

Tour Report Norfolk in Late Winter 7-10 February 2025

Shorelark



Jack snipe



Stoat



Goshawk



Compiled by Nick Acheson

Friday 7 February 2025

Day 1:

This afternoon we headed out to a nearby heathland National Nature Reserve, in hopes of seeing birds of prey come to roost. Despite the perishing wind, we saw a spectacular cloud of red kites above a nearby mixed wood, while on the heath an adult male hen harrier was joined by a first winter.

Saturday 8 February 2025

Day 2:

Today we headed out along the shore of The Wash. Our first port of call was Ken Hill where an exceptional flock of 24 lesser white-fronted geese from the Swedish reintroduction scheme has spent the past few weeks. These exquisite birds typically winter in the Netherlands but, happily for us, they were still at Ken Hill this morning, very close to the sea wall, accompanied by a noisy group of greylags (and with a magnificent female marsh harrier overhead). Further out in the marsh, there were plenty of Canada geese, giving their joyous spring whoops, plus shoveler and Egyptian geese.

Having admired these lovely geese, we walked a short distance onto the RSPB Snettisham reserve, seeing tufted ducks, little grebes and a group of handsome goldeneye.

Not far round the coast, we made our next stop at Heacham to watch a group of snow buntings, accompanied by a single sanderling. We saw snow buntings even better at Old Hunstanton, in the company of a small group of very confident shorelarks. A British first winter glaucous gull sat on the shore, dwarfing herring gulls, oystercatchers and a knot.

At Thornham, we walked out along the sea wall, past shoveler, teal, curlews, two black-tailed godwits, lapwings and hordes of wigeon. We made a beeline for a small flock of dark-bellied brent geese, in which – though it was very hard work – we saw a black brant from the Pacific. A female merlin slammed past, scattering wigeon and teal and, as we walked back, we saw both snipe and rock pipit over the salt marsh.

Following lunch in the friendly cafe at RSPB Titchwell, we walked out onto the reserve. On the freshwater pools and scrapes we added coot, pochard, avocet, shelduck and golden plover to our list, while on the salt marsh, there were grey plovers, elegant pairs of pintail and two amorous pairs of red-breasted mergansers. The wintering flock of common scoters was sadly too far offshore, in rough conditions, for us to pick out the eight velvet scoters which are with them.

By the time we got back to the van (past a Chinese water deer and a very obliging water rail) the light was failing, so we chose to head back to our warm hotel.

Sunday 9 February 2025

Day 3:

It was a bleak, cold day today, but we made the most of it and saw several wonderful things. Our first port of call was in a nearby village, where neither woodlarks were singing nor a little owl at his roost. Though at the woodlark stop we saw a cock stonechat, a mistle thrush, a kestrel, a pair of stock doves and a group of red-legged partridges. Undeterred, we drove north to the coast, stopping at Choseley to check arable fields for birds. But it was not birds which delighted us here. As we surveyed the fields, a stoat ran out of the hedge, followed by another stoat – partly in ermine – which was chasing it. Once the female had gone to ground, the male (in partial ermine) responded to squeaking, coming right into the open and affording us wonderful views.

Our morning already made, we drove the last mile to the coast. At Holkham, there were no Russian white-fronted geese to be seen but we did meet a large flock of barnacle geese, with a few pink-footed geese,

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greylags and Egyptian geese among them. We then stopped briefly at Lady Anne's Drive, to visit the loos and admire the wigeon, shoveler, teal and curlews carpeting the marsh.

By now the sky was clearing a little and the day brightening, so we drove a few miles inland to a well-known site for goshawks. No sooner had we got down from the minibus than a female came up from the wood, giving her characteristic slow, deep flap. Enchanted, we watched for several minutes. Our departure from the woods was made difficult by the huge number of molehills in the car park. There was nowhere to turn the vehicle around without driving across them and, for a moment, we became ominously stuck in the soft mud.

Crisis averted, and back on the coast at Stiffkey, Norfolk's celebrity glossy ibis was present for his second winter, among more wigeon and teal. From here we continued east to Cley. Our attempts to watch seals from the beach car park were made impossible by the biting wind and big waves, though we did see a group of common scooters flying by and a red-throated diver on the sea.

After lunch in the NWT visitor centre, and with the weather ever more gloomy and cold, we went a mile inland to Glandford, where several of the guests wanted to visit an optics shop and some enjoyed a wildlife art gallery. Our last port of call today was the village of Thornage, where there had recently been a huge roost of starlings. We did eventually see the starlings, in very large numbers, but, in part thanks to the dim light, they didn't put on quite the show we hoped for.

Monday 10 February 2025

Day 4:

This morning we went first thing to a small wet heath not far from our hotel. Here a friend of mine, with a thermal imager, had already found several day-roosting jack snipes. With his help, we had superb views of these remarkable birds, admiring both their beautiful plumage and their astonishing camouflage.

Our little owl was still not at his roost, so we visited Dersingham Bog National Nature Reserve for a final (very enjoyable) walk before finishing the tour at our hotel.

Many thanks to you all for making our Norfolk in Late Winter tour so very enjoyable, for your boundless enthusiasm and unflinching wit. It was a pleasure to share Norfolk's birds and wildlife with you.

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Checklist for Norfolk in Late Winter



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
	Birds					
1	dark-bellied brent goose	<i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>		✓	✓	
2	black brant	<i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>		✓		
3	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓	
4	barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>			✓	
5	greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	
6	pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		✓	✓	
7	lesser white-fronted goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>		✓		
8	mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	
9	Egyptian goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		✓	✓	
10	common shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓	
11	shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓	✓	
12	gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓		
13	Eurasian wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓	
14	mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	
15	northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓		
16	Eurasian green-winged teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	
17	common pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓		
18	tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓		
19	common scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>		✓	✓	
20	common goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		✓		
21	red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓		
22	red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓	
23	common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓	
24	red-throated diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>			✓	
25	little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓		

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26	grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓		
27	little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	
28	great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	
29	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓	
30	northern goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			✓	
31	western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓	✓	
32	hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓			
33	red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
34	common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	
35	water rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		✓		
36	common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	H	
37	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓		
38	European oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓		
39	piebald avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓		
40	northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
41	Eurasian golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓		
42	grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓		
43	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	
44	black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa islandica</i>		✓		
45	ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	✓	
46	red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓		
47	jack snipe	<i>Lymnocyptes minimus</i>				✓
48	common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		✓		
49	common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓		
50	black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
51	great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	
52	common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		✓	✓	
53	glaucous gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>		✓		
54	European herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
55	common woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	✓
57	common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓		
58	great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	

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59	common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		✓	
60	merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		✓		
61	Eurasian jay	<i>Glandarius garrulus</i>		✓		
62	common magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓
63	Eurasian jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓	
64	rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>				✓
65	carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	
66	coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>			✓	✓
67	great tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	
68	European blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓
69	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			H	
70	shorelark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>		✓		
71	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H		
72	long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓		✓
73	goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H		✓
74	Eurasian treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>				✓
75	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓		
76	common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓
77	Eurasian blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	
78	fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			✓	
79	song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			H	
80	mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓	
81	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓	
82	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓	
83	house sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		
84	dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		H	✓	
85	pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>			✓	
86	meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	
87	rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓		
88	common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	
89	European bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓		
90	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	
91	linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓		

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92	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	
93	snow bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>		✓		
94	Eurasian reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓		

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