

NORTH EAST ENGLAND
2ND – 8TH JUNE 2008
TRIP REPORT



CELTIC BIRD TOURS
& ORIOLE ADVENTURES

TOUR LEADER: ASHLEY SAUNDERS

WEATHER: The week started dreary and damp with a weather front moving up the east coast. However, most of the rain fell at night and we escaped the worst. As the week progressed we enjoyed four dry days with plenty of sunshine and temperatures into the low twenties.

Monday 2nd June East Barsham and West Carlton

We had a little time before lunch in East Barsham today ahead of our third North-east tour of 2008, and so a walk to West Barsham produced a few birds including Spotted Flycatcher, Red-legged Partridge and Common Buzzard. Following arrival at West Carlton we took a walk around the farm and as well as the ubiquitous Tree Sparrows we noted Common Whitethroat, Song Thrush, Common Shelduck and a superb Barn Owl which flew across the road ahead of us.

Tuesday 3rd June Spurn

A dreary day for weather, but fortunately not for birds! We headed down to Spurn after breakfast, the rain pouring down and not making the walk towards the point particularly inviting! However, we saw the bird of the day without even getting out of the car, as a superb male **RED-BACKED SHRIKE** was perched on the fence just ten feet from the minibus at The Warren. We watched the bird catching insects from the fence line for several minutes, its beautiful pink flush and smart black face mask brightening up the morning. We continued down to the Chalk Bank where we parked before walking towards the point. Around the wire dump trap, we encountered the first of several Common Cuckoos, with ten or so sightings during the day. A Spotted Flycatcher was a typical migrant for the time of year, but a Redwing certainly wasn't, and certainly provided the surprise of the morning. Around the point, there was no sign of the Eurasian Golden Oriole seen earlier in the day though we saw Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot and Sanderling on the mudflats. Walking back towards the bus, we then found a second **RED-BACKED SHRIKE**, a female this time, feeding low in the sea buckthorn near the lighthouse, and back at Chalk Bank, a Lesser Whitethroat gave excellent views in song. Common Whitethroats were plentiful and other species noted included two Yellow Wagtail and Reed Bunting. After lunch a relatively unproductive walk to Beacon Ponds at least produced eight Little Terns, two Sandwich Terns, European Oystercatcher and Ringed Plover. Finally at Out Newton, a Corn Bunting was perched on wires and two smart Yellow Wagtails were seen at close range.

Wednesday 4th June Hornsea Mere, Flamborough Head and Bempton Cliffs

A great days birding today with dry sunny weather and temperatures reaching 20 Celsius. A ringing session in the garden at West Carlton before breakfast produced four Tree Sparrows among a catch of fifteen birds, and a Common Cuckoo was calling nearby. Our first stop of the day was Hornsea Mere and the star birds were undoubtedly two smashing drake **GARGANEY** which we found on the water just off Kirkholm Point. Excellent views were obtained of the birds before they flew west across the mere. A drake Eurasian Wigeon, drake Ruddy Duck, two Great Crested Grebe and several Common Pochard were also noted. At Flamborough Head, we had our first selection of seabirds with the waters to the north of the lighthouse absolutely packed with rafts of Common Guillemot, Razorbill, **ATLANTIC PUFFIN** and Black-legged Kittiwake. Parties of Northern Gannet were passing offshore and several close Northern Fulmar were seen. Around the walk to Old Fall, a Corn Bunting was seen briefly and by the plantation, a singing Garden Warbler gave superb views, often alongside a Common Chiffchaff. Walking up Old Fall hedge towards Lighthouse Road, our day got better as we found a stunning male **RED-BACKED SHRIKE** perched on the fence! We watched the bird at close range as it fed on insects caught on the ground, and once it performed a miraculous sally a hundred feet into the air to take a large beetle on the wing before returning to its original post! After lunch at nearby Bempton Cliffs we spent the remainder of the afternoon viewing the spectacular seabird city on the chalk cliffs here. Thousands of birds included Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Northern Fulmar, Black-legged Kittiwake, Northern Gannet and some nice perched **ATLANTIC PUFFINS** as well as a single of the bridled form of Common Guillemot. A Corn Bunting showed well and a Sedge Warbler was singing near the centre.

Thursday 5th June County Durham

We set off northwards again today with our first birding stop in Upper Teesdale at Langdon Beck. Almost immediately we located **BLACK GROUSE** here with seven males seen during the morning, looking resplendent in the warm sunshine. In the conifers close by Sedge and Willow Warblers were seen, Eurasian Siskin were displaying and a nice Lesser Redpoll perched for scope views. Heading across Moor House nature reserve towards Widdybank Fell, breeding waders were typically abundant notably Eurasian Curlew, Northern Lapwing, Common Redshank and Oystercatcher but Common Snipe and Common Sandpiper were also seen. **RING OUZEL** were elusive today with two calling birds eventually seen in flight by some, though the rest of us had to settle for the good views of Northern Wheatear and close ups of a pair of **RED GROUSE** with newly hatched chicks. A **DIPPER** on the River Tees was a useful addition to the list, and Common Snipe was seen drumming on the walk back to the minibus. After lunch we headed over into Weardale, pausing to scan the moorland along the watershed which revealed two European Golden Plover on breeding habitat. Our final birding stop today was the beautiful setting of Tunstall Reservoir, and our short time in the oak woodland was very productive! A pair of **PIED FLYCATCHERS** were quickly located and the birds were watched coming and going at the nest hole. A singing **WOOD WARBLER** gave excellent views perched in a sapling for several minutes and allowing us all scope views. Other species noted included Spotted Flycatcher, European Nuthatch, Willow Warbler, Great Spotted Woodpecker and a singing male Common Redstart which we could not locate. A **RED KITE** was seen from the minibus as we drove north to our next destination in Rothbury.

Friday 6th June Harthope Valley and the Farne Islands

A truly excellent days birding started in the picturesque Harthope Valley on the fringe of the Northumberland National Park. Our real target bird here was **RING OUZEL** as some missed yesterdays bird, and we located a superb male perched in the top of a hawthorn and had good, if a little distant, scope views. A pair of **COMMON REDSTARTS** were feeding young in the alders and we had very good views of these birds, which was nice after failing to see them yesterday. Spotted Flycatcher, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Garden Warbler, Eurasian Bullfinch, European Sparrowhawk, **RED GROUSE**, Mistle Thrush and Common Treecreeper were other highlights, while two **RED KITES** drifting over the valley, each seen off by resident Common Buzzards, was a little unexpected.

While watching one of these Kites, however, a large raptor drifted into view and after initially disappearing behind the trees, it re-emerged briefly to be identified as a **NORTHERN GOSHAWK**, a bird known to reside in these parts but seldom seen. Lesser Redpoll showed very well in the waterside alders and a pair of **WHINCHAT** were seen on the hillside scrub. We then made for Seahouses and had lunch in the harbour before our 14.00 sailing to the Farne Islands. The magical experience of landing on the Inner Farne rounded off the day perfectly and we saw many thousands of seabirds including Common Guillemot, Razorbill, **ATLANTIC PUFFIN**, Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar, European Shag, Black-legged Kittiwake, Common, Sandwich and **ARCTIC TERNS**. Rock Pipit, Ruddy Turnstone and Ringed Plover were also noted.

Saturday 7th June Long Nanny Burn, Cresswell Pond, Druridge Pools, East Chevington, Hauxley, Amble and Coquet Island

A warm and mostly sunny day saw us start out with the walk from High Newton Links car park to the Long Nanny Burn where a **LESSER GREY SHRIKE** had been seen in recent days. We soon located the bird, and had absolutely brilliant views at close range as it fed along the fence line. Being a singing male, the pink flush was particularly obvious. What a superb bird! Stonechat was a trip tick here, but the other highlight was the huge **ARCTIC TERN** colony at the mouth of the burn, where the National Trust observation post afforded brilliant views of the nesting birds, along with a few Little Terns, the only colony in Northumberland. Cresswell Pond was our next location, and although quiet here we did see a few birds such as Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Reed Bunting, Tree Sparrow, Sedge Warbler, Sandwich Tern and Grey Heron, as well as a Great Cormorant devouring a very large Eel! At nearby Druridge Pools, little of note was seen although the Northern Marsh Orchids by the path were of interest. East Chevington lagoon was more productive with large numbers of gulls and terns resting and bathing around the islands. Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns were numerous, and three first-summer Little Gulls dropped in to add themselves to our growing list. A Whimbrel was an unexpected bonus and Stonechat and Sedge Warbler were in the scrub. At Hauxley NR another Whimbrel [or the same] was seen as well as our first Common Teal, Dunlin and a Little Egret, still a scarce bird this far north. Six Ruddy Turnstone dropped in and broods of Tufted Duck and Gadwall were noted. Our final destination was Amble harbour for our boat trip out to Coquet Island, and with warm evening sunshine and a calm sea we had a very enjoyable trip! **ROSEATE TERN** was our target bird here, and we had superb views in the beautiful sunlight as the birds indulged in courtship display on their nesting boxes. Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns, Black-legged Kittiwake, Common Guillemot, Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar, Atlantic Puffin and Common Eider were also seen to round off a spectacular week in style!

Sunday 8th June

A pre-breakfast walk by the River Coquet at Rothbury produced **DIPPER**, Grey Wagtail for some and a nice group of juvenile Eurasian Siskin. On our way back to Norfolk a **RED KITE** was seen drifting over the A1 mobbed by a Common Buzzard.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Great Crested Grebe
Northern Fulmar
Northern Gannet
Great Cormorant
European Shag
Grey Heron
Little Egret
Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Canada Goose
Common Shelduck
Eurasian Wigeon
Mallard
Gadwall
Northern Shoveler
Common Teal
Garganey
Common Pochard
Tufted Duck
Common Eider
European Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
Common Kestrel
Red Kite
Northern Goshawk
Red-legged Partridge
Grey Partridge
Common Pheasant
Black Grouse
Red Grouse
Common Moorhen
Common Coot
Eurasian Oystercatcher
Ringed Plover
European Golden Plover
Northern Lapwing
Dunlin
Ruddy Turnstone
Common Snipe

Bar-tailed Godwit
Red Knot
Sanderling
Eurasian Curlew
Whimbrel
Common Redshank
Common Sandpiper
Black-headed Gull
Common Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Black-legged Kittiwake
Sandwich Tern
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Little Tern
Roseate Tern
Woodpigeon
Stock Dove
Collared Dove
Common Guillemot
Razorbill
Atlantic Puffin
Common Cuckoo
Barn Owl
Little Owl
Common Swift
Great-spotted Woodpecker
Green Woodpecker
Sky Lark
House Martin
Sand Martin
Barn Swallow
Meadow Pipit
Rock Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail
Dipper
Winter Wren
Dunnock
European Robin
Common Redstart
Stonechat
Whinchat
Northern Wheatear
Common Blackbird
Ring Ouzel
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Redwing
Sedge Warbler
Common Whitethroat
Lesser Whitethroat
Garden Warbler
Blackcap
Willow Warbler
Common Chiffchaff
Wood Warbler
Spotted Flycatcher
Pied Flycatcher
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Long-tailed Tit
Common Nuthatch
Common Treecreeper
Eurasian Jay
Black-billed Magpie
Rook
Carrion Crow
Western Jackdaw
Red-backed Shrike
Lesser Grey Shrike
Common Starling

House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Common Chaffinch
European Greenfinch
European Goldfinch
Common Linnet
Eurasian Siskin
Lesser Redpoll
Eurasian Bullfinch
Corn Bunting
Reed Bunting
Yellowhammer

Total species recorded: 127