

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

9th to 13th December 2024 (5 days)

NORFOLK

winter wildlife in East Anglia

"excellent guides, knew their stuff inside out and were a great inspiration to learn more about the natural world"

Norfolk 2021

Norfolk is justly famous for its wildlife. Our itinerary is designed to take in the most spectacular avian events and to give us a chance of seeing some of the county's splendid mammal-life.

From our base just north of Norwich, we'll explore the great wetlands and sweeping vistas of the **Norfolk Broads**. We'll visit a colony of Grey Seals and hope to witness both newborn seal pups and rough-and-ready courtship. We'll also visit the Thurne catchment where we have a high chance of finding wintering geese and charming Chinese Water Deer. We end the day at the **spectacular roost of harriers** at Stubb Mill, where up to 100 Marsh Harriers may be accompanied by other raptors, Cranes and occasionally Bitterns. Our second day in Broadland will be spent in the Yare Valley, where we have a chance of seeing Otters at play, as well as wintering White-fronted and (fingers crossed) Taiga Bean Geese. Our final visit today will be to watch thousands of corvids coming in to roost, a spectacle which inspired Mark Cocker's celebrated 'Crow Country'.

After our time in the east, we head north to spend a day on the marshes along the North Norfolk coast. A feature of this time of year are the large flocks of geese feeding out in the fields: thousands of Pink-footed Geese, along with smaller numbers of White-fronted and Tundra Bean Geese. We will spend some time on our goose chase, before turning our attention to the marshes and beaches in search of Shorelark, Snow Bunting and any rare birds which may appear at this rewarding time of year. Our day in **North Norfolk** will end with the cackles of innumerable thousands of Pink-Footed Geese in our ears, as they fly in to roost. Unforgettable!



Price

£1080

Single Room Supplement

£190

Full board

Day 1 arrive
Day 2 Broadland
Day 3 Yare Valley
Day 4 North Norfolk
Day 5 depart

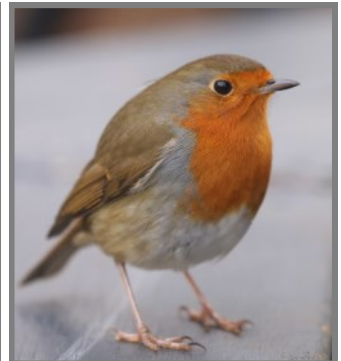
Leader

Philip Precey
and James Lowen

Group size

min 4, max 14

Grey Seal pups,
amazing winter roosts of
birds: wild geese, raptors,
cranes and crows



ITINERARY

Please note that the itinerary may be changed to suit the weather or other practicalities or at the discretion of the leaders.

Day 1 Monday 9th December. Our holiday starts in Crostwick where we meet this evening at our hotel in time for an introduction to the holiday and our first dinner together.

Day 2 Tuesday 10th December. Today we travel eastwards, to explore the edge of the Broads National Park. We will start by heading to the coast at **Horsey**. As we walk through the sand dunes, we will be on the look out for migrant birds passing through the scrub, but the main attraction here is the breeding colony of **Grey Seals** on the beach. We should be able to get good views of the seals: the males fighting on the foreshore over the females, who are busy at the back of the beach with their newborn pups.

We will look for Red-throated Diver, Guillemot and the occasional sea duck amongst the waves out at sea. Walking back inland, we cast our eyes over the nearby grazing marshes, where Stonechat flit about in the rough vegetation, flocks of winter thrushes feed in the hedges and occasional Barn Owl or harriers hunt at the field edges.

As the shadows lengthen, we will make our way inland a short way to Stubb Mill, to watch what will hopefully be the first of several impressive evening roosts in the county. Marsh Harriers gather to roost together, some years numbering more than 100 birds, along with occasional Hen Harriers. Another highlight should be the presence of **Common Cranes**: a small and increasing population of this magnificent bird is now resident in the Broads, and regularly fly in to roost on the nearby Mere, giving their trumpeting call as they fly past.

Day 3 Wednesday 11th December. We head south to explore the nearby Yare Valley. The RSPB reserve at **Strumpshaw Fen** gives us access to Alder woodland and open pools among the reedbeds. We can expect to hear the explosive calls of Cetti's Warbler, while we will also be listening out for the pinging of Bearded Tits as they move through the reeds and the squeals of secretive Water Rail. We are likely to spot one or both of the diminutive Muntjac and Chinese Water Deer as they graze quietly along the edge of the reeds. For the real stars of the reserve however, we will need patience and luck in equal measure, as the hides here offer some of the best chances for seeing Otter in the county.

The nearby grazing marshes at Buckenham are home to wintering wildfowl, with flocks of whistling Wigeon alongside Lapwing and Golden Plovers. This is also home to the only wintering flock of **Taiga Bean Geese** in England, numbering just a handful of individuals.

As dusk falls, we head a little higher up the valley sides, to watch one of the unsung spectacles of the bird world: the massive roost of Rooks and Jackdaws, thousands and thousands of birds swirling into their roost, made famous in Mark Cocker's 'Crow Country'.

Day 4 Thursday 12th December. Today we head north to the **North Norfolk Coast**, where our exact itinerary will depend very much on where the birds are.



Large flocks of Pink-footed Geese spend part of the winter grazing the fields of North Norfolk, amongst which smaller numbers of White-fronted, Tundra Bean and Barnacle Geese often turn up. We will use the latest local information to track down the feeding flocks if possible.



We aim to spend our day on the coast, perhaps starting at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust reserve of **Cley Marshes**, where large numbers of Golden Plover and Dark-bellied Brent Goose gather on the Eye Field, while Marsh Harriers hunt over the reeds. The shingle beach between here and Salthouse is a regular wintering site for flocks of Snow Bunting, together with occasional Lapland Bunting and Shorelark.



Another likely location for these species is the broad beach at **Holkham**, where we will also have the chance to look for sea duck such as Eider, Common Scoter and Red-breasted Merganser offshore.

In the evening, we will watch as **thousands of Pink-footed Geese** gather on the grazing marshes after a day spent feeding out in the fields, before heading off overhead to their roosting site out to sea. Wherever we end up, we are sure to enjoy the day.



Day 5 Friday 13th December. One final cooked breakfast, and then it is time to bid farewell to The Old Rectory and to Norfolk and to head home, hopefully taking some good memories of the big skies and spectacular flocks of a Norfolk winter.

Accommodation, meals and travel

Our accommodation will be at **The Old Rectory** in the village of Crostwick, which lies 10 minutes north of Norwich on the B1150 towards North Walsham. All rooms are en-suite. The nearest train station is Norwich.



We shall be taking packed lunches each day. Evening meals will be taken at our hotel. Requests for special diets can be accommodated.

Our transport for this trip will be by small coach or minibus.

Weather

The English weather is of course anything but predictable. We should expect cool and possibly damp conditions, although, the weather could be bright and sunny on some days and cold and wet on others! We will adapt our itinerary to the weather. It can be 'breezy' or even windy on the coast at times. We will not walk for long in adverse weather conditions. We will need to wrap up warm, as we wait for dusk to fall and the flocks to head to roost.



Leaders

This trip will be led by **Philip Precey**, a Director of Wildlife Travel who has led many of our trips in recent years, including six previous trips to Norfolk. Philip lived in Norfolk for three years and has visited the county innumerable times before and since.

Depending on final group size, Philip will be joined by Norfolk resident, wildlife expert and author **James Lowen**.

James is a frequent contributor to BBC Wildlife and author of several books, most notably the recent *Much Ado About Nothing* as well as *A Summer of British Wildlife: 100 Great Days Out Watching Wildlife*, winner of the Travel Guide Book of the Year at the 2016 Travel Media Awards.

Health and Fitness

We will be **walking for much of the day**, each day, albeit at a slow pace. In some locations 'facilities' are scarce! **You therefore need to have a reasonably good level of fitness** although none of the walks are strenuous.



TO BOOK

Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

**DEPOSIT PER PERSON £350,
BALANCE DUE BY 09/09/2024**

INCLUDED: Four nights' accommodation, all meals from dinner day 1 to breakfast day 5. Local transport on excursions as specified in the itinerary. Entrance fees as specified in the itinerary. Services of leaders. **NOT INCLUDED:** Travel to Crostwick. Refreshments and drinks with meals. Entrance fees for optional tourist attractions. Gratuities. Travel insurance. Covid tests and associated costs

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Photos Front: (clockwise from top): Grey Seal, Robin, Waxwing, Horsey Gap landscapes.

Page 2 (from left): Little Egret, Mottled Umber, Wigeon.

Page 3 (from top): Cley, Short-eared Owl, Snow Buntings, Dark-bellied Brent Goose, crow roost at Buckenham. **Back:** Black-tailed Godwit, Chinese Water Deer.

All photos taken on previous Wildlife Travel holidays. See our website for previous trip reports.