



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT EAST YORKSHIRE 23RD – 28TH SEPTEMBER 2018

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SUNDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER – *Fresh North-westerly winds, sunshine following heavy rain, 11C*

Today was perhaps the first time in what feels like months that it actually felt properly chilly out and about, with a real autumnal feel as we embarked on our East Yorkshire autumn migration tour. Having driven through heavy rain as we left Norfolk, it soon dried up once we pushed on into Lincolnshire, with an extensive depression bringing rain further south gradually moving east out to sea. The sun was even shining as we reached our birding stop at Frampton Marsh, and after a quick sandwich it was straight down to the wet grassland by the seawall to look for the lingering **Long-billed Dowitcher**. With the main body of the reserve currently dry as part of the annual habitat management, this area looked the most promising for waders and sure enough we enjoyed good close views of two **Spotted Redshanks**, several **Common Snipe**, just three [!] **Dunlin** and **Black-tailed Godwit** here. Not the usual Frampton wader-fest it has to be said, but the light was excellent and so we kept searching for our main quarry. Eventually a grey shape was spotted moving in and out of the edge of some dense grasses by the edge of a ditch, and it proved to be the **Long-billed Dowitcher** – the bird went on to show really well over the next fifteen minutes or so, often in the company of the **Spotted Redshanks**. As it eventually moved closer, its barred flanks, broad pale fore-supercilium and bright yellowish-green legs could be clearly seen. Not the longest billed **Long-billed Dowitcher** one could hope to see, so thankfully for us the identification had been sorted out before it moulted into non-breeding plumage [which it was now virtually complete in doing]! Three **Yellow Wagtails** were a welcome bonus among the cattle here, and there was a good selection of the usual wildfowl – supplemented by a ‘V’ of **Pink-footed Geese** heading south overhead. Without a huge amount of time on our hands, we just had time then to call in at the reservoir on the way out to look for the **Black-necked Grebe** – we couldn’t find it, but a smart juvenile **Little Stint** was good compensation, and a juvenile **Ruff** was also present. From here it was onwards to our base for the next five nights, in rural East Yorkshire midway between the birding hotspots of Spurn and Flamborough. Despite the persistent westerlies forecast over the coming days, we were still hopeful of a successful week – it is Spurn after all!



Long-billed Dowitcher – showing well at Frampton this afternoon

MONDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER – *A fine and sunny day in light North-west winds, 14C*

Today was something of a slow burner, but when it did eventually get going, it was a good one! We headed down to the Spurn area to spend the whole day checking as many spots as possible for migrants, while hopefully also enjoying some passage over both land and sea. We started with a seawatch for an hour or so off the Bluebell, and it was quickly apparent that while there wasn't a great deal of movement, it was also very distant. Nevertheless a steady trickle of **Red-throated Divers** south numbered about a dozen, and we also noted two **Great Skuas**, two small skua sp, two **Sandwich Terns**, a handful of **Common Teal** and a **Sparrowhawk** heading north up the beach. A **Peregrine** was also noted, way out to sea above the distant wind turbines, no doubt looking to pick off passing migrant ducks or waders. Next we doubled back to Kilnsea Wetlands, and as we sorted out our gear in the car park, a superb **Merlin** came over and began to harry two **Skylarks**. Both the larks and the falcon were desperately trying to get above each other, the larks eventually winning out and the Merlin breaking off and heading off towards the listening dish. On the wetlands, we saw a couple of **Pintail** and **Shoveler** among the throng of **Teal**, plus three **Dunlin** and a **Ringed Plover**. The **Merlin** appeared again, and gave a really great view as it passed close to us over the fields, much to the annoyance of a big flock of **Starlings** nearby. A small crop strip of quinoa near the listening dish was proving attractive to many **Reed Buntings**, with twenty or so moving in and out of the hedge in the sunshine – no doubt this will attract something rarer at some point during the autumn! Back at the car park we had a coffee, before driving down to The Warren ready for a circuitous walk around The Triangle.

Heading north up the canal bank, a **Yellow Wagtail** was on the path and a nice flock of **Golden Plover** were resting on the mudflats of the Humber. Visible migration was just not happening today, so we concentrated on checking the bushes and fencelines for anything that might have sneaked through on the north-westerly winds. Two nice **Whinchats** were feeding with a couple of male **Stonechats** for company, and we also had excellent views of two **Whimbrel** along the saltmarsh edge. Close views revealed one to be a dark, scruffy looking moulting adult, while the other was a pristine juvenile with beautifully marked plumage. Little else was seen as we checked **Cliff Farm**, the **Crown & Anchor** car park and the churchyard, and the sun was now really warm – we paused to watch a couple of **Migrant Hawker** dragonflies which were showing very nicely along the warm, sheltered hedgerow. As we wandered back towards the Bluebell, it felt as though the day was grinding to a halt, but hope was reinstalled as two small thrushes came out of the hedge and flew west with a drawn out 'seeee' call – they were our first **Redwings** of autumn, newly arrived from Scandinavia. An adult **Mediterranean Gull** then floated over, catching flies above the field just west of the caravan park. Buoyed by this, we continued on back to the van, and lunched in the sunshine [in the company of the same Med Gull again], before popping into the Canal Scrape Hide – nothing more than a **Reed Warbler** and four **Common Snipe** here, but a small skein of **Pink-footed Geese** passed over high south on their way to Norfolk.

Our plan next was to pop up to the cliff behind The Warren and have another look at the sea, but one of the local birders stopped by and told us there was now a **Yellow-browed Warbler** in the sycamores there – the first here this autumn. So our plan changed and we went to stand quietly along the sunny edge of the small clump of trees by the Heligoland trap to see if the warbler would show. After about half an hour, just a couple of the group had glimpsed the bird, which was proving very elusive. Just as we were about to give up and move on, a medium sized grey-brown passerine dropped out from the trees and into the low seeding vegetation where it paused briefly in the open, sporting two distinct pale wing bars – it was a juvenile **Common Rosefinch**! We alerted the other birders close by, and soon about twenty birders were also enjoying a good view as the **Rosefinch** remained faithful to a small patch of greenery beneath the sycamores. Occasionally it would fly into the mouth of the trap to drink from the trough there, and then back up into the trees before dropping in to its favoured feeding spot again. We watched it on and off for a further half an hour, during which time the **Yellow-browed Warbler** also popped out in the sunshine for a good view – a lovely fresh, bright bird! Amazingly, as we stood watching the **Rosefinch**, a second bird dropped in from the south and perched in the treetops – another one! Eventually this bird worked its way down through the

shrubbery and joined the first bird, and we had them both in the scope together. A rare sight indeed to see multiple Rosefinches away from the Northern Isles these days.



Common Rosefinch – one of two juveniles at Spurn this afternoon

Heading back to the van for a brew, the tide was now racing in across the Humber and we wanted to have a scan through the advancing flocks of waders. Big numbers of mainly Knot and Grey Plover were off The Warren, along with plenty of Dunlin, single Sanderling and Bar-tailed Godwit and a few Golden Plover. It was now gone 5pm though, and we wanted to check Kilnsea Wetlands one more time on our way out, as many waders would now be pushed on there by the tide. Several hundred Common Redshank were there, as well as single **Common Greenshank**, but nothing more. Gull numbers were building though as the evening drew in, and we picked four first-winter **Mediterranean Gulls** out among them. Back at the car park, we scanned the fields to the east as there were a hundred or more Curlew now roosting here – our day was wrapped up nicely as a fine **Short-eared Owl** floated into view behind them, and across the fields with the evening sun glowing through its wings. It may have been an unpromising day's forecast, but when you are at Spurn, you *always* have the chance of a great day!

TUESDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER – *Sunny day in fresh westerly winds, 15C*

A very quiet day today as the westerly winds continue and hamper the chances of any new birds arriving on the east coast – with even Shetland struggling to produce any birds, the rest of us really are up against it! We headed north to Flamborough today, and as yesterday we started the day with a seawatch from the headland by the foghorn. Unlike the previous day at Spurn [and due to both the geographic position of the head and its location relative to the breeding seabird cliffs nearby] there were lots more seabirds 'milling' about offshore even though there wasn't a great deal of obvious

passage going on. Most birds [notably the Gannets] were actually heading north, presumably re-orientating themselves after the strong northerlies on Sunday. We gave it an hour, and saw a nice selection of species – twenty or so **Red-throated Divers**, a few **Razorbills** and **Kittiwakes**, and two flocks of **Common Scoter** heading north. A **Great Skua** was a highlight passing close inshore, and we also noted six **Manx Shearwaters**. **Shag** and **Sandwich Tern** were among other species noted, before we packed in and headed off on a circular walk around the head. In the sunshine and stiff westerly breeze, we managed to complete a two hour circuit without seeing a single migrant passerine – hard work indeed! In fact there was barely anything to note at all, until we reached the Old Fall steps and had a scan across towards Northcliff marsh – a juvenile **Hen Harrier** was cruising in against the wind over the distant fields, pursued by a couple of corvids. Back at the car park, we had a coffee before planning our next move.

The small marsh at Thornwick was only a short detour, so we decided to have a quick check there. Nothing other than two **Common Snipe** and the odd **Teal**, so we thought we may as well take a drive a bit further north to Filey and check the Dams reserve. We had lunch here, then visited the two hides – slim pickings again, with just a **Stock Dove**, **Sparrowhawk** and three **Lapwing** of any real note! **Teal**, **Gadwall** and **Wigeon** were also present, and a couple of **Grey Herons**. What to do next? **Hornsea Mere** had produced a few interesting sightings in recent days, so we decided to call there on our way back to base. From **Kirkholme Point**, we did OK – a single **Whooper Swan**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Greenshank** and distant views of a **Great White Egret** against the reeds on the far side of the lake. A big improvement! Moving around to the south side, we took a walk along through the fields so we could view the mere in better light – a female type **Greater Scaup** was added, and more views of the various wildfowl, **Great Crested Grebes** and a dozen nice **Pintail**. Despite looking hard, we couldn't find the recently reported **Red-necked Grebe**. A **Marsh Harrier** greeted us back at **West Carlton** as we arrived – it had been a trying day!

WEDNESDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER – *Sunshine and moderate westerly winds, 19C*

A tough day today as the fine weather and westerly winds continue to persist, leaving the bushes devoid of grounded migrants and visible passage both over land and sea virtually non-existent. We returned to **Spurn** hoping that we could eke something out of the day, and we enjoyed some nice walks and didn't get wet! **Kilnsea Wetlands** would be our first port of call, as the tide was now dropping off but we knew there would still be a fair few birds roosting here. A couple of hundred **Redshank** were on the pools, and we also picked up two **Bar-tailed** and a single **Black-tailed Godwit** together – initially in flight over the lagoon and then settled among the wildfowl at the back. A few **Dunlin** were also present, and there was an increase in **Mediterranean Gulls** with at least fifteen present, mainly first-winters. Two **Yellow Wagtails** were a highlight, feeding in among the sheep, and six **Pink-footed Geese** flew in low from the North and circled before continuing on their way. Checking **Beacon Ponds**, we didn't add anything else – the roosting **Knot** and **Grey Plover** had now departed and we watched them heading back to **The Humber** in long snaking lines.

Heading round to the **Bluebell**, a quick look at the sea soon showed that nothing was moving over the flat calm water, so we embarked on the circular walk around **Kew** and the **Triangle** to see what else we could find. A few **Golden Plover** were on the **Humber**, and we found our first **Turnstones** of the trip here too, but there was no sign of any chats along the fencelines by **Clubley's Field** today. Pausing to scan back across the fields towards **Rose Cottage**, we picked up a chunky passerine flying out from **Kew** and heading off towards **Corner Field** – it was a **Hawfinch**, which had first appeared on Monday and tuned up in a mist net the next morning. Thankfully it circled round a few times, allowing everyone to see it, before it dropped into one of the gardens. We carried on south to **The Warren**, but the trees there were much quieter today with no sign of either of the **Rosefinches** – **Painted Lady** and **Small Copper** were noted though! We decided to head back along the clifftop, and enjoyed the views from this slightly raised vantage point. A handful of waders were feeding on the beach on the ebbing tide, and these included a single **Sanderling** and a nice **Purple Sandpiper**. The excellent views we had of this bird feeding among the **Ringed Plovers** made it the highlight of the day.

After lunch we returned to check the Canal Scrape, where two Common Snipe, Little Egret and close studies of several Little Grebe were had, before we returned to the Bluebell and wandered along the road to Kew to just check the churchyard area again in case the Hawfinch was about. We didn't find it, and had to make do with another seventy Pink-footed Geese heading low south. **Mediterranean Gulls** are a frequent sight these days around Spurn, and in fact they almost seemed to be the most regular flyover gull during our walks – the striking first-winters being particularly prevalent with their bold black leading edge to the wing and bandit mask. With the day running out of sensible options, we decided to check Sammy's Point paddocks as we had not been there yet – a **Marsh Harrier** quartering was about the highlight. Frustratingly, we then learned that a Jack Snipe had been photographed at Canal Scrape, where we had just been an hour before! With little else on the cards we opted to head back and look for it, but despite Ashley getting a glimpse of it bobbing among the cut reeds at the back, no-one else really got a proper view. The Common Snipe were showing very well, now increased to four, and an adult **Water Rail** popped out into the open to provide some compensation. From here it was back to base – things could only get better!

THURSDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER – *Fresh westerly winds and sunshine, 20C*

A better day today as we went a bit off piste and crossed The Humber back into Lincolnshire to spend the morning at the excellent Alkborough Flats reserve. As we crossed the bridge it soon became apparent that a bit of a movement of **Pink-footed Geese** was taking place, as we passed a stubble field full and then soon saw other small flock as we headed west along the south bank of the Humber. Stopping by Read's Island, we could overlook the channel on the ebbing tide where large concentrations of birds could be seen. Another big flock of Pink-feet were resting here, and another 1500 or so came up from distant fields and flew in right over our heads – a great sight! On the mudflats here were many hundreds of Common Teal and also **Avocets** which were present in staggering numbers – perhaps a thousand birds or more. A few Dunlin, **Marsh Harrier**, **Pintail** and large numbers of Redshank were also noted at this productive spot, with a great view back to the Humber Bridge too! Moving on to Alkborough, it felt really warm in the autumn sunshine by the shelter of the car park, and this was backed up with a signing **Cetti's Warbler**, and our first group of **Bearded Tits** 'pinging' away as they towered up out of the reedbed, a typical feature of reedbed sites on sunny autumn days. This species would become a feature and highlight of the morning, as we had great views of a male just before Prospect Hide, and then more fantastic views of erupting little groups in the reeds adjacent to the hide. The light was fantastic here and we enjoyed a Little Egret fishing right outside the hide, and roosting ranks of Redshank and Shoveler on the lagoon. Among these we picked out three **Ruff**, eleven **Spotted Redshank** and a single **Greenshank**, while a lone adult **Eurasian Spoonbill** was a nice bonus too. Our walk along to the tower hide was less productive, though we did randomly note two **Common Crossbills** heading south calling and get some great close views of **Marsh Harriers**. From the hide, we could see across to Blacktoft Sands in the distance, and back to the confluence of the Rivers Trent and Ouse. Pink-footed Geese were still very much in evidence in the distance, too.

Around an hour's drive back over the bridge and north past Beverley took us to our stop for the afternoon at Tophill Low reserve. We lunched in the warm sunshine in the car park, before heading down to the south end of the reserve. South Marsh East was full of Teal, but little else – a single Greenshank being the only wader of note. Watton NR was similarly full of duck, including our first Common Pochards of the trip, but other wise the various common butterflies and Migrant Hawks noted were the highlight. The north end of the reserve was a bit more lively, with many hundreds of Coots and Tufted Ducks on 'D' Reservoir giving us something to scan through. We picked out a fine drake **Greater Scaup**, and an adult **Yellow-legged Gull** dropped in to the pre-roost. Another small gathering of Pink-footed Geese, a couple of **Grey Wagtails**, Goldcrest and a few Great Crested Grebes were also noted. Back to base, and some of the group saw a **Little Owl** around the farmyard at dusk just as we were getting ready to head out for dinner. With the wind swinging round to the north and a bit of cloud and rain in the air, we hoped for a more productive morning tomorrow at Spurn for our last day of the tour.



Bearded Tits put on a great show at Alkborough today

FRIDAY 28TH SEPTEMBER – *Light Northerly winds and sunshine, 15C*

Having rearranged our days to leave this morning free in case of an improvement in the weather, we headed back to Spurn with at least a sniff of a prospect of some birds arriving in the now northerly airflow along the east coast. With low pressure still at large over Scandinavia though, the big problem was that birds simply weren't leaving the continent and again we experienced a quiet final morning. Starting with a seawatch from the Bluebell, there were some seabirds moving but everything was extremely distant in the light winds – several **Common Scoter**, **Red-throated Diver**, a **Razorbill**, three **Manx Shearwaters** and the odd Gannet, plus three **Great Skuas** which were heading south distantly through the windfarm. The highlight though was a **Sooty Shearwater**, heading North with two juvenile Gannets and providing a nice comparison with the size of the latter, and also its more elastic, strident wing beats compared with the stiff-winged and faster flapping Manx seen earlier. Two Stonechats were by the car park, and we saw another five along Beacon Lane, suggesting a small arrival of this species – though we still couldn't find a Wheatear! We had a coffee and then headed west along the road towards Kew, checking Corner Field and the churchyard on the way along but again failing to note a single passerine migrant. The Humber itself was a bit more lively, with lots of Redshank, Dunlin, Knot, Sanderling and Grey Plover on show, plus a Rock Pipit along the shore and the two **Whimbrel** again in the saltmarsh grass by the tank traps. A further three Stonechats were in the triangle, but that was about it – we checked Canal Scrape again too, but there

was no sign of the Jack Snipe from two days previously. Lunch back at the Bluebell wrapped up our trip, and we went our separate ways around 1.30pm.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Greylag Goose
2. Pink-footed Goose
3. Barnacle Goose
4. Canada Goose
5. Mute Swan
6. Whooper Swan
7. Common Shelduck
8. Northern Shoveler
9. Gadwall
10. Eurasian Wigeon
11. Mallard
12. Northern Pintail
13. Eurasian Teal
14. Common Pochard
15. Tufted Duck
16. Greater Scaup
17. Common Scoter
18. Common Goldeneye
19. Red-legged Partridge
20. Common Pheasant
21. Red-throated Diver
22. Little Grebe
23. Great Crested Grebe
24. Sooty Shearwater
25. Manx Shearwater
26. Northern Gannet
27. Great Cormorant
28. European Shag
29. Grey Heron
30. Little Egret
31. Great White Egret
32. Eurasian Spoonbill
33. Western Marsh Harrier
34. Hen Harrier
35. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
36. Red Kite
37. Common Buzzard
38. Water Rail
39. Common Moorhen
40. Eurasian Coot
41. Pied Avocet
42. Eurasian Oystercatcher
43. Grey Plover
44. European Golden Plover
45. Northern Lapwing
46. Common Ringed Plover
47. Whimbrel
48. Eurasian Curlew
49. Bar-tailed Godwit
50. Black-tailed Godwit

51. Ruddy Turnstone
52. Red Knot
53. Ruff
54. Sanderling
55. Dunlin
56. Purple Sandpiper
57. Little Stint
58. Common Snipe
59. Long-billed Dowitcher
60. Common Sandpiper
61. Spotted Redshank
62. Common Greenshank
63. Common Redshank
64. Great Skua
65. Razorbill
66. Black-legged Kittiwake
67. Black-headed Gull
68. Mediterranean Gull
69. Common Gull
70. Herring Gull
71. Yellow-legged Gull
72. Lesser Black-backed Gull
73. Great Black-backed Gull
74. Common Tern
75. Sandwich Tern
76. Stock Dove
77. Woodpigeon
78. Collared Dove
79. Little Owl
80. Tawny Owl [H]
81. Short-eared Owl
82. Great-spotted Woodpecker
83. Common Kestrel
84. Merlin
85. Peregrine
86. Eurasian Jay
87. Common Magpie
88. Eurasian Jackdaw
89. Rook
90. Carrion Crow
91. Eurasian Skylark
92. Barn Swallow
93. Common House Martin
94. Coal Tit
95. Eurasian Blue Tit
96. Great Tit
97. Long-tailed Tit
98. Bearded Tit
99. Eurasian Nuthatch [H]
100. Eurasian Treecreeper [H]
101. Eurasian Wren
102. Goldcrest
103. Cetti's Warbler
104. Common Chiffchaff
105. Yellow-browed Warbler

- 106. Eurasian Reed Warbler
- 107. Eurasian Blackcap [H]
- 108. European Robin
- 109. Whinchat
- 110. European Stonechat
- 111. Eurasian Blackbird
- 112. Redwing
- 113. Song Thrush
- 114. Mistle Thrush
- 115. Common Starling
- 116. Dunnock
- 117. Western Yellow Wagtail
- 118. Grey Wagtail
- 119. Pied Wagtail
- 120. Meadow Pipit
- 121. Rock Pipit
- 122. Common Reed Bunting
- 123. Common Chaffinch
- 124. European Greenfinch
- 125. Common Linnet
- 126. European Goldfinch
- 127. Hawfinch
- 128. Eurasian Siskin [H]
- 129. Common Crossbill
- 130. Common Rosefinch
- 131. House Sparrow
- 132. Eurasian Tree Sparrow