



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT NORFOLK SUMMER BREEDERS 19TH – 21ST JUNE 2018

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TUESDAY 19TH JUNE - *Overcast but warm in light winds, 24C*

A bit of a mixed bag today with some nice highlights, but a few 'dips' as well! We started our day in North-east Norfolk, to try one of our favoured spots along the Cromer-Holt ridge for **Firecrest**. They can be tricky at this time of year, often in between broods and the males only singing occasionally from high in the canopy. That was pretty much our experience today, though over the course of an hour of careful observation, we were able to work out the routine of a male **Firecrest** which was signing on and off, in between foraging trips high in the treetops. Only once or twice did the bird perch in the open, on some bare twigs inside the shade of the canopy, but everyone managed to get a decent view. The woodland was full of birdsong of other species too - Common Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Goldcrest and a family party of Treecreepers. All in all a nice start to the day. Moving onto the heaths, we spent the rest of the morning looking for a couple of target birds, and it was a really lovely day to be wandering around birding here in light winds and warm temperatures. Almost right away, we were enjoying great views of Yellowhammers, Linnets and Common Whitethroats, which would entertain us throughout our walk. Willow and Garden Warblers were also noted, but the latter only heard, babbling its sustained song from some distant birches. We could also hear the soft fluted scale of a **Woodlark**, and soon found the bird perched on the top of a small pine. We had great views through the scope of this sought after bird, before it flew down into the heather. In the warm sunshine, **Silver-studded Blue Butterflies** began to emerge in clouds - we must have seen fifty or more along one stretch alone. They were beautifully fresh, and we saw one still with partly furled wings obviously having just emerged this morning. Our quest for Dartford Warbler was unfortunately unsuccessful today, with just a single 'tchaaair' call note heard at one spot, but no sighting. We worked hard, trying a number of good spots, but the birds just didn't want to show themselves today. Raptors were frequent overhead though - Common Kestrel and Common Buzzard of course, but also a pair of **Hobby**, swooping high in the clouds. Heading back to the car park for lunch, we had more nice views of song-flighting **Woodlark**, and then a great interruption to lunch itself - a fine **Turtle Dove** which flew in and landed for us and allowed prolonged scope views. Nice one!



Silver-studded Blues, 19th June

Our afternoon would see a total change of scenery as we headed south-east to Potter Heigham, to spend a couple of hours birding the marshes along the River Thurne. Unfortunately, the summer growth meant the vegetation was now too tall to properly view the first pool, which is full of waders just at the moment! With some degree of difficulty, we managed to see a flock of Black-tailed Godwits, two fine male **Ruff**, **Common Greenshank**, three Knot and a handful of Dunlin. Driving down to the fishermans car park, a **Swallowtail** Butterfly flew past, with another seen shortly afterwards along the riverbank. Here we also saw the other iconic insect of the Broads in early summer, the **Norfolk Hawker** dragonfly. Excellent views of one perched in the pathside vegetation allowed us to see the yellow triangle at the top of the abdomen which leads to its latin name *isocola*, as well as its 'other wordly' green eyes. On the scrapes, we saw plenty of wildfowl - Teal, Wigeon, Shoveler, Gadwall, Egyptian Goose, Great Crested & Little Grebes. Waders were low in number on this side though, other than the local Avocets. Two superb adult **Mediterranean Gulls** flew in calling, and landed on one of the islands, and we also had some great views of Marsh Harrier. Along the path, many damselflies were seen, including the localised **Variable Damselfly**. Back at the van, we had a coffee before returning to the first pool again - the **Ruff** were showing much better, and we could now see four fantastic males. A **Green Sandpiper** had also appeared, and we had better views of the **Greenshank** too. A decent day, and a weary van as we made our way back to Great Ryburgh!

WEDNESDAY 20TH JUNE - *Warm day with sunny spells and fresh northerly winds, 25C*

An epic days birding today! We spent the whole day down in Breckland, with a mixture of forest, heath and wetland birding giving us a superb variety of species and one or two really cracking specialities. First up in the breezy conditions, we decided to chance our arm looking for Goshawk from a favoured watchpoint. Raptor activity was pretty high, with plenty of Common Buzzards around, and it didn't take long to pick up our target as a monster female **Goshawk** drifted up out of the trees and circled around a few times for us before dropping away out of view. Almost right away, a smaller male appeared, clearly in wing moult and possibly and immature bird, but it was higher and more distant than the female. Still its bulging secondaries, fairly narrow, pointed 'hand' and long rounded tail were typical features. Being a smaller male, and busy trying to gain height, it showed some faster wingbeats than is often the case with the species, and it was useful to note the differences in identifying the two sexes. A good start to the day, and time to move on further into the forest where we planned to spend some time checking clearings for Tree Pipit and Woodlark. Reaching a spot we know well, we could hear a **Tree Pipit** singing as soon as we approached the area, and had decent views in the scope of the bird perched on the top of a young conifer. Yellowhammer, Common Whitethroat, Stonechat and Goldcrest were other species noted hereabouts, and we soon picked up the soft fluted notes of a **Woodlark** too. Continuing towards the sound, we found the **Woodlark** also perched up on a conifer, and had some good scope views before it flopped away over the treetops and down. We had now enjoyed good views of our target species, and so decided to wander on a bit further, to check an area where we sometimes find **Common Redstarts**. Earlier in the season we had drawn a blank here with no singing males found, so it was purely speculative. We were therefore delighted to see a female **Redstart** flick across the track ahead of us just a short way along, and then even happier to locate a stunning male as well! Whats more, the pair were calling constantly and clearly gathering food, so we figured there must be young close by. Keen to prove the breeding attempt, we stood back with the scopes and watched carefully. Eventually a streaked juvenile **Redstart** hopped into view, with yellow gape and half grown tail! This was clearly the more mobile of at least two young, with the second one remaining fairly terrestrial and well hidden. We couldnt work out why the adults seemed so agitated though, as we were standing well back - they seemed to be constantly returning to the same bare bush and flicking around calling. Two Willow Warblers then also joined in with the same behaviour, and we figured there must be a predator - perhaps a stoat, or fox, hiding under the bushes. Imagine our astonishment, when closer inspection of the bush in question revealed a **Long-eared Owl**, perched in view with ear tufts fully erect!! No wonder they had been agitated! The owl now took centre stage, with scopes all trained onto the bird and a little gentle pruning of the bracken to allow the shorter members of the party to see over it through the scope! An amazing bird and quality moment to chance on it in this way! The **Redstarts** meanwhile

continued to ferry caterpillars to the concealed youngsters - we left them too it, in favour of heading back to the van for sustenance of our own!



Redstart and Long-eared Owl – two of today's Brecks highlights

Lunch today would be in the car park at Weeting Heath, before we wandered down to West Hide to look for **Stone Curlew**. Unfortunately, due to the disease-ravaged rabbit population, it is now virtually impossible to see the birds from the hides due to the tall grass. A Common Curlew was striding around, but initially we couldn't find our target. Eventually a beady eye was spotted through the vegetation, and a check in the scope revealed a **Stone Curlew** standing motionless and very well camouflaged. Eventually, the view improved as the bird moved around a bit, and everyone got a satisfactory look at this classic Breckland special. A quick check of the feeding station revealed a Yellowhammer, and a male Blackcap bathing in the small pool outside the hide. With time ticking, we had to make the most of the remainder of the afternoon and crack on to Lakenheath, where we would spend the rest of the day. It was certainly warm now, but the fresh wind was very welcome and keeping the temperature pleasant. We walked pretty much directly to the New Fen viewpoint, and had a great half hour here pretty much 'cleaning up' on all the main species. A **Kingfisher** showed really nicely, hovering over the pool before perching on the reeds at the far side. Then a **Bittern** appeared, flying low over the reeds from right to left long enough for everyone to get a good view. Soon after, a second bird flew in from high across the river, showing a full crop, and dropped down in a similar spot to the first - superb! Distantly, a **Hobby** was seen hawking back and forth across the front of West Wood, and to cap it off two young **Bearded Tits** appeared along the edge of a reed island in front of us and gave some really nice views. Reed Warbler, Common Whitethroat and Reed Bunting were also noted, while odonata were also excellent today. **Variable Damselfly** was identified close to the watchpoint, and along the track towards Joist Fen, we had great views of a **Scarce Chaser**, perhaps the flagship dragonfly for the reserve. Red-eyed Damselfly, Four-spotted Chaser and Ruddy Darter were also noted as we walked along. Stopping by the corner of West Wood, we watched for a while to see if we could get better views of the **Hobby**. We saw it perched along the edge of the trees, and also in flight, but it was pipped by another cracking view of a **Bittern**, which flew out of the reeds quite close to us and off into the wood. Joist Fen itself was pretty quiet, though we enjoyed sitting on the benches there and relaxing! A muffled grunting alerted us to yet another

Bittern though, which flew right past us calling, flying down into the reeds back towards West Wood. It flew again a short while after, and we saw it in superb light - five great sightings of at least three different birds today. Two **Cuckoo** were calling in stereo, but we didn't manage to see them - the reserve had given up pretty much all of its secrets today though.



Bittern at Lakenheath – one of five sightings today

Our excellent day was not even yet done, as tonight we had our dusk excursion to the west Norfolk heaths to look for **Nightjar** & **Woodcock**. Our trip out started well, with two **Barn Owls** tussling right over the road in front of the van. Soon after we arrived at our chosen site, the first **Woodcock** of the night was seen in 'roding' display flight above the forest ride. This was followed by a cracking **Woodlark**, hunkered down in a rut in the track in front of us. The bird was only a couple of metres ahead of us, so the view through the scope was fantastic despite the fading light. A second bird, probably a fledgling, flew up from the grass and the two birds headed off to the pines presumably to roost. Our next sighting was totally bizarre, as we looked up to see an adult **Eurasian Spoonbill** flying towards us over the ride! It flew directly overhead, and the last embers of the sunset were making it glow warm pink below as it headed purposefully north - quite remarkable!! More expected was the churring of a **Nightjar**, marking the start of the evenings activity and soon we had our first sighting, of a male floating over the bracken with white wing spots flashing. He perched in a Silver Birch, allowing some brief scope views, until the female chased him and the two began wing clapping and calling as they flew between the trees. We had a couple of other flight views, and some more excellent **Woodcock** roding overhead, as we headed back to the car park in the semi dark. There was still time for one more highlight though, as we had tremendous views of a **Woodcock** which landed on the road in front of the van and stood in the headlights no more than five metres away. The best views many of the group had ever had of one! What a great day!



Woodlark in West Norfolk at dusk, 20th June

THURSDAY 21ST JUNE – *Sunny spells and cool in a fresh NW wind, 16C*

A day of quantity rather than quality as we finished the tour with a good list of wetland species, splitting our day between the two main reserves of Cley & Titchwell. First of all, we opted to start the day with a short seawatch, as the North-west wind was fresh to strong and whipping up some real ‘white horses’ over the North Sea. These type of conditions in mid June are often good for producing small movements of seabirds, including non-breeding Manx Shearwaters, so we were keen to give it a go. It was pretty chilly on Cley beach but we sheltered behind the old brick hut on the shingle ridge and began to enjoy some good views of passing Sandwich Terns battling their way west towards their breeding colonies. We saw some **Little Terns** too, also nice and close in, but everything else was predictably rather distant. This included the odd Gannet, a couple of Fulmars and really distant auks. The highlight though was a single **Manx Shearwater**, shearing west into the wind in lovely light, and not too far offshore. Local birders went on to log 45 during the rest of the morning, a decent count for the time of year.

Cley reserve next and after collecting our permits at the centre, we walked out to Dauke’s Hide. Here we were sheltered from the wind and could enjoy the variety of waterbirds on offer – this included two superb male **Ruff** still in breeding plumage, right outside the hide. There were good numbers of Redshanks, including the odd fresh juvenile, and a group of smart **Black-tailed Godwits** of the race *islandica* dropped in. We were also able to compare both Common Ringed and Little-ringed Plovers,

and saw a second calendar year **Mediterranean Gull** among the roosting Commons. Wildfowl numbers are just starting to increase now, as the drakes start their post breeding moult and form batchelor flocks – there were around fifty Common Teal on Simmond's Scrape, and obvious increase on recent days. Sand Martins were lovely to see, whizzing low over the pools in the strong wind, and as we left the hide and headed back along the boardwalk, we had great views of a **Eurasian Spoonbill** flying low overhead.

Trundling west along the coast road, we reached Titchwell in time for lunch in the car park. It was comparatively warm and sheltered here, and soon we were enjoying another great owl moment as we watched an adult **Tawny Owl** sitting out in full view in the sunshine. A pair have bred on the reserve this year, and currently have 'branching' young by the Visitor Centre. We couldn't see any of the chicks, but would check again on our way back. The freshmarsh was full of birds today and already there is an autumn feel about things, even though we are only just on the longest day of the year! Immature and failed breeding waders make up the bulk of these early season movements, and we picked out two fine adult **Spotted Redshanks** among the mixed throng of Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits. Two Dunlin were a poor return on the small waders though, and there was no sign of yesterdays Curlew Sandpiper. **Little Gulls** are to be expected at this time of year, and we saw eleven first-summers, dip feeding over the water in tern-like fashion. An adult **Spoonbill** was roosting at the back of the marsh, and we noted eight **Red Crested Pochards** – including a female with two young. A feature of Titchwell in summer nowadays is the bustling gull colony, ironically created by fencing the main island which was in the hope of increasing productivity of Avocets. Of course, the gulls not only now occupy most of the available nesting space, but predate the very species the fence was designed to protect! Nevertheless, it is excellent for **Mediterranean Gull**, a species which is booming in the county – there are scores of breeding birds here and they offered super views from Parrinder Hide. We also managed to pick out a single Bar-tailed Godwit showing some red summer plumage, and it was great to see a group of five **Spoonbills** – including two recently fledged local juveniles – heading west over the reserve. Back at the Visitor Centre, one of the young **Tawny Owls** was now sitting out in view, next to the parent bird – great to see! From here, we ran into King's Lynn to drop off some of the group for a train, before returning to Great Ryburgh with the remaining guests. One last bird for them was a lovely **Little Owl**, roosting out in the sunshine in an old gnarled hedgerow Oak just outside the village. Four owls in a trip in June is not bad going!



Scarce Chaser – this was a good trip for bugs, as well as birds!

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. Northern Gannet
9. Northern Fulmar
10. Manx Shearwater
11. Mute Swan
12. Greylag Goose
13. Canada Goose
14. Egyptian Goose
15. Common Shelduck
16. Mallard
17. Common Teal
18. Gadwall
19. Northern Shoveler
20. Eurasian Wigeon
21. Tufted Duck
22. Common Pochard
23. Red Crested Pochard
24. Red-legged Partridge
25. Common Pheasant
26. Common Kestrel
27. Eurasian Hobby
28. Marsh Harrier
29. Common Buzzard
30. Northern Goshawk
31. Red Kite
32. Peregrine
33. Common Moorhen
34. Common Coot
35. Stone Curlew
36. Pied Avocet
37. European Oystercatcher
38. Common Ringed Plover
39. Little-ringed Plover
40. Northern Lapwing
41. Common Redshank
42. Common Greenshank
43. Spotted Redshank
44. Green Sandpiper
45. Eurasian Curlew
46. Black-tailed Godwit
47. Bar-tailed Godwit
48. Red Knot
49. Dunlin
50. Ruff
51. Eurasian Woodcock
52. Black-headed Gull
53. Common Gull

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

- 109. Western Jackdaw
- 110. Common Magpie
- 111. Eurasian Jay
- 112. Common Starling
- 113. House Sparrow
- 114. Chaffinch
- 115. Goldfinch
- 116. Common Linnet
- 117. Bullfinch
- 118. Eurasian Siskin[H]
- 119. Reed Bunting
- 120. Yellowhammer