

## Tour Report UK – Norfolk in Late Winter 8 - 11 March 2024

Marsh harrier



Nuthatch



Pied wagtail



Skylark



Compiled by Nick Acheson

There was an excellent spell of winter birding in Norfolk, both along the coast and in the Brecks. Highlights included displaying goshawks, hen harriers, ravens, shorelarks, a great grey shrike, a singing woodlark, hawfinches, bramblings, and two amorous drake goldeneye.

**Day 1:**

**Friday 8 March 2024**

Tour began at Knights Hill

*High clouds and a very cold wind*

Having checked in at Knights Hill early this afternoon, we visited a nearby heath which is well known for its roost of raptors. Despite the very chill wind, we spent almost two hours overlooking a wide, wild expanse of heather, gorse and birch and were treated to repeated views of buzzards, red kites, marsh harriers and two hen harriers, one a first-winter female and the second an adult female.

Also here were two grazing roe deer in the distance, three hares very close to us which were engaged in a courtship chase, two singing yellowhammers and a group of greylag geese.

**Day 2:**

**Saturday 9 March 2024**

Breckland

*Bright sunshine and a breeze*

As the weather was forecast to be good, today we made for the Norfolk Brecks. We made our first stop at Lynford Arboretum where we spent a happy hour among hawfinches, bramblings, chaffinches, siskins, yellowhammers, nuthatches and a stock dove at the feeding station. We next walked to the paddock where a pair of crossbills was in a poplar by the stream, and we heard the briefest snatch of firecrest's song. A marsh tit was very obliging as we walked back, and the understorey was suddenly alive with a dozen male brimstones, freshly emerged from hibernation.

From here, we headed to a well-known site for watching hawks. It took us no time at all to see a distant raven and two or three goshawks among far more numerous buzzards. A pair of lapwings was displaying here, and a curlew flew by calling.

Following lunch at Mundford, we saw the wintering great grey shrike at Weeting to the tune of a singing woodlark. There were several stonechats here, too. After such superb birding in the Brecks, we returned to our hotel. Some chose to rest, while half the group opted to spend the last 90 minutes of daylight at the nearby heath, hoping for birds of prey.

Like yesterday, we saw plenty of red kites, buzzards and marsh harriers here. A kestrel hunted the ridge behind us, and a peregrine flew by. There were plenty of distant roe deer to be seen, though the few hares we saw were less obliging than they had been yesterday. As the shadows lengthened and the heat of the sun vanished, we returned to our hotel for dinner.

**Day 3:**

**Sunday 10 March 2024**

West Norfolk

*Thick cloud, intermittent rain and a chill wind*

Our first port of call this morning was Holkham. At a roadside stop, we managed only the most distant views of nesting spoonbills, but happily, one flew over us as we parked at Lady Annes's Drive. Here, we paid close attention to ducks, with some group members learning the differences between shoveler, wigeon, teal and gadwall.

By the time we reached the beach, it was raining fairly hard. We pressed on, however, to the cordoned area (stopping briefly to admire a flypast raven) and had exceptional views of a dozen shorelarks right beside the track. With them were a couple of meadow pipits. We later warmed up with hot drinks at the Lookout.

Next, we explored Holkham Park, where stock doves, robins, woodpigeons, and a goldcrest were all singing.

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Hundreds of barnacle geese and dozens of oystercatchers were on the cricket pitch to the north of the hall, among the captive herd of fallow deer. On the lake, we admired the dazzling spring plumage of great crested and little grebes and added tufted ducks and pochard to our list of common ducks identified.

From here, we drove to Titchwell for lunch. By the time we headed onto the reserve, the cold wind was quite strong, and it was raining again, so we took refuge in the first hide. From here we watched feeding avocets, black-tailed godwits, pintail and teal and we learned to identify young dark-bellied brent geese by the pattern on their backs and first-winter great black-backed gulls by their bills and mantles.

Despite the rain and wind, we nobly strode to the beach where, in adverse conditions, we saw bar-tailed godwits, grey plover and oystercatchers. Soon, though, the weather drove us back to the Parrinder Hide via a short stop to watch a pair of red-breasted mergansers on the tidal pool. From the relative warmth and comfort of the hide, we compared courting pairs of black-headed and Mediterranean gulls, watched turnstones, dunlin, redshank and ringed plovers, and photographed feeding shovelers and teal.

By this point, we had acquitted ourselves magnificently in the face of the weather and opted to return slightly early to warm showers and clean clothes at our hotel.

#### **Day 4:**

**Monday 11 March 2024**

Snettisham

*Cloud and a chill wind*

On our final morning, we visited RSPB Snettisham, arriving as the tide dropped while wading birds were still very close to land. We quickly saw plenty of black-tailed godwits, avocets, oystercatchers and dunlin and a few knot, grey plover, ringed plover, bar-tailed godwit, curlew and redshank.

There were linnets singing from the gorse beside the pits as we walked towards the hides. From the first, we could see Mediterranean gulls on a distant island and plenty of ducks, including wigeon, teal, shelduck and gadwall. As we could see displaying drake goldeneye in the distance, we walked to the second hide, where we had outstanding views of a male and a female. On the far side of the pit, a second male threw his head around in the hope of impressing several nearby females.

There were dunnocks, blackbirds, Cetti's warblers, a reed bunting, a chiffchaff singing as we walked back, and a greenfinch in song-flight over the car park. In no time, we were back at Knights Hill, where our most enjoyable tour came to an end.

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# Checklist for Norfolk in Late Winter



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
	<b>BIRDS</b>					
1	Brent goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			✓	✓
2	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			✓	
3	Barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>			✓	
4	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>				h
6	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>				✓
7	Egyptian goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>				✓
8	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	✓
9	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓	✓
10	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓	✓
11	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			✓	✓
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓	
14	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓	✓
15	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓	
16	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓	✓
17	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>				✓
18	Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			✓	
19	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		h		
20	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	✓
22	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	✓
23	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			✓	
24	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	
25	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	✓
26	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓
27	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		✓		
28	Marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	✓			
30	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	
33	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	
34	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			✓	✓
35	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓	✓
36	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			✓	
38	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			✓	✓
39	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			✓	✓

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40	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	✓
41	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			✓	✓
42	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓	✓
43	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			✓	
44	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>				✓
45	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓	✓
46	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				
47	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	
48	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓	✓
49	Mediterranean gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>			✓	✓
50	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓		✓	✓
51	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓	✓
52	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓		
53	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	h	
54	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓		
56	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓		
57	Great grey shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		✓		
58	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓	✓	
59	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓
60	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓	✓
61	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓		
62	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓		
63	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	
64	Coal tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	h	
65	Marsh tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓		
66	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	
67	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	
68	Bearded reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>			✓	
69	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		✓		
70	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		h	✓	h
71	Shore lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>			✓	
72	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				h
73	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			h	h
74	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓		
75	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		h	h	
76	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		h	h	
77	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	h	
78	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		h	h	
79	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	
80	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓			
82	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		h		
83	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	h	✓	✓	✓
84	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓		
85	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	
86	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	✓
87	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓		

88	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	
89	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	
90	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		✓		
91	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓		
92	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	
93	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Common crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓		
95	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	
96	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓		
97	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	✓	✓		
98	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓	✓
	<b>MAMMALS</b>					
1	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
2	Grey squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>			✓	
3	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	✓		
4	Chinese water deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>			✓	
	<b>AMPHIBIANS/ REPTILES</b>					
1	Common toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>			✓	