

Tour Report

UK – The Farnes and Northumberland

22 – 27 June 2021

Roseate tern



Atlantic puffin



Common blue butterfly



Early marsh orchid



Compiled by Martin Kitching

Tour Leaders: Martin Kitching & Nick Acheson with ten participants

Day 1: Newton Links and the Long Nanny

Tuesday 22 June 2021

Weather: Sunny

After gathering in the car park of our hotel, and having an open-air briefing, 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. A pair of mating common blue butterflies were being pestered by a second male and newly emerged large skippers and dark green fritillaries were obligingly settling in the dunes where we found northern marsh, common spotted and pyramidal orchids. 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). 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!

Day 2: East Chevington, Coquet Island and Newton Pool

Wednesday 23 June 2021

Weather: Overcast and breezy

We started the day by heading south to East Chevington, a nature reserve reclaimed from surface (opencast) mining in the mid-1990s, which produced one of the three species that the reserve was designed to attract when it was created from an opencast mine, with marsh harrier dropping into a reedbed near one of the hides. Bearded tits remained elusive in the reedbeds where reed and sedge warblers were providing a helpful song comparison, as great crested grebes were feeding a single chick and little gulls were roosting on the mud in front of the hide. Then we headed a short distance to the northern end of Druridge Bay, and 'the friendliest port' Amble, for a sailing around Coquet Island. The island lies 1.2km 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, and a lone razorbill was an unusual bird for the island. 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! A lone common eider duckling was approaching the boat and calling but defied all attempts to rescue it so Martin was messaging a local wildlife rescue to arrange for it to be picked up if we could get it to the harbour. A stop at Newton Pools nature reserve on the way back to Seahouses demonstrated the value of the efforts of local birders to create a wader scrape behind the village, with black-tailed godwit and avocet both present – the latter at the northern edge of its range.

Day 3: Holy Island and the Farne Islands

Thursday 24 June 2021

Weather: Hot and sunny, then cloudy, then very wet

Today's first destination was one of the two islands in Northumberland that are linked to the mainland by tidal causeways. The eerie moaning of grey seals, hauled out on the low tide mudflats between the island and the mainland carried on the wind and provided an aural backdrop as we walked past the early medieval farmstead of Green Shiel and along the dune slacks, opening up a remarkable opportunity to explore the flora of the island, with northern marsh, early marsh, common spotted and pyramidal orchids, marsh helleborine and common twayblade, alongside viper's bugloss, mouse-eared hawkweed, common restharrow, crosswort, yellow rattle, bird's-foot trefoil, meadow vetchling, ladies bedstraw, marsh

arrowgrass and butterwort. Linnets, meadow pipits and skylarks were all found as we made our way along the island... and discovered that the main car park was empty and the tide was coming over the causeway! A slight planning mishap gave us another few hours on the island and, as we waited for the falling tide a roe deer ran across Goswick sands from the mainland towards the island and the Flying Scotsman steamed up the East Coast main line as the rain started.

After returning to 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, particularly with wind and rain leaving the air thick with the scent of guano. As the skipper was telling us how unusual harbour seals are on the islands, we passed two that were on the rocks where the island's large population of grey seals were hauled out. With increasing wind and rain one guest managed to persistently choose exactly the wrong place to stand, which helpfully gave everyone else a heads-up about where not to stand!

Day 4: River Blyth, Cresswell and Druridge Pools

Friday 25 June 2021

Weather: Wet and windy

We started the day by heading south to the riparian habitat of the river Blyth, along a stretch of river which once held an important ironworks. Grey wagtails were busying themselves along the water's edge and tit flocks and a family party of nuthatches called from the pathside trees. Cresswell pond, a brackish subsidence pond in an area that was extensively mined for coal, had little gulls and selection of waders before we headed for a café stop at the Drift Inn. The rushy marsh of Druridge Pools, which had been planned to return to agricultural use after the end of the surface (opencast) mining on the site contained, among others, 11 adult avocets and four juveniles, black-tailed godwits, ruff, snipe, spotted redshank and a marsh harrier that sent a ripple of panic through the waders and wildfowl. With the wind strengthening and no sign of a let up in the rain we had a slow journey back up the coast to Seahouses.

Day 5: Budle Bay, Bamburgh and Craster

Saturday 26 June 2021

Weather: Dreich

Our original plan was to visit the Harthope valley in the shadow of the Cheviot, an 815-metre-high extinct volcano just 2 kilometres from the Scottish border. As we headed north on the A1 the weather inland looked less than promising so we turned back towards the coast and the mudflats of Budle Bay, with an impressive number of shelduck, as well as curlew close to the layby where we were parked. Stag Rock, just north of Bamburgh Castle had a selection of the birds that breed on the Farne Islands, but the wind and rain were arriving with a vengeance. A brief discussion between the leaders about the next destination "I think we'll head to Beadnell next. There are only eight little terns still at the Long Nanny colony, but I think we'll find them feeding close inshore there" "You're the most disturbingly optimistic human I've ever met. We've been to the colony twice and not seen them and now the weather's grim but you still won't stop smiling and give up"...and, remarkably, a brief hiatus in the weather produced relatively close views of little and Arctic terns close to Beadnell harbour before the weather closed in again and the highlight of the rest of the day was the 'world famous Auchtermuchty' from the Piper's Pitch cafe at Craster, haggis and bacon in a bread bun!

Day 6: Howick cliffs and Cullernose Point

Sunday 27 June 2021

Weather: Sunny and warm

Our final morning excursion was a walk along the footpath above the impressive seabird cliffs of Howick with hundreds of pairs of black-legged kittiwake and dozens of pairs of fulmar nesting just below the clifftop footpath. Oystercatchers were engaged in territorial disputes beside Earl Grey's Bathing House and meadow brown and dark green fritillaries were very active in the warm sunshine as whitethroats and yellowhammers sang from the clifftop bushes.



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	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓		✓		
6	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓		✓		
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
8	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	✓		
9	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	✓	✓		
10	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		
11	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
12	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓		
13	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓				



14	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓		
16	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
17	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓		✓		
19	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
20	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓	✓		
21	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓		✓		
23	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓		✓	✓	
24	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
25	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓		✓		
27	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		✓	✓			✓
28	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>				✓		
29	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	✓			✓		
30	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				✓		
31	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



32	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>				✓		
33	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>		✓	✓			✓
34	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Little gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>		✓		✓		
36	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	✓	✓			
38	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>					✓	
42	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Rock dove / feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓
48	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓		
49	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓			

50	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	✓					
51	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓
52	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				✓		
56	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>				✓		
57	Great tit	<i>Parus major</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	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓		
63	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				✓		
64	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓		
65	Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓	✓	✓		
66	Reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>		✓		✓		
67	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				✓		



68	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
69	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓	✓		✓
70	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓		
71	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
73	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	✓		
74	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
75	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓		✓	✓		
76	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
77	Tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>				✓		
78	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓	✓		
79	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓		
80	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			✓	✓		✓
81	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓
82	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			✓			✓
83	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓		✓			✓
84	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓		✓	✓
85	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓		✓	✓		

86	Common eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>		✓	✓	✓		
87	Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓			✓
88	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓			✓
89	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓			✓
90	Atlantic puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓	✓			✓
91	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>		✓				
92	Arctic skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>				✓		
93	Black tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	✓					
94	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		✓	✓			✓
95	Great skua	<i>Stercoaraius skua</i>				✓		
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA						
1	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓		✓			
2	Brown hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓					
3	Common seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			✓			
4	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			✓			
5	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			✓			
6	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>			✓			

