

ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT NORFOLK 12TH – 17TH FEBRUARY 2012

Monday 13th February

A relatively mild day after recent freezing weather, and the birding certainly reflected the cold snap with some top birds seen today along with great views of many commoner species. We took the back roads across to Ringstead noting several Grey Partridge, Egyptian Goose, Redwing and Fieldfare en

route. Eight Corn Buntings showed really well in the hedgerows with a couple of birds even singing, and we also saw a fine Yellowhammer, a few Skylarks and a Marsh Harrier. Down at Holme, we walked out to Gore Point to check the shoreline and sea, and with the tide coming in large concentrations of birds were making the most of the unfrozen pools. Common Redshank, Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot and Eurasian Oystercatcher were most numerous but we also saw Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Ruddy Turnstone. Fourteen SNOW BUNTING fed along the tideline just a few metres away and offshore we saw three Northern Fulmar, three Red-throated Divers, female Common Goldeneye and three fine drake Common Eiders flying east along the surf. Over the grazing marshes, Common Buzzard and Marsh Harrier were hunting and we saw both Grey and European Golden Plovers, a few Stock Doves and a male Bullfinch, as well as several hundred more Fieldfares. At nearby Hunstanton cliffs, there wasn't much on the sea other than about twenty Northern Fulmars and a single female Red-breasted Merganser, so we headed off to the south following the Wash coast down to Kings Lynn and along the Great Ouse relief channel to Saddlebow. From the first bridge, an amazing collection of waterfowl was crammed into two small unfrozen pools in the river channel of solid ice. A melee of diving Tufted Duck and Common Pochard held no fewer than eleven SMEW including three drakes, though we had better views of the redheads in the closer pool especially when they climbed out onto the ice. Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Teal and Northern Pintail were also seen as well as Little and Great Crested Grebes – but imagine our surprise when eleven BEWICK'S SWANS flew in and landed in the same little pool! We had fantastic views of these superb birds, with apparently two family groups involved. Another hundred Fieldfare flew over too. Heading on we checked the second bridge with little success and then at the third bridge near Magdalen, added a superb drake GOOSANDER. Two Common Goldeneye and a close fly by Green Woodpecker were also here, rounding of an excellent morning. After lunch, we headed south again and took the road across Ten Mile Bank to Welney. By the side of the road, a feeding flock of about seventy BEWICK'S SWANS provided a wonderful sight in the snow, their trumpeting calls adding to the scene. A single WHOOPER SWAN could also be picked out at the front of the flock. We called in briefly at the WWT centre to use the facilities and check the feeders, but couldn't add any further species so retraced our route back to the main road. Along the A10 at Tottenhill, we called in at the gravel pit which had quite a bit of open water and hence a lot of ducks. Probably four hundred Tufted Ducks and two hundred Common Teal were crammed into the open pool, and we were pleased to find another three GOOSANDER including two drakes. Finally, we ended the day at Roydon Common NWT where a walk out to view the raptor roost proved very successful. Two ringtail HEN HARRIERS were quickly seen, followed by a third, and we had some great scoped views of the birds perched and in flight in the last rays of afternoon sunshine. About eight Common Buzzards were seen, and the day was rounded off with a fine male HEN HARRIER ghosting in and giving memorable views.

Tuesday 14th February

A fantastic days birding today had both quantity and quality as we concentrated on the Northern part of the Broads. We started at Cley though and headed down the East Bank, where we able to view a large flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese. At least five Pale-bellied Brent were easily picked out among the flock, though the cold wind meant we didn't fancy standing still for too long! At Arnold's Marsh, a good selection of waders included many Grey and Ringed Plovers, three Bar-tailed Godwits, one Black-tailed Godwit, one hundred Dunlin and ten Pied Avocets. A female Red-breasted Merganser was feeding at the back of the lagoon too, nicely complementing yesterdays Goosander. Two Bearded Tits gave showed superbly in the edge of the reeds by the main path, giving uncharacteristically close and lengthy views for the time of year. Two Marsh Harriers were quartering the reeds and a pair of Stonechats fed along the edge of the channel. Moving on to nearby Kelling we stopped for a coffee break and to check the garden where a flock of Redpolls had recently been feeding. Around twenty Lesser Redpolls were seen, and to our surprise the COUE'S ARCTIC REDPOLL appeared and gave simply stunning views down to a few metres as it came to the feeder – the bird had gone missing for the last two weeks and only seems to have just reappeared. A male Eurasian Siskin shared the same feeder, rounding off a very good selection! Sheringham was our next stop, and a brief one it turned out to be as we found two roosting PURPLE SANDPIPERS within minutes, tucked in on the rocks below the promenade despite the waves breaking virtually over them – once again, extremely close views were the order of the day. We now headed inland to the Broads, making the 45 minute journey to Wroxham where we had arranged to take a boat down the river to Wroxham Broad. This turned out to be a great move, as the Broad was thronged with birds and we were able to get extremely close using the boat. A roost of several thousand Common Gulls was present, though we couldn't find anything else amongst them despite careful scanning. We had more luck with the large rafts of aythya ducks however, with two GREATER SCAUP among the hundreds of Tufted Duck and Common Pochard the forerunner for one of our 'bird of the week' contenders, as we located the female RING-NECKED

DUCK that had returned this year for its third winter in the Broads. The bird has always been notoriously difficult to see, however, and in this case would certainly not have been visible from land – we watched it down to about 15 metres for over half an hour as we enjoyed our lunch in its company, even managing to get some record shots. A female GOOSANDER and three or four Common Goldeneye were also on the Broad, as well as plenty of Great Crested and Little Grebes. Leaving Wroxham, we took a circular route through Martham and out along the coast road to Horsey, noting a large mixed herd of WHOOPER and BEWICK'S SWANS on our way through Ludham in a roadside field. A flock of Pink-footed Geese near Horsey Mill encouraged us to pull over and scan, and we were pleased to find two COMMON CRANES in the same field. Two Ruff and around fifty European Golden Plovers were also present, with at least five Marsh Harriers quartering in the background. Finally at Stubb's Mill Hickling, we logged over forty five Marsh Harriers coming in to roost, as well as four more COMMON CRANES, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Red Fox, Chinese Water Deer, Lesser Redpoll, ringtail HEN HARRIER and perhaps the highlight here, a superb Eurasian Woodcock which flew past right in front of us.

Wednesday 15th February

A grey and breezy day but we still managed some excellent birding on the North coast. Starting at Holkham, we parked at Lady Anne's drive and had our first unsuccessful scan for Rough-legged Buzzard. A Pale-bellied Brent Goose was in the fields and both Grey Partridge and European Golden Plover were also seen, a flock of the latter flushed by a nice male Eurasian Sparrowhawk. Heading out onto the beach, a cursory scan of the distant dunes from the top of the boardwalk helped us pick up four distant dots scurrying among the dunes at the West end of the bay. Walking out, they did indeed turn out to be SHORELARKS and we had splendid close range views as they loosely associated with one hundred Skylark, thirty SNOW BUNTINGS and half a dozen Rock Pipits. Continuing west we picked up the Boardwalk and crossed through the pines to Washington Hide. A tit flock greeted us here, and amongst many Goldcrest a FIRCREST jumped out at us, even perching on the handrail of the boardwalk! It was frustratingly brief though, but we decided to leave the flock and catch up with them later. From the hide, Common Buzzard and Marsh Harrier could be seen, along with our first Eurasian Jay and a distant flock of Eurasian White-fronted Geese. Good numbers of Northern Pintail were also present on the marsh, along with the usual assortment of other wildfowl. Heading back towards the drive, we did catch up with the flock again and this time had two FIRECRESTS, showing brilliantly at eye level and just feet away. Another check for the Rough-legged Buzzards was fruitless though, and we failed to find them both at wells, and the west end of Holkham freshmarsh either so not sure where they were today. Large flocks of Dark-bellied Brent and better views of the White-fronts were had though. Titchwell was our next stop and straight after lunch we found the COUE'S ARCTIC REDPOLL in the picnic area, though views were hardly as good as yesterday's bird! At Bett's Pool on Thornham Marsh, a routine scan along the reed edge produced a GREAT BITTERN, sat right out in the open and close too! It soon crept off into the reeds but not before we'd all scoped it. On the brackish pool, a Spotted Redshank came so close it disappeared under the bank beneath us, always a lovely sight in winter. The sea was rough today with a lot of swell, but the high tide at least meant the birds were close and we had very good views of two VELVET SCOTER just beyond the surf, in the company of Great Crested Grebe and Common Goldeneye. A RED-NECKED GREBE also flew east but sadly did not settle for better views, and our first Sanderling were on the shoreline. Back at Parrinder Hide, about twenty Ruff were seen, along with more good flocks of Northern Pintail and at least twenty Common Goldeneye. The COUE'S ARCTIC REDPOLL was seen again as we walked back, drinking from the ditch by the path and flying up in the willows, showing off its Bullfinch-esque rump beautifully. Our last stop of the day was Thornham Harbour, where close up waders included another Spotted Redshank, Grey Plover and both Bar and Black-tailed Godwits side by side. From the seawall, large numbers of Pink-footed Geese could be seen flying out from Holme to their roost in the Wash, and with patience our target bird revealed itself – a superb SHORT-EARED OWL spotted hiding amongst the grass.

Thursday 16th February

A quieter day today with a few missed species, but we certainly achieved our main target. At Shereford, there was no sign of the Little Owl but we had excellent views of three Tree Sparrows, including a pair prospecting a nest site. A Grey Wagtail flying over was a surprise and a new list addition, and few again saw Grey Partridges. Nearby at Fakenham, a thorough search for the Great Grey Shrike proved fruitless, despite the bird being paged after we had left! We did see a nice Green Woodpecker, Yellowhammer and Common Buzzard here though. We then left to head down to the Yare Valley, arriving at Buckenham Marshes around 11am and immediately being greeted with a superb male Perergine perched in a tree. The TAIGA BEAN GOOSE flock was feeding very distantly in

the north-east corner of the marsh, and with patient searching through the fifty or so birds, we had some head and shoulders views of the LESSER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE, our main target bird of the day. Deciding better views were needed, we drove to the end of the track and walked east to get the sun behind us and narrow the distance between us and the birds. This gave us much better views of the bird, and actually some stunning views of the Bean Geese too, which would normally have been the highlight in itself! Vast flocks of Eurasian Wigeon were grazing here, with huge flocks of Common Starling, Northern Lapwing and Black-tailed Godwit also spread out across the marshes. Two Peregrines were now perched in an Oak tree, the huge female dwarfing the male, and Ruff and Dunlin were both on the main scrape. A Water Rail picking its way along the edge of the ditch outside the hide gave some good views and was perhaps surprisingly our first of the week. Moving on to Great Yarmouth, we had lunch before braving the cold winds on Breydon Water South wall. Again vast numbers of birds were the order of the day, with all manner of waders and wildfowl present – a flock of European Golden Plovers glinting in the sun and some feeding Pied Avocets perhaps the highlight, though another Peregrine was seen nearby making off with prey. Heading back to the Yare Valley, we finished the day at Strumpshaw Fen, picking up Great-spotted Woodpecker and three Marsh Tits on the feeders near the visitor centre. The reserve was quiet, though we did add Common Snipe to our list and pick up a nice Treecreeper in the woodland.

Friday 17th February

A superb days birding to sign of the week with 133 species! We started at Fakenham, where we managed to catch up with the GREAT GREY SHRIKE after dipping on it yesterday. It was a little distance but showed for long enough for us to get decent views. After this we headed straight down into the Brecks and Santon Downham in the heart of the forest. At St Helen's Well, a few Brambling were about and constituted our only ones of the week – a nice male perching up for us was enough though. European Nuthatch and Great-spotted Woodpecker were also seen here before we relocated to the river and took a walk along the north bank towards Brandon. Eurasian Siskins and about six Lesser Redpolls were in the trees by the bridge, and as we walked along the first section of river bank a Marsh Tit showed well. A little further on, we heard a male COMMON CROSSBILL singing in the Alders ahead of us and with careful positioning had stunning scoped views as it sat right out in the open. We had four or five further views of a couple of others as we continued the walk too, and added another species to our list in the form of a Common Kingfisher which posed nicely for us. Next we headed on to Lynford Arboretum, and spent some time viewing the paddocks where we were surprised to see a RED KITE circling in the distance. Heading around to the east side of the paddock, we saw three HAWFINCHES distantly in the treetops and then as if by magic another four appeared very close to us and we had stunning scoped views for several minutes before they flew off over our heads. Feeling very pleased and happy that this would be our last good bird of the trip, we had lunch before heading back towards base not knowing that there would be one final top bird to cap of an excellent week! We paused south of Swaffham near Cockley Cley to check out a tip off about a pair of WILLOW TITS seen in a conifer plantation with a small tit flock two days ago. Almost immediately as we walked along the track we heard one call and ended up getting great views of one feeding on pine cones – hardly the type of habitat or food type associated with the species and surely they must be refugees from the continent on the back of the cold weather? Whatever their origin we were both delighted and amazed to find them in exactly the spot we had been told about, and made this county rarity [now requiring a description] to our superb weekly total.

Systematic List

Birds

1. Red-throated Diver
2. Great Crested Grebe
3. Little Grebe
4. Red-necked Grebe
5. Northern Fulmar
6. Great Cormorant
7. Great Bittern
8. Grey Heron
9. Little Egret
10. Mute Swan
11. Whooper Swan

12. Bewick's Swan
13. Greylag Goose
14. Canada Goose
15. Egyptian Goose
16. Brent Goose
17. Pink-footed Goose
18. White-fronted Goose
19. Lesser White-fronted Goose
20. Taiga Bean Goose
21. Common Shelduck
22. Mallard
23. Common Teal
24. Eurasian Wigeon
25. Gadwall
26. Northern Shoveler
27. Northern Pintail
28. Velvet Scoter
29. Common Eider
30. Red-breasted Merganser
31. Goosander
32. Smew
33. Common Goldeneye
34. Tufted Duck
35. Greater Scaup
36. Common Pochard
37. Ring-necked Duck
38. Grey Partridge
39. Red-legged Partridge
40. Common Pheasant
41. Eurasian Sparrowhawk
42. Common Kestrel
43. Peregrine
44. Marsh Harrier
45. Hen Harrier
46. Common Buzzard
47. Red Kite
48. Common Moorhen
49. Water Rail
50. Common Coot
51. Common Crane
52. Pied Avocet
53. European Oystercatcher
54. Common Ringed Plover
55. European Golden Plover
56. Grey Plover
57. Northern Lapwing
58. Dunlin
59. Purple Sandpiper
60. Sanderling
61. Red Knot
62. Ruddy Turnstone
63. Common Redshank
64. Spotted Redshank
65. Eurasian Curlew
66. Ruff
67. Common Snipe
68. Eurasian Woodcock
69. Black-tailed Godwit
70. Bar-tailed Godwit
71. Black-headed Gull
72. Common Gull

73. Herring Gull
74. Lesser Black-backed Gull
75. Great Black-backed Gull
76. Common Kingfisher
77. Green Woodpecker
78. Great-spotted Woodpecker
79. Barn Owl
80. Short-eared Owl
81. Woodpigeon
82. Collared Dove
83. Stock Dove
84. Skylark
85. Shorelark
86. Meadow Pipit
87. Rock Pipit
88. Pied Wagtail
89. Grey Wagtail
90. Winter Wren
91. European Robin
92. Dunnock
93. Stonechat
94. Common Blackbird
95. Redwing
96. Song Thrush
97. Mistle Thrush
98. Fieldfare
99. Cetti's Warbler
100. Goldcrest
101. Firecrest
102. Blue Tit
103. Great Tit
104. Coal Tit
105. Marsh Tit
106. Willow Tit
107. Long-tailed Tit
108. Bearded Tit
109. Treecreeper
110. Nuthatch
111. Rook
112. Carrion Crow
113. Western Jackdaw
114. Magpie
115. Eurasian Jay
116. Great Grey Shrike
117. Common Starling
118. House Sparrow
119. Tree Sparrow
120. Chaffinch
121. Brambling
122. Greenfinch
123. Goldfinch
124. Linnet
125. Eurasian Siskin
126. Lesser Redpoll
127. Coue's Arctic Redpoll
128. Common Crossbill
129. Hawfinch
130. Yellowhammer
131. Corn Bunting
132. Snow Bunting
133. Reed Bunting

