



TOUR REPORT
NORFOLK BRECKLAND & COASTAL
3rd – 6th MARCH 2024

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MONDAY 4TH MARCH – *Calm day with sunny spells, 7C*

A superb day of Breckland birding today as we headed to a number of sites within a short striking distance of our Mundford base, seeing essentially all the forest specialities in a day (notwithstanding the flooded-out woodpecker site at Santon Downham!). Our first port of call was only two minutes away at Lynford arboretum and we thought an early morning visit there on a Monday would be nice and peaceful and great for seeing woodland passerines – wrong! A massive forestry operation involving lots of chainsaws, diggers and dumper trucks was going on about 20yds from the gate looking down the ‘tunnel’ and so activity there was understandably low – though we did have good views of several smart **Bramblings**. It was a stunning morning though so we left the noise behind and wandered further down towards the bridge. We soon heard the sharp penetrating call of a **Hawfinch** and spotted it flying in to the top of a deciduous tree left of the path. A quick scope view and then it was gone, but we did manage a few more sketchy sightings of it deeper into the wood. The canopy here was full of winter thrushes, clearly getting ready to depart to their breeding grounds as there was lots of calling and singing going on. We saw **Redwing** and **Fieldfare** sat on the same branch, and it was a novelty to watch the latter species singing away! **Marsh Tit**, **Treecreeper** and **Goldcrest** were all seen in the same area too.

The chainsawing seemed to have stopped so we walked back to the gate and a male Hawfinch did come in briefly right at the back, but no-one really managed to see it. We opted to take a circular walk down and around the paddocks next but it was really quite here, the best behind some waterside **Siskins** feeding in the Alder trees along the edge of the lake. With the tunnel area still too disturbed we decided to cut our losses here and make the most of the rest of the morning with some raptor watching a bit further to the north. This proved a good move as the activity level was really high in the sunshine and breeze – in fact over the hour we watched, **Goshawks** were virtually continually on show with a minimum of five and max of probably eight seen! The sky was full of Buzzards too and we could practice picking out the slow, powerful circling of the **Goshawks** with their flat wings and full, rounded tail. We saw a couple of pairs together too, showing the obvious difference in size between the smaller male and the near Buzzard-sized female. A really great show, and we glimpsed two **Crossbills** in flight low behind the watchpoint too!



Crossbill at Mayday Farm, 4th March

Next we headed back south and made a short stop at a roadside cover crop where we hoped we might find the declining **Tree Sparrow**. There were quite a few birds here commuting between the crop and the hedgerow, and we saw Linnets, Goldfinches, **Reed Buntings** and **Yellowhammers**. Eventually we heard the distinctive call of the **Tree Sparrow** and eight flew into land in the hedge along the field margin giving some good scope views. Such a sad state of affairs that this is no longer a bird you can see casually in our countryside without a 'site' for it. Lunchtime now, and for this we headed deeper into the forest and Mayday Farm, south of Brandon and on the Suffolk side of the border. We had a superb walk here, first checking an area of larches for **Redpolls** and getting some lovely close views of them feeding. As we walked back, we put a **Woodlark** up from beside the trail and then had excellent views of it feeding on the ground alongside its partner. These lovely birds brighten up an early spring day in the Brecks for sure! Happy with that, we then had the added bonus of five **Crossbills** on the way back to the car park. They flew in and landed low in some birch trees by a drinking pond and we were able to sneak closer and use the viewing screen to get superb views. One was a full deep red male, and we saw him come down to drink briefly from the pond before rejoining the females in the trees above.



Woodlark

The afternoon was wearing on but we wanted to try next for a **Great Grey Shrike** – a bird which in normal years is an annual visitor to the forest but like so many 'northern' visitors, it has become scarce to the point that there has only been three in the whole country of late. The bird had not been seen all day but thankfully positive news came through just as we parked up on site. Another pleasant walk soon had us watching the bird, along with the one birder who had stayed looking for it after everyone else had given up and gone! Soon a crowd gathered but the **Great Grey Shrike** continued to show really well and we watched it for some while through the scopes as it moved along the edge of a pine plantation. Always an exciting bird to see and there were plenty of other birds around the clearing too such as **Stonechat** and **Fieldfare**.

Finally, we rolled the dice one more time at the end of the day by re-visiting Lynford. The chainsaws had finished and there was distinctly more activity down the tunnel than there had been in the morning, with lots of **Yellowhammers** dropping in to feed at close quarters. We didn't see a Hawfinch, but did have a somewhat unexpected sighting of a **Firecrest** which came in and bathed in the small pond in front of the gate! If we'd had better views of the Hawfinch then it would have been a clean sweep for the day, but thankfully we still had Wednesday to come back and try for them again anyway. Only a short hop back to base then at the end of an excellent day.

TUESDAY 5TH MARCH – *Overcast day with light drizzle, 8C*

A full day on the North Norfolk coast today saw us depart the brecks under grey skies and drizzle and this would remain with us for half the day, but never really getting bad enough for us to get properly wet or to hamper what proved to be a superb day's birding. Holkham was our first port of call and along Lady Anne's Drive we had close views of lots of waterbirds – **Teal, Shoveler, Wigeon, Snipe** and **Black-tailed Godwit**, plus a bonus brace of **Grey Partridges** close to the new horse track on the east side. Heading out into the bay, there was barely a breath of wind so despite the continuing spots of rain it was rather pleasant. We soon found our quarry too, as the often-elusive **Shorelarks** flew into the cordon as soon as we arrived. There was no-one else on the beach and we settled in to watch them, the birds feeding busily and gradually working their way closer towards us so that eventually, they were no more than 10m in front of us. Some of the thirteen birds present are now gaining a rusty flush on the nape and the yellow is intensifying on the face – stunning birds! Offshore, the glass-like North Sea was strewn with scoter, and among the 2000-strong flock of **Common Scoter** we were able to pick out maybe twenty **Velvet Scoters** too.



Shorelark at Holkham, 5th March

Stiffkey next and a stop to see if we could find the wintering Glossy Ibis on the main floods south of the A149 coast road. We couldn't see it today (it was reported later) but the marsh was really good being absolutely full of birds. Hundreds of **Black-tailed Godwits** fed cheek-by-jowl with parties of **Ruff** and large flocks of **Wigeon**. Half a dozen **Avocets** were feeding and there were lots of gorgeous **Pintails** too. A **Great White Egret** stood sentinel at the back, but the ibis remained elusive. We met a couple who had seen the wandering Sea Eagle heading towards Blakeney Point so this swayed our lunch stop option, and we headed down to Morston Quay. We didn't spot the eagle, but a **Greenshank** was in the creek and a few **Brent Geese** were on the marsh. Indeed, we saw a large flock of the latter going inland from here and so decided to have a quick drive round to see if we could locate where they were feeding (thinking of the wintering Red-breasted Goose). We did find the area but it was impossible to access in dead ground well back from the road, so we had to leave them to it.

The clifftop fields at Weybourne have been excellent at late for winter passerines and so we headed there now, to see if we could see some of the scarcer species present. Walking in from the windmill the clifftop stroll was really lovely and peaceful other than for Skylark song, as there was virtually no wind at all. From a good vantage point on the coast path, we got stuck in and the stony field, previously occupied by sugar beet, had a treat in store for us. Hundreds of Linnets, about fifteen **Snow Buntings** (including some superb males), a single **Lapland Bunting**, **Mealy Redpoll** (pink-chested male!) and at least ten **Twite** were all on offer, and good views too as the birds all fed together at the northern edge of the field. A good haul especially since the buntings in particular have been rare this winter.

There was now time for one final roll of the dice as we headed to Warham Greens to see if we could see the wintering **Pallid Harrier** coming to its evening roost. There was a fine mist out over the saltmarsh so the visibility wasn't the best, but the **Pallid Harrier** was showing as soon as we arrived at the north end of Garden Drove! We scoped the bird as it flew east of us and perched on a bush, and had some further flight views of it coming back west a bit later. Two **Hen Harriers** gave closer views (both ringtails), a **Spoonbill** flew by but the absolute star of the show was a cracking **Short-eared Owl** which flew right along the coast path towards us, so close we daren't draw breath as it passed! A great end to the day!

WEDNESDAY 6TH MARCH – *Calm and misty day, 9C*

It was quite foggy this morning as we drive towards Lakenheath Fen on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, around a fifteen minute drive away from our base at Mundford. Thankfully though, the sun was doing its best to burn through and by the end of our walk here, it was warming up and visibility was good. We made the long walk out to Joist Fen this morning, hoping to bump into one or two reedbed specialities to boost our list. There were some lovely **Siskins** and **Reed Buntings** at the Visitor Centre feeders and we had good views of one of several singing **Cetti's Warblers** just along the path towards the first wood. The rest of the walk was quiet until we reached the corner of west wood and here a large flock of **Redwings** were singing up in the trees, and we saw Marsh Harrier and **Great-spotted Woodpecker**. Up at Joist Fen, a small party of **Bearded Tits** showed really well in reeds close to the path and a **Bittern** boomed a few times distantly. We could also hear the loud bugling calls of **Common Cranes** from here, but they remained out of view somewhere towards the railway. A **Water Pipit** was glimpsed among the cut reed from the viewpoint and we heard **Water Rail** calling too. Calling at Mere Hide on the walk back, a **Great Crested Grebe** was preening in front of the hide, but the hoped-for Kingfisher didn't appear on its favoured perch. Finally on the washland, a selection of ducks were seen plus five **Great White Egrets** – one of which was now in full breeding plumage.

We rounded off the tour with another visit to Lynford, as our views of the **Hawfinch** on the first day had not been satisfactory. We set up camp at the gate and this time we were soon rewarded with excellent views of up to three birds, including two superb males. The leaf litter was full of **Brambling** and **Yellowhammer** too, and we capped things off perfectly with good views of a singing **Firecrest** nearby. After a late lunch we headed back to the hotel from here, so folk could get on their way home.



Hawfinch

ORIOLE BIRDING NORFOLK BRECKLAND AND COASTAL MARCH 2024

Species order, names and taxonomy follows - Gill, F and D Donsker (Eds). 2018. IOC World Bird List (v 8.1). <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/>

#	Common Name	Scientific name		4	5	6	
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>			.		

#	Common Name	Scientific name		4	5	6	
34	Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>				H	
35	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			.	.	
36	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			.	.	
<i>Sulidae and Phalacrocoracidae (Gannets, Cormorants and Shags)</i>							
37	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>					
38	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			.	.	
<i>Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)</i>							
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>		.	.	.	
<i>Rallidae (Rails, Coots and allies)</i>							
46	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				H	
47	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			.	.	
48	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				.	
<i>Burhinidae, Recurvirostridae and Charadriidae (Thick-knees, Avocets, Plovers and Allies)</i>							
49	Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</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>					
<i>Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)</i>							
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>			.		
<i>Laridae (Gulls and Terns)</i>							

#	Common Name	Scientific name		4	5	6	
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>		.	.	.	
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>				H	
90	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>					
91	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>				.	
92	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>					
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>Periparus 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)							

#	Common Name	Scientific name		4	5	6	
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>					
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>			H	H	
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>		.		.	
122	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		.			
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>		H	.	.	
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>				H	
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>		.	.		

#	Common Name	Scientific name		4	5	6	
140	Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>					
<i>Fringillidae (Finches)</i>							
141	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		■	■	■	
142	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		■		■	
143	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		■		■	
144	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		■			
145	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		H			
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>		■		■	
<i>Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)</i>							
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			4	5	6	
1	Great White Egret				■		
2	Lapland Bunting				■		
3	Mealy Redpoll				■		
4	Pallid Harrier				■		
5	Water Pipit					■	