



Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

Telephone: 01603 300552

www.honeyguide.co.uk E-mail: chris@honeyguide.co.uk



North Norfolk break
10 – 14 October 2022

Participants

Sonia Donaghy
George Malcom
Pat Harding

Plus:

Chris Ash (12 October)
Julia Maynard (13 & 14 October)
Fiona Pitcher (14 October)
Dilys Wadman (14 October)
Helen Young (14 October)

Leaders

Rob Lucking
Chris Durdin (14 October)

Report and lists by Rob Lucking. Photos by Rob Lucking and Chris Durdin.



Group members on the boat going towards Blakeney Point.

The group stayed at Titchwell Manor www.titchwellmanor.com

Cover photos: golden plovers at Titchwell (CD).

Cover, below: red kite, little grebe and wall brown butterfly, all from Holkham (RL).

Other photos by Rob Lucking and Chris Durdin.

Honeyguide Wildlife Holidays always tries to put something into nature conservation where we visit, on this occasion a donation of £40 per person to Norfolk Wildlife Trust. With the addition of Gift Aid through the Honeyguide Charitable Trust, we were able to give £140 to NWT. Ginny Seppings from NWT says: "Wonderful! Thank you so much."

DAILY DIARY

Monday 10 October – arrival at Titchwell Manor for the three group members staying over.

Tuesday 11 October – Holkham

The group met at Lady Anne's Drive on the Holkham Estate on a fine, sunny autumn morning. As we purchased car park tickets and got ourselves organised, we were treated to a fly-by from two red kites and watched some distant flocks of pink-footed geese flying into the grazing marsh.

We walked through the pines towards the beach and puzzled over the identity of a pine tree with large cones growing in a whorl formation around the branches. Reference to books at home revealed it to be Monterey Pine, one of several species planting in the 1800s to stabilise the sand dunes.

We then headed out into Holkham Bay where the tide was receding. The salt marsh was full of meadow pipits and pied wagtails and a small flock of dark-bellied brent geese flew in. There was no sign of the small flock of snow buntings that had been reported in recent days though the sea was nice and calm and we had good, but distant, views of red-throated diver, great crested grebe, razorbill and a single female eider.

We enjoyed our lunch outside the café and then headed along the path running westwards behind the pines. Birds were in short supply – the weather was too good! – but we had a small flock of redwings fly over giving their distinctive thin 'seep' call. There were plenty of jays as well and we noticed that the holm oaks were full of acorns.



Cigar gall on reed; ant-lion larval pits.

In the reeds that fringed the path we found several cigar galls - a cigar shaped swelling in the reed stem. These are caused by a type of frit fly – *Lipara lucens* – which lays its egg in the stems of reeds. When the egg hatches, the larva bites into the growing tip of the reed stem causing a gall to form.

We stopped at Meals House and inspected the ant lion pits in the dry soil under the barn and a bit further on had good views of a wall butterfly as it perched obligingly on a hemp agrimony seed head.

Unfortunately, the Jordan Hide had been closed for safety reasons but peering over the fence we saw that the grazing marshes were dry and, apart from a pheasant and a muntjac deer, largely devoid of wildlife!

As we cut through the pinewoods back towards the beach, we found a good selection of fungi including false chanterelle, sulphur tuft and a *Russula*, probably blackish-purple russula which is common in pine woodlands.



False chanterelle, sulphur tuft and *Russula* sp.

Walking back along the beach we saw more red-throated divers on the sea but not the hoped-for snow buntings.

Wednesday 12 October – Blakeney boat trip and Cley

Today we were joined by Norwich-based Honeyguide Chris Ash and we gathered at Morston Quay in readiness for our boat trip out to Blakeney Point on the Ptarmigan. It was a very high tide as we sailed out of the harbour. A small flock of golden plovers was roosting on the exposed saltmarsh and we saw our first little egret of the holiday. As we entered Blakeney Harbour we saw several flocks of oystercatchers roosting on the sandbars and brent geese and shelduck fed along the shoreline.

As we rounded the end of Blakeney Point we saw our first seals. A group of around 30 Atlantic grey seals loafed on the shingle and we could hear their wailing calls. A single common or harbour seal appeared next to the boat. Common seals breed in Norfolk during the summer and move off in the winter when the much larger grey seals appear.



Grey seals, Blakeney Point.

Back at Morston we had a quick coffee from the National Trust café and then headed along the coast to the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's flagship reserve at Cley.

We walked out to the central hides in the midst of the reedbeds. The scrapes held plenty of ducks - mostly teal and wigeon but with a scattering of shovelers. Amongst the lapwing were at least five ruffs including a male with pure white head. We also saw our first black-tailed godwits.

After lunch we walked out along the east bank to the shingle beach. Grazing marsh held a large flock of wigeon and starlings fed amongst the tussocks. We heard a bearded tit but it remained hidden from view. A Cetti's warbler sang loudly from the reedbed. On Arnold's Marsh we saw our first grey plover and two dunlins proved remarkably difficult to see but we all got there in the end!

From the beach we had very good views of several red-throated divers with one bird close in still in full summer plumage. Other than the divers and a single great-crested grebe, it was very quiet on the sea.

As we walked back down the East bank, several marsh harriers quartered the reedbed and another birder told us that a grey phalarope had been seen but had flown. Never mind! We crossed the road to look over Snipes Marsh where two jack snipe had been reported. After a short wait we finally had good views of one 'bobbing' on the edge of the reed. It was so well camouflaged that as soon it stopped bobbing it disappeared from view immediately!

Thursday 13 October – Wells and Stiffkey Fen

The coastal town of Wells-next-the-Sea was our meeting point this morning and we were joined by Honeyguider Julia Maynard.

It was another very high tide and Wells Harbour was full of water with the saltmarsh very nearly covered. Three little egrets were roosting on the saltmarsh and several family groups of brent geese were grazing on the exposed vegetation. We had a good opportunity to differentiate between adult and juvenile brent geese – the young birds having white tips to their wing coverts giving the effect of white barring on the back.



We saw our first house sparrow of the holiday in a garden, and we proceeded to the start of the sea wall, past the fishermen's huts with stacks of fish crates, crab and whelk pots outside, leading to North Point pools.

The pools at North Point are a relatively new feature on the north Norfolk coast created around five years ago on arable farmland that was too wet to farm effectively. It has since become an important site for breeding waders and wintering waterfowl.

The eastern pool was the only one holding significant water (a legacy of the dry summer) and was full of ducks, primarily wigeon and teal. We found a single female pintail among the other ducks but it was very distant and difficult to pick out. However, a marsh harrier flew over the pools and helpfully caused some disturbance to the duck flock, and we were then able to pick out a single male pintail and three females.

Three juvenile ruffs fed in the closest part of water, and we could see the difference in size between the large male and smaller females. Lots of meadow pipits were feeding on the exposed mud and sifting through them, we were able to find a single water pipit which was larger, paler and greyer than the meadow pipits and with a pale supercilium. Moving further up the track, a fellow birder kindly showed us where a jack snipe had been seen and we had great views of it feeding out in the open. Much easier than yesterday's bird at Cley!

As we headed back to Wells for lunch, the tide had dropped considerably, and various waders fed in the exposed mud. We had a couple of great opportunities to compare bar-tailed and black-tailed godwits side by side. The bar-tails with shorter 'thighs', a slightly upturned bill and a scalier back. We also had good views of grey plover and a little egret (*above*) fishing in the shallows.

Lunch was at Wells Deli and afterwards we walked up one of the back streets of Wells looking at the old brick and flint cottages which are characteristic of north Norfolk. Flint was a cheap building material collected from nearby fields and bricks, which were expensive, were used only for the parts of the house that required straight edges - corners, windows and doors. If you were wealthy your house would be made entirely of bricks or a mixture of bricks and 'knapped' flint – a flint nodule that has been split to expose a dark, smooth face.

We then drove the short distance along the coast to Stiffkey Fen. A fallen willow tree presented a bit of an obstacle but with a bit of assistance, everyone got under or over it without losing too much dignity!

The fen was full of wildfowl - mainly wigeons and teals, but with a few mallards and shovelers thrown in for good measure. The fen was created in the mid-1990s by Aubrey Buxton, one of the founding members of WWF, to try and attract breeding bitterns but the reed was slow to establish due to grazing by feral greylag geese leaving an area of open water surrounded by a broad fringe of reed.

From the sea bank we could also see out over Blakeney Harbour which looked very different when the tide was out compared to the previous day. There were good numbers of shelducks feeding out on the mudflats. The majority of the UK's shelducks migrate to the German Waddensea to moult, returning to the UK from October onwards. Two grey plovers fed close by on a creek edge and way out on the mudflats we could see dunlin, turnstone and ringed plover.

We spent far too long looking at an owl on top of a houseboat before concluding that it was plastic! We headed back to the cars hearing a water rail calling from the dense reeds.

Friday 14 October – Titchwell Marsh

We were a big group today being joined by Julia again as well as Helen Young, Fiona Pitcher, Dilys Wadman and Chris Durdin. The car park at Titchwell was already getting busy when we arrived so we kitted up and headed down to the visitor centre where some of the group had a quick coffee as we waited for Chris to catch up with us.

We headed down the main west bank path and scrutinised the ditch running alongside the path which is often a good place to see water rail. It didn't have much water in but there was something in the bottom – a redwing!

As we headed out into the reedbed, we saw a great white egret feeding in a pool, later joined by a grey heron. We heard bearded tits 'pinging' in the reedbeds and then three flew across the path and eventually showed themselves well as they climbed up the reed stems to feed on the seed heads.

Chris pointed out some small yellow galls on the underside of the leaves of alexanders. These were caused by the rust fungus *Puccinia smyrnii*.

On the fresh marsh we stopped to watch a flock of around 1,000 golden plovers. They were quite jumpy, frequently flying around in swirling flocks, but when they settled in the sun, they looked stunning. Also on the fresh marsh were some nice close ruffs and a more distant group of avocets and black-tailed godwits.



Golden plover flock; ridged hemlock seeds.

On the way to the beach, Sonia and Chris discussed the varied size of sea beet leaves. They found an umbellifer in flower and there was much debate as to its identity. After checking references, it was later identified as hemlock albeit a very stunted individual of what is usually a tall plant.

The tide was on its way out when we reached the beach and we soon found small groups of sanderlings, turnstones and bar-tailed godwits. There wasn't much on the sea except for a single great crested grebe and some passing gulls.

We did find a lump of preserved peat from the ancient forest that covered the southern North Sea during the last Ice Age. It was riddled with holes made more recently by the common piddock, a bivalve mollusc that

can burrow into quite hard sediments using the hard teeth on the blunt edge of its shell. We found some empty piddock shells on the beach along with hornwrack - a marine bryzoan.

On the way back for lunch Rob explained some of the history of the reserve from when it was a tank training area during WW2 and the concrete structures now embedded into the sea banks contained winches that pulled dummy tanks on wires for trainee tank gunners to take pot-shots at.

We had lunch back at the visitor centre and bade farewell to Helen and Dilys. We then explored the rest of the reserve along the Fen and Meadow Trails. We found a willow emerald (or western emerald spreading) damselfly resting up on a reed stem. The willow emerald is a recent colonist to the UK, first recorded in any numbers in 2009 in north Essex/south Suffolk and subsequently rapidly spreading north, aided by climate change. It lays its eggs on the stems of willow (and other species) trees overhanging permanent water leaving distinctive scars. The eggs overwinter and when they hatch in the spring, the larvae fall into the water and emerge as adults later in the year. We managed to locate some of the scars in a willow stem.



Willow emerald (photo from NWT Thorpe Marshes). Becoming coppery-coloured is a late-season feature that we noticed on the damselfly at Titchwell.

Patsy's reedbed held a couple of little grebes, coot, a single ruff and a small group of lesser black-backed gulls. We continued along to the end of the Autumn Trail seeing a couple of kestrels along the way. A knapweed in flower was the 'rayed' form of black knapweed, expertly identified by Sonia. This was probably a relic from a wildflower mix sown on the reserve. There were shaggy inkcaps by the path, starting to 'deliquesce': the mess underneath the toadstools as bits become liquid by absorbing moisture from the air.

The end of the Autumn Trail gave us a different view over the fresh marsh and Rob explained the purpose of the new anti-predator fence and the work that had been carried out to compartmentalise the fresh marsh to allow water levels to be manipulated so that suitable habitat conditions could be managed for breeding avocets which require high water levels and spring passage waders which need lower water levels with exposed mud. We looked out over the tidal reedbed and found a pair of stonechats and a kingfisher shot past giving its 'squeaky wheelbarrow' call. On the way back we found a bloody-nosed beetle crossing the path, named for its defence mechanism of exuding a foul-tasting red liquid from its mouth.

We ended the day back on the West Bank path looking over an adjacent area of grazing marsh in the hope that a barn owl would appear. Sadly, there was no barn owl though we found a third stonechat and had good views of a marsh harrier hunting over the saltmarsh



Black knapweed, rayed form; bloody-nosed beetle.

WILDLIFE LISTS

BIRDS

Red-throated diver: around a dozen in Holkham Bay 11/10; 4 Cley Beach 12/10

Great crested grebe: 6 in Holkham Bay 11/10; 1 Cley Beach 12/10; 1 Titchwell 14/10

Little grebe: 1 in front of the cafe at Holkham & at least 3 in Salts Hole 11/10; 2 Titchwell 14/10

Cormorant: Seen in small numbers at virtually all coastal sites visited. Largest count was around 50 at Titchwell on 14/10

Little egret: Three on the saltmarsh at Morston 12/10. Also seen at Cley, Stiffkey Fen and Titchwell.

Great white egret: One at Titchwell on 14/10.

Grey heron: Singles at Holkham 11/10, Cley 12/10, North Point, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 13/10 and Titchwell 14/10.

Mute swan: 1 Cley 12/10 & 1 Blakeney Harbour 13/10

Pink-footed goose: Skeins at Holkham 11/10, Morston & Cley 12/10, Wells 13/10 & Titchwell 14/10.

Greylag goose: Seen at all wetland sites.

Canada goose: Several among greylags at Wells 13/10 & Titchwell 14/10.

Brent goose: Small group on the saltmarsh at Holkham on 11/10, Blakeney Harbour on 12/10, on the saltmarsh at Wells on 13/10 and around 50 on the Titchwell freshwater marsh on 14/10.

Egyptian goose: Several at Holkham on 11/10, large flock at North Point Pools, Wells on 13/10

Shelduck: Several in Blakeney Harbour and at Cley 12/10, several on the saltmarsh at Wells & North Point Pools and at Stiffkey Fen 13/10, several at Titchwell 14/10

Wigeon: Large flocks at all wetland sites visited.

Gadwall: Several at Holkham 11/10, Cley 12/10, North Point Pools, Wells 13/10 & Titchwell 14/10

Teal: At all wetland sites visited.

Mallard: Small numbers seen at all wetland sites.

Pintail: 3 at North Point Pools, Wells on 13/10 and at Stiffkey Fen, 14/10

Shoveler: Small numbers seen at all wetland sites.

Tufted duck: 2, Titchwell, 14/10.

Eider: One Holkham Bay 11/10.

Red-breasted merganser: One at Cley, 12/10

Red kite: Two Holkham 11/10, one Titchwell 14/10

Marsh harrier: Several at Holkham 11/10, at Cley 12/10, North Point Pools, Wells & Stiffkey Fen 13/10 & at Titchwell 14/10.

Buzzard: Small numbers seen throughout.

Sparrowhawk: One at Holkham 11/10 & at North Point Pools, Wells 13/10

Kestrel: One at Holkham 11/10, also at Cley 12/10 & two at Titchwell 14/10.

Pheasant: Several at Holkham 11/10.

Water rail: One heard at Stiffkey 13/10

Moorhen: Small numbers seen/heard at most wetland sites visited

Coot: Several at Titchwell, 13/10

Oystercatcher: Several flocks roosting in Blakeney Harbour 12/10, several on saltmarsh at Wells & at Stiffkey 13/10 and on the beach at Titchwell 14/10.

Avocet: Several at Cley on 12/10 & ca 20 at Titchwell 14/10.

Ringed plover: One in Blakeney Harbour on 12/10 & 1 Stiffkey 13/10

Golden plover: Flock of ca 1000 on the fresh marsh at Titchwell on 14/10

Grey Plover: Several on Arnold's Marsh, Cley 12/10, on the saltmarsh at Wells at Stiffkey 13/10 & on the beach at Titchwell 14/10.

Lapwing: Good numbers at Cley on 12/10, Stiffkey 13/10 and Titchwell 14/10

Sanderling: Small numbers on beach at Titchwell 14/10

Turnstone: Seen at Stiffkey 12/10 and several on the beach at Titchwell 14/10
Dunlin: Several at Cley 12/10
Green sandpiper: 1 Holkham 11/10
Redshank: Seen and heard in Holkham Bay 11/10, in Blakeney Harbour & Cley 12/10 at Holkham, Wells & Stiffkey on 13/10 and Titchwell 14/10
Black-tailed godwit: Seen at Cley 12/10, Wells and North Point Pools 13/10 at Titchwell 14/10
Bar-tailed godwit: Several at Wells 13/10 and on the beach at Titchwell 14/10
Curlew: Several at Holkham 11/10, on the saltmarsh in Blakeney Harbour & at Cley 12/10, at Wells and Stiffkey 13/10 and Titchwell 14/10.
Snipe: 1 North Point Pools, Well 12/10 & 2 Titchwell 14/10
Jack snipe: 1 Cley 12/10 & 1 North Point Pools, Wells 13/10
Ruff: Several at Cley 12/10, North Point, Wells 13/10 and 15 at Titchwell 14/10
Black-headed gull: Seen at all wetland sites visited.
Common gull: Two in Holkham Bay 11/10 and one Titchwell Beach 14/10
Lesser black-backed gull: Several at Cley 12/10 and Titchwell 14/10.
Herring gull: Seen at all coastal sites visited
Great black-backed gull: On the beach at Holkham 11/10, Blakeney Harbour & Cley 12/10, North Point Pools & Stiffkey 13/10 & at Titchwell 14/10
Razorbill: One in Holkham Bay 11/10
Woodpigeon: Common throughout.
Kingfisher: Two seen briefly at Titchwell 14/10
Great spotted woodpecker: 1 heard at Holkham 11/10
Skylark: Seen in small numbers throughout - several in the salt marsh at Holkham 11/10.
Meadow pipit: Seen in small numbers throughout - several in the salt marsh at Holkham 11/10 and at North Point Pools 13/10.
Rock pipit: Saltmarsh at Holkham, 11/10.
Water pipit: 1 North Point Pools, Wells 13/10
Pied wagtail: Small numbers seen throughout.
Wren: Seen or heard most days
Duncock: Several in the saltmarsh at Wells 13/10
Robin: Seen or heard most days
Stonechat: 3 Titchwell 14/11
Blackbird: Seen or heard most days in suitable habitat
Redwing: Small numbers flying over at Holkham 11/10 and one in ditch at Titchwell 14/10.
Cetti's warbler: Heard singing at Holkham, Cley, North Point Pools & Titchwell.
Goldcrest: Several seen & heard at Holkham 11/10, seen well at Titchwell 14/10.
Bearded tit: Heard at Cley, 12/10, and excellent views at Titchwell, 14/10.
Long-tailed tit: Feeding flock at Titchwell 14/10
Coal tit: Several at Holkham 11/10
Blue tit: Seen/heard in most woodland habitats
Great tit: Seen/heard in most woodland habitats
Jay: Small numbers moving through constantly at Holkham on 11/10
Magpie: Heard in the woods at Titchwell 14/10
Jackdaw: Seen throughout
Carrion crow: Seen most days.
Starling: Several in the grazing marsh at Holkham 11/10, at Cley 12/10 and Titchwell 14/10. Probably overlooked at other sites.
House sparrow: One in Wells 13/10
Chaffinch: Odd birds seen and heard throughout
Goldfinch: Seen or heard most days in suitable habitat
Linnet: Small flock in the dunes at Holkham 11/10,
Reed bunting: Several at Titchwell 14/10

MAMMALS

Grey seal: ca 50 on Blakeney Point, 12/10
Common or harbour seal: 1 Blakeney Point 12/10
Muntjac: one at Holkham 11/10 and at Titchwell 14/10
Chinese water deer: one at Titchwell 14/10
Brown hare: several at North Point Pools, 12/10

NOTABLE INVERTEBRATES

Willow emerald (Western willow spreadwing) – Titchwell 14/10
Bloody-nosed beetle – Titchwell 14/10
Wall brown butterfly – several Holkham 11/10