

# Tour Report

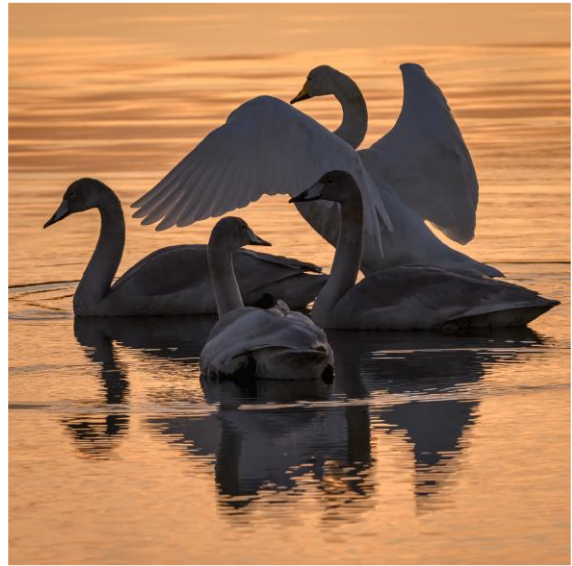
## Autumn Birdwatching in Northumberland

20-24 October 2025

Barnacle goose



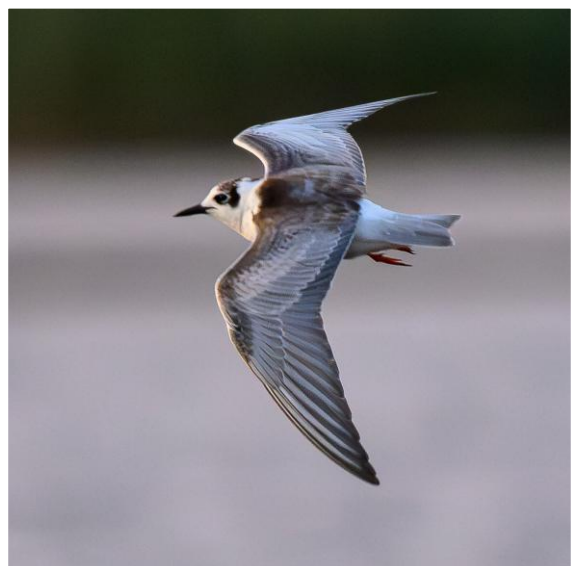
Whooper swan



Northern gannet



White-winged tern



Compiled by Martin Kitching

A great trip on the Northumberland coast with seven guests, lots of thrushes, thousands of geese, stoats on three days, a few rare and scarce birds, and a character-building breeze on the final two days.

## Monday 20 October 2025

### Day 1:

Howick and Newton

*Sunny with sea fret towards dusk, 15°C, 9mph SW*

Once all of the guests were checked in at the Bamburgh Castle Inn, we headed south to Howick and the tree-lined coastal path between Earl Grey's Bathing House and Cullernose Point. Recent arrivals were in evidence, with blackbirds and robins feeding along the path and goldcrests calling as they restlessly foraged through the canopy. A brown hare was in a field adjacent to the path, glaringly obvious whenever it stood up, before almost disappearing as it lay back down. Northern gannets were plunge-diving offshore, beyond a raft of common eider and a flock of herring and black-headed gulls. A lone common gull flew along the cliff edge, as great cormorant and shag passed by low over the sea and a curlew headed south. As we returned to the car, a goldcrest was incredibly obliging as it fed on the pathside edge of the trees, and a cool sea fret began to envelop the clifftop, as cloud obscuring the sun saw the temperature drop noticeably. A stop on the way back to Seahouses saw us checking another tree line, this time at Newton. We'd passed a field filled with pink-footed geese on the way there, and as we were about to leave, their high-pitched yapping calls could be heard away to the south, suggesting they were on the move. Wave after wave lifted above the treetops on the horizon and eventually more than a thousand geese flew across a dark grey sky with one break in the cloud providing an orangey-yellow sunset of sorts as we returned to Seahouses.

## Tuesday 21 October 2025

### Day 2:

Holy Island and Harper's Heugh/Budle Bay

*Light drizzle, 14°C, v. light SW breeze*

After breakfast, we were away before 08:30 and heading north to Holy Island, in a drizzle that hadn't been forecasted. A goldcrest was in the hawthorn next to where we parked, and the first trees along the road to the village produced chiffchaff, blackcap, chaffinch and brambling. The Vicar's Garden, at the south west tip of the island had blackbird, redwing and fieldfare that quickly moved on towards the mainland, passing over pale-bellied brent geese, grey seals, common eider, red-breasted merganser and common murre as a juvenile gannet flew back and forth over the narrow strip of water between exposed sandbars. A walk along the crooked lonnen revealed waves of blackbirds and redwings rippling along fence lines and field edges, two or three fieldfare, Eurasian curlews sharing some of the fields with the thrushes and a flock of reed buntings. Skylark, meadow pipit, wren and stonechat all perched obligingly as we continued our walk and returned to the village, where we had lunch in the Post Office Café. Leaving the car park as the end of safe crossing time approached, we stopped in a layby towards the landward end of the causeway to watch as the tide rose. Curlew were feeding nearby, little grebes were diving in the South Low (the small river that passes under the central bridge across the causeway), little egret numbers were into double figures, and unexpected excitement came in the form of a merlin and then a great white egret that flew south over the causeway, heading towards our next planned stop.

After the tide began lapping gently at the edge of the layby, we headed south to Fenham le Moor. Wigeon and common eider were expected, male and female northern pintail were a bonus, and a small group of dark-bellied brent geese flew in before quickly departing. Tree sparrows were in the top of the hedgerow, a flock of goldfinch and linnet were swirling over a nearby field, two or three stoats were running around on hay bales, and we relocated the great white egret along the shoreline to the north of us, where it was next to two little egrets offering a handy comparison of the extraordinary size difference between these species. Continuing our journey south, two or three thousand barnacle geese were in the fields below Harper's Heugh, with at least seven brown hares loping around the closest field. Eventually, we found a viewpoint behind a hedge where we could watch the geese as more and more arrived to feed. We noticed a

common buzzard flying along the hedge line of the field, only a few seconds before the geese did. Once they saw it, they all took to the air, providing a stunning finish to our day of birding on the North Northumberland coast before we headed back to Seahouses.

### Wednesday 22 October 2025

#### Day 3:

Beadnell, Farne Islands, Low Newton

*Sunny, predominantly clear sky, 8-12°C, 10mph W*

With our cruise around the Farne Islands scheduled for late morning, we started the day with a short drive south to Beadnell. Ruddy turnstone, curlew, oystercatcher and common redshank were exploring rockpools as low tide approached, and a walk along the beach produced sanderling, two Mediterranean gulls (adult and 2<sup>nd</sup> winter), kestrel, common buzzard, and a raft of 100+ common eider out in the bay.

The sea was calm for our sailing around the Farne Islands on Serenity, and European shags were sunning themselves on the first islands we passed. Grey seals were around the outer islands, some lazing in the sunshine, some crooning, and one with a very young pup. Purple sandpiper and turnstone were around the bases of rock stacks, flirting with the edge of the now rising tide, and northern gannets started diving not far from the boat. After returning to land, we had lunch at the Seahouses Café and then headed south again, this time to Low Newton. Approaching high tide, the shoreline was a hive of activity with curlew, oystercatcher, bar-tailed godwit, common redshank and ruddy turnstone all in one mixed feeding flock. Stonechats perched obligingly as we walked along the track towards Newton Pool, and greylag, Canada and pink-footed geese were on a field that usually has a substantial wader scrape but dry weather has reduced to a small puddle. Newton pool itself had some shallow water, with common redshank, ruff, common snipe and a little stint probing the muddy margins. The sky was suddenly filled with pink-footed geese flushed from nearby fields, then six whooper swans arrived to bathe and drink in sublime light as sunset approached and we headed back to the car park and returned to Seahouses.

### Thursday 23 October 2025

#### Day 4:

River Wansbeck, Coneygarth, Newbiggin by the Sea, Druridge Pools, East Chevington

*Sporadic heavy rain showers, 8-10°C, 10-15mph W*

Our final full day was spent dodging the worst of the weather in south-east Northumberland. The walk along the River Wansbeck around Sheepwash produced kestrel, sparrowhawk, and a fly-by calling grey wagtail. Coneygarth (Bothal Pond) held a selection of wildfowl and other water birds, including teal, wigeon, tufted duck, shoveler, little grebe, coot and moorhen, and a noisy volery of long-tailed tits flew along the hedge overlooking the pond as the next rain shower arrived. Heading east to the coast, Newbiggin Bay brought several close fly-bys from Mediterranean gulls, and a busy tideline feeding flock of gulls, common redshank, sanderling, oystercatcher, ruddy turnstone, and a lone common ringed plover, were just in front of a female long-tailed duck, with common eider and red-throated divers further out towards the offshore sculpture named 'Couple'.

Lunch at the Drift Café (broth - either vegetable, gammon or chicken - and a cheese scone is highly recommended) was quickly followed by a marsh harrier quartering roadside reedbeds as we drove the short distance to Druridge Pools. A gathering of waders on the rushy field included dozens of lapwing and six dunlin, then 25 European golden plover and nine ruff arrived. A common buzzard flushed the waders, other than the ruff and ten lapwings, as it flew in to perch on the edge of a small plantation, overlooking nine European roe deer grazing the edge of the marsh, and the explosive song of Cetti's warbler came from the rank vegetation in front of the hide, although the singer remained typically unobserved. A flock of whooper swans headed south overhead, and a greater scaup was with a flock of tufted ducks. As the rain eased and a break in the weather promised us a dry spell, we headed up onto the wind-exposed top of the dunes for some character-building seawatching. Red-breasted mergansers were drifting south on the rising

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tide and a small raft of common scoter were accompanied by a red-throated diver, razorbill and common murre.

Our final site for the day was East Chevington, where gadwall and goldeneye joined the trip list, starlings murmured briefly before dropping into the reeds, and flocks of wigeon, teal, gadwall, mallard and tufted duck were constantly startled by marsh harriers as more whooper swans headed south against the backdrop of a stunning sunset. Eventually there were seven harriers in the sky together, and as dusk began to take hold and a Cetti's warbler belted out its refrain, and our second little stint of the week arrived with a small group of (grey) red knots, one of the guests said "that looks like a tern dip-feeding", then the white-winged tern that had been commuting between East Chevington and Druridge Bay Country Park over recent days hawked along the reeds and eventually flew back and forth in front of us. The day still had one more great bird in store as we walked back to the main path, with a short-eared owl rising and falling along the skyline as it quartered the dunes. A final wildlife sighting came only to those in the front of the car, as a stoat dashed across the road and vanished into the verge.

**Friday 24 October 2025**

**Day 5:**

Stag Rock, Budle Bay

*Overcast, 8°C, 25mph NW (gusting to 40mph)*

Our final morning didn't bring the rain that was forecasted, but a very stiff breeze was bone-chilling. The dunes overlooking Stag Rock, and the Farne Islands, with Bamburgh Castle just to the south and Lindisfarne Castle on the northern horizon, gave us a view over a sea that had a deep rolling swell, with common scoter, red-throated loon, common murre and razorbill riding the waves below juvenile northern gannets, as a skein of pink-footed geese were yapping overhead, their neat coordinated 'V' breaking apart as they were exposed to the full force of the wind. Rock pipit, linnets and skylark flew along the dunes, with purple sandpiper and ruddy turnstone occupying their usual niche along the edge of the surf breaking over the rocks. The exposed mud of Budle Bay had lots of shelduck and shoveler, barnacle geese were on the far side of the bay, and oystercatcher, Eurasian curlew and common redshank were all close to our vantage point as a stoat ran along the sea wall and into cover.

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# Checklist for Northumberland in Autumn



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	<b>BIRDS</b>						
1	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Pink-footed goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓
3	Brant (Dark-bellied)	<i>Branta bernicla bernicla</i>		✓			
4	Brant (Atlantic)	<i>Branta bernicla hrota</i>		✓			
5	Barnacle goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>		✓			✓
6	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			✓	✓	
7	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓		✓	✓
8	Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
9	Common shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓		✓	✓
10	Northern shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				✓	✓
11	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>				✓	
12	Eurasian wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		✓			
15	Eurasian teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓	✓	✓
16	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>				✓	
17	Greater scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>				✓	
18	Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	Common scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>				✓	✓
20	Long-tailed duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>				✓	
21	Common goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>				✓	
22	Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Grey partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		H			
24	Ring-necked pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓		✓	
26	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	
27	Red-throated loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓

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28	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				✓	
29	Common wood-pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Eurasian collared-dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Eurasian moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓	
33	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Black-bellied plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		H	✓		
35	European golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	✓		✓	✓	
36	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			✓	✓	
38	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Bar-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		✓	✓		
40	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	✓	✓	
41	Red knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>				✓	
42	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>			✓	✓	
43	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	
44	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>				✓	
45	Purple sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>			✓		✓
46	Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>			✓	✓	
47	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓		
48	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Common murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓		✓	✓
50	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Mediterranean gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>			✓	✓	
53	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓			
54	European herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓	✓	
56	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	
57	White-winged tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>				✓	
58	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓
59	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	European shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓			

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63	Gray heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓			
64	Eurasian marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	
65	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				✓	
66	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Short-eared owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>				✓	
68	Eurasian kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓	✓	✓
69	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>				✓	
70	Eurasian magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Western jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Carriion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Coal tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>			✓		
75	Eurasian blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	H	✓	✓	H	
76	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓		
77	Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓		✓
78	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				H	
79	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	
80	Eurasian blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓			
81	Common chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓			
82	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
83	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
84	Common starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓			
86	Eurasian blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		✓			
88	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓		
90	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>		✓			
92	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓	
94	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
95	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓		✓
96	European rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓	✓			✓
97	Common chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓		✓	

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98	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		✓			
99	Common linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓		✓	✓
100	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓		✓	
101	Common reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓			
	<b>MAMMALS</b>						
1	Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>		✓		✓	✓
2	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓		
3	European roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓			✓	✓
4	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓		