

# Northumberland & the Farne Islands (Wildlife Photography Tour)

Naturetrek Tour Report

5th – 9th July 2021

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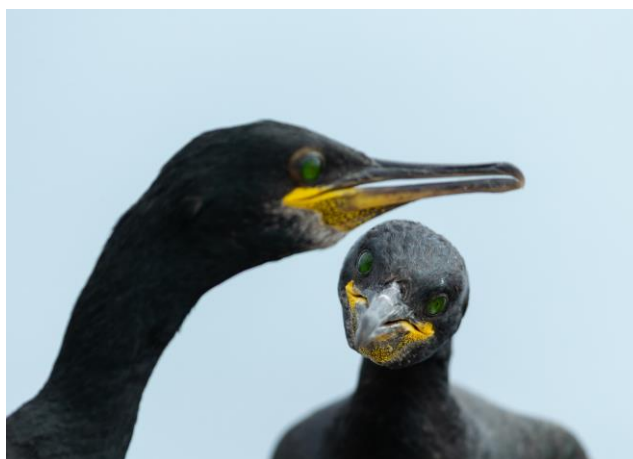
Puffins



Razorbill



Bamburgh Castle



Shags

Report and images by Oliver Smart



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Tour participants: Oliver Smart (leader) with five Naturetrek clients

## Introduction

Northumberland is an historic county in North East England, bordering Scotland and the North Sea with Cumbria to the west and Tyne & Wear to the south. The county is rich in wildlife with the famous Farne Islands just two nautical miles from the coast. It is therefore a fantastic destination for seabird photography and natural history viewing. Due to the close proximity to Scotland, there have been many battles, and castles are dotted all along the coastline with many more inland too. It's a wonderful county to explore and our trip was based in Bamburgh and was to focus on the incredible seabird life as well as scenic landscapes, incorporating some of the most picturesque castles in the country.

## Day 1

**Monday 5th July**

Our small group of five photographers and tour leader Oliver Smart arrived at the Victoria Inn in Bamburgh for our four-night stay. We met for a pre-tour briefing before our first delicious dinner at The Lord Crewe Hotel before heading out to Bamburgh Castle to explore the surroundings, the beach, rocks and dunes. We were looking for interesting compositions of the castle as the sun began to set. At first, we were struck by Inner Farne and the lighthouse lit by warming light. The castle itself was glowing in the evening light and we mainly used the dunes as a focal foreground. The blue sky was littered with fluffy clouds, creating all kinds of shapes, so the emphasis was on the sky with a smaller castle in the lower portion of the frame. We also were thrilled to spot a Barn Owl hunting over the dunes and later found another one on higher ground overlooking the village. Bats hunted along the lanes where moths were out in number. We changed angles and moved to the south-eastern side of the castle to backlight the building. Also, with a low tide we explored the pools created along the shoreline. Lovely pink hues were present now, and layered clouds allowed for some interesting compositions.

## Day 2

**Tuesday 6th July**

With a very wet start to the day, we decided to keep dry and use the time to work through our images from the previous evening. We also discussed ideas about composition, lighting and timing. On request, the group were walked through some of our leader's recent images from the previous trip and what works and what doesn't when it comes to taking a good photo! It is often in the planning stage and the thought processes that go into an image beforehand that makes a shot or shoot more successful, and so this was an invaluable opportunity for the group to learn more.

With rain forecast for most of the day, we headed to Seahouses to pick up a picnic lunch and then headed to Low Newton where we walked to the National Trust headland and along the shoreline, before venturing inland and checking out the Newton Pools Nature Reserve. We got absolutely soaked but we encountered a good number of birds along the way, despite the horrible wet and windy conditions. Oystercatcher with chicks, Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Turnstone, Sandwich and Common Tern were seen along the shoreline and Skylark, Meadow Pipit and Linnet over the meadows. At the pools, Redshank, Shelduck, Lapwing, Avocet, Little Grebe and a

variety of ducks, geese and swans were present too. By late afternoon we headed back for dinner at The Castle Inn.

Our final adventure for the day was to visit Dunstanburgh Castle and check out the beach, which tonight was low tide. Unfortunately, the weather was still pretty overcast and dull, but at least the rain had stopped. We tracked along the beach, taking opportunities to photograph the scene using rocks, sandy ripples and water features as leading lines or foreground interest. We progressed to a closer point where we also encountered Sedge Warbler, Brown Hare and we heard a Grey Partridge too. Back at the car after our lovely walk we watched and recorded the sound of a hunting Common Pipistrelle bat along the lane. A super end to an almost write-off day.

## Day 3

Wednesday 7th July

An early 04:30 start and walk along the Seahouses coast photographing Kittiwakes nesting in their more natural surroundings. The light was still not entirely in our favour but some nice compositions were possible from various viewpoints. We also managed to pick up the calls and then sighting of a Common Sandpiper at the end of the rocky shoreline.

The main focus of our day consisted of two boat trips, covering the Farne Islands, inner and outer groups with a landing on Inner Farne in the afternoon. We were delighted to find the weather for the day was very settled with incredibly calm waters. The group thoroughly enjoyed the outings and with the advice from the previous morning still fresh in their minds, they were able to compose and capture some beautiful images of these vast seabird colonies. Arctic Terns were in force along the edge of Staple Island and a flock of Golden Plover on the outermost group of rocks. There are 28 islands in total with 14 of these disappearing at high tide. The rest are awash with breeding seabirds and the sight, sound and smell are all there to take in!

After a light lunch in Seahouses we milled about the harbour, resting and preparing for the afternoon landing.

Our evening after a fabulous dinner at The Sunningdale Hotel consisted of our first visit to Holy Island to explore the dunes at The Snook. We were in search of orchids and with calmer conditions, slightly muggy, with mostly cloud cover, we made our way through the dunes and managed to see six species including Lindesfarne and Marsh Helleborine, Common Spotted, Early Marsh, Northern Marsh and Pyramidal orchids. A Roe Deer stag made a brief appearance and distant hauled our Grey Seals were an entertaining sight and particularly sound, which drifted over the marsh. There must have been many hundreds, perhaps even thousands resting on the low sand banks.

## Day 4

Thursday 8th July

Our final full day and what a lovely day we had in store. Firstly, two trips to the Farne Islands in glorious weather where we saw many of the usual suspects plus a few Gannets. These are the largest seabirds in Europe and can dive up to 60mph from a height of 30m to catch fish! The nearest colony is Bass Rock, about 45 minutes to the north but they will travel hundreds of miles in search of suitable feeding grounds. The rest of the birdlife here seemed very successful this year and the volume of sand-eels being brought in appeared very good. Grey Seals in

the Farne Islands can reach up to 6000 animals, but you never see all at once, and plenty were hauled out on the rocks, being left 'stranded' as the tide drops and they position themselves on a favoured spot.

After a very peaceful lunch overlooking Seahouses Harbour from a quiet corner of the beach, we returned for our landing trip to Inner Farne. Even though these have been restricted to one hour, it is still a whole lot of fun and the group took time to explore image ideas they'd missed the previous day or following discussions with the group leader about the options that could be taken on today. Young seabirds were everywhere and even a few black and white and grey looking Pufflings were starting to emerge from their burrows. Great for having their picture taken but watching the dramatic action of Puffins being attacked and chicks being taken by gulls is sometimes hard to watch but is all part of nature, the experience and, for us, makes for excellent photography!

Following our penultimate boat trip we headed back for dinner at The Lord Crewe Hotel, which was excellent before dashing out to Holy Island once more. This time the target was Lindisfarne Castle and although the weather did not play ball once again, it was a lovely evening excursion and we all managed to obtain some pleasing images, particularly those that could be converted into black and white. With low tide giving us access to the pebbly beach, we could use the surroundings as a lovely lead-in to the castle on a hill. On our way across the causeway, Oliver spotted a Spoonbill from some distance and we were able to approach with the vehicle to a point where some were able to take a few images.

## Day 5

## Friday 9th July

After our final hearty breakfast, we packed, checked out and made our way to Hauxley Nature Reserve. This is managed by the Northumberland Wildlife Trust and is an excellent example of where an old quarry can be converted into a beautiful sanctuary for nature and people. Hides are positioned all around the site with great vantage points overlooking the lagoons. Although photography is perhaps not optimal here, it was a wonderful walk and we managed to spot a Ruddy Shelduck, which makes regular appearances here, along with plenty of Curlew, Tree Sparrow and a variety of terns, geese and other waterfowl.

We were lucky to obtain tickets for a boat trip around Coquet Island, owned by the Duke of Northumberland and leased to the RSPB for managing the immense seabird colonies here. On our approach, over the calmest of seas, we were astounded by the volume of bird life. We could not get too close to the shore, for fear of hitting shallow rocks as it was still a lower tide, but we were able to pick out Roseate Terns and enjoyed the variety of birdlife, much of which was rafting on the water.

This was our final hurrah, and so we headed to Druridge Bay and enjoyed views over lakes and marshy lagoons for the final couple of hours. Avocet, a group of ten breeding plumaged Black-tailed Godwit, Snipe, a family of Redshank and two breeding male Ruff all made for a fantastic end to our trip. It was quite sad to be saying goodbye after five days of intense and brilliant wildlife and landscape photography. New friends had been made and a great journey complete. We all looked forward to meeting again in another classic destination

## Checklist

### Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	Date:				
			05-Jul	06-Jul	07-Jul	08-Jul	09-Jul
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>				Y	Y
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		Y			Y
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		Y	Y		Y
4	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		Y			Y
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		Y			Y
6	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		Y			
7	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>					Y
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		Y			Y
9	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		Y			Y
10	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>					Y
11	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
12	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
13	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		H			
14	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		H	Y	Y	Y
15	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			Y	Y	Y
16	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		Y			Y
17	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
18	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				Y	Y
19	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
20	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>			Y	Y	
21	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			Y	Y	Y
87	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				Y	
22	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			Y		
23	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		Y			Y
24	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		Y			Y
25	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
91	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>					Y
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	H	Y	Y		Y
27	European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			Y		
28	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		Y			
29	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
89	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		Y			
30	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Y				
88	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>					Y
31	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		Y	Y	Y	
92	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>					Y
33	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>			Y		
34	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	H	Y			Y
35	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
36	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
37	Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		Y			
38	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			Y	Y	Y
39	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
40	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
41	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
42	Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>					Y

			Date:				
	Common name	Scientific name	05-Jul	06-Jul	07-Jul	08-Jul	09-Jul
43	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
44	Arctic Tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>			Y	Y	Y
45	Common Murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>			Y	Y	Y
46	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			Y	Y	
47	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			Y	Y	Y
48	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	Y	Y		Y	Y
49	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			Y		Y
50	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	Y				
51	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H			
52	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
53	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			Y	Y	Y
54	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			Y		Y
55	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
56	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
57	Carriion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
58	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>			H		Y
59	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>					Y
60	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		Y	Y		Y
61	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
62	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
63	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
64	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>					H
65	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	H	H			Y
66	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		Y			Y
67	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		H			Y
68	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>					H
69	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		Y			Y
70	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>					H
71	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
72	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Y	H	Y	Y	Y
73	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Y	H			H
74	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	Y	Y			Y
75	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
76	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>					Y
77	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		Y			H
78	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		Y	Y		Y
79	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Y	Y	Y		Y
80	Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		Y	Y	Y	Y
81	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>					H
82	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>					Y
83	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	Y	Y	Y		Y
84	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	H	Y	Y	Y	Y
85	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		Y		Y	Y
86	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		Y	Y		Y

		Date:				
Common name	Scientific name	05-Jul	06-Jul	07-Jul	08-Jul	09-Jul
<b>Mammals</b>						
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		Y			Y
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		Y			

Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			Y		
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			Y	Y	
Common Pipistelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>		Y			
Common Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>			Y		
<b>Butterflies</b>						
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>					Y
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>					Y
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			Y		
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>					Y
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>					Y
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>				Y	
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>					Y
Green-veined White	<i>Polyommatus icaru</i>					Y
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>				Y	
<b>Moths</b>						
Drinker Moth (larva)	<i>Euthrix potatoria</i>	Y				
Yellow Shell	<i>Camptogramma bilineata</i>		Y			
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>			Y	Y	Y
<b>Orchids</b>						
Common Spotted Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>			Y		Y
Northern Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza purpurella</i>			Y		
Early Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza incarnata</i>			Y		
Marsh Helleborine	<i>Epipactis palustris</i>			Y		
Pyramidal Orchid	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	Y		Y		
Lindisfarne Helliborine	<i>Epipactis sancta</i>			Y		

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