

Tour Report

UK – The Farnes and Northumberland

18 – 23 June 2022

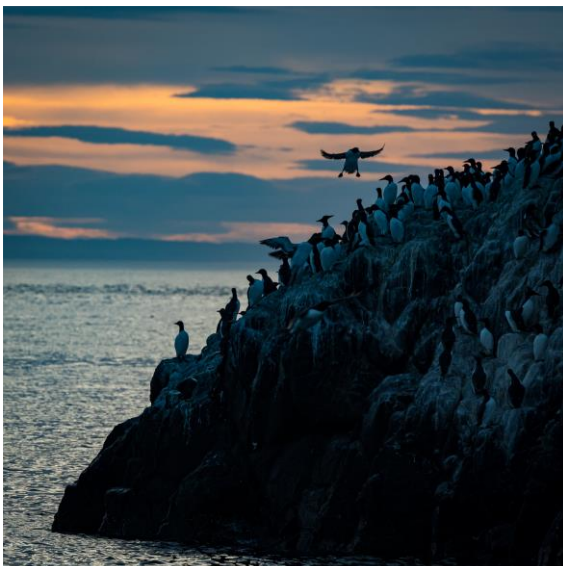
American black tern



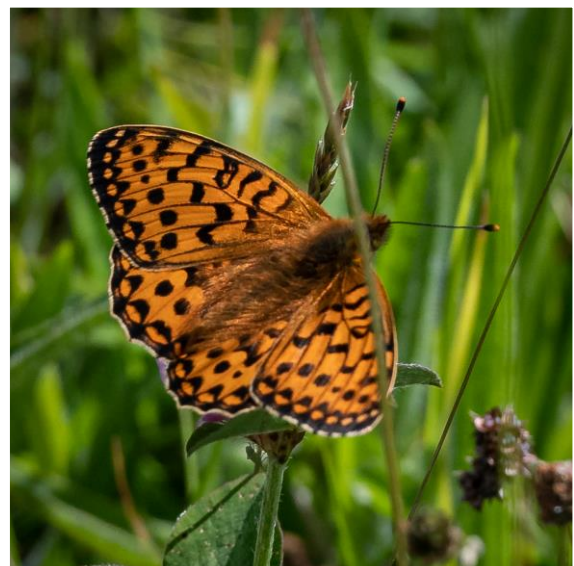
Bee orchid



Farne Islands at dusk



Dark green fritillary



Compiled by Martin Kitching

Tour Leader: Martin Kitching

Day 1: Newton Links and the Long Nanny

Saturday 18 June 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, 18°C, 15mph W

After gathering in the hotel, we headed south to High Newton to visit 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. It's always a fascinating start to our Northumberland holidays, with a nutrient-poor dune system that offers an interesting flora, song-fighting skylarks and meadow pipits and then, as if by magic, the tern colony that can only be heard for much of the walk. The American black tern, returning for its third consecutive summer of forlorn and fruitless courtship of Arctic terns, had been out of sight for ~30mins when we arrived but it hadn't been seen leaving so we were hopeful that it was still just out of sight on the seaward side of the dunes.

Then, it was suddenly in the air and flying back and forth in front of us! After being as obliging as we could have hoped for, and Arctic terns returned to their hungry chicks with food, we headed back to Seahouses. The Northumberland coast had another treat in store for us, as a small group of bottlenose dolphins were breaching as they headed south past the harbour mouth while we were at dinner.

Day 2: The Cheviot Valleys

Sunday 19 June 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, 17°C, 14mph NW

Today we journeyed inland to the Harthope Valley, in the shadow of the Cheviot – Northumberland's highest peak at 815m above sea level. It feels remote and wild, even though we walk along a track that can be driven to a holiday cottage. Bees were nectaring on wild thyme as we made our way up the valley and the eerie cries of a curlew, spooked off the nearby hillside, echoed and faded. Common buzzards soared high overhead and, as we watched a spotted flycatcher be less than obliging as it sallied forth from trees on the opposite side of the Harthope Burn, a juvenile nuthatch perched on a rock for a few minutes with the calls of a cuckoo carrying distantly from lower down the valley. A stop on the journey home, at Monks' House Pool, was an opportunity to discuss tern and gull ID before we headed back to Seahouses.

Day 3: Holy Island and the Farne Islands

Monday 20 June 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, 16°C, variable slight breeze

Today's first port of call was another one of the Northumberland locations that feel remote, despite being a popular visitor destination. It just depends where you go once you're there, and the dune system on the north side of the island has an early medieval farmstead tucked down in a dune slack bedecked with orchids. The flora of the island is remarkable, with northern marsh, early marsh, common spotted and pyramidal and bee orchids, marsh helleborine and common twayblade. Incredibly one small rise in a dune slack had five of those seven orchids that we found during our walk. Viper's bugloss, mouse-eared hawkweed, common restharrow, yellow rattle, bird's-foot trefoil, ladies bedstraw and butterwort might not get the attention that the orchids do but are all beautiful and fascinating in their own right. The unearthly moans of grey seal out on the sandbars at low tide are a viable explanation for the mythology around sirens and mermaids, and we made our way further east on the island to the Lough, thought to have been created by the monks on the island to farm fish. Garganey swam quickly between the now dense reedbeds, almost exactly a year since we found one on our 2021 holiday, and we left the island ahead of the incoming tide.

After returning to Seahouses for an early dinner we boarded our boat for a sunset cruise around the 'Galapagos of the North'. The Farne Islands should be on everyone's bucket list, and it's a challenge to put into words what the experience entails.

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Cliffs covered in breeding birds, gullies echoing with the eponymous calls of kittiwakes and the moaning grumbles of guillemots, a sky that seems to be filled with auks carrying sand eels and sprats back to hungry nestlings, and the smell of guano.

Day 4: Coquet Island, Druridge Bay and Alnwick Moor

Tuesday 21 June 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, drizzle, 16°C, 5mph SE

Today we headed south to Amble, for a sailing around Coquet Island. With the state of the tide, we couldn't get close to the island but sharp-eyed guests were able to pick out roseate terns from the whirling maelstrom of birds above and around the island. After returning to dry land we headed to the NWT reserve of Druridge Pools, where spoonbills were sharing the marsh with a selection of waders, including spotted redshank still in summer finery, yellow wagtails, including a Channel wagtail, and some wildfowl of 'questionable' origin. A discussion about provenance concluded with 'the only arbiter of your list is your own conscience'! As we walked back to the minibus, and emerged from the trees along the path to the hides, the question "what's that"? drew attention to an adult hobby flying south, mobbed by swallows, low over the dunes. It's still a rare bird in Northumberland, and a full-description species for our county records committee so very unexpected.

After dinner, we headed inland to Alnwick Moor, and what had looked like a clear evening produced low cloud on the moors, with woodcock, tawny owl and long-eared owl all making it onto the list as heard-only.

Day 5: South East Northumberland and Howick

Wednesday 22 June 2022

Weather: Sunny, 26°C, 12mph SW

We started by heading south to Choppington Woods LNR, a 76-hectare mixed woodland that bears little evidence of the once bustling industrial site that it was in the heyday of the southeast Northumberland coalfield. Tracks surfaced for the benefit of the elderly residents who live close to the reserve, and a boardwalk and dipping platform built to allow local schools to engage their pupils with the natural environment offers a real contrast to the wilder, more traditional, wildlife locations on the coast. Four damselfly species were active around the pond and toadlets were starting their first venture onto dry land.

Cresswell pond is a subsidence pond at the southern end of Druridge Bay and that was our post-lunch destination. Until recently it was the northernmost breeding location for avocet in the UK, although they're now spreading northwards up the coast from there, and it's a good site for tree sparrow, a species that so many birders in the UK don't see regularly and guests were surprised by. After Cresswell, we headed a few miles north to East Chevington, a former surface mine that was remodelled as a nature reserve in the mid to late 1990s. On the hottest day of the week, everything seemed to be enjoying a siesta as we scanned through the mixed roost of gulls and terns, including little gulls demonstrating just how small they are, and a great crested grebe was dozing on a nest.

A stop at Howick, and a walk along the clifftop footpath, allowed close views of kittiwakes and fulmars on their nests before we headed back to Seahouses where dinner was again disturbed by those inconsiderate bottlenose dolphins as a group of ten, including a calf, headed south past Seahouses harbour.

Day 6: Stag Rock, Budle Bay and Monk's House Pool

Thursday 23 June 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, 21°C, 10mph SW

Our final morning excursion saw us taking the short drive north to the mudflats of Budle Bay, and then a final stop at Monk's House Pool between Seahouses and Bamburgh. Budle Bay is at its best in the winter but holds a lot of shelduck and a sizeable gull roost in mid to late June, and curlew and redshank, early returners from higher ground inland were pottering about on the mud. Monk's House held a selection of wildfowl and gulls,

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including dip-feeding little gulls, as warblers and reed buntings led our binoculars on a merry chase before everyone departed the summer heat.

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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	Egyptian goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>				✓		
5	Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>				✓		
6	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>			✓			
8	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓	✓	✓	
9	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓	✓	✓	
10	Eurasian wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>				✓		
11	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>				✓	✓	
13	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>				✓	✓	

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14	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Red-breasted merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>			✓	✓		
15	Red grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus scotica</i>		✓				
16	Red-legged partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓				
17	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
18	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	✓	
20	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				✓		
21	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	✓		
23	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			✓	✓		
24	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
25	European shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
26	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓			✓	
27	Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓		
28	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓			✓	
29	Water rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				✓		
30	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	

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31	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓		✓	✓	
32	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓		✓	✓	
34	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓	✓	✓	
35	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓					
36	Eurasian whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	✓					
37	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
38	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>				✓		
39	Eurasian woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>				✓		
40	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				✓		
41	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		✓				
42	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				✓		
43	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>				✓		
44	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓	✓		
45	Black-legged kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Little gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>			✓	✓	✓	
48	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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49	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
52	Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	✓					
53	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>				✓		
54	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
55	Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
56	American black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger surinamensis</i>	✓					
57	Common murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓	✓		
58	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓	✓	✓	
59	Atlantic puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>			✓	✓		
60	Northern fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Rock dove / feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>				✓	✓	
63	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Common cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓				
66	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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67	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓				
68	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
69	Eurasian hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				✓		
70	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
71	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
73	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
74	Coal tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>		✓			✓	
75	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓			✓	
76	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>					✓	
77	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
78	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
79	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
80	Common house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
81	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				✓		
82	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓			✓	
83	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
84	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓		✓	✓	

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85	Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>					✓	
86	Eurasian reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			✓		✓	
87	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓		✓	✓	
88	Garden warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		✓			✓	
89	Common whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				✓	✓	
90	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓			✓	
91	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓				
93	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
95	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓		
96	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓		✓		
97	Spotted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓				
98	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
99	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓				
100	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓			
101	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓					
102	White-throated dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓				

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103	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
104	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>					✓	
105	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
106	Yellow wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>				✓		
107	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓				
108	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
109	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
110	European rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓		✓			
111	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
112	European greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓					
113	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
114	Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		✓				
115	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
116	Eurasian siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓				
117	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA						
1	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			✓	✓		
2	European roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓				

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3	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓				
4	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓		✓		
5	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>	✓				✓	
	BUTTERFLIES	LEPIDOPTERA						
1	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓			
2	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓				
3	Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>	✓	✓	✓			
4	Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓				
5	Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>		✓				
6	Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓					
7	Dark green fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>		✓	✓			
8	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓		✓	
9	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>					✓	
10	Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>					✓	
11	Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
12	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>				✓	✓	
13	Large skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>					✓	
	MOTHS	LEPIDOPTERA						

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1	Six spot burnet	<i>Zygaena filipendulae</i>			✓			
2	Narrow-bordered five spot burnet	<i>Zygaena lonicerae</i>			✓			
	DRAGONFLIES	ODONATA						
1	Large red damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>					✓	
2	Azure damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>					✓	
3	Common blue damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>					✓	
4	Blue-tailed damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>					✓	

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