	*		
92	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	*	*	*	*
93	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>			*	*
94	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>				2
95	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	*	*	*	*
96	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	*	*	*	*
97	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>		2		
98	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	*	*	*	*
99	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	*	*	*	*