WILDLIFE TRAVEL



#	DATE	LOCATIONS
1	5 th Dec	arrival, The Old Rectory, Crostwick
2	6 th Dec	The Broads: Horsey Gap, Winterton Dunes, Stubb Mill
3	7 th Dec	Ouse Washes: Welches Dam and Welney
4	8 th Dec	Mid-Yare Valley: Strumpshaw Fen and Buckenham Marshes
5	9 th Dec	North Norfolk: Weybourne, Salthouse, Cley, Burnham Overy, Holkham
6	10 th Dec	North West Norfolk: Titchwell
7	11 th Dec	depart

LIST OF TRAVELLERS

Leaders

Philip Precey Mike Symes

A gallery of Philip's photos from the trip can be found at https://www.flickr.com/photos/wildlifetravel/sets/72157647373786623/



6th December 2014. The Broads. After our first night in the Old Rectory, the day dawned frosty and clear: a good omen! Meeting up with our driver, Tim, we headed off eastwards from Crostwick, through the lanes and villages into the Broads.

Our first stop was at the well-organised beach car park at Horsey Gap, from where we walked along the landward side of the dunes, heading south to the viewing points. The beach was littered with Grey Seals: massive slug-like males lolling near the water and occasionally chasing each other through the surf; smaller females snoozing the morning away or noisily interacting with their neighbours; and everywhere white fluffy pups. Yesterday's count was of 700 seal pups, the third most important breeding site on the English east coast (after Donna Nook and Lindisfarne).

Amongst the larger Grey Seals was a single Harbour (or Common) Seal, while a couple of Sanderlings and a Turnstone ran about in the surf and a handful of Red-throated Divers flew past out at sea.

After our fill of seal action, we struck inland towards the village of Horsey. In the distance a big flock of Pink-footed Geese lifted up, and we passed a pair of Stonechats and our first Marsh Harrier of the trip hunting over the grazing marsh. Walking along the path, a funny starling flew overhead and caught our leader's eye, landing up in the top of the tallest tree and raising its crest: a lovely Waxwing, fresh in from Scandinavia. After resting for a while, giving us all a chance for a good look, he flew off, trilling as he went.

Meeting up with Tim again, we made the decision to head south a little way to Winterton Dunes, where a Desert Wheatear had been found the night before. And half an hour later, we were enjoying wonderful views of this handsome vagrant, a beige, black and peach male busy feeding along the strandline, no doubt stocking up on sand flies after his mammoth journey from the deserts of Central Asia: a very nice bonus for our lunch break!

So on we went, to Hickling Broad and the view point at Stubb Mill. As we walked along the track, the sound of bugling Cranes could be heard out on the marsh, and over the next hour they put in a good show, with one pair stalking about at the far side of the field and another ten birds flying past in twos and threes, heading off to roost.

Another local speciality is the little Chinese Water Deer, and two of this pretty deer put in an appearance in the grazing marsh, before disappearing into the reeds. Some enormous skeins of Pink-footed Geese flew across in the distance, heading north-west to their roost site offshore. Marsh Harriers were on constant display, with birds arriving all the time: at one point, no fewer than 49 birds were in the air together, and more continued to arrive after this main 'flock' had settled into their bushes for the night. Two Hen Harriers showed up: a single brief female and a lovely ghostly male who appeared three times in the field in front of us. And a Barn Owl floated about at the edge of the field.

With a wonderful Norfolk sunset as we made our way back to the bus, not a bad first day.

7th December 2014. Ouse Washes. Sunday dawned grey and wet, but with the promise of better weather to come. We headed west, crossing the northern edge of the Brecks, where we were lucky to see a small herd of Red Deer feeding in a field on the edge of the pine forest, and on into the black soils of the Fens.

We spent the morning at the RSPB/Wildlife Trust reserve at Welches Dam, arriving at the same time as the rain clouds. Once the rain had eased off, we headed up to the hides, stopping to check the visitor centre bird feeders on the way: alas, no sign of any Tree Sparrows today.

Much of the Washes was flooded, with good numbers of Tufted Duck and Pochard, Wigeon, Mallard and Teal, along with a handful of Gadwall close in and some Pintail far out in the distance, and one or two Great Crested and Little Grebes. A pair of Marsh Harriers put all the birds up, while in the far distance a surprise Red Kite was hunting beyond the far side of the washes. One the flood banks, Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, Goldfinch and a surprising pair of Green Woodpeckers fed.

The Wildfowl and Wetland Trust's reserve at Welney isn't quite so 'low key' as Welches Dam, and we took full advantage of the facilities here, notably the café, before heading over the bridge to enjoy the luxury of a centrally-heated hide and comfortable seats from where to watch the evening feed. A small number of Whooper and Mute Swans joined the large numbers of Mallard and Pochard in taking advantage of the free grain on offer, while we learned a lot (some might suggest a little too much!) about the lives of the birds and the work of the WWT.

Apart from the swan feeding, there was plenty else to see. A dense flock of maybe 400 Black-tailed Godwits were roosting and feeding out on the islands in front of us, with a single Ruff and a handful of Dunlin mixed in. Much more surprising was a male Black-winged Stilt, looking very out of place in a chilly wintery Norfolk when he should have been down in the Mediterranean enjoying the sun.

Another Marsh Harrier came through putting all the birds up in the air, an intriguing (but very brief and very distant) pale buzzard hovered over the far bank, and a Peregrine zipped through at dusk.

After the feeding, with the sun quickly setting to our left, several hundred Whooper Swans came in to roost from their day spent feeding out in the sugar beet fields, a very atmospheric end to the day.

8th **December 2014. Mid Yare Valley.** Today we headed south east, to the Yare Valley and the Mid Yare National Nature Reserve. We started our day at the RSPB reserve at Strumpshaw Fen, with Marsh Tit (as well as Coal, Blue and Great Tits) and a rather shy Nuthatch on the bird feeders by the toilet block.

Our first stop was Fen Hide, where a male Peregrine zipped through, a couple of Marsh Harriers put on a good show and a briefly glimpsed Bittern didn't... Heading along the muddy riverbank path, Tower Hide proved to be even quieter, with a fly-by Little Egret pretty much the only bird!

And so back to Reception Hide, where there were at least ducks to keep us entertained, and four Marsh Harriers keeping the ducks on their toes. A couple of Bearded Tits were seen by a few of us as they flew across the pool, but otherwise it was a bit quiet... time to move on.

Luckily, at least one of us wasn't quite so quick to leave, and so was in place to see the head of an Otter as she swam out from the reeds! All quickly back in the hide, and we all enjoyed marvellous views of a mother and, briefly, her two cubs as they fished around the reed edges. The cubs soon disappeared back into the reeds, but the female swam out in the open, before eventually disappearing behind the island: our cue to leave, after a brilliant 30 minutes!

Our afternoon walk was a little further down the valley, at Buckenham Marshes, where hundreds of Wigeon whistled, three Little Egrets flapped about on the marsh and a big female Peregrine spent most of her time sitting on the gate posts, occasionally flying about and playing with the hundreds of Lapwing and Golden Plover that took flight. A group of ten Ruff were feeding quite close to us, and the geese included Canada and Greylag Geese, a pair of Egyptian Geese and two European White-fronted Geese, but alas we couldn't track down their rarer cousins the Taiga Bean Geese who winter at this site.

Back across the marshes, we walked up the hill to the top of the lane, and waited for dusk to fall. As it did, the Jackdaws and Rooks began to gather... first a few hundred in the oak trees, and then slowly more and more came in. Out across the river we could see some large flocks lifting up and heading our way.

A female Hen Harrier flew through, trying to slip past unnoticed while she chased Skylarks, and four Marsh Harriers came overhead, heading towards Strumpshaw. And still the crows came.

Gradually the field next to us became black with birds, with massive flocks of thousands of birds filtered in from the north. Looking east over the woods, even more could be seen swirling above the trees. As the light finally failed, the massive flock in the field took off and poured overhead to join the swirling clouds of

birds over Buckenham Carr: tens and tens of thousands of birds in the air together, all calling and flapping, a terrific noise... and then, almost as one, they went down to roost: a very impressive end to a great day!

9th December 2014. North Norfolk Coast. With South, West and East all covered already, today it was our turn to head North, up to the coast.

Our first quick stop was along Station Road, Weybourne where a large flock of Pink-footed Geese was feeding in roadside fields. A quick scan revealed two families of Tundra Bean Geese, with their bright orange legs giving them away. A Brown Hare ran through the goose flock.

From here we headed west to what remains of the beach car park at Salthouse, where the shingle bank sea defences have been pushed right back onto the road by last year's tidal surge. In the grazing marshes by the road we found a small group of Dark-bellied Brent Geese grazing, and soon picked out their black and white cousin, a well-marked Black Brant from western Canada.

On the beach, a group of about 30 Snow Buntings were flitting about the shingle, flying back and forth over the 'Little Eye' pool, but never really giving us the greatest of views. Even less showy were the flock of Twite, which twice flew up out of the longer grass to pause briefly on a fence line, but just as quickly dropped down again. Considerably more friendly were several Turnstones doing as their name suggests and turning stones, relatively unconcerned us being next to them!

From here we drove on westwards, to the famous Wildlife Trust reserve of Cley Marshes, the very first Wildlife Trust reserve and still amongst the best. After availing ourselves of the facilities (and warming up a bit after the icy blast at the beach), we walked out to the little cluster of hides overlooking Pat's Pool, where we found two elegant Avocets, a couple of Ruff and large numbers of Teal and Wigeon, Lapwing and Golden Plover. A Marsh Harrier or two drifted by, and a large flock of Dark-bellied Brent Geese flew in to the pool to wash.

Back to the visitors' centre for some very welcome hot drinks and cake, before we headed westwards again, this time to a lay by looking out over the grazing marshes at Burnham Overy. With the cold wind really biting now, we settled in to eat our lunches while the hardy few scanned the marshes. Large numbers of Pink-footed Geese together with smaller numbers of Greylags and Brents were grazing out on the marshes, along with a small group of black-and-white Barnacle Geese, a scarce visitor to East Anglia from their main wintering grounds over on the continent. A handful of Marsh Harriers were patrolling back and forth, but better was a male Hen Harrier who came close past along the hedgeline. Better still, but much further away, we finally picked out a juvenile Rough-legged Buzzard, hunkered down on a fence post way in the distance, but still showing off his creamy head and breast, black belly and pale tail with dark terminal band.

And so to Lady Anne's Drive at Holkham. Here we walked through the pine woods, past a small pond with a pair of Goldeneye and several Little Grebes on it, to the hide overlooking the grazing marshes inland. Several Marsh Harriers were patrolling the marsh, and a couple of Common Buzzards along the edge of the woods.

The marshes were alive with birds: big flocks of Lapwing and Wigeon, but primarily geese: thousand upon thousand of Pink-footed Geese. One final goose species for our list was a Snow Goose, easily picked out with the naked eye.

Groups of Pink-footed Geese were coming and going all the time, and right up until dusk large flocks were still pouring in to the gathering: an impressive noise and vast numbers of birds, but alas the wind seemed to put them off departing for their offshore roost, at least while we were there.

10th **December 2014. Titchwell.** Back up to the coast today, to the RSPB reserve at Titchwell. The reserve here includes a good variety of habitats: coastal grazing marsh, reedbed, freshwater marsh, salt marsh and sandy beach, giving us plenty to keep us occupied for the day.

The freshwater marsh was alive with ducks and waders: hundreds of Teal and Wigeon, with smaller numbers of Gadwall, Shoveler and some lovely Pintail. We also picked out a single female Scaup, fast asleep at the far side. Waders included large numbers of Lapwing and Black-tailed Godwits, together with Dunlin, Golden Plover, Redshank and Avocet. Amongst them we picked out three Knot, a single female Ruff and three silvery Spotted Redshank.

The gulls gave us the chance to compare Common Gull and Herring Gull side by side, and then the trickier pair of Herring Gull and Yellow-legged Gull.

A male Peregrine came through a couple of times, putting all the birds up but failing to make a kill.

The saltwater marsh was much quieter, with Dunlin and Redshank, a few Shelduck and Curlew and a pair of Grey Plovers. Heading towards the beach, we found a couple of Greenshank and a Little Egret posed nicely in a dark corner.

By the time we reached the sea, the wind had picked up again. Out on the falling tide we picked up all the 'usual' coastal waders: large numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit and Dunlin whirling back and forth and feeding in the shallows. Sanderling were running about, together with Grey Plover, Curlew and our first Oystercatchers of the trip. A small group of Linnet were flying about in the dunes, where we eventually found a sheltered spot to have our picnics.

Birding out to sea wasn't the easiest, but we did pick out some sea ducks in the form of an Eider, a fly-past Red-breasted Merganser and, for some of us, a small party of Common Scoter.

Finally the cold defeated us, and sent us back to the visitor centre for hot drinks and some retail therapy.

And so we headed back to Crostwick and our final dinner at the Old Rectory, complete with crackers and party hats...

ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME						
		6 th	⊈	8th	9th	10 th	
Family Anatidae (Swans	, geese and ducks)						
Mute Swan	Cygnus olor	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	
Whooper Swan	Cygnus cygnus	Com	mon a	t the (Ouse V	Vashes	, 7
Greylag Goose	Anser anser	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Х	
White-fronted Goose	Anser albifrons	2 at Buckenham Marshes, 8 th					
Pink-footed Goose	Anser brachyrhynchus	Χ			Χ		
Tundra Bean Goose	Anser (fabalis) rossicus	10 w 9 th	ith Pir	ık-feet	near	Weybo	ur
Lesser Snow Goose	Chen caerulescens caerulescens	One with the Pink-feet at Holkha Fresh Marsh, 9 th					
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis		Χ	Χ	Χ	Х	
Canada X Greylag Goose		One	hybric	famil	at W	elney,	7 th
Barnacle Goose	Branta leucopsis		ut 6 wi 7, 9 th	th Pinl	k-feet	at Burr	าhล
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	Branta (b.) bernicla				X	Χ	
Black Brant	Branta (bernicla) nigricans		adult nouse,		e Bre	nt Gees	se
Shelduck	Tadorna tadorna				Χ	X	
Egyptian Goose	Alopochen aegyptiaca	Χ		Χ	Χ		
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Х	
Gadwall	Anas strepera		Χ	Χ		Х	
Pintail	Anas acuta		Χ			Χ	
Shoveler	Anas clypeata		Χ	Χ	Χ	X	
Wigeon	Anas penelope	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	X	
Teal	Anas crecca		Χ	Χ	Χ	X	
Pochard	Aythya ferina		Χ				
Tufted Duck	Aythya fuligula		Χ				
Pochard X Tufted Duck		One	hybric	male	at We	lney, 7	th.
Scaup	Aythya marila					X	
Eider	Somateria mollissima					X	
Common Scoter	Melanitta nigra					X	
Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula				Χ	X	
Red-breasted Merganser	Mergus serrator					Χ	
Family Phasianidae (Phe	easants and Partridges)						
Pheasant	Phasianus colchicus	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	
Red-legged Partridge	Alectoris rufa				Χ	Χ	
Family Gaviidae (Divers)							
Red-throated Diver	Gavia stellata	Χ					
Family Podicipedidae (G	rebes)						
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis		Χ		Χ	Χ	
Great Crested Grebe	Podiceps cristatus		Χ			Χ	
Family Phalacrocoracida	e (Cormorants)						
Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	
Family Ardeidae (Herons	5)						
Bittern	Botaurus stellaris					flight o Impsha	
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta			Χ	Χ	Х	T
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	Х		Х	Х	Х	T

ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME					£		
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Family Accipitridae (Ha								
Red Kite	Milvus migrans	One in the distance from Welcon, 7 th						
Hen Harrier	Circus cyaneus	One ringtail and one ghostly-pale male at the Stubb Mill roost, 6 th . One ringtail at Buckenham, 8 th . One male at Burnham Overy, 9 th .						
Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	Х	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ		
Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ		
Rough-legged Buzzard	Buteo lagopus	One juvenile perched in the far distance on a fence post, Burnha Overy, 9 th .						
Sparrowhawk	Accipiter nisus		Χ	Χ	Χ			
Family Falconidae (Falconidae	cons)							
Kestrel	Falco tinnunculus	Х	X	Χ	Χ	Χ		
Peregrine	Falco peregrinus		Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ		
Family Rallidae (Rails a								
Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus		X	Х	X	Х		
Coot	Fulica atra		X	X	X	Χ		
Water Rail	Rallus aquaticus				Χ			
Family Gruidae (Cranes	s)							
Common Crane	Grus grus	_	in the sey an			lds bet and th	-	
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ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME						
		ф .	1	8 th	o _{th}	10 th	
Family Laridae (Gulls)							
Black-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus ridibundus	X	X	X	Х	X	
Common Gull	Larus canus	X	Χ	Χ	Х	X	
Herring Gull	Larus argentatus	X	Χ	Χ	Х	X	
Yellow-legged Gull	Larus michahellis	One adults on the fresh marsh at Titchwell, 10 th					
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus		Χ				
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	Х	Χ		Χ	Х	
Family Columbidae (Pig	eons and Doves)						
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	Columba livia	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	
Woodpigeon	Columba palumbus	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	
Stock Dove	Columa oenas		Х	Χ			
Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х	1
Family Tytonidae (Barn							
Barn Owl	Tyto alba	Х	Χ				
Family Picidae (Woodpe	ckers)						
Green Woodpecker	Picus viridis		Χ				
Family Alcedinidae (Kin	gfishers)						
Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	Н					
Family Alaudidae (Larks							
Skylark	Alauda arvensis	Н		Χ	Χ	X	
Family Motacillidae (Pip	oits and Wagtails)						
Meadow Pipit	Anthus pratensis	Χ	Χ			Х	
Pied Wagtail	Motacilla alba		Χ	Χ	Χ	Х	
Family Troglodytidae (V	/rens)						
Wren	Troglodytes troglodytes	Х		Χ		X	
Family Prunellidae (Acc	entors)						
Dunnock	Prunella modularis		Χ	Χ		X	
Family Turdidae (Thrush							
Robin	Erithacus rubecula	X	Χ	X	Х	X	
Stonechat	Saxicola torquata	X					
Desert Wheatear	Oenanthe deserticola	A male on the beach at Winterton					
Blackbird	Turdus merula	Х	Х	Χ	Χ	Χ	
Song Thrush	Turdus philomelos		Χ		Χ		
Redwing	Turdus iliacus	Х	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	
Fieldfare	Turdus pilaris	Х	Χ	Х	Χ		
Family Regulidae (Kingl	ets)						
Goldcrest	Regulus regulus				Н		
Family Aegithalidae (Lo	ng-tailed Tits)						
Long-tailed Tit	Aegithalos caudatus	Χ				Χ	
Family Panuridae (Bear							
Bearded Tit	Panurus biarmicus			Χ			
Family Paridae (Tits)							
Marsh Tit	Parus palustris			Χ			
Coal Tit	Parus ater			Χ			
Blue Tit	Parus caeruleus	Х	Χ	Χ	Χ	Χ	
Great Tit	Parus major		Х	Х	Х	Х	

ENGLISH NAME	LATIN NAME							
		9 th	₹	8 th	9 th	10 th		
Family Sittidae (Nuth	atches)							
Nuthatch	Sitta europaea			Χ				
Family Corvidae (Cro	ws)							
Magpie	Pica pica	Х	X	X	Χ	Х		
Jay	Garrulus glandarius			Χ				
Jackdaw	Corvus monedula	Х	X	X	Χ	Х		
Rook	Corvus frugilegus	Х	X	X	Χ	Х		
Carrion Crow	Corvus corone	Х	X	X	Χ	Х		
Family Sturnidae (Sta	ırlings)							
Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	Х	X	Χ	Χ	Χ		
Family Bombycillidae	(Waxwings)							
Bohemian Waxwing	Bombycilla garrulus		flew in the			and sho)W	
Family Passeridae (Sp	parrows)							
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus		Χ	Χ				
Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus							
Family Fringillidae (F	inches)							
Chaffinch	Fringilla coelebs	Х	X	X	Χ	Х		
Greenfinch	Carduelis chloris					Х		
Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis		Х	X	Χ	Х		
Linnet	Carduelis cannabina				Χ	Х		
Twite	Carduelis flavirostris				Χ			
Bullfinch	Pyrrhula pyrrhula			Χ				
Family Emberizidae (Buntings)							
Reed Bunting	Emberiza schoeniclus		X			Χ		
Snow Bunting	Plectrophenax nivalis	Х			Χ			
MAMMALS								
Family Muridae (Mice			V					
Brown Rat	Rattus norvegicus		X					
Family Sciuridae (Squ		Х	V	Χ		V		
Grey Squirrel	Sciurus carolinensis	λ	X	Λ		X		
Family Leporidae (Ra Rabbit		Х	V	Χ	Х	Х		
Brown Hare	Oryctolagus cuniculus Lepus europaeus	^	X		X	X		
			^		Λ	Λ		
Family Phocidae (Sea Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus	Hun	ina hor	a ch				
	Haliciloeius grypus	Hundreds on the breeding beach Horsey, 6 th .						
					Salthou	ıca Oth	1	
Common Seal	Phoca vitulina	One offshore at Salthouse, 9 th . One on the beach at Horsey, 6 th .						
		Offic	OH CH	beaci	iatin	л зсу, ч		
Family Mustalidae (M	1 ~	Λfa	milv ar	oun of	a fer	nale wit	ŀh	
Family Mustelidae (M		A family group of a female with well-grown cubs at Strumpshav						
Family Mustelidae (M Otter	Lutra lutra	الصيد	-arowr	Clibe '	אך אדרי		۷۷۸	
Otter		well	-growr	cubs	at Stri			
Otter Family Cervidae (Dee	r)						† <i>c</i>	
Otter		Two	from	Stubb I	Mill vie	ewpoin		
Otter Family Cervidae (Dee	r)	Two 6 th ;	from s	Stubb I nts alo	Mill vie	ewpoin e riverb	ar	
Otter Family Cervidae (Dee	r)	Two 6 th ; Stru	from s footpri mpsha	Stubb I nts alo w, 8 th ;	Mill vie ng the 2 at 7	ewpoin	ar ell,	





Desert Wheatear at Winterton (left), Turnstones at Salthouse (right) and Little Egret at Tichwell (below)



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