



TOUR REPORT
NORFOLK BRECKLAND & COASTAL
23RD – 26TH MARCH 2023

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FRIDAY 24th MARCH – *Fresh SW winds, sunny spells and showers, 13C*

A bright and breezy day in the brecks with some great sightings of many top target birds exploring the forest from our base in Mundford. We started off heading north and checking some productive arable areas for farmland birds. Several **Grey Partridge** were seen at close quarters, often keeping company with some of the many Brown Hares in the newly tilled fields. **Yellowhammers**, Skylarks and Lapwings were about too, but we couldn't find any Stone Curlews on these initial forays. Soon we reached a favoured raptor watchpoint and set ourselves up using the van as a windbreak, to scope over the woodland. Lots of Common Buzzard activity, a very close **Red Kite** and a couple of **Sparrowhawk** sightings kicked us off, plus there were a pair of Curlew in the field behind us – a scarce breckland breeder. Typically given the time of year and the ideal weather, it wasn't long before we saw our first **Goshawks**. Our initial couple of sightings were of very distant birds, drifting above the treetops well to the north of us. Patience paid off though as a big immature female **Goshawk** lifted up out of the trees and powered towards us, circling around slowly and giving everyone a much closer scope view. As we watched, three **Woodlarks** came over with one bursting into song and hovering low over the road above our heads, escorting the other pair off its territory.



Woodlark overhead, 24th March

Next we went south and headed down to Cavenham Heath in NW Suffolk, as this is a great place early in the season to get good views of **Stone Curlews**. The walk down the main track added a pair of **Stonechats** and another Sparrowhawk, and soon we picked up a **Stone Curlew** sitting in the heather. We watched the bird for some time, and eventually it had a little wander around – its yellow legs and bill were incredibly vivid in the strong sunshine! Walking back, we spotted a **Woodlark** beside the track and had a cracking view of it walking quietly among the heather tussocks. On a large open breck area on the drive out along the track, we had great views of two pairs of **Wheatears**, freshly arrived and bounding around on the short turf in the sunshine. Superb!

Back into the forest, we lunched at Mayday Farm and then took a walk here into the forest to a spot with a small drinking pool. There were some finches coming to drink such as **Siskin**, Goldfinch and **Lesser Redpoll**, with four of the latter perching up in some larches for us. Sadly only Ashley glimpsed a Brambling though and there weren't any Crossbills about. Out of the wind and in the sun, a couple of freshly emerged Brimstone and a Peacock were seen, and with several **Chiffchaff** singing it did feel spring-like!



Brown Hare – one of the many seen today

Lynford would be our final port of call today, arriving on cue at the paddocks just after 3pm to scan for pre-roost **Hawfinches** perching on the tops of the conifers. The weather threatened with a purple sky, but it flanked us and we just stayed on the edge. Two **Hawfinch** flew through, one bounding off over us, but we had to be patient to eventually get a female perched beautifully against the leaden sky, calling away for about ten minutes and giving everyone some great scope views. On the walk back, **Marsh Tit** and **Treecreeper** were added and then among the hollies near the gate, we enjoyed a superb view of a male **Firecrest** singing at eye level. Not a bad way to end the day and apart from the super-scarce Crossbill, we had enjoyed good views of five top target birds.



Stone Curlew at Cavenham, 24th March



Female Hawfinch at Lynford

SATURDAY 25TH MARCH – *Strong SW winds, heavy showers, 13C*

Our Norfolk coast day today and we had three rarities to try for, plus a host of excellent ‘fillers’ in between! It took just short of an hour to drive up to Holkham from our brecks base, and one good thing about the strong winds and threat of rain was the fact that Lady Anne’s Drive was much quieter than normal! After picking up some of the common wildfowl and waders in the fields either side, we set straight out for the beach to look for the **Shorelarks**. It was exposed and windy but thankfully despite the mornings high tide, six **Shorelarks** were faithfully feeding in the cordon and giving excellent views. A few spells of sunshine lit up their sulphur yellow faces – such superb birds! We performed a smash and grab today, avoiding looking at the sea as it was so rough, and we were unlikely to see anything there. So it was straight back to the Lookout, where around 100 **Pink-footed Geese** could still be seen in the long grass to the east, and then back to the van for a coffee.

This tour had fallen right in the midst of the most unprecedented influx of **Alpine Swifts** ever to have occurred in Britain, and now was our chance to get in on the action. Heading east along the coast to Cromer, the centre of operations for **Alpine Swifts** in recent days, we received some up-to-date gen just as we arrived at the town and made our way to Park Road from where we could scan along the southern edge of the golf course. Within moments of getting out the van, we picked up the two **Alpine Swifts**, whizzing back and forth over the trees by the coast road. After initially quite distant but acceptable views, we noticed there was a gap in the hedge where we could get onto some waste ground and walk across to a position almost underneath the birds. Sure enough here we had sensational views of the birds which now passed directly over us – quite something!



Alpine Swift and Buzzard, Cromer 25th March

Our next target was the long staying **Long-billed Dowitcher**, which had been seen again off Cley East Bank while we were watching the swifts. After lunch in the East Bank car park, we set off under darkening skies and unfortunately got soaked in a downpour which saw us scuttling for the shelter. The Dowitcher had flown too, so it was a double blow for us! After picking up a few Ringed Plovers and a **Water Pipit** on the Serpentine, we thought the most likely place for the bird to be now would be Babcock Hide, on Salthouse Marshes. We drove there and walked round to the hide, and as we opened the flaps the trilling call of the **Long-billed Dowitcher** was heard!



Long-billed Dowitcher, Cley 25th March

It had flushed out of the grass close to the hide and was now in the open water among **Ruff** and **Black-tailed Godwits**. Over the next half hour, the sun came out and bathed everything on the pool in the most perfect light – we had superb views of the dowitcher, which returned to the grass right in front of the hide, a male **Ruff** was coming into plumage, a drake **Pintail** was among the Shoveler and two **Water Pipits** included a close one in breeding plumage. It was quite hard in fact to tear ourselves away from this spot but we had one more bird to try for.



Long-billed Dowitcher

The wintering Pallid Harrier, having gone missing for several weeks, had randomly returned a couple of days before the trip started. This saw us heading down Garden Drove in the late afternoon, to scan the saltmarsh for the bird. The weather was our problem though – the showers scuttling in from the west were increasing in frequency and we got hit by two, the second of which was really ‘game over’ as it closed the visibility in altogether. We managed to see a flock of **Brent Geese**, both Golden and **Grey Plovers** and a distant **Spoonbill**, but we gave up just after 4.30pm as it was clear the rain wasn’t going to pass.

SUNDAY 26TH MARCH – *Moderate SW winds, light rain and overcast, 7C*

For our last morning we had planned to rise early and head down to Santon Downham to look for the **Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, but unfortunately the weather forecast deteriorated and it was now supposed to rain all morning, and be cold and windy – not ideal! So with greatly reduced chances and the clocks going forward, we stuck to our usual 0730 breakfast and arrived on site around 0900. Despite the light rain, the first section of the walk was already more birdy than of late here, with finally some decent numbers of finches and thrushes around (normally a real March feature here). We had good views of Siskin and **Lesser Redpoll**, with a small flock of the latter buzzing around, and we also saw our first **Brambling** of the tour (a singing male) and a party of about forty **Redwing**. Negotiating the muddy track down to the furthest poplars, we were disgruntled to find

that the only three other birders present had seen a pair of **Lesser Spots** but they'd flown off just before we arrived. Often that is that for the rest of the day but we opted to give it an hour and see if anything reappeared. **Mandarins** kept us entertained in the meantime, and we actually saw as many as fifteen – including a single flock of a dozen flying round together! Eventually the distinctive 'kee-kee-kee-kee' of a **Lesser Spot** was heard and the bird flew in and perched nicely in view up in the trees ahead of us. She started drumming and carried on doing so on the same trunk for ten minutes, giving us all a superb scope view. She then flew and called again, before melting away into the trees. A great showing! The walk back produced six singing **Chiffchaff** and then back near the bridge, three **Woodlark** singing over our heads.



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker female, 26th March

The weather had brightened slightly now and we wanted to head across to Lakenheath to try and see some **Garganey** which had been recently reported. These weren't hard to find – three birds sleeping on the banks of the Washland from the viewpoint. A good assortment of other common ducks, Great Crested Grebe, a couple of Stonechats, Reed Bunting and a **Cetti's Warbler** were also seen, plus a couple of nice **Redpoll** feeding on the ground near the Visitor Centre.

One final roll of the dice for us then, as we headed back into the forest. **Crossbills** have been extremely hard to come by over the last couple of years, and this was the only breckland speciality we had thus far missed. We headed to one of the fire rides in the forest south of Brandon and took a slow walk and listen. The wind had dropped considerably and we noticed the scales of pine seeds floating down on from the trees. This is often a sure sign of **Crossbill** feeding activity and sure enough we also heard some subtle muted calls – they were up there somewhere. With patience we eventually had five **Crossbills** fly out and over our head, thankfully perching on the tops of a large conifer a bit further back along the track. We all got a scope view, before they flew off calling into the forest – job done! From here it was back to the hotel for drop-offs around 2pm.

#	Common Name	Scientific name		24	25	26		Comments
Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)								
1	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>			▪			
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		▪	▪	▪		
3	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		▪	▪	▪		
4	Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>			▪			
5	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		▪	▪	▪		
6	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		▪	▪			
7	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		▪	▪	▪		
8	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>				▪		
9	Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			▪	▪		
10	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		▪	▪	▪		
11	Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			▪	▪		
12	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		▪	▪	▪		
13	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			▪			
14	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		▪	▪	▪		
15	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				▪		
16	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>						
17	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			▪	▪		
18	Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>						
19	Velvet Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>						
20	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>						
21	Long-tailed Duck	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>						
22	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>						
23	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>						
Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)								
24	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		▪	▪			
25	Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>		▪				
26	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
Gaviidae and Procellariidae (Divers and Shearwaters)								
28	Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>						
29	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>						
Podicipedidae (Grebes)								
30	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		H				
31	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				▪		
32	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>						
Threskiornithidae and Ardeidae (Spoonbills, Herons, Egrets and Bitterns)								
33	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			▪			
34	Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>						
35	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		▪	▪			
36	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			▪	▪		
Sulidae and Phalacrocoracidae (Gannets, Cormorants and Shags)								
37	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>						
38	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			▪	▪		

#	Common Name	Scientific name		24	25	26		Comments
Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)								
39	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
40	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		▪				
41	Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			▪	▪		
42	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>						
43	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		▪	▪			
44	Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>						
45	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		▪	▪	▪		
Rallidae (Rails, Coots and allies)								
46	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>						
47	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
48	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			▪	▪		
Burhinidae, Recurvirostridae and Charadriidae (Thick-knees, Avocets, Plovers and Allies)								
49	Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>		▪				
50	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
51	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			▪			
52	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		▪	▪			
53	Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>			▪			
54	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			▪			
55	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			▪			
56	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>						
Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)								
57	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		▪	▪			
58	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>						
59	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			▪			
60	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>						
61	Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>						
62	Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>			▪			
63	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>						
64	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			▪			
65	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>						
66	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			▪			
67	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>						
68	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			▪	▪		
69	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>						
70	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>						
Laridae (Gulls and Terns)								
71	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
72	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Larus melanocephalus</i>						
73	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>			▪	▪		
74	Little Gull	<i>Hydrocoloeus minutus</i>						
75	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			▪			
76	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			▪			

#	Common Name	Scientific name		24	25	26		Comments
77	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		▪	▪			
78	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>						
79	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>						
80	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>						
Columbidae and Cuculidae (Pigeons, Doves and Cuckoos)								
81	Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>						
82	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		▪	▪	▪		
83	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
84	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		▪	▪	▪		
Tytonidae and Strigidae (Owls)								
85	Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>						
86	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>						
87	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>						
88	Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>						
Alcedinidae and Picidae (Kingfishers and Woodpeckers)								
89	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>						
90	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>				▪		
91	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			▪	▪		
92	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	▪	H		
Falconidae (Falcons)								
93	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
94	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>						
95	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>						
Lanidae and Corvidae (Shrikes, Crows, Jays, and Magpies)								
96	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>						
97	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		▪	▪			
98	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		▪	▪	▪		
99	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		▪	▪	▪		
100	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
101	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		▪	▪	▪		
Paridae and Panuridae (Tits and Reedlings)								
102	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>		▪		▪		
103	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		▪		▪		
104	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
105	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		▪	▪	▪		
106	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>						
Alaudidae (Larks)								
107	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		▪		▪		
108	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		▪	▪			
109	Shore Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>			▪			
Hirundinidae (Swallows)								
110	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>						

#	Common Name	Scientific name		24	25	26		Comments
111	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>						
112	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>						
Scotocercidae, Aegithalidae and Phylloscopidae (Bush Warblers, Bushtits and Leaf Warblers)								
113	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H	▪		
114	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		▪	▪	▪		
115	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		▪	▪	▪		
Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)								
116	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>						
117	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>						
Regulidae (Kinglets)								
118	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		▪				
119	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		▪		▪		
Troglodytidae, Sittidae and Certhiidae (Wrens, Nuthatches and Treecreepers)								
120	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			▪	▪		
121	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		▪		H		
122	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		▪		H		
Turdidae and Sturnidae (Thrushes and Starlings)								
123	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		▪	▪	▪		
124	Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>						
125	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		▪	▪	▪		
126	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>						
127	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>				▪		
128	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		▪				
129	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		▪		▪		
Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)								
130	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		▪	▪	▪		
131	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>						
132	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		▪		▪		
133	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		▪				
Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)								
134	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			▪			
135	Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>						
Prunellidae (Accentors)								
136	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		▪		▪		
Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)								
137	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				▪		
138	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		▪	▪			
139	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			▪			
140	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>						
Fringillidae (Finches)								
141	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		▪	▪	▪		
142	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>				▪		
143	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		▪				

#	Common Name	Scientific name		24	25	26		Comments
144	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>						
145	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		▪				
146	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>						
147	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		▪	▪			
148	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		▪		▪		
149	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>				▪		
150	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		▪	▪	▪		
151	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		▪		▪		
Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)								
152	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>						
153	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		▪				
154	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				▪		
155	Snow Bunting	<i>Plectrophenax nivalis</i>						
#	Additional species			24	25	26		Comments
1	Alpine Swift				▪			
2	Water Pipit				▪			
3	Long-billed Dowitcher				▪			
4	Mandarin					▪		
5	Raven					▪		