

Tour Report UK – The Farnes and Northumberland 15 – 20 June 2021

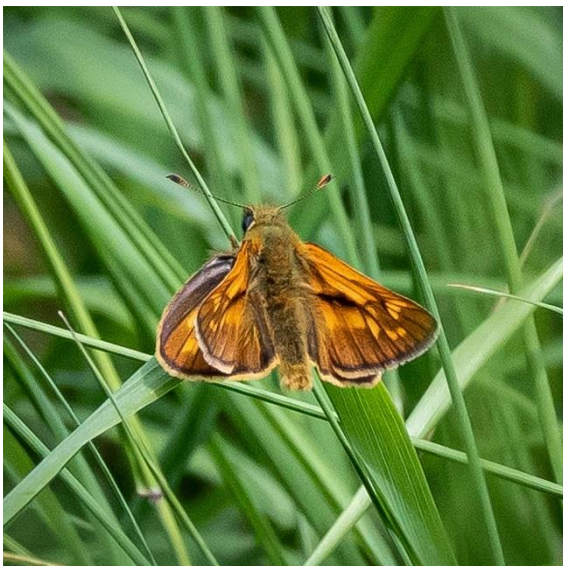
Bottlenose dolphin



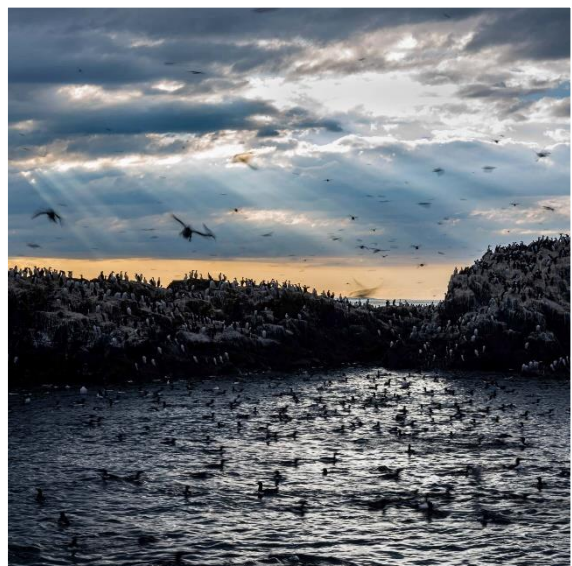
Roseate tern



Large skipper



Seabirds



Compiled by Martin Kitching

Tour Leaders: Martin Kitching & Nick Acheson with ten participants

Day 1: Coneygarth and Church Point (Newbiggin by the Sea)

Tuesday 15 June 2021

Weather: Sunny

After gathering in the car park of our hotel, and having an open-air briefing, we headed south towards Coneygarth (Bothal Pond), just to the west of Ashington. Robins, goldfinches and tree sparrows were all calling from the hedgerows as Nick delivered a masterclass in grass identification and Martin focused the telescope (after his long-suffering better half came to meet us with it...) on a drake ring-necked duck trying to hide himself away among a flock of tufted ducks. Heading east to Newbiggin by the Sea for a brief seawatch, the take home lesson was to always have extra layers with you whenever you're out of the vehicle anywhere in Northumberland! In a stiff biting breeze, gannets, fulmars and Manx shearwaters were gliding majestically over a sea that was a beautiful aqua green patterned with white horses, as an impressive range of auks, terns and gulls battled the breeze before we headed up the coast to the Bamburgh Castle Inn and dinner.

Day 2: Holy Island

Wednesday 16 June 2021

Weather: Sunny

Today's destination was one of two islands in Northumberland that are linked to the mainland by tidal causeways. Grey seals were 'bottling' along the eastern shore of the island, in the shadow of Lindisfarne Castle, and a stop at the hide overlooking the Lough produced a surprise in the shape of a female garganey and an informative lesson on the typical reaction of mallard, tufted duck, mute swan and little grebe to the presence of an otter. The only thing missing was an appearance by the otter itself, although the gaze of the birds allowed us to get a good idea of its location among the bogbean along the far edge of the pool. Wandering through the dune slacks opened up a remarkable opportunity to explore the flora of the island, with northern marsh, early marsh, common spotted orchids and common twayblade, alongside viper's bugloss, mouse-eared hawkweed, common restharrow, crosswort, yellow rattle, bird's-foot trefoil, meadow vetchling, ladies bedstraw and butterwort. Linnets, meadow pipits and were all found as roe deer were grazing and dozing in fields between the village and the dunes on the north side of the island before we headed across the causeway and back down the coast.

Day 3: Druridge Bay and the Farne Islands

Thursday 17 June 2021

Weather: Sunny

Our first destination today was the post-industrial coastal landscape of south-east Northumberland, with the Northumberland Wildlife Trust reserves of East Chevington, Druridge Pools and Cresswell all being either subsidence ponds or reclaimed opencast coal mines. Reminiscent of the north Norfolk coast, but tranquil and rarely busy and overcrowded, this string of reserves is home to waders, wildfowl, raptors, owls and a range of mammals. East Chevington produced two of the three species that the reserve was designed to attract when it was created from an opencast mine in the mid-1990s, with marsh harrier dropping into a reedbed near one of the hides and a persistent series of fly-bys from a pair of bearded tits over a reedbed where reed and sedge warblers were providing a helpful comparison of their songs and a willow warbler repeatedly returned to the same sunlit perch to deliver his descending silvery cadence. The rushy marsh of Druridge Pools contained, among others, 19 adult avocets and four juveniles. Cresswell had a group of little gulls and black-tailed godwit and dunlin in a wader roost. After an early dinner back in Seahouses we boarded Serenity II for a sunset cruise around the 'Galapagos of the North'. As we approached Inner Farne, the density of Atlantic puffins, common guillemots and razorbills flying to and from the islands began to increase dramatically and by the time we were next to the pinnacle rocks on Staple Island the air was filled with birds, the cries of black-legged kittiwakes and the unmistakable, and unforgettable, smell of a seabird

colony. It's a memorable all-out assault on the senses. With patchy cloud it looked like we were going to get a decent sunset, and the light on the water was beautifully sublime as we began to head across towards Bamburgh Castle and the mainland. Then the first couple of bottlenose dolphins appeared, and for nearly an hour we had 12 of them bow-riding, tail-slapping and breaching in the sunset as we travelled very slowly south!

Day 4: Coquet Island and Craster

Friday 18 June 2021

Weather: Sunny

After breakfast we headed back down the coast again, but this time only as far as the northern end of Druridge Bay, to 'the friendliest port' Amble, for a sailing around Coquet Island. The island lies 1.2 kilometres from Amble harbour and is an RPSB reserve with no public landings allowed and is home to the UK's only breeding colony of roseate terns. As we approached the island, Atlantic puffins and common guillemots were rafting, as well as flying from the island in search of food, or returning with sprats and sand eels. Grey seals watched as we passed by and then we were just off the breeding ledges for the roseate terns. Artificial terraces have been constructed on the island and this year there were 151 nests and 193 nestlings ringed (an increase from 2020 when there were 130 nests, which was a post-1970 record). As well as roseates there were also Arctic, common and Sandwich terns, and an impressive set of impersonations and impressions in an ID masterclass that really had to be seen to be believed! After lunch in Amble we went north to the impressive seabird cliffs of Howick with hundreds of pairs of black-legged kittiwake and dozens of pairs of fulmar nesting just below the cliff top footpath, and an incredibly well camouflaged oystercatcher chick on the rocks just above the tideline beside Earl Grey's Bathing House and then walked from Craster to the gaunt ruin of Dunstanburgh Castle as bottlenose dolphins headed in the same direction, just offshore from us.

Day 5: Harthope Valley

Saturday 19 June 2021

Weather: Sunny intervals and scattered showers

The day started spectacularly, as a group of bottlenose dolphins passed Seahouses harbour, visible from our breakfast table, and began breaching as they headed north. After breakfast we headed inland to the Harthope Valley, in the shadow of the Cheviot massif. One group stayed along the valley bottom with Nick, and Martin led a smaller group on the steady uphill walk from the Hawsen Burn towards Langleefordhope. Red grouse were cackling on the hillsides around us, the eerie cries of curlew carried across the fells as we had our first rain of the week, grey wagtail and dipper were both found taking food to nests and a few guests were fortunate enough to spot adders before they slid away into hiding. As five common buzzards began thermalling, the buzzy calls of lesser redpoll filled the air, although in typical summer redpoll fashion they were flying high overhead and not settling obligingly. Innumerable chiffchaffs and willow warblers were singing along the valley and we headed back towards civilisation and a cafe stop in Wooler. An afternoon stop at Branton gravel pits produced various wildfowl, with the highlight being common goldeneye, before we headed back east to Seahouses.

Day 6: Newton Links and the Long Nanny

Sunday 20 June 2021

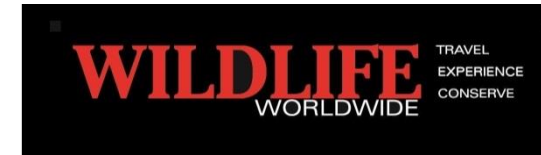
Weather: Sunny

Our final morning excursion was the walk from High Newton to the National Trust reserve at the Long Nanny estuary where little terns breed in the strandline on the beach and Arctic terns breed in the dunes. Little terns were hit by flooding earlier in the season, so have been erratic in appearance, but Arctic terns are present in good numbers (~600 pairs, after a collapse in 2019 due to botulism in the colony). Ringed plovers were nesting on the beach, a summer-plumaged sanderling was an ID challenge in the heat haze, four great northern divers flying south were very unexpected for mid-June and a lonesome black tern was

trying, unsuccessfully, to courtship feed Arctic terns. We watched as the bird flew back and forth along the dunes and over the estuary, and photographs taken by local birders have subsequently allowed the identification of the bird to be confirmed as the mega-rarity American black tern!



Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>						
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓			
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓		✓			
3	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
4	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	✓		
5	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>		✓				
6	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓			
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
10	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓		✓			
11	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
12	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		



14	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
15	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓		✓			
16	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓		✓	✓		
18	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>						✓
20	Marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			✓			
21	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>						✓
22	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
23	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
24	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
25	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓	✓		
26	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
27	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>						✓
28	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓			✓	
29	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓	✓		
30	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			✓	✓		
31	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>			✓			

32	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>							✓
33	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓				
34	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓				
35	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>						✓	
36	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓				
37	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓		✓	✓			
38	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Little gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>			✓				
40	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓		✓		✓		
42	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓		✓				
44	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
45	Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>					✓		
46	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>			✓	✓			
47	Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>			✓	✓			
48	Rock dove / feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
49	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

50	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓			
51	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>					✓	
53	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Bearded tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>			✓			
58	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓			✓	✓
59	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			✓		✓	
63	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓		✓	
64	Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓	✓			
65	Reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			✓			
66	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>					✓	
67	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			✓	✓		✓



68	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>					✓	
69	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓		✓	
70	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓				
73	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
74	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>					✓	
75	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	✓		✓			
77	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓			
78	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					✓	
79	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>					✓	
83	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓				
84	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>					✓	
85	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓			



86	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	✓		✓	
87	Ring-necked duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	✓					
88	Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		✓		✓		
89	Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓		✓		
90	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓		✓		
91	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓		✓		
92	Atlantic puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			✓	✓		
93	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>				✓		
94	Common scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>			✓	✓		
95	Arctic skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>				✓		
96	Great Northern diver	<i>Gavia immer</i>						✓
97	Black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>						✓
98	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>			✓	✓		
99	Red grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus</i>					✓	
100	Common goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>					✓	
101	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>					✓	
	MAMMALS	MAMMILIA						
1	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓				

2	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>				✓		
3	Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓				
4	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓		✓		
5	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>			✓	✓	✓	

