



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT NORFOLK LATE AUTUMN 27TH OCTOBER – 1ST NOVEMBER 2019

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MONDAY 28TH OCTOBER – Moderate NW-NE winds, showers and sunny spells, 10C

A good variety of species were recorded on tour today, as we headed down to the coast to start the trip with a seawatch from Cley coastguards. The wind was supposed to be quite fresh from the north with squalls, but it was actually flat calm when we arrived at the beach – very pleasant in fact! This soon changed as the first shower came in off the sea, and the wind whipped up from nowhere. Large auks were moving in numbers (passage of **Guillemot** and **Razorbill** has recently been very good) and we saw several mixed groups passing mainly east offshore, with some birds close in on the water. Most other species were moving west, and this included several Gannets, mainly juveniles, passing close in to the beach. Mixed wildfowl, such as Wigeon, **Pintail** and **Brent Geese**, were also in evidence, and **Common Scoters** were moving in good numbers with several good sized flocks of mainly young birds passing close inshore. Other highlights included a single **Puffin** hurrying west, two adult **Kittiwakes**, a female **Red-breasted Merganser**, numerous **Red-throated Divers** (close in) and six **Goldeneye**. Starlings and Skylarks, two classic late autumn ‘vis mig’ species, were also on the move, and a group of **Golden Plover** were in the Eye Field behind. After a ninety minute seawatch, we headed east along the shingle ridge, picking up a superb **Merlin** which flew west along the Eye Field fence before powering off across **Blakeney** freshes with several bursts of undulations. Behind **North Hide** screen, a **Snow Bunting** came up and flew past us calling, and a **Kingfisher** whizzed across **Main Drain**.

After a coffee and toilet stop at the Visitor Centre, we made for **Walsey Hills**, hoping that the long staying **Yellow-browed Warbler** might still be present. We saw a single **Chiffchaff** and **Goldcrest** in the willows, but that was it. A good sized flock of **Pink-footed Geese** moved along the ridge, and overhead went two **Brambling** and five **Siskin**. **East Bank** next, but there was a lot of water on **Arnold's** after the morning tide and subsequently no waders other than a few **Black-tailed Godwits**. A drake **Pintail** was nice though, and we also picked a **Common Snipe** out. After lunch back at the centre, we decided to head inland for the rest of the afternoon, in view of the coast being relatively quiet. This meant an hours drive into the Brecks, and to a spot for gathering **Stone Curlews** prior to their migration.



Icy Yellow-legged Gull at Cressingham pig fields, 28th October

Reaching the site, we scanned distantly to check on the birds whereabouts, seeing one **Stone Curlew** hunkered down in the edge of a strip of fat hen in a pig field. The views were poor, so we drove further along the road and found a pull off where we could get closer views with the sun behind. Here we had four **Stone Curlews** out in the open, so numbers are dwindling but there are still a few here! Good views, and to cap it off, a superb first-winter **Yellow-legged Gull** was standing among the Lesser Black-backs right in front of us. A fine beast, we were also able to study its plumage features next to a young Herring. After a short stop at a nearby raptor viewpoint, which added a Sparrowhawk, we continued to Lynford for dusk in the hope that one or two Hawfinch might appear to roost. It was quiet, with no Hawfinches noted, but we did see an unprecedented 30+ Pied Wagtails gathering to roost by the lake. Mixed flocks of Redwing and Fieldfare were seen, and the day closed with a **Goshawk**, cruising through the paddocks much to the annoyance of the local corvids.

TUESDAY 29TH OCTOBER – *Sunny spells and a moderate NE wind, 12C*

With east in the wind, we headed down to Burnham Overy Staithe this morning with the hope of finding a few freshly arrived migrants. In truth though, it didn't happen on the passerine front at all – we barely saw a 'crest, thrush or Robin in the whole walk to the west end of Holkham pines and back! We did enjoy some good birding though, with good sized flocks of **Pink-footed Geese** in the fields by whincover, and an unprecedented 51 **Barnacle Geese** among them – presumably a feral group, but you never really know! Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit were in the estuary, where **Brent Geese** were also present in numbers. A **Great White Egret** flew in the distance, and a small group of Golden Plover and covey of **Grey Partridge** were on the grazing marsh. Reaching the dunes, we saw a trio of Stonechats before heading out to the seaward side of the dunes (several Little Auks had been seen along the coast earlier in the morning so we were hopeful). Close inshore were at least 500 **Common Scoters**, and we picked out two **Velvet Scoters** among them, though they were very difficult to see in the strong swell. Flocks of Sanderling, a couple of Razorbills, Goldeneye, Red-throated Diver and more Brents were strewn along the shoreline in perfect bright sunlight. Back in the dunes, we carried on east to the pines, picking up a few **Redwing**, seven overhead **Brambling**, two Siskin and a Goldcrest. From the vantage point of the dunes, we could see not only six of the eight **Cattle Egrets** among the cows by the boardwalk, but looking towards Decoy Wood, an impressive five **Great White Egrets** in one field of view! Two **Red Kites** showed brilliantly on the walk back, and Golden Plovers had now increased to an impressive 750+. A mention must also go to both Rock Pipit and Skylark, which were numerous throughout the whole morning, and we even glimpsed a **Cetti's Warbler** by the seawall on the way back.



Great White Egrets at Holkham – part of a group of five together

Lunch was had at Thornham harbour, where we hoped to catch up with the newly returned Twite. They weren't around today, but we did enjoy a bit of a tringa-fest with a gorgeous **Spotted Redshank** in the creek, and 5 **Greenshanks** flying over calling noisily. We ended the day at Titchwell, where the stunning late afternoon light made for great viewing. We headed straight down to the beach – still no Little Auk! – and picked up a drake **Common Eider**, Great Crested Grebe, Goldeneye, Red-throated Diver and Red-breasted Merganser. The beach was full of waders too, and a party of Brent Geese were feeding on the mussel beds right in front of us with several goslings in tow. The freshmarsh was starting to fill with birds arriving to roost, and we stayed until it was dark noting increasing numbers of Knot and Bar-tailed Godwit, a Snipe, 30 Avocets, 2 Ruff, and another excellent gull roost. An adult **Little Gull** was perhaps the highlight, but we also saw a 2cy **Mediterranean Gull** and 3 adult **Yellow-legged Gulls**. Little Egrets into roost in Willow Wood numbered around 70 – quite a sight to see them adorning the dead trees before heading in for the night. Two **Barn Owls** on the way home rounded off a pleasant day's birding indeed.

WEDNESDAY 30TH OCTOBER – *Sunny spells and light Easterly winds, 12C*

With a ridge of high pressure starting to push eastwards and east in the wind across the North Sea, we continued to hope for a few migrant birds from the continent and so headed down to Stiffkey first thing this morning to work the campsite wood. There had been a big marsh tide, which was just subsiding, and there were plenty of Brent Geese on the marsh as we headed through the sycamores to the east of the car park. Almost right away we were into a tit flock, and saw a Goldcrest and a smart **Brambling**. We followed the flock pretty much all the way through the woodland, adding a Great-spotted Woodpecker before a **Yellow-browed Warbler** uttered its distinctive 'tsoo-eet!' call from the canopy above us. We didn't see it, so continued east through the sycamore belt hoping for a glimpse. At the far end, a surprise female **Blackcap** popped out, but otherwise it was mainly tits on offer. As we started to make our way back west, we relocated the **Yellow-browed Warbler** and with patience, we had superb views of it flitting in the canopy just above us. A nice result, as it looked increasingly like it would be the only one of the trip!

Wells Woods was our next stop, and the winds had dropped and the sun was out prompting hope that we could find something with the tit flocks. It was, however, very quiet – we saw a few Goldcrests, Redwings, two Chiffchaff and that was about it. Time to move on to Holkham, and have lunch, before heading out to check the bay in case any Shorelark had appeared for winter. Pink-footed Geese and **Grey Partridges** were showing brilliantly by the drive, and another **Yellow-browed Warbler** called vigorously and showed briefly in the canopy of a Holm Oak at the north end. Our on the beach, we failed to find any larks, but on the sea we saw Great Crested Grebes, Common Scoters and Red-throated Diver. As we returned to the car park, news broke of a Little Bittern at Titchwell – with the afternoon fading, we had just enough time to try for it! We raced to Patsy's Reedbed screen, where a crowd was already gathered, but alas there was no sign of the bird as dusk approached. A substantial murmuration of Starlings was some compensation, as well as several Marsh Harriers assembling to roost. As dusk fell, Blackbirds, Song Thrushes and Redwings were departing high to the west into the clear sky lit dimly by a new moon – continuing their journey having no doubt already crossed the North Sea in recent days. We managed to end our day on a high, with a roost flight of **Pink-footed Geese**, heading out to Scolt Head Island straight over the top of us at Brancaster Staithe.

THURSDAY 31ST OCTOBER – *Sunny spells and fresh SE winds, 10C*

A frustrating day today which promised plenty and delivered little as we headed into East Norfolk to explore the Broads region. A Pallas's Warbler had been present for over a week at Waxham near the Shangri-la bungalow, so surely it would do the decent thing and linger for one more day? Sadly not, and neither us nor anyone else on site could find this delightful sprite among the ivy clad trees in the copse this morning. There were plenty of **Goldcrests** here, but these were scant compensation indeed. The sea was disappointing too – half a dozen **Razorbills** and a few **Red-throated Divers**

moving offshore being the best of it. After a coffee, we headed along the coast road to Horsey, noting a decent flock of Pink-feet behind Brograve Farm, but no sign of any Cranes in any of the usual favoured spots. We continued down to Great Yarmouth and Breydon Water, where at least plenty of wildfowl and waders would be on offer on the ebbing tide at the east end. Yesterdays Grey Phalarope had gone (it really was a case of you should have been here yesterday!) but we saw some nice **Pintail** at close range among hordes of Wigeon, flocks of **Black-tailed Godwits**, 22 **Avocets**, about 200 **Dunlin**, a few **Grey Plover** and massed ranks of Curlew and large gulls. Several **Rock Pipits** were among the flooded sea lavender, and a female **Sparrowhawk** drifted in and flew really close to us, before spotting us at the last minute and dashing inland.

After lunch, we headed back to Acle and checked the fields nearby for Cranes without success, and so continued to Potter Heigham Marshes. After negotiating the very bumpy and muddy track, we scanned Heigham Holmes for Cranes but again drew a blank. The pools held hundreds of Teal, and a few Shoveler, Wigeon and Gadwall, and two **Lesser Redpolls** were a brief surprise in a birch along the edge of the Thurne where a dozen Fieldfare also assembled in a bush on the bank. Hickling NWT was our final port of call today, and thankfully the wind dropped and sun persisted until dusk giving lovely warm light across the marsh for the Stubbs Mill Roost. A **Merlin** appeared almost as soon as we arrived, and perched in the open on a dead bush. Two **Common Cranes** finally gave themselves up for us too, and we had excellent views both on the ground and in flight. **Marsh Harriers** numbered around 25 into the roost, and we finished the day with two **Barn Owls** out hunting, with several Brown Hares, Chinese Water Deer and Muntjac on the marsh and the Cranes bugling under the New Moon in the background. A nice start to Halloween!

FRIDAY 1ST NOVEMBER – *SE winds and persistent drizzle, 13C*



Water Pipit at Titchwell, 1st November

Our last day was something of a damp squib, as we set off in the gloom to West Norfolk hoping to start the day with some goose flocks in the fields. We found one group of a round one thousand **Pink-footed Geese** feeding near North Creak, and managed to find a strategic gap in the hedge from which to scope them. Always a great sight and sound – this group were feeding in maize stubble, a modern day staple for these birds given the decline of sugar beet being grown in the county. We tried to locate another flock unsuccessfully, so continued on to Thornham harbour to try again for the Twite. We had perhaps the worst of the days weather here, so it was pretty grim! Nevertheless, and

despite the lack of Twite, we saw a good selection of wildfowl and waders on the ebbing big tide, including close views of Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit and Red-breasted Merganser, plus several Rock Pipits thrown in. Titchwell was the logical next stop given the weather, and we headed directly out to Parrinder Hide. Here we had superb views of two **Water Pipits**, feeding on the cut reed close to the hide. This was a really good opportunity to study the subtle ID features in comparison to the similar Rock Pipit, which was also present. The marsh was full of wildfowl, a good flock of Avocets, a nice mixed group of Knot and Dunlin, and a bonus **Bittern** flew across the reedbed at the far side. It appeared to land by Patsy's screen, so we headed there on the way back, but there was not further sign. Two unsuccessful stops on the way back to King's Lynn included a roadside pull over to try for Woodlark (we did see two Yellowhammer here) and then a hike onto Roydon Common for yesterdays Great Grey Shrike, which had disappeared and was not seen today. Into King's Lynn for drop off, then back to Great Ryburgh for everyone else. It had certainly been a challenging week, but we'd managed a good variety of species and some nice sightings.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Greylag Goose
2. Pink-footed Goose
3. Canada Goose
4. Brent Goose
5. Barnacle Goose
6. Egyptian Goose
7. Mute Swan
8. Common Shelduck
9. Northern Shoveler
10. Gadwall
11. Eurasian Wigeon
12. Mallard
13. Northern Pintail
14. Eurasian Teal
15. Common Scoter
16. Velvet Scoter
17. Tufted Duck
18. Common Goldeneye
19. Common Eider
20. Red-breasted Merganser
21. Red-legged Partridge
22. Grey Partridge
23. Common Pheasant
24. Red-throated Diver
25. Little Grebe
26. Great Crested Grebe
27. Northern Gannet
28. Great Cormorant
29. Grey Heron
30. Little Egret
31. Great White Egret
32. Cattle Egret
33. Great Bittern
34. Western Marsh Harrier
35. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
36. Northern Goshawk
37. Red Kite
38. Common Buzzard

39. Common Crane
40. Common Moorhen
41. Eurasian Coot
42. Pied Avocet
43. Stone Curlew
44. Eurasian Oystercatcher
45. Grey Plover
46. European Golden Plover
47. Northern Lapwing
48. Common Ringed Plover
49. Eurasian Curlew
50. Bar-tailed Godwit
51. Black-tailed Godwit
52. Ruddy Turnstone
53. Red Knot
54. Ruff
55. Dunlin
56. Sanderling
57. Common Snipe
58. Eurasian Woodcock
59. Spotted Redshank
60. Common Greenshank
61. Common Redshank
62. Black-legged Kittiwake
63. Black-headed Gull
64. Mediterranean Gull
65. Little Gull
66. Common Gull
67. Herring Gull
68. Yellow-legged Gull
69. Lesser Black-backed Gull
70. Great Black-backed Gull
71. Common Guillemot
72. Razorbill
73. Puffin
74. Stock Dove
75. Woodpigeon
76. Collared Dove
77. Barn Owl
78. Tawny Owl (H)
79. Common Kingfisher
80. Great-spotted Woodpecker
81. Common Kestrel
82. Merlin
83. Eurasian Jay
84. Common Magpie
85. Eurasian Jackdaw
86. Rook
87. Carrion Crow
88. Eurasian Skylark
89. Coal Tit
90. Eurasian Blue Tit
91. Great Tit
92. Long-tailed Tit
93. Eurasian Treecreeper

94. Eurasian Wren
95. Goldcrest
96. Cetti's Warbler
97. Common Chiffchaff
98. Yellow-browed Warbler
99. Eurasian Blackcap
100. European Robin
101. European Stonechat
102. Eurasian Blackbird
103. Redwing
104. Song Thrush
105. Mistle Thrush
106. Fieldfare
107. Common Starling
108. Dunnock
109. Pied Wagtail
110. Meadow Pipit
111. Rock Pipit
112. Water Pipit
113. Common Reed Bunting
114. Yellowhammer
115. Snow Bunting
116. Common Chaffinch
117. Brambling
118. European Greenfinch
119. Common Linnet
120. European Goldfinch
121. Eurasian Siskin
122. Lesser Redpoll
123. Bullfinch
124. House Sparrow