



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT NORTH-EAST ENGLAND 3RD — 9TH JUNE 2019

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MONDAY 3RD JUNE – *Sunny spells in brisk southerly winds, 19C*

Our annual North-east England Grand Tour kicked off again today for the 16th year in a row, and the now regular stop off at Frampton Marsh RSPB this afternoon gave us an excellent start. It was a pretty windy but warm afternoon, as we arrived down at the car park below the seawall just after lunchtime. The tides weren't favourable for our visit, with most small waders being out in The Wash, but there was still plenty to see. A mixed party of Bar-tailed and **Black-tailed Godwits** were seen together, and on the opposite side of the track, we enjoyed **Little-ringed Plover** and **Tundra Ringed Plover** feeding cheek by jowl too. A small group of seven calidrid waders flew in and circled the main pool, and in flight we could see one was clearly larger and longer winged with a white horseshoe on the rump – it was a first-summer **Curlew Sandpiper**, in grey and white plumage. Thankfully the birds settled right in front of us, and we could see the Curlew Sand's longer bill and legs, and just a few rusty markings scattered across the belly. A superb comparison with the Dunlin, which all looked like bright and long-billed arctic types, but they didn't hang around and soon shot off over the sea wall and vanished. Further along the bank, we picked up a few **Brent Geese**, lots of wader chicks including Lapwing, Redshank and Avocet, and an immature **Peregrine** in heavy moult came powering low over the reserve. The highlight here though was a superb **male Ruff** in full plumage, which was watched bathing and then strutting around with its ruff puffed out. Brilliant!



Curlew Sandpiper with Dunlin, Frampton, 3rd June

On the walk back, the pools nearest the track now held more small waders, as another group had dropped in. We moved closer for a clearer look as there was another grey and white bird with them, but it wasn't the Curlew Sand this time - instead a very worn, pale first-summer Dunlin. This was clearly a different flock, with more Ringed Plovers present, and in among them asleep was a fine adult **Little Stint**. We were just about to get everyone onto it when a microlight came over the reserve, and the whole lot took flight and flew out to The Wash – they were not coming back! Two drake **Red Crested Pochards** were seen back by the visitor centre, before we headed round to Marsh Farm Reservoir to finish. Our target here was **Turtle Dove**, and we had excellent views of a purring bird in its favoured dead tree along the hedgerow. Two **Grey Partridges** showing brilliantly by the roadside, were the last birds of the afternoon before we completed the 2.5hr journey north to our base for the

next three nights in East Yorkshire. After a smashing evening meal, we were serenaded to sleep by the local **Tawny Owls** hooting around the guest house!

TUESDAY 4TH JUNE – *Sunny spells and a strengthening SE wind, rain later, 15C*

Both **Barn Owl** and **Little Owl** were seen by some members of the group around the guest house early morning, making for a good start to the day. Today we headed south to the Spurn area, where a surprise or two is always on the cards even in June! We arrived with some anticipation for a good day, as late news from yesterday of a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** had been compounded by the fact that a **Rose-coloured Starling** had also just been found! We headed straight to the Bluebell, as the starling had been seen in Sand Beaches Caravan Park and seemed like the best way to start. We met a couple of other birders here, who told us that it was still present with the mobile starling flocks in the caravan site, but that the sandpiper had flown off early morning and not been seen since. We set off to search for the starling, and did not have to wait long, as the bird was frequently coming down to seed put out by local birders. Starlings seem to have had a good breeding season, with lot of fledged young whirling about noisily. The **Rose-coloured Starling** appeared with a small group of them, and what a stunner! We had the bird feeding in the open right in front of us, before flying up to the wires where it raised its floppy crest and started singing! We could not have had better views of this eastern visitor, and so capitalised on our good fortune by heading off down to The Warren to check the Humber estuary on the falling tide for waders. A surprisingly good number and variety were present, for the time of year – three **Whimbrel** were close in among the eel grass and gave excellent views, while we saw small groups of **Grey Plover**, **Knot** and **Sanderling** too. We also picked out a few Turnstone, Dunlin and Bar-tailed Godwit, before the receding tide meant everything was too distant. From here, we then took a circular walk up the canal bank and around The Triangle, and while it was fairly quiet we enjoyed a few of the local breeding birds such as Reed Bunting, Sedge and Reed Warbler, a Sparrowhawk and lots of Tree Sparrows. A couple of Sandwich Terns flew through, and a **Lesser Whitethroat** was seen briefly.



Rose-coloured Starling at Kilnsea

After a coffee back at the van, we headed back to the Bluebell and took a walk down Beacon Lane. Our aim was to check the beach for waders (the **Broad-billed Sand** had been here) and look for **Little Terns**. We didn't succeed with either, and had to make do with a few nice butterflies in what was now the warmest part of the day – **Red Admiral**, **Green-veined White**, **Wall**, **Large Skipper**, **Common**

Blue, Speckled Wood and Small Heath. After lunch, we proceeded around to Kilnsea Wetlands to try our luck there. Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and Gadwall were all present, and there were a handful of Dunlin and Ringed Plover among the Avocets. A first-summer **Mediterranean Gull** dropped in briefly, and several Sand Martins were hawking over the water. The highlight was a dazzling male **Yellow Wagtail** which dropped in close to the hide – superb! In between the developing showers, we took a walk up to Beacon Ponds to try again for **Little Terns**, and this time had good views of four including one settled on the sand. The wind was really picking up now though, and it felt cold here! Retracing our route, we ended our day with a quick check of Canal Scrape and a pop into the Spurn Visitor Centre, but by now the rain had set in properly and so we opted to head for home. A couple of **Corn Bunting** were seen on the soggy drive back to base.

WEDNESDAY 5TH JUNE – *Cloudy with sunny spells in fresh SW winds, 14C*

A good days birding today saw us make a change to the itinerary for the first time in many years, as we aimed to fit in a new location and key target bird! We started by calling in at Hornsea Mere, as the stiff wind and cool conditions were likely to drive good numbers of Swifts down to the Mere to feed. This was certainly the case, with possibly thousands of swifts on view at any one time, particularly favouring the woodland on the northern edge of the mere and also spiralling way up into the clouds – the sky was literally filled with them. There wasn't much else to be seen here though, so we cracked on to Flamborough Head which would be our first meaningful stop of the day. Visibility was good for viewing the seabirds on the north side of the headland, and we enjoyed the comings and goings of the noisy **Kittiwakes**, plus good numbers of **Puffins** along the clifftop. The water was peppered with thousands of **Guillemots** and **Razorbills**, and squadrons of **Gannets** were flying south past the head from their colony at Bempton a bit further north. We took a walk south across the outer head, to check the bushes and scrub for passerines. It was really quiet though, and we only noted the local breeding Common Whitethroats, Reed Buntings and **Sedge Warbler**. On the south side. We had great views of the breeding **Fulmars** on the chalk cliffs, and marvelled at the continuous streams of auks heading west along the south side of the peninsula. Back at the van we had a coffee, and then set off for nearby Bempton.



Kittiwake at Bempton Cliffs, 5th June

It was an ideal day for visiting Bempton – clear and bright but breezy, giving plenty of uplift to the seabirds flying around the cliffs and making for even more of a spectacle. We passed the visitor centre and its armies of **Tree Sparrows**, and headed down to the viewpoints to enjoy the massed ranks of seabirds. **Kittiwakes**, **Guillemots**, **Razorbills** and **Gannets** were of course all enjoyed in huge numbers and at close quarters, while **Puffin** numbers seemed excellent this year – we saw around thirty scattered along the cliffs. Nesting season did seem to be somewhat behind though – we normally see plenty of Kittiwake chicks on the tour, but some pairs were still only nest building. A **Corn Bunting** sang and gave nice views in the scope, and Common Whitethroats were dancing up from the scattered hawthorns inland from the clifftop as we headed to the East Neuk viewpoint. Here we could view the spectacular Gannet colony, which is now so large it has begun to spill up onto the top of the cliff. Fulmars were also nesting here, and we enjoyed fantastic views looking south to Flamborough, and north to Filey. We lunched back at the car park, and then it was time for something different!



Crossbill female, Wykeham Forest 5th June

Only forty minutes drive to the north-west, is Wykeham Forest – an area we have been considering for inclusion on this tour for a while, but never got around to it. Today was ideal – migration on the coast was virtually non-existent, so we weren't missing anything by heading inland. The pleasant drive soon found us winding our way up into the beautiful forest, and to the raptor watchpoint. Many small birds added themselves to the tour list – Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Willow Warbler, Goldcrest and **Siskin** were all seen or heard between the car park and the viewing area. The watchpoint overlooks a shallow valley, with the edge of the north York moors visible in the distance, and big tracts of mainly conifer forest below. It was a beautiful spot, and as soon as we set our scopes, a family party of **Common Crossbills** appeared on the trees right in front of us. An adult female was feeding two newly fledged juveniles, which was fantastic to see. Then we started scanning for raptors, and it was quickly apparent that there was plenty of activity from the local Common

Buzzards, which were constantly on show for the next 1.5hrs. Very soon, we picked up a very distant large raptor. It was circling slowly on long, flat wings and had a big full tail. It was extremely pale below, being almost totally white on the underparts – it was a male **Honey Buzzard**! This was the bird we had come here to look for, and over the next ten minutes, we managed to get some decent, though very distant, scope views of the bird in wing clapping display flight high in the sky above the forest. Eventually it dropped down out of sight, and we didn't see it or another again during our watch. The vigil was interrupted occasionally by other small birds though, in particular a **Tree Pipit** which appeared on a pine beside us calling before dropping into the bracken. **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Bullfinch** were also seen briefly, and a Willow Warbler sang throughout from the trees behind us. All in all, a successful new stop and one we will be very keen to include in future. It was an hour and twenty minutes back to base from here – in good time for one of Caroline's hearty dinners!

THURSDAY 6TH JUNE – *A fine day with fresh SW winds, 14C*

We departed West Carlton early this morning for the two hour run north to Scotch Corner, where we would break for coffee and toilets before continuing another fifty minutes into Upper Teesdale for our first birding stop. Moor House NR is a delightful area with breeding waders and moorland flora, on the Pennine Way along the River Tees. It was a fine day but cool in the fresh winds, as we set off across the moor towards Widdybank Farm. Breeding waders here are not a patch on the early years of our visits – we did not see a single Redshank today for example, and only a light scattering of Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Curlew and a single Snipe. No Golden Plover were recorded either, yet the habitat hasn't changed here at all in the 16 years we have been visiting. So let's focus on what we did see instead! Two male **Black Grouse** were hunkered down among the buttercups and while we only really saw bits of them on the way out, we had much better views on the return walk as they were wandering around in the open. Seeing a pair of Curlew with half-grown chicks was an absolute delight, and we also saw a couple of good sightings of **Red Grouse**. By the farm, the reliable **Ring Ouzel** spot came up trumps as usual with two males gathering food for their young, the females presumably already busy incubating a second clutch. We had great views of one of the males as he hopped around on the pasture with a Blackbird and Mistle Thrush for company. **Wheatear** were signing and displaying here too, and we saw **Common Sandpiper** along the river. A beautiful walk, among some of the finest scenery in the Pennines.

Lunch was taken along the river in Langdon Beck, where we enjoyed watching the activities of a pair of **Dippers**, and another Common Sandpiper. From here, we crossed the watershed into Weardale, and the headed east along the valley to Tunstall Reservoir north of Wolsingham. This delightful spot was pretty windswept as we arrived, with a cold squall moving up the valley dragging strong winds behind it. It soon passed though, and once we were in the woods, the sun was out and the wind all but disappeared. Almost immediately, we found **Pied Flycatcher** – the nest box scheme here has transformed this species fortunes in the wood and we located four different territories along a short walk. We had fantastic views of them, and were able to watch them signing, gathering food and feeding young at pretty close quarters. Other woodland birds included Great-spotted Woodpecker and Jay, but a nice surprise too in the form of a Woodcock flushed from beside the path. A **Grey Wagtail** on the weir was our last new bird of the day, before we made the final push on to Rothbury in Northumberland where we would be based for the next three nights.

FRIDAY 7TH JUNE – *Sunny morning, overcast later in increasing easterly winds, 14C*

We enjoyed a fine day for our exploration of some of Northumberland's birding gems today, starting along the River Coquet in Rothbury where we had superb views of a pair of **Dippers** before breakfast, and **Grey Wagtails** feeding young. After breakfast, we headed north to Wooler and then into the Cheviot Hills along the beautiful Harthope Valley, always one of the participants favourite locations on this varied tour. We started off well, with distant but clear views of a pair of Whinchats feeding way up on the slope on the north side of the valley, among the scattered Hawthorn bushes in typical habitat. **Lesser Redpolls** were a common breeding species here too, and eventually we had excellent scope views of a raspberry red male. **Siskin**, Willow Warbler, **Dipper** and a **Tree Pipit** way

up on the hillside were also noted, before we set off upstream for a walk to see what else we could find. It was pretty quiet along the next section, with just more Willow Warbler and singing Blackcap in the riverside Alders. By the small bridge, another **Dipper** showed superbly, and several Sand Martins were whizzing up and down calling. A **Garden Warbler** sang from the dense bushes, and we managed a brief view, though some of the group saw it again shortly after. Over the hillside, we noted a Peregrine circling, as well as several Buzzards and a Kestrel. Before leaving, we parked in another spot for coffee and scones (well the bakery next door to our hotel is so good!) and watched a pair of **Spotted Flycatchers** – lovely stuff! Now it was time to head across to the coast to Seahouses, for our afternoon boat trip to the Farne islands.



Dipper, Harthope Valley 7th June

Thankfully the strong winds and rain hitting southern Britain were not due to reach us until later in the evening, and our 2m trip went ahead as scheduled. **Eider** and **Red-breasted Merganser** were new species for the trip just around the harbour, and once out among the Farne Island, we were of course immersed in a seabird spectacle unlike anywhere else in Britain. To be within touching distance of such vast numbers of breeding auks, **Shags** and **Kittiwakes** really is a magical experience.

Flocks of **Arctic Terns** were fishing off the islands, and massed ranks of **Puffins** were coming off the water left, right and centre. We toured round Longstone Island, hearing all about Grace Darling and her famous rescue, and took a look at some of the resident **Atlantic Grey Seals**, before landing for an hour on Inner Farne. Here we ran the gauntlet of the dive-bombing **Arctic Terns**, and saw **Eider** nesting within inches of the boardwalk. By the lighthouse, the views of the breeding **Shag**, **Guillemot** and **Razorbill** are just amazing, and of course the **Puffins** too. We also spent a while studying the subtle differences between **Arctic** and **Common Terns**, which were nesting cheek by jowl. Back down at the jetty, a party of ten **Knots**, all grey first-summers (though one was red just under the chin!) were apparently an island year tick, and we also noted **Ringed Plover** and **Turnstone**. A fine drake **Red-breasted Merganser** was close by, but we could spot any **Roseates** among the tern roost this year. Back to harbour, where afternoon tea and cake awaited us – we took this by the small pool north of Seahouses, where amazingly a **Baillon's Crake** had been seen two days previously! Needless to say we didn't see that, but we did add **Stonechat** to the trip list and see a couple of **Teal** and **Little Grebe**. Time to head home, after another busy day!



Common Guillemot of the 'bridled' form

SATURDAY 8TH JUNE – *A wet day in strong NW winds, 10C*

Not the easiest days birding today, but we kept going right to the end and got our just desserts! The plan was to spend the day birding the excellent Northumberland Wildlife Trust sites around Druridge Bay, culminating in a boat trip to Coquet Island, though unfortunately due to the weather, we learnt early in the day that this would not be going ahead. Disappointing, but all we could do was to make the best of it. We started at Cresswell Pond, where a **Spoonbill** livened up proceedings from the off – it was a fine adult, and feeding in the open rather than snoozing! **Avocets** were also seen here, and the odd **Sandwich Tern**. We received word from local birders in the hide, that a **White-billed Diver** had just gone north past Whitely Bay, and they thought it would take around half an hour to reach us. We dashed down to the beach, and began a seawatch in the driving rain – not a lot of fun. We waited until an hour and a quarter after the sighting, but the bird didn't pass us within range. Nevertheless, around fifty **Common Scoter** hurrying north through the waves was a lovely sight, and three redhead **Goosander** also flew north along the beach right in front of us. Next stop was East Chevington, where we visited the hide at the south end. This was probably the worst point

of the storm, and the cold wind was driving rain in through the hide windows. Not pleasant! Common, Arctic and Sandwich Terns were bathing, and two Great Crested Grebe nests could be seen. Otherwise, though, it was slim pickings. Up at Hauxley, the weather at least brightened up, bringing Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler out to sing and a superb male Bullfinch showed by the feeders. We spent some time checking the terns which were coming in and out from the sea to bathe – more of the common species, but sadly no Roseate among them. At Hadston Carrs, we lunched by the beach, and the rain had now finally stopped. About one hundred **Common Scoter** were in a raft offshore, quite close in. Nearby at the country park, we had some decent views of a **Grasshopper Warbler** feeding young, and we were able to stand quietly and watch it creep in and out with food a couple of times.

A drake Baikal Teal which had been touring the country over the last couple of months, and the previous evening it had been seen on some pools behind the farm just north of Cresswell pond. So our last act of the day would be to wander down the track through the farm to double check it hadn't been overlooked today! It hadn't, and there was no sign at all. The wind was really whipping up now, so we drove the short distance to the car park at the north end of Cresswell pond, to park up and have our afternoon tea somewhere with a bit of shelter. The **Spoonbill** flew in and began feeding next to us, but was not the highlight of the stop. In the willows by the car park, a quiet song started up, riddled with mimicry. Immediately our ears pricked up, and the bird burst into full song – it was a **Marsh Warbler**! Moving round the bushes, the bird was still singing on the leeward side and Ashley managed a brief good view showing an unstreaked 'acro' with very long, pale-tipped primaries, strikingly marked tertials and a pale straw wash to the underparts. After that, it became devilishly elusive, and we only managed a few brief glimpses as it fed in the canopy between bouts of singing. One of the group was in the right spot though to get another clear view of it. After a while, it relaxed into singing a bit more, and gave some wonderful prolonged renditions of a wide variety of species – fantastic to hear! We had to leave though, as dinner was calling – it was now gone 6pm! A nice way to end the trip, in any case.

SUNDAY 9TH JUNE – *A fine day, 18C*

Purely a travelling day today, as we departed Rothbury and headed south with stops in King's Lynn, and finally Great Ryburgh.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

1. Little Grebe
2. Great Crested Grebe
3. Great Cormorant
4. European Shag
5. Northern Gannet
6. Northern Fulmar
7. Grey Heron
8. Little Egret
9. Eurasian Spoonbill
10. Mute Swan
11. Greylag Goose
12. Canada Goose
13. Barnacle Goose
14. Brent 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. Common Eider
25. Common Scoter
26. Red-breasted Merganser
27. Goosander
28. Common Kestrel
29. Peregrine
30. Common Buzzard
31. European Honey Buzzard
32. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
33. Red Kite
34. Common Pheasant
35. Red-legged Partridge
36. Grey Partridge
37. Red Grouse
38. Black Grouse
39. Common Moorhen
40. Common Coot
41. Pied Avocet
42. European Oystercatcher
43. Common Ringed Plover
44. Little-ringed Plover
45. Grey Plover
46. Northern Lapwing
47. Red Knot
48. Little Stint
49. Dunlin
50. Sanderling
51. Curlew Sandpiper
52. Common Redshank
53. Eurasian Curlew
54. Whimbrel
55. Black-tailed Godwit
56. Bar-tailed Godwit
57. Ruddy Turnstone
58. Common Snipe
59. Woodcock
60. Common Sandpiper
61. Ruff
62. Black-headed Gull
63. Common Gull
64. Herring Gull
65. Lesser Black-backed Gull
66. Great Black-backed Gull
67. Mediterranean Gull
68. Black-legged Kittiwake
69. Common Guillemot
70. Razorbill

71. Atlantic Puffin
72. Arctic Tern
73. Little Tern
74. Sandwich Tern
75. Common Tern
76. Collared Dove
77. Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon
78. Woodpigeon
79. Stock Dove
80. Common Swift
81. Little Owl
82. Tawny Owl
83. Great-spotted Woodpecker
84. Green Woodpecker
85. Dipper
86. Barn Swallow
87. House Martin
88. Sand Martin
89. Skylark
90. Meadow Pipit
91. Rock Pipit
92. Tree Pipit
93. Pied Wagtail
94. Grey Wagtail
95. Yellow Wagtail
96. Wren
97. Northern Wheatear
98. European Robin
99. Dunnock
100. Common Stonechat
101. Whinchat
102. Common Blackbird
103. Ring Ouzel
104. Song Thrush
105. Mistle Thrush
106. Common Chiffchaff
107. Willow Warbler
108. Sedge Warbler
109. Reed Warbler
110. Marsh Warbler
111. Common Whitethroat
112. Lesser Whitethroat
113. Blackcap
114. Garden Warbler
115. Grasshopper Warbler
116. Spotted Flycatcher
117. Pied Flycatcher
118. Blue Tit
119. Great Tit
120. Coal Tit
121. Long-tailed Tit
122. Common Treecreeper (H)
123. Carrion Crow
124. Western Jackdaw
125. Common Magpie

- 126. Rook
- 127. Eurasian Jay
- 128. Common Starling
- 129. Rose-coloured Starling
- 130. House Sparrow
- 131. Tree Sparrow
- 132. Chaffinch
- 133. Greenfinch
- 134. Goldfinch
- 135. Common Linnet
- 136. Lesser Redpoll
- 137. Eurasian Siskin
- 138. Bullfinch
- 139. Common Crossbill
- 140. Yellowhammer
- 141. Reed Bunting
- 142. Corn Bunting

*Checklist includes species seen on journey