

NORTH EAST
ENGLAND
25TH – 31ST MAY 2008
TRIP REPORT



CELTIC BIRD
TOURS

TOUR LEADER

Ashley Saunders

TOUR PARTICIPANTS

Richard Heap
John Jeffries
Deryck Leivers
Graham Sparkes
Mary Sparkes
Colin Spurdle

WEATHER

A windy start to the week with strong north-easterlies dominating for the first four days, accompanied by overnight rain into Tuesday and low cloud/mist in the fells. These conditions resulted in an impressive east coast fall of continental migrants centred mainly on the Spurn area but extending as far north as Holy Island and as far south as Norfolk. Abating winds made for a pleasant day on Thursday and allowed us to complete our boat trips before the strengthening Northerly again on Friday afternoon.

Sunday 25th May West Carlton

Arriving at West Carlton around 16.30 we took a walk around the farm in the evening before dinner. The highlight was the Little Owl which we located in the paddock, thanks to the mobbing Blackbirds! Yellow Wagtail, Common Whitethroat, Tree Sparrow and Grey Partridge were also seen.

Monday 26th May Spurn and Kilnsea

A memorable days birding today in dry weather though with a fresh North-easterly wind. Despite making life difficult at times, it was this wind which bought much of the days highlights to the Spurn area! Parking by the bird observatory we walked back along the Canal zone to view the Humber estuary on the rising tide, and we were soon watching a superb **BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER** roosting on the beach with fifty plus Dunlin and Ringed Plover. Initially spending long periods asleep, the bird eventually began feeding and showing extremely well. Three summer plumage European Golden Plovers dropped in, four **ARCTIC TERNS** flew south and Northern Gannet, Northern Fulmar, Reed Bunting, Sedge Warbler and **WHINCHAT** were also noted along the walk. News then broke of a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Kilnsea in gardens near the Crown & Anchor pub just a few hundred yards away, so we headed straight there. However, despite the attention of fifty or so birders the bird could not be relocated in the windy conditions so we moved on, though we did see Spotted Flycatcher here. Moving the bus down to Chalk Bank, a singing Lesser Whitethroat greeted us and we visited the hide where more waders were visible on the estuary. Large numbers of Sanderling, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Red Knot and Grey Plover were seen with several Little Terns on the beach and a Blue Fulmar flew north up the Humber. After lunch, we headed south along the point towards the Heligoland trap and beyond towards the lighthouse. Despite much effort we could not locate the Golden Oriole seen earlier in the day and had to settle instead for Northern Wheatear and a male **WHINCHAT**. We did hear the singing male **ICTERINE WARBLER** and managed two brief flight views between areas of sea buckthorn. It was on return from our walk towards the point that we saw this bird again, as it shot out of an elder while we were watching a Spotted Flycatcher! Longer flight views were obtained by most though unfortunately only Ashley saw the bird very well down to a few feet in an elder. While trying to relocate the bird again we inadvertently flushed the female **GOLDEN ORIOLE** which perched in a hawthorn allowing superb scope views! Things were looking up! Finally we headed back up to Kilnsea to see if the **RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER** had been seen again, though as there were few people now left looking, we split up in the hope of locating it ourselves. After some time we found the bird in the sheltered corner of the garden and following some good views in the dense canopy [obtained by crawling on hands and knees under the bushes!]. The bird decided it had skulked enough and came out to perch on the fence. It then dropped down onto the seaweed covered rocks beneath us and proceeded to give stunning views down to a few feet! What a cracking little bird! Three Yellow Wagtails and two Grey Partridge were seen on the way home.

Tuesday 27th May Hornsea Mere, Flamborough Head, Thornwick Bay & Bempton Cliffs

A dull and overcast start to the day turned to sea mist and drizzle in the afternoon, though with an easterly wind and birds arriving to the south of us, we had high hopes for the morning. We called in at Hornsea Mere where Common Pochard, Common Sandpiper, Sand Martin and Great Crested Grebe were all trip ticks. Starting then at Flamborough Head lighthouse we walked the circuit round by Old Fall. Our best bird was a **COMMON NIGHTINGALE** which we flushed from the Old Fall Hedge, and the bird began singing from the plantation. The first sighting here for a decade made this a good bird for the area. Two Lesser Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Whinchat, Northern Wheatear and three Spotted Flycatchers were also noted, along with Stonechat, Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black-legged Kittiwake, Northern Gannet and European Shag. After lunch we called in at Thornwick Bay near the north landing to look for an Icterine Warbler without success, though Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting were noted. Finally at Bempton Cliffs the usual seabird spectacle was enjoyed despite the rain, and we had particularly good views of many **ATLANTIC PUFFINS** as well as Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Black-legged Kittiwake, Northern Gannet and Northern Fulmar. Yellowhammer, Reed Bunting, Tree Sparrow, Spotted Flycatcher and Lesser Whitethroat were also seen.

Wednesday 28th May County Durham

We left West Carlton and its Tree Sparrows behind this morning and made the three hour drive north to the fells of Teesdale in county Durham. Our first birding stop was Langdon Beck and despite the dense low cloud we soon located our first male **BLACK GROUSE** with ten birds in a distant field. The walk towards Widdybank Fell took us through open country where breeding waders abound and we were surrounded by calling Common Redshank, Eurasian Curlew, Northern Lapwing and Oystercatcher. A few Common Snipe were seen and one was drumming right above us, and a female European Golden Plover was nice to see in breeding habitat. A displaying male **RED GROUSE** gave really close views in the somewhat unusual spot of the grassy valley bottom. Further along the track we stopped to scan for elusive **RING OUZEL**, and could hear a distant bird on the far hillside.

Eventually the mournful songster was located perched on a fence post and we enjoyed good views. On our walk back to the bus we flushed two **EURASIAN WOODCOCK** from a grass field and the birds flew off calling over the hillside. We headed back to the river where we enjoyed lunch in the company of Common Sandpiper and our first **DIPPER** of the trip, before returning to Langdon Beck for more views of the **BLACK GROUSE**. This time four males were in the field, and we had more good views. Our final birding stop was the picturesque Tunstall Reservoir where a walk through the oak woodland produced a good selection of birds. Two **PIED FLYCATCHERS** included a male which showed very well, and on the open hillside beyond a **TREE PIPIT** was singing and showing well. Green Woodpecker was also noted here while **WOOD WARBLER** could be heard calling in the trees behind. This elusive species eventually gave itself up with a calling bird showing just a few feet above our heads. This was quickly followed by a splendid male **COMMON REDSTART** and the trip list was looking good! On to Rothbury in the Coquet Valley for our next few days in Northumberland.

Thursday 29th May Harthope Valley and the Farne Islands

A warm sunny day started in the Harthope Valley which is always a joy and today was no exception, the stunning upland scenery and peaceful setting enhanced by some good birds. Willow Warbler were very common, though we also managed views of Garden Warbler, and Eurasian Siskin, European Bullfinch, European Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Common Sandpiper, Grey Heron and Green Woodpecker were also noted. A displaying male **RED GROUSE** was seen on the moorland fringe and an elusive male **RING OUZEL** gave us another chance to view this species in its breeding habitat. Finally a brief **COMMON REDSTART** was noted before it was time to head across to Seahouses in time for the 2pm sailing to the Farne Islands. Lunch in the harbour added our first Common Eiders of the trip. Once on board the boat and heading out to the islands, our first **ARCTIC TERN** were soon noted as well as Sandwich and Common Tern, Black-legged Kittiwake, Northern Fulmar, Northern Gannet, Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin and European Shag. On the Inner Farne, the usual close ups of the breeding terns and auks were a highlight including a few of the bridled form of Common Guillemot, and passerines included two Willow Warblers, **COMMON REDSTART** and Rock Pipit.

Friday 30th May Coquet Island, Hauxley NR and Holy Island

Our boat trip to Coquet Island left Amble harbour this morning at 10.00 and we were fortunate indeed to make the trip as the deepening swell cancelled the later boat. Once out to the RSPB bird sanctuary we were able to moor the boat by the Trinity House stone jetty and enjoy a spectacular feast of seabirds right in front of us. This included our target bird, the beautiful **ROSEATE TERN** which performed brilliantly for us, displaying birds on their nesting boxes at close range. Huge numbers of **ALANTIC PUFFIN** were seen too with ten thousand pairs breeding on the island, and the usual range of other seabirds included Common Guillemot, Northern Fulmar, Northern Gannet, Common, Sandwich and **ARCTIC TERNS**, two Little Terns and seven Common Scoter. Rock Pipit was also noted before our rather choppy return to the safety of the harbour! Our next stop was the Hauxley Nature reserve and we were soon watching the summer plumaged drake **LONG-TAILED DUCK** here at close quarters. Gadwall, Common Teal, Common Pochard, Willow and Sedge Warblers, Ruddy Turnstone, Eurasian Curlew and Tree Sparrow were also seen here as well as both Common Spotted and Northern Marsh Orchids. With news coming through from Lindisfarne to the north of us we decided to head there in the afternoon in the hope of catching up with some of the scarce migrants present. Despite extensive searching, we could not locate the Red-backed Shrike or Icterine Warbler reportedly present but while checking the shallows by the dune slacks we flushed a superb male **HAWFINCH** which flew out an into another clump of bushes. The bird was subsequently seen well in flight by some group members before disappearing back into the original thicket. An unexpected bonus! Four Spotted Flycatchers, Northern Wheatear, Willow Warbler and Reed Bunting were also seen.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Great Crested Grebe
Northern Fulmar
Northern Gannet
Great Cormorant
European Shag
Grey Heron
Mute Swan
Greylag Goose
Canada Goose
Common Shelduck
Mallard
Gadwall
Northern Shoveler
Common Teal
Common Pochard
Tufted Duck
Common Eider
Common Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
European Sparrowhawk
Common Buzzard
Common Kestrel
Red-legged Partridge
Grey Partridge
Common Pheasant
Black Grouse
Red Grouse
Common Moorhen
Common Coot
European Oystercatcher

Ringed Plover
Grey Plover
European Golden Plover
Northern Lapwing
Dunlin
Broad-billed Sandpiper
Ruddy Turnstone
Eurasian Woodcock
Common Snipe
Bar-tailed Godwit
Red Knot
Sanderling
Eurasian Curlew
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
Little Owl
Common Swift
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Green Woodpecker
Common Skylark
House Martin
Sand Martin
Barn Swallow
Tree Pipit
Meadow Pipit
Rock Pipit
Pied Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail
Dipper
Northern Wren
Dunnock
European Robin
Common Nightingale
Common Redstart
European Stonechat
Whinchat
Northern Wheatear
Common Blackbird
Ring Ouzel
Song Thrush
Mistle Thrush
Sedge Warbler
Icterine Warbler
Common Whitethroat
Lesser Whitethroat
Garden Warbler
Blackcap [H]
Willow Warbler
Common Chiffchaff [H]
Wood Warbler
Goldcrest [H]
Spotted Flycatcher
Pied Flycatcher
Red-breasted Flycatcher
Coal Tit
Blue Tit
Great Tit
Black-billed Magpie

Rook
Carrion Crow
Western Jackdaw
European Starling
Eurasian Golden Oriole
House Sparrow
Tree Sparrow
Common Chaffinch
European Greenfinch
European Goldfinch
Common Linnet
Eurasian Siskin
Eurasian Bullfinch
Hawfinch
Corn Bunting
Reed Bunting
Yellowhammer

Total species recorded: 123