

Tour Report Norfolk in Late Summer 19 – 23 September 2024

Ruff



Curlew



Migrant Hawker



Black-tailed godwit



Compiled by Nick Acheson

In late summer and early autumn, just a few spring tides push tens (sometimes hundreds) of thousands of wading birds off The Wash onto shore at RSPB Snettisham in Norfolk. We spent two early mornings at Snettisham and were astounded by the spectacle (and sound!) of so many birds around us. We also visited a number of coastal wetlands and heaths, seeing a huge range of characteristic Norfolk birds and plenty of migration in action.

Day 1:

Thursday 19 September 2024

Snettisham Coastal Park

Weather: clear sky and a brisk wind

We met early this afternoon at our hotel, prior to heading out to Snettisham Coastal Park. Despite the weather being warm and mild in King's Lynn, just a few miles away at Snettisham there was a strong, cool breeze which meant birding was hard work (and also meant those who had stayed in shorts and t-shirts felt the cold).

We nonetheless had gorgeous, close views of a juvenile marsh harrier and saw a range of wetland birds on the marshes at Ken Hill, including teal, shoveler, shelduck and snipe. In the bushes here we found linnets, greenfinches, goldfinches, reed buntings and a mobile flock of long-tailed tits, while in the hawthorn scrub of Snettisham Coastal Park we found a couple of chiffchaffs.

Day 2:

Friday 20 September 2024

RSPB Snettisham and RSPB Titchwell

Weather: low cloud and drizzle

We were up early this morning, to witness the astonishing spectacle of the wader roost at RSPB Snettisham. The day was cloudy, and this – to our delight – seemed to keep the tens of thousands of knot (and other wading birds) low above our heads as they flew into the pits of the RSPB's Snettisham reserve.

This breathtaking phenomenon happens only on the highest spring tides (and is rarer still in daylight) and it is hugely worth the early start to witness it. While the bulk of the flock is composed of knot, we heard and saw many other species among them, including curlew, bar- and black-tailed godwits, avocet, oystercatcher, redshank, dunlin and turnstone. Around 25 spoonbills and easily as many little egrets loafed on the islands and shore of the pit as the waders swirled around their heads. Out on The Wash, hundreds of shelduck were simply lifted from the mud by the incoming tide.

Such is the grandeur and magnitude of the spectacle that we stayed to the very end, witnessing the huge flocks of birds both arrive and leave, each member of the group mesmerised, lost in their own thoughts, focused on taking their own photos of this rare event.

But the great flocks of knot were far from the only highlight at Snettisham this morning. We saw at least two (perhaps three) turtle doves, plus a passing common sandpiper, and winter's first pink-footed geese, wigeon, pintail and teal.

Weary but elated, we returned to our comfortable hotel by lunchtime and headed out again in the early afternoon to RSPB Titchwell. Here it was wonderful to see many of the same birds we had seen in the morning at closer quarters. We also had excellent views of ruff (in a range of plumages including beautiful juveniles) and snipe. Though we heard bearded tits on a number of occasions, the stiff wind made them difficult to see, and we were astounded by the lack of marsh harriers, as they are generally impossible to miss here.

From Parrinder Hide we picked out freshly-arrived pink-footed geese (and a barnacle goose) among a large flock of greylags, plus a departing wheatear and some lovely lemony juvenile pied wagtails.

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Day 3:**Saturday 21 September 2024**

RSPB Snettisham and RSPB Titchwell

Weather: clear sky and a brisk wind

This morning we headed back to RSPB Snettisham, but this time under a clear sky. The moon shone down on us, even long after dawn. And the birds behaved in an entirely different way, swirling in dramatic shapes over our heads – to audible gasps from the group – sometimes stirred by a dashing male peregrine. Having been amazed by yesterday's display, today you were amazed to be even more amazed!

The knot spent hours in the pit this morning, as the tide was extremely high, so we spent plenty of time in the hides taking photographs or along the shore, looking out to The Wash. Curlews were always on the move, as their long legs mean they are rarely pushed off The Wash by the tide. To our surprise – having not seen a single sanderling the day before – great lines of sanderling flew past, far out from shore, dazzlingly white in the morning's sun. Equally white were the wings of several Mediterranean gulls among the far more numerous black-headed gulls. We also saw a distant group of eider on the water, a small flock of avocets and lots of migrant meadow pipits overhead. Once again we were delighted to see a late turtle dove which, unusually, was in flight over the water.

After hours of astonishment and delight, we made our way back to our hotel in King's Lynn for lunch and a brief siesta. In the early afternoon we returned to Titchwell. Here some chose to walk out along the west sea wall to take more photos of wading birds and ducks, while most of us headed through the willow carr towards Patsy's and the autumn trail, giving us an entirely different take on this extensive reserve.

At Patsy's we had superb views of two great egrets, one of them standing right beside a little egret, for ease of comparison. Also here were plenty of handsome gadwalls, plus a scattering of pochard, tufted ducks, coot and little grebes. Despite repeatedly hearing bearded tits, the strong breeze kept them low in the reed and out of sight.

Walking back from the eastern edge of the reserve (on a trail only open in late summer and early autumn) we saw a juvenile sparrowhawk and met a single migrant lesser whitethroat in the hawthorn hedge which marks the southern boundary. We also stopped to make the acquaintance of a couple of devastatingly handsome bloody-nosed beetles and some among you sniffed your first pineappleweed.

Day 4:**Sunday 22 September 2024**

NWT Cley Marshes and Kelling Heath

Weather: cloudy with some rain

With the weather forecast to be rainy, today we opted to be somewhere we could retreat to hides. This was an excellent decision as Bishops' Hide at NWT Cley Marshes was on superb form. The whole cast of regular autumn (and winter) wetland birds could be seen right in front of us. We spent plenty of time comparing juvenile ruff with adults, including a handsome white-headed male, and admiring the many dunlin fidgeting over the mud.

In the distance there were numerous ringed plovers (which were joined, just before we left the hide, by a group of golden plovers). Also here were black-tailed godwits, shoveler, teal, gadwall, shelduck, redshank, and avocets. But the two highlights were a bearded tit which occasionally popped up and sat atop a reed stem to our east and a bittern which flew past over the North Scrape and Daukes's Hide. For some of you both of these were new birds.

Having enjoyed every bird and every feather on Pat's Pool from Bishops' Hide, we walked along the south edge of the reserve to the East Bank, stopping to admire a migrant hawk perched on a reed stem and several fresh wall browns in the grass. On the Serpentine and surrounding wetlands, there were wigeon, shoveler, teal, redshank and a horde of Canada geese, while on Arnold's Marsh we were treated to flocks of

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curlews and black-tailed godwits and a superb display of purple glasswort (in its shocking red autumn colours) flanked by rich green perennial glasswort.

During lunch at Cley Visitor Centre, one of your leaders disgraced himself by yelling "BITTERN" at the top of his voice, as one of these reclusive birds flew right over the marsh from west to east. Happily, as a result, everyone in the centre managed to see it. With batteries recharged we headed a short distance inland to a coastal heath where, with a little effort, everyone managed to see both stonechats and Dartford warblers well.

By mid-afternoon, the promised rain had begun, so we turned west and returned to our hotel. At this point just a couple of you opted to join a walk on Dersingham Bog National Nature Reserve, where we enjoyed leaning over the edge of the boardwalk to investigate round-leaved sundews, cranberries (with fat, delicious cranberries to taste), common cottongrass and Sphagnum mosses.

Day 5:

Monday 23 September 2024

NWT Roydon Common

Weather: low cloud and rain

The weather forecast for this morning was truly awful, so we chose to head just a short distance to NWT Roydon Common, to explore a landscape full of special wildlife. Here we had close encounters with both the Dartmoor ponies and the British white cattle whose job it is to graze and browse this exceptional site for the benefit of its rare denizens.

Yellowhammers, red kites, skylarks, meadow pipits and stonechats all kept us company as we explored Roydon Common but all too soon the rain began in earnest and it was time to return to our hotel and say good-bye.

Thank you all for joining us to share in the spectacle of Snettisham's knot. We look forward to seeing you on another wild adventure soon.

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Checklist for Norfolk in Late Summer



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	MAMMALS						
1	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓				
2	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>			✓		
3	Grey squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>			✓	✓	
4	Brown rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>		✓		✓	
5	Reeves's muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓			
	BIRDS						
1	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓		✓	
2	Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		✓	✓		
3	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
4	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			✓	✓	
5	Dark-bellied brent goose	<i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>		✓			
6	Barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		✓			
7	Egyptian goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>	✓	✓			
8	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
10	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	✓		✓	✓	
11	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓			
12	Northern shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Eurasian wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>		✓	✓	✓	
14	Eurasian teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓	✓		
16	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓		

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17	Greater scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>			✓		
18	Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>			✓		
19	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>			✓		
20	Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	✓	
22	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓		
23	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			✓	✓	
24	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓	✓	
25	Western cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				✓	
26	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Great egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>			✓	✓	
28	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓		✓	
29	Eurasian bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>				✓	
30	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>		✓	✓	✓	
31	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓			✓	✓
33	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>				✓	✓
34	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓		
35	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓		
37	Water rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				✓	
38	Common moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
39	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓		
40	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓		
41	Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avocetta</i>		✓	✓	✓	
42	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
43	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		✓	✓	✓	
44	European golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		✓	✓	✓	
45	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
46	Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>		✓	✓		
47	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>			✓		
48	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓	✓	✓	
49	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	✓		
50	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
51	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		✓	✓		

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52	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		✓			
53	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓			
54	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓	✓	✓	
55	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓	✓	✓	
56	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓	✓	
57	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		✓	✓	✓	
59	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
60	Mediterranean gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>			✓		
61	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>			✓		
62	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
64	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓	✓	
65	Sandwich tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>		✓	✓		
66	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓		
67	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				✓	
68	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓	
70	European turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		✓	✓		
71	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓	
72	European green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>					✓
73	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	✓	
74	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓	✓
75	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓		
79	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓		✓
80	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓			
82	Common stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>				✓	✓
83	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓	✓
84	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	
85	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓				
86	Lesser whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			✓		

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87	Dartford warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>				✓	
88	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
89	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓		✓	✓	
90	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓		✓	✓	
92	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				✓	
93	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓		✓	✓	
94	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
95	Bearded tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
96	Eurasian treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			✓		
97	Common magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
98	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				✓	
99	Western jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓		✓	✓	
100	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>			✓	✓	
101	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
102	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
103	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
104	Common linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓		✓		
106	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓		✓		
107	Eurasian bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓	
108	Common reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		✓		
109	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓		✓

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