

Norfolk Trip – May 2015

Having been up to The Highlands in March we were keen to get a spring trip for migrants in this year. Wendy's back was still dodgy and due to work arrangements it was difficult for us to arrange a week, which ticked all the boxes. I was hoping to try a week in April for the first time but the only one available was the 1st week in May, so we just hoped that it wouldn't be too late for the chance of anything decent turning up! Our 1st big problem was that with it being a Bank Holiday weekend there were no dog cabins for our outward journey, so we ended up having to settle for the dog lounge. After our 1st experience in there we were anything but keen to have to repeat the process but we had no choice. I managed to get a really good price on a different cottage with Rookery Farm, who we'd stayed with last year and it looked really nice. This cottage was bigger, better, all on one level for Wendy's back and had a secure garden for Lyca to run around in.....happy days :). Having refused to renew our NWT membership due to their no dog policies I finally decided to reconsider, as I planned to go to Cley in the evenings. We also planned to go Holme for Ring Ouzel and with the additional fact that we'd be supporting a good cause I sorted our renewal out before we went. Unfortunately during the run up to our trip it looked as though all the Wrynecks and Ring Ouzels had already gone through in April, so it seemed as though we'd been forced into another duffer of a week! Grrrrrrrr! The wind predictably picked up to gale force (but that goes without saying) and persisted for days. By some miraculous stroke of good fortune it actually died right down on the morning our sailing was due, which to us was nothing short of a miracle.

Friday 1st May

Wendy had yet again managed to get the afternoon off work, so she could get ready and I worked through my lunch to get out early. After we'd both had baths and tea I started to pack up the car. A final check that we hadn't forgotten anything and we were ready to go.....that is until we got ½ way to the Sea Terminal and Wendy asked where Lyca's short lead was. I'd carried her out to the car (Lyca not Wendy) and had left it on the side in the kitchen along with my drink....Doh! Neither of us had picked it up as we went out the door and we needed it for the boat and for taking her into pubs when we ate out, so I had to turn straight around and go back to get it as quickly as possible. Urrghhhhh.....so much for being ready! After our slight delay we made it to the Sea Terminal for 6.40pm and the car park was heaving. This was a lot earlier than we'd normally arrive but I'd planned this in the hope of getting on quicker to nab a decent side bench in the dog lounge so as not be stuck on the uncomfortable seats. Unfortunately I think we were the last car to arrive but this time we weren't searched and were told go and park up at the back of one of the queues. It looked as though everyone was clearing off for the Bank Holiday, so we weren't surprised there were no dog cabins. There were a lot of dogs in cars too and we prepared ourselves for the dog lounge to be busy.

As we sat waiting to board we clocked up **Feral Pigeon, Herring Gull, Starling, Great Black-backed Gull** and Wendy spotted a **Peregrine** blasting over the headland. She also had a look over the houses up on Head Road and found some **House Martins** flying around to start our trip list off. We didn't have to wait long before we were boarding and we headed upstairs dreading to see how many dogs were in the dog lounge. When we got there and peered inside to our total shock it was absolutely empty and there wasn't a single person in sight! This just didn't seem right and we waited for people to start piling in. Even after we departed at 7.45pm and got going there was still no sign of anyone else, so we were very happy indeed. Seeing as we had the place to ourselves we made the most of having a brilliant view out of the huge (albeit dirty) side windows and even dared to get our bins out.



Seawatching in peace

We had a look down at the rocks at the Tower of Refuge and found **Oystercatcher** and **Shag** and breathed a sigh of relief as we looked out at the lovely calm sea. It was unbelievably nice not to have to worry about a rough crossing or getting funny looks from people. We scanned the sea hoping to catch a glimpse of a Porpoise, Dolphin, Manxies, Arctic Tern or even a Puffin like in the past, but mainly for any birds that might be out there. In the real world we actually saw absolutely nothing, not even a Gannet! It wasn't long before Wendy needed a paper cup to put her drink in, so went off to the café to get one. Feeling a bit hungry again she grabbed a packet of crisps for us to share and headed back. I was starting to think that she'd got lost on the way back but when I looked out through the door I could see her standing chatting to some bloke with his kid. Wendy has an uncanny knack of attracting any oddball in the vicinity to come and talk to her, so I presumed that's what had happened. When she eventually came back in Lyca was very pleased to see her and it turned out the bloke wasn't just another random weirdo but someone she'd not seen since leaving school 25 years ago! They'd been talking about a reunion that some of her old school mates had planned for August and discussing whether they were going or not.

We ate our crisps and Lyca was behaving herself curled up next to Wendy when all of sudden the door open and a Steam Packet bloke poked his head through the door, which made Lyca start barking. He admired her anyway and said something about crackers, which we presumed was referring to her and Wendy said, "Yes!" He disappeared only to return a minute later with a packet of Jacob's crackers in his hand. We were slightly confused but he then came in and made a huge fuss of Lyca and said he loves dogs and asked if it'd be OK to give her some. We couldn't say no and let him feed a very willing Lyca some crackers, which went down a treat and stopped her barking at him instantly. He even gave us the rest of the packet to give her later. How kind was that? Outside the dog lounge all we could hear was kids screaming, so we felt very lucky to have the whole room to ourselves. It was so busy out there that a few people had stuck their heads in and asked us if it was just for pet owners, which we'd replied with, "Yes." Much later on I read a sign on the wall saying that it was but other passengers could also use it at busy times....Oooops! If anyone else had come in Lyca would probably have barked and been a pain anyway, so we were pleased that nobody had noticed. For some reason we were both starving, so Wendy went back out to the café to see what she could get. Not fancying another packet of crisps she didn't have many options and ordered a cheese and tomato pizza. It was quickly brought in to us and we started tucking in. It was bigger than we'd expected and wasn't the nicest pizza we'd ever had but it certainly did the job nicely. While we were eating it the door opened and a bloke with a kid came in wanting to say, "Hello" to Lyca.....Urrghhhhhh! Wendy smiled and welcomed them in and sat eating pizza while chatting away to the bloke. The kid made a beeline for Lyca, who was sitting at my feet and he just prattled away to me while poking and prodding

her, which was slightly stressful to say the least! Not being the biggest fan of kids it was difficult to tell him not to grab Lyca's tail, foot, head etc etc without sounding like I was wanting to boot him out the door. All I wanted was for them to disappear but that didn't seem to be likely for a while. All of a sudden and completely out of the blue the kid said to me, "Where's all your hair gone?" My instant reaction was to say something about a monster that comes in the night and eats people's hair but amazingly I held that back and went with, "I woke up yesterday and it had all fallen out." The kid seemed completely none fussed about that explanation so luckily I hadn't scarred him for life :). Lyca was then given some of Wendy's pizza crusts too but only because the kid wanted to know if she'd like it but we suppose she was on holiday too :P. Every time I thought they were about to go they'd strike up another conversation and my heart would sink. Eventually they left and I looked at Wendy and said, "Well done, you've managed to attract some more weirdos!" Her face was a picture and she explained that he was actually the bloke from school she'd been talking to earlier! Oooops! After all that stress I decided to take Lyca outside where it was pretty cold but looked nice.



Destressing

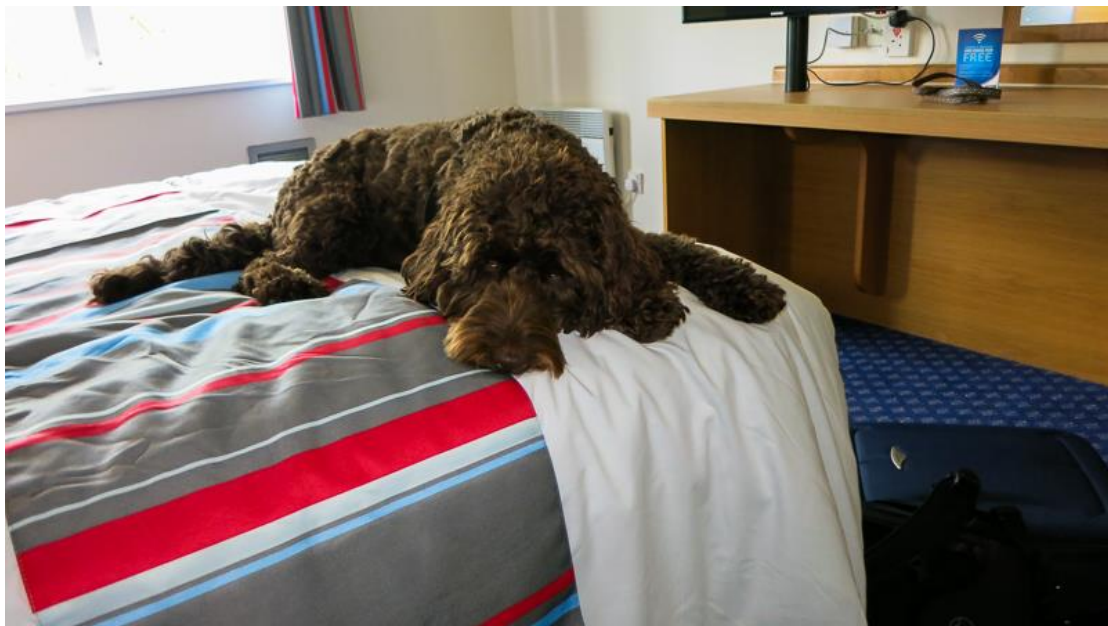
The last hour of the sailing was boring and we seemed to be chugging towards the harbour at the pace of a snail on valium when all we wanted was to get going so we could go to bed. Finally the announcement came for our disembarkation and Lyca seemed to know we were on the move and started to go nuts, after being asleep on Wendy's leg for ages. A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** flew past the window and we got our stuff together and headed down to the car. Eventually we drove off at 11.37pm (which was earlier than normal for us) and set off to the Travelodge, which was nearby, so we could get a bit more sleep than usual. When I plugged my phone in to fire up the Sat Nav nothing happened and it seemed to be dead. This wasn't a good start but after a bit of fiddling around I got it working and we were on the road.

Saturday 2nd May

We arrived at Birch Services Travelodge at 12.33am and we were pooped! Luckily it'd been the shortest drive after getting off the boat we'd ever done, so we hadn't had the worry of me falling asleep at the wheel. For some reason I decided I was Hulk Hogan and carried all the bags up to the room in 1 trip but had to keep stopping under all the weight. As usual the room was up 2 flights of stairs and right at the end of the corridor, which was really helpful....NOT! After Lyca had been given a drink she jumped onto the bed and made herself at home while we got changed and brushed our teeth.

It was a bit chilly in the room so Wendy cranked up the heating and at 1am we crashed out as soon as our heads hit the pillows and slept right through to when my alarm went off at 7am.

We woke up to a stifflingly hot room after turning the heating up too high, so 1st up was turning it down and opening the window. Looking outside there was a **Wood Pigeon** and **Pied Wagtail** in the car park and at least it wasn't raining. I took Lyca out for a wee while Wendy was getting ready to go and noticed that all the shops were open, so we could get breakfast. My Mum and Dad had told me about this Travelodge as they stay there and although a big service station Travelodge isn't normally my cup of tea, so far it had gone OK and now the nearby shops were a godsend. There was an M&S, Gregg's and Costa to give us a bit of choice instead of having our usual boring cereal bar. When I got back to the entrance the guy who'd checked us in last night was standing outside with the girl who was obviously taking over the shift for him. I said, "Hello" and went to open the door only to find that it was locked. Instantly the girl looked worried and said that she thought she'd left in on the latch, she looked at the other bloke and he said, "Don't look at me" so all 3 of us were now locked out!! I thought quickly and phoned Wendy's mobile but it rang and rang and she didn't answer....Uh oh! While we were waiting I got chatting to the Travelodge staff and took the mickey out of the bloke by saying he'd purposely put us onto the 1st floor after seeing the amount of bags I had whilst wrestling with a dog! He denied it but the woman joined in and said she would have given us a family room on the ground floor if she'd been on the desk :). A minute later Wendy phoned me back wondering what I wanted, so I sheepishly told her that she'd have to come down to let us all back in :P. She'd been in the bathroom getting ready and hadn't been able to answer straight away but quickly got dressed and came down to open the door.....Phew! If she'd come out with me and Lyca who knows how long we'd have been standing there until another guest appeared to let us in.....Doh! Back in the room Wendy gave Lyca her breakfast, so I started taking the bags back down to the car. This time I did it in 2 trips, so I didn't nearly kill myself again. Although we were keen to get going as soon as possible Lyca appeared to have other ideas!



Raring to go?

We put Lyca in the back seat and ambled our way over to the shops to get some breakfast. Wendy's 1st stop was of course Costa to get a cappuccino but when we noticed that M&S was all the way over the bridge on the other side of the road we thought better of going there, with Lyca being in the car, thinking we'd be fine at Gregg's. When we went in there the staff were really friendly but there was nothing for Wendy apart from cheese pasties, which she didn't really fancy for breakfast. She spied some instant porridge on the counter so chose the red berries version whereas I was sorted with a sausage bap and tomato sauce. There was a **Blackbird** on the grass gathering food in its beak, obviously to take back to its nest. We took our food back to the car and when I opened mine up the bloke had only gone and put brown sauce on it instead of tomato like I'd asked for. It was doable though unlike Wendy's porridge, which she said was watery and horrible and didn't seem to want to rehydrate even after giving it ages.

Uninspired by breakfast we'd been very impressed with the Travelodge and the services but Wendy just wished she'd made the effort and gone to M&S or just got a cheese pasty after all.



Birch Services

With our boring chores done we set off at 8.22am to go to our 1st stop of the day, Widdop in Lancashire. It had been ages since we'd visited Widdop and seen our 1st ever Ring Ouzel, so, since we were over in May for the first time in a while, I reckoned it'd be a good idea to go back to see if they were still there. There were **Black-headed Gulls** and **Rooks** all over the fields and **Swallows** zooming around over a small lake we drove past. Further along we had **Mallard** on a roadside pond but then I noticed that I hadn't had any speed camera warnings on my Sat Nav since we'd left Heysham. I pulled over to try and find out why and realized that it was because I hadn't even turned the app on....Doh! Carrying on we had **Canada Goose** at the side of the road, **Song Thrush**, **Magpie** and **Collared Dove** before we came to a weird looking old mill town built along a valley. We were pretty high up and looking down on it, so had a good view of the strange place but there was nowhere to pull in to take a pic. There were a lot of trees surrounding us and plenty of busy looking **Jackdaws**, out looking for food to take back to their nests, as well as a **Goldfinch**. As we started dropping downwards we reached a classic hairpin that I'd have loved to have hand braked around! :)



Hairpin and a half

It was a tricky maneuver alright and I didn't manage it in 1, so it was good job I had the road to myself to complete my 10 point turn in peace :P. While I was doing that we saw **Chaffinch**, **Robin** and heard **Great Tit** calling from the woods. After that it wasn't long before we reached familiar territory of Hebden Bridge and started to climb upwards again. The dry stone walls and farm fields full of sheep were totally different to the scenery we'd be seeing for the rest of the week in Norfolk.



Lancashire

Passing a farm we saw a **Kestrel** land on top of the farmhouse, a **Pheasant** and some **Lapwing** displaying over the fields.

It was slow going on such small roads and seemed to have taken us forever but eventually at 9.14am we arrived at Widdop and parked up in the car park. Wendy got out and her ears pricked up instantly when she heard screeching nearby. She spotted the culprits when she saw 2x Kestrels over at the Ring Ouzel site, which set off alarm bells. Surely there'd be no R.O's there, if it was being used by Kestrels? The noisy pair didn't look like they were moving in a hurry either and flew around overhead before landing back on the rocks nearby.



Widdop

We were slightly worried that they had a nest site and that we were disturbing them but there must be loads of walkers visiting there every day, so they should've be used to it.

After I'd struggled to get a very excited and hyper Lyca out of the car we set off down the footpath seeing **Curlew** and then hearing a squeak that we hadn't heard for ages.



Brrrrrrrrrr!

A **Common Sandpiper** came hurtling up stream, calling constantly and flew under the bridge next to us, which was a pretty good start. A **Snipe** flew over and landed somewhere deep in the heather covering the hills. Widdop feels like you're in no man's land, very remote and exposed but it wasn't long before we were reminded that you're never alone when a group of cyclists came peddling up the path. It was absolutely freezing and we were wishing we had more layers on but I bet they weren't cold in the slightest! It certainly wasn't as bitterly cold as the last time we'd been there at 5am though, so we carried on up towards Lower Gorple Reservoir. A **Skylark** was singing high above us, there were Lapwing everywhere and then we spotted 2 more Common Sands on the ground. It's a pretty amazing place for these ground-nesting birds. When we got up to the reservoir itself we had a quick scan of the flat concrete overflow area to see what we could find.



Lower Gorple Reservoir

There was another Common Sand feeding along the wall and Wendy spotted a **Grey Wagtail** running around frantically. I then found a **Stock Dove** before looking on the water of the reservoir and disappointingly finding nothing but **Tufted Duck**. I thought the Common Sand was worth getting a shot of, so I raised my camera only for another

bird to catch my eye. This bird was much closer, so presuming it to be yet another Common Sand I focused in on that instead. When I got it in my view finder I was pleasantly surprised to find that it was in fact a **Little-ringed Plover**, which neither of us had expected to see there at all :O!



Little-ringed Plover

After that I made use of my new camera and got some shots of the Common Sand as well, just for good measure :).



Common Sandpiper

There was nothing else about, so we turned round and on the way back down we found a **Greylag** sitting motionless on the ground and heard the brilliant sound of a Snipe drumming. We looked up and found the bird displaying above us, so I grabbed my camera to try for a shot. I was quite pleased with the outcome considering it was so high up.



Snipe

There was also a Skylark, so thought I may as well fill my boots and have a pop at that as well. I don't think my old camera would've coped as well with this shot either!



Skylark

There were Waders everywhere and we'd definitely got off to a good start. It was disappointing that we'd gone so far out of the way hoping to see Ring Ouzels but we must've just been too early for them to back on site. I wasn't that worried though as there was still quite a few being reported in Norfolk. Near the car park we came across a young couple and the bloke had a camera over his shoulder. He was a really friendly Yorkshireman and after admiring my set up he stopped for a chat. Of course we had to ask him about whether he'd had any Ring Ouzels yet and, of course.....he had! Not only had he just had Ring Ouzel and Cuckoo down the road by the pub but he was off to find all the other amazing birds he knew were about somewhere.....Urrghhhh! We

knew the area had looked brilliant and it obviously was! We wished him luck and off they went up the track while we went back to the car to leave.



Barron

It was 10.14am when we drove away and obviously our 1st plan was to try the fields by the pub in a desperate attempt to succeed in finding what we'd gone there for in the 1st place! Needless to say that, after a thorough scan of the area, we left empty-handed, nor did we catch up with his Cuckoo! Grrrrrrrrr! We checked all the fence posts on our way out for the Cuckoo and although the place was made for one it was nowhere to be seen. Some **Golden Plover** flew over the road on our way back towards Hebden Bridge and we saw **Carriion Crow** in some fields. My car was reading just 6.5c (in May!!) and the next bird we added to our list was a **Willow Warbler** singing as we drove past more woods. We'd been in the middle of the nowhere and progress had been slow up until we hit Sowerby Bridge where we joined the motorway.

Although we'd enjoyed being in the heart of the countryside, we really needed to get going if we were to fit all our plans into the day. It was already getting quite late and we realized that we'd been a bit ambitious with our day's plans, so ditched off Frampton Marsh until our homeward journey. There was no way we were going to miss going to Whisby, as it'd been ages since we'd been there last and we'd have been fools to knock back a potential Nightingale. We were finally making up for our slow start and as we blasted down the motorway we saw our 1st **Buzzard** of the trip being mobbed by Crows and a **Cormorant** flew over the road. Wendy commented that she could've done with her shades as the bright yellow fields of Rape were so bright in the sun they were almost dazzling. She also said how nice the smell of the flowers was as it filled the car but I have to say it was a bit strong for me. As we drove over the River Trent we spotted a **Mute Swan** and we cheered when we finally hit the sign for Lincolnshire at 12.23pm :).

Luckily Whisby wasn't far away and we arrived at 12.30pm and although we hadn't been there for years it only seemed like 5 minutes ago. It looked very popular with dog walkers and there were families with dogs everywhere, so we prepared ourselves for Lyca to do a lot of barking and pulling on her lead. In the car park we could hear a **Garden Warbler** singing right next to the car, which was a very good start. Firstly Wendy went into the Visitor Centre for a wee and a recce hoping to come back with some food but she had no idea what to get me, so came back out to get me to go in for a look myself. It was busy in the café and service seemed slow but with no other options we had to pick something. Wendy asked if they could do her a simple take out cheese and tomato toastie, as it wasn't on the menu and got a cappuccino to go with it. I chose a toasted flatbread with chicken and bacon eventually, after they said they didn't have what I really wanted either. The portions we could see coming out on plates were massive and came with tons of salad, so when Wendy paid the best part of £15 for our

order she thought it'd be worth it. We stood there for ages and as usual Wendy ended up with a random mad woman talking to her....Hahahahaha! The vibe coming from behind the scenes in the kitchen wasn't good and looked and sounded like something you'd see in some kind of Army camp for juvenile delinquents. The Chef was a very butch looking tattooed woman who appeared to have her work cut out and was shouting orders at the seemingly totally useless kitchen staff like a Sergeant Major at full volume. It was pretty awkward and taking soooooo long that I thought I'd better go back to the car to check on Lyca and left Wendy in there. After about 30minutes a very annoyed looking Wendy appeared and stomped back to car carrying our food. When she opened hers to find a tiny micro toastie sitting in the huge box her face fell. Mine was even smaller and neither had any salad with it at all (not that I was complaining) and Wendy was fuming that it'd cost her as much as it would've to have eaten in and had all the trimmings too. Surely they should've reduced the price considerably for a take out? She'd wasted far too much time in there already and we were starving, so she certainly wasn't going to take it back and dispute the fact. The food itself definitely wasn't up to Galloway Lodge standards but it would fill the hole in our bellies for a while at least.

After being ripped off and having eaten our uninspiring lunch we aimed to do the Coot walk and then the Willow Walk which goes over the railway bridge to see what we could find. The Coot walk is where the Nightingales are and isn't very long, so surely we couldn't fail. We set off at 1.31pm and luckily the dog walkers seemed to have dissipated nicely and we didn't meet many as we walked into the Reserve. At the 1st lake by the Visitor Centre there were loads of **Sand Martins** feeding over the water as well as **Coot**, **Moorhen**, **Shelduck** and **Gadwall**.



1st Pool

There was a **Dunnock** and **Blue Tit** in the hedge and finally I spotted a **Great-crested Grebe** right at the back of the pool. We continued up the Coot walk path hearing nothing vaguely resembling a Nightingale until we reached the 2nd Pool where we'd heard them in the surrounding bushes previously.



2nd Pool

There was a male **Blackcap**, **Chiffchaff** and **Long-tailed Tits** but still no sign of what we were after. An elderly couple heading our way had a small Shih Tzu type dog with them and we had to laugh when it stood up on its back legs and started dancing like Lyca does! We've never seen any other dog apart from Cockerpoos doing it and they told us that it was even known as 'The Dancing Dog of (wherever they were from)'Hahahahaha! Further up the track Wendy picked up on a call and found a nice male **Bullfinch**, which I was just about to get a shot of when it flew off.

Lyca was having a wail of a time with all the new smells and I think she could have spent the entire week at Whisby!



Snifftastic!

It then started to rain and the sky turned very grey indeed so it was up with our hoods as we crossed over the new bridge, which had been built over the railway line and onto the Willow Walk. We saw a very busy looking **Wren** and a **Jay** belting through the trees at speed. There are certain areas of woodland on the walk where dogs are asked to not go through, so we'd skirted round them but eventually we found ourselves lost.



Uh oh!

We'd already gone back on ourselves and were now faced with a dilemma. Did we risk going through the restricted section of the Willow Walk or try and find our way back via the maze of confusing footpaths? I knew that if we turned around on the footpath we'd be walking away from the car park and Wendy was already feeling like a zombie and I didn't feel much better. Instead of making the fruitless walk even longer we chose to risk it. As it was a restriction based on Wildlife issues I put Lyca on the shortest lead so she was right by my legs and the worst she could do there was stand on a few Ants. We scuttled off along the footpath, hoping to not come across anybody and luckily cleared it without meeting anyone else.....Phew! At the next pool Wendy looked as though she was going to fall asleep at any second but we found a couple of **Common Terns** out over the water.

All of sudden we heard a bird singing from the trees nearby and knew that we should've known what it was. Try as might we just couldn't place it and eventually Wendy decided on Sedgie, while I, in a tired state optimistically plumped for Nightingale. We watched the tree intently trying to catch a glimpse of our mystery bird until eventually out popped a.....Garden Warbler! Doh! I grabbed my camera to try and get a shot of it anyway but it dived back under cover again before I could even focus on it.....Grrrrrr! After that we carried on back along the Nightingale path but didn't hear so much as a squeak.



Surely there's 1 in there somewhere?

As we turned a corner we could see a woman coming towards us with a familiar looking dog. It was a lovely 10 month old, Apricot Cockerpoo called Monty who seemed to enjoy being a total nutter, play fighting with Lyca for a few minutes while we chatted to his owner. Back at the Visitor Centre we read the reports board and were horrified to read that there were 12 singing male Nightingales back on site but that's just typical of our luck!

It was 3.35pm when we got back to the car and when I reconnected my phone onto the mount on the dash to use it as a Sat Nav the mount snapped in half! Luckily I still had the tape we'd bought for Wendy's bins straps in Scotland in my dash, so used it to stick it back together. Wendy made use of the W.C's before we left and grabbed a couple of drinks from the café and surprise, surprise, ended up with another weirdo chatting to her in the queue! We set off at 3.53pm having dipped for our 2nd time of the day which wasn't the best start to our trip! Only we could manage to dip on not 1 but 12 singing Nightingales! It was still raining as we drove away and the only thing we saw before hitting the 'Norfolk' sign at 5.02pm were 2x **Brown Hares** in a field. I stopped off just outside Hunstanton to get some more petrol where we were treated to a **Sparrowhawk** blasting over the road. Although it was getting late and the weather was far from favourable I reckoned we still had enough time to try for the reported Dotterel at Choseley before we went to our HQ. Wendy wasn't remotely enthused and reckoned it would be pointless in the driving rain and that we should ditch it off for another day but I ignored her, as usual and carried on despite her protests.

When we arrived at the layby at Choseley it was 5.55pm we got out of the car for a scan of the field we assumed them to be in. Wendy found a **Yellowhammer** really close to the car and then 3 more in the hedge up the path from the barns. There was no sign of any Corn Buntings but a few **Linnets** flitted around cheerfully. We couldn't find any Dotterel in the ploughed field either, so decided to drive further down the road to the next field where Wendy found some **Red-legged Partridge**. We carried on to the next field and found 4x **Wheatears** and to the next which was totally dead, as was the next. Grrrrrrrr! We'd just dipped for our 3rd time that day although we'd certainly put in the effort :(. We were pretty tired by then and Tesco wasn't due to deliver to HQ until 9pm, so Wendy suggested getting our tea out. I didn't really fancy it but seeing as we didn't have any food I agreed but it was just a case of where? As usual, there wasn't a single Barn Owl as we drove past the fields where we used to see them regularly but we came across a diversion instead. A huge section of the coast road was closed and I could see that being a right pain during the week. We spotted our 1st **Marsh Harrier** of the trip while trying to follow the confusing signs and eventually found ourselves in the familiar territory of Holkham. A **Grey Heron** flew over the road and we kept our eyes peeled for somewhere to eat. I wanted to go to the Kings Arms in Blakeney but Wendy wanted something a bit higher class than that! When we approached the Stiffkey Red Lion Wendy reckoned it was our best bet as Blakeney was too far out of the way, as was Salthouse. We knew that the food was really nice there and that we could sit outside with Lyca, so I pulled in.

As soon as we arrived at 6.40pm we could see it was busy and there was a car load of people heading down towards the pub as well, so I suggested Wendy got out and grabbed us a table and menu before they beat us to it. She jumped out and whizzed past them all while I parked up and got Lyca out. Wendy had put her bowl and dinner in her rucksack so she could have hers too. When I got down to the tables outside I took a seat and waited for Wendy to come out. When she sat down she instantly noticed how cold it was and quickly spotted the heater next to the table by the wall and got us all to move. The heater wasn't on, so she stood up and flicked the switch hoping that it'd work. Needless to say it made very little difference but it was better than nothing. Looking at the menu I noticed it'd changed since we'd been there last and there was nothing on it I fancied at all....Uh Oh! Wendy pointed out a couple of things that were doable and I finally settled on sausage and mash without all the horrible vegetables that came with it. She was limited too and her only option was to get a starter of soup, which was spring vegetable and asparagus with crusty bread plus a side of chips. This suited her down to

the ground so off she went to order it before they got too busy. A few seconds later she reappeared saying that they didn't have any mash but could do sausage and chips from the kid's menu.....Grreat! It wasn't what I wanted but I had to agree or go hungry. The barman asked if she wanted it as an adult portion and she obviously said, "Yes!" and paid the £14.95, which was the same price as our measly lunch! Back outside Lyca ate her dinner and demolished her Dentastick while we waited.

There was a couple on the next table next to us who were shivering and looking as cold as we were who drank up and cleared off pretty quickly. It was freezing! Finally Wendy's soup arrived and she waited for her bread and mine before starting to eat. After a few minutes mine came out and Wendy's eyes nearly popped out of her head. It was a kid's portion, so she instantly pulled him up on it. She told him that she'd paid for an adult portion and he apologized and took it away. There was still no sign of her bread either, so she asked him where it was. He apologized again and scuttled off to sort it out. By then her soup was rapidly getting cold, so she tried some before it was ruined. Her 1st mouthful was enough and she screwed her face up and spent the next couple of minutes pulling bits of what looked like hay out of her mouth. This wasn't going well at all especially after our bad experience at Whisby earlier and she wasn't happy. When mine came back they'd added another sausage, which didn't look as though it was cooked enough and a few more chips and he had some bread to go with Wendy's soup. Wendy, who never complains, had had enough and told him, in the nicest possible way, that her soup was inedible and that it needed to be taken off the menu before they dished it out to anyone else :O. She told him that, as asparagus featured strongly on the current menu the chef had obviously and very naughtily tried to make something out of the fibrous ends of the asparagus, which would normally be thrown away. I couldn't believe what I was hearing and she must have been really annoyed to have done it! The poor guy had started to look very embarrassed by then and offered her a drink on the house and a full refund, which she accepted. When he came back and Wendy had apologized for complaining he explained that the head chef was on holiday and that he totally understood. They weren't happy with his stand-in either and he was glad of the feedback....Phew! This was bad news for them considering it was a bank holiday weekend and they knew they were going to be busy. He was really nice about it from start to finish and even said that he hoped it hadn't put us off visiting them again in the future! After my 3rd sausage was left at the side of the plate because it was a bit pink and Wendy had drunk her free Spritzer and eaten a free plate of bread and butter we thought we'd make a quick get away. Urrrghhhhhh what an end to the day! We'd dipped 3 times and had eaten nothing but rubbish food, so we felt a bit nervous as we headed towards HQ and half expected it to be a let down too.

After driving down the track we arrived outside Garden Cottage at Rookery Farm at 8.06pm and I wandered round the front to find the key safe. I entered the code and got the key, so we opened up and took our 1st peek inside.

Thankfully our day had just improved beyond belief to make up for the succession of disasters and the place was amazing. We should really have had total faith in the owner, Emma's skills.



Kitchen/living room

I'd managed to get it at a bargain price too so we were well impressed :). Emma had yet again come up trumps with her welcome pack and not only did we have a whole homemade Victoria Sponge cake to keep us going for the week but there was more. We had a loaf of fresh bakery Spelt flour bread, semi-skimmed milk, hand made butter, homemade Rookery Farm Strawberry Jam, local Apple Juice and some Fairtrade Organic Teabags. There were even 3x dog biscuits sitting on top of the cake tin for Lyca and a small vase of flowers from the garden on the dining table, so she'd thought of everything. After being blown away by that Wendy took a look at the bed only to find a spider on it :O. She ran into the kitchen to get a glass to catch it in but when she got back it ran behind the headboard.....Aarrghhhh!



Bedroom 1

After she'd unpacked and found a place for everything Wendy sneaked off for a bath while I waited for our Tesco delivery. When she came out they'd just left, so she put everything away and finally sat down to speak to her Mum. Apparently it had rained and only been 6c at home, so although it hadn't been great we'd definitely got the better deal although only just. We watched a bit of TV until we were nearly falling asleep and headed off for a well earned sleep. Wendy obviously had one eye on the mattress just waiting for the spider that got away to reappear.....Urrghhhh!

Sunday 3rd May

We had no intentions of getting up early, as we reckoned we deserved a bit of a lie in but Lyca had other ideas. She decided that at 6.30am we'd had enough and needed to get up.....Grrrrrrrr. After ignoring her we managed to go back to sleep until 8am, which was a far more respectable hour. The weather outside was awful, it was raining and really windy and not a good start for our 1st day. Lyca seemed to like exploring her new garden and there were **Greenfinches** in the trees at the top of the bank. We were in no hurry to go out either, so had a relaxing start but after Wendy had made the sarnies and I'd packed up the car we left at 9.55am.

With the General Election looming there were a lot of posters dotted around and one of them made us laugh.....quite a lot! There was a mug shot of a UKIP candidate in a field but somebody had taken the trouble to go into the field, climb the 6 foot high fence that had been erected around the poster and cut his head out of the picture. Hahahahaha we couldn't have done a better job if we'd tried! Even though it was a horrible day it was much warmer than we'd expected, so Wendy was far too hot in her winter fleece. As we passed Cley Spy I suggested going in for a look at the clothing for a more lightweight one. She went in but there was nothing for under £50, which she wasn't prepared to pay so she quickly left. Next she popped into the Art Café next door and reappeared with a cappuccino and a box of surprises. She'd got me a croissant and hadn't been able to resist buying a veggie sausage roll, which was still warm, for herself. She insisted I tried a bit and cut a small piece off but it looked like it was full of hideous vegetables. Surprisingly it was actually edible but one mouthful was all I could stomach and I was much more at home with my croissant. She was impressed with it though and while we sat munching away she commented as to how posh everyone in there was.

After our 2nd breakfast we headed off hoping for a more successful re-run of finding the Dotterel at Choseley. It was still raining and looked as though we were in for a grim day as we passed the pool at Stiffkey but we picked up **Shoveler** and **Little Egret**. As we were driving past it anyway Wendy wanted to try Fat Face in Burnham Deepdale for a fleece and when I turned into the car park she spotted a sign for Craghoppers, which was new. If she couldn't get a fleece from there then she might as well forget it, so we left Lyca in the car and ventured out to find it. There was no sign of it being on the main row of shops nor was there in the pop up shops through the lane behind them.....Eh? Wendy asked a couple of shop owners if they knew but none of them had any idea what she was on about. After having a browse in Fat Face and leaving empty handed we double-checked the sign for Craghoppers on the way out and sure enough it was still there and we hadn't imagined it. How odd!

Shortly after that we arrived at Choseley again but this time I'd worked out better directions. I'd found out about another road up to the other side of the field, which is where everyone had been seeing them from. I parked up and we started to scan from the car, as we didn't fancy standing outside in the rain.

The freshly ploughed field was furrowed and brown and trying to find some small waders in amongst it looked like an impossible task.



Where do you start?

We'd been there for a few minutes with no joy but finally I saw a movement and a bird flew. I shouted out, "**Dotterel!**" and Wendy said, "Just flew?" so had seen it too. Trying to find it again was tricky as it was soooooo well camouflaged but as soon as our eyes started to adjust to the conditions we eventually found four. A couple of blokes in their 30's turned up and bailed out of their cars setting their scopes up next to the gate.



Dotterel twitch

They appeared to be looking in the right direction so we presumed that with the extra magnification they'd have found them easily. We picked up the song of a **Whitethroat** and found it at the top of a gorse bush before we decided to make a move. Knowing that nobody likes a smart arse, but just to make sure, before I drove away I asked the blokes if they had the birds. I was very surprised to find out that they didn't, so I didn't feel so stupid after all and was glad I'd asked them. After getting out of the car to show them where they were I found that I'd lost my bearings so it took a while to re-find them but luckily I did and got them onto them too.....Phew! With the birds being so distant I reckoned we could get a better view by driving down the single-track road, so we headed off and parked in a small layby. If a tractor came I'd have to move but it was worth a shot. Wendy got out to check it out and sure enough the birds were right opposite her in the field scurrying about and totally unfazed by her presence. I drove a bit further down to park up and got out for a look myself and even managed a few still distant pics.



Dotterel

Dotterel are notoriously tame birds, which is very handy and Wendy ended up finding 7 of the 9 reported and even though we were much closer they were still really hard to pick out from the brown field. It was still raining when we left at 12.07pm, so we just hoped it was going to brighten up for our next stop of the day. We'd been gone a few minutes when Wendy chirped up with, "I suppose that's 1-0 to me on spot the fit birder then!" I burst out laughing thinking she must be getting desperate :P.

Driving through Thornham Wendy wanted to stop at the Deli for pressies (yeah right) and also to try to find something poncey she couldn't get at home. Since buying a new super grain called Freekeh when she was in Scotland she'd become addicted. Her Mum was also rather partial and her sister wanted in on the act, so she said she'd try and stock up while she was away and was confident that with all the Delis in Norfolk she couldn't possibly fail. Thornham Deli was, as always, very busy and Wendy scuttled off inside. She certainly didn't blend in with the other people who had obviously dressed for the occasion and spent hours getting themselves ready to face the world. God forbid anyone should see them without makeup, they may as well have been going to meet the Queen! Wendy on the other hand was in her scruffs and doesn't even bring any makeup away with her. Luckily she couldn't give a monkey's about things like that and would rather not waste the day looking into a mirror. She was gone for ages and I sat in the car surrounded by Range Rovers, which will never have seen off-roading in their lives, watching the endless stream of very posh looking families coming and going. The rain was desperately trying to stop but was still hanging on for dear life.....Urrghhhh! I couldn't help but notice when a kid of about 8 years old came out looking very smug at his latest purchase. Under his arm he was carrying a wooden sign with the words 'HAPPINESS IS NOT A DESTINATION, IT'S A WAY' written on it! Surely a boy of 8 is too young to understand such deep and meaningful quotes? Surely he should be too young to have even ventured into philosophy yet and should've been walking out of Toymaster with a Lego set instead! What a little ponce but obviously settling in to the North Norfolk way of life early, his parents must be so proud :P. Ah well, so much for the carefree days of childhood.....Hahahaha! There were 3 women, all of the same mold, sitting in the café window who were gesticulating frantically while their mouths did ten to the dozen. They looked very busy 'doing lunch' and all I could hear in my head was, "Blah blah blah" with a liberal scattering of the word "Ya." Another brand new Range Rover pulled up and an old unattractive bloke got out followed by his young and very attractive wife, which I know is pretty shallow of me but I couldn't help but giggle and wonder how much he was worth or if it was indeed worth it for her! Two Policewomen

were next to go in and unlike at home there wasn't a sausage or bacon bap in sight when they reemerged. Finally Wendy came out and she'd been stuck behind someone buying a gift for someone of a very expensive garden ornament and tea set (but of course!), which all needed individually and carefully wrapping in bubble wrap before being put into bags. Because the customer was spending so much money the girl behind the till was pandering to him and was in no hurry.....Aarrghhhh! Apart from a weird looking cauliflower and some other bits and bobs she'd failed to find her Freekeh and if they didn't have it there surely there was no hope? After that we set off to our next stop laughing about our observations from our interesting time at the Deli. Much as we love Norfolk we really can't imagine fitting in with "new" locals.

As there'd been 5 reported the day before, we thought we'd give Holme Dunes a shot for Ring Ouzel or anything else that might've dropped in. After Wendy had used the WC's and we'd flashed our NWT cards to the person in the hut and got our entrance stickers I parked up at 12.45pm. It was well and truly lunchtime by then so after letting Lyca out for a wee we had our food in the car. When we got out to go for our walk at 1.08pm we were treated to the sound of a **Grasshopper Warbler** reeling from one of the nearby bushes. Lyca again was having the best time and was sniffing everything under the sun.



Exciting!

This was soon followed by a noisy **Sedge Warbler**, which sounded as happy that the rain had stopped as we were. We wandered up the path and out onto the Dunes hearing a **Lesser Whitethroat** singing and loads of Dark-bellied Brent Geese flew over heading out to sea.



Brent Geese

First of all I wondered why on earth they were still there and then wondered if they were off on their migration to their breeding grounds. I thought it'd be quite an exciting thing to witness but Wendy wasn't convinced. Unfortunately, although it looked promising they all dropped down by the waters edge on the beach and started feeding! We carried on up the bank towards the Dunes flushing 2x **Grey Partridges** out of the long grass, which flew over the path and went down in the field opposite. Next we found a **Reed Bunting** and could hear **Redshank** calling from the pools but our attentions soon turned to the Gropper we could still hear. We stood on the path looking down at the brambles it was in and waited to see if it'd show, which could take all day!



Gropper brambles

Fortunately after a few minutes Wendy saw it fly between a gap but I wasn't looking so I missed it....Doh! She then asked had I heard the **Cetti's Warbler** but I hadn't and although we hung around for a bit it didn't seem to be feeling particularly vocal and she didn't hear it again. Some **Avocets** flew over and looking down onto the pools we picked up **Wigeon** and **Teal** but there wasn't much else.

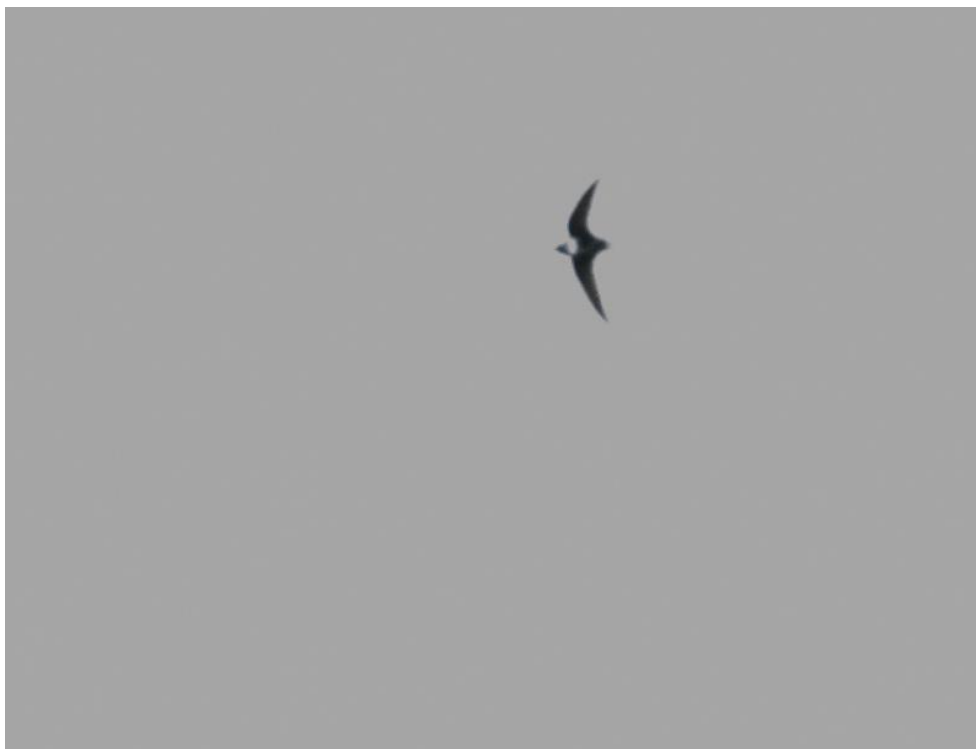
We wandered through the Dunes knowing that there'd been a Ring Ouzel there as well as a Redstart the day before but did we find anything? Of course not! Grrrrrrr!



Hurry up!

We had the distinct impression that it just wasn't our lucky day and that we were wasting our time.

Having done the entire walk without seeing anything but Blackbirds, Robins and Magpies we went back to the car and I drove up to the Visitor Centre, so we could go into the trees and Wendy went in to have a read of the reports book. She came back out to tell me there'd been nothing but the 1st Swift of the year and then called out, "**Swift!**" I looked up above the conifers and sure enough there was a Swift zooming around, so I raised my bins to check it. It was only a Swift but at that time of year and given where we were you never know what you're going to find. All of a sudden I noticed how it had a massive white bib and white under its rump, so my heart started to race. I grabbed my camera for a distant in flight record shot of the bird but it was on a mission and flew straight over us and carried on until it had vanished up the coast. Noooooooooo! I looked back at my pics and every single one was totally useless but you could still make out the white bib, which had caused all the fuss.



Weird Swift

We couldn't imagine what it was and I even went back to the car to get my book so we could have a proper look but it wasn't consistent with anything. We mentioned it to the Warden, who had a look and even he didn't have a clue, so we hoped that someone else further up the coast would see it and hopefully ID it! Had we just found something amazing? We severely doubted it and after a while we put it down as just an aberrant Common Swift but it continued to bug us for the rest of the day.

Excitement over we headed off into the trees having a good look for the Redstart first. There was nothing, so we carried on noticing how different it sounded to when we'd last been there in autumn. There'd been nothing but Goldcrests calling then and we were on the look out for Firecrest but we didn't hear a single squeak this time. This was very good news for our necks of course but it was pretty dead in there. I found a nice little **Muntjac** foraging under the cover of some bushes and there were a good number of **Speckled Wood** as well as a few **Large White Butterflies** flitting around in the sun. It was getting way too hot for my liking and we were both feeling tired by then, so when we got to the end of the trees we had a quick look out to sea.



Nice :)

There was nothing there so we turned around and went back to the Visitor Centre. I needed an Ice Cream to cool me down (well it was as good an excuse as any) and we sat down on the bench outside where thinking about the Swift from earlier continued to drive us nuts.

It was 18c when we drove away at 3.23pm and a Damselfly flew over the path but we have no idea what type but it was probably a Large Red. I stopped ½ way down the track to remove a big annoying stone from my tyre and Wendy heard another blast of a Cetti's Warbler from the bush right next to the car. Unbelievably I didn't hear it again and she couldn't understand how (maybe my hearing is going?) especially as it was so close that time. Back on the main A149 coast road we approached another Farm Shop, which looked massive, so Wendy wanted to go in resume her Freekeh hunt.....Urrghhhhh! I parked up outside and watched her vanish inside to join the other ponces for the next hour or so :P. I decided to see if I had a signal on my phone yet to kill some time but it was still dead as a Dodo, which is the biggest problem with Norfolk. The other customers were equally as amusing as those I'd watched earlier but I soon lost interest in them when I noticed the Swallows flying in to rest on the ledges above the front door. I don't think anyone else had noticed them even though they were coming in right above their heads. I couldn't help but think how funny it'd be if one of them pooped on some perfectly preened woman's head.....Hahahahaha! Hopefully they don't poo on the produce, although you can't get anymore organic than that! When Wendy came back out she had a face that would rival any of the other top ponces in there but when I laughed at her it turned out that the sun was in her eyes.....Oooops!

She still hadn't managed to find her Freekeh, so our trip was turning into 'Tour de Deli' and she wasn't going to give up until she'd found it. It was getting quite late but we thought that seeing as we were nearby we'd pay Titchwell a visit.

By the time I parked up in Titchwell car park it was 3.57pm and 19.5c, so we weren't surprised to see a lovely yellow **Brimstone Butterfly** flapping around in the heat of the sun. As soon as we got out of the car a massive big dirty black cloud rolled in and it looked it was about to rain.....Grrrrrr! We quickly put our coats on again, including Lyca's, as we didn't fancy another soaking. What is it with Titchwell? Every time we go there it chucks it down and we end up like drowned Long Tails! I got Lyca out and then my camera from the boot but she was so excited she started dancing and pulling on her lead knocking my new 7dmarkII camera over.....Nooooooo! It crashed onto the road with a thud and to say I was gutted would be an understatement, as every time I buy a new camera a nasty accident quickly ensues :(I picked it up and had a quick check to see if it was OK. Externally it looked fine luckily but yet again the camera wasn't focusing on things so at the back of mind I had a horrible feeling that the internal focusing mechanisms could be broken :(After that we wandered into the reserve and onto the footpath just as the wind started to pick up and the heavens opened.



Incoming!

We upped the pace and sat on the bench to view the freshwater pool. There were some **Black-tailed Godwits** feeding in the shallows miles away and we could hear **Reed Warblers** deep in the reeds in front of us. After clocking them we realized that we'd already heard them earlier while we were at Holme....Doh! A **Common Gull** flew over us as we sat there taking the hit of the rain and heard a **Little Grebe** calling from one of the gullies. The rain started to ease off so we shook ourselves off and carried on. There was a nice Male Gadwall near the path so I quickly grabbed a shot of it.



Gadwall

We'd got just past the hide when I spotted a **Turnstone** but it looked as though a 2nd lot of rain was heading our way, so with very little about anyway we decided to call it a day. Another birder stopped us in our tracks and said, "You look like you've been here all day?" We knew we hadn't and that there was more chance of Peace on Earth than for us to spend an entire day at Titchwell but we obviously looked like a right pair of saddos. We said, "No, we've just got here." and he carried on to say that he was wondering if there was anything decent about. He'd checked the reports board when he'd arrived and it was rubbish so was hoping that we were heading back to the Visitor Centre to report all our amazing findings. We wished! Wendy laughed and said, "No.....sorreeeeeeeeeeeeeeee" and he rolled his eyes in his head and carried on looking as depressed as we did.

Back at the car it was 5.03pm and we were glad we'd left when we did as the rain started and this time it was torrential! My windscreen wipers couldn't cope with it even on full and visibility was dreadful. It'd been so warm, so we wondered why there was no thunder and lightning just to complete the scene. As we drove along the coast road and were nearing Stiffkey a massive rainbow appeared, which we could see both ends of. At one point the end was on my car bonnet, shame there's no treasure in there, it'd come in very handy!

We were home by 6pm and after tea and baths we sat down to chill out for the evening. A report came in of a Grey-headed Wagtail with a flock of Yellow Wagtails showing well at Cley. We'd seen one of them last year in the same place and even though it looks smart I thought I'd give it a miss, as I was too tired to drive. I was sure we'd get a chance to see something better during the week anyway. By 10.22pm we were pretty tired and headed off to bed hoping for a better day tomorrow.

Monday 4th May

Wendy was awake at (drum roll) 5am, so she got up and made herself a coffee to enjoy in bed with Lyca. It wasn't the lovely sunny day that'd been forecast and was decidedly overcast and threatening rain, so when we got up we had no idea what to do. Fortunately, by the time we were thinking about going out it actually brightened up, so as it was still early it was the perfect day head to Winterton which was nearly an hour away. We left at 7.25am and in the bush at the end of the track was a Lesser Whitethroat singing away, which was a good way to start the day not to mention a pretty cool garden tick!



Driveway

The roads were nice and quiet as I drove there and we parked up in Winterton car park at 8.31am. It was a bit chilly and pretty windy as we set off, so Wendy had gone armed with her hat, which she was very glad of. Firstly I wanted to check the South Dunes for migrants, hoping for a Mopopolese Warbler (:P) or something equally as optimistic. The South Dunes is nearly always where the rarities turn up at Winterton. There was a Lesser Whitethroat sitting out in the open singing away and looking up the path ahead of us there were Blackbirds everywhere.



South Dunes

We looked at each and every one of them but not one was the Ring Ouzel, which was the least we were hoping for there. There were also loads of Whitethroats about too and some very pristine looking **Peacock Butterflies**. It was really sheltered in the Dunes, so it wasn't long before Wendy had to take her hat off and she realized she had nowhere to put it. She managed to stuff it into a pocket in her trousers and carried on, wishing she hadn't brought it at all. After walking further south than we'd ever gone before and finding nothing, to say we felt deflated would be an understatement. Just to add insult to injury I then got an alert of a Rough-legged Buzzard still by the plantation in the North Dunes. Still?!? We'd heard nothing about this bird since we'd been away, so this was news to us :O. If we'd gone in the opposite direction 1st there's a good chance we'd have seen it! It was totally typical that we'd just walked further south than ever as well, so we turned around and walked back as quickly as we could.

We made a beeline for the car on the way, so that Wendy could get rid of her hat, coat and grab some more water. It was getting warmer by the second as we wandered into the North Dunes and we quickly spotted a **Small Copper Butterfly** flitting around on the ground. We met another Birder heading back, so we had to ask him if he'd seen anything. When he replied we were well and truly gob smacked, as he said he'd had a Roughleg soaring at about 80feet right above him. He said it was with 2x Common Buzzards but had now gone so high up he'd lost it. Brilliant! :(We thanked him anyway and carried on with the vague hope that it'd come back down and we might finally catch up with a Rough-legged Buzzard, which is seemingly now our bogey bird. Walking past the trees Wendy spotted a Buzzard in the distance, so we raised our bins for a look. I spotted another one further away and Wendy found a 3rd bird, so it was all starting to kick off. It was looking promising that we'd found the Buzzards that the other birder had seen earlier so we waited to try and get any details on the 3 very distant birds. Unfortunately, when we did all 3 of them were just plain old Common Buzzards, so our hearts sank big time. While we were looking at them desperately hoping that we were wrong something else caught my eye. When I looked at a dead tree I was surprised to see a **Green Woodpecker** and I called it to Wendy who was still looking up for Buzzards. Before I could even finish telling her it flew off into the trees right at the back and vanished, so she didn't see it. She did find a nice **Silver Y Moth** on the ground though and heard the Woodpecker laughing at her from deep in the trees somewhere. Further along Wendy stopped dead in her tracks and squealed in delight, "**Cuckoo!**" We'd been wondering if and when we'd hear one calling, so we waited to hear it again but it all went very quiet and we had no time to hang around if we wanted to find that Buzzard.



Approaching the pools

After traipsing for what seemed like hours in the blazing sun we reached the concrete blocks we'd been aiming for. Wendy held on to Lyca while I wandered over to see if there was any water in the pool next to it. The pool was totally dried up and I think we've only ever seen it once with water in it, so obviously there'd be no Dragonflies about. We still had the other pool to try though and we headed straight for it still looking up for Buzzards. When we got there Lyca, who must've been hot and thirsty had a massive drink. After that she settled down on the grass next to us and seemed quite tired.



Nap time

Wendy had a scan with her bins and quickly found a Damselfly resting on a blade of grass sticking out from the water. She got me onto it and we could see that it was just a **Large Red Damselfly**, which is what you'd expect given the time of year. She found another one but apart from that it was pretty lifeless above the surface but who knows what was going on underneath. Wendy was just about to take a pic of Lyca sitting posing with the pool behind her when something caught my eye. Before she could press the shutter I called out, "**Common Crane!**" so she dropped what she was doing and looked up. There were 2 of them flying over and had come in off the sea. They went over a field on our left and they slowly started to drop down before they landed and vanished in the long grass.



Common Cranes

Lyca wasn't the only one who was feeling tired by this point and after the Cranes had gone we stood up to carry on our walk over to the plantation.



Plantation

The heat wasn't helping matters and if it hadn't been for the strong wind I think I'd have fried! The section of walk from then on was meant to be the best for Ring Ouzel and we couldn't believe we'd never done it before and had always turned round at the pool. The 3x Common Buzzards were still hanging around and we were really paranoid that we were missing something but there was no way we could stretch our imaginations and make one of them into a Rough-legged. When we finally got to the plantation we realized that we'd just arrived at Horsey Gap :O! If we'd known this we could've just driven to Horsey and parked up right next to best section of the North Dunes and it wouldn't have taken us so long.....Grrrrrrrr! Ah well, we'll know for next time! There were a couple of Birders ahead of us staring at the Buzzards through their bins but with none of them being anything different we started to head back.

It was 11.25am by then and we were getting quite hungry and we still had a fair old walk back ahead of us. No sooner had we turned around than the 2x Common Cranes flew over us again and headed straight back out to sea. They circled over the water getting higher and higher up into the sky, which was pretty cool to watch. Who knows if they were going to keep going, it looked to me like they'd popped across the North sea from maybe Holland, didn't like the look of Norfolk so were heading straight back. We hadn't been walking for long when I got an alert, which made us think we may as well just give up. Someone had reported the Roughleg, a Ring Ouzel and 7x Whimbrel at 11.30am, which was 5minutes after we'd turned round :O! OK, there were Buzzards around but none of them looked like a Rough-legged to us at all even though one of them was paler than the others. Maybe someone had mistakenly misidentified it or maybe it'd actually put in an appearance, who knows? We'd scoured that sky for hours, double checked thoroughly on Wendy's phone app just in case and come up with nothing but then again if anyone can be in the right place at the wrong time it's us! With the Ring Ouzel report having just come in we made a beeline for the dunes to hopefully catch up with it on the way back and also give us a better chance of picking up some new birds on the way.



The Dunes

It was hard going climbing up one sandy path and down the other side knowing that we'd have to repeat the process of going up and down, all the way back to the car. Our feet were beginning to throb in our boots and we felt decidedly unfit as we trudged endlessly over the shifting sand. We were really hungry and needed a drink with the sun's heat beating down on our heads. Who'd have thought it'd turn out to be so hot after our chilly start? Winterton is notorious for having 4 seasons in a day and the weather can change in the blink of an eye, so people are advised to prepare accordingly. We, of course hadn't and the small bottle of water Wendy had brought had run out ages ago. We finally got sick of going up and down and we'd run out of energy by that point anyway, so decided to do the rest of the walk up on the top of the ridge. We could hear the **Little Tern** colony before we saw it all fenced off down on the beach. The Terns were all out over the sea and the fence around their breeding grounds was brilliant. It looked as though NWT had really pushed the boat out for them and there was even an electric fence running around it! We saw 3x **Wheatears** on that stretch but not entirely surprisingly no Ring Ouzels.....Urrghhhhhh!

Having thought we'd never get there we finally got back to the car at 12.24pm and the 1st thing on the agenda was to give Lyca a drink, as her last one had been all the way back at the pool. We grabbed our lunch from the back and sat down to rest our feet for a bit while we ate it. It was no wonder we were feeling the effects, as we'd been out walking for 4 hours and had clocked up 8 miles! No doubt our efforts wouldn't have felt so grueling if we'd found something amazing out there but with nothing other than hearing a Cuckoo and seeing 2x Cranes it'd seemed a lot worse. After lunch I really fancied an ice cream seeing as it was now 20c, so Wendy hobbled off to the café. A couple of seconds later and she was coming back empty handed, as there was no way she was going to stand in the humungous queue for ages! We set off at 12.50pm and I pulled up outside the 1st shop we came to and Wendy went in. Luckily she'd remembered to get my ice cream as well as some drinks and she reckoned we should give Horsey Gap a shop as a last ditch attempt at the Roughleg.

I thought it'd be quite simple to get there but skillfully managed to get lost and missed the turning. When I re-found it we were horrified to see cones all the way down the track and it looked as though it was heaving. It'd been a good idea but if there was nowhere to park in the car park and hordes of people it would be pointless even trying, so we binned it. Our next plan was to try NWT Alderfen Broad but we knew that Lyca wouldn't be able to join us on some of the paths. There were plenty of Kestrels on the way and we realized that we'd probably seen more Kestrels on this trip than any other. We'd also seen a lot in Scotland, so hopefully this means that they're doing well again. We drove through a village called Martham and noticed that there was a fair in full swing with a small funfair on a grass verge and stalls set up everywhere. Our eyes

nearly popped out of heads when we noticed a bloke with Isle of Man TT leathers on. The locals had also been rummaging through the bowels of their garages and attics for unwanted and long forgotten about random items to try and sell in their front gardens. One bloke had set up at table outside his front door and was sitting on a chair in the doorway waiting for a sale. The whole set up was all very strange and looked more like a Gypsy Tat Fair than anything else :P.

As we passed the Radar Museum we recounted how we'd been practically tripping over loads of Grass Snakes at Alderfen when we'd visited it last. I was feeling so tired that when I mentioned Grass Snakes that I said, "Green Snakes" by accident.....Oooops! This made Wendy laugh and she started to make fun of me to get me back for all the times I'd done it to her. Unfortunately it was still no contest for her classic of Kangaroo in the Highlands though :P. Driving down the track to the reserve was an altogether more pleasant affair than on our previous visit. It was nice and dry this time and I didn't have to drive ½ way up the hedge to avoid getting stuck in massive puddles and mud. An **Orange Tip Butterfly** was flying around the bushes and I parked up at 1.44pm.

We were the only car there, so I got Lyca out and we set off down the footpath, which we knew she was allowed on. A few yards into the walk and something in the tiny stream at the side of the path caught my eye. I had a look and couldn't believe my eyes when I saw a **Grass Snake** in the water. It was unfortunately covered in twigs and grass and I couldn't get a clear shot so grabbed a record shot instead.



Grass Snake

You could just about make out its head peeking out above the surface, so I got Wendy onto it quickly. It was a good job too because as soon as she looked down it swam off and vanished completely. At least we'd seen one though and kept our eyes peeled for more on the way down. Wendy then stopped and said, "Did you hear that **Tawny Owl**?" There was one calling from the woods in broad daylight, which we didn't expect at all! Further down still, we saw a Brimstone Butterfly and it landed on a leaf, so I grabbed my camera and went in for the kill (not literally).



Brimstone

I wasn't too pleased with the shot but passed the camera over to Wendy so she could have a go as well.



And fire!

There were midgies everywhere, which wasn't surprising in the slightest. It was warm and very damp in there, so perfect conditions for the bloodsucking little ****'s. Next we found a **Holy Blue Butterfly** and nearly stood on a couple of small **Frogs**. Wendy wanted to get some pics, so I checked the camera before giving it to her. She complained she couldn't focus as close as normal and when I checked the camera settings again I was gutted to see that the minimum focus switch was set to the furthest distance, so if I'd realized we could've got much better shots of the Brimstone than we had...Argghghghhh!



Frog

There was no sign of any other Grass Snakes, probably because the area was so dry, so we turned around and started to head back. The Brimstone was still in the same place, so I stopped in the hope of making up for my mistake earlier. It flew, so we followed it until it went down again and I edged my way towards where it'd landed. You'd think that a yellow Butterfly would stick out like a sore thumb, so imagine my surprise when I nearly stood on it and it shot off again! It belted off back down the track and eventually landed in a bramble bush, where we reckoned we had it pinned down. We turned around and headed back but when we got to the bush we couldn't see it for dust. They really are hard to find once they've taken cover. We looked for ages but we'd well and truly lost it, so much for 2nd chances :(We looked for snakes again on the way back without any success and all of a sudden I heard a very loud buzzing noise, which was very close. When I turned around I was horrified to find that I was being chased by a massive monster of a **Hornet** and it was all I could do, in my powerless state, to scream, "Aarrghhhh Hornet!" to Wendy. We both screamed like a pair of girls and then legged it back to the car as quickly as we could :/.

Mine was still the only car there but there were a couple of cyclists just pulling up in the car park. Once they'd disappeared we decided to go to the other side of the reserve. I put Lyca on the shortest lead so she would be by my side, as there was no way I was leaving her in a hot car. We were looking for Hairy Dragonfly and Damselflies and had found the place to be really good last time. Walking on the path through the reeds was a lot different to the one we'd just been on through the woods.



Squelch!

It was really boggy underfoot and slightly smelly but Lyca wasn't bothered and probably loved it! We negotiated our way around the worst bits and kept our eyes peeled but there was no sign of much life at all. I spotted a couple of small blue Damselflies in the reeds and presumed them to be Common Blue and Azure. After having a better look at their mug shots it turned out that the Common Blue was actually an **Azure Damselfly**.



Azure Damselfly

Not only that but the one we thought was an Azure was in fact a **Variable Damselfly**. Quality ID'ing skills.....NOT!



Variable Damselfly

It happens every year but it'd been such a long time since seeing them last that we'd obviously become severely rusty to get them both wrong! Maybe with it having been so cold recently the insects just hadn't emerged in any great numbers yet, apart from all the midgies that is! I was up ahead with Lyca squelching my way through the bog when a Buzzard flew in and landed on a tree directly above my head!! Buzzards never do this kind of thing and are normally incredibly wary birds, which is why I don't have any good Buzzard shots. When Wendy came round the corner behind me she clocked the bird and the situation and stopped to get a pic and watched on in amusement.



Oooooooo :)

Unbelievably the bird wasn't fazed by my (or Lyca's) presence in the slightest and let us stay right underneath it, so I thought I might as well get some shots. It was watching us like a Hawk, no pun intended, and I fired some off, as it looked straight down at me.



"Hello"

Eventually it flew off but Wow! That kind of thing never happens, so it felt like a pretty special moment :). We carried on the rest of the loop path and thankfully it dried up, so wasn't so squelchy but saw nothing else of interest.

Back at the car it was 3.03pm and we felt totally pooped especially as the temperature was now 19c. I did a quick check of how far we'd just walked and found that we'd just added another 2miles to the 8miles we'd done at Winterton earlier, so no wonder we were knackered. We reckoned 10miles was enough for 1 day and even Lyca curled up on the back seat and went to sleep after she'd had a drink. We realized that our memories of tripping over Grass Snakes were delusional and more to do with the conditions than we 1st thought. It'd been raining and very wet everywhere last time and this time it was too dry in comparison. As for the insects, I think we were just too early and had we been there a week or 2 later it would've been a different kettle of fish but that's the story of our lives!

On the way back to HQ Wendy wanted to stop somewhere to buy a towel for Lyca. She'd managed to forget to pack her towel from home and didn't want to ruin the crisp white ones at the cottage with muddy dog paws. When she spotted a Waitrose I pulled up so she could go for a look. Needless to say they didn't have one, so we carried on hoping there'd be somewhere else on the way. Wendy spotted a pub, which was called 'Black Boys Public House' and after laughing at how totally un-PC it was we joked that it must be a big UKIP area :P. We're actually very surprised that it hasn't been forced to change its name what with all the issues in this day and age and all that! I then saw something, which I thought was a brilliant idea. With public phone boxes being abandoned and only used as public toilets these days someone had put the one I was looking at to very good use by installing a defibrillator for the village. Brilliant! It wasn't the only one either, as we passed another couple on the way back. Just then we heard a noise coming from my car tyre and passed it off as a stone stuck in the tread. Shortly after came a horrible crunching sound, which sounded a lot more serious. Uh oh! I noticed that it was worse when I turned corners and Wendy was getting freaked out that we were going to conk out. We just wanted to make it home without that happening, so I could have a look and see what was going on. We held our breath for the rest of the way and crossed our fingers that it'd be OK. About a mile away from HQ Wendy found 2x Wheatears in a ploughed field, which keep our minds occupied.

We were so relieved to pull up outside HQ at 4.22pm without any incidents and after we'd taken all our gear in I went straight out for a check. I couldn't see anything, so shrugged it off as just a stone in the wheel arch and crossed my fingers that it'd be OK tomorrow. Lyca was really hungry after her 10mile walk and after her tea she sprawled out on the floor and fell asleep. After Lyca was sorted we set about doing ours before Wendy went off for a well-earned soak in a hot bath. I on the other hand wanted to try and get some decent bird photos, so decided to pay Cley a visit even though I could happily have just stayed in and relaxed too.

I packed my camera into the car and set off at 6pm. Only about half a mile from the cottage I rounded a corner on a narrow road and went berserk as a car towing a caravan cut right across the corner giving me less than a cars width!! I slammed on, turned towards the hedge and held my breath ready to hear that horrible metal on metal scraping noise. It all happened in slow mo as I watched in amazement as the caravan missed my car by just 3-4cm.....Phew! Luckily, although I was in shock, I was still able to let out a massive Scottish style expletive tirade at the horrendous driver!! After recovering I slowly carried on my way trying to calm down!

When I arrived at Cley it didn't look good as the local bloke who goes there every evening till dark was already leaving! I should have taken that as a cue to turn round and give up but I carried on to the hides anyway. On the way there were some **Bearded Tit's** flying over the reeds. There were also clouds and clouds of midgies, which wasn't nice at all. A Reed Bunting posed for me on a bush so I grabbed my only shot of the evening.



Reed Bunting

From the hides the views were pretty empty so I quickly gave that up as a bad job and drove off to Cley beach road to look at the eye field. There'd been some smart Wagtails the day before but obviously because I'd just turned up there was absolutely nothing. After thinking about it I reckoned it was due to the cows having been moved from the field where the Wagtails had been to another one with much longer grass. The Wagtail flock hadn't been seen since the cows had moved.....Great! Since it was still light I drove back to Salhouse and had a walk out to Gramborough Hill. Again it was dead apart from about 50 x Sand Martins flying in off the North Sea. Maybe one day we'll get to see something good there like everyone else seems to? At that point I realized I was flogging a dead horse so gave up and headed home and on the drive back a **Grey Squirrel** ran across the road.

After my disappointing and non-eventful outing I was home by 7.30pm to finally put my feet up. We watched some TV and at 9.20pm Wendy announced that she was done for and headed off to bed! I was flabbergasted, as she's always calling me an old fart for going to bed early when we're on holiday but this took the biscuit! There was no way I was going to bed at 9.20pm, so off she went to do her teeth. Lyca quickly followed her and settled down on the bed while Wendy got ready, so I found myself sitting in the living room on my own. After a few minutes I got bored and decided that I knew how she felt and headed off too.

Tuesday 5th May

It was a shame it'd been so windy the night before and we hadn't been able to put the Moth Trap again because we were up nice and early at 7am. The weather looked OK but when we saw the forecast it was saying showers until after lunchtime with strong winds all day again. There was going to be gale force gusts during the evening, so yet again we wouldn't be able to put the trap out. We started to wonder why we'd even bothered bringing it with us and doubted that we'd get a chance to use it at all. We were ready to go but had no firm plans for the day with the weather being so dodgy so weren't complaining when we bumped into the owner of the house going into his office next door. We'd met his wife Emma when she popped round to greet us after arriving in Garden Cottage last time and she was really nice. He was equally as pleasant and we enjoyed his chitchat before we packed up and left for the day at 9.17am.

You'd think that after the amount of times we've been to Norfolk it wouldn't be possible but I managed to get lost on our way out. I completely missed the turning to the coast road and ended up driving towards Holt instead....Doh! Fortunately there were no crunching noises coming from my car, so whatever it was must've sorted itself out like I'd hoped. There was a Muntjac in some woods and after our diversion we were back on track. When we entered Cley there was only 1 thing on Wendy's mind and that was the Deli! I parked up in the car park and she battled her way through the wind and rain over to the shop. When she returned she had a bag of goodies, a cappuccino, croissant and finally.....2 tubs of Freekeh :)! She'd bought the last 2 in the shop and knew that they wouldn't last very long, so the hunt was still on.....Boooooooo :(After we'd eaten the very unimpressive croissant we set off again until Wendy spotted Stiffkey Deli and I had to stop there as well. Not surprisingly she came out empty handed on the Freekeh front so we continued up the coast. Wendy still needed a thin fleece, so as it'd started to absolutely chuck it down by then and we were approaching Holkham Hall she asked me to turn in, so she could try the shop there. I parked up and off she went inside and vanished for ages! When she came out she'd bought some pressies but no fleece and had ended up chatting to the owner about the current Dental situation in the UK. The last thing Wendy wants to talk about on holiday is work but she only had herself to blame and had owned up to being a Dental Nurse when the shop lady mentioned having just been to her new NHS Dentist.....Urrghhhhh! Ah well, at least it was raining and we weren't in a hurry to get somewhere. As we pulled out of the car park a Frog hopped over the road in front of us, obviously having been brought out by all the rain. It makes you wonder where the saying, "Nice weather for Ducks" comes from when Frogs seems far more appropriate :P. Further along the road we came across some **Egyptian Geese** in a field and when we got to Burnham Overy it started to chuck it down again.....Urrghhhhhh!



Nice weather – for Frogs!

This was where we were meant to be going for our walk and we'd planned to go right out to Holkham Pines but it was out of the question in weather as bad as it was. Wendy then decided that she needed a wee but there were no toilets around, so I turned the car around and drove away, hoping to find some nearby. We ended up all the way back at Burnham Deepdale where there's some inside the café. Wendy trotted in and when she came back we decided to go for another look in Fat Face to kill some time. It's usually Wendy who's on the look out for things but I needed some new clothes after losing a bit of weight, so after a lot of faffing around I came out £100 worse off but sorted. That's the most I've spent on clothes in a shop ever!! Luckily when we came out the rain had stopped although it was still blowing a gale, so it was back to plan A.

On the way back to Burnham Overy we passed a field where there were some Grey Partridges and a Brown Hare really close, so I stopped the car. I gave Wendy her camera

from the foot well behind her and she went in for kill. When she looked back at the pics she'd just taken all the Grey Partridge ones were rubbish and she just about managed to get an OK one of the Hare.....Doh!



Brown Hare

Back at Burnham Overy it was 11.44am and it looked as though there was more rain coming in. It was still very windy too but warm, so it was hard to decide what to wear. We set off down the footpath and realized it was going to be an unpleasant walk, as we were nearly being blown over by the wind. Lyca loves the wind and was sticking her face right into it while Wendy couldn't see through her streaming eyes. Talking of streaming, there were streams of Swifts coming in off the sea flying inland as we walked down towards the saltmarsh.



Burnham Overy

It was so windy up on the ridge that we decided to do the walk down in the ditch instead and being so low down put us at a disadvantage from the start. Down at the saltmarsh itself I found some nice summer plumage **Grey Plovers** and there were a few **Bar-tailed Godwits** in with the Black-tailed Godwits. We carried on battling our way through the wind and heard some **Whimbrel** flying over. Wendy suddenly stopped in her tracks

and said, "Did you hear that?" As usual I hadn't heard anything but she was looking puzzled and said that she'd just heard what sounded like a booming Bittern. There'd been no reports of Bittern there and although we waited a while we didn't hear it again. She was totally frustrated, as it's such a distinct sound that can't be mistaken for anything else but it had fallen very quiet. We carried on with her reluctantly dragging behind hoping to hear it again until we reached the dunes. I really wanted to go right over to the edge of Holkham Pines but Wendy wasn't very enthusiastic at all. A lot of times good stuff is reported in that area but we always go the opposite way out to Gun hill instead. This time I wanted to try the Pines direction but she reckoned we were wasting our time and that there was nothing about to find anyway. Having gone that far I wasn't leaving until I'd completed the plan. Walking through the dunes was unpleasant to say the least and even though they were relatively sheltered the wind was still ridiculously strong but at least the sun was out and it wasn't cold.



Even Lyca was fighting the wind!

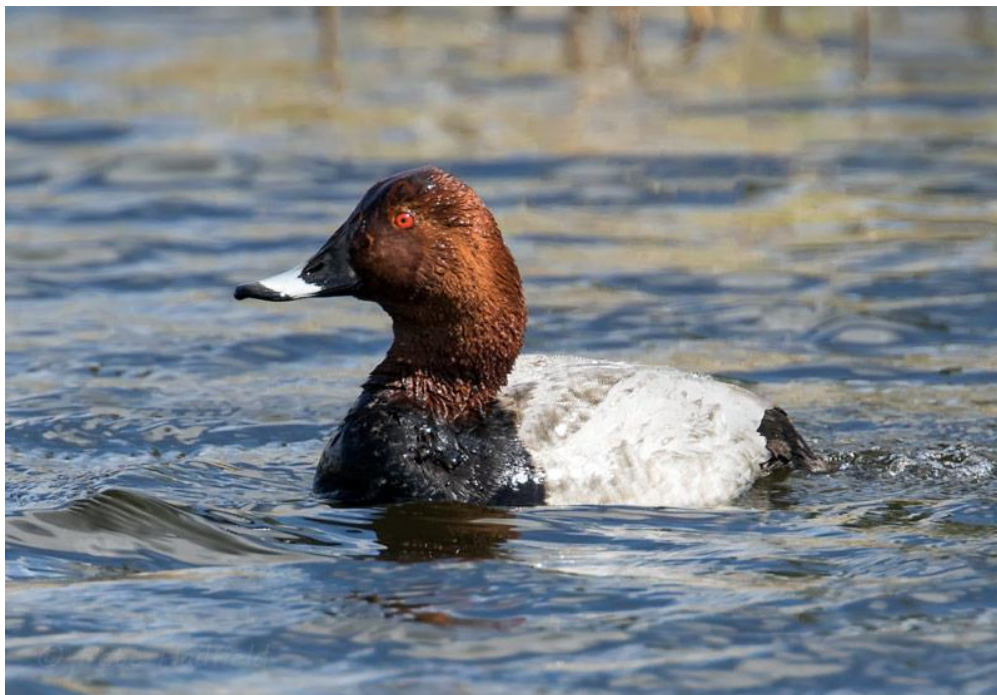
Wendy had lost all interest by then and was pretty hacked off but I kept my optimism going just in case. We finally made it to the Pines and Wendy's face instantly lit up. We could now turn round and start heading back but not before we'd thoroughly scanned the area for Ring Ouzel :P.

We'd found nothing and couldn't even pull out a Ring Ouzel but as usual we didn't leave without finding some human poo and some toilet roll under a bush.....Bleurrghhh! There were 5x Whimbrel in a field and further on we found another Wheatear, which for all our efforts was pretty disappointing. As we were now walking into the wind we now had another problem to contend with. The sand was being blown into our faces, so we had to walk with our heads down! If there was anything about how on earth were we going to stand any chance of seeing it? We were confident enough that there was nothing so carried on with just the ground to look at. Eventually when we were back on the footpath and had left the dunes behind us we could finally lift our heads up again....Phew!



Looking back at the Pines

It was still so windy we had to walk back in the ditch again and although we didn't hear a Bittern booming on the way back there was a nice male Pochard, so I stopped to take a quick pic.



Pochard

We were nearly back at the car when Wendy caught a glimpse of something flying into a bush ahead of us. She had her suspicions as to what it was and stopped dead. I stopped too but unfortunately due to Wendy's terrible directions I was standing right in front of where she was looking, so she couldn't see a thing. She of course shouted at me to get out of the way, which I did, just in time for us to see the tail of a Cuckoo vanish into the bush before it flew right off. Brilliant! We were very relieved to be back at the car at 2.04pm and after a very thirsty Lyca had guzzled her drink we cracked open our lunch bag.....Om nom nom :). As we sat there eating we watched constant streams of Swifts coming in from the sea and carrying on up the coast, so at least we were finally seeing some vis mig happening. We'd also somehow managed to stay dry again despite the heavy downpour and dodgy looking sky before we'd set off :). After we'd had lunch I found out that our walk had been a very acceptable 4.3miles and we set off again at 2.28pm.

It was now 16c and although the weather was perking up I got a report, which just rubbed salt in our wounds. We'd skillfully managed to dodge not only the rain but also 5x Spoonbill and a Ring Ouzel at Burnham Dunes :O! Grrrrrrrrrr! What was going on with us and Ring Ouzels? When we'd missed out at Widdop we'd never bargained on struggling to find one in Norfolk at all :{.

Approaching Wells Wendy reckoned she'd go and have a look for a towel for Lyca as well as a fleece, so I dropped her off on the harbour. There was nowhere to park so I drove off to find somewhere to wait for her and we arranged to meet up in the same place when she texted me. Off she went with a list as long as her arm, so I prepared myself for a long wait. After 30 minutes or so I saw something that I didn't expect when 2 people went past casually walking some Alpaccas.....Hahahahaha! Then a **Spoonbill** flew over the road and I couldn't help but think that Wendy would be really cheesed off that she'd missed them, especially the Alpaca walkers :P. Finally I got her text and drove off to meet her back at the harbour. Luckily she'd found a towel for Lyca and finally had a thinner fleece for herself but had failed yet again to find any Freekeh, so the hunt continued.....Urrghhhhh! Next up was Blakeney Deli, swiftly followed by Weybourne Deli but she was still Freekeh-less! Surely there couldn't be many more Delis left for her to try? She could probably write a guidebook called 'The North Norfolk Coast Deli Trail' with all the experience she now has!

It was getting quite late by then and with no other plans we decided to head for home and then go out for tea. When we turned a corner near Holt I had to stop the car, as there were a group of Horses in the road. The riders were all standing at a gate next to a field obviously waiting to go in but couldn't. They didn't look best pleased and neither did the Horses but it looked as though the gate was locked or something.



Eh?

We waited for ages until they eventually lead the Horses into the side of the road so that vehicles could pass. It was 4.25pm when we got back to HQ and we started to think about where to go for food. Typically, Wendy wanted to go the Dun Cow but I really fancied The King's Arms, so who would win? In the end I agreed that if was anything on the menu for me I'd go to The Dun Cow but if not it'd have to be The King's Arms, so at 5.50pm we headed out.

I pulled up outside the Dun Cow and Wendy went inside to have a look at the menu. She reappeared quickly shaking her head, so jumped back in the car and I carried on down the coast to Blakeney. I got a park on the quay and we headed up the road to The King's Arms. There was nobody else out in the back room, so I grabbed a seat with Lyca while Wendy went to the bar to order. My Tempura Chicken was still on the Specials board, so Wendy picked the Spicy Parsnip Soup with rice and we were sorted. I knew The King's

Arms would be our best bet, it never lets me down :P. Our food was as nice as ever, Lyca behaved herself and when our plates had been cleared from the table the bloke came back with a couple of dog treats for her :). It's so nice when you can go out for tea with your dog and at the end they get a treat, so hopefully the Isle of Man will follow suit and be as hospitable now they've started opening their pub doors to our furry best friends :).

Back at HQ we had our baths and chilled out for a while, so I had a quick look at my emails to see if anyone had any replied about our Swift. Everyone on birdforum had said to email the pic to the BTO as they were stumped too, so I had. The BTO had replied and put down as a part leucistic Common Swift, which I accepted straight away. It didn't fit with anything else and I'd told them that in my email. I was happy with that but when they started rambling on patronizingly about how to ID an Alpine Swift, which I've seen myself and told them I'd discounted, I wasn't so happy. Grrrrrrrr! By 10.12pm we were ready for bed and yet again the moth trap sat dismantled in the corner of the kitchen still unused :{.

Wednesday 6th May

For some reason Lyca decided that she'd get us up at 6am but after ignoring her we went back to sleep until 7am. Feeling lazy we stayed there until 7.22am before we finally got up. I let her out for a wee and it was very obvious that she'd woken up full of the devil and was going to be a bit of a handful for the day.....Urrghhhhhh!



Bad dog :P

It was still really windy outside but at least the sun was shining, so hopefully we'd be in for a better day weather wise. After we'd got our stuff ready we headed out, devil dog in tow, taking a slight detour to Weybourne Deli for a pain au chocolat.

Our 1st plan was to do the Cley East Bank loop walk and when I parked up in the car park at 10am we looked down at the marshes and sighed as we watched the reeds being blown to bits. It looked like it was going to be another very windy walk like yesterday and we set off reluctantly over the road and into the reserve. As we walked down East Bank we listened for Bearded Tit but we didn't even hear one! We've noticed that since the terrible floods a couple of years ago there doesn't seem to be as many as there used to be and there's not as many reed beds either.



East Bank

Hopefully we're wrong and they just weren't feeling very vocal at the times we've been there since. There was a big white blob down by a pool at the far end of the path, which turned out to be a Spoonbill, so Wendy was pleased after missing out on the one that flew over at Wells. We chatted to a birder who told us that it'd been much closer earlier on, which sounded about right! There was a Marsh Harrier hinting at flying towards us, which they normally never do but this time I decided to hold on just in case. It finally came a lot closer than usual, so I got a slightly better shot of a Marsh Harrier but still not one I'm happy with.



Marsh Harrier

There was little else all the way down to the beach but it was surprisingly sheltered there and not like we'd expected. Having prepared ourselves for the worst it was actually very pleasant and Lyca was having great fun running around and paddling in the sea :).

Even though it's always a let down we went over for a look from North Hide Screen anyway. Usually there are birds there but the sun's always behind them and all you can see is black silhouettes, so they're not worth looking at but today there was literally nothing! There were 2x **Cormorants** and that was it, so we didn't hang about. We

carried on up the beach and all of a sudden the wind started to pick right up.....Noooooooooo! We took a bit of a battering until we came out at the car park. We'd seen absolutely nothing on our walk and there still weren't any Wagtails to look through in the Eye Field. There were just 6x Wheatears in the field, so we joined the West Bank path to start heading back to the car park.



Cley Windmill

When we got to end by the road we noticed that the £1.5 million house had finally been sold and even I had to admit that it didn't look as out of place as we'd 1st thought. The wooden exterior seemed to have weathered quite well, so it blended in much better with the surrounding buildings. I certainly wouldn't say no if someone gave it to me as a present :P All of a sudden I saw a bird ahead of us on the fence and raised my bins to see a nice **Whinchat** sitting there. I fired off a few distant record shots before it flew behind a bramble bush.



Whinchat

When we got round to the other side of the bush the bird was nowhere to be seen and seemed to have flown off very stealthily without us seeing it.....Doh! Ah well, we couldn't sniff at Whinchat at the end of the day and it was a good way to end our otherwise uneventful walk. Back at the car park Lyca had a drink before we headed into

the Visitor Centre to use the W.C.'s. Wendy went 1st and was very confused to find that the toilets had gone and where they used to be was now a kind of staff room. There was a bloke standing by the open door, so she asked him where they'd gone. He then very kindly took her outside and across to the new Training Centre building and showed her the new and very plush toilet block. While Wendy was admiring the delights of the toilets I'd been browsing through the books and had found one I fancied. When she'd shown me where to go and I too had admired them and put them to the test I came back out to buy my book. We then headed to the café where Wendy bought a cappuccino and I couldn't resist a slice of cake and we took it all back to the car.

It was only 12pm by then but we decided to have our lunch anyway, as we were pretty hungry. Lyca was tired after her walk and went to sleep on the back seat when we got back. I had a quick flick through my 'Norfolk Wildlife' book and was pleased to see that it gave loads of good info about new sites to see things we were interested in. Our next plan had been to go to Holkham Pines but the rain clouds were rolling in at an alarming rate, as it was so windy. Wendy was nearly falling asleep too, so I thought Weybourne would be a smaller walk.

When we arrived in the Weybourne car park the rain started, so given the fact that it was also blowing a gale we ditched it off and headed for home. It was only 1.22pm when we arrived back at HQ and annoyingly it didn't look as though it was going to rain there at all.....Grrrrrrrr! It was still too windy to make for a pleasant walk anywhere though, so I set about tackling the editing of all our scenery shots to make good use of the free time. The forecast was much better for the rest of the week, so Wendy decided to give the now very scruffy looking Lyca a bath. As usual it turned into a right palaver and even the bathroom needed a thorough drying afterwards.



Bathroom

After we'd dried her and she looked all nice and fluffy, she wanted to go out into the garden for a wee. This typically coincided with the heavens opening, so all our hard work had been in vain.....Urrghhhh! While we pottered about and relaxed it suddenly hit us that it was our last full day tomorrow :(It seemed like only 5minutes ago that we'd opened the doors of HQ, unpacked our stuff and settled in!

To cheer ourselves up we thought we'd go out for tea again, as tomorrow we'd be too busy packing up and preparing to leave. Lyca had her dinner and while Wendy was washing her bowl at the kitchen sink she spotted a Grey Squirrel in the garden. We watched it foraging around for a while and luckily it went totally unnoticed by Lyca who was asleep again after her traumatic bath.....Hahahaha! Before I'd gone away I'd set everything up at home to auto download a game I wanted on its launch day, so it would be ready for me to play when I got home. It would be a good commiseration prize for

the end of the holiday and would lessen the blow of being back home. I'd read online that the download wasn't starting and that you needed to turn your PS4 on to set it off. Nooooo! After my initial panic I thought about it logically and used my PSVita to remotely turn my PS4 on over the internet. Straight away the auto download started, so I breathed a sigh of relief.....Phew! How clever is that though? Modern technology for ya :). It would all be ready and waiting for me when I got back home.....Sorted!

At 5.55pm we headed out for tea and had seen a nice looking pub just down the road called The Wheatsheaf. We'd checked it out online and the menu looked good as did the reviews, so we were happy to try it even though it was somewhere new. We arrived 4minutes later and were greeted by a very friendly bloke who showed us to a table and instantly brought a huge bowl of water out for Lyca. They gave us a couple of minutes and then a girl came over to take our drinks order. Wendy as usual asked for a Rose spritzer with soda, no ice and I got a Coke. When Wendy took her 1st sip she pulled a face and said it wasn't soda but lemonade, which wasn't what she'd asked for at all! Typically there was no one to be seen, so she got up and went to find someone. She found the girl round the corner and after apologizing to her she told her that she'd asked for soda. The girl was very nice and apologetic and went off to change it and returned quickly with the corrected drink. We scoured the menu and weren't ready when the girl came back to take our order because having thought I'd be spoilt for choice with the vast curry menu I was struggling. All the curry's seemed to have cream in them, which didn't sound right, so Wendy asked her when she came back but she didn't know and went off to ask the boss. He came out and clarified that they did indeed all have cream in them, so Wendy awkwardly told him we'd need more time due to my lactose intolerance. He then stood there and rattled off what he could make without cream or what other things were on the menu but I just wanted him to go away, as I was feeling quite uncomfortable! Since when did cream belong in every curry known to man anyway? I was looking forward to having a curry too.....Grrrrrrrr! There was only one thing left for me to have and that was Cod and Chips, which I didn't fancy at all but it was too late to leave by then and the bloke came back for the 3rd time to ask if we were ready to order yet. Wendy ordered mine and the Goat's cheese tartlet with caramelized red onions and a side of chips for herself. We'd had high hopes about this place but all of sudden we were starting to doubt it very much. When the food came mine was pretty much bog standard Cod and Chips but not being a fan in the 1st place and burning my mouth on the 1st mouthful might have had something to do with it. Wendy's tartlet was undercooked, the pastry was still raw apart from around the outer edge and the red onion certainly hadn't been caramelized by any stretch of the imagination. She picked her way round that and ate the goat's cheese from the middle with my unwanted salad but we both agreed that the chips were very nice though :P! Wendy wasn't feeling like complaining again after her outburst at The Red Lion and after paying the bill we left feeling disappointed. We definitely weren't having much luck on the food front on this trip and I felt vindicated that my constant vote for the Kings Arms was justified :P

As we drove down the track to HQ we found 4x **Stock Doves** feeding on the ground before I parked up outside at 7.09pm. Wendy went off for a bath and then made the sarnies to save time in the morning. It was going to be a nice day, so we wanted to get out as early as possible to make the most of it. Yet again it was far too windy to put the moth trap out and the sky looked dodgy again too. There were literally no birds about in the whole of Norfolk and with the relentlessly strong wind the conditions weren't even right to go looking for Dragonflies or Butterflies to add a bit of interest. By 9.40pm we we'd had enough and switched off the TV and headed to bed.

Thursday 7th May

After a great night's sleep we were up and about at 6.34am and the weather outside was looking good. It was finally sunny and more like what we'd been hoping for all week, so we decided that we'd give Kelling Heath a shot. There was no guarantee we'd see anything decent but we kept our fingers crossed that we'd at least bump into John again, so he could give us an update on what had been happening out on the heath. We left HQ

earlier than usual at 8.30am and just 12minutes later I parked up in the Kelling Heath car park.

Although it was sunny my car was only reading 9c, so it was hard to know what to wear. Wendy kept her coat on due to the early morning chill that was still lingering but I decided to go for the optimistic approach and left mine behind. I had to wonder if I'd made the right choice though when we set off and the cool breeze cut straight through my fleece. As we walked through the heath we started to notice some small moths, which could only mean one thing. They were **Common Heath Moths** that were feeding on the heather and our 1st sighting of these early moths of the year. The air was filled with the sound of **Willow Warblers**, **Chiffchaffs** and **Yellowhammers** who sounded as happy of the sunshine and lack of wind as we were. We remembered where John had told us was another good spot for Dartfords, which was closer to the car park than our usual site and headed straight there.



Kelling Heath

As we were approaching my ears pricked up and I asked Wendy if she'd heard it. Fortunately she had, so we'd both just heard a **Dartford Warbler** calling.....Yes! We've lost count of the amount of times we've been to Kelling and come away empty handed, so this was brilliant. The only problem we had now was to try and find the elusive little bird, as it was calling from deep inside a huge area of gorse!



Dartford bush

We stood in front of the dense area of very high and bright yellow gorse and waited.....and waited :/. We could hear it as clear as a bell but it just didn't want to come out and show itself. We were being very quiet, so as not to put the bird off but then we heard loud voices coming up behind us. We turned around to find a Tour Guide with a large group of people and he was telling them all about the Dartfords.....Uh oh! If they joined us and carried on talking at the same volume we may as well forget it and go and try our luck further on. We'd nailed this bird and we didn't want our chances scuppered by anyone. We carried on looking into the bushes and hoped for the best but then we heard the Guide saying, "We'll leave them in peace, there's another pair over the road." Phew! We thought that was very decent of him and just hope he found the others to show his group. Just as they turned around the bird flew and gave us a split second view before vanishing again.....Doh! We weren't going to give up though and Wendy took a wander round to the other side of the bushes to see if she could pin it down there. We both stood patiently for a few more minutes until the bird finally flew up onto a branch in the open and started to sing.....Yes! I fired off some shots and we both had some cracking views, which turned out to be our best ever.



Dartford Warbler

Strangely, even though I managed to fire off over a hundred shots very quickly, when I checked through them over 90% looked like they were out of focus! I was gutted. This was my new 7dmkII, which had been spot on focusing up until then. I started to panic that when it got knocked onto the road at Titchwell maybe it'd been damaged after all? Looking back I think it was more likely that the yellow glare coming off the gorse caused it some problems or acted like a weird heat haze. The shots were still my best ever Dartfords so I couldn't complain too much.

It was totally unfazed by us and carried on singing its heart out for ages but eventually it flew off and although we could still hear it there was no point in pursuing it. Poor Wendy was feeling very frustrated with not being able to carry her camera but her back just wasn't up to it and she knew she'd not get a chance like that again in a hurry. We'd had our time with it, so we left it in peace hoping that it had a successful breeding season to help boost the population. What a cracking little bird :).

After that we crossed over the road to go for look at the usual place over the railway line. We could hear a bird singing and looked into a tree only to find a Garden Warbler sitting there out in the open. The birds were certainly being very obliging this morning. I crossed my fingers that my camera would behave itself and fired off some shots.

Although I'd somehow managed to mess up all the shots of it completely in the clear and had to settle for one of it more hidden away it was still my first proper shot of a Garden Warbler so all was not lost.



Garden Warbler

We then noticed 2x birds flying over and held our breath before confirming our suspicions. When we got them in our bins we could clearly see that they were a pair of **Turtle Doves** :). There were now 2x Garden Warblers singing and we thought it was a bit strange when we noticed that one of them had pulled a female Blackcap! I know their song is very similar but surely the confused Blackcap should've known better?

After we'd crossed over the railway line Wendy saw a **Lizard** running across the path in front of her and we could hear a Steam Train coming down the track. As Wendy's camera was out of battery I'd given her mine to use instead, so she got into position to take a photo of it as it went past. I watched it come round the corner and thought, "Now!" but when I turned to look at Wendy she looked flustered and I wondered what on earth she was doing. The train went by and I think it's the 1st time we've ever been there to see it happen, so I asked her did she get the shot. She didn't look happy and shouted over, "Noooooooooooo, I pressed the "beep" off button instead of the "beep" shutter! I couldn't stop myself from cracking up laughing because she wasn't going to get that opportunity again in a hurry either.....Useless! :P. Carrying on alongside the railway line we kept our eyes peeled for the Woodlarks as well as John but there was no sign of either. It's not unusual to miss out on Woodlark but John? Where was he? He didn't gain the name The Ghost of Kelling Heath for nothing but for once he didn't seem to be around. We'd noticed that there was still a total absence of Stonechats after they'd all suffered from the terrible winter a couple of years ago, so there was still nothing to give the Dartford Warblers away. We hadn't heard any of them either over on that side, so we hoped that they'd just moved sites rather than gone completely. All of a sudden a Butterfly caught my eye and I called out, "**Green Hairstreak!**" to Wendy. It'd landed on the gorse bush nearby, so we went over for a look. We'd only ever seen these Butterflies in Scotland before then, so it was a pretty good and surprising find. I didn't have my macro lens with me and had to use my point and click, so I handed Lyca over to Wendy and set about trying to get a shot decent enough for the article. The wind had picked up a bit, so it wasn't easy with the tiny Butterfly being blown around all over the place but eventually I had a photo that would do the job.



Green Hairstreak

My little Sony point and click always impresses me with its Macro capability.

While I was doing that and taking ages Wendy had got bored and had wandered further up the path. She'd stopped at the end where she had a great view out over the fields and to the sea.



Cracking view

While she stood there admiring the scenery she could hear the cooing of the Turtle Doves coming from the trees behind us. When I wandered up I could hear them too and that's the 1st time either of us had ever heard one calling. All of a sudden it became decidedly chilly and looking up at the sky we wouldn't have been at all surprised if it had started to rain before we got back to the car.



Uh oh!

With that in mind we hurried off to try and beat the downpour heading our way hearing our 1st **Goldcrest** of the trip calling in the trees. Back at the railway line we could hear another train coming, so this time I gave Lyca to Wendy and got myself into position to try to make up for her mishap earlier. As it appeared from round the corner my heart sank when instead of the nice Steam Engine filling the frame there was a horrible 2-carriage diesel thing chugging it's way towards me. I laughed out loud and pressed the shutter anyway.....Urghhhhh!



Not quite what I had in mind

We had a look for Adders on the way back and checked all the areas John had shown us in the past but there was no sign of any. We've only ever seen 1 Adder before and that was at Kelling Heath but we've not been lucky enough to find any more since.

Luckily it was still dry when we got back to the car at 11.50am and although it was saying it was 15.5c it felt much cooler. After our eventful start, having had our best ever views of Dartford Warbler, Garden Warbler and Green Hairstreak and hearing Turtle Doves cooing for the 1st time the walk back had been very quiet. This just reinforced what we already knew, that Kelling Heath is definitely a place to visit as early in the day as possible. We gave Lyca her drink and had our lunch while we wondered where to go next. The decision was made even harder when the rain, which hadn't been forecast, finally started. This was meant to be the best day weather wise but it wasn't panning

out as we'd expected. We'd hoped to go looking for Butterflies and Dragon/Damselflies next, with so few birds around but that would be pointless if it was raining. After lunch we bit the bullet, hoping that it was just a passing shower and stuck to our plan.

When I parked up in the car park at Holt Country Park at 12.25pm the sky was still grey and we wondered why we'd bothered. We didn't have anything better to do, so we just had to keep our fingers crossed that the sun would reappear while we were there. We waited around for more rain to pass over and then set off towards the Visitors Centre. I was after an Ice cream but we were totally surprised to find it closed. Last time we'd been there it was open and the reports board was full of Silver-washed Fritillaries sightings! We carried on down the path, which had been teeming with various types of Butterflies last time but we didn't see even one. I decided to go a different way this time, to mix things up a bit, so we followed the colour coordinated arrows on the posts for the Butterfly Trail. Wendy wasn't happy and kindly pointed out that there were no Butterflies around, so it would be pointless. After a while I realized that we were doing the walk backwards and we became slightly lost, which didn't help with the fact that Wendy had of course been right.....Doh! Not surprisingly the Dragonfly pool was also completely dead and even when the sun poked through the clouds briefly there was nothing flying around.



Dragonfly pool

With that we headed back to car and got back in at 1.01pm feeling totally fed up. What were we going to do for the rest of our last day in Norfolk? Normally we'd be grabbing every opportunity and visiting as many places as possible but our options were very limited.

Still clutching at straws we arrived at Sheringham Park at 1.13pm and I parked up just in time for a really heavy downpour :(We sat in the car waiting for it to pass over and realized that we'd been there before.



Déjà vu

I don't think we've ever been to Sheringham Park without having to wait for the rain to stop before! The car park was very busy and we watched various soaking wet dog walkers hurrying back to the shelter of their cars. Lethargy had well and truly set in and Wendy started to flag and was nearly falling asleep, while Lyca was curled up on the back seat, out for the count....Urrghhhh! The rain was lashing against the car windows and we wondered if it'd ever stop, so we could actually get out!

Eventually at 1.50pm it stopped and the sky turned blue again, so this was our window of opportunity to get going. We headed straight for the feeders hearing Goldcrests calling from the massive trees that lined the entire path. We started off trying to check them for Firecrest but they were so high up and impossible to see that we quickly had to give up on that idea or we'd have been there for the next week! Instead we hoped we'd be able to pick up the call of a Firecrest, which would save a lot of time as well as our necks! I wandered over to the feeders, while Wendy scoured the Rhododendrons and I was pleased to find a **Nuthatch** on one of the peanut feeders.

With the sun having come out after all the rain the midgies were having a field day and were out in force. There were clouds of them everywhere swarming above the paths and we had no choice but to walk straight through them.....Nice! We then saw a Butterfly, which turned out to be just a **Green-veined White** but we'd dodged showers by hiding under bushes for long enough and there were more black clouds rolling in, so we thought it was about time we turned back. Just then Wendy stopped and raised her bins, pointing in the direction of a Rhododendron.



Firecrest bushes

She'd heard a call that made her ears prick up and all of sudden she squealed, "**Firecrest!**" She'd found one but it was deep in the bush and try as I might I just couldn't find it. This was made worse by the fact that she then announced a 2nd bird, which was even more well hidden and only showed itself for a brief moment.....Aarrghhhh! I scoured that bush with a fine-toothed comb but never caught so much as a glimpse but I could hear them calling. Wendy had also lost them both and it started raining again, so we stood under the bush opposite and waited. They never did appear again and when the rain stopped we gave up and made a hasty retreat back to the car.

When we got back we let Lyca in and then paid the Gift Shop a visit but by the time we came out the rain was torrential and only 10c but feeling much colder. It was only 3.06pm and having struggled to fill the day up till then, as it was, there was nothing else for it but to call it a day. We were back at HQ by 3.32pm and couldn't believe that our last day, which was meant to be the sunniest of the week, had turned into a wash out. I suppose it gave Wendy more time to start the packing and she washed all our dirty stuff, to save her doing it when we got back. I had a look through my pics of the morning at Kelling Heath and wasn't happy when it confirmed my Dartford Warbler shots were nearly all out of focus and the Garden Warbler shots were all ruined by leaves in front of it, although typically they were in focus.....Aarrghhhh!

With so few birds, no insects about and Wendy being completely out of action it'd certainly been a bad holiday for photography :(. Later on it started to brighten up but the sky still looked dodgy, so I didn't bother going out to Cley again. While we watched TV and ate toast we had a horrible feeling that since it was the only suitable night we should be making the effort to go to Kelling Heath for Nightjar. We'd gone past the point by then and just hoped we wouldn't regret our decision too much when we were back at home. I wanted to tally up our trip list but Wendy had the Mac so we still had no idea how many (or how few!) birds we'd seen over the past week. It was the general election and we knew that it was going to be a bad night for the future of British Wildlife. Eventually we decided that seeing as it didn't look like it was going to rain for the 1st night of the week we'd put the moth trap out. Finally! For security purposes I had to plug it into a socket in the bedroom and keep the window partially open to allow the cable to be outside. I went out for a look when I let Lyca out for a wee and there was 1x Hebrew Character on the wall of the house. It hadn't even gone into the trap and as we got ready for bed at 10.20pm we had a horrible feeling that we were going to have a disappointing catch.

Friday 8th May

At 5am we were woken up by the sound of a Kestrel screeching just next to the house.....Urrghhhh! If the window hadn't been open we probably wouldn't have heard it and could've slept for longer but at least we'd been able to trap for once, so we couldn't complain too much. It was misty outside and I went straight out for a look to see what surprises we had in store. Firstly I noticed that there were a few on the wall of the house, which was a good sign and I quickly potted the ones I didn't recognize. I then brought the trap in and opened it up for a quick recce. Although there wasn't huge numbers of Moths in there some of them were quite interesting and potential lifers :).

The list is as follows:

Waved Umber x1

Silver Y x1

Hebrew Character x9

Pebble Prominent x1

Flame Shoulder x1

Angle Shades x1

Clouded Drab x1

Streamer x2

Grey Pine Carpet x2

Shuttle-shaped Dart x1

Oak tree Pug x2

Frosted Green x1

We'd ended up with 23 Moths of 12 species with 5 of them being lifers for us both, which wasn't too bad considering.



Waved Umber



Frosted Green



Shuttle Shaped Dart



Streamer

After we'd ID'd the Moths and got ready to go out, which took far longer than we'd expected, we left at 8.02am. Maybe it was a blessing that we hadn't been able to trap all week or we'd been getting up so late we wouldn't have been getting out before midday! As it was our last day and we hadn't been there yet I thought that Kelling Quags would be worth a check but from a different angle.

We arrived at Weybourne car park at 8.17am and it was a lovely sunny start to the day. I reckoned that we could walk along the coast and check the bushes until we ended up at Kelling Quags to view the water meadow. We'd never done the walk along the coast that way before so I was interested to see what the habitat for migrants looked like. There were loads of Sand Martins and Swallows feeding over a pool hidden amongst the reeds and nice Wheatear was also flitting around the car park so I nabbed a quick photo.



Wheatear

We headed off over the stony beach but no sooner had we set off than Wendy shrieked, "Poo!" and pointed to the ground to warn me. Urrghhhh there was dog poo everywhere and we had to be very careful where we were standing, as it was well camouflaged amongst the stones. There was a poo bin in the car park too, so absolutely no excuse for not picking it up! I spotted another pool a bit further away, which had quite a high muddy bank around it, so I stopped for a look.



Hidden pool

As I scanned the area my eyes nearly popped out of my head when I spotted a **Fox** staring straight at us from the left side of the far bank. I called it to Wendy and then tried to get a very distant record shot, while it lay soaking up the early morning sun.



Fox

We couldn't help but think that it'd better watch its back now the Tories were back in power wanting to dust off their Horses and Hounds to keep their hunting fraternity mates sweet :(It quickly got sick of our attention and moved out of view, so we carried on and looked longingly at the amazing looking coastal bushes on our left imagining what could be in them. They looked like the perfect spot for any tired migrant to drop down into and indeed they are but there was absolutely nothing. We could just picture a

Wryneck or Ring Ouzel there but after a week of failing to find either we knew the image was destined to stay in our imaginations. We walked all the way over to the turn off to the water meadows without seeing anything of any interest and the bushes remained totally dead. The water meadow was also dead (as usual!) but there were a couple of Avocets and Egyptian Geese there, which were new birds for the pool. We stopped for a look about but soon gave up and headed back hearing Whimbrel calling.



Kelling Water Meadows

Back on the path a Whitethroat was doing their usual trick of singing like made but not sitting in the open. Eventually it did and although it was a bit far away I tried for a shot anyway.



Common Whitethroat

After that we managed to get nearly all the way back without seeing a sausage but were getting some cracking views. Even Lyca was enjoying them!



Nice view

Suddenly Lyca was looking very eager to get up ahead and pulling like mad. There was a Whimbrel on the path and instead of flying off or going into the field it was running up the path ahead of us. It was never going to get rid of us that way and we wondered how long it would take it to realize. Lyca was pulling on her lead to try and catch it up while it carried on running for its life. Eventually the penny dropped and it took a sharp left hand turn and ran off down the dunes away from us. When we approached the area where the Fox had been we were going to have a look to see if it was still there but all of a sudden we were distracted by a call. I instantly ID'd it and then looked up the path to find 2x **Yellow Wagtails**, which instantly flew off and headed up the coast. Phew! Finally we'd found something to add a bit of interest to uneventful walk :).

The Fox was long gone and we were back at the car by 10.12am and needing an end of holiday treat to cheer ourselves up with so we headed off to Weybourne Deli. Wendy nipped in to get a pain au chocolat but even though it was still early they'd already sold out.....Boooooooo :(She ended up buying the only thing they had, which was a pastry with a dollop of what Wendy reckoned was apricot jam in the middle. Whatever it was it was very nice but with nothing about and nowhere to go locally we decided to go back to HQ, pack up, leave Norfolk and try our luck at Frampton Marsh instead.

We were back by 10.23am and after we'd emptied the fridge, tidied the cottage up a bit and loaded the car we were just about ready to go at 11.25am. Wendy took a wander round the side of the house and into the courtyard to get a pic and bumped into Emma, who we'd met last year.



Front of cottage

She got chatting to her about our stay and how much we'd loved the cottage. The conversation soon diverted to Wildlife and interestingly Emma said that she was worried about the Grey Partridges. She said that that having lost the 10 years of grants to keep the field borders Wildlife friendly the population that had built up because of it would be struggling. Apparently their numbers had really increased and they'd also had Turtle Doves on the farm over the years but without the borders they wouldn't survive. The neighbouring gamekeeper had also been done for poisoning and shooting birds of prey due his concern over his farmed Pheasants.....Grrrrrrrrrrrr! We can actually remember that story when it hit the headlines! After saying our goodbyes we drove away wishing that our week had been as exciting as our last one but sadly there just hadn't been anything happening.

Our next stop was to get rid of our left over bread to the Ducks and Gulls at Salhouse. After that we found ourselves in a traffic jam in the narrow streets of Cley again, which now seems customary. As we sat there we noticed that the Swifts had well and truly arrived, as they soared screeching low over the houses. Having watched them streaming in off the sea it was nice to see them established on their territory. Next up was Blakeney Spa for some cash and by then it was 16.5c but we wanted to get on the road to make it up the Frampton Marsh as early as possible. We'd got as far as Wells when I had an alert go off on my phone, which had been very few and far between all week. I had a look to see what and where it was and could've screamed. There was a Wryneck at Cromer but having driven away from that neck of the woods and not wanting to turn back, even for a Wryneck, we decided to just carry on. If we'd stuck to original plan of staying in Norfolk until 4pm we'd have been heading straight there but it was just typical of our luck that we'd chosen to leave early. It was the 1st Wryneck reported in weeks too, so we were slightly gutted :(.

Needing to fill my car up again I pulled in at Burnham Deepdale petrol Station. Wendy was still being bugged by where the Craghopper's shop was and after she'd been into Fat Face, as they now had a Sale on, she wandered over to where the sign was. The only place she hadn't tried was the end unit, which looked like the reception area for the Youth Hostel. She cautiously went in and could hear the staff behind the counter talking about how they'd found various random items, like dirty socks, behind the beds in some of the rooms. They were complaining about the rooms not being cleaned thoroughly enough and saying that it needed sorting! Wendy turned a corner only to find that the back wall was full of Craghopper's clothing! She was less impressed than she'd expected when she found that all the women's fleeces were in bright girly colours and in no sizes below a 10! It was a good job she'd found one in Wells after all. She came back to the car and we set off, making a beeline for our traditional visit to Flitcham Abbey Farm.

After what Emma had said earlier we started to notice how all the Farms had got rid of the wildflower borders. We always used to admire them due to how nice they looked with the long grasses and colourful red Poppies, which were always buzzing with insects. Approaching Flitcham we saw that it too had ploughed them all up and returned them to clinical crops, which was a pretty sorry sight. I parked up in the car park for Abbey Bird Hide at 1.08pm and we decided to eat our lunch before going in. I was munching away on my sarnie when I caught something out of the corner of my eye. It was a **Bank Vole**, which ran across the path but Wendy couldn't see it from where she was sitting. After lunch we left Lyca in the car and headed down the boardwalk to the hide not expecting to see much as usual.



Flitcham

There were the usual Ducks, Geese, Coots and Moorhens all of which had their babies in tow on and around the pond. In the field were Lapwing and **Stock Doves** and we heard a **Little Grebe** calling but there was no sight or sound of the Kingfisher. We'd been searching high and low in all the usual places for the Little Owls too but they didn't seem to be about either. There were lots of Rabbits about so thought I would add a shot of one of them to my portfolio :). Now all we needed was a hungry Stoat to bounce across the field to add a bit of action!



Rabbit

I had a quick flick through the Visitors book and read it out to Wendy. The Little Owl had been seen the day before on the Oak tree, which we'd already scoured, so Wendy went in for another look. Seconds later she chirped up with, "**Little Owl!**" and told me where it was. It was asleep on the uprooted roots of the tree and blended in so well that we'd obviously overlooked it 1st time around.....Oooops! It didn't move a muscle and was totally out for the count the whole time we were there and although it was miles off I grabbed a record shot anyway :P.



Spot the Little Owl

Having found what we'd gone for, we went back to the car where Lyca was eagerly waiting for our return. It was 1.45pm when we left for our next stop and we just hoped that it'd be worth it considering we'd left a Wryneck behind to go there! The journey to Frampton was pretty non eventful and boring, so Wendy ended up taking a pic of Sutton Bridge as we approached it.



Sutton Bridge

When we arrived at RSPB Frampton Marsh I parked the car and we looked up at the sky. It looked as though it was going to rain at any moment, it was cold and just to top it all off it was windy too! Even though the weather wasn't the best there were hundreds of Swifts flying round catching insects so I had to have a go and test out the 7d mkII in the poor conditions. It did pretty well really and I managed to get an OK shot of one, albeit in terrible light!



Swift

Wendy went into the Visitors Centre to use the WC's and have a look at the reports board before we set off. She got chatting to one of the volunteers who told her that there'd been a Little Gull hanging around but he didn't know where it'd gone. She thanked him and they both raised her bins with Wendy quickly finding the bird flying around with the Black-headed Gulls right at the back. She told him she'd found it and they both watched it before his attention turned to her new bins. After telling him what they were she was feeling awkward and like she should give him a go of them but before she could offer he started talking about the 2x male Garganey that had been seen the day before. He said that they hadn't been seen since and that they'd all been out there throughout the course of the day and checked thoroughly. The reports board was as uninspiring as she'd feared, so she came back out to tell me what she knew. She showed me the Little Gull but as it was so far away I didn't even consider even a record shot. By

the time we set off it'd started raining, so it was up with the hoods on our coats and we braced ourselves for a downpour.



Frampton Marsh

It was really cold as we wandered up the main footpath knowing that we couldn't go into the good bits of the reserve to view the pools properly because of having Lyca with us. There were **Ruff** in various shapes and forms everywhere but they were keeping just a touch too far away for any really nice shots.



Ruff

We could hear a Sedge Warbler singing really close and when we found it in the bush ahead of us I was keen to try for a shot. It was quite obliging and sang out in the open for a while, so I ended up with this shot.



Sedge Warbler

We walked all the way down to the bank, which runs along the saltmarsh but looking out over the flat expanse of sand and channels it was completely dead.



Saltmarsh

All the birds were around the pools on the reserve, so we tried to view them instead even though it was from afar. Wendy started laughing and pointed out 2x Hares chasing around at the speed of light. After they'd gone out of view for a while one of them came back round on it's own and continued to race around the place as though it was just enjoying itself :). With nothing else about and it being so cold and windy we gave up and headed back. As we passed the Sedgie bushes we spotted 2x Little Grebes in a channel and stopped to watch them. I wandered off to try for a better Sedgie shot while Wendy watched one of the Grebes clumsily haul itself out of the water and waddle like it was wearing flippers across the mud. It launched itself back into the water of the next channel along where it looked much more at home. Those feet just aren't made for walking! :P.

Nearby were quite a few Dark-bellied Brent geese. It still confused me as to how they were all still here even though we were into May. Even though the light was still terrible I took a shot as they were quite close.



Brent Goose

Back at the car it was 4.17pm and having wanted to go into the Visitors Centre to use the WC's before we left I was gutted to see a volunteer pulling the shutters down and locking up for the night. I had a look at the feeders next to the building and found a Yellowhammer sitting there but underneath it was a nice little **Tree Sparrow**. Having failed to see one all week it was nice to have added another new bird to our pitifully small trip list. Although it'd rained the whole time we'd been at Frampton all of a sudden it became much heavier, so we thanked our lucky stars that it'd held off until we were back at the car. It looked as though it was set to stay as well, so that didn't fare well for our last stop of the day. We'd failed to even hear Nightingales at Whisby on our 1st day, so we'd planned to give it another shot on the outward journey but if it was raining heavily surely we didn't have a hope in hell's chance? Urrghhhhhh! It was far too early to just head up to the pub and we had no better ideas, so we decided to just go for it and hope that the weather was better there, even though it was only about an hour away. As we set off it looked as though it was raining as far as the eye could see and it carried on lashing it down relentlessly. It appears to be customary for it to rain every time we end a holiday and I have to drive to Heysham!

When we arrived at Whisby at 5.25pm it was no exception and the sky was dark and it was raining heavily. By heavily I mean HEAVILY not just rain but torrential rain. There were loads of people sitting in their cars obviously waiting to see if it would stop before going out as well as those who'd gone anyway returning to their cars looking as though they'd been for a swim fully clothed with their equally as soaked dogs. Grrrrrrrr! We really didn't want ourselves or Lyca to get that wet knowing that we'd never dry out in time to go to the pub. Now what? I ran over to the Visitor Centre to use the loos, while Wendy gave Lyca her dinner in the back seat. When I got back we had our tea as well, which was identical to what we'd had for lunch.....boring! It was all we had left at the cottage though and we were starving, so it was better than nothing. There were a few people standing around by the info board dressed in full waterproofs with bins round their necks and the car park was busy even though the majority of people were still sitting in their cars. We started to wonder whether they'd come for some kind of group walk for Nightingales or something, so it was shame the weather was so awful. Eventually I got sick of waiting and decided to go out to test the water (no pun intended)

anyway. I grabbed my waterproof trousers from the back and put them on, zipped up my coat and pulled up my hood. Wendy was definitely not budging so it was all down to me!

Off I went into the rain at 5.54pm wondering why on earth I was bothering receiving some sympathetic smiles from the people standing by the entrance. I wanted to make it as quick and painless as possible, so I put a move on and motored my way up the path and turned the corner to where we'd heard them on previous visits. I wasn't sure at 1st but I thought I heard one singing but because of the weather conditions I convinced myself that it couldn't have been. Further along I heard it again and stopped for a listen. This time I knew it was definitely a **Nightingale** and then I heard another and then another :O! Finally I caught a glimpse of a brown bird and raised my bins to get a cracking view of a Nightingale. In the end I'd tallied up 5 birds, so it was looking good and I ran back to the car to tell Wendy.



A bit soggy!

I was back by 6.25pm and Wendy, who was by then very bored was pretty gutted that she'd not been there. There was no way she was going to miss out though. Being the Gentleman that I am I offered her my waterproof trousers and this was enough to persuade her to come and have a look. With the nearest bird being only 2minutes away we weren't going to be long, so at 6.35pm we decided to leave Lyca in the car and hurried our way over towards the reserve. Luckily the rain started to ease off a tiny bit and I don't know if they'd picked up on my actions but the group of people had more than doubled, so they must've seen it as their time to go too. Feeling optimistic that we didn't have far to go and that we had it in the bag imagine my total surprise when we got to where I'd heard my 1st bird and were greeted with total silence! What the....? Unbelievable!



Nightingale path

We stood around for ages waiting but there was nothing, so Wendy suggested carrying on in the hope of hearing one further up the path. We trudged our way further and further up but didn't hear so much as a squeak. Uh oh! Wendy made for a sorry sight as she stood there in the rain looking dejected, peering through her hood with my huge waterproof trousers rolled up, so they fitted her :P. She couldn't believe that after all that they'd all shut up just in time for her to get there. What about the big group of people who'd all met up to go and see them too? Who knows how far some of them had travelled for it? Oh dear :(Just as she thought her luck had completely run out our ears pricked up! What was that? We waited to hear it again and fortunately, much to Wendy's relief, it was indeed a Nightingale....Yey :). We thought we had it pinned down to one bush in particular but after a while it sounded like it was coming from the opposite side of the path entirely. They're brilliant at throwing their voices but eventually we worked out that there were 2 different birds singing. We could hear another back from where we'd come from too, so we took a wander back down. We managed to get a fleeting glimpse of it flying between bushes and it dropped quite low down. Unbelievably I even managed to fire a record shot off, where you can just about tell it's a Nightingale through the dense foliage. Again there was no way my old 7d could have got this shot as it was at ISO16000!!!



The group had caught us up by that point and the leader stopped to ask if we'd had any joy as they hadn't. We told them that we'd seen one a minute ago, which was now somewhere in amongst the dense foliage in front of us. He thanked us but didn't look hopeful, as he'd have a job on his hands to get every member of his group onto such an elusive little bird. The rain was by now nowhere near as bad as when I'd been out on my own, so it surprised me as to how much less vocal the Nightingales had been for Wendy. It was a relief for us though and I didn't get nearly as wet as I thought I would've. Poor Lyca had been in the car for ages and in fact could've come with us if we'd known it was going to ease off, so we thought we'd better go back to her. Considering how bad the weather had been it hadn't been a bad last day after all. We'd added Yellow Wagtail, Little Gull, Ruff, Tree Sparrow, Little Owl and Nightingale to our trip list, so we couldn't sniff at that. Back at the car Wendy changed her shoes and took off my waterlogged waterproofs and at 7.30pm we drove away with our next stop estimated at 10pm.

Wendy was soon bored of the drive up north, so was on the lookout for the sign for Blyth Services. I didn't want to stop but she needed a wee and to stretch her legs. When we arrived the sky turned the blackest I've even seen in the daytime and it started chucking it down with torrential rain again and after she'd been inside and Lyca had also been out we carried on our journey. The rain didn't stop and the sky was so dark it was like the middle of the night and the visibility was dreadful although this photo doesn't quite show how bad it was.



Urrghhhh!

There was so much standing water on the roads that I aquaplaned several times and again I went right up the A1 and through Harrogate like the last time we came back from Norfolk. This is a much better route back avoiding all the jams on the M62 but it's a shame not to see the nice Yorkshire scenery as we always go through in the dark. We finally arrived at The New Inn at Clapham at 10.06pm and breathed a huge sigh of relief :).

We were tired, cold and just wanted to be back at home when we ventured into the pub. Lyca as usual stood up on her back legs and started dancing, so I bundled her into a corner and sat down while Wendy went to the bar. There was a good few people next door in the restaurant still and the main bar was quite busy too but as usual we sat in the small reception bar near the doorway and Lyca curled up on the floor and went to sleep. We had the room to ourselves until some of the guests from upstairs came out from the restaurant for a nightcap before retiring for the night. They were very loud, very posh and made their presence well known, so our peace was shattered in an instant

and Wendy could hardly hear her Mum on the other end of the phone. We reckoned they were already well oiled but they started chatting to the landlord like he was their long lost best friend. He, obviously having a nose for money to keep his bank balance healthy, proceeded to bring out all his finest and most expensive whiskeys, which they were all sniffing and promising to try the next night. He was so engrossed in his somewhat lavish guests that Wendy was totally overlooked as she stood at the bar patiently waiting to be served another drink.....Haha. After we'd drunk our drinks and had a belly full of the cringe worthy conversation on the table next to us we decided that at 11pm it was time to get the last leg of the drive over before I fell asleep.

Outside it was freezing and felt more like winter than May but at least it wasn't windy! Luckily it wasn't a long drive from Clapham and when we reached Asda I pulled in to fill my car up with petrol. With time to kill we went into the store for a nosey and to get some milk. While she was thinking about milk she remembered that of all her new kitchen appliances the only thing that didn't match was the kettle, so she ended up buying a new one :P. After that we headed straight to Heysham and were the last to arrive at 1.03am to join the queue of other passengers waiting to board. Lyca instantly knew where we were and started to get excited at the prospect of being unbelted and able to jump in the front to sleep on Wendy's knees. No sooner had she curled up and dozed off than we were boarding at 1.30am.....Woo Hoo! As soon as we were in the cabin and had got ourselves comfortable we were also asleep until my alarm went off at 5.40am. We docked at 5.50am and were home at long last at 6.05am.

Rather than go back to sleep I carried in all the bags and Wendy set about unpacking the clothes, after she'd made a cappuccino 1st that is :P. There was a big mess to clean up in the bathroom after that, as she'd had a new hot water system fitted while we'd been away. I set about hoovering and then steam cleaning all the floors before we both went downstairs to clean the PVC and windows before she got her new blinds fitted. No rest for the wicked! We'd only just got home and had done a day's work already by the end of it all, so having not had much sleep we were totally knackered at the end of the day.

All in all we'd only seen a total of 118 birds which is pretty poor for May and had left with no lifers whatsoever. We'd travelled 879miles, which was quite low for a week away but it'd been another enjoyable trip regardless. The weather could've been much better especially as we'd only just managed one night of Moth Trapping during the whole week. We'd managed to get 5 moth lifers on that night though, which was pretty good considering. We'd ended up being rained off and back at HQ early a couple of times, which felt like such a waste of time but it was a better option than traipsing around outside seeing nothing and getting soaked. The lack of decent winds and therefore movement at the time meant that there were no birds to go for, so it'd been hard to keep the enthusiasm levels up especially as the weather wasn't so good. If it'd been sunny with lighter winds we could've added some interest and gone out to find Dragon/Damselflies and Butterflies but we couldn't even do that. Needless to say we didn't come back with many Wildlife photos to edit, in fact it's probably our least amount ever! I'd already edited the majority of scenery shots before we'd left, so it was just the few from our way home that I had to do when I got home. It may have been an uneventful trip but it could've been worse and it didn't make the article any easier or quicker to write either!

After getting home we fully expected the news of some amazing bird having been found in Norfolk but even that was an underestimation. An absolutely mega rare Citril Finch was found at Holkham Pines on the Sunday, exactly where we'd been in the gale force winds just a couple of days before!!!! Not only that but there was a Bee-eater at Winterton and it just continued to get worse over the days that followed. There were a pair of Moltoni's Warblers and a Subalpine Warbler at Blakeney Point, Red-rumped Swallow at Cley and a Wryneck at Holme Dunes, so from then on we just had to stop looking at Birdguides :P!

Ah well there's always October :D.

Bird List

Mute Swan	Black-tailed Godwit	Stonechat
Greylag Goose	Bar-tailed Godwit	Wheatear
Canada Goose	Whimbrel	Blackbird
Brent Goose	Curlew	Song Thrush
Egyptian Goose	Common Sandpiper	Mistle Thrush
Shelduck	Redshank	Cetti's Warbler
Wigeon	Turnstone	Grasshopper Warbler
Gadwall	Black-headed Gull	Sedge Warbler
Teal	Common Gull	Reed Warbler
Mallard	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Blackcap
Shoveler	Herring Gull	Garden Warbler
Pochard	Great Black-backed Gull	Lesser Whitethroat
Tufted Duck	Little Tern	Whitethroat
Red-legged Partridge	Sandwich Tern	Dartford Warbler
Grey Partridge	Common Tern	Chiffchaff
Pheasant	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Willow Warbler
Little Grebe	Stock Dove	Goldcrest
Great Crested Grebe	Woodpigeon	Firecrest
Cormorant	Collared Dove	Bearded Tit
Shag	Turtle Dove	Long-tailed Tit
Little Egret	Cuckoo	Blue Tit
Grey Heron	Little Owl	Great Tit
Marsh Harrier	Tawny Owl	Coal Tit
Sparrowhawk	Swift	Nuthatch
Buzzard	Green Woodpecker	Jay
Kestrel	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Magpie
Peregrine	Skylark	Jackdaw
Moorhen	Sand Martin	Rook
Coot	Swallow	Carrion Crow
Common Crane	House Martin	Starling
Oystercatcher	Meadow Pipit	House Sparrow
Avocet	Yellow Wagtail	Tree Sparrow
Little Ringed Plover	Grey Wagtail	Chaffinch
Ringed Plover	Pied Wagtail	Greenfinch
Dotterel	Wren	Goldfinch
Golden Plover	Dunnock	Linnet
Grey Plover	Robin	Bullfinch
Lapwing	Nightingale	Yellowhammer
Dunlin	Whinchat	Reed Bunting
Snipe		

