

LEADER: ASHLEY SAUNDERS

PARTICIPANTS: JILL SHARLAND, DENISE HOWE, BRIAN HILL, BRUE RYLAND, MARGARET DALGARNO, ROSIE & BILL PERKINS

WEATHER: A CHALLENGE AT TIMES! SOME VERY WET AND WINDY CONDITIONS IN CO DURHAM ON WEDNESDAY ALSO BROUGHT SLEET AND A SNOW FLURRY. A LOVELY DAY THURSDAY FOR OUR TRIP TO THE FARNES FOLLOWED BY MORE OVERCAST AND DRIZZLY WEATHER ON FRIDAY. SW WINDS DOMINATED BRINGING FEW MIGRANTS.

MONDAY 22ND MAY SPURN POINT

Spurn Point: Parking by the observatory we spent the morning walking to the Chalk Bank Hide and back again. With the tide pushing up on the Humber Estuary, we enjoyed an excellent variety of summer plumaged waders on the way with at least 15 smart Grey Plover, 10+ Knot, Turnstone and Bar-tailed Godwit. Four Turtle Doves heading south along the point proved to be our only ones of the trip, while Common Whitethroat proved a familiar sight along the length of the point. From Chalk Bank up to seven Little Terns were noted with a small group of Common Scoter offshore, though best birds here were the two Spotted Flycatchers in scrub adjacent to the hide. As we drove back towards the Bluebell car park for lunch, a Barn Owl hunting over the rough fields to the west was a really nice bonus, obviously forced out to feed by the persistent wet weather.

Beacon Lane: A very productive walk down to Beacon Ponds began with a Lesser Whitethroat singing by the caravan park, with a second bird further down the track eventually showing quite well. A superb male Yellow Wagtail gave good views on the bank by the playing field while 2 Sedge Warblers and a Wheatear provided other passerine interest. At Beacon Ponds, 20+ Little Terns, 20+ Sandwich Terns and a single Kittiwake were seen, along with summer plumaged Sanderling and our first Sparrowhawk which made a pass across the lagoon.

Withernsea/Easington: Stopping along the coast road by the wind farm, we soon located two Corn Buntings on the wires, along with at least three Yellow Wagtails with one perching very close on the wires. A great end to the days birding.

TUESDAY 23RD MAY FLAMBOROUGH, BEMPTON AND HORNSEA

West Carlton: Bird ringing at the farm this morning proved very successful with Tree Sparrow, Goldfinch, Starling, Wren, Dunnock, Robin, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Blue Tit, Great Tit and star bird, a Jackdaw, all finding their way into the three mist nets erected in the garden.

Flamborough Head: Heading down to the cliffs on the northern edge of the headland we obtained our first views of some of the typical cliff nesting seabirds such as Guillemot, Razorbill, Puffin, Shag, Fulmar and Kittiwake.

Large numbers of auks on the water here proved quite a sight and we also encountered cliff-nesting House Martins, quite a rarity in itself. We then completed a circular walk along the southern edge of the headland to Old Fall Plantation and back up to the road. Six Common Scoter sheltering in the bay gave very good views while at the plantation itself we had good views of Lesser Whitethroat with two singing birds present, as well as a nice Spotted Flycatcher perched quietly in the trees.

Bempton Cliffs RSPB: With good weather holding out for us here, we enjoyed our picnic lunch before heading down to the cliff top. As always this fantastic seabird city proved a real highlight with superb views of the birds notably Puffin, Gannet, Kittiwake, Guillemot [including the bridled form] and Razorbill. We spent a while soaking up the sights, sounds and smells of this spectacular location but the highlight was provided by two Great Skuas which cruised by the Gannet colony and lingered offshore for several minutes.

Hornsea Mere: The skies over the Mere were alive with swifts and hirundines ahead of the stormy weather, with literally thousands of birds hawking low over the water. Great Crested Grebe and Pochard were other list additions here.

WEDNESDAY 24TH MAY CO DURHAM

Langdon Beck: Very cold, windy and wet conditions made birding in Teesdale very difficult but despite the elements we managed some good birding. It didn't take us long to locate Black Grouse in the fields along the valley, though not surprisingly they were found cowering under the dry stone wall out of the wind! Five males were seen well and also present were six smart summer plumaged Golden Plover obviously forced off the high tops by the bad weather. Also in the vicinity of Langdon Beck village we had good views of our first Dippers as well as Common Sandpiper, Grey Partridge Lapwing and Redshank.

Tunstall Reservoir: This beautiful spot provided a very pleasant walk this afternoon though the persistent westerly wind made looking for the oak woodland specialities difficult. Pied Flycatcher and Redstart were both heard singing but not located, though we did see Sparrowhawk, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper, Long-tailed Tit, Spotted Flycatcher and Willow Warbler with Great Crested Grebe, 2 Grey Wagtail and Common Sandpiper around the reservoir.

THURSDAY 25TH MAY HARTHOPE VALLEY AND THE FARNE ISLANDS

Harthope Valley: A very productive couple of hours in this fabulous valley overlooked by the Cheviot allowed us to 'clean up' on many species missed yesterday due to the poor weather. Scattered scrub on the scree-strewn slopes along the northern flank resonated to the call of Cuckoo, with excellent views obtained of this species and both Whinchat and a pair of Redstarts were seen in the same area. Tree Pipit could be heard singing further up the hillside and we glimpsed our first Garden Warbler in the bushes here while watching the Redstarts. Further down the valley where alder woodland

lines the beck we soon encountered Spotted Flycatchers in promising numbers as well as Treecreeper, Blackcap, Grey Wagtail, Common Buzzard and good scope views of Garden Warbler.

Distant views of Red Grouse were then obtained along the heather dominated southern side of the valley, and persistent scanning for the seemingly invisible 'Mountain Blackbird or Ring Ouzel' paid off at the last minute with a male bird chasing a Kestrel high above the gorge and then settling for us to get decent scope views as it fed in the grass on the ridge top. On the walk back the deep croaking of a Raven alerted us of the presence of this, the only one of the trip.

Farne Islands: With lovely weather for our tour of the islands this afternoon, this wonderful experience proved a highlight for all. As we sailed around the outer group of islands, the sheer number of auks on the water was quite staggering, and as we entered the narrow gorge of Staple Island the noise and smell was quite amazing! After touring round the islands and the famous Grace Darling Lighthouse we landed on the Inner Farne for an hour with the seabird colonies. As soon as we left the safety of the jetty we were bombarded by the nesting Arctic Terns, the major attraction of this national trust island. Around the boardwalk, one or two female Eider were brooding and Rock Pipit were carrying food, while the Sandwich Tern colony in the centre of the island also hosted a few pairs of Common Tern providing an excellent comparison with the more numerous Arctic. On the cliffs, we enjoyed amazing close ups of nesting Shag, Kittiwake, Guillemot and Razorbill, with a few Puffins also giving great views along the cliff top as they sat by their burrows. All in all these fabulous seabird islands produced a magical spectacle that should be top of any birders list of great experiences.

FRIDAY 26TH MAY CRESSWELL, DRURIDGE, EAST CHEVINGTON, HAUXLEY AND COQUET

Cresswell Pond: Fairly quiet on the pond today though Gadwall and Wigeon were new trip species and Sedge Warbler, Sandwich Tern and Reed Bunting were also seen.

Hauxley: Our visit to the NWT reserve was cut short by heavy rainfall though we noted Ringed Plover, Redshank, Gadwall, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Tree Sparrow, Sand Martin and Northern Marsh Orchid.

Amble Harbour/Coquet Island: With the rain holding off for our hour long boat trip we were fortunate to be able to get in close to the jetty on the high tide and observe the breeding Roseate Terns at one of only two major UK colonies for the species. About thirty birds were seen with some fantastic close ups of birds resting on the rocks with the Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns as well as displaying pairs on their numbered nesting boxes. A close contender for bird of the trip with their beautiful rosy pink flush, the terns were supplemented by tens of thousands of Puffins and the 'usual' Guillemot, Razorbill, Kittiwake, Fulmar and Gannet as well as Turnstone and Dunlin on the rocks.

East Chevington: Our final port of call proved well worth a visit with this relatively new reserve a popular feeding and resting site for gulls and terns breeding on the nearby islands. Arctic, Common and Sandwich Terns, Great Crested Grebe, Common

Gull and even a Pink-footed Goose were seen, though the highlight was a first-summer Little Gull dip-feeding over the water and a Black-tailed Godwit, our only one of the trip.