

ELBF Norfolk trip 6-8 February 2009

by Mike Dent

On a soggy and cold Friday afternoon seven of us met up at Lynford Arboretum. As we walked down the track we heard **Siskins** and **Redpolls** calling and spotted a couple of Roe Deer taking shelter under a tree. A **Nuthatch** was seen and we soon got views of three **Redpolls** which, after much debate, we agreed were **Lessers**. We managed to notch up both **Green** and **Great Spotted Woodpeckers** before the first **Hawfinch** was found. Two of these elusive finches were watched for quite a time, interrupted only by a **Marsh Tit** which was certainly a bonus. A stroll back through the trees didn't produce much except for a view of **Goldcrests** feeding on the ground which was slightly bizarre.

We walked through the car park and down to Lynford Water from where we had heard reports of two Ferruginous Ducks. Unfortunately we were unable to find either, making do with lots of commoner ducks and four **Goosander**. Then it was time to drive up to the north coast and ensconce ourselves in our various quarters before meeting up for an evening meal in the Three Swallows in Cley. Several of us decided to continue the birding theme of the weekend by ordering Ostrich steaks, an experience which none of us will repeat in a hurry!

Saturday dawned bright and cold and stayed that way all day until the evening. Our intention was to cover east Norfolk, concentrating on geese and raptors but we took a detour to North Walsham where three Waxwings had been reported in Sainsbury's car park. However, by the time we got there they had been and gone and, we were reliably informed, they wouldn't return for a few hours. So we moved on to Cantley to try for the first of our target species for the day and, at the second viewing point we tried we scored with distant views of three **Taiga Bean Geese**. We saw our first Chinese Water Deer which we then continued to see virtually everywhere we went. The first **Marsh Harrier** of the day was seen, little did we realise how many we would have seen by the end of the day. Adrian had joined up with us by this time making our full compliment of eight and we drove along some interesting roads to Buckenham. Having admired the level crossing keeper's collection of garden gnomes and other ornaments, we drove down to the RSPB reserve at Buckenham Marshes. The area was teeming with **Wigeon** and **Teal** but we were unable to find the reported Green-winged Teal.



Wigeon (Neil Murphy)

However, we did add some waders to the trip list with fifty-plus **Black-tailed Godwits**, a couple of **Ruff**, **Snipe** and lots of **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover** and saw another two **Marsh Harriers**.

It was then time to drive up to Hickling Broad for what we hoped would be the highlight of the day. Whilst driving through Broadland we saw several skeins of **Pink-footed Geese**. On arriving at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust centre we heard **Common Cranes** calling in the distance and then started walking down to the viewing point. A little way along the track we came upon quite a large mixed flock of small birds which contained quite a number of **Yellowhammers**, certainly more than any of us had seen locally. Shortly after that we all saw our first **Barn Owl** of the trip, shortly followed by the second. One or two people had seen a couple earlier but these were the first that we all got. As soon as we got to the viewing platform we started seeing **Marsh Harriers** and another **Barn Owl**. We managed to identify both male and ring-tail **Hen Harriers**, a **Merlin** and saw a group of three **Common Cranes** on three occasions. At one point there was a mass of **Marsh Harriers** in the air in one small area which different people managed to count as 43, 45 and 47. Given that there were several still perched in bushes and flying in different parts of the marsh and that quite a few more birds came in later, we estimated that there were at least 80 birds present. A remarkable number, especially when you consider how rare this species was thirty years ago and was only a summer migrant. It was while we were looking at this flock that Dave saw a **Bittern** in flight. Also at Hickling we had large numbers of **Pink-foot** flying over plus a single **White-fronted Goose** and seven **Bewick's Swans**. A **Bullfinch** was another good passerine find. On arriving back at the car park as the light was fading fast, a **Woodcock** went hurtling past and we were again treated to the trumpeting of **Common Cranes**.

Sunday morning again started off bright and clear and we met up at the end of the west bank at Cley where a first-winter **Glaucous Gull** was sitting obligingly on the shingle in between bouts of feeding on the carcasse of a seal pup.



Glaucous Gull (Neil Murphy)



Snow Bunting (Neil Murphy)

A scan of the **Dark-breasted Brent Goose** flock produced a rather smart **Pale-bellied Brent** but no sign of the reported Black Brant.



Pale-bellied Brent Goose (Neil Murphy)

There were lots of **Red-throated Divers** flying past on the sea and some were seen on the water. Simon was lucky enough to identify a **Black-throated Diver** and we all saw a few **Guillemots** and a first-winter **Kittiwake**. There were also a few **Common Scoter** flying past and **Turnstones** on the beach. Whilst some of us went to do a bit of last minute specialist shopping and packed the car up, Roy, Debbie, Bill and Adrian went along to the visitor centre where they added **Pintail** and **Avocet** to the trip-list.

From Cley we drove to Lady Anne's Drive at Holkham where there were **Pink-feet** right up against the fence of the fields.



Pink-footed Goose (Roy Woodward)

Two **Marsh Harriers** were seen flying above the flashes and when all the duck and waders went up Adrian picked out the cause in a fine **Peregrine** which gave quite a long display before flying out of sight. Waders here were mainly **Lapwing** and **Golden Plover** with a few **Snipe** and **Dunlin**. On reaching the beach three **Red-breasted Mergansers** were soon picked out on the sea and a flock of about fifty **Snow Buntings** was seen. Closer inspection of the area where this flock was, revealed single **Rock** and **Water Pipits**. As we were walking back the conversation turned to **Short-eared Owls**, most of us agreeing that years ago you saw them all along the north coast but that we had failed to find one this weekend. A scan across the area to the east gave us what we wanted as a **Short-eared Owl** put on a marvellous display before being joined by a second bird for a brief while.

On leaving Holkham it was time to say "Good-bye" to Bill and Debbie who had the luxury of staying another night and going home on the Monday. The rest of us headed south to our final stop at Lakenheath where the **Great Grey Shrike** was soon found by Neil.



Great Grey Shrike (Neil Murphy)

It sat in the same bush for the whole time we were there, quite boring really. The lake held a first-winter **Yellow-legged Gull** which was appreciated by some more than others and, just as we were leaving, **Bearded Tits** were heard in the reedbed and seen by a couple of people.

All in all it was a brilliant weekend with a trip list of 118 species. Many thanks are due to Dave for the organisation and the driving.



Dave's Robin

Neil Murphy

Species list		
Mute Swan	Peregrine Falcon	Water Pipit
Bewick's Swan	Water Rail	Pied Wagtail
Taiga Bean Goose	Moorhen	Wren
Pink-footed Goose	Coot	Dunnock
White-fronted Goose	Common Crane	Robin
Greylag Goose	Oystercatcher	Stonechat
Canada Goose	Avocet	Blackbird
Barnacle Goose	Golden Plover	Fieldfare
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Lapwing	Song Thrush
Pale-bellied Brent Goose	Dunlin	Redwing
Egyptian Goose	Ruff	Mistle Thrush
Shelduck	Snipe	Goldcrest
Wigeon	Woodcock	Bearded Tit
Gadwall	Black-tailed Godwit	Long-tailed Tit
Teal	Curlew	Marsh Tit
Mallard	Redshank	Coal Tit
Pintail	Green Sandpiper	Blue Tit
Shoveler	Turnstone	Great Tit
Pochard	Black-headed Gull	Nuthatch
Tufted Duck	Common Gull	Great Grey Shrike
Eider	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Jay
Common Scoter	Herring Gull	Magpie
Red-breasted Merganser	Yellow-legged Gull	Jackdaw
Goosander	Glaucous Gull	Rook
Red-legged Partridge	Great Black-backed Gull	Carrion Crow
Pheasant	Kittiwake	Starling
Red-throated Diver	Guillemot	House Sparrow
Black-throated Diver	Rock Dove	Chaffinch
Little Grebe	Stock Dove	Greenfinch
Great Crested Grebe	Wood Pigeon	Goldfinch
Cormorant	Collared Dove	Siskin
Bittern	Barn Owl	Linnet
Little Egret	Short-eared Owl	Lesser Redpoll
Grey Heron	Kingfisher	Bullfinch
Marsh Harrier	Green Woodpecker	Hawfinch
Hen Harrier	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Snow Bunting
Sparrowhawk	Sky Lark	Yellowhammer
Common Buzzard	Meadow Pipit	Reed Bunting
Kestrel	Rock Pipit	Corn Bunting
Merlin		118 species