

ORIOLE BIRDING



TOUR REPORT
NORFOLK 10TH –
15TH FEBRUARY
2013

Monday 11th February

A dry but very cold and breezy day today with temperatures struggling above 4C. Our day started superbly, with a fine ringtail HEN HARRIER just North of Colkirk providing an excellent local record and good views too, though it was soon seen off by the local corvids. Heading across to West Norfolk, we first called at Flitcham, picking up three fine Brambling in the hedges along the lane and six Eurasian Curlew in a roadside field. From the hide the Little Owl showed well, and we also saw good numbers of Common Teal, Fieldfare, Redwing and a Little Grebe. The hedgerows opposite the farm held at least eight Tree Sparrows, several Yellowhammer and more Brambling and Chaffinch with a few Stock Dove in the adjacent fields. Moving on we headed south of Kings Lynn, following the Great Ouse down to Saddlebow. The river and its relief channel between Kings Lynn and Downham Market can often hold interesting waterfowl during cold winter weather, and while the first two bridges produced little other than four Common Goldeneye and a few Tufted Ducks, we did much better at Wiggshall St Mary Magdalen. Here on the relief channel we had superb views of five GOOSANDER and a drake Red-breasted Merganser together, along with several more Common Goldeneye and numerous Great Crested Grebe. The highlight though was a SLAVONIAN GREBE which we found North of the bridge, an excellent inland record. More Fieldfare and two Great-spotted Woodpecker were also noted in the area. At nearby Tottenhill GP, four SMEW completed our sawbill hat-trick for the morning, and we celebrated with coffee and cake before contemplating our next move. We decided to check out the North Wooton marshes, where a Richardson's Canada Goose had been seen over recent days with a flock of Pink-footed Geese. We found the Pink-feet, numbering about 150 birds, but there was no sign of the Cackling Goose so we quickly moved on. After picking up some Grey Partridges and a couple of Marsh Harriers in the road feeding on a dead rabbit near Ringstead, we dropped down to the coast and had lunch in the car park at Titchwell. Around the Visitor Centre, at least eight Brambling were on the feeders and the Water Rail was performing as usual in the adjacent ditch. Single Ruff and Dunlin were on Bett's Pool and a couple of Little Egret were on the saltmarsh. Heading straight down to the brackish marsh, four Spotted Redshanks were among a feeding melee of ducks and waders in the channel at the north end, along with twenty or so Black-tailed and a single Bar-tailed Godwit and two Grey Plovers. Behind us, a female LONG-TAILED DUCK showed superbly as it floated on an improbably small pool on the saltmarsh! These were the best views everyone had had of this normally distant seaduck, and we were able to watch it preen and wing-flap on the water from close range. A female Red Crested Pochard was on the tidal pool, and a few Northern Pintail flew over us, completing a fabulous morning for ducks! Two Common Eider were the last waterfowl species of the morning to be added, bobbing on the waves close inshore, but it was gulls for which the beach was most productive. High tides had washed up great swathes of razor shells, and literally tens of thousands of gulls were feeding on the beach, smothering every inch of sand from Brancaster to Thornham in a feeding frenzy quite unlike any of us had ever witnessed. Common and Black-headed were the predominant species, with just a single Lesser Black-backed and a fine adult MEDITERRANEAN GULL as well as large numbers of Herring. To be honest, we would have needed a whole day to check through the birds properly, so we enjoyed the 'Med' coming into its summer finery and left them to it! Sanderling, Red Knot, Dunlin and Bar-tailed Godwit were also capitalising on the seafood takeaway. Back at Parrinder Hide, two more Med Gulls were picked out and we saw about one hundred Common Pochard, twenty Northern Pintail and other common waterfowl. The Water Rail gave better views on the way back, more Brambling were seen and a couple of Marsh Harriers were also noted. From here we made our way back to Great Ryburgh, enjoying smashing views of a Barn Owl on the way.

Tuesday 12th February

A smashing day in the Norfolk Broads, with lighter winds and still dry and very cold, with temperatures around 3C for most of the day. We headed down to the South-west side of Norwich, starting at Marlingford where an American Wigeon has been present several weeks. Sadly today we couldn't find the bird, which may have moved on, despite locating two decent flocks of Eurasian Wigeon. Nearby at West Earlham marshes on the outskirts of the city, we thought it was going to be one of those days as the wintering GREAT WHITE EGRET was flushed by a dog while we were looking for somewhere to park and flew high East. We took a chance and drove around to Bowthorpe to try and relocate it on flooded fields at Bowthorpe NR and thankfully there it was, on a large pool on the edge of this large suburban area. We had stunning views as it preened no more than fifty metres away from us, a stroke of luck indeed! Moving on to the Yare Valley we called in at Strumpshaw Fen, noting Marsh Tit and Brambling on the feeders and good numbers of Gadwall, Common Teal and Northern

Shoveler from the reception hide. Deciding to walk round to Fen Hide, we noted Bullfinch and Great-spotted Woodpecker in the woodland and from the hide, a female OTTER was seen briefly but well as it surfaced along the reed edge a few times before slinking off up a channel and out of sight – another lucky sighting! Two Marsh Harriers were over the reedbed but it was otherwise quiet so we continued along the valley to neighbouring Buckenham Marshes. The flock of TAIGA BEAN GEESE were showing really well on the marsh, and we counted 28 birds before they were flushed and flew to Cantley Marshes. A feral flock of Barnacle Geese were also present along with the usual large numbers of Eurasian Wigeon. A Peregrine hunting over the marshes displayed its hunting prowess by charging at flocks of wildfowl, and a small party of European Golden Plover flew over. From here we headed across towards Hickling, calling on the way at Catfield to check for a recently reported flock of wild swans. They weren't difficult to find, with over three hundred BEWICK'S SWANS feeding in a harvested beet field. By negotiating the network of minor roads, we were able to get quite close, and pick out sixteen WHOOPER SWANS too which was a bonus. From here it was just a short hop to Hickling Stubbs Mill, and we arrived at the roost site nice and early to be greeted by a stunning SHORT-EARED OWL hunting right in front of us, the first we've seen here on the tours for several years. As it exited stage left a Barn Owl took its place and also came in close, pouncing on a vole in the grass just in front. Amazingly a Common Kestrel then swooped down and robbed the owl of its catch following a short wrestling match on the ground! Sometimes this viewpoint can just come up trumps in every way and next up was a GREAT BITTERN flying across the reeds towards the old mill, and of course the first of many Marsh Harriers coming into roost. The cloud rolled away to the south leaving a swathe of blue sky and a beautiful orange evening light, just right for four COMMON CRANES to glide in right in front of us and land no more than 100 metres away! The party of two adults and two youngsters showed extremely well for much of the rest of our stay. Finally after some more good showings from the Barn Owl, the GREAT BITTERN flew back right across the reeds giving better views and despite the fact that there was still more time for raptors to come in and another three COMMON CRANES flew over, we were now so frozen stiff that we decided to head back to the car park and make our way back to Fakenham.



Bewick's Swans, Catfield and Great White Egret, Bowthorpe 12th Feb 2013

Wednesday 13th February

Another bitterly cold day with the fresh southerly wind keeping the temperature down near zero. Burnham Overy was our first port of call to look for raptors on the grazing marshes, and we started well picking up two RED KITES along the A149 near Holkham before we even arrived! Heading out to the seawall, large flocks of Eurasian Wigeon, two Common Buzzards, Grey Partridge, a few Fieldfare and a Rock Pipit were noted and a big flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese held a single Pale-bellied Brent and a Dark-bellied Brent x Black Brant hybrid. One of the RED KITES were circling over the dunes with a Marsh Harrier, and then the adult male ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD appeared and the three species circled together before dropping into the dunes. The Rough-leg then flew to the pines and perched up but it was really too distant to see clearly. After a few minutes though it flew down and landed on the grazing marsh giving better views before taking off again and heading over the wood. Two or possibly three Red Kites were now involved, along with two Common Buzzards and three Marsh Harriers, hunting Barn Owl and Common Kestrel adding to the raptor fest. Heading back to the van for coffee we continued to scan the marshes and could now see about eight raptors circling together, including the ROUGH-LEGGED BUZZARD. Another *buteo* then flew up to join this bird – another Rough-leg! We had great views of the two birds circling together before the whole lot drifted

east over Holkham Pines and disappeared. A flock of Pink-footed Geese dropped onto the marsh, containing two Eurasian White-fronted Geese and a few feral Barnacles. From here we headed east to nearby Holkham, and walked through the pines to Washington Hide. This area was extremely quiet though, other than about eight Eurasian Jays, several more Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzards, two Common Goldeneye and a flock of Northern Pintails. Moving on again, we checked some close Brent Goose flocks along Lady Anne's Drive and at nearby Wells Beach Road, noting another two Brant hybrid types among the throngs but no genuine Black Brants. After lunch at Wells Beach car park, we popped into the pines to add a roosting TAWNY OWL to the list, our fourth owl species of the trip. We had great views of this lovely rufous phase bird, peering down through the pine branches at us. Next up was Cley beach road, and yet another massive flock of Dark-bellied Brent held a nice Pale-bellied bird and two European Golden Plover were in the Eye Field. On the Eye Field pool, a cracking PURPLE SANDPIPER was feeding in the open on the grass, with a Dunlin close by for comparison. Offshore, two Red-throated Divers flew east and a Ruddy Turnstone was on the beach, while a Barn Owl was sat on a post right beside the van as we made our way back out to the A149. Nearby at Salthouse, our patience was rewarded with great views of about twenty SNOW BUNTINGS, coming to seed at the edge of the car park. Finally, at Stiffkey Saltmarsh, we stuck out the cold for as long as we could and saw two different MERLINS including a bird feeding on a kill and a second bird chasing a Eurasian Sparrowhawk. Two HEN HARRIERS also came in to roost including a fine sub-adult male which flew right past in front of us, rounding off the day in style.



Dark-bellied Brent Geese, Cley 13th February 2013

Thursday 14th February

The first rain of the week certainly meant business, having continued throughout the night until about 11am this morning, resulting in localised flooding. We headed down to Breckland, hoping that the rain would clear by the time we reached Lynford. It didn't, so we decided to continue on to Thetford to look for the wintering BLACK-BELLIED DIPPER. After a good hour looking for the bird in its usual spot without success, a local alerted us to the fact that the bird is often seen about 1km upstream and so we set off on foot, noting a nice flock of Eurasian Siskin on the way. We eventually got to the two bridges in question and found the Dipper crouching at the base of the stone bridge, showing brilliantly as it fed along the waters edge just a few feet away from us. Having taken a lot longer than expected, we headed on to Santon Downham where we had some nice views of eight Lesser Redpolls and another flock of Eurasian Siskins, European Nuthatch and a couple of Marsh Tits. We lunched here before continuing on to nearby Lynford where we took a walk down to view the gravel pits. Good numbers of Tufted Duck and Gadwall were present, along with a female GOOSANDER and two Great Crested Grebes. Passerines were few though until we entered the Arboretum, where we added a Common Treecreeper, three Lesser Redpolls, Great-spotted Woodpecker, European Nuthatch and Goldcrest. Another flock of Eurasian Siskins were by the lake, and as we walked up the western side of the paddocks, we picked out two HAWFINCH perched in the treetops. The male and female sat calling to one another for several minutes before the female flew off into the trees and the male dropped down out of sight, making for a successful day. A Barn Owl flew past us on the Colkirk road as we entered Great Ryburgh on the way home and a Common Buzzard was perched in a roadside hedge.



Black-bellied Dipper, Thetford, 14th February 2013

Friday 15th February

Our final day today and the chance to fill a few gaps in the list, which weren't many! A warmer day with temperatures around 9C saw us starting at Choseley Barns, where we hoped to pick up Corn Bunting despite a poor showing at the site this winter, However, we were in luck today, with a flock of about fifty Brambling in the game cover south of the barns, and many Yellowhammer mixing with six Corn Bunting on the concrete pad. We enjoyed some fantastic views of all these birds by using the car as a hide, with sixteen Brambling feeding right in front of us. Moving down to the coast we planned to target the high tide and visited Holme Dunes, picking up Reed Bunting, Northern Fulmar, Ringed Plover and Common Guillemot as trip ticks and three drake Common Eider flew North. About forty SNOW BUNTINGS were on the beach with a mixed flock of Common Linnet and European Goldfinch, and a few common waders were on the shoreline. At nearby Hunstanton, surprisingly few duck were seen offshore from the cliffs but we did see adult and immature SHAG, a scarce bird in Norfolk, and picked up both LITTLE GULL and Black-legged Kittiwake offshore as well as good numbers of Northern Fulmar, Great Crested Grebe, and Red-breasted Merganser. Moving back to Holme we called in at the NWT hides in the village, noting Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, five Marsh Harrier and a Barn Owl. At nearby Thornham Harbour, a Spotted Redshank showed well and two Rock Pipits were by the coal barn, while from the sea wall a good selection of wildfowl and waders were seen. One hundred European Golden Plover were probably the pick, along with a huge flock of Common Scoter offshore that ran well into thousands. Bar-tailed Godwit, Red Knot, Dunlin, Grey Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and many Dark-bellied Brent Geese were also noted. From here we decided to head all the way back along the coast to Salthouse, as a Shorelark had been reported earlier. Showing just how scarce this species has now become in Norfolk, many local birders had had the same idea, though unfortunately the lucky finder was the only person to see the bird and despite extensive searching it was not relocated. 27 SNOW BUNTINGS were some compensation, though were extremely mobile. Finally along the East Bank at Cley we finished the week with yet more large numbers of common waders and wildfowl but failed to add anything new to our now impressive list which finished just over 130 species.

Systematic List

Birds

1. Red-throated Diver
2. Great Crested Grebe
3. Little Grebe
4. Slavonian Grebe
5. Northern Fulmar
6. Great Cormorant
7. European Shag
8. Great Bittern
9. Grey Heron
10. Little Egret
11. Great White Egret
12. Mute Swan
13. Whooper Swan
14. Bewick's Swan

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

70. Eurasian Curlew
71. Ruff
72. Common Snipe
73. Black-tailed Godwit
74. Bar-tailed Godwit
75. Black-headed Gull
76. Common Gull
77. Herring Gull
78. Lesser Black-backed Gull
79. Great Black-backed Gull
80. Mediterranean Gull
81. Little Gull
82. Black-legged Kittiwake
83. Common Guillemot
84. Black-bellied Dipper
85. Great-spotted Woodpecker
86. Barn Owl
87. Tawny Owl
88. Little Owl
89. Short-eared Owl
90. Woodpigeon
91. Collared Dove
92. Stock Dove
93. Skylark
94. Meadow Pipit
95. Rock Pipit
96. Pied Wagtail
97. Winter Wren
98. European Robin
99. Dunnock
100. Common Blackbird
101. Redwing
102. Song Thrush
103. Mistle Thrush
104. Fieldfare
105. Goldcrest
106. Blue Tit
107. Great Tit
108. Coal Tit
109. Marsh Tit
110. Long-tailed Tit
111. Treecreeper
112. Nuthatch
113. Rook
114. Carrion Crow
115. Western Jackdaw
116. Magpie
117. Eurasian Jay
118. Common Starling
119. House Sparrow
120. Tree Sparrow
121. Chaffinch
122. Brambling
123. Greenfinch
124. Goldfinch

- 125. Linnet
- 126. Eurasian Siskin
- 127. Lesser Redpoll
- 128. Hawfinch
- 129. Bullfinch
- 130. Yellowhammer
- 131. Corn Bunting
- 132. Snow Bunting
- 133. Reed Bunting