



ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT SOMERSET LEVELS & FOREST OF DEAN 6TH — 10TH JUNE 2021

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SUNDAY 6th JUNE – *Light WSW winds, sunny spells, humid, 22C*

The group convened at 14:00 at the Speech House Hotel in the heart of the Forest of Dean, where we would be spending the next two nights. Gathering in the car park, we took time to appreciate the healthy numbers of Common House Martins and Barn Swallows nesting on the hotel's various outbuildings, seemingly unconcerned by our presence.



Barn Swallow

Our first port of call would be a short session at New Fancy View, where the remnants of old colliery workings afford a splendid vista over a large part of the forest, looking north. The hoped-for raptors failed to materialise, perhaps reluctant to take to the wing in the very light winds, with just a few Common Ravens, Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Common Woodpigeons over, while birds in the

proximity of the viewpoint included Song Thrush (plenty in song), Eurasian Siskins, Willow Warblers and Eurasian Blackcap.

Moving on, we headed the short distance to Nagshead RSPB, a lovely oak woodland reserve in the south-west of the Forest of Dean, just past the village of Parkend. Walking first to the Lower Hide area, we were quickly onto a showy pair of **Common Redstarts**, bringing food to a nest in a split dead branch, always such lovely birds to see. A Eurasian Treecreeper showed briefly near the hide and a **Spotted Flycatcher** flitted through the canopy. Next to the short trail, where a female **Pied Flycatcher** was working hard feeding her brood in a nest box, with a pair doing the same a short distance north along the trail from here, with the male giving prolonged views as he rested on a perch. A short distance up the long trail we located a singing **Wood Warbler**, although the views were rather fleeting.



Common Redstart & European Pied Flycatcher

Following an agreeable dinner at the hotel, an evening excursion was made to a nearby area of recent forest clearfell, where the heath-like habitat is managed for ground-nesting birds (including Eurasian Nightjar) by the Forestry Commission. Arriving at 21:15, we were quickly treated to a roding **Eurasian Woodcock**, right overhead. Soon after the first **European Nightjar** began churring, followed by superb close views of three or four birds, as they called and chased around us – magical! By now, the midges were becoming an annoyance, so we stayed just long enough for another couple of Nightjar and Woodcock sightings, before retracing our route back to the vehicle, concluding a successful first day in the forest.

MONDAY 7th JUNE – *Light W winds, sunny spells, 19C*

After breakfast our first destination would be Yew Tree Brake, where we would take a very enjoyable circular walk in lovely sunny conditions, taking in Woorgreens Pond, covering a variety of habitats. Willow Warblers and Common Whitethroats showed well, with most of the former carrying food to hidden young. Garden Warblers were well represented, including four singing at one relatively small clearing, one of which treated us to fabulous views, not always the case with this species! Common Chiffchaffs and Eurasian Blackcaps were frequent and a Stock Dove flew past. A little further on we encountered our first singing Tree Pipit, with six in total during the walk, while a Common Buzzard flew in and perched at close quarters.

Taking the footpath which runs past the eastern shore of Woorgreens Pond, we paused by a sheltered bay and were pleased to locate two **Downy Emerald** dragonflies, a rather localised species in Britain and a specialist of woodland water bodies. Other Odonata here comprised Four-spotted Chaser, Large Red Damselflies and Common Blue Damselflies. The pond itself held a few Tufted Ducks, Greylag Geese, Canada Geese and Common Moorhens, while our first Common Swifts of the tour whizzed over.

Following refreshments at the hotel, we checked out the Speech House Woodland just across the road from the hotel, but there was no sign of the hoped-for Wood Warbler, which had been present here on the previous tour. Moving on to Cannop Ponds, we parked the vehicle by the feeding station on the approach road, where we were entertained by a variety of woodland birds, including Eurasian Nuthatch and Coal Tit, while a female Mandarin Duck tucked into the grain. More Mandarin Ducks were seen at the south end of the ponds, where Great Spotted Woodpecker and Eurasian Siskin were attracted to the feeders at the stone works. A Grey Wagtail was on the stream here, with Beautiful Demoiselle added to the Odonata list.

Packed lunch was taken at New Fancy View, where a breeze had at least encouraged several Common Buzzards onto the wing, although Northern Goshawks remained conspicuous by their absence.

A sizeable portion of the afternoon was spent at Symonds Yat Rock, where a viewpoint affords superb views of the precipitous rocks, under which the River Wye snakes. With patience we eventually had flight and perched views of **Peregrine Falcon**, this being a traditional nesting location. A Eurasian Sparrowhawk flew past below us and Common Buzzards were frequent. A most unexpected sighting here was a **Common Club-tail** dragonfly, a female perched on vegetation just below the railings. This sought-after species is a very localised specialist of the silty middle and lower courses of a handful of rivers in Britain, emerging for a short period in early summer, with adults dispersing into woodlands up to 10 km away.

Having taken refreshments in the pleasantly situated café there, we finished the day at Parkend. Stopping on a tiny bridge over Cannop Brook by the cycle shop, we were delighted to watch the antics of a **White-throated Dipper**, always a pleasure to see. Finally, we stretched our legs at the church, where Long-tailed Tit was new for the list.

TUESDAY 8th JUNE – *Light W winds, mainly sunny, 24C*

Today we would be transferring to the Somerset Levels, via Steart Marshes WWT, a reserve on the coast of the Bristol Channel, just west of Bridgwater.

Before departing the forest, however, we opted to take a pre-breakfast walk through the mixed habitats at Crabtree Hill. Mustering in the car park, we paused to watch a singing **Common Redstart**, perched atop a dead branch in the crown of an oak tree just across the road from the hotel, where a pair of Stock Doves was also present.

At Crabtree Hill we were greeted with an impressive chorus, especially from Song Thrushes, Eurasian Wrens, Eurasian Blackcaps and Garden Warblers. The first section of woodland yielded two Mistle Thrushes and a **Common Redstart**, with a Green Woodpecker seen briefly just before the heath, where Tree Pipit, European Stonechat, Common Linnet and Long-tailed Tits were all noted. A **Wood Warbler** sang at a distance, but soon fell quiet. The return route yielded a male Eurasian Bullfinch, several Goldcrests and a brief **Firecrest** by the car park.

Following breakfast, we checked out of the hotel and headed south for Steart, navigating the rather circuitous route from the M5 past Bridgwater and onto the coast. Here the Quantock Hide, overlooking Otterhampton Marsh, afforded close views of the substantial colony of breeding **Pied Avocets**, with plenty of well-grown chicks present. Further sightings included two sitting **Little Ringed Plovers**, Eurasian Oystercatchers and numerous Common Shelducks. The vegetated reens held Sedge Warbler, Eurasian Reed Warblers and Reed Buntings, not to mention a riot of flowers (notably the rather local Grass Vetchling), attracting a variety of insects, including Painted Lady. Lunch was taken at the nearby Steart Gate car park, where it is possible to view the beach and the Welsh coastline across the channel. Unfortunately, the tide was low, which here means the shore

was an awful long way off, but even so plenty of Little Egrets were visible spaced out across the flats, while a Great Black-backed Gull flew past and Eurasian Skylarks sang.

Leaving Steart, we retraced our route to the M5, took a break for refreshments and headed east to the Avalon Marshes, arriving at the fabulous Ham Wall RSPB at about 14:00. Walking east from the car park, we were soon onto our first **Western Marsh Harriers** of the day, with a **Great White Egret** not far behind from the first. An expanding breeding colony of Great Cormorants was visible to the south, while bird song included Garden Warbler, Eurasia Reed Warbler and the explosive bursts of Cetti's Warbler. Tufted Ducks, Gadwalls and Common Pochards were seen, with Little Grebe also soon located. A small crowd of birders on the track to the Avalon Hide indicated that **the River Warbler** was still present; this off course eastern *Locustella* had turned up a few days before and was singing at frequent intervals from its favoured territory. With the afternoon heat and humidity making standing uncomfortable, we opted initially to take cover in the spacious Avalon Hide. Several **Eurasian Hobbies** were hawking overhead, **Great White Egrets** were commonplace and **Western Marsh Harriers** were almost constantly in view. A few Northern Lapwings flew past, Water Rails called and a flock of Long-tailed Tits moved through. Best of all, though, was a **Eurasian Bittern**, which gave a super close fly past.



Great White Egret

Retracing our route past the **River Warbler** (we would return for better views in less hot conditions in the morning), we headed for our hotel in historic Wells, where we would be spending the next two nights, with dinner taken that evening in Glastonbury.

WEDNESDAY 9th June – *Light SW winds, sunny morning, cloudier afternoon, 21C*

The first part of the day would be spent revisiting Ham Wall, where we enjoyed excellent views of the **River Warbler**, which sang vigorously from various perches, delighting the gathered crowd. Moving on from the 'mega', we covered parts of the reserve not reached on the previous day, walking as far as the second platform and returning via Loxton's Marsh, taking in the sights and sounds of this special place. Odonata included Scarce Chaser, Four-spotted Chaser, Hairy Dragonfly, Red-eyed Damselfly, Variable Damselfly and Banded Demoiselle, while a Grass Snake basked by the gate down to Loxton's Marsh. Common Cuckoo was heard only, but **Western Marsh Harriers** and **Great White Egrets** performed, with Eurasian Bullfinch, Northern Lapwing and Eurasian Sparrowhawk also logged.

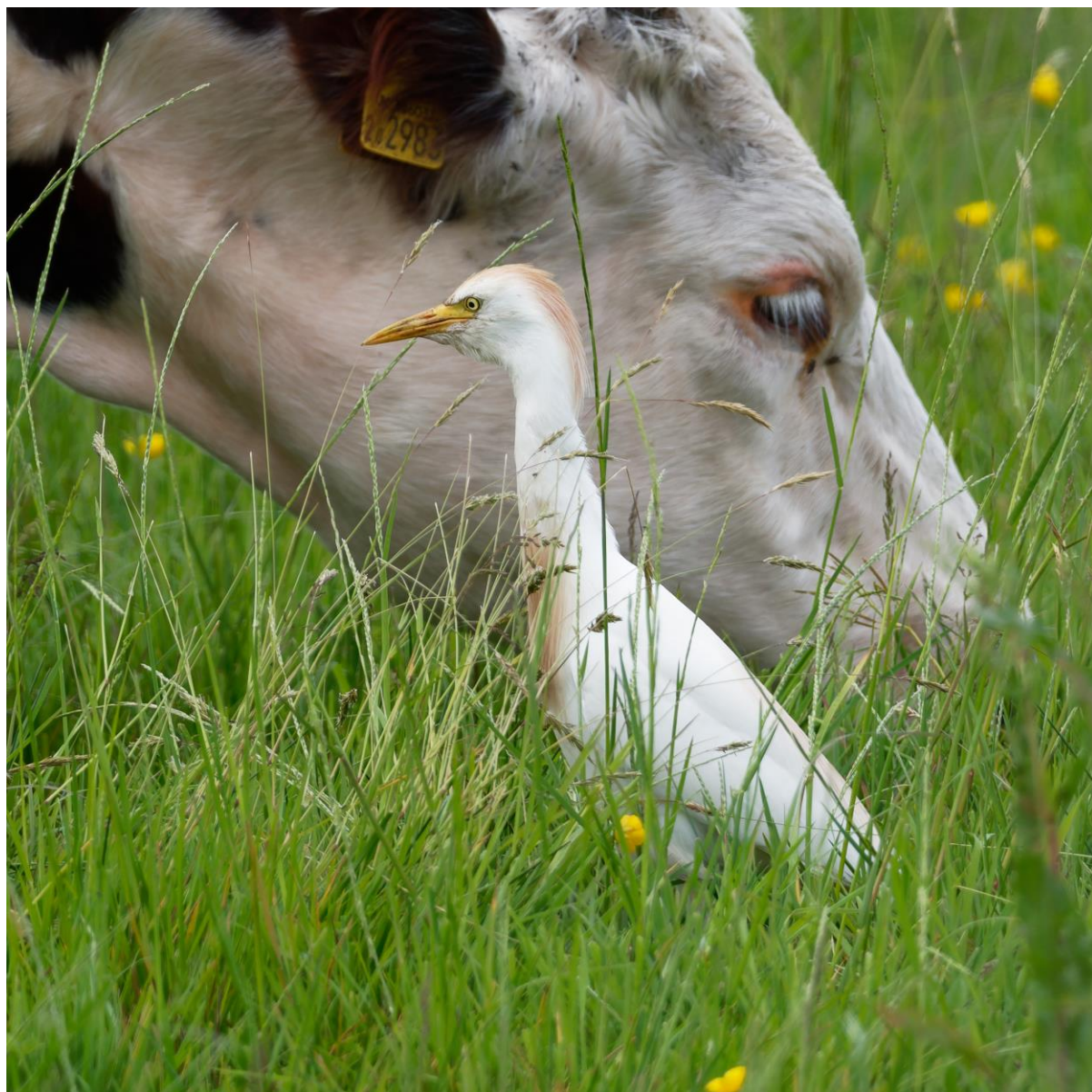


River Warbler

Moving on, we stopped for refreshments at the Avalon Marshes Centre (good coffee to be had here) before driving the short distance west to Catcott Lows. Formerly arable land, Catcott is one of the lowest points in the Brue Valley and has been converted to grazing marsh, with Glastonbury Tor forming a scenic background from the Lows Hide. Northern Shovelers were new for the trip and several Northern Lapwings displayed, with a pair of Common Redshanks also observed, while **Great White Egret**, **Little Egret** and **Western Marsh Harrier** vied for our attention. Prolonged views of a hunting **Barn Owl** were enjoyed, which eventually flew back to its bespoke nest box, where no doubt some hungry youngsters impatiently awaited. Odonata were plentiful, including several Emperor Dragonflies.

Following lunch at Catcott, we drove the short distance to Westhay NNR, a long-established Somerset Wildlife Trust reserve, being a network of open water, reedbed and the largest surviving fragment of lowland acidic mire in the south-west, all reclaimed from the remnants of industrial-scale peat extraction. The reserve gave us excellent views of Cetti's Warbler, while several pairs of Great Crested Grebes tended young nearby. Common Cuckoo called close by, but tantalisingly refused to show. Spending some time in the North Hide, we were privileged to witness two **European Otters** moving along the edge of a reedbed, while a **Common Kingfisher** perched at almost touching distance in front of the hide. **Western Marsh Harriers** and **Great White Egrets** showed well, but a 'booming' **Eurasian Bittern** remained unseen, as did **Bearded Tits**, which called briefly, before falling silent.

Back at the car park, we decided to spend the remainder of our time birding from the vehicle, having walked a fair distance during the day. Heading off west, we drove slowly along Totney Drove, though a landscape seemingly belonging to a previous age, where vegetated reens criss-crossed a complex of damp grazing pastures. The best sighting here was three **Western Cattle Egrets** by the roadside at Tealham Moor, a species which is now seemingly firmly established on the Levels.



Western Cattle Egret

Dinner that evening was taken at a pleasant local gastro pub in Wells, where the cathedral had been taken over by a film crew for 'Dungeons & Dragons', a big production due out in 2023, apparently.

THURSDAY 10th JUNE – *Light SW winds, sunny morning, cloudier afternoon, 21C*

Our final session of the tour would be spent at Shapwick Heath NNR, next to Ham Wall on the Avalon Marshes. Walking west towards the Meare Heath Hide (noting White-legged Damselflies on floating vegetation on the canal), **Western Marsh Harriers** were hunting, while a huge emergence of Scarce Chasers and Four-spotted Chasers was noted from the hide, with hundreds newly emerged on the reeds.



Noah's Lake didn't produce any surprises, but we had more luck from the adjacent 70 Acres Hide, where we watched a pair of **Bearded Tits** seemingly taking food to a nest, albeit at some distance. Also here a **Eurasian Hobby** gave a close fly past. Heading back to the car park, we paused at the Shapwick Tower Hide, where two researchers gave us some interesting information on their work studying **Great White Egrets**, with the use of drones. Watching a family party, we learned to a good way to distinguish newly fledged juveniles from on-breeding adults is the dark tip to the upper mandible in the youngsters. You learn something new every day!

By now it was late morning and time to make tracks back to Speech House Hotel, where the participants cars had been left, where we arrived 90 minutes later, concluding a very successful tour of the Forest of Dean and Somerset Levels.

THE SOMERSET LEVELS AND FOREST OF DEAN IN SPRING - JUNE 2021

Species order, names and taxonomy follows - Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2018. The eBird/Clements checklist of birds of the world: v2018. Downloaded from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>

#	Common Name	Scientific name		6	7	8	9	10		Comments
Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)										
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			✓		✓	✓		
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			✓		✓	✓		
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
4	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				✓				
5	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>			✓					
6	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>					✓			
7	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>				✓	✓	✓		
8	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
9	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>				✓				
10	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓	✓		✓		
Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)										
11	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>					✓			
Podicipedidae (Grebes)										
12	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				✓	✓			
13	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
Columbidae, Cuculidae and Apodidae (Pigeons, Doves, Cuckoos and Swifts)										
14	Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>				✓	✓	✓		
15	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓	✓				
16	Common Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

17	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓			
18	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>					H		
19	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		✓					
20	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Rallidae (Rails and Coots)</i>									
21	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				H	H	H	
22	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	✓	✓		
23	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Recurvirostridae and Charadriidae (Stilts, Avocets, Plovers and allies)</i>									
24	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>				✓			
25	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>				✓			
26	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				✓	✓		
27	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓			
28	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				✓			
<i>Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)</i>									
29	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		✓					
30	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>					✓		
<i>Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skuas)</i>									
31	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>				✓		✓	
32	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
33	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>				✓	✓		
<i>Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)</i>									
34	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓	✓	✓	
<i>Ardeidae (Heron, Egrets and Bitterns)</i>									
35	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>				✓	H		
36	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
37	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>					✓		3 at Tealham Moor
38	Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓	✓	✓	
39	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓	✓	✓	

	Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)									
40	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
41	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓		✓			
42	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)									
43	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					✓			
	Picidae (Woodpeckers)									
44	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	✓	H	✓	H		
45	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>				✓				
	Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)									
46	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				✓				
47	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>				✓		✓		Maximum c. 20
48	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓					
	Corvidae (Crows, Jays and Magpies)									
49	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓		
50	Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>				✓	✓	✓		
51	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
52	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>				✓	✓			
53	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
54	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓	H			
	Panuridae and Alaudidae (Reedling and Larks)									
55	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>					H	✓		
56	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>				✓	✓			
	Hirundinidae (Swallows)									
57	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
58	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Paridae (Tits)									
59	Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>		✓	✓	✓				
60	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

61	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Sittidae and Certhiidae (Nuthatches and Treecreepers)</i>									
63	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓	✓			
64	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓					
<i>Troglodytidae (Wrens)</i>									
65	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Regulidae (Kinglets)</i>									
66	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓	✓			
67	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>				✓			
<i>Scotocercidae and Phylloscopidae (Bush and Leaf Warblers)</i>									
68	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>				H	✓	✓	
69	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		✓		H			
70	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	H	
71	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	H	
<i>Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)</i>									
72	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>				H	✓		
73	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓	✓	✓	
74	River Warbler	<i>Locustella fluviatilis</i>				✓	✓		
75	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
77	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)</i>									
78	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓					
79	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		H	✓	✓	✓	✓	
80	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓					Nagshead RSPB
81	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓		✓			
82	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			✓				
<i>Turdidae and Sturnidae (Thrushes and Starlings)</i>									

83	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓	✓				
84	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
85	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
86	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
<i>Prunellidae (Accentors)</i>										
87	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			✓	✓	✓			
<i>Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)</i>										
88	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓					
89	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
90	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			✓	✓				
<i>Fringillidae (Finches)</i>										
91	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
92	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓	✓			
93	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓	✓				
94	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓	✓				
95	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
96	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓					
<i>Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)</i>										
97	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
<i>Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)</i>										
98	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

