

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 3rd to 7th December 2018

WILDLIFE TRAVEL



Norfolk 2018

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

#	DATE	LOCATIONS
1	3 rd Dec	arrival, The Old Rectory, Crostwick
2	4 th Dec	The Broads: Horsey Gap, Stubb Mill (Hickling Broad NWT)
3	5 th Dec	North Norfolk: Cley Marsh NWT Reserve, Holkham NNR
4	6 th Dec	Mid-Yare Valley: Buckenham Marshes and Strumpshaw Fen, Mid Yare NNR
5	7 th Dec	depart

Leaders

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Norfol



Cover: Grey Seal, Horsey Gap.

Above: Konik Ponies, Hickling Broad NWT Reserve

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

4th December 2018. The Broads. After our first night in the Old Rectory, and the first of several full English breakfasts, our morning started with a short lesson in winter moth identification, with ten or so Mottled Umber moths of various colour morphs around the hotel lights. Nearby we also found a single rather drab Winter Moth. All the moths we saw were males: the females of both Winter Moth and Mottled Umber are flightless, virtually wing-less animals that crawl up onto tree trunks and wait for the males to find them.

Boarding the bus, we met up with our driver, Colin, and headed off through the winding lanes and villages of East Norfolk. After a short stop to check (unsuccessfully) for Otter on the River Bure, we arrived at this morning's destination, the wonderfully empty beach car park at Horsey Gap, from where we walked a short way through the sand dunes to the viewing point.

The beach here was littered with the hulking shapes of hauled out Grey Seals: massive thick-necked and Roman-nosed males lolling near the water and occasionally chasing each other across the beach, with several impressive fights taking place, with plenty of neck-biting and spilled blood; smaller females snoozing the morning away or noisily interacting with their neighbours; and everywhere white fluffy pups. Last week's count was of an amazing 1285 seal pups (up from 962 this time last year), along with 1698 adults (1,370 adults in December 2017) on the beach, the third most important breeding site on the English east coast (after Donna Nook and Lindisfarne). The UK is home to 40% of the world's Grey Seals, and an amazing 95% of the EU population.

Alas, try as we might, we couldn't pick out any Common Seals amongst their larger Grey cousins, although a pitch black pup was an impressive animal, as was the female who decided to come for a wander (or should that be a waddle) along the dune-top footpath.

A couple of Sanderling paused briefly on the beach for a characteristic run about in the surf before heading off southwards, followed not long after by a single Turnstone; out at sea quite a few Red-throated Divers were flying past, with a couple of Guillemots just beyond the waves; and a party of four Snow Buntings flew past along the beach, unfortunately not hanging around long enough for us all to see.

After our fill of seal action, we struck inland towards the village of Horsey and the promise of hot drinks (and toilets!) at the Nelson's Head pub. In the distance several small flocks of Pink-footed Geese were flying back and forth, yapping and dropping into the fields, we passed a trio of Stonechats in a weedy field corner and a Common Buzzard sat up on a gatepost before dropping away to hunt.

After our picnic, making the most of the sunshine in what promised to be a less-than-sunny week, we made our way inland, to Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Hickling Broad reserve and walked out to the viewpoint at Stubb Mill.

Something of a local speciality is the little Chinese Water Deer, and one put in an appearance on the edge of the reeds on the grazing marsh, before disappearing behind a group of Canada Geese. Another 2 or 3 animals were seen during the afternoon, including one barrelling past right in front of the viewing platform. This East Asian species was introduced to Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire in the late 19th century and to Whipsnade in 1930: individuals escaped (or were deliberately released) and the species is now well established in the Cambridgeshire Fens and the wetlands of Norfolk and Suffolk, as well as areas around Bedfordshire. The English population probably numbers more than 2,000 individuals, and with the Asian populations now in decline, this is thought to represent around 10% of the world population.

We also came upon the local herd of Konik ponies on their winter pastures: this Polish breed of horse is well suited to wetlands and is now used for conservation grazing on a number of large fenland nature reserves, including a number of sites across the Norfolk Broads.

As we walked further along the track, a pair of Common Cranes flew across in front of us, with the same or another pair flying over our heads when some of us walked out to the end of the track beyond the viewing

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

platform. Another trio were feeding quietly on the edge of the marsh, while yet more could be heard bugling in the distance as we walked back in the gathering dusk to the bus.

A trio of Common Cranes arrived at Horsey in the winter of 1979, with their first nesting attempt in 1981. Over the years, the population has grown, slowly at first but now helped by landscape-scale wetland creation projects across the country, and in recent years by the 'Great Crane Reintroduction Project' in Somerset, where the first 'wild' chicks were fledged in 2015. The total UK population now numbers 178 individuals, with around 50 pairs now breeding: an impressive conservation success story.

At the raptor roost, a single female Hen Harrier appeared for Phil and Jenny, as well as a Short-eared Owl. The great attraction here is the harrier roost, and Marsh Harriers were on constant display from the moment we arrived at the viewpoint, albeit mostly quite distant in the increasingly misty conditions, and just arriving in ones and twos before disappearing into their roost site. At one point, something must have disturbed the roost, as all of a sudden the sky above the low hawthorn bushes was alive with birds, and 50 Marsh Harriers were in the air together for a little while, a very impressive sight!

With light falling, first a Roe Deer doe appeared in the field in front of us, and then more surprisingly, a Red Deer hind trotted across the same field.

Walking back along the track, a large skein of yapping Pink-footed Geese were heard in the distance, along with the bugling of more Common Cranes: not a bad way to end our first day in Norfolk.

5th December 2018. North Norfolk Coast. Once aboard the bus, and with the forecast rain looking like it was settling in for the day, we headed north, up to the coast and the famous Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve of Cley Marshes, the very first Wildlife Trust reserve, and still amongst the best.

On arrival, and with the expected downpour more of a light drizzle, we headed straight out on to the reserve, to the little cluster of hides overlooking Pat's Pool. Initially, all was rather quiet, apart from a handful of Teal feeding in the drain right in front of the hide, and a large flock of Wigeon out on the shallow water. The only waders were a fly-by Dunlin and a single Black-tailed Godwit sleeping on a rather distant island, amongst more Teal.

A surprise was a Water Rail that suddenly appeared out of the reeds, swimming halfway across the drain before thinking the better of it and heading back into cover. After a short wait, it appeared again, creeping out from the reeds and making its jerky way along the near side of the ditch in front of us. Moving into another hide, we found a male Pintail and a pair of Gadwall at the far side of the pool, while at least five Marsh Harriers quartered the reedbeds.

Back at the visitor centre, we took advantage of the wonderful cake on offer and learned that a Red-rumped Swallow, a rare visitor from southern Europe, had turned up at the eastern end of the reserve, and was actually visible distantly from the visitor centre, hawking over the small woodland. After our cake and hot chocolate, we walked the couple of hundred metres along the road eastwards and were soon watching as the vagrant fed over our heads.

From Cley, and with the rain still not putting in its expected appearance, we continued westwards to Holkham National Nature Reserve, and Lady Anne's Drive. Walking out to the beach, we walked back east along the edge of an area of interesting saltmarsh vegetation, with Sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare* agg, Sea Purslane *Halimione portulacoides*, Glasswort *Salicornia europaea* agg and Shrubby Seablite *Suaeda vera*, where a single Dark-bellied Brent Goose was feeding. At the eastern end, on the edge of a roped off area, we found what we were looking for: a flock of 23 Shore Larks, lemony-faced little birds with bandit masks, shuffling about feeding on seeds amongst the sparse vegetation.

In the dunes nearby, checking around the mature Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* we found the rare Sea Buckthorn Bracket *Fomitoporia hippophaeicola*, a fungus only known from a couple of spots in Norfolk.

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

With the skies looking a little darker, we headed back through the pine woods towards the Washington Hide, overlooking the grazing marshes, where we enjoyed long, close-up views of a hunting Barn Owl, as well as a sturdy little Muntjac deer, a handful of Marsh Harriers and Common Buzzard and, as dusk began to gather, a trio of Red Deer further out on the marshes, a couple of hinds and a spectacular stag with his massive antlers.

With the light fading, the first flocks of Pink-footed Geese began to fly in, long lines of birds coming in from far to the south west, with skeins of hundreds and hundreds of birds coming over head, chattering as they went. Some dropped in to the marshes, while most carried on overhead towards their roost site offshore. Just after the light gave out and we set off back to the bus, more and more skeins of geese continued to arrive, with probably a few tens of thousands of birds coming over our heads as we stood in wide-mouthed wonder: a very atmospheric end to another good (and surprisingly dry) day.

6th December 2018. Mid Yare Valley. Today we headed south east, to the Yare Valley and the Mid Yare National Nature Reserve, managed by the RSPB.

We started our day at Buckenham Marshes, where the grazing marshes were home to good numbers of Wigeon and Lapwing, with plenty of Shoveler and Teal on the pool at the end of the track and several pairs of Mute Swans dotted out across the marsh.

A trio of Chinese Water Deer ran into cover along the edge of the railway line, while a pair of White-fronted Geese flew in to land quite distantly, flashing their white foreheads before settling down to feed tucked away behind the rushes.

Raptors were a real feature of the morning: Marsh Harriers were quartering the marshes in ones and twos across the horizon, with two or three Common Buzzards floating over the tree tops and one hunched up on a gate post. A Red Kite was a welcome sight, floating over the rough grassland and occasionally landing down on the ground at quite close range, before heading out across the marshes, being chased by a Marsh Harrier as it went. And to top the raptor list off, a pair of adult Peregrines appeared, causing mayhem amongst the Lapwing and Wigeon flocks before perching up on either end of a gateway, showing off the difference in size between the tidy little male and the hulking great female.

Along the river, a Cetti's Warbler was singing from the taller vegetation, typically hiding out of view, while a Kingfisher put in a brief but close appearance.

For lunch, we headed a little further west, up the valley, to Strumpshaw Fen, where several Marsh Tits joined the Coal, Blue and Great Tits on the bird feeders by the main reception hide, a mixed party of Siskin and Redpoll flew through the tree tops and out on the water a good number of Gadwall were feeding and displaying amongst the Coot, together with Teal, Mallard and Shoveler, and a single Black Swan, an escaped bird that has been resident here for several years now.

We made our way round to Fen Hide, which can only be described as 'quiet', apart from a single Chinese Water Deer who came barrelling past right in front of the hide, and at least ten Marsh Harriers out over the reedbeds. Unfortunately, the Bittern that had been seen an hour earlier decided not to put in a repeat showing, probably put off by the reed cutting and burning that was going on out on the reserve.

Making our way back to the bus, we walked along the lane through some wet woodland, looking out for plants in unseasonal flower, and came up with an impressive total of 19 species.

Back to Buckenham, and to the little car park by the railway line, where six Jackdaws were sitting patiently on the telegraph wires... We headed up the lane above the marshes, from where we could see and hear the first small flocks of Jackdaws and Rooks flying in to the nearby fields. The numbers on the wires began to increase, ten here, ten there. And then, looking out to the west, we could see large flocks of birds swirling in, thousands of them gathering on the distant fields, with yet more, great swirling flocks of cawing birds coming in from the east.

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

The two great flocks joined and landed on the field in front of us, a black mass of birds who were oddly silent as they gathered together, just the occasional cack and caw as darkness fell. And then, just as the light finally failed, they all lifted up *en masse* and came streaming across the road in front of us, great clouds of birds swirling over our heads and gathering in a swarm of corvids above Buckenham Carr: thousands of birds in the air together, all calling and flapping, a terrific noise... and then, almost as one, they went down to roost: another 'wow' moment to remember.

And so we headed back to Crostwick and our final dinner at the Old Rectory, complete with crackers and party hats... a festive end to a wonderful, wildlife-filled visit to Norfolk.

PLANTS IN FLOWER AT STRUMPSHAW FEN

Apiaceae	Hogweed <i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Asteraceae	Canadian Fleabane <i>Conyza canadensis</i>
Brassicaceae	White Mustard <i>Sinapis alba</i>
Caryophyllaceae	Red Campion <i>Silene dioica</i> Daisy <i>Bellis perennis</i>
Geraniaceae	Herb Robert <i>Geranium robertianum</i> Groundsel <i>Senecio vulgaris</i>
Lamiaceae	Black Horehound <i>Ballota nigra</i> Nipplewort <i>Lapsana communis</i>
Papaveraceae	Field Poppy <i>Papaver rhoeas</i>
Polygonaceae	Redshank <i>Polygonum persicaria</i> Red Dead-nettle <i>Lamium purpureus</i> Shepherd's Purse <i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i> Small-flowered Cranesbill <i>Geranium pusillum</i> Smooth Sow-thistle <i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>
Solanaceae	Black Nightshade <i>Solanum nigrum</i> White Dead-nettle <i>Lamium album</i> Wild Radish <i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i> Yarrow <i>Achillea millefolium</i>

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

BIRDS

ENGLISH NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th
Family Anatidae (Swans, geese and ducks)						
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		X	X	X	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		X	X	X	
White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>				X	
Pink-footed Goose	<i>Anser brachyrhynchus</i>		X	X	X	
Barnacle Goose	<i>Branta leucopsis</i>				X	
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		X	X	X	
Dark-bellied Brent Goose	<i>Branta (bernica) bernica</i>			X		
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		X	X		
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		X		X	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		X	X	X	
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>			X	X	
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			X		
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>			X	X	
Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>			X	X	
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			X	X	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			X		
Family Phasianidae (Pheasants and Partridges)						
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		X	X	X	
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>				X	
Family Gaviidae (Divers)						
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>		X			
Family Podicipedidae (Grebes)						
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			X		
Family Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants)						
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		X	X	X	
Family Ardeidae (Hérons)						
Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		2	1		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		X	X	X	
Family Accipitridae (Hawks and Eagles)						
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		1			
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		52	X	15	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		5	X	X	
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1			
Family Falconidae (Falcons)						
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		X	X	X	
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				2	
Family Rallidae (Rails and Crakes)						
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>		H	X	H	
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		X	X	X	
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		X	X	X	
Family Gruidae (Cranes)						
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>		7			
Family Scolopacidae (Sandpipers)						
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			X	X	
Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>		X			
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>				X	
Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		X			
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		X			
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>				X	

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

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Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			X		
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			X		
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			X		
Family Charadriidae (Plovers)						
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		X	X	X	
Family Laridae (Gulls)						
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		X	X	X	
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		X	X	X	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		X	X	X	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		X	X	X	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		X	X		
Family Alcidae (Auks)						
Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>		X			
Family Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)						
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		X	X	X	
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		X	X	X	
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		X	X	X	
Family Tytonidae (Barn Owls)						
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>			X	X	
Family Strigidae (Owls)						
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>			H		
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>				H	
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>		X			
Family Picidae (Woodpeckers)						
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		X		H	
Family Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)						
Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				X	
Family Alaudidae (Larks)						
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		X	X		
Shore Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>			23		
Family Motacillidae (Pipits and Wagtails)						
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		X	X	X	
Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		X			
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		X	X	X	
Family Troglodytidae (Wrens)						
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		X	X	X	
Family Prunellidae (Accentors)						
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		X	X		
Family Muscicapidae (Flycatchers and Chats)						
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		X	X	X	
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		X			
Family Turdidae (Thrushes)						
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		X	X	X	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		X			
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		X		X	
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>		X		X	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		X		X	
Family Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)						
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		X			
Family Regulidae (Crests)						
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		X		X	

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018

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Family Scotocercidae (Bush-warblers)						
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H	H	
Family Aegithalidae (Long-tailed Tits)						
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		X	X	X	
Family Panuridae (Bearded Tit)						
Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>			X		
Family Paridae (Tits)						
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecilus palustris</i>				X	
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		X	X	X	
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		X	X	X	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		X	X	X	
Family Corvidae (Crows)						
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		X	X	X	
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		X		X	
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		X	X	X	
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		X	X	X	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		X	X	X	
Family Sturnidae (Starlings)						
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		X	X	X	
Family Fringillidae (Finches)						
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		X	X	X	
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montana</i>		X			
Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>		X			
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		X	X	X	
Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>				X	
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>			X		
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>				X	
Family Emberizidae (Buntings)						
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		H	X	X	

95 bird species

MAMMALS						
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		X	X	X	
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		X		X	
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		X			
Grey Seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>		X			
Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjac</i>			X		
Chinese Water Deer	<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>		X		X	
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		X			
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		X	X		

MOTHS						
December Moth	<i>Poecilocampa populi</i>				X	
Winter Moth	<i>Operophtera brumata</i>		X		X	
Mottled Umber	<i>Erannis defoliara</i>		X		X	
Scarce Umber	<i>Agriopsis aurantiaria</i>				X	
Dark Chestnut	<i>Conistra ligula</i>				X	

Norfolk species lists and trip report, 4th to 8th December 2018



Grey Seal at Horsey (top left), Scarce Umber and Mottled Umber at Crostwick (bottom left)
Common Crane at Hickling Broad (top right), Water Rail at Cley Marshes (bottom right), and
Wigeon at Buckenham Marshes (below)

