



October 2018 Tour reports

11th October – 5 day Scarce & rare bird tour

The day started immediately at the accommodation with some small flocks of Redwing overhead, and a small group of Fieldfare as well. We then took a steady journey over to Buckenham marshes. On arrival a **Red Kite** was soaring overhead, plus **Buzzard & Kestrel**. We walked out from the car park heading towards the hide and pool. A quick inspection from distance picked out a nice group of **Teal, Wigeon**, plus **3 Dunlin**, but we couldn't initially see the target waders. We moved further down and after a few minutes of scanning, I picked out the first of the **Pectoral Sandpipers**, we enjoyed this individual and then after a few minutes the second one appeared! We had lovely scope views of the **2 juvenile Pectoral Sandpipers**, and they showed very well in good light, before flying off over the river wall, lucky we had enjoyed them for several minutes! As we walked back up the track 5 Ruff flew past us and alighted on the pool.

We then headed over to Waxham, where after on arrival we were fortunate to get almost immediate views of the **1st winter male Red-breasted Flycatcher**. Over the next couple of hours we had intermittent views, sometimes some of us had nice perched views, whilst others just caught the bird in flight, it just depended on where you were stood and how quickly you could locate the bird when it was in view! Eventually everyone had at least seen the bird and we headed off for lunch.

We sat up on the dunes at Waxham and had lunch, with a bit of seawatching thrown in, **Brent Geese** passed, plus several **Red-throated Divers**, a few **Gannets** were offshore. Then **5 late Swallows** passed by heading south, before **8 Bramblings** came in off the sea, great to see!

It was a late lunch so we decided to head over to Costessey on the edge of Norwich, where we were very lucky to be asked into the owner of the house that was hosting an adult **Rose-coloured Starling**, we had great views, eventually as it came down for mealworms the chap was providing. We very gratefully thanked him for allowing us in and sharing his rare bird.

We rounded the day off by dropping in at Lyng Mill where a beautiful **Grey Wagtail** was showing very well along the river, plus **Mistle & Song Thrush** gave us 4 Thrush species for the day!

12th October – 5 day Scarce & rare bird tour – Day 2

An early start today with a visit to Snettisham for the high tide, we arrived an hour before the peak of the tide and out on the shore there was already a huge mass of Knot, easily the biggest numbers so far this autumn with **75,000 Red Knot** swirling and making Mexican waves. It was a truly great spectacle, though the gusting southerly wind probably resulted in most of the birds staying out on the wash, as it restricted the height of the tide. Several thousand **Knot** went on to the pits and were joined by **1000+ Oystercatchers**. We watched a continuing spectacle of **Knot, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew** and **Oystercatcher**. There was also a good number of **Pintail** with over 100 flying out on to The Wash.

There was also a nice flow of overhead visible migration with good number of of **Chaffinch, Meadow Pipit, Skylark** and a few **Brambling** passing overhead.

Marsh Harriers were hunting in the backdrop and flushing more distant birds, the sky filled again and again with layers of birds above and below.

From the southerly hide, there was a nice selection of birds, **4000 Knot, 1200 Dunlin, 500 Redshank, 5 Greenshank, Bar and Black-tailed Godwit, Sanderling 6 Greenshank, Ringed Plover, Turnstone** and masses of **Wigeon, Teal** a few **Shoveler, Pintail, Egyptian Goose & Little Grebe**.

By late morning the spectacle was almost over, though the distant mass of **Knot** were again spinning on the horizon. We also now had nice views of **Grey** and **Golden Plover** out on the freshly emerged mud.

We next headed to Holme and took a walk to Gore Point. Out on the sea we had a few **Red-throated Diver, Common Scoter, Gannets, Brent Geese, Pink-footed Geese, 2 Red-breasted Merganser** and a **Great Skua** with another chance to study lots of shorebirds now feeding much closer. A juvenile **Common/Arctic Tern** was on the shore, but only showed briefly before frustratingly flying off and disappearing. A smart adult **Mediterranean Gull** was much more obliging and a **Swallow** passed heading south.

We had a late lunch up at the Holme Bird Observatory and took I nice views of **Redstart**, showing nicely in the pines.

We rounded the day off with a short visit to Titchwell where we had cracking views of **2 Jack Snipe** bobbing and feeding just 50m from the hide, also alongside **Common Snipe** for comparison. There was lots of **Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler** and plenty of **Ruff** out on the marsh here too, plus a cracking male **Marsh harrier**.

13th October – 5 day Scarce & rare bird tour – Day 3

We headed up to Hunstanton this morning and were pleased to find a nice huddled roost of **50 Turnstone**, complete with a single **Purple Sandpiper** sat amongst them. There was also a nicely marked juvenile Sanderling on the end and a single **Knot** as well. The birds were remarkably tame as beach strollers walked within metres of them! Looking out to sea, I suddenly noticed a Harrier, coming off the sea. It was a ringtail and had a nice apricot wash below, my first reaction was **Hen Harrier**, but with “Pallids” always a possibility we studied the bird carefully as it moved north up the coast. I alerted Gary Hibberd who was fortunately at Holme on a webs count and he had better views as the bird was overland and landed briefly. He was able to confirm it was just a **juvenile Hen Harrier**, still a great bird to watch arriving.

We next walked out on to the saltmarsh between Holme & Old Hunstanton and had a really nice few hours birding. There was lots of **Meadow Pipit**, **Skylark**, **shorebirds**, plus some **Brent Geese**. After a bit of searching we latched on to **5 Shorelarks**, which almost immediately flew up. We watched them drop and land, then moved quickly closer and had good scope views. Searching around produced **2 Stonechat**, then nice views of a lovely **Short-eared Owl** sweeping across the tideline.

As we headed back we came across a late **Northern Wheatear** and whilst getting closer to this bird, suddenly realized **3 Shorelarks** were right in front of us just 20m away, and we had really nice views. There was also small bunches of **Chaffinch**, **Meadow Pipit**, **Linnet** and **Skylark** with **1-2 Brambling** moving South overhead, even as we headed back for a late lunch.

We rounded the afternoon visit off with a wander around Thornham harbour and bank. There was a small flock of **c60 Golden Plover**, a really nice group of **c3500 Pink-footed Geese**.

Out over Holme firs there was a late **Hobby** hunting dragonflies, back and forth, lovely views of **3 Marsh harrier**, including very close views of a juvenile overhead. The walk back gave us another species for the tour and exceptional views of a **1st winter Spotted Redshank**.

A good day of scarcer birds and migrants, with the total over a 100 and lovely group evening meal.

14th October – 5 day Scarce & rare bird tour – Day 4

A tricky day in rather wet weather. For the first hour the rain held off and we searched around the Choseley area. We started with a nice covey of **9 Grey Partridge**, then flew across the road and pitched up on the field. We also found a small group of **Yellowhammer** feeding along the field edge and a very nice flock of **c300 Linnet**. Nearby we stopped again and two fields had a nicely spread out flock of **c500 Golden Plover**, with **c20 Ruff** accompanying them. There was also a few **Blackbirds** and **Redwing** in the hedges. As well as **2 Marsh harriers** hunting along the margins. Claire spotted a group of Swans flying south and we quickly got the scopes on them, **5 Whooper Swans** a nice bonus.

The rain started up around 10am and we then headed for the shelter of the hides at Titchwell. We decided to take the path to Patsy's first, we added **Long-tailed Tit**, **Coal Tit** and **Greenfinch** to the list via the feeders!

At Patsy's there was a nice selection of wildfowl and very close views of **Marsh Harriers**. I suddenly noticed a tawny brown bird steadily heading towards us.... "**Bittern, Bittern coming right towards us!**" Incredibly not only did the **Bittern** fly almost right in front of us, it did a circuit of the pool and then flew back towards us for a second time, providing for some unsurpassed views!

We had a coffee break back at the centre, dried off and headed back out. Just as we headed past the hides, we had good views of a superb **male Hen Harrier** hunting. In the hide the **Jack Snipe** was still showing and there was a good selection of wildfowl, with over **c800 Teal** present, **Gadwall**, **Wigeon**, **Shoveler**, **Brent Ruff**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Ringed Plover Goose**, a few and **3 Dunlin**.

We had a late lunch and headed back out to the hides in the afternoon, we made use of the hides as it was still raining on and off. From Parrinder hide we added a nice group of **5 Spotted Redshank**, plus **Greenshank**. We rounded the day off chatting through gulls, although we didn't manage to find Yellow-legged or Caspian we had a very useful discussion chatting through the id criteria!

15th October – 5 day Scarce & rare bird tour – Day 5

The wet weather continued, but at least now the wind had turned to the North east, giving us chance to try some different birding. I decided on the shelter of the Leas at Sheringham and from here we sat relatively comfortably in the dry.

We had a pleasant 2-3 hours, with **20+ Red-throated Diver**, **12+ Manx Shearwater**, **3 Arctic Skua**, **10 Great Skua**, a **Mediterranean Gull**, a steady stream of **Gannets**, a single **Shag**, a few **Brents** passed by, also groups of **Wigeon**, **Teal** and **Pintail** plus a few **Common Scoter** and a real highlight 2 groups of **24 Eider**.

We then headed to Cley, there was a nice selection of shorebirds and waders, the highlights were a nice group of **Ruff** and **Black-tailed Godwit**.

We headed over to Holkham, after a bit of searching we located a calling **Yellow-browed Warbler**, it was active in with a nice flock of tits and crests. Eventually several of the group got reasonable views, it wasn't quite the end of the tour though as we enjoyed fantastic close up views of a perched **Peregrine** on our way back to the accommodation. **123 Species recorded**.

20th October – 2 day exclusive tour

We started the day at Cley, a quick look at the sea but it was quiet, fortunately overhead passage from Walsey Hills proved more fruitful! A steady flow of **Chaffinch**, **Brambling**, **Siskin**, **Skylark**, **Starling** and a few **Redwing**. Sue and David also enjoyed watching a Blue Tit being ringed and processed. A large dark **Peregrine** swept by, but was tricky to get enough detail on to think any further on it's origin. A ringtail **Hen Harrier** was nice and passed west towards Blakeney.

We next headed over towards Salthouse, where we were joined a small line of birders studying the **Siberian/Stejnegers Stonechat**. The bulk of opinion was firmly with **Stjneger's Stonechat** potentially a first for Norfolk and a second record for the UK. Post tour it appears that fecal samples have been collected so we may have a DNA answer to the question! It was a nice bird and it showed rather well, typically perching up on vegetation.

We enjoyed a lovely lunch from Picnic fayre, then headed on to Stiffkey Fen. There was a plethora of birds out on the water, particularly **Wigeon**, **Teal** plus **Pintail** highlights were **15 Greenshank**, **20 Ruff**, **Green sandpiper**, **Snip** and **100 Black-tailed Godwit**.

We then headed over and looked out over the slatmarsh from here there were carpets of shorebirds and wildfowl, including **c100 Pintail**. We passed a lovely couple of hours concentrating on shorebird identification. There was also a dozen **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Great Crested grebe**, **Brents** and **Pink-footed Geese**.

21st October – 2 day exclusive tour

We made an early start and headed for Hunstanton Cliffs where we passed a couple of very enjoyable hours watching a wonderful stream of migrants passing overhead - **3836 Chaffinch, 50 Brambling, 16 Skylark, 15 Greenfinch, 53 Siskin, 33 Meadow Pipit, 4 Reed Bunting, 3 Grey wagtail,, 1 Yellowhammer, 3 Rock Pipit.**

We next wandered into the cemetery area of Hunstanton, surrounded by a nice stand of mature trees, there were plenty of grounded migrants, a lot of **Chaffinch** a few **Brambling** a **Chiff-chaff**, **Goldcrest** and eventually a nice stripey **Yellow-browed Warbler.**

Having enjoyed a great few hours around Hunstanton, we were heading to Titchwell for some general birding, when a message came through, that changed our plans! Brown Shrike at Weybourne, a first for Norfolk!

Sue and David were more than keen and so we headed over to Weybourne. We arrived a little ahead of the masses! Fortunately the **BROWN SHRIKE** was showing on arrival and we got quite good scope views. Moss Taylor then arrived and generously allowed birders into the private area with a contribution of £1 for a cerebral palsy charity. Over the next 2 hours the **BROWN SHRIKE** showed intermittently very well and by the time we left for a late lunch, over 450 people had seen the bird with people still arriving.

We enjoyed lunch at Kelling tearooms, then headed to Cley. We watched a fantastic number of Pink-feet arriving in the fields off the East Bank. Several thousand **Pink-footed geese**, but we didn't quite manage the trio of rare birds as the Todds Canada Goose failed to put in an appearance before we needed to leave, still it had been an excellent couple of days with a whole variety of birds and birding!



Yellow-browed warbler & Brown Shrike
Thanks to Steve Gantlett www.cleybirds.com for allowing the use of these images!



**Eider & Stejgener's Stonechat Thanks to Steve Gantlett
www.cleybirds.com for allowing the use of these images!**

If you are interested in joining contact us as soon as possible as this is a very popular trip.

www.norfolkbirding.com
chrismills@norfolkbirding.com

44-7876 357677