



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT
NORTH-EAST ENGLAND
6TH – 12TH JUNE 2017

TUESDAY 6TH JUNE – *Wet and windy, 15C*

The tour met in Great Ryburgh at 1100 and after a pick up at Kings Lynn station thereafter, we made our way up to Frampton Marsh in Lincolnshire for our first birding stop. The weather would conspire against us though – twelve hours of solid heavy rain and strong westerly winds, which made anything other than birding from the east facing hides an impossibility. This was a shame, as Frampton does have so much to offer at this time of year. Little and Great Crested Grebes, Little Egret and many hirundines and swifts feeding low over the water were seen as we had lunch in the visitor centre. We then had to brave the elements to walk around to the 360 hide, from where we did actually see a decent selection of waterbirds. Pied Avocets were nesting, and we saw both Common and **Little-ringed Plovers** on the scrapes, giving a nice comparison. A single **Black-tailed Godwit**, Ruddy Turnstone and two Dunlin were added, and a surprise flock of about twenty **Grey Plovers** flew around and dropped in. Common Tern, Skylark, **Brent Goose** and Common Pochard were other species of note, while a cracking adult **Mediterranean Gull** flew past the car park as we arrived back. The weather really precluded us from exploring the rest of the reserve though, and so we embarked on the rest of our journey north, to West Carlton Guest House in East Yorkshire. We arrived here just before 6pm, greeted by **Tree Sparrows** and Stock Dove in the garden before dinner. The rain was still hammering down as we retired to bed – hopefully things would improve tomorrow!

WEDNESDAY 7TH JUNE – *Strong WNW winds and sunny spells, 16C*

Today was definitely a day for grinding out our sightings in very difficult weather conditions! Strong winds seem to have been something of a theme on our UK trips this spring, and today was no exception – gusts over 40mph making it difficult to see small birds in bushes, and nearly impossible to use a telescope! Our journey down to Spurn produced a male **Marsh Harrier**, and a **Corn Bunting** on a wire, as we wound our way around the twisty roads south towards Easington. We started at the Bluebell Café at Kilnsea, and walked back along the road towards Rose Cottage where a late **Common Nightingale**, quite a scarce bird at Spurn, had been present for a few days. We didn't really expect to even hear it given the wind, but amazingly it flipped out of the hedge and across the road in front of us as we approached the cottage! We didn't hear it, or glimpse it again, so we carried on to the churchyard and had a quick look on the Humber, but saw nothing other than a single Common Whitethroat, the odd Common Linnet and Speckled Wood and Common Blue Butterflies. As we walked back along the road, the **Nightingale** began singing – very nice to hear on a windswept morning! There was no more glimpse to be had, but we were grateful for what we had seen! Heading down Beacon Lane, we connected with **Sedge Warbler**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Reed Bunting** and **Common Whitethroat**, while a walk down the beach produced some views of **Little Terns** over the dunes in the distance, and a Northern Fulmar battling south. Four **Sandwich Terns** also flew inland, looking strikingly white in the beautiful light.

After a coffee, we drove round to Kilnsea wetlands. A **Common Cuckoo** flew past as we pulled into the car park, and round at the hide we saw Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, **Pied Avocet**, Common Ringed Plover, and another nice **Sandwich Tern**. The highlight here was the views of the **Little Terns**, as several small groups came struggling past right in front of the hide. The light was perfect for seeing their black-tipped yellow bills and white forehead patch. We waited for a bit longer than planned in the hide, as an Osprey was reportedly heading south towards Spurn, but it didn't pass while we were watching. Back to the van, and a drive down to the Triangle where we parked up facing north to eat lunch and scan the skies. A cracking **Eurasian Hobby** blazed past us across the fields towards The Warren, and then a few moments later returned, to chase Swallows over the canal in front of us. Sammy's Point next, and a very windswept walk to check the paddocks for warblers. We actually found some lovely sunny sheltered spots round the back of the bushes, and here found a pair of **Common Chiffchaffs** feeding fledged young, and saw another **Common Cuckoo**, Common Whitethroat and Reed Bunting. A pair of **Lesser Whitethroats** were feeding young too, deep in the brambles, and by finding a good spot where we could watch them without putting them off coming in, we managed some decent views as they used the same perch each time they left the nest site.

Heading back out towards Kilnsea, perhaps the bird of the day was sunning itself in the middle of the road – a superb male **Yellow Wagtail**. He allowed us to pull up really close and cut the engine, and watch him preening in the sunshine. The female flew in and joined him, and the male puffed out his chest, pointed his bill skywards, quivered his wings and began strutting around in the road – none of us had ever seen this before! Amazingly, an equally yellow male **Yellowhammer** was sitting on the tarmac next to the wagtail – a nice couple of bonuses there! We rounded off our visit to the area by driving back down to The Warren, and checking for waders on the incoming tide on The Humber. The wind was really difficult here, but we eventually found a spot with a little shelter and watched **Grey Plovers**, **Dunlin**, **Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Red Knot** gathering on the mud close to the edge. One of the Knot really was red – a superb breeding plumaged adult. Our route home produced two nice Eurasian Sparrowhawk sightings, and we returned to the Guest House around 5pm. Our birding day was not quite finished either, as we had fantastic views of two **Barn Owls** on our way out to dinner in Hornsea this evening.

THURSDAY 8TH JUNE – *Fresh SW winds, rain giving way to sunny spells, 15C*

We headed north from base today towards Flamborough, setting off in the rain which persisted through the whole of the drive, and during our quick stop at Hornsea Mere. Off Kirckholme Point, there were he numbers of hirundines and swifts feeding low over the water on insects driven down by the weather. Sand Martins were duly added to the trip list, but it was quite a sight to see so many birds whizzing back and forth – difficult to pick a good one out! There was no sign of the recent Iceland Gull [though irritatingly it was seen again later on] so we continued up towards Bridlington and on to Flamborough. After another short stop to check Thornwick Pool [and adding Willow Warbler but nothing else of note] we continued to the head itself. Here the rain had just about stopped, perfect for walking down a short way and enjoying the spectacle of seabirds on the cliffs and on the sea below. There seemed to be even more birds here than usual, particularly **Kittiwakes**, which were collecting seaweed for their nests up on the chalk cliffs above. There were thousands of them, and the water was littered with auks too – **Common Guillemot** and **Razorbill**, but with the odd **Atlantic Puffin** thrown in for good measure. We actually saw quite a number of **Puffins** going in and out of burrows on the earthy strata at the top of the chalk outcrop, something we have not seen here on previous visits. **Eurasian Shag**, **Northern Fulmar** and of course a great many **Northern Gannets** moving by were also seen. Time to head to the main attraction!



Northern Gannets and Common Guillemot, Bempton 8th June

Our visit to Bempton Cliffs is often a trip highlight, and with the wind easing off and the sun even trying to come out, we enjoyed an excellent couple of hours watching the tens of thousands of nesting seabirds. There were chicks to be seen of several species – **Common Guillemot**, **Razorbill**, **Kittiwake** and **Gannet**, the latter ranging from naked new hatchlings, to white fluffy chicks perhaps a couple of weeks old. The views of the birds as ever were spectacular, and of course we saw a few **Puffins** here too! Its always a little bit hard to tear yourselves away, with each ledge crammed with inhabitants playing out their own little soap operas on a square twenty centimetres of space. The smell of course adds to the occasion! There were Common Whitethroats, Tree Sparrows and Reed Buntings to be seen too, before we headed back up to the car park for lunch.



Kittiwake and chick, Bempton 8th June

Our afternoon would be in very different surroundings, inland at the Yorkshire Water reserve at Tophill Low. This varied site is always great for adding a variety of wildlife to the trip list – today we

saw Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Peacock, Speckled Wood and Large Skipper, Common Blue and Azure Damselflies, and Hairy Dragonfly, Black-tailed Skimmer and Four-spotted Chaser. In the woodland, the songs of Common Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Willow Warbler could be heard and on 'D' Reservoir, a fine pair of **Red Crested Pochards** were added. North Marsh was a bit quiet but a **Common Kingfisher** almost flew in through the hide windows and we saw Sedge Warbler too. The woodland in truth was rather quiet in the fresh winds and sunshine – we did get good views of a Common Treecreeper on the walk back though, and some saw a Goldcrest. South Marsh East is generally the best part of the reserve and here we were treated to a stunning first-summer **Little Gull** with a full black hood – a very smart bird indeed. Three more dropped in to join it later on, but in more typical plumage with only a dark smudgy cap. Three or more **Little-ringed Plovers** were squabbling on the shingle islands, and we saw a brood of Common Shelducks, several Common Terns, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Common Teal, Little Egret, Little Grebe and a cracking male **Yellow Wagtail**. A nice spot to sit and watch the comings and goings! South Marsh West was less productive, but we did finally see a couple of European Reed Warblers here, and it was lovely to see Sand Martins had finally taken to the very plush artificial bank here. A cracking showing of orchids on the grass around 'O' Reservoir included Northern Marsh, Common Spotted and Bee Orchids. Leaving the reserve, a small flood in one of the fields was proving attractive to bathing birds, with three more beautiful **Yellow Wagtails** and a male Yellowhammer observed at close quarters from the vehicle – all in all, a good selection of highlights today! After dinner this evening, we had great success on our 'owling' session, seeing six owls in half an hour! A pair of **Little Owls** were in the small paddock across the road from the farmhouse, and while watching these, a pair of **Barn Owls** flew in and went into the nest box there! We ended up getting superb views of one of the Little Owls, which came and perched on a post right in front of us, and then up onto a wire. As dusk fell, the local pair of **Tawny Owls** became active and we had one fly low across the farmyard right in front of us, chased by the Little Owl! A great end to the day, and to our stay at West Carlton.

FRIDAY 9TH JUNE – Moderate SW winds and sunny spells, 15C

We departed West Carlton this morning and began making our way north to County Durham, where we would spend most of the day birding. After a short comfort break at Scotch Corner, we continued past Barnard Castle and Middleton-in-Teesdale, and on to Moor House NR in Upper Teesdale. This wild and beautiful location is perhaps one of the best sites in the whole of the Pennines for seeing typical upland birds, with breeding waders particularly noteworthy here – Lapwing, Redshank, Curlew, Oystercatcher and **Common Snipe** all being common breeders. IN fact we enjoyed the display flights, and saw the chicks, of most of these on our walk. A fine upland flora provided a backdrop to close views of a female **Black Grouse**, which walked across the track right in front of us. Several male Black Grouse were also seen loafing in the fields, with one indulging in a bit of display with tail fanned, and we saw several **Red Grouse** too including a crèche of chicks. We couldn't find any Golden Plover this year in their usual spot, but there were Belted Galloway cattle on their favoured slope and the habitat looked far too well grazed for them this year. At Widdybank Farm, we enjoyed our time by the River Tees scanning the hillside opposite – **Northern Wheatear** and Common Stonechat were seen, but also a lovely juvenile **Ring Ouzel**, with freshly scaled plumage but lacking the white crescent of the adults. A **Merlin** flew across the valley and along the hillside in front of us carrying prey – a real bonus to pick one up and perhaps only the second time we had ever seen one here. It was a male, its blue-grey upperparts clearly visible against the dark heather of the fellside as it dashed past us. Back at the van, we drove a little way down to park by the stream for lunch, noting an adult **Dipper**, Willow Warbler, **Grey Wagtail** and Mistle Thrush while we ate. Such a tranquil spot, and we were lucky that the weather had been pretty kind so far today,

Making our way over the watershed into Weardale, we had some nice views of Golden Plovers at the summit – particularly useful as we had missed them earlier on in the day. Then it was along the valley to Wolsingham and up to Tunstall Reservoir, where the oak woodland would be our final destination for the day. A **Common Sandpiper** was seen along the dam, and a **Grey Wagtail** had a lucky escape from a hunting **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** too. Once inside the woodland, it took less than a minute to locate our main target bird – a female **Pied Flycatcher** sallying back and forth from a low perch by

the side of the path. We soon realised her young were begging from an adjacent nestbox, and we had some superb views of her feeding them at the nest hole, clearly trying to tempt them to make their first leap into the unknown. Two more pairs were seen further on in the woodland, including a dazzling and confiding male, which we really enjoyed watching helping to feed young in another box. The woods were rather quiet for other species though – only one Common Redstart was heard singing, but none were seen. The seemingly now extinct Wood Warbler also failed to appear – this species had become increasingly hard to come by at the site in recent years. Willow Warbler, Bullfinch, Common Treecreeper, Eurasian Jay and Great-spotted Woodpecker were noted, while the walk back across the dam added a nice **Grey Partridge**. A pair of **Spotted Flycatchers** were our last new birds of the day, with one perched on a wire right above our parking spot while we enjoyed afternoon tea. From here it was about a ninety minute drive to Rothbury, our base for the next three nights.



Black Grouse female, and Pied Flycatcher female with young 9th June

SATURDAY 10TH JUNE – *Rain and fresh SSE winds, 18C*

Another wet and miserable day today, but it turned out to be a good one! The rain was really coming down as we headed north this morning to Wooler, and into the Northumberland National Park at Harthope Valley, one of our favourite birding destinations in the north-east. Still a beautiful valley even on a grey morning like this, its varied habitats play host to some excellent and sought after upland breeding birds. One of the noticeable things along the valley was the number of thrushes – both Song and Mistle Thrushes were seen aplenty, and small flocks of the latter were seen at several spots. At our first stop, along the stream, a pair of **Dipper** and **Grey Wagtail** were seen, and Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Common Chiffchaff were seen in the waterside Alders. On the sparse scrubby hillside, we scanned carefully for **Whinchat**, and eventually picked out a fine male singing from the top of a dead Hawthorn. **Lesser Redpolls** were also plentiful here, and we had several perched views of birds including a lovely raspberry red male. Walking upstream, we found a **Spotted Flycatcher** and had close views of **Common Treecreeper**, while a **Garden Warbler** played cat and mouse with us in the canopy. After hearing so many Blackcaps, it was great to hear its more sustained bubbling song and compare the two. Eventually it showed OK, too! Once we got into the more open part of the valley, it was quite windy, and so we headed back along, enjoying views of the same species again, for coffee and freshly baked scones back at the van! A short drive thereafter took us up

to the top of the valley, but a brief exploration there failed to add anything new, despite the weather improving. One of the **Dippers** was seen again on the way back down, and a Yellowhammer was on a fence line.

Next we made the journey over to Seahouses on the coast, to see what the status was of our planned boat trip to the Farne Islands. We were dismayed to find out that all the boats were cancelled for the afternoon – the sea didn't look particularly rough, but it seemed the wet, and health and safety, were probably bigger factors. So after lunch on the quay with the Common Eiders, we swung plan B into action. This involved driving south to Druridge Bay, and the hide at Cresswell Pond. It was actually a lot more pleasant here, with the rain stopped and the temperature rising. A quick call to the Coquet Island boat folks revealed that in fact they were sailing today, and a quick re-scheduling of tomorrow's trip was made – we would get a boat trip today after all! We had plenty of time first to visit the hide, noting Reed Bunting, Tree Sparrow and Common Whitethroat on the way down. Three first-summer **Little Gulls** showed beautifully on the first island, where a Pied Avocet was sheltering three quite small chicks. Other species noted included Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Little Egret, Arctic Tern and both Sedge and Reed Warblers right outside the hide.

Up at Amble, we met with our boat for the rescheduled 4pm trip out to Coquet Island. **Common Eiders** were swimming around in the harbour, and Sandwich and Arctic Terns were both fishing alongside the jetty giving superb views. The excitement mounted as we sailed out of the harbour, picking up nine **Goosanders** roosting on the rocks as we went. In fact we had only just left the shelter of the harbour, when a fine **Roseate Tern** flew low past the bow of the boat – a great start! As we neared the island, the numbers of birds increased – feeding flocks of **Arctic Terns** around boat, scores of **Puffins** on the water, and plenty of Fulmars, Guillemots and Kittiwakes too. Once we reached the island, a real spectacle could be enjoyed – point blank views of many stunning **Roseate Terns**, both on the rocks, flying around and settled outside their chosen nest boxes. The beach was full of terns, and there were fantastic opportunities to compare the differences between Common and Arctic Terns, side by side. The clifftop was thronged with **Puffins** at their burrows, and the air was filled with the sounds of the nesting seabirds. Superb stuff! A **Rock Pipit** was feeding a fledgling by the small jetty and on our way back into harbour, a nice pair of **Razorbills** were also seen. From there it was back to Rothbury – we were looking forward to a pint to round off the day!

SUNDAY 11TH JUNE – *Fresh SW winds and showers, 16C*

After yesterday's boat cancellation for our planned Farne Islands trip, today's itinerary revolved somewhat around our attempt to try and reschedule. With winds strengthening throughout the day, it wasn't until fairly last minute that we were sure we were going to get a trip! With that in mind, our morning was spent north of Rothbury in preparation for the fact that we would need to get across to Seahouses for the trip. This meant missing out on the rest of the Druridge Bay reserves this year, but it did mean we had the opportunity to explore further into the Northumberland National Park. First though, a bit of a treat as we had received a tip off from a local birder about a female **Common Goldeneye** with a brood of young on a pool – a site we had never visited before but which we found easily, and where we were soon watching the proud mother and five well grown ducklings. Many of the group had never seen young Goldeneye before, and this was certainly an exceptional breeding record – there can't be many wild pairs in England! Next we headed up the Ingram Valley into the hills to try for some more upland birds – yesterday we had been hampered with heavy rain at Harthope and it had certainly cost us one or two species. At our first stop by the river, we had excellent views of **Common Sandpiper** and **Grey Wagtail**, and a short walk back downstream produced several **Lesser Redpolls**, trilling in song flight. One particularly impressive male perched nicely on a wire for a scope view – what a colour! In Alders along the burn, we were surprised to find a cracking male **Pied Flycatcher**. It only paused briefly in the open before shooting off and we didn't see it again, but this was the first time we had ever seen one here. Willow Warblers were common all along the valley, and Sand Martins were nesting along the eroded river banks – a really stunning valley to drive along and as we headed further up so the scenery got wilder and more impressive. A male **Whinchat** was a lovely bonus, and it actually flew off the road in front of us and perched on the

bracken - much closer than yesterday's views. At the top of the valley it was really too windy to see much other than a couple more **Redpolls**, so we retreated back down again. The **Whinchat** was in the same place - posing on the fence this time - an absolutely stunner! After another short walk along a section of the burn had failed to produce anything new, we had a coffee before setting off to Seahouses.



Puffin and Sandwich Terns, Farne Islands 10th June

It was like a different day in Seahouses harbour - pleasantly warm and hardly any wind. This meant we were definitely going to get out on the boat at last, and soon we were steaming out towards the northern side of the islands. Once offshore, there was actually a fair bit of swell running and a really stiff wind, but the crossing was comfortable and soon we were in amongst the Atlantic Grey Seals and hordes of feeding **Arctic Terns**, **Kittiwakes** and **Shags**. There were a lot of birds on the water around the islands today - vast rafts of **Common Guillemot** and **Puffin** - and some great views of the nesting seabirds around the stacks of Staple Island. After the usual trip round Brownsman and Longstone, we landed on Inner Farne for just over an hour. While being dive-bombed by **Arctic Terns** is an expected feature of this trip, being pooped on by a Shag was not in the script - jackets in the wash for everyone when we get home! **Common Eiders** at touching distance, wonderful close views of nesting **Razorbills**, **Puffins** coming in and posing by their burrows with bills full of Sandeels - just some of the highlights of a Farne Islands visit. We enjoyed particularly watching the **Sandwich Terns**, which had quite well grown chicks this year, but despite intense searching we couldn't find a Roseate Tern on the rocks this time. There were more good opportunities to compare Common and Arctic together though, and most of the group were now getting the hang of it! Back to harbour around 1700, we made the trip back to Rothbury for the last time. The trip had just flown by!

MONDAY 12TH JUNE - *A warm and dry day, 19C*

It was a travelling day today as we packed up and departed Rothbury around 0915. The journey south went well despite a lot of traffic - we managed to avoid being completely stationary at any point! After a couple of stops en route, we arrived into King's Lynn railway station just before 3pm, and on to Great Ryburgh shortly after.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Great Crested Grebe
2. Little Grebe
3. Northern Fulmar
4. Northern Gannet
5. Great Cormorant
6. European Shag
7. Grey Heron
8. Little Egret
9. Mute Swan
10. Greylag Goose
11. Canada Goose
12. Brent Goose
13. Common Shelduck
14. Mallard
15. Gadwall
16. Eurasian Wigeon
17. Northern Shoveler
18. Common Teal
19. Common Eider
20. Tufted Duck
21. Common Pochard
22. Red Crested Pochard
23. Goosander
24. Grey Partridge
25. Red-legged Partridge
26. Common Pheasant
27. Red Grouse
28. Black Grouse
29. Common Kestrel
30. Common Buzzard
31. Marsh Harrier
32. Red Kite
33. Eurasian Hobby
34. Merlin
35. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
36. Common Moorhen
37. Common Coot
38. European Oystercatcher
39. Pied Avocet
40. Common Ringed Plover
41. Little-ringed Plover
42. Grey Plover
43. European Golden Plover
44. Northern Lapwing
45. Common Sandpiper
46. Red Knot
47. Dunlin
48. Sanderling
49. Ruddy Turnstone
50. Common Redshank
51. Eurasian Curlew

52. Black-tailed Godwit
53. Bar-tailed Godwit
54. Common Snipe
55. Black-headed Gull
56. Common Gull
57. Herring Gull
58. Lesser Black-backed Gull
59. Great Black-backed Gull
60. Little Gull
61. Mediterranean Gull
62. Black-legged Kittiwake
63. Sandwich Tern
64. Common Tern
65. Arctic Tern
66. Roseate Tern
67. Little Tern
68. Common Guillemot
69. Razorbill
70. Atlantic Puffin
71. Barn Owl
72. Little Owl
73. Tawny Owl
74. Great-spotted Woodpecker
75. Green Woodpecker [H]
76. Common Swift
77. Common Kingfisher
78. Common Cuckoo
79. White-throated Dipper
80. Woodpigeon
81. Collared Dove
82. Stock Dove
83. Skylark
84. Meadow Pipit
85. Rock Pipit
86. Pied Wagtail
87. Yellow Wagtail
88. Grey Wagtail
89. Sand Martin
90. Barn Swallow
91. House Martin
92. Winter Wren
93. European Robin
94. Dunnock
95. Whinchat
96. Common Stonechat
97. Northern Wheatear
98. Common Redstart [H]
99. Common Nightingale
100. Common Blackbird
101. Ring Ouzel
102. Song Thrush
103. Mistle Thrush
104. Blackcap
105. Garden Warbler
106. Common Whitethroat

- 107. Lesser Whitethroat
- 108. Sedge Warbler
- 109. European Reed Warbler
- 110. Common Chiffchaff
- 111. Willow Warbler
- 112. Goldcrest
- 113. Spotted Flycatcher
- 114. Pied Flycatcher
- 115. Blue Tit
- 116. Great Tit
- 117. Long-tailed Tit
- 118. Coal Tit
- 119. Rook
- 120. Carrion Crow
- 121. Western Jackdaw
- 122. Magpie
- 123. Common Starling
- 124. House Sparrow
- 125. Tree Sparrow
- 126. Chaffinch
- 127. Greenfinch
- 128. Goldfinch
- 129. Linnet
- 130. Eurasian Siskin [H]
- 131. Lesser Redpoll
- 132. Bullfinch
- 133. Corn Bunting
- 134. Reed Bunting
- 135. Yellowhammer

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