

# The Great British Bird Race – Norfolk

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th – 30th January 2026

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Tour report by John Williamson

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

## Day 1

Wednesday 28th January

Having convened at the Pheasant Hotel at Kelling, we departed for the Broads at 1.00pm, arriving on the east coast at Sea Palling at 1.45pm, before walking down onto the beach to view the gulls. Here, we quickly located the second-calendar-year Iceland Gull amongst a throng of feeding gulls, which also included two second-calendar-year Caspian Gulls, an adult Mediterranean Gull, an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull, and large numbers of Black-headed, Common and Herring Gulls. Roosting on the adjacent granite rocks and later feeding on the beach were three Purple Sandpipers, some forty Turnstones, and smaller numbers of Sanderlings, Dunlins and Oystercatchers. Several Cormorants were roosting on the offshore reefs.

We recorded Collared Dove on return to the car park at Sea Palling, before moving quickly on to our next port of call, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve at Hickling. En route, we encountered several Kestrels, Wood Pigeons, Pheasants and Blackbirds, and a small flock of about ten Yellowhammers. On the approach to Hickling, we saw some 250 Lapwing and four Stock Doves in roadside fields, before we visited the feeders at the Hickling Visitor Centre. Here we saw Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tits, Robin, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Dunnock, House Sparrow and Reed Bunting. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was drumming in the wood nearby, but could not be located. Jay was also heard. Following a brief comfort stop, we visited the Stubb Mill raptor watchpoint, where we had distant views of the Black-winged Kite and a hunting Marsh Harrier, with much better views of a pair of Stonechats in front of the watchpoint.

Moving on we located Greylag Goose, Rook and Carrion Crow in roadside fields en route to Martham, where we quickly looked at about three hundred Pink-footed Geese. Returning north towards Ludham, we saw plenty of Jackdaws and a couple of Magpies, and we had close views of a pair of Red-legged Partridges beside the road. By now, evening was creeping on, and the mist started to develop again, so we headed on to Ludham, where thirty-seven Whooper and six Bewick's Swans were in the fields, with a pair of Egyptian Geese nearby.

We then continued through Ludham to nearby St. Benets Level, where we saw a Buzzard perched on a gate post and at least four Cattle Egrets feeding on the grazing marsh. A pair of Cranes was located beside a pool on the marsh: they took flight and landed slightly farther away with a further four Cranes. A small flock of about twenty Fieldfares flew overhead calling as dusk fell, but we had arrived too late for the hoped-for Short-eared Owl.

We returned to The Pheasant at Kelling for dinner at 7.00pm.

Day total = 55 species

## Day 2

Thursday 29th January

Prior to breakfast, at least 2 Tawny Owls were calling from the hotel grounds, and one was seen briefly in flight. Breakfast was taken at 7.30am, following which we headed to The Brecks. Our first stop was at Lynford Arboretum, where the tunnel adjacent to the entrance produced good views of Marsh Tit, Nuthatch and Goldcrest. With no sign of any Hawfinches, we wandered down to the Hornbeam enclosure, and immediately found a single Hawfinch perched in the top of the trees. Here, we also saw two calling Siskins in flight, a small flock of

Goldfinches perched in the treetops, and about twenty Crossbills overhead, calling repeatedly. A Jay was seen well in the larches as we returned to the vehicle. We then headed just around the corner, onto the West Tofts road, where we saw a singing Song Thrush, but failed to locate Firecrest.

Our next stop was Hilborough, where we managed to find a large mixed flock of finches, which contained a least one calling Brambling and a few Linnets. The hedgerows here also held three Tree Sparrows, and the parkland opposite had a singing Mistle Thrush and a flock of some twenty Redwings in the top of the tall oak trees.

We then moved on to Cockley Cley, where a Red Kite was hunting over the arable land; a little surprisingly, a group of six Shelducks flew over, but given the conditions, the possibility of either Goshawk or Woodlark was quickly eliminated from our thoughts.

Moving quickly on, we next stopped at Heacham North Beach, where the waders feeding on the rising tide included several Bar-tailed Godwits, Curlews and Common Redshanks. On the sea were about fifteen Red-breasted Mergansers, a single Goldeneye, about 500 Common Scoters, and a least two Great Crested Grebes.

We quickly moved on to Hunstanton, where we took a comfort stop and had a short break for lunch. We drove down to the sailing club car-park, where we could see about twenty-five Fulmars on the cliff ledges, and several Feral Pigeons. Out targets achieved at Hunstanton, we moved to Thornham Harbour, where a walk produced Grey Plover, Greenshank and Teal. We continued along the path up onto the sea wall, towards Holme-next-the-sea, where we saw a flock of Wigeons and a pair of Shovelers; returning through the edge of the saltmarsh, we saw a single Meadow Pipit.

Continuing east along the coast road, we stopped briefly overlooking Burnham Norton near Burnham Overy Mill, where Little Egret and Coot were added to the total. Our next brief stop further east overlooked Burnham Overy grazing marsh, where we added Brent Goose and Golden Plover. With daylight fading and the temperature beginning to fall, with a cold north-easterly breeze, we drove into Lady Anne's drive at Holkham, where a Common Snipe was seen close to the road. We quickly travelled onwards to Wells Quay, where a failure to locate any Little Grebes led us to drive to the beach car-park at Wells, where we added both Tufted Duck and Little Grebe to the day total.

Our final stop of the day was at Warham Greens, where we immediately had good views of a Hen Harrier over the arable land. As we walked the path to the edge of the saltmarsh, a pair of Grey Partridges was noted in an adjacent field. At the saltmarsh edge we saw two Ravens flying inland from Wells East Hills, and a single immature Spoonbill, while a large flock of some 200 Knots swirled over the distant sandflats. We returned to Kelling for dinner at 7.00pm.

Day total of new species = 45

Running total = 100 species

## Day 3

Friday 30th January

Following a hearty breakfast, we set off for nearby Salthouse beach, where a walk up to the shingle ridge overlooking the sea produced views of both Guillemot and Red-throated Diver as we braved drizzle and strong, cold north-easterly winds. As we walked along the ridge to Salthouse Little Eye, we saw and heard a Wren, almost unbelievably the first of the trip! As we returned to the vehicle along the fence line at the base of the shingle ridge, we saw two pairs of Gadwalls in the freshwater drain.

With conditions very challenging, we headed back to the vehicle and drove east along the coast road to Cley Marshes NWT reserve where, from the elevated mound outside the visitor centre, we were able immediately to 'scope about twenty-five Avocets and a similar number of Black-tailed Godwits.

Further west along the A149 coast road, we stopped briefly opposite Stiffkey Flood and were able to see Pintails on the expansive flooded area to the south. Unable to locate any of the hoped-for Glossy Ibises here, we continued through the village of Stiffkey to the flood opposite the Red Lion pub, where we found the three ibises feeding in close proximity, before two of them flew west and out of view: perfect timing!

We headed further west along the coast road to visit Holkham Park; on arrival at the park gates, we entered on foot and walked down to the large lake. The woodland was very quiet on the way to the lake, but we quickly found a flock of about twenty Pochards diving in the deep water, and a surprise redhead Goosander added to our tally: it gave very good views. As we returned towards the woodland, we located a flock of some fifty Barnacle Geese grazing, but were unable to find any Canada Geese, a species we still needed for the list. Returning through the park woodland, we heard and finally saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker in the tall oaks adjacent to the park gates, but we failed to find either of Green Woodpecker or Treecreeper.

We drove a short distance west and stopped in a lay-by, in search of White-fronted Goose. After some intense scanning with 'scopes, we managed to locate just three of the reported flock of 180 White-fronted Geese: they were very distant on the grazing marsh.

Pleased with our efforts so far, as time approached midday we headed for our final destination of RSPB Titchwell. On arrival at the reserve, we managed quickly to find a very tricky roosting Woodcock in the woodland leaf litter, before a short walk in the woodland gave us views of a roosting Tawny Owl in an ivy-covered tree. This gave the members of the group who had missed the bird at the hotel a chance to catch up with this species. We then returned along the boardwalk, to find a Water Rail feeding brazenly in the ditch beside the west bank path, giving sensational views. As we headed out towards the beach, we were hoping for Ruff on the freshmarsh, but had no luck. However, we did locate and see very well a Common Chiffchaff feeding in the base of cut reeds, almost at our feet on the edge of the marsh. Continuing towards the sea, we searched in vain for a Scaup on the tidal marsh, before spending the last hour looking at the sea. Here we found four Long-tailed Ducks just beyond the surf, which gave very good views, and a Great Northern Diver drifted east into Brancaster harbour. Despite further searching in an increasingly strong and cold wind, we could not find any new grebes, so we returned to Parrinder Hide for a few minutes respite from the conditions, before our return walk back along the west bank finally gave us distant views of two Canada Geese in with a grazing flock of Greylag Geese.

We returned to the visitor centre at Titchwell for lunch at 2.00pm; this marked the cessation of birding activities. Before lunch, we completed and submitted our checklist, and subsequently returned participating clients to their vehicles at 4.00pm.

Day total of new species = 19

Final total = 119 species (plus Brambling heard only)

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## Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Note: only the first sighting of each species is recorded here

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	January 2026		
			28	29	30
	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		✓	
	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			✓
	Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>			✓
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓		
	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓		
	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>			✓
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓		
	Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>	✓		
	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	✓		
	Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	✓		
	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	
	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓
	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		
	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓
	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	
	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓
	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	
	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>		✓	
	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>			✓
	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓	
	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			✓
	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓	
	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		✓	
	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓		
	Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓		
	Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓		
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓		
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			✓
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓		
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	
	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓		
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓		
	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓	
	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	
	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓		
	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓		

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	January 2026		
			28	29	30
	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	
	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓	
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓
	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>			✓
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓	
	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		✓	
	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	✓		
	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓	
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	✓		
	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓		
	Purple Sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>	✓		
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		
	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>	✓		
	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓		
	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	✓		
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓		
	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓		
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓		
	Iceland Gull	<i>Larus glaucoides</i>	✓		
	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓
	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			✓
	Great Northern Diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>			✓
	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		
	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			✓
	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		✓	
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	
	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	
	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>	✓		
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		
	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	✓		
	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		✓	
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓		
	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓		
	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		✓	
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		
	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>	✓		
	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	
	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓		
	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓		

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	January 2026		
			28	29	30
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓		
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓		
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓
	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓
	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	
	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓		
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	
	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓		
	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓		
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓		
	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓		
	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓	
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		
	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓		
	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓		
	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	H		
	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓	
	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		
	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	
	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	
	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	
	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓		
	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		