

Tour Report

UK – The Farnes and Northumberland

30 June – 5 July 2022

Roseate tern



Narrow-bordered five spot burnet



Whinchat



Marsh helleborine



Compiled by Martin Kitching

Tour Leader: Martin Kitching

Day 1: Newton Links and the Long Nanny

Thursday 30 June 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, 16°C, 8mph SSW

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. The walk out to the tern colony took much longer than it usually would, as we were entertained by song-fighting meadow pipits and skylarks, and an incredibly energetic male stonechat who kept briefly perching on fence posts before heading skywards and rattling out his song as female and juvenile stonechats flitted around in the low vegetation next to the path. The tern colony was a hive of activity and the walk back to the car park brought an unexpected sighting as two juvenile northern wheatears hopped around just off the path ahead of us before we headed back to Seahouses.

Day 2: Beadnell, Howick, Boulmer and Coquet Island

Friday 1 July 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, torrential thundery showers, 17°C, 9mph SE

Starting the day with a short drive south to Beadnell, where the first few spots of rain preceded the arrival of heavier showers later in the day, an adult Mediterranean gull was foraging along the shoreline as little and Arctic terns from the Long Nanny colony arrived to feed. Possibly the same adult Med gull was joined by a first summer bird flying around the car park as we prepared to continue our journey south to Howick. Kittiwakes and fulmars were still in residence on the cliffs below the footpath and as more rain arrived there was a noticeable northward passage of swifts.

Boulmer beach was our next stop, with curlews on the mud and a fascinating insight into how fleets of lobster pots are laid out on the seabed and how quickly the rising tide covers a shallow beach. Onward to Amble and our sailing around Coquet Island as we caught the edge of a heavier rain shower. Puffins, guillemots and a razorbill (probably one of the pair that breed on the island) were on the water as inquisitive grey seals approached us and the rain added a new dimension to the Arctic/roseate/common tern ID challenge. A few roseates were sitting forlornly in the rain on the rock ledges below their nest boxes and just above the sea, providing a good opportunity for everyone to get familiar with their ghostly beauty before we headed back to shore and north to Seahouses, where bottlenose dolphins were breaching as they passed the harbour entrance heading north at dusk.

Day 3: Holy Island and the Farne Islands

Saturday 2 July 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, scattered showers, 18°C, 19mph SW

Today's first destination was one of the two islands in Northumberland that are linked to the mainland by tidal causeways (the second is St Mary's Island at the northern end of Whitley Bay). The island is an incredibly busy visitor destination during the summer but we avoided the crowds by walking along the dune slacks on the north side of the island, opening up the remarkable flora of the island, with northern marsh, early marsh, common spotted and pyramidal orchids and marsh helleborine, alongside viper's bugloss, mouse-eared hawkweed, common restharrow, yellow rattle, bird's-foot trefoil, ladies bedstraw and butterwort. Each dune slack seems to have its own microclimate and we found some areas with all of the orchids gone over, yet cresting a small rise into the next slack revealed them still in bloom. Linnets, meadow pipits, skylarks and stonechats were all found as we made our way through the dunes and the eerie moaning of grey seals drifted across the island on a stiff southwesterly breeze from their low tide haul-out on the sandbars of Fenham Flats.

After returning to Seahouses for an early dinner we boarded our boat for a sunset cruise around the Farne Islands. Leaving the harbour revealed our destination, referred to by local photographers as the 'Galapagos

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of the North' but no indication of what was in store for us. A few minutes into the crossing the first auks started flying past the boat, then gannets soaring magnificently on outstretched wings, terns diving into the water around us then, as we neared the inner group of islands, the density of Atlantic puffins, common guillemots and razorbills flying to and from the islands increased and, by the time we'd crossed Staple Sound and were close to the outer group, the all-out assault on the senses of a seabird colony was in full flow. The onomatopoeic calls of kittiwakes echoed around the narrow gullies, fulmars and guillemots grunted and grumbled, the air was filled with whirring wings, and the late-season smell of guano gripped eyes, noses and throats. Grey seals watched us as we sailed past their haul-out ledges, with the sun breaking through gaps in the cloud as we headed back to the harbour.

Day 4: The Cheviot Valleys

Sunday 3 July 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, 19°C, 12mph W

Today we headed inland to the Harthope valley at the base of the Cheviot, Northumberland's highest peak at 815 metres above sea level. The high-pitched calls of siskin, and the buzzing trill of lesser redpoll, filled the air as we found ourselves just outside the edge of a rain shower and eventually a flock of siskin, including some stunning adult males, settled in the bare branches of a nearby tree and were joined briefly by an adult male redpoll as willow warbler and chiffchaff busied themselves everywhere we looked. A grey wagtail managed to provide both an entomological highlight and low point all rolled into one as it flew in and landed next to the burn with its beak stuffed full with an elephant hawk-moth! The walk back along the valley to the car was delayed as a whinchat appeared in the bracken by the track. Then another, and another, and another as the bracken seemed to come alive with them, along with willow warblers and chiffchaffs. A stop off at Branton gravel pits provided an interesting contrast of a former industrial site so close to the much wilder habitats of the Harthope before we headed back to the coast and Seahouses.

Day 5: South-east Northumberland

Monday 4 July 2022

Weather: Sunny, 18°C, 22mph W

The post-industrial landscape of south-east Northumberland was our final full-day destination, starting with Choppington Woods, a 76-hectare mixed-woodland local nature reserve, with a small pond and boardwalk/dipping platform, on the former site of three coal mines, including the Stephenson pit which was one of the first deep shaft mines anywhere in the world. The footpaths and the pond proved to be a good hunting ground for damselflies and butterflies and the birds found included a jay which perched obligingly for all of ten seconds (Choppington Woods is my local patch, and the jays do tend to be very skittish...) and goldcrest watched at close range as it fed along branches just above head height.

The Northumberland Wildlife Trust reserves just inland of the dunes along Druridge Bay were our next destination; a mix of former surface (open-cast) mine sites and subsidence ponds. After visiting Cresswell Pond we headed a short way up the coast to Druridge Pools and the rushy marsh of the Budge Fields. With so many clumps of rush dotted about, it was a challenging couple of hours as anytime a good bird was spotted instructions needed to be quick and concise so everyone knew where to look. Summer-plumaged spotted redshank was stunning as were three male ruff, moulting out of breeding finery, and a wood sandpiper occasionally appeared from behind clumps of rush where common snipe were sleeping. East Chevington is another former surface mine site and has been a nature reserve for less than 30 years, with extensive reedbeds that were part of an ambitious management plan to create suitable habitat for bittern, marsh harrier and bearded tit. Sadly, the impact of the avian flu epidemic was evident here, as it was at Cresswell, with several dead Sandwich terns. A macabre set of signposts when giving direction to the three little ringed plovers that were running along the edge of the mud as we packed up and headed north up the coast for our final night in Seahouses.

Day 6: Budle Bay and Monk's House Pool

Tuesday 5 July 2022

Weather: Sunny intervals, 17°C, 13mph NW

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Our final morning excursion saw us taking the short drive north to the mudflats of Budle Bay, alive with curlew, shelduck and common redshank and then a final stop at Monk's House Pool between Seahouses and Bamburgh, where Sandwich, common and Arctic terns bade the guests a fond farewell from Northumberland as reed buntings, common whitethroat and both reed and sedge warblers popped up and down in front of us and a diminutive little gull looked completely out of place in a roost of lesser black-backed, great black-backed and herring gulls.

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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	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	Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
11	Common goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>				✓		
12	Common merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓				
13	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	

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14	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	✓	✓	
15	Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>					✓	
16	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	✓	✓
18	Northern gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓	✓			
19	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
20	European shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>		✓	✓			
21	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>				✓	✓	
22	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				✓	✓	
23	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>					✓	✓
25	Eurasian oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>					✓	
27	Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓				✓	
28	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>					✓	
29	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>					✓	
30	Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>					✓	

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32	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>					✓	
33	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>					✓	
34	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>					✓	
35	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓		
36	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>					✓	
37	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓
38	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>					✓	
39	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
40	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Little gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>					✓	
42	Mediterranean gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>		✓				
43	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Sandwich tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	✓	✓				
48	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>		✓				
49	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>					✓	✓

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50	Arctic tern	<i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
51	Common murre	<i>Uria aalge</i>		✓	✓			
52	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>		✓	✓			
53	Atlantic puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>		✓	✓			
54	Northern fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>		✓	✓			
55	Rock dove / feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
56	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				✓		
60	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
61	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>					✓	
62	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			✓		✓	
63	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	
64	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>				✓		
67	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓		✓	

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68	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>					✓	
69	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
70	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
71	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Common house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	
73	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓	✓	
74	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>				✓	✓	
75	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>				✓	✓	
76	Sedge warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓
77	Eurasian reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>					✓	
78	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>				✓	✓	
79	Garden warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>				✓		
80	Common whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>				✓	✓	
81	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				✓	✓	
82	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓	✓	✓	
83	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Common blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>				✓	✓	

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86	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓		
87	European robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>				✓	✓	
88	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>				✓		
89	European stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓		✓		✓	
90	Northern wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	✓					
91	White-throated dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				✓		
92	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>					✓	
94	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>					✓	
95	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓		
96	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
97	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	
98	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>			✓	✓	✓	
99	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
100	Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>				✓		
101	European goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓			
102	Eurasian siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>				✓		
103	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓				

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104	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	✓				✓	
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA						
1	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		✓	✓			
2	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓		✓	✓		
3	Bottlenose dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>		✓				
	BUTTERFLIES	LEPIDOPTERA						
1	Large skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>			✓			
2	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>				✓		
3	Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓		✓			
4	Dark green fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>	✓		✓			
5	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓	✓		
6	Small tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>					✓	
7	Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>					✓	
8	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>					✓	
9	Wall	<i>Lasiomatta megera</i>					✓	
10	Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	✓		✓			
12	Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓			

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	MOTHS	LEPIDOPTERA						
1	Narrow-bordered five spot burnet	<i>Zygaena lonicerae</i>	✓		✓			
2	Elephant hawk-moth	<i>Deilephila elpenor</i>				✓		
3	Yellow shell	<i>Camptogramma bilineata</i>	✓					
4	Cinnabar	<i>Tyria jacobaea</i>		✓				

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