

Norfolk - Winter in the Broads

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 12th November 2025

Tour report by John Williamson



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Tour participants: John Williamson (leader) with four Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 10th November

The group assembled at The Dairy Barns, Hickling, at 3.00pm for tea and cakes. They received a rapid briefing on procedures from Hannah and on the schedule of events to follow from the tour leader, before heading out into the late afternoon rain. As the group loaded the vehicle prior to departure, they noted Meadow Pipits, Pied Wagtails, Wood Pigeons, Jackdaws, and a flock of about 50 Rooks perched in nearby trees.

On arrival at Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) Hickling Broad reserve, the group was fortunate to have a Sparrowhawk fly along the road a few metres ahead of the vehicle for approximately 30–40 metres, before it banked away into a hedgerow. At the NWT reserve, they were able to use a window of light drizzle amidst the rain to overlook Brendan's Marsh and the hundred-acre reedbed, where they saw up to twenty Marsh Harriers assembling prior to the evening roost. In the half-light across the adjacent marsh, both Water Rail and Cetti's Warbler put forth their distinctive songs, and Bearded Reedlings were heard calling from the reedbed. Wildfowl present included Shoveler, Teal, Mallard, Greylag Goose, and Mute Swan, while approximately 3,000 Pink-footed Geese dropped distantly from the darkening sky onto nearby Heigham Holmes to roost. Shortly afterwards, as Starlings were skimming the reed tops heading to their evening roost, two Cranes were heard calling as they flew towards Brendan's Marsh, appearing low over the trees to the north before dropping onto the scrape to roost, giving relatively good views in the failing light.

As the light gave out, the group headed back to The Dairy Barns at 4.30pm via some small country lanes, where they were able to get fairly good views of a herd of eight Roe Deer, and more fleeting views of four Muntjacs, another Roe Deer, a single Chinese Water Deer, a Brown Hare, and a couple of Rabbits. Dinner was taken at 7.00pm.

Day 2

Tuesday 11th November

An early visit to Waxham dunes proved to be rather unproductive, but the group did manage to see Oystercatcher, Cormorant, and a selection of gulls including Great Black-backed, Herring, Common, and Black-headed. Inland, approximately 500 Pink-footed Geese were feeding on arable land, and a small group of Red-legged Partridge was nearby. The adjacent farm buildings held Collared Dove, Wood Pigeon, and Feral Rock Pigeon. The journey back for breakfast provided both Meadow Pipit and Yellowhammer on roadside wires.

Following a hearty breakfast, the group visited St. Benet's Levels, where they had very good views of a single Whooper Swan and more distant views of seven Cattle Egrets feeding in a recently slubbed-out ditch, a single Great Egret in flight, and a couple of views of a single Little Egret. The bushes around the old abbey ruins held small numbers of Fieldfares and Redwings. Several Kestrels and a single Marsh Harrier hunted over the grazing marshes, where a few Chinese Water Deer were grazing.

The next destination was the Trinity Broads, where the group visited Rollesby, Ormesby Great and Little Broads, and Filby Broad. En route to Rollesby, they stopped at the roadside in Repps-with-Bastwick to watch a mixed flock of approximately eighty Lapwings, ten European Golden Plovers, 150 Starlings, and an impressive 440 Stock Doves feeding on rough arable land. A single Red Kite flew overhead before they arrived at Rollesby, where a

single Great Crested Grebe was among a small flock of feeding Tufted Duck. Ormesby Great Broad was little better, but did hold around forty Coot and three Great Crested Grebes. The boardwalk at Filby proved more productive with a large flock of 105 Pochard and 120 Tufted Duck, mixed in with a few Gadwalls and Mallards, and another 150 Coots.

The walk down to the viewing platform at Ormesby Little Broad put the group among a roving tit flock that contained numerous Long-tailed, Blue, and Great Tits, with single Coal and Marsh Tits, and a Treecreeper also seen well. As the group continued along the path, a Kingfisher flashed through the carr woodland towards the broad. At the broad, they encountered a further 200 Coot, five Tufted Ducks, and two Great Crested Grebes, but the highlight was a Bittern which flew low over the reedbed edge, before perching in view for a few seconds. A Buzzard circled overhead, both Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers were calling, and a single Marsh Harrier passed through.

The group took a light lunch in Rollesby, before heading off to NWT Hickling Broad to explore further, following their brief visit on the evening of the first day. At the NWT reserve, the feeders around the visitor centre held Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, House Sparrow, and Coal, Blue, and Great Tits. The group walked the woodland path to the viewpoint overlooking Brendan's Marsh, where one of two Stonechats gave very close views, and three Whooper Swans and at least four Pintails were present among hundreds of Teal, Mallard, Gadwall, and Shoveler. Several Marsh Harriers were in the air to the east over the reedbed. The group then continued to the viewpoint overlooking Hickling Broad, where they saw a Great Egret on the reedbed edge and a distant flock of Gadwall. A Green Sandpiper flew overhead calling, and two Marsh Harriers quartered the reedbed. Cetti's Warblers and Reed Buntings were in the reedbed, and four Bearded Reedlings flew on two occasions over the reed tops.

The group continued on to Secker's Hide, where they saw a Jay in the wooded area, but flight views of three distant Curlews were the only other thing of note. They then headed for the raptor roost at Stubb Mill. Here, a number of Marsh Harriers were already present over the roosting area, and two Cranes dropped into the grazing marsh. Pink-footed Geese flew around in the distance, and a Great Egret flew south, before a Merlin was watched hunting a small flock of Linnets. Four Curlews flew south, and a pair of Tawny Owls was duetting from the bushes as the two Cranes flew almost over their heads.

A spectacular twelve-point Red Deer stag then entertained the group at close range, before it realised that it was being watched, and it bolted off into the gathering gloom. There was enough light left for the group to have great views of two flocks of twenty-nine and four Cranes passing over as they dropped onto the grazing marsh to roost. As the group walked back to the vehicle in near complete darkness, they could see and hear thousands of Pink-footed Geese gathering to roost on Brendan's Marsh, and a small number of bats were active along woodland and hedgerow edges. Given that there is a known roost of Common Pipistrelle in the adjacent Hickling Visitor Centre roof-space, it was assumed that they were of this species. The group then headed back to The Dairy Barns, where dinner was taken at 7.00pm.

Day 3

Wednesday 12th November

The final day commenced with a pre-breakfast visit to the Horsey Gap Grey Seal rookery, where day-old pups were easily visible on the beach. Birds of interest were few, but a Woodcock was flushed from the roadside verge

on the journey, Stonechat and Meadow Pipits frequented the dunes, and a gathering of Great Black-backed, Herring, and Black-headed Gulls attended the breeding colony.

Following breakfast, the group headed to NWT Ranworth Broad, where a walk along the boardwalk to the floating visitor centre gave them excellent views of a Redpoll. A Long-tailed Tit flock added to the usual carr woodland suspects: Siskin, Blackbird, Chaffinch, Water Rail, and Cetti's Warbler were recorded, and a Nuthatch called but remained unseen. On Ranworth Broad and in the cut adjoining the River Bure, four Little Grebes were feeding along with Great Crested Grebes, while ducks included Tufted Duck, Mallard, Teal, Wigeon, and Shoveler. At least four Marsh Harriers, a Red Kite, and a Buzzard were over the broad or the adjacent woodland.

The next destination was the RSPB reserve at Buckenham Fen. Here, the walk down to the hide adjacent to the fishermens' car park saw large flocks of Wigeon and Lapwing grazing on the marshes, with an impressive 230 Canada Geese also present. The local rookery produced good numbers of Rooks, accompanied by plenty of Jackdaws and the odd Carrion Crow.

From the hide, at least four Red Kites, two Marsh Harriers, and two Buzzards were seen, with the scrape and adjoining grazing marsh also holding waders in the form of eighteen Black-tailed Godwits, two Snipes, and a Ruff. Wildfowl present comprised large numbers of Teal and Wigeon, with a few Shovelers, Gadwalls, and Mallards. Scanning over the grazing marshes, the group was unable to locate any White-fronted Geese, but three Little Egrets and approximately 400 Lapwings gave them some compensation.

The group next headed for Great Yarmouth, where they took a brief lunch stop before walking out along the north wall at Breydon Water to watch the amassing waders and wildfowl on the rising tide. Although never the most picturesque part of the tour, this site always offered things of interest, and today was no exception. Around 5,500 European Golden Plover were massed on the mudflats, constantly on edge given the presence of a pair of Peregrines, which gave a spectacular aerial display as they warned off a local Buzzard from their territory. Wheeling flocks of alternating gold and white continued throughout the visit, providing a spectacular backdrop to 350 Redshanks, 200 Dunlins, thirty-five Black-tailed Godwits, twenty Grey Plovers, ten Curlews, eight Ringed Plovers, five Bar-tailed Godwits, five Knots, and a single Turnstone. Wildfowl were numerous and included 100 Shelducks, and large numbers of both Wigeon and Teal were feeding in the shallows or roosting on the area known locally as 'The Lumps'.

With time passing quickly, the group began their journey back to Hickling, but had enough time for a quick visit to Brograve Levels, where they saw several hundred Pink-footed Geese on the ground in the grazing marshes, with thousands in the air as a backdrop, and two obliging pairs of Cranes offered up the best views they had had all trip. One pair allowed the group to 'scope them at approximately fifty metres range. A few Reed Buntings, Yellowhammers, and Goldfinches adorned the trackside wires as the group concluded a successful tour.

Clients were returned to their vehicles at The Dairy Barns at 4.00pm. With the inclusion of a few 'heard only' species, the group had managed to amass 101 bird species and nine mammal species in just over two days.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I = Introduced		November 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		40	230
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	3000	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		4	
Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		2	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			100
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓	120	2000
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		4	
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		105	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		120	✓
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓	✓
Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		40	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	H		H
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		400	✓
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	2	35	4
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			4
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		10	✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			20
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		10	5500
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			8
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		80	600
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		7	10
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			5
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		2	53
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>			1
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			3
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		1	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			350
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			1
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>			5
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>			1
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			200
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	✓

I = Introduced		November 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		3	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>		1	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		1	11
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		3	
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>		7	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	2		1
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	20	25	6
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		1	5
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		5	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	H
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		8	✓
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			2
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	50		✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		1	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	H	4	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H	H
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			H
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		2	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		5	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		2	7
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓

I = Introduced		November 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		10	40
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>			2
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			H
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓	15
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	✓

Mammals

I = Introduced		November 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12
European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	
European Hare - I	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	
(presumed) Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>		✓	✓
Reeves's Muntjac - I	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	4	5	✓
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		1	
Chinese Water Deer - I	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>	1	3	✓
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	9		1
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓