



**BIRDING NORFOLK (FEATURING SUFFOLK):
EXPLORING EAST ANGLIAN DELIGHTS IN MAY**

17 - 26 MAY 2025

By Drew Lyness



*May is the time for **Black Tern**, and we were lucky to find this beauty at RSPB Minsmere!*

Overview

This was a private ten-day-long guided tour around Norfolk (including a one-day excursion into Suffolk) during peak season for bird diversity in East Anglia. It was packed with iconic Norfolk resident classics including **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Eurasian Bittern**, **Bearded Reedling**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Common Crane**, plus some scarce summering species including **European Turtle Dove**, **Common Nightingale**, **Eurasian Stone-curlew**, **European Nightjar** and **Osprey**. Traversing spectacular rural and urban scenery, we covered a range of reserves and habitats, from woodland to heathland, reedbeds and marshes, coastal shingle and sandy beaches. It's fair to say that passage migration was unseasonably slow for this time of year, following a period of settled high pressure and hot, dry weather. Nevertheless, quality was found in several tiny **Temminck's Stints**, a dapper drake **Garganey**, a showy **Black Tern**, some smart **Wood Sandpipers**, an educational **Western Yellow (Channel) Wagtail** and more. This trip ended with quite the mega showstopper, with a spectacular and exciting encounter with a pale-morph **BOOTED EAGLE** on the North Norfolk Coast – just wow!



*Iconic of the Norfolk area, **Bearded Reedling** was simply a joy to see!*

Detailed Report

Day 1, 17th May 2025. An introduction to the magic of Norfolk

Marc jumped off the plane at Norwich airport and met Chris Lotz, eager to begin the East Anglian adventure! First stop was the Hawk and Owl Trust's reserve, Sculthorpe Moor. Highlights from here were a good selection of woodland birds including **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Marsh Tit**, **Great**

Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Blackcap and Common Chiffchaff. A specialty of Sculthorpe is the wonderful views one gets of **Eurasian Bullfinch**, which were very much enjoyed. Excellent views of **Red Kite** were also achieved.



***Eurasian Bullfinch** is very shy at most sites across the county so good views are always most welcome.*

Continuing the journey north-west, Choseley Drying Barns was the next stop, in the hope of some farmland birds. Here the first **Red-legged Partridge, Stock Dove** and **Common Whitethroat** were added to the trip list.

Onwards to the main event – an afternoon at the diverse RSPB Titchwell Marsh. Marc, although feeling jetlagged, was not deterred and the reserve delivered 53 species in under three hours. These included lots of waders including **Pied Avocet, Little Ringed Plover** and **Black-tailed Godwit**, while two **Eurasian Spoonbills** were also seen (one flyover and one on the fresh marsh).

A couple of **Spotted Flycatchers** were seen around the woodland trail and a showy **Water Rail** also made an appearance in one the ditches, making for a successful afternoon and a good introduction to Norfolk birding for Marc.



Spotted Flycatcher has declined in the UK at an alarming rate, so we were lucky to see some at two sites (RSPB Titchwell and RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, where this photo was taken).

Day 2, 18th May 2025. A shingle ridge, some scarce shorebirds and skulking warbler

Drew (author of this report) took over guiding from Chris today and for the rest of Marc's tour. We began at the oldest Wildlife Trust's reserve in the UK, Cley Marshes, an iconic reserve on the North Norfolk Coast with an excellent reputation for delivering quality birds throughout the year. Today didn't disappoint and we were greeted with a constant buzz in the skies overhead as **Common Swifts** and **Western House Martins** were catching insects just above us, and a Eurasian **Spoonbill** glided past the car park.

After checking in we headed down to the hides where, on Pat's Pool, we were treated to excellent views of five tiny **Temminck's Stints**, a real target at this time of year. A wide variety of waders were also using the scrapes, including two smart **Wood Sandpipers**, a dozen or so **Common Sandpipers**, alongside **Common Ringed Plover** and its seasonal summer-visiting counterpart, **Little Ringed Plover**, allowing for a lovely comparison between the two. There was plenty to look at outside the hide, but a pair of **Barn Swallows** performed exceptionally inside the hide too. Always a treat to see them so well!



*Two of five **Temminck's Stints** from the hides at NWT Cley Marshes – a proper May speciality!*

We then explored NWT Cley Marshes further by heading up east bank. There a **Cetti's Warbler** was singing tantalizingly close - but didn't show - however a lone summer-plumaged **Western Cattle Egret** foraging alongside cattle was on view distantly. **Sand Martins** were zooming up and down the bank, while **Sedge Warbler** and **Common Reed Warbler** both performed well on either side of us. Arnold's Marsh held some cute **Little Terns** plus a mixture of waders including **Sanderling** and two **European Golden Plovers**.



*Two wonderful **Wood Sandpipers** at NWT Cley Marshes in the fleeting sunshine.*

After a quick packed lunch at the Cley Marshes Visitor Centre we headed east to Gramborough Hill, where a male **Common Reed Bunting**, displaying **Meadow Pipit** and a couple of **Common Linnets** all showed well along the beach road. A short walk over the shingle to the hill was worth it for lovely views of a family of **European Stonechats** and a singing **Common Whitethroat**. There were sadly no passage migrants, however a look out to sea revealed a distant flock of roughly 200 **Common Scoters**, which was certainly notable for this time of year. A few **Black-legged Kittiwakes** also passed the scoter flock as a bonus.

Continuing east we stopped at Muckleburgh Hill to catch up with some woodland birds, plus a spectacular view of the Norfolk coastline! The descent from the hill offered a bright male **Yellowhammer**, a couple of squabbling **Mistle Thrushes** and a family of **Long-tailed Tits**, alongside the expected **Common Chiffchaff** and **Eurasian Chaffinch**. The invertebrate animals here were numerous, with a very cooperative **Green Tiger Beetle** and some stunning **Common Blue Butterflies** to add some color to the walk.

We ended the day venturing inland to Kelling Heath with just one key target on our mind, **Dartford Warbler**! These elusive warblers are often found in the shadow of European Stonechat and, after a lovely walk featuring excellent views of the Poppy Line Steam Train, we found ourselves in prime gorse-covered habitat for these often-secretive birds. It didn't take long before we scored, with very satisfying scope views of a singing male **Dartford Warbler**, ending the day on a wonderful high indeed.



Green Tiger Beetle is a stunning emerald gem – fast, ferocious, and every caterpillar's worst nightmare!

Day 3, 19th May 2025. A clean sweep in the mid-Yare Valley – a Strumpshaw Spectacular

With a glorious sunny day forecast, we started early and headed east of Norwich into the mid-Yare Valley in the hope of catching up with some of Norfolk's most iconic birds and it certainly didn't disappoint. We spent most of the day at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, beginning our journey at Reception Hide. From the viewing screen, as we arrived, we saw a **Common Tern** quartering the water, and then, out of nowhere, two **Eurasian Bitterns** took off from the reedbed to our left, offering some brief but exciting flight views, before they dropped back into the reeds. This was a sign of things to come.

We progressed through the woodland trail, where a **Goldcrest** was seen briefly and a few **Willow Warblers** showed beautifully, in full song, at the 'sandy wall'. We spent the next hour in Fen Hide looking across the reedbed and were greeted first by two displaying **Northern Lapwings**. Drew could hear a **Common Grasshopper Warbler** 'reeling' in the distance but sadly not visible. After a few minutes, a lone, handsome, male **Bearded Reedling** flew right across us, soon followed by another small group, which emerged from the reedbed well enough for some photos. Two more **Eurasian Bitterns** then took off from another area of the fen, one of which flew past the hide giving excellent, prolonged views. As we left the hide, two calling **Common Cuckoos** shot past at very close range. The excitement continued, as a newly arrived migrant **Spotted Flycatcher** showed well in the willows back along a sandy wall. We wandered along the sunny riverbank and saw insects including the bright orange **Scarce Chaser** dragonfly and a **Wall** butterfly.



*One of as many as five(!) **Eurasian Bitterns** seen by us at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen this morning.*

After a brief stop at the Strumpshaw pumphouse we checked out the surrounding ditches and came across a beastly **Fen Raft Spider** – one of the UK's rarest (and biggest) arachnids! Back through the woodland trail we glimpsed a **Eurasian Treecreeper** and had good views of a singing **Marsh**

Tit. As we arrived back at reception for a cuppa, a **Common Kingfisher** showed even better than before, back in the Fen Hide!



Kingfisher always brightens up the day – this male at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen performed brilliantly.

After a spot of lunch we lucked out with top views of the UK's largest butterfly, **Swallowtail**, which landed right next to us in the overflow car park. This endemic subspecies is found only in East Norfolk and is a highly prized sighting when encountered. Back on the trails, we wandered up to Tower Hide where en route we had a flyover **Eurasian Hobby** hawking for dragonflies. A few **Western Marsh Harriers** showed wonderfully from the hide too, often swooping at wandering ducklings.



*We couldn't have asked for better views of **Swallowtail Butterfly** – this one in a carpark of all places!*

We moved on to the neighboring RSPB Buckenham Marshes in the afternoon, where we were greeted with good views of the introduced and bizarre **Chinese Water Deer**. The first scrape had some very entertaining **Pied Avocet** chicks with their proud parents, plus a **Little Ringed Plover** and a **Common Sandpiper**. We took a walk up to the mill, only to see a shiny drake **Garganey** swimming around with **Eurasian Teal**, **Northern Shoveler** and **Gadwall** on the flood. This elusive yet dapper duck, a summer visitor to the UK, was a quality way to round off an excellent day. One to remember!



Garganey is a scarce and elusive summer visitor to the UK, with only c100 pairs in the whole country.

Day 4, 20th May 2025. The day that Suffolk stole the show

The tempting draw of a long day out along the Suffolk coast in the beautiful weather, helped us start early and we crossed the county border fired up for a great day. As we arrived at the beautiful Dunwich Forest, Drew pulled over, having picked out a singing **Common Firecrest** from the moving car. It showed soon after in woodland by the side of the road. An excellent start to the day!

We then headed to a nearby heathland and were treated to lovely views of a pair of **Eurasian Stone-curlews** which stared back at us with their dazzling yellow eyes. We also saw **Garden Warbler** and a huge family of **Long-tailed Tits**. We heard a brief extract of **Common Nightingale** song here, which we felt we would need to come back and investigate later.

It was soon time for breakfast, so we made our way over to the world-famous RSPB Minsmere reserve for a delicious bacon roll and chocolate cookie slices. We enjoyed excellent views of the **Sand Martin** colony while eating, then headed to Minsmere's North Wall. The wind picked up but we nevertheless had brief views of a female **Bearded Reedling**, alongside singing **Common Reed Bunting**, **Common Linnet** and a **Common Tern**. A brief look out to the blustery sea revealed several terns moving, including a couple of **Little Terns** feeding in the nearby surf.

We then proceeded to the boardwalk, where a **Common Whitethroat** and several **Common Reed Warblers** were singing on the walk down. East Hide was full of birds (and people) when we entered, and we had excellent views of **Pied Avocet**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, a couple of **Bar-tailed Godwits**, and an adorable family of **Barnacle Geese**. Several **Mediterranean Gulls** were dropping into the lively **Black-headed Gull** colonies, while **Sandwich Tern**, **Common Tern** and **Little Tern** were dropping in to bathe.



*A wide range of birds were seen on RSPB Minsmere's East Scrape, including **Pied Avocet**, **Little Tern** and **Sandwich Tern**.*

We continued to the viewing platform on the beach, where we picked out a duo of **Red Knots**, a **Ruddy Turnstone** and some **Common Ringed Plovers**. Out of nowhere, a stunning **Black Tern** dropped in from the direction of the sea and proceeded to hunt over South Scrape, before disappearing high north. A very exciting moment indeed, but we were surprised later to see that the bird had returned to feed on the famous albatross pool behind South Hide, allowing for an excellent photography opportunity. We even had a close flyby **Eurasian Bittern** while watching the tern. An overload for the senses!



*This **Black Tern** was a very welcome surprise for the trip, as there were so few around the UK at the time.*

After a quick refreshment break, and a surprise close encounter with a **Slow Worm**, we proceeded to Island Mere where we spotted hawking **Eurasian Hobby** and our first **Great Crested Grebe** of the trip. A **European Green Woodpecker** taunted us on Whin Hill by calling relatively close by but, sadly, we couldn't find it. The next stop was Bittern Hide, which delivered exactly what is said on the tin, as a **Eurasian Bittern** soon arrived and dropped in at a nearby pool. We had scope views as it skulked through the reedbed and even went for a short swim!

It was soon time for a quick dinner, so we went over to the White Hart at Blythburgh (Marc's first ever pub!). On the way we had a brief encounter with a **Western Barn Owl** as we were driving past an area of reeds. Classic birders, we never switched off and did a pub garden list - adding **House Sparrow** to the trip list, plus close views of **Eurasian Oystercatcher** feeding on the lawn.

After excellent food, we headed to Westleton Heath in hope of Common Nightingale, which remained elusive, nevertheless a **Woodlark** was a treat as it displayed over our heads, showing off its bat-like flight.

Later, we returned to our **Eurasian Stone-curlew** site in Dunwich Forest and, after admiring the enormous local **European Rabbit** population, managed to see three 'stonies' out on the grassland. After our short burst of song in the morning, we'd hoped for views of **Common Nightingale** on this evening visit. We weren't disappointed, with two males singing in competition on either side of the path. We managed to lock eyes with one of the birds as it sung its heart out from a dense patch of scrub.

After all that excitement, there was even more in store! We headed to an area of open forestry heathland in Dunwich Forest as the sun was setting. Fighting off the biting midges, we were soon rewarded with incredible close flyby views of a couple of **European Nightjars**, bringing a long

day to an excellent and thrilling conclusion. On the drive home to Norfolk, we reminisced over what a top few hours it had been, agreeing that it had been a highly worthwhile excursion over the county line.



European Nightjar performed spectacularly in Dunwich Forest, with one male flying right up to us!

Day 5, 21st May 2025. Urban birding in “a fine city”

After yesterday’s extra-long day, we decided to enjoy some relaxed birding around Norwich, starting at the University of East Anglia (UEA) campus. The woodland here offered brief views of **Eurasian Jay**, **Coal Tit** and some common garden birds, while UEA broad trail had several singing **Garden Warbler**, **Eurasian Blackcap** and **Song Thrush**. Several **Great Crested Grebes**, including one pair with chicks, were on the water, and we glimpsed a flash of blue as a **Common Kingfisher** flew past. A male **European Greenfinch** showed very well near the iconic UEA ziggurats. We heard a **Common Cuckoo** singing around the playing fields but couldn’t see it in the dense willow canopy.



*It is always worth admiring **European Greenfinch**. It is pleasing to see them recovering after recent population declines.*

Heading into the city centre for lunch, we enjoyed fish and chips at the Complete Angler pub, at the waterside. A bit of sightseeing followed, and we walked along the river - busy with **Mute Swan** and **Egyptian Geese** - to see the beautiful Norwich Cathedral and with it, a **Peregrine Falcon** which was one of the nesting pair on the site. The other adult was out of view, busy feeding this year's chicks, which we could see on the live video feed from the watchpoint.

The final stop of the day was the new NWT Sweetbriar Marshes reserve. We walked along Marriott's Way, where we added **Ring-necked Parakeet** to the trip list. Sadly, the Tawny Owl we'd hoped to see had been replaced in its tree hole by **Western Jackdaw**, but there were still plenty of **Common Whitethroat** and **Common Chiffchaff** on the site, which were delightful.

Day 6, 22nd May 2025. Wet and Welney

The day started off grey and drizzly, in classic British fashion, but spirits weren't dampened as we went west from Norwich and found ourselves in Thetford Forest. We were met at the Santon Downham carpark by a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** fly-past and a large sociable flock of **Eurasian Siskins**. A few **Goldcrests** were singing in the pines, otherwise the area seemed quietly subdued by the rain, so we decided to move further west.

Our next stop was WWT Welney reserve where we were greeted by a mixed flock of sparrows, including some wonderful **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** which were using the feeders frequently. A **Corn Bunting** was singing in Lady Fen, affording good scope views. Both species are always a treat to see, given that they've declined in Norfolk over recent years. On the fen were hunting **Western Marsh Harrier**, a **Great Egret** and a few **Pied Avocets**, **Common Redshanks**, **Common Shelducks** and a delightful summer plumaged continental **Black-tailed Godwit** (ringed

as part of the European reintroduction project). Over breakfast in the visitor centre, of which we seemed to be the only customers, we had a good comparison of **Stock Dove** and **Rock Pigeon** at the feeders, which was educational for Marc.



*Checking the **House Sparrow** flock at WWT Welney closely was worth it to find **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** amongst them.*

Feeling refreshed, we made our way over the huge bridge and onto the reserve, stopping over in the Main Observatory. Here, a big mixed flock of **Black-tailed Godwits** (including both the Icelandic and continental races of the species) were mobile but showing very well. It was interesting to see the species displaying here, as this is not something frequently seen in the UK.

A bright burst of color came when a male **Western Yellow Wagtail** landed at the back of the pool, adding to the delight of the mix of waders and waterfowl on the pool, including **Common Ringed Plover**, **Eurasian Wigeon** and **Northern Lapwing**. Looking into the marshes, we spotted more **Great Egrets** and a nice pair of **Whooper Swans**. The latter normally migrate to Iceland to breed, but a few injured birds linger on the reserve throughout the year and sometimes even raise families of their own here.



*WWT Welney remains one of the few places where continental **Black-tailed Godwits** breed in the UK.*

We then moved towards the Lyle Hide to see what else was on offer. We stopped en route at a viewpoint and located the summering **Tundra** (Bewick's) **Swan** amongst a small group of whoopers. This was an unexpected addition to the trip list, but what was even more surprising was that as we were watching the swan through the scope, a vivid male **Western Yellow** (Channel) **Wagtail** landed on the vegetation in front of it! This is a hybrid between the British Yellow Wagtail and the Blue-headed Wagtail (a subspecies of Western Yellow Wagtail from southern Europe). This bird immediately stood out, with its chalky-blue head contrasted against its bright yellow front and green back. Although a hybrid, these are always good to find in Norfolk!

Continuing to the other hides, a **Lesser Whitethroat** popped up out of the bushes along a ditch. The hides offered few additional birds for the day, but a **Little Ringed Plover** running around on the mud was good to watch, as were yet more **Western Yellow Wagtails**. It was soon time to move on, but Marc remained thoroughly impressed by this fabulous reserve.

On the way back to Norwich, and knowing Marc's fondness for wildfowl, we stopped at Brandon Country Park, in the brecks, on a quest for an additional one for the trip list. Upon arrival, we stopped at the feeders to see close views of **Eurasian Chaffinch** and **Coal Tit**, before moving to the pond, where we quickly found a small group of drake **Mandarin Ducks**. A couple of these were already moving into eclipse plumage, but still lovely to see in the emerging sunshine, especially to the background song of **Common Firecrest** – an icon of the park.



Mandarin Duck is on category C of the British list – introduced, but now having self-sustaining populations.

Day 7, 23rd May 2025. A quest out west for the UK's fastest declining bird

A new day, with the sun shining once more. We couldn't resist a trip to Norfolk's bizarre west coast in search of something very special indeed! En route, we dropped into Abbey Farm in Flitcham (admiring the stunning and quintessentially British villages we passed through in the area) and dropped into the famous bird hide there. We were joined by two local birders who were very helpful, as the birding community in Norfolk often is. From the hide, we enjoyed close views of a female **Western Marsh Harrier**, plus a variety of geese and goslings (harrier food as Drew calls them) and a trio of **Eurasian Oystercatchers**. Our target bird appeared to be missing however, so we prepared to leave. We checked the area from a different angle - and we're pleased we did - as after seemingly only twenty seconds we had eyes on a cute **Little Owl** sat comfortably in the shade on a low branch of an old oak tree. A great start to the morning.

We moved on briefly to Dersingham Bog in the hope of a Tree Pipit but, sadly, it felt a bit late in the morning for one to be singing. We still had great views over the beautiful forest, heathland and boggy landscape, and Drew picked up a distant **Northern Raven** from here, plus **Red Kite**, **Common Buzzard**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, the regular **Common Linnet**, and **European Stonechat**. Yet another **European Green Woodpecker** taunted us with its distinctive 'yaffle' call but refused to show (face-palm!). It was interesting to see **Common Shelduck** in breeding habitat here too.

Time for a late breakfast at the lovely Poppylicious Café near Snettisham and then onwards to our main site for the day – RSPB Snettisham Reserve and Coastal Park. At the carpark entrance, we had eyes on a **Lesser Whitethroat**. Soon after, we were joined by Chris Lotz, who had kindly journeyed up from Norwich to help with the search for a core target bird, and to check that all was

well (we were indeed still having a lovely time). He initially brought some good luck, as a **Western Barn Owl** flew along the footpath towards us at the coastal park. We had brief views of **Eurasian Bullfinch** here too, plus the usual **Common Whitethroat** and **Common Chiffchaff**. A **Mediterranean Gull** flew over the marshes inland of the sea wall, but there was no sign of our target. We enjoyed a slight surprise as a **Tawny Owl** sung here briefly, but finding it would have been difficult in the thick vegetation.

Chris had desk work to complete, so we said our goodbyes, departed, and continued the mission back down to two. After a quick refreshment break, we made our way along the beach to RSPB Snettisham, encountering a **Grey Seal** and a big flock of dark-bellied **Brant Geese** en route alongside the still, glass-like, shimmering North Sea waters. Our first waders of the day, including **Common Ringed Plover**, **Red Knot** and **Sanderling**, started appearing as we came upon areas of mudflats. A **Eurasian Spoonbill** dropped into one of the pits behind the holiday park.

As we pressed on towards the first hide, Drew stopped in his tracks when he heard what we were looking for. Reacting quickly and assembling the scope, it was mere seconds before we locked eyes on our target, the beautiful and depressingly rare **European Turtle Dove**! The population of this wonderful dove has crashed in the UK, falling in numbers by 99% between 1967 and 2020. It is a privilege to see one, so seeing this individual, singing out in the open like this, was an encounter to remember.



European Turtle Dove eluded us at first, so it was exciting to finally catch up with one!

Thrilled to have seen what we had come for, we continued to the hide, where we saw huge flocks of distant waders out on the mudflats including **Eurasian Curlew** and **Grey Plover**. On the pits were **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Mediterranean Gull**, **Barnacle Goose**, **Common Shelduck** with ducklings and a large mixed colony of **Black-headed Gulls** and **Common Terns**. Over the fields

behind was a big flock of **Red Kites**, joined by a couple of **Western Marsh Harriers** for good measure. Satisfied, we walked back to the car, en route encountering yet another **European Turtle Dove** which gave close but brief flight views, and a spectacular **Eurasian Spoonbill** feeding on one of the pits, while a **Grey Heron** wrestled with a huge **European Eel** in the background.



Eurasian Spoonbill is becoming an ever-increasing sight in Norfolk, and always a pleasure to see.

We still had time for one more bird, so we headed to Hunstanton Cliffs and walked down to the beach, past a samurai group practicing sword fighting (normal for Norfolk, as the saying goes). Here we had awesome views of **Northern Fulmar**, which flew up and down the cliffs and right over our heads. This was a wonderful way to end the day, in the glorious early evening light.



Northern Fulmar is very underrated (in my opinion). We had a spectacular show at Hunstanton Cliffs.

Day 8, 24th May 2025. Sugar rush in the Norfolk Broads and lower Yare Valley

The weather turned wet once again and, with little by way of new birds arriving, we had a late start and devoted the day to exploring some new sites to see what we could find. We started off in the unusual setting of the Cantley Sugar Beet Factory. After signing in, we headed through the factory buildings to explore the pools at the rear of the complex. While pulling up to park, a **Northern Raven** flew over the car, we were greeted with close views of a **Common Reed Warbler** at the edge of the river, and a **Common Cuckoo** called in the background. Walking up to the pools, we had several **Common Swifts** and **Barn Swallows** hawking overhead.

We scanned a factory pool that had a couple of **Little Grebes**, alongside **Common Shelducks** and **Gadwalls**. We continued to the back edge of the main lagoon on site, where lots of wildfowl were feeding, including **Common Pochards** and **Northern Shovelers**. There were a few waders here too, including **Pied Avocet** and **Common Redshank**, but little else of note. We soon moved on, but not before admiring a **Peregrine Falcon** sat high on a chimney stack, waiting patiently for prey to come closer.

We moved onwards to NWT Ranworth Broad, after a tasty lunch at The Maltings Pub. We walked along the boardwalk, to a soundtrack of **Willow Warbler**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Eurasian Treecreeper**, while a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** showed briefly too. A quick stop in at the visitor center enabled us to see a large female **Osprey** perched on the opposite side of the broad – one of the pair attempting to breed and create the first Osprey chicks to be born in Norfolk in modern history! The broad held a few birds, including **Great Crested Grebe**, **Common Tern** and **Eurasian Oystercatcher**.



*Four summer-plumaged **Western Cattle Egrets**, with Great Yarmouth as a backdrop.*

Upon receiving news of a Glossy Ibis not too far away, we trekked over to a new birding site for the trip, Burgh Castle near Great Yarmouth. We unfortunately couldn't find the ibis but saw several **Eurasian Spoonbills**, four **Western Cattle Egrets** and a hunting **Common Kestrel**. The Breydon Water estuary was covered with wading birds but, unfortunately, the tide was not conducive to close views, which would have enabled us to filter through the flocks of **Common Ringed Plover** and **Dunlin** for any scarcities that might have been lurking.

Day 9, 25th May 2025. A wild eagle chase – the full UK twitching experience

I don't think Marc was ready for the first words of the day to come out of Drew's mouth, asking "Ready to chase an eagle?" After picking Marc up, the race was on to get up to the Cley area to look for a mega-rare sighting that had cropped up that morning. We arrived at a good vantage point near NWT Cley Marshes and waited. **Brown Hare** and a lovely view of the coast kept us busy until a rain band passed through. As the weather cleared, several **Common Buzzards**, **Red Kites**, **Common Kestrels** and even **Eurasian Sparrowhawks** got up from the woods, but no sign of our target. News broke that the bird we were after had been seen again to the east of us, but was moving in the wrong direction, so the chase was on! We stopped at a large group of twitchers, who told us we had just missed it, so we continued in the direction the bird was heading, but with no joy.

Feeling deflated, we moved back towards Cley to enjoy a day of birding and forget about the morning. Nevertheless, Drew, with a glimmer of optimism left, drove past the Bayfield estate and spotted a good vantage point to have one last look. There were already a couple of birders there, so we U-turned and parked at the site. One of the birders there said he might be on the bird, so we set the scope up and immediately identified **BOOTED EAGLE**! The bird drifted towards us and hung over the woods in front of us for a good thirty minutes, affording excellent views.

With such a joyous and uplifting experience all the troubles of the morning instantly left us as we watched this fantastic juvenile pale-morph Booted Eagle circle and dive over the woods. This was pure magic, made better by sharing this experience with several local birders who had turned up following the news of our sighting. Marc won't forget today in a hurry. I should also mention the **Eurasian Hobby** and **Western Marsh Harrier** we saw here but they pale in comparison.



***Booted Eagle** was not on the agenda, and was an incredibly thrilling bird to catch up with!*

On a high, we went to enjoy a pint with the other successful local birders at the Three Swallows Pub in Wiveton. This was Marc's first big UK twitch, so it was a crazy experience to reflect on, but we had a good laugh hearing and exchanging birding stories from times gone by with other Norfolk birders.

It was then on to NWT Cley Marshes visitor centre for a spot of lunch. The afternoon was taken up by a walk along the shingle ridge at Cley down to North Scrape. Over the sea were several **Little Terns**. We also noticed a handful of **Western House Martins** and **Barn Swallows** on the move, going west over the sea. On the beach a couple of **Eurasian Skylarks** showed well. On the scrape were a few **Common Ringed Plovers**, **Dunlin**, a **Little Ringed Plover** and an adult **Common Gull**. All in all, whatever we did for the rest of the day was simply a bonus at this point.



*This **Booted Eagle** was the same pale-morph individual seen in Cornwall earlier in the year.*

Day 10, 26th May 2025. Planes, Cranes and automobiles

Marc's last day arrived all too quickly and, since he had an early flight the next day, we would have to get him to the airport hotel in good time tonight. We thus opted for an early start today, to make the most of the sunny weather before the wind was due to pick up. We started off in the heart of the Norfolk Broads at the fantastic NWT Hickling Broad reserve. On arrival, we wandered down to Brendan's Marsh in a sea of birdsong, with **Eurasian Blackcap**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Eurasian Chaffinch** and **Yellowhammer** all singing. We'd been at the marsh all of five minutes when a flock of four **Common Cranes** flew so low over our heads that we could hear the wingbeats. What a start!

On the marsh were many **Little Egrets**, four **Eurasian Spoonbills** and a couple of **Great Egrets**, plus some waders, including two **Common Greenshanks** – new for the trip and one of which was color-ringed with a yellow flag. We also had brief views of a **Bearded Reedling** and a **Cetti's Warbler**. As the morning warmed and the wind picked up, a **Eurasian Hobby** took off from its roost to hunt. Another two **Common Cranes** flew past in beautiful morning light.



*There's no better way to end a trip to Norfolk than with some close views of **Common Cranes** - a real local specialty.*

Moving around the reserve, we went up to the viewing hut on the edge of the broad where we were treated to close views of **Western Marsh Harrier** and yet more **Bearded Reedlings**. A few **Common Pochards** and nearly a hundred **Mute Swans** were also on the broad. Dragonflies were starting to wake up too and lots of **Four-spotted Chasers** greeted us on the edge of the footpath. As we wandered up to Secker's Hide, a **Eurasian Bittern** was booming loudly, adding to the reedbed atmosphere.

Before leaving the site, one of the reserve volunteers alerted us to the arrival of more wading birds, so we had one last check of Brendan's Marsh. Sure enough, several **Common Ringed Plovers** and **Dunlins** had dropped in, along with a male **Ruff** adorned with purple neck plumage.

We went for a late breakfast at the Waterside Café in Rollesby, before checking some other sites in the area. Unfortunately, the scrapes near Ludham had dried out in the recent hot weather, but a fresh **Norfolk Hawker** dragonfly was patrolling a ditch at the site, affording good views.



Norfolk Hawker dragonfly is an icon of the Norfolk Broads and also known as 'Green-eyed Hawker'.

For our last site of the trip, we went to check Potter Heigham Marshes where, despite not adding anything new to our list, we still enjoyed views of **Western Marsh Harrier**, the same two **Common Greenshanks** from Hickling we'd seen earlier, and lots of ducks, including **Common Pochard** and **Tufted Duck**. A **Norfolk Hawker** also flew directly into Drew's face on the way out, which was a great and hilarious parting gift from the area.

Just like that, the trip came to an end, and it was time to head to the Norwich Airport Hotel. We celebrated the trip with a quick pint in the pub there, before saying our goodbyes.

It was a privilege to spend time birding in Norfolk and Suffolk in spring, and was a great reminder to Drew about how lucky he is to have such a wonderful area on his doorstep.

Bird List – Following IOC (version 14.2, August 2024)

Birds ‘heard only’ are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen. The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: VU = Vulnerable.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Brant Goose (<i>dark-bellied</i>)	<i>Branta bernicla</i>
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Tundra (Bewick's) Swan	<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>
Eurasian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
European Turtle Dove - VU	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>
Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Eurasian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>
Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyiaetus melanocephalus</i>
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Tawny Owl (H)	<i>Strix aluco</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker (H)	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Ring-necked Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>

Total seen	145
Total heard only	2
Total recorded	147

Mammal List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>
Reeve's Muntjac Deer	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>
Chinese Water Deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>

Butterfly List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon britannicus</i>
Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>

Dragonfly List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrosoma nymphula</i>
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>
Hairy Dragonfly	<i>Brachytron pratense</i>
Norfolk Hawker	<i>Aeshna isoceles</i>
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>
Scarce Chaser	<i>Libellula fulva</i>

Other Notable Wildlife

Common Name	Scientific Name
Slow Worm	<i>Anguis fragilis</i>
Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>
Fen Raft Spider	<i>Dolomedes plantarius</i>
Green Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela campestris</i>