



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT NORFOLK BUTTERFLIES & DRAGONFLIES 16TH – 19TH JULY 2018

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TUESDAY 17TH JULY – Overcast giving way to sunny spells, 22C

A cooler day today after the recent heatwave, which meant the day started a bit slowly, but built up to be an absolute cracker! We headed straight to Holt Country Park, where butterfly activity was decidedly low under the heavy cloud – just the odd Ringlet and Meadow Brown on the wing along the woodland rides. We decided to head out onto the heath, to search for **Keeled Skimmer**, which we were fairly confident we could find among the heather and gorse despite the weather. There were lots of Gatekeeper out and about, and we managed to find one female **Keeled Skimmer** which showed well. Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard and **Red Kite** were all seen over the woodland, and we also saw some nice patches of Round-leaved Sundew. Back in the woods, there was a distinct rise in the temperature, and this was instantly met with our first sighting of a superb male **Silver-washed Fritillary** which floated down and landed in front of us. Further along the track towards the car park, we saw two or three more, plus an obliging **White Admiral**, gliding along in typical fashion. The highlight though was a brief but clear sighting of a *valezina* **Silver-washed Fritillary**, the so called 'greenish' form. Back at the car park, we added Large, Small and Green-veined Whites, Red Admiral, Holly Blue, **Purple Haristreak** [high among the oaks!] and two more **Silver-washed Fritillaries**. Throw in a singing Firecrest, and we had not had a bad morning so far!

Onto the nearby heaths after coffee break, and with the sun now taking hold we had high hopes of some more butterfly activity. Just around the car park, we had another **Silver-washed Fritillary**, and then onto the heath itself we began to find our first Silver-studded Blue Butterflies, Small Skipper and a nice example of **Essex Skipper** too. We were keen to head straight to a good spot for **Grayling**, and we were lucky to find one almost right away, posing nicely on a bare patch of earth among the heather. Several more **Silver-studded Blues** were also noted, including a surprisingly fresh looking male, and we had some nice views of Yellowhammer, Linnet and Stonechat. A soft, fluted call alerted us to the presence of a **Woodlark** close by, and with patience we located it, typically being much closer to us than we first thought! Eventually it showed really well, foraging quietly among the heather and occasionally popping out into full view. Taking a long route back to the car park, we added **Southern Hawker**, and then finally a singing male **Dartford Warbler**, foraging for a calling and unseen youngster. The bird only showed briefly, but was pretty vocal – a new species for some of the group.



Lesser Yellowlegs at Titchwell – a star performer today!

Our afternoon would be spent birding, with the plan to head across to Titchwell and try to see the **Lesser Yellowlegs** which had been present there for the last few days. En route, we made a quick stop at Wells church to check in on the regular roosting adult male **Peregrine**, which was sitting up on its favoured perch on the gargoyle on the east face of the tower. A wing stretch and it was off though, heading inland and out of view, so we were lucky to connect with it. Reaching Titchwell, we had a cuppa in the car park, noting a **Purple Hairstreak** around the oaks there, before making haste to the freshmarsh where the 'legs' had reportedly just dropped back in after a few hours absence. The reserve was absolutely bustling with birds today, and you could barely prick a pin on the freshmarsh for gulls, wildfowl and waders. The **Lesser Yellowlegs** was feeding along the exposed mud by the reed edge, among **Ruff**, **Black-tailed Godwit** and a brace of **Spotted Redshanks**, but soon flew closer and ended up on the oozing mud right by the West Bank path just a few metres away from us. The assembled throng of waders included a couple of hundred gorgeous **Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits**, several **Ruff** including at least one full plumaged male [the rest already being well into their moult] and a delightful leucistic **Little-ringed Plover**, being almost entirely white apart from of course its distinctive yellow eye ring! Four **Dunlin**, a bathing **Whimbrel**, first-summer **Little Gull**, two each of **Pink-footed Goose** and **Red Crested Pochard**, and a great showing from juvenile **Bearded Tits** were just some of the other highlights. Gulls are always likely to feature at this time of year, and there were plenty to see today! The thriving **Mediterranean Gull** colony on the reserve means the freshmarsh is currently awash with fresh juveniles, and several could be seen still begging from the gaudy adults. There were at least 100, but we didn't count them – others were reporting having logged nearer 200 in recent days. Another sign of the times, two adult **Eurasian Spoonbills** circled the pool, with another foraging in the deep water at the back and a further four on the tidal pool. While watching the yellowlegs, a report reached us that someone had seen a **Caspian Gull** on one of the islands. We quickly picked up the candidate, but it was fast asleep and not giving too much away. Eventually it woke up, showing a long, slender greenish-yellow bill with black and red subterminal marks, a dark beady eye, white head, spotted neck shawl and solidly dark centred tertials. It was a second-summer, with second generation grey mantle, and it showed very long, yellow-pink legs. A really classic looking individual, we eventually had the best views of it from Parrinder Hide, when it stood up and had a wander around for us. From here, a juvenile **Common Snipe** was also seen, and one of the **Spoonbills** gave us another fly past. It had been a breathless and exciting day, with a full notebook to take home with us, but even then the day was not quite done!



Second-summer Caspian Gull at Titchwell, a lovely, classic individual

After dinner, we ventured out to west Norfolk to make our last **Nightjar** trip of the year. It was a perfect evening, though of course the midges thought so too! We were treated to fantastic views of several **Nightjars**, including at least five churring males, and a particularly good view of a female which buzzed our group before landing on the sandy track in front of us – a great way to sign off the season!

WEDNESDAY 18TH JULY - *A warm day with sunny spells and light winds, 25C*

We planned to spend the whole day down in the Brecks today, starting with a quick look around some of the North brecks pig fields for gathering Stone Curlews which have started to appear in small flocks already. We couldn't find any 'stonies' unfortunately, with lots of agricultural activity going on in the birds favoured fields, but we did have brief views of a stunning fresh juvenile **Yellow-legged Gull**, which was tugging at a dead rabbit in a roadside field. There was only a narrow gap in the hedge where the bird was visible, so we had to get out in order for everyone to see – predictably for a timid large gull this didn't work out and the bird flew off strongly and was lost to view. Nevertheless everyone was able to see its dark upperpart plumage, big chunky bill, dark eye patch, dark centred tertials with marbled tips, lack of a primary window and white tail with striking black terminal band. We spent some more time searching for our main quarry without success, and so pressed on to Lakenheath Fen, which would be our main site for the rest of the morning.



Small Red-eyed Damselfly at Lakenheath Fen

It was already hotting up as we wandered down the path towards New Fen, but we wanted to get down to Mere Hide in order to try and see the family of Bitterns which had been showing really well there in recent days. The plan was then to work our way slowly back, enjoying the various odonata as we went. Arriving at the hide, we were greeted with the news that the Bitterns had just flown off! Anyway, we enjoyed superb views of **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** right outside the hide, Emperor,

Four-spotted Chaser and Black-tailed Skimmer. We were also able to observe the feeding activities of several species of fish, including Rudd, Perch and a fine Pike! Realising we weren't going to see a Bittern from here, we headed back towards New Fen, stopping to scan by the corner of West Wood. A cacophony of noise coming from a big sallow couldn't immediately be placed, but we thought it sounded a best fit for a fledged family of **Kingfishers** – with that the adult flew out of the tree, confirming our suspicions that there was a concealed bunch of youngsters somewhere within! A young **Water Rail** then appeared, preening at the edge of the reeds in the sunshine, and then just behind us, a **Bittern** flew low over the path and away across the reeds – a crazy few moments! Not long afterwards, another **Bittern** appeared, flying in high from the west. It was a familiar bird we had been observing for the whole year, with a dangling leg, and it flew slowly right over us before dropping down into the reeds – a truly awesome view! A **Hobby** also appeared briefly over the poplars, meaning we had now seen all our bird targets for the site, and could get to work on the dragonflies! The walk back along the ditch towards New Fen was alive with dragonflies, mainly **Brown Hawker** and **Southern Hawker**, both of which settled for amazing views. Ruddy Darter was also extremely common, and we saw a few butterflies too – Small Copper, Brimstone, Peacock and Painted Lady.



Bittern at Lakenheath – the regular bird with dangling leg!

A break at the viewpoint was necessary to take some shade, a drink of water and a bit of a breather before pressing on. This few moments provided one of the days highlights, as we discovered a female **Willow Emerald Damselfly** newly emerged and hanging in the reeds just in front of the shelter. This species is only a recent UK colonist, and this was an Oriole first on a UK tour – quite unexpected indeed! Continuing out to the river bank path, we scanned the small pool by the River Little Ouse and found a female **Garganey** sitting on the water right in front of us! A second bird took flight and headed off, showing prominent blue forewing coverts, so clearly and eclipse drake. A bit further on, we found Banded Demoiselle to be common on the river, and had a reeling **Grasshopper Warbler** which was found settled in the crown of an umbellifer and available for scope views. **Brown Argus** was the main butterfly of note here, basking among the flowering thistles, and a Painted Lady was also very popular with those taking photos, being a freshly emerged specimen. The main washland is now very low in water, with plenty of exposed mud around its fringed. This means it is unusually

goof for passage waders and we saw a **Greenshank**, five **Green Sandpipers**, **Avocet**, 30 **Black-tailed Godwits** and numerous **Little Egrets**. Best of all though, a fledged young **Cuckoo** was perched on a fence post at the edge of the river, perhaps still waiting for its **Reed Warbler** host to return to feed it!

Our afternoon would be devoted largely to damselflies, with a couple of rare species still to look for. The glacial pingoes at Thompson Common were therefore our next stop, and after a short impromptu pull-over to rescue a fledgling **Blackcap** from the middle of the road near West Tofts, we reached the small car park where the Pingo Trail begins near Stow Bedon. The woodland section of the walk is always mosquito-ridden, and we had to make particular haste today to avoid their advances, which some of us achieved and others did not! Once out in the open on the common though, we were safe and able to get to work on separating the two speciality damselflies – **Emerald** and **Scarce Emerald**. Males and females of both species were seen very well, and we also noted more **Brown Hawker**, **Ruddy Darter** and **Emperor**. Butterflies here included a photogenic **Painted Lady**, **Small Skipper** and **Small Copper**, while both **Marsh Tit** and **Garden Warbler** were also noted. Finally we ended the day by pressing on up to central Norfolk, to visit a small reserve where the **Small Red Damselfly** occurs. This species finds its only Norfolk outpost here, though sadly today we found that the recent hot weather had seen it through its annual cycle and for the first time ever we couldn't find any on the wing. Botanical interest here though included some superb spikes of **Fragrant Orchid**, and some very nice **Marsh Helleborine**. Common **Spotted** and **Pyramidal Orchids** were also seen, as well as several other interesting species of marsh plants. It was a weary crew which returned to base around 6pm, with another very full notebook after a great day of varied wildlife watching in the Brecks.

THURSDAY 19TH JULY – *Sunny spells in fresher east breeze, 23C*

A bugging day to finish the tour saw us heading across to Roydon Common in West Norfolk to try our luck with **Black Darter** and other odonata. Walking out across the heath, we saw several **Keeled Skimmers** including our first sightings of mature males, and on reaching the main pool we were pleased to find that at least it still held plenty of water! Being so early in the emergence period for **Black Darter**, we didn't expect to find any mature males, but instead knew the tactic would be to wander slowly around through the heather and bracken looking for immatures and trying to separate them from the similar looking **Ruddy Darter**, which was common! Eventually we found a couple of immature **Black Darters**, and everyone had a chance for a good look at the salient features. **Emerald Damselfly** was really common, and both **Emperor** and **Four-spotted Chaser** were over the water. More exciting though, was our second **Willow Emerald Damselfly** in two days, and this one a male. We believe this to be the first record for the site, so quite a significant sighting. On our way back to the car park, we enjoyed a bush full of migrant warblers with **Blackcap**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, two **Garden Warblers** and at least three **Willow Warblers** including two lovely lemon yellow juveniles. Nice!

No bug-hunting trip in Norfolk would be complete without a visit to Holkham Meads on the North Norfolk Coast, and so we made our way up there for a couple of hours wandering through the pine woods and dunes to round off the tour. It was quite overcast for the most part, so butterfly activity was quite low, and we had to concentrate on the bramble blossom and Hemp Agrimony flowers to see what we could find. **Comma**, **Painted Lady**, **Peacock**, **Red Admiral**, **Holly Blue**, **Essex Skipper**, **Small Skipper** and lots of **Ruddy Darter** were noted, the latter apparently having an excellent season. Having seen a few more **Purple Hairstreaks** dancing around the tops of the oaks [another species booming this year] we eventually found one nectaring at the agrimony blossoms and had fantastic photographic opportunities. Great views of fledged young **Goldcrests** and **Common Chiffchaffs** being fed by their parents, and a brace of **Green Woodpeckers**, were also noteworthy. Reaching the cross tracks, we headed north out onto the dunes, where the sun came out and brought everything briefly to life. This included two female **Dark Green Fritillaries**, which gave some superb views feeding on the thistle flowers. **Common Blue** and **Small Heath** were also final additions to the list, and there was a good opportunity to see a variety of specialised plants such as **Sea Spurge**, **Sea Spurrey**, **Sea Holly** and three species of sea lavender. **Marsh Helleborine**, **Southern Marsh**, **Pyramidal** and **Common Spotted Orchids** were also plentiful. The wander back through the dunes in the sunshine took us

past the bay, where the sea lavender was in full bloom and offering a spectacular purple wash. We concluded the tour around 4pm, and headed back to Great Ryburgh.



Purple Hairstreak – ‘on the deck’ at last after lots of fleeting glimpses!

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Little Grebe
2. Great Crested Grebe
3. Great Cormorant
4. Grey Heron
5. Great Bittern
6. Little Egret
7. Eurasian Spoonbill
8. Mute Swan
9. Greylag Goose
10. Canada Goose
11. Egyptian Goose
12. Pink-footed Goose
13. Common Shelduck
14. Mallard
15. Common Teal
16. Garganey
17. Gadwall
18. Northern Shoveler
19. Red Crested Pochard
20. Red-legged Partridge

21. Common Pheasant
22. Common Kestrel
23. Eurasian Hobby
24. Peregrine
25. Marsh Harrier
26. Common Buzzard
27. Red Kite
28. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
29. Common Moorhen
30. Common Coot
31. Pied Avocet
32. European Oystercatcher
33. Little-ringed Plover
34. Northern Lapwing
35. Common Redshank
36. Common Greenshank
37. Spotted Redshank
38. Green Sandpiper
39. Lesser Yellowlegs
40. Eurasian Curlew
41. Whimbrel
42. Black-tailed Godwit
43. Dunlin
44. Ruff
45. Common Snipe
46. Black-headed Gull
47. Common Gull
48. Herring Gull
49. Lesser Black-backed Gull
50. Great Black-backed Gull
51. Little Gull
52. Mediterranean Gull
53. Yellow-legged Gull
54. Caspian Gull
55. Sandwich Tern
56. Common Tern
57. Woodpigeon
58. Collared Dove
59. Stock Dove
60. Common Kingfisher
61. Green Woodpecker
62. Barn Owl
63. Little Owl
64. Common Swift
65. Common Cuckoo
66. European Nightjar
67. Skylark
68. Woodlark
69. Pied Wagtail
70. Barn Swallow
71. House Martin
72. Sand Martin
73. Wren
74. European Robin
75. Common Stonechat

76. Dunnock
77. Common Blackbird
78. Mistle Thrush
79. Cetti's Warbler [H]
80. Sedge Warbler
81. Reed Warbler
82. Grasshopper Warbler
83. Blackcap
84. Garden Warbler
85. Common Chiffchaff
86. Willow Warbler
87. Common Whitethroat
88. Lesser Whitethroat
89. Dartford Warbler
90. Goldcrest
91. Firecrest [H]
92. Blue Tit
93. Great Tit
94. Coal Tit
95. Long-tailed Tit
96. Marsh Tit
97. Bearded Tit
98. Common Treecreeper
99. European Nuthatch
100. Rook
101. Carrion Crow
102. Western Jackdaw
103. Common Magpie
104. Eurasian Jay
105. Common Starling
106. House Sparrow
107. Chaffinch
108. Goldfinch
109. Common Linnet
110. Bullfinch
111. Eurasian Siskin
112. Reed Bunting
113. Yellowhammer

Butterflies

1. Large White
2. Small White
3. Green-veined White
4. Brimstone
5. Meadow Brown
6. Ringlet
7. Gatekeeper
8. Speckled Wood
9. Comma
10. Peacock
11. Red Admiral
12. White Admiral
13. Small Tortoiseshell
14. Painted Lady

15. Grayling
16. Silver-washed Fritillary
17. Dark Green Fritillary
18. Small Heath
19. Small Copper
20. Common Blue
21. Silver-studded Blue
22. Holly Blue
23. Brown Argus
24. Purple Hairstreak
25. Small Skipper
26. Large Skipper
27. Essex Skipper

Odonata

1. Common Blue Damselfly
2. Azure Damselfly
3. Blue-tailed Damselfly
4. Red-eyed Damselfly
5. Small Red-eyed Damselfly
6. Emerald Damselfly
7. Scarce Emerald Damselfly
8. Willow Emerald Damselfly
9. Banded Demoiselle
10. Four-spotted Chaser
11. Black-tailed Skimmer
12. Keeled Skimmer
13. Common Darter
14. Ruddy Darter
15. Black Darter
16. Emperor
17. Southern Hawker
18. Brown Hawker
19. Migrant Hawker