



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT NORFOLK SUMMER BREEDERS 27TH – 30TH JUNE 2017

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WEDNESDAY 28TH JUNE – *Heavy rain and strong Northerly winds, 13C*

A day to forget in terms of the weather today, but in true Oriole Birding style we plugged away and ended up with a pretty decent list of wetland birds and one or two nice bonuses along the way too. We essentially were confined to birding from hides because the rain for the most part was simply too heavy to do anything else – we started at the local hide in Great Ryburgh and this got us off to a nice start. We saw five Pied Avocets, a Little Egret was feeding right outside the hide, and a **Green Sandpiper** flew off towards the River Wensum. Common Buzzard and Grey Heron were also about, but the hoped for Kingfisher and Little-ringed Plover seen yesterday evening did not reappear! Heading up to the coast at Cley, we drove through torrential rain all the way – it was going to be a difficult day! We collected permits and made for the Bishop's Hide overlooking Pat's Pool, but we had to stand at the back of the hide as the rain was hammering in through the flaps on the northerly wind. Another **Green Sandpiper** was feeding along the edge of the main island, before flying off to the back of the scrape showing its white rump. A trickle of birds passing through the scrape included good numbers of Sand Martins probably from the nearby coastal cliff colonies, and a few terns – large and strikingly white **Sandwich Terns** battling into the wind on angular wings, but also a **Little Tern** with its much snappier flight action and smaller size came through too. A **Common Greenshank** passed through giving its three-note call, but headed off strongly over the West Bank. Many of the birds on the scrape were very bedraggled – in fact we watched a Skylark picking around for some while before we could even work out what it was – it looked black! Heading back to the car park we warmed up with a brew before continuing round to Dauke's Hide. Here we had nice views of a small party of **Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits** in breeding plumage, but also picked out a less glamorous but equally interesting **Yellow-legged Gull** in fourth calendar year type plumage. It was good to see this species alongside the three other more regular large gulls, and compare structure, mantle and bare part colouration. Two recently fledged juvenile **Marsh Harriers** were nice to see, sitting in the reedbed waiting for their parents to bring them in a meal, and a second calendar year **Little Gull** breezed through the scrape and off towards the North Hide. Popping into Avocet Hide, we had closer views of the godwits, and also a very brief view of a **Eurasian Spoonbill** in flight over the Cricket Marsh. Four **Sandwich Terns** had also dropped onto Simmond's Scrape, and we could now see their yellow-tipped bills and shaggy black crest. The walk back to the car park was rather grim, into the rain, but we at least now had some decent birds to show for it!

In the afternoon we drove west along the coast road to Titchwell, where we lunched in the [empty!] overflow car park which has recently been frequented by a breeding pair of Turtle Doves and their squab. We couldn't see the doves, so hoped that we might get another chance on the way back as the weather was due to slowly improve. Heading up the West Bank path, we had to battle into the wind and rain and head pretty directly to Parrinder Hide. Once there, we spent a good while enjoying the excellent mix of birds on offer and had a really good session. A drake **Garganey** was almost the first bird we looked at, roosting with Common Teal among the vegetation. There are quite a few ducks starting to build up on the coastal pools now, mainly drakes going into eclipse – the **Garganey** was starting to look a little scruffy itself! Excellent opportunities for close observation of waders outside the hide included a fine **male Ruff** in full plumage, and a pair of **Little-ringed Plovers** sparring with a Common Ringed Plover. It was great to see these two side by side, and compare their structural differences as well as the more obvious eye ring and bare part colour. Several Common Terns were resting on one of the islands, and they were joined by a couple more nice Sandwich Terns and also two second calendar year **Little Gulls**. We had much better views of these than the earlier fly-by, and it was great to watch them dancing over the water in the rain from the relative comfort and dry of the Parrinder Hide! The main fenced island is now a bustling mixed gull colony, and an estimated nine pairs of **Mediterranean Gulls** are reported to be breeding here this year for the first time. We had some super views of them, looking especially fine with their bright red bills, black hoods and white wing tips. It was good practice for the group to try picking them out in flight above the island, when they really come to life against the dark sky. The final highlight was a juvenile **Eurasian Spoonbill**, which suddenly appeared right in front of the hide. This gave us the chance for some real close up views, as it fed alone with bill ajar, sweeping from side to side. Its short, flesh-coloured bill, small size and black primary tips denoted a recently fledged juvenile from the North Norfolk colony – unusual

to see one away from its parents so soon after fledging, they normally continue to beg for as long as possible! Back at the Visitor Centre, we had a look at the feeders so that Kate could see some of the common birds, as she was joining us all the way from the USA and many of these species were new – Blue Tits, Great Tits, Greenfinch, Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Dunnock were just as exciting as some of the scarcer species we had been watching on the pools! One final twist came as we were just about to leave the car park – a dove flew in and landed in an Elder right in front of us, showing a bright white tail fringe. It was the young **Turtle Dove**, and thankfully we had some great scope views of it to round off the day – we were very pleased not to have missed out on it after all!

THURSDAY 29TH JUNE – *A dry overcast day in light SW winds, 16C*

Today we ventured south into Thetford Forest and Breckland region to explore some of the different habitats on offer there. We started at the superb RSPB reserve at Lakenheath Fen, where we hoped to see as many of its specialities as we could! Walking up the main track towards New Fen, we were soon enjoying good views of some of the common species here such as Reed Bunting, Sedge and Reed Warblers and Common Whitethroat – the latter especially conspicuous today with several broods of young about. At New Fen, we spent some time patiently watching around the pool and scanning the reedbed, and it was not long before our main target put in an appearance – a nice long flight view of a **Great Bittern** across the reeds at the far side. We also had a couple of sightings of **Common Kingfisher**, and a pair of Great Crested Grebes were feeding two well grown youngsters. Continuing towards West Wood, a **Common Cuckoo** flew over us, and was surprisingly the only one we saw all morning. It was just starting to warm up a touch under the grey skies and this meant that we saw our first odonata with several Ruddy Darters basking low on the vegetation, and also several Ringlet butterflies which were quite happy flying in the cool conditions. Up at Joist Fen, we did another watch and as well as several superb male Marsh Harrier sightings, we were rewarded with an absolutely cracking view of another **Bittern** which came up from the reeds to our left and flew right across in front of us. A family of **Bearded Tits** were also a highlight here, with a male bird feeding three fledged young in the reeds below the watchpoint and making regular visits back and forth. With good sightings of most of the key species in the bag we decided to push on a bit further along the river bank, and were straight away rewarded with a nice view of a **Cetti's Warbler**, which popped up and sang in the open in a dead elder allowing everyone to catch up with it. Once on the river bank, we headed west for about half a mile and picked another flight view of a Bittern up heading fairly distantly away from us. This was soon followed by another **Bittern**, a paler bird this time, which flew directly towards us giving more excellent views as it banked and dropped into the reeds. That was four different birds in about an hour! One bird we had hoped to catch up with here today was **Eurasian Hobby**, and here we got a good sighting of one making two passes in front of us low over the reeds – the only one we saw today with the cool weather no doubt keeping the dragonflies down out of the skies. The walk back was rather more direct, with a cup of coffee calling us at the end!

Next up was a visit to Weeting Heath where we planned to have lunch in the car park and pop down to the hides after to look for **Stone Curlew**. We ended up not leaving the car park though as we spotted two **Stone Curlews** across the road viewed from the gate. Because of the overcast conditions, there was no heat haze today, and we were able to get some nice views through the scope. One even stretched a wing and did a bit of preening. Several Mistle Thrushes and a Common Kestrel were also seen here during lunch, before we pressed on into the forest to look for some of the typical birds of the more open cleared areas. This took us along a fire break into one of our favoured spots in the forest, and while it was quieter than usual here today we managed to eke out most of the key species with patience. There were lots of small birds in the woodland on the walk down, with roving parties of Coal Tits, European Nuthatch, Great-spotted Woodpecker and Common Treecreeper all noted. Once into the clearing, several lovely Yellowhammer were seen, plenty of Common Whitethroats, Willow Warbler and a family of Common Stonechats with two fledglings. Continuing around the far side of the clearing, we took another track back along the far edge and here we found three **Tree Pipits**, including two fledged youngsters up in a big dead pine which gave some good views through the scope. Almost at the same time, we could hear a **Woodlark** singing very distantly, back along the

track we had just walked, so we made haste back there. The **Woodlarks** were foraging on the track in front of us, but not easy to see in the long grass. One flicked up and over the fence, into the more open field, and here we could see it standing head and shoulders in the grass softly subsinging its distinctive song. Turning the corner, we then found two fledged scaly young **Woodlarks** sitting on the track in front of us, just long enough to get a scope on them before they followed the parent birds back into the original field. More nice **Yellowhammer** sightings followed on the walk back, where a piece of cake and cup of tea was welcome to wash down a good afternoons birding.

Our final bit of action today was back up in North Norfolk where we hoped to try and see **Montagu's Harrier** on our way back to base. A couple of nice surprises as we drove down a farm track included a smart male **Grey Partridge** wandering around in the open, and then far more surprising was a **Tawny Owl** which flew out of the hedge as we walked up the track, and flew low across the wheatfield into a small copse! Arriving at the watchpoint for the harriers, we didn't have to wait long for a view of the female **Montagu's Harrier**, as she came up from the crop and began quartering the far side of the field. We had some great views of her through the scope as she patrolled up and down against the backdrop of a distant wood, before hopping over the hedge and into the next field. We waited for around an hour, but we didn't see her again, nor her mate. The day had run away with us somewhat, and with an evening excursion planned for crepuscular birds, we headed back to base. At 2030 we met up again and kicked off our 'night tour' with a **Barn Owl** hunting by the bridge in Great Ryburgh. This set the precedent for what turned out to be a great evening, as we headed into the pine forest of West Norfolk to look for **European Nightjar**. At our regular site, we were soon in position and enjoying the first 'roding' **Eurasian Woodcock** of the evening overhead. Around 2140, the first flight call of a **European Nightjar** was heard, and what followed over the next half hour were some of the best views we have ever had at the site. First the female appeared, flying alongside us, and then her mate began to follow her up and down against the trees dancing above her with wings and tail spread. The female then settled on the wires just above us, giving some superb scope views for a full five minutes, leaving the male to carry on displaying before eventually heading to a perch to 'churr'. Several more **Woodcock** sightings rounded off a successful evening, and we headed back to base for about 2230.

FRIDAY 30TH JUNE – *Overcast in light northerly winds, 20C*

A spectacular finish to our tour today started with cracking views of the **Barn Owl** again in Great Ryburgh, hunting right beside the road for several minutes. A quick stop in at the scrape revealed a **Green Sandpiper**, but there was now a lot of water on after recent heavy rain and so not too much else was about. Heading a bit further on, we wanted to check on a family of **Little Owls** in an old oak tree in the hedge. Choosing a convenient spot about 100m away where we could watch through a scope, we had a very enjoyable time watching four **Little Owls** – three fledged young and an adult – perching out in the open and flying around their nest tree. Up towards North Norfolk next and a try for one of the birds we had not had time to search for properly in the Brecks yesterday – **Firecrest**. We could hear one singing as soon as we got out of the van at our chosen site and soon we were watching two flitting around in the Ivy-clad trees and often showing just a few metres above us in the shady foliage. The male even flashed his bright crest to the female as the two interacted, and we actually had 'walkaway' views in the end as everyone had filled their boots. One or two butterflies were starting to emerge as the day warmed up slowly – Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Large Skipper and Red Admiral. These were closely followed by Silver-studded Blue and Small Skipper at our next stop up on the heaths, as we headed up to look for **Dartford Warblers**. It was beautiful in the warm overcast weather, with Skylarks and Yellowhammers singing all around and several lovely male Common Linnets in the gorse. We soon had some sketchy views of three **Dartford Warblers** moving around in low heather, and so set ourselves up quietly to watch over the area they were favouring to try and get better views. Eventually the birds worked their way towards us, frequently popping up and pausing in the open for everyone to get some good views. Two fledged young and an attendant adult female were seen, but they were largely silent and certainly easy to walk past! As we watched, two Buzzards drifted into view above us – nothing particularly unusual about that. A quick glance through the bins revealed a densely chocolate brown barred breast and belly, strikingly barred

underwing, long narrow head and paddle like tail – they were **European Honey Buzzards**!!!! And they were literally circling above our heads! The diagnostic tail barring could be clearly seen, but it was all going to be over a bit too quickly as they were clearly very purposefully heading North-west towards the coast. We managed to grab some poor quality photos and video to satisfy the rarities committee, as they flapped slowly away over the horizon, and then we were able to take stock of what we had just seen! Late June/early July is often a time when failed breeders or non-breeding immature Honey Buzzards float around and the wooded Cromer-Holt ridge has always been a traditional place to pick them up. But you still have to be lucky enough to be standing in just the right place at the right time to see them! The rest of our walk was rather tame by comparison, but did produce a purring **Turtle Dove**, nice male **Common Stonechat** and a **Woodlark** briefly flying over.



Record shots of one of two Honey Buzzards heading NW over Kelling, 30th June

With most of our key target birds in the bag we could spend the last couple of hours of the tour looking for waterbirds on the coast at nearby Cley, with a walk down the East Bank on the cards before lunch. There was a lot of water on The Serpentine after the recent rain, but we saw plenty of birds including chicks of **Redshank** and **Lapwing**, and a small party of **Black-tailed Godwits**. **Reed Bunting** and **Reed Warbler** were easily seen along the path and on **Arnold's Marsh**, we encountered good numbers of resting terns. There were perhaps one hundred **Sandwich Terns** here today, and a few **Common Terns**, plus a single first-summer **Arctic Tern** among them. Its small size and short-legged appearance, short, stout and all black bill, long tail streamers and clear white trailing portion to the upperwing all helped to identify this tricky plumage. An adult **Mediterranean Gull** flew over too, and lunch was accompanied by a smashing **Eurasian Hobby** charging across the reedbed. From here it was pretty much straight back to **King's Lynn railway station**, but we did pause briefly at **Burnham Overy** to check the lane for **Lesser Whitethroat** as several people in the group were keen to see one. We couldn't find any, but had to make do instead with a family of **Common Chiffchaffs**, a **Red Kite**, and another **Hobby** dashing through. We had packed a lot into the three days, and there was even time for one more bird – a recently fledged party of **Peregrines** on the tower in **King's Lynn Docks** on the way past!

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. Common Shelduck
13. Mallard
14. Common Teal
15. Gadwall
16. Northern Shoveler
17. Garganey
18. Tufted Duck
19. Red-legged Partridge
20. Grey Partridge
21. Common Pheasant
22. Common Kestrel
23. Marsh Harrier
24. Montagu's Harrier
25. Common Buzzard
26. European Honey Buzzard
27. Eurasian Hobby
28. Peregrine
29. Red Kite
30. Common Moorhen
31. Common Coot
32. Stone Curlew
33. Pied Avocet
34. European Oystercatcher
35. Little-ringed Plover
36. Common Ringed Plover
37. Northern Lapwing
38. Common Redshank
39. Black-tailed Godwit
40. Green Sandpiper
41. Ruff
42. Eurasian Woodcock
43. Black-headed Gull
44. Common Gull
45. Herring Gull
46. Lesser Black-backed Gull
47. Great Black-backed Gull
48. Yellow-legged Gull
49. Mediterranean Gull
50. Little Gull
51. Common Tern
52. Arctic Tern
53. Sandwich Tern

54. Little Tern
55. Woodpigeon
56. Collared Dove
57. Stock Dove
58. Turtle Dove
59. Common Swift
60. European Nightjar
61. Common Cuckoo
62. Common Kingfisher
63. Little Owl
64. Barn Owl
65. Tawny Owl
66. Great-spotted Woodpecker
67. Green Woodpecker
68. Skylark
69. Woodlark
70. Meadow Pipit
71. Tree Pipit
72. Pied Wagtail
73. Yellow Wagtail
74. Barn Swallow
75. House Martin
76. Sand Martin
77. Winter Wren
78. European Robin
79. Common Stonechat
80. Dunnock
81. Common Blackbird
82. Song Thrush
83. Mistle Thrush
84. Cetti's Warbler
85. Blackcap
86. Garden Warbler [H]
87. Sedge Warbler
88. European Reed Warbler
89. Common Chiffchaff
90. Willow Warbler
91. Common Whitethroat
92. Dartford Warbler
93. Firecrest
94. Goldcrest
95. Blue Tit
96. Great Tit
97. Coal Tit
98. Long-tailed Tit
99. Bearded Tit
100. European Nuthatch
101. Common Treecreeper
102. Rook
103. Carrion Crow
104. Western Jackdaw
105. Black-billed Magpie
106. Eurasian Jay
107. Common Starling
108. House Sparrow

- 109. Chaffinch
- 110. Greenfinch
- 111. Goldfinch
- 112. Common Linnet
- 113. Reed Bunting
- 114. Yellowhammer