

Norfolk Trip - October 2013

With our summer trip to Norfolk still fresh in our minds, probably due to trying to get the article done before we had yet another to do, our October trip came round in no time. Before we knew it we were thinking about packing again and worrying about the weather.....especially the wind! The forecast was as bad as usual for our sailing and it was looking like we'd be lucky if the boat sailed at all. This was an altogether predictable scenario and even one of Wendy's work colleagues commented that it's always windy when she goes away. We'd managed to book one of old haunts again, Three Owls Cottages in Blakeney, which is a perfect location. It was to be our 4th time staying there but after the dirty and smelly experience of Farriers Barn in July we opted for tried and tested just to be on the safe side. The last thing we needed was to be staying somewhere horrible on top of useless weather and the disappointment of finding no birds. Unfortunately Lyca was still too young to take away with us, so she was going for her own holiday to Wendy's Mums where she'd be spoilt rotten and would have lots of fun with her friend Trixie, who's also a Cockerpoo. We were really going to miss her but consoled ourselves with the possibility of actually getting a (relative) lie in for the 1st time since August!

I'd decided to be clever this time, as everything had kicked off big style in Norfolk on the day we'd left last year so I booked the week later. Sickeningly, this year we watched the weather turn into perfect migration conditions and all the birds poured into Norfolk.....the week before our trip! The Birders on Birdforum were saying that it'd been a fantastic week and most of them had even been rewarded by finding their own rarities.....Urrghhhhhh! I'd always wanted to see a Red-flanked Blue-tail and unbelievably there were 3 in Norfolk on the Sunday before! The chances of them staying put until we got there were zero and it looked as though I'd chosen yet another total duffer of a week. Our only desperate hope was that some of the birds would stick around, or else we were set for a nonproductive week of traipsing round in the pouring rain and gale force wind. Aarrghhhhhh!

We didn't know where to head to after driving from Heysham but one idea was to give Lynford Arboretum another shot for Hawfinch. Hopefully we'd be able to get some sleep in the car before we set out this time round, as it would still be dark when we arrived. The 1st time we'd tried this plan we found it to be trickier than we'd bargained for, as it was an incredibly weird experience. We'd parked up in the dark, surrounded by thick swirling mist and tried to get some sleep with the eerie sound of a pack of howling dogs echoing in the distance.....creepy! It wasn't pleasant but we'd been lucky and found a Firecrest, on call, and also had our 1st ever views of Hawfinch in the nearby Hornbeams. Not a bad way to start the holiday, by any stretch of the imagination :). Although we were really keen to see them again and possibly get better views, there were no reports of any Hawfinches on Birdguides so it looked like we'd have to review our plans.

Friday 18th October

At the end of a very busy week and another long day at work, including working through my lunch again, I was home early to get myself ready at 4.30pm. Wendy was ridiculously lucky when she'd arrived at work at 8.30am, as all her bosses were away at an exhibition so they didn't need her. This meant that she could go home to spend the whole day with Lyca and pack our stuff without rushing.....jammy or what?

I'd packed everything the day before, so for me it was just a matter of eating tea, getting changed and loading everything in the car. A quick check of Birdguides showed that, sure enough, all the decent birds, we'd have killed for, had already left Norfolk. Typical! After we'd dropped Lyca and her stuff off at Wendy's Mums and said, "Goodbye" we packed up our stuff and headed off to the Sea Terminal in the torrential rain and strong wind. I parked up at 6.58pm to find the car park to be practically empty and that there were hardly any cars waiting to board at all! We needed it to be busy to weigh the boat down, so it wouldn't be such a rough crossing, but it looked as though we'd be bobbing about like a cork for the journey. Unbelievably, 9mins later we were boarding, so we'd timed it to perfection. When I was in the shop, after getting the cabin key, I noticed the 'Isle of Man Wildlife' book sitting on one of the shelves. The cover of the book has one of my Barn Owl photos on it, so we joked that I should set up a table and offer to do signings. However, something told me that I'd be in for a very quiet night :P. At 7.35pm we were off and although we'd prepared for a rough ride it was actually a surprisingly smooth crossing.....Phew! After watching a bit of TV we both even managed to get some sleep :). Wendy, who sleeps like the dead, woke up to the announcement that we about to arrive at Heysham but I'd been awake for a while. We docked at 11.15pm and waited to get off so we could get going.

We disembarked at 11.35pm and headed straight to the Terminal for a caffeine fix for Wendy. She must've needed it though, as in her sleepy daze she freaked out when she couldn't find her purse in her rucksack. After her mass panic she eventually found it, exactly where it should've been.....Doh! While she was inside she met a woman with a black Cockerpoo Puppy, which was being trained as a Hearing Dog for the deaf. He was tiny and Wendy couldn't resist but didn't know if any interference would distract him from his training. She asked the woman nicely if she could say, "Hello" and was given the go ahead. It turned out that he was only 4 weeks younger than Lyca but the size difference was staggering! We're already sure we're going to end up with the biggest Cockerpoo ever and this just reinforced Wendy's fears! When he started to roll over and do naughty puppy things she thought she'd better make a quick exit and left them to it. At 11.55pm we drove off into the heavy rain with our aim being to get to Titchwell for a bit of sleep in the car park.

Saturday 19th October

Unfortunately, my Sat Nav decided to stop working so I goofed up the very 1st junction and managed to turn north on the M6...not a good start! Luckily there was another junction only 3 miles away so we didn't lose much time. I'm still annoyed by this now, as I've done that junction about 20 times and never messed it up. Grrrrrrrr! We were back on track quite quickly and on the way to our usual ½ way house, Blyth Services. We arrived at 1.58am and bailed out of the car for a WC break and to stretch our legs. There was some refurbishment going on there and most of the services were closed, including the Men's toilets so Wendy found herself sharing the Ladies with a load of blokes! She assured me that the smell in there wasn't pleasant! We were already starting to flag by then so it was straight to Costa, which was the only shop open, for a coffee for Wendy. The guy behind the counter was so miserable but I suppose you would be if you worked the nightshift at the local Services. After parting with £11 for a small cappuccino, 2x smoothies and a tiny piece of cake we went back to the car to enjoy our extortionate goodies. While we sat there a 4x4 screeched to halt right outside the entrance and not even in a parking space. A bloke jumped out, wearing just his PJ's and with bare feet, splashed through the puddles and

charged through the doors to inside. Uh? Very strange hahahahahaha :P. We thought the trend to wear PJ's to the shops was over, except at Anagh Coar Spa! We were still really tired, so we had a decision to make. We could either carry on in the hope that we could get to Norfolk in one go and get some sleep when we arrived or take a quick nap now, which would mean we'd lose some sleep when we got there. We came to a unanimous decision... SLEEP! I moved the car into a quieter spot and we reclined the seats and had a nap.

At 3.17am, after 30minute sleep, we felt strangely refreshed and drove away for the 2nd stretch of our journey seeing **Rabbits** on the grass verge on the way out. It was still very dark but at 3.54am I could see something up ahead in the headlights. A **Fox** ran out into the road, stopped dead then totally changed its mind and backtracked to where it had come from, clever animal! It's always nice to see rural Foxes when we go away, as they're not easy to see by any means unless they're dead at the side of the road! We let out a cheer when we hit the 'Welcome to Norfolk' sign at 4.40am and we knew that we were less than an hour away from our 1st stop. We were nearly there by the time we spotted a **Tawny Owl** flying over, just in front of us, which was shortly followed by a **Frog** hopping across the road. At 5.20am, a lot earlier than expected after our nap at Blyth, we arrived at Titchwell and after Wendy had wriggled into her sleeping bag we both conked out to the sound of the rain hitting the car.

It was 7.10am when we woke up again and although it was still pretty dark the rain had fortunately stopped. The 1st thing we heard was a **Pheasant** and then a very enthusiastic **Robin** singing its heart out from the branch of a nearby tree. We got out of the car and headed over to the toilet block where a **Grey Squirrel** was making light work of negotiating the treetops above us. We heard then saw a **Blackbird** and saw **Starlings, Herring Gull** and **Wood Pigeon**. I had a quick look over the field where a Great Grey Shrike had been the day before but there was no sign.....obviously! When Wendy came out of the Ladies, which luckily hadn't been locked up for the night, she said there were a few moths around the windows inside. She went in with her camera to get some pics to ID them later and found some more on the windows outside. They were mainly all **November Moths**, which we'd only seen once before in the Copse at Warham 2 years ago.



November Moth

There was also a **Large Yellow Underwing** and a **Grey Shoulder-knot**, which was a lifer for us, in the entrance.



Grey Shoulder-knot

She also found a little Frog so I tried to get a pic with my point and click but it just didn't work. Luckily there was nobody else about, so we both went into the Men's and found a **Common Plume, Mallow**, which was another lifer, **Silver Y** and more November Moths.



Mallow

We never thought for a second that we'd be Mothing in October, so we hadn't brought any books with us, meaning ID'ing the new ones had to wait until we got home. After our unexpected distraction we went back to the car, as we weren't planning on staying at Titchwell, and left at 7.45am.

As we drove out of the car park some **Black-headed Gulls** and a **Jackdaw** flew over and a largish mammal scuttled across the track in front of us. I've no idea what it was and it quickly disappeared into the same spot we'd had a Weasel a couple of years ago. Our plan was to hit nearby Holme Dunes NNR early, as there'd been a Ring Ouzel and Great Grey Shrike reported the day before. It was also the only day where there'd been Easterly winds overnight, so hitting a coastal hotspot was the best plan I could come up with. Although we were anything but optimistic there's always that little glimmer of hope making it worth the effort.

In no time at all we were driving down the track to Holme car park where some **Mallards** and a **Magpie** flew over. I parked up at 7.59am and as the gate was still closed and wouldn't be open until 10am we had to park miles away from where we wanted to be. The 1st thing on our agenda was to have our breakfast before we set off on our walk. As we sat there eating a 'make do' cereal bar and drinking our smoothies, which by then were warm and horrible, we noticed huge flocks of **Lapwing**, **Pink-footed Geese**, **Wigeon**, **Curlew** and **Redwing** going over. There were **Skylarks** singing everywhere we looked and when we got out of the car we started to see some smaller birds flitting around in the bushes. After waiting for them to come out and show themselves we'd ended up with a **Wren** and 2x nice male **Blackcaps**. These weren't exactly the amazing birds we'd hoped for but it was a start. A **Redshank** flew noisily around and I heard a high-pitched squeak and we looked up to see 2x **Common Snipe**. Looking around us we managed to find a **Kestrel** and a massive flock of 1000's of Starlings, which were putting on a bit of a murmuration over the Dunes. There were also **Little Egrets** flying between pools, further out over the sea were **Gannets** and **Cormorants** and in a nearby bush was a male **Reed Bunting**.

Thinking we'd better get a move on we wandered up onto the bank and viewed the distant beach seeing **Great Black-backed Gull**, **Oystercatcher** and a single **Dark-bellied Brent Goose** heading east over the sea.



Holme

We carried on over the bank and down into the Dunes where Wendy stopped to admire the Sea-buckthorn, which was covered in bright orange berries. This area always smacks of Ring Ouzel to us and with it having already had one the day before we crossed our fingers that it had decided to stick around. There were loads of **Teal** heading over towards the pools, a flock of **Linnets** flew in and

we heard a **Green Woodpecker** calling from somewhere nearby. As always, each bird that moved turned out to be just a **Chaffinch** and our hearts started to sink when we realized that the bushes were a lot quieter than we'd expected. A **Sparrowhawk** appeared from nowhere and zoomed straight through, low over the bushes and then we heard a Warbler. It was staying well hidden in the cover, so we didn't see it but considered it safe to say that it was a **Chiffchaff**. Having taken in all the nearby stuff it was time to explore further afield and take a walk into the Dunes.



Holme Dunes

With every corner we turned we hoped to catch a glimpse of something that would make us stop and think, "What the?" As so often is the case we saw nothing and after having such positive vibes from the constant flocks flying over we just couldn't dig anything out of the bushes apart from a ton of Blackbirds and Chaffinches! Typical!

We'd walked all the way over to the Visitor Centre by the Pines without seeing a single bird. All of a sudden I heard a call which made my ears prick up, it sounded similar to something at home but with a slight difference.....**Redpoll**! We watched as 3 birds flew over us calling, in an unusually deep sounding tone. There'd been 35x Mealy Redpoll reported from there the day before but we could only say that they were likely to be them, as they didn't land for us to see. Walking past the private part of the reserve, where the Wardens have nets up for ringing purposes, we heard a very weird call indeed. There were birds flying around everywhere but all we could make out was black silhouettes high in the sky and most of them were very obviously Skylarks and Pipits. This call however sounded like that of a Crossbill, but non-stop for ages and ages. As we couldn't see much we took a guess that it was just a recording to lure Crossbills in to ring. This was quite depressing if the best we could come up with was a tape lure! We had a scan out to sea again and found a **Razorbill**, heard a **Moorhen** from the ditch behind us and headed into the Pines themselves.



Holme Pines

Straight away we could tell we'd found the Tit flock but to start with we couldn't see a single movement in the treetops. It took a while but eventually our eyes adjusted and we started to find the birds, really high up. There were **Blue Tits**, **Coal Tits** and countless **Goldcrests**, so we set about the tedious and neck breaking task of going through them all.

This was as difficult as ever and took ages but we were crossing every digit that we could manage to pull out a Yellow-browed Warbler or Firecrest from somewhere. After giving it our best shot we had to admit defeat but we knew we'd get more chances during the week at other places we'd be going to. We headed back to the Visitor Centre, which was still closed, and back into the dunes.



Still no birds

We saw even more Blackbirds and had to check every single one, as no doubt that was the flock that the Ring Ouzel was hiding in. Obviously we didn't find it and ended up selfishly hoping that it had gone rather than it being our lack of skills. Later on in the day the Ring Ouzel was reported again, so it was our lack of skills after all.....Doh! We got back to the car at 10.08am having seen nothing else apart from a **Marsh Harrier** and **Carriion Crow** and although the Reserve

was meant to open at 10am the gate was still locked. Quite poor really especially as it was a weekend. When I looked up at the sky I saw something I'd never seen before, a Rainbow up in the clouds! I assumed it was an ice rainbow but after researching online when we got it back it seems it wasn't an ice rainbow. No idea what it was though.



Strange floating rainbow

I had a quick look at the reports on Birdguides and my heart sank when I saw that even though it was a Saturday, so every Birder around would be out looking, there was only 5 reports for the day so far.....Urrghhhhh! This said it all to us, there was nothing happening after the amazing week before and the final night of Easterlies. Everything had ground to a halt. As I drove off down the track we spotted a flock of **Goldfinches** and some **Red-legged Partridges** scuttled across in front of us. After our disappointing start we thought we'd head back to Titchwell, for a coffee fix for Wendy and some food.

We were back at Titchwell car park, where we'd woken up at 7.10am, at 10.25am and the effects of our couple of hours of sleep were starting to wear off. We were knackered already so we hoped that a trip to café would boost our energy levels for the walk around the Reserve. Wendy ordered herself a Cappuccino, a warm cheese scone and a sausage bap for me and we plonked ourselves down on a table inside to wait for our food. As always it was very nice and hit the spot so we were good to go and went straight into the shop to check the days reports board. Wendy took a pic of it with her phone so we wouldn't forget where anything was and we carried on straight out to view the feeders.

reserve

Saturday 19 October 2010

Bird species	Location	Number	Comments and
Spotted Redshank	Freshwater	7	
Greenshank	"	6	
Bar-tailed Godwit	"	200	
Golden Plover	"	600	
WOT	"	300	
Ruff	"	11	
Duocet	"	4	
Black-tail	"	20	
Lapwing	"	200	
Cettis	West Bank Path	3	
Red-backed Godwit	Sea	2	
LT Duck	Sea	2	
Common Scoter	Sea	1	
Marsh Harrier	Freshwater	3	
Common Shrike	Reeds	4	
Sparrowhawk	Wetland	1	
Redwing	"	2	
Stonechat	Thornham 6M	1 imm	
Whinchat	"	1 imm	
Brambling	Feeder	1	
Little Stint	Freshwater	1	
Kingfisher	Tidal Marsh	1	
Bearded Tit	West Bank Path	15	

Please Turn over for more wildlife

Not very exciting!

Brambling were getting seen on the feeders but all we could find were Chaffinches. The Bramblings could be anywhere, so we'd have to keep our eyes peeled and we headed off down the path hearing a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** on the way. On the 1st pool, before you get to the nearest Hide, there were **Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Shoveler** and **Shelduck** and we heard the blast from an ever-present **Cetti's Warbler**. A flock of **Golden Plover** called mournfully overhead and landed with 100's more on one of the Islands in front of the Hide.



Titchwell fresh marsh

We had a look from the Hide but only added **Pintail** and **Common Gull** from there so we didn't stick around. Walking past the Brackish Marsh we found **Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit** and **Black-tailed Godwit**. We

stopped to get some pics of a very close Bar-tailed Godwit and I ended up with this shot.



Bar-tailed Godwit

Although there were plenty of Redshanks around there was no sign of any of the reported Spotted Redshanks amongst them. Next off we wandered over to chance our luck at the beach, where there'd been Long-tailed Ducks, Red-necked and Slavonian Grebes reported. When we emerged from the path we saw that the tide was right out and anything out on the water was a tiny black dot in our bins.



Titchwell beach

We could make out some **Sanderling**, **Dunlin** and **Turnstone** down at the waters edge but everything else was proving impossible. We were just about to give it up as a bad idea when we spotted something bobbing about and diving, which had a definite Grebe like appearance. I took a very distant record shot and

zoomed right in to see what it was and we were pleasantly surprised to see a lovely **Red-necked Grebe** :). Shame the tide wasn't in!



Titchwell beach

Happy with that we made our way back noticing that we were being followed by an incredibly tame Black-headed Gull. He landed next to us and when we walked off he trotted along by our sides! I think he thought of himself as a Norfolk tourist guide that welcomed visitors but didn't realize that we didn't understand Gull language. Wendy instantly loved the friendly little bird so took a picture.



Friendly Black-headed Gull

Funnily enough this seemed to conclude the Gull's guide and he flew off to more visitors further up the beach! After that excitement we went to the Parrinder Hide and sat down to put our feet up for a while.

From there we could see loads of **Ruff**, all of which were various different sizes and colours, just to confuse everyone. There were still a few young **Avocets** around but apart from the usual Ducks, Gulls and Waders there was nothing else,

not even the Spoonbills. Wendy scanned through a group of very distant waders and pointed out a smaller bird, which looked particularly white underneath in comparison to the others. When they all lifted we noticed just how tiny this bird was and when they landed again we could tell that it was in fact a **Little Stint**. This was the best we could manage, so we decided to give up and set off back to the car.

On the way we found a small gathering of 3 Birders who were looking out over the marsh at something. Wendy spotted what they were all looking at sitting on top of a bramble bush and although it was miles off we could still clearly see that it was a **Whinchat**. That was a bird we hadn't expected see during our week away. Handy! We soon became distracted by the insects flying around, which we initially presumed to be November Moths. It wasn't until one landed on my leg that we realized that that were all **Caddis Flies**! We were also very surprised to see some Dragonflies zooming over the pools in a ditch, which were 3x **Migrant Hawker** and 2x **Common Darter**. Another surprise came in the form of a **Woodcock** flying over and not at all surprising was a **Duncock** hopping around on the path on the way back to feeders. We stopped for another quick look to see if the Brambling was hungry yet but needless to say, it wasn't. We picked up **Greenfinch** and **Collared Dove** making use of the free food and a flock of **Long-tailed Tits** flitted through the trees surrounding the path back to the exit.

We left at 1.17pm and I drove the short distance down the road to a car park behind Briarfield's Restaurant. This was where the Titchwell Great Grey Shrike had been seen the day before but all we saw were 2x **Jays** in a field behind the grounds collecting and stashing food for the winter. Again we had to admit defeat and I drove away to head for our next stop of Wells, where there'd been a Yellow-browed Warbler the day before. As I pulled out into the road Wendy shrieked, "Grey Partridge.....close!" I stopped the car and there was indeed 11x **Grey Partridge** as well as some Redlegs really close to us. Unbelievably, our cameras were in the boot and if we'd tried to get out to get them the birds would've certainly flushed. I drove a bit further down the road, out of sight and grabbed them before spinning back round to try for a shot. Predictably, when we got back, we found that all the birds had gone and were nowhere to be seen, so I headed for Briarfield's car park to turn round again. Annoyingly we found 13 more in the field next to the car park but there was nowhere to stop the car! Back in the car park I put the cameras back in the boot and headed off for the 2nd time only to find that the birds we'd seen originally were back. Urrghhhhh, sods law! Driving through Burnham Norton we saw a **Mistle Thrush**, we had a **Pied Wagtail** at Burnham Overy Staithe and a **Buzzard** over Holkham.

We arrived at Wells-next-the-Sea at 2.15pm and the car park was heaving, it was busier than we'd ever seen it! There'd been an injured but rehabilitated Shag released on the pond and we wondered if anyone had gone there especially to see it, as Shag is something most Norfolk folk aren't used to seeing. Wandering over towards the pond there was indeed a crowd of Birders and Photographers gathered around the edge. We had a quick scan and found 5x **Little Grebes** and then the **Shag** popped up. Our 1st plan was to re-find 'The Dell' but having lost all my locations on my phone after changing it we ended up getting lost again.



This isn't the Dell :(

This was an all too familiar scenario and having only found it the previous year I'd optimistically thought I'd remember the way without needing a map...Doh! We hit the 1st Tit/Crest flock but there was absolutely nothing else in with them. All we were asking for was a Yellow-browed Warbler and we didn't think it was too far fetched with a report of one there the day before. We stumbled across a **Muntjac** in the trees and Wendy kept herself amused by taking pics of the wide variety of different types of Fungi. This type has been a hard one to ID and she still doesn't know what it is!



Fungus

Having wandered around aimlessly through the trees searching for the Dell and not finding it we gave up and headed for the old toilet block, where a YBW had also been seen. There were a lot of Birders standing around and we spoke to a couple who told us that they'd just seen it but it was doing circuits, which were becoming less frequent as it got later in the day. Aaaaarrghhhhh! This was just typical of our luck, we'd missed another bird by minutes and we got the

impression that if we stood any chance of seeing it ourselves, we'd be in for a long wait.



Everyone looking bored

Not having the time or energy to hang around indefinitely we gave it a while before deciding that we'd had enough. Surely we'd catch up with another bird somewhere else during the week? Heading away from the crowd we were being approached by a couple out for a stroll. All of a sudden we heard a noise and the biggest pinecone we've ever seen hit the ground with an almighty thud just inches in front of them! We looked up to find a Grey Squirrel sitting there looking down at them, probably gutted as to what a bad shot he was. What the? We came to the conclusion that it was an Assassination Squirrel and walked the rest of the way back wishing we were wearing hard hats! Where was the 'Health and Safety' board, warning people of the dangers of that then? They seemed to have covered everything else in the area apart from the threat of being knocked unconscious, or worse, by the local Wildlife!



Mind your head!

Having survived the dangers of the woods we were back at the car by 3.43pm and we decided that it would be the best time to go and get our weeks shopping and move into our HQ.

We arrived at Morrison's at 4.30pm and as usual wandered around in a tired daze trying to get enough food stocked up for the week ahead. We left at 5.10pm and headed for Blakeney, which wasn't too far away. Having stayed in the same Cottage 3 times already I didn't bother with my Sat Nav but my memories of the place were obviously blurred, as I took the wrong turning and ended up driving up the wrong road.....Ooops! Back on track we eventually breathed a sigh of relief when we pulled up outside Church Owl Cottage at 5.30pm.



Church Owl

We were very pleased to find it lovely and warm inside and that we didn't have any neighbours :). There were new owners this time too and they'd told me in an email that they'd done a bit of redecoration and updated it a bit.



Newly painted HQ

They'd certainly done a good job of it and the place looked so much better for having had a few simple alterations.....happy days :). The windows were open obviously to air the place, so not surprisingly a few flies had found their way in. We ignored them for a while but we knew it wouldn't be long before they'd start annoying us and we'd have to try and swat them. After I'd unloaded the car and Wendy had put the chilled food in the fridge we were starving and just couldn't be bothered cooking. We decided to leave everything else until later and to go out for some food, hoping that this time we'd have more luck and that everywhere on the North Norfolk coast wouldn't be fully booked, like in July, and we left at 6.15pm.

As it was just a stones throw away and tried and tested we went straight to 'The Kings Arms' in Blakeney. It was very busy but we still managed to get a table in a nice dark corner and Wendy went up to get our drinks. Looking at the menu I wasn't inspired but the Specials board had just what I fancied, Tempura Chicken with a Sweet Chilli Sauce! Wendy was happy too with a nice sounding Cauliflower and Chive Soup so she went straight up to order.....sorted! She ended up chatting to a woman who said that the forecast for the next day was awful but she told her to ignore it as they always get it wrong for Norfolk. This sounded all too familiar to us, coming from an Island, so she felt more positive. Our food was really nice and afterwards Wendy fancied another drink, whereas I couldn't resist a pudding and went for Chocolate Brownie and Vanilla Ice Cream.....om nom nom :). I think my eyes must've bigger than my belly after the long day because I felt pretty sick after I'd struggled my way through the final few mouthfuls....Hehehe!

Re-fuelled and happy we were back at HQ at 7.30pm to unpack the rest of our stuff. After we'd well and truly moved in Wendy went off for a well-deserved soak in the bath before finally sitting down to chill out. She went outside for a listen and heard our 1st **Tawny Owls** calling outside, which is always nice to

Wondering why we were wasting our time and energy we carried on regardless over to 'the quarry,' which is also another good spot. Although there was a bit of Redwing action going on there we couldn't pull out anything unusual. In fact, the best we came up with was when a **Song Thrush** flew in, giving us another new bird for the trip. By then we just wanted to get over to the Whirly-gig and find a Ring Ouzel or something but the walk seemed longer than we remembered it and went on forever.



Warham bushes

As we finally approached it we stopped for a check of the bushes and shortly after Wendy alerted me that she had something. She couldn't see much of the bird just a dark moustache and a heavily streaked appearance and knowing that being in Norfolk it could be anything she hoped it would come into the clear. Before she could explain where it was to me the bird flew, not out towards us but over the back of the bush, and was gone. The only suggestion she had was that it was a Reed Bunting and I just hope she was right and that we hadn't just missed out on a Rustic Bunting or something! The guy doing the survey was on his way back so we exchanged notes (or lack of them) and he pointed out a nice **Hen Harrier** floating over the marsh in the distance. The last stretch of footpath had even more Common Darters on it and we finally made it to the Whirly-gig. After walking around and covering every inch of ground we'd still managed to find nothing but common birds. By now it was warm and sunny, so it was off with the hats and gloves, even though it was still windy. We found another Silver Y and had a 2nd check of the quarry, which had been busy earlier but was totally lifeless on the way back. As we headed back towards the Copse Wendy caught a fleeting glimpse of a **House Martin**, which flew straight through and didn't stick around. The Copse was just as dead as it had been 1st time around, as were the trees up the track to the car. It was 1.05pm when we arrived back and we were starving, so we cracked open our lunch and wondered where to go next. Having failed to see the YBW at Wells the day before we thought it could be worth another shot being earlier in the day and if we went straight to the toilet block, missing out the Dell, which we probably couldn't re-find anyway.

The car park was very busy and there were a lot of Birders again when we arrived at Wells at 1.38pm, so we grabbed our stuff and headed for the woods. Wendy couldn't resist stopping to get a pic of a Grey Squirrel on the fence by the gate.



Grey Squirrel

Passing the lake there were 7x Little Grebes and the Shag was still attracting a lot of attention. A massive flock of 1000's of Pink-feet flew in and went down into the fields on Lady Anne's Drive at Holkham, which looked quite impressive. Typically the only Geese near us were **Greylags** and I hadn't had a single Birdguides report for hours! If the YBW was about it would've been reported by someone by then....Urrghhhhh! One of the previous day's birds had been seen in the trees west of the caravan park so that was our 1st stop. If there'd been a YBW there we'd have heard it before seeing it but there was no sign, so we carried on to the toilet block. There were a couple of groups of Birders and Photographers standing around staring into a section of the trees, so it looked promising. Some of them were edging their way off the track and into the woods but we'd picked up no signs that the bird was around. We found the Tit/Crest flock and listened intently for 'that' call but still there was nothing :/. We were being very wary in case Assassination Squirrel was lurking somewhere above us, as neither of us fancied a large heavy object dropped on our head! There was a Squirrel right above us but luckily it didn't look like it was about to go in for the kill :P. We stood around for ages but there was no sign of any action so we went up the steps to view the beach. We'd never done this before and having been there so many times before we thought we'd better have a look. There were beach huts lining either side of the path and when we were back at HQ later we had a look to see how much they went for.



Wells Beach

We couldn't believe it when we saw how much people were willing to pay for a hut so small you couldn't swing a cat in it! For the bargain price of £69,000.00 you get the privilege of having a place to store your bucket and spade and somewhere to get changed in private!!! We bet owning one is a must for anyone who thinks they're anyone.....suckers! :D. It was still warm and sunny so the view was very pleasant and everybody looked as though they were making the most of it before the winter set in. Back at the car it was already 3.02pm so not to be defeated by the Wells YBW we headed to Holkham to see if we catch up with all those Pink-feet and a YBW or two.....Hahahahahaha!

At 2.50pm we parked up and followed the directions from the previous day to walk east where one of the birds had been. A **Grey Heron** flew in but the Pink-feet were all in a field miles off behind a hedge. Our walk produced nothing so we followed the 2nd directions and headed west over to the Washington Hide where there'd been another. Yet again it was dead so we went back towards the entrance, where there'd been 2x birds. We've been to Holkham many times before but had never realised how interesting the ponds there are.



Holkham pond

We stopped to see if we could get a shot of one of the 3x Little Grebes and were distracted by the Info board in front of us.



Salts Hole info board (zoom in to be able to read the info)

The birds were really twitchy and staying well away from us but they came within photographable range briefly. The light was terrible and we were really up against it, so this is the best one I came up with in the end.



Little Grebe

After the Little Grebe's had decided they didn't want to play anymore we ended up back at the main entrance only to have no luck there either. Unbelievably we'd failed to see a single YBW despite the fact that there'd been 2 there the day before.....Grrrrrrr! We heard a **Treecreeper** on the way back, which is another bird that's far more difficult to come across than you'd think. Back at the car it was 4.20pm and starting to get dark but even though we felt like calling it a bad day we still had one more place to try before giving up.

I'd had a report of a Black Redstart at the Cley-Spy shop at Glandford, which was just up the road from our cottage, so we'd have been mad not to give it a go. The

sky began to turn black as we drove away and it started to rain again shortly after, while Wendy was getting some bits from the local Spa. I thought I knew exactly where to go to get to Glandford but it soon became apparent that the never ending and single track country road we were on was definitely not it....Ooops! By the time I'd found somewhere to turn round it was so dark and horrible outside that we had to ditch the idea off and head for home.

It was 5.15pm when we got back to HQ and before we started to make our tea I had to try and get rid of some of the flies. I managed to get one of them but the others continued to be a total nuisance while we cooked and then ate our food. Wendy went off for a bath and I managed to get another but annoyingly missed what appeared to be last one. With my newly acquired Ninja fly swatting skills it was only a matter of time until we were hopefully fly free :P. We finally sat down to watch a bit of TV and relax and Wendy was very relieved to get the good news from her Mum that Lyca was not only behaving herself but had also had a fun day too. At 10pm we were both totally done for and crashed out for another good nights sleep.

Monday 21st October

Wendy woke up at 7.50am to the sound of Geese flying over and leapt out of bed excitedly with a Power Ranger style fist pump saying, "Geese!" Hahahaha totally nuts! It was a decidedly dull looking morning and there was now 3x flies buzzing around the kitchen/living room. First off I set about continuing with my fly massacre and managed to get all 3.....Ninjastastic! After having breakfast and packing our lunch we set off at 9.45am to see what we could find at another good spot for migrants.

Luckily Friary Hills is just down the road and we were there by 9.50am but the rain had just started as I parked up.



Friary Hills

We decided not bring the cameras with us, so they didn't get wet, and we headed out to see what was about. We quickly noticed the lack of birds down the path but it didn't put us off and we carried on. There'd definitely been some kind of movement as there were continental Blackbirds, Song and Mistle Thrushes as well as Redwing in the bushes and fields. This wasn't exactly what we'd hoped for though but it was still worth checking them for a stray Ring Ouzel. On 1st

glances there didn't seem to be any small birds about but I was surprised to find 2x **Yellowhammers** sitting on top of some Hawthorn. I got Wendy onto them just in time, as they flew off and completely vanished. We found another Chiffchaff and loads of Blackcaps but they all seemed to be moving through the area in a hurry. There was a **Mute Swan** out on the marsh and apart from that it was pretty dead. We were back at the car by 10.37am totally soaked through and having had a small indication that something was happening we left feeling pretty disappointed and uninspired. It had certainly killed off Wendy's burst of enthusiasm from earlier.

As we parked up at Salthouse car park the 1st thing I noticed was that the Coffee van wasn't there.....Uh oh! Wendy's face fell when I told her and it was throwing it down, so we couldn't help but feel depressed already even though it was only our 3rd day. A proper coffee would be something to look forward to after, what we predicted to be, another unproductive walk over to Gramborough Hill. I'd had a report of a Pallid Swift flying over at Felbrigg Hall, which if my calculations were right meant that if it carried on it would go straight over us! We obviously weren't optimistic and reckoned we'd have to sit there all morning looking up at the sky if we stood any chance of seeing it. This we weren't prepared to do, so we carried on with our plan seeing **Turnstone** and loads of birds flapping about on the ridge. We had a chance of Snow/Lapland Buntings there, so we had to go over and check them out. As we grew closer and the birds became viewable we scanned through them all finding good numbers of Reed Buntings, Meadow Pipits and Goldfinches but that was it! We had a wander past the hill but there was nothing there and then had a scan of the sea, which was also dead. Predictably the Pallid Swift hadn't flown our way either, so we gave up as the rain was getting even heavier by then. We were back at the car and driving away at 11.43am and wondering what on earth we were going to do next. There was only one thing for it, in weather like that we'd have to go to Cley and take cover in the Hides.

The car park was nearly full when we arrived at 11.48am and our 1st stop was the Café for a caffeine fix for Wendy and a sugar rush for me. It was absolutely packed in there but luckily someone had just left so I was told to grab the table while Wendy went up to order. We couldn't believe how many flies were buzzing around in there as well and wondered if October is a bad time for them.....or if we were being followed! After our cravings were satisfied we went back to the car for lunch, which we concluded would be the highlight of the day. Being in no hurry we set off into the rain at 1.50pm and headed straight for the nearest Hide.

Looking out, all we could find was the usual Ducks and Godwits but luckily there was a nice Black-tailed Godwit heading our way along the bank. We heard a sonic boom as we sat there waiting and Wendy was poised with her camera and ready to get a shot of the bird. She ended up with quite a nice one in the end although the light was anything but ideal.



Black-tailed Godwit

I hadn't brought mine, as I couldn't be bothered carrying it around for nothing, but I started to wish I had when 3x Snipe appeared right outside the Hide. Wendy was firing off the shots and I had to ask her if I could have a go before the opportunity had gone. I noticed that her battery was running dangerously low, so I told her to hold back until they were closer. They ended up ridiculously close, so unable to stand it any longer, I ran back to the car to get my camera and a spare battery for Wendy. In record time and slightly out of breath I was back and we spent the next 20mins like pigs in muck trying to get some good pics. I ended up with this shot, which I'm quite pleased with considering it was so dark.



Snipe

Wendy always seems to attract the weirdest people and yet again, much to my amusement, she'd ended up with some random mad stranger chatting to her :P. All of a sudden the sky turned very dark so the day looked like it was going to be a washout. We then noticed something that we'd never experienced before on any of our Norfolk holidays, the sound of sirens and blue flashing lights. The vehicles were racing down the main road, so it must've been something urgent. They all pulled in to East Bank and parked up on the track and you can even see Walsey Hills NOA in the background.



Emergency!

One of the vehicles started up and proceeded to drive off right down the East bank towards the shingle ridge! That must've been a dodgy drive as the path is just about wide enough for one person! We shuddered to think where the nearest Hospital was and didn't envy anyone who needed to get there in a hurry. We gave up and went back to car and I drove the short distance to the layby near the other Hides. There'd been a report of a White-fronted Goose from Dauke's Hide so we thought we'd keep a look out for it while we were there.

We arrived at 1.54pm and trudged our way over to Dauke's with all the enthusiasm of a couple of poisoned slugs. There was no sign of the White-front nor anything else for that matter but we watched as more blue flashing lights appeared and drove towards the ridge over at East Bank.....Oooooooooo? There was no other action going on so we had a look through our bins to see if we could find out what was happening. The Coastguards 4x4, complete with a pair of Paramedics, headed off down the bank, turned in at the ridge and carried on across the shingle. There were a couple of walkers standing around and it looked to us as if someone had had a fall or something and couldn't get up. It didn't look like a dire emergency or anything so when Wendy took some pics and we noticed that the Paramedics had their arms around each other we were slightly confused. For all we know they may've been looking at a dead person but we doubted it very much.



Uh?

Excitement over we packed up and returned to the car at 2.40pm.

Three minutes later we were at the beach car park and climbing up the shingle ridge to view the sea. The ubiquitous seawatching brigade were all out with their scopes over at the hut but the sea was dead. We were just about to give up when I spotted a **Velvet Scoter** flying past so I suppose if we'd had the time to stand there for hours anything could've turned up. Neither the time nor the weather were on our side, so we didn't hang around but there were 1000's of Brent Geese grazing in the fields and we saw our 1st **Brown Hares** of the trip as we headed back over to the car. Wendy wanted to pop into the Deli on the way out of Cley so that was to be our next stop.

After she'd browsed her way through the poncy offerings and had emerged with some bits and bobs we headed off back to Glandford. Having gone the wrong way the day before, I thought I had it sussed, but once again I took the wrong turning and nearly got us lost for the 2nd time! Eventually at 3.21pm we parked up and got out into the rain to try find the bird we'd intended to look for yesterday. We had a good look around but apart from some **House Sparrows** and **Stock Doves** there was no sign of it, so we went into Cley-Spy for a nosey. They had a sale on Paramo clothing and I found some total bargain trousers and had to try them on. I went into the changing room and wished I hadn't bothered as I couldn't even pull them up over my arse.....Boooooooo :(How depressing! Having lost quite a lot of weight I'd hoped they'd fit but obviously not, or maybe it could've been because they were a size smaller than me :P. Having spotted the Art Café earlier Wendy wanted to go in for Coffee, which we did and she read the menu to find it was all Veggie stuff and sounded really nice, which impressed her no end. We then did something totally out of character, to back up our clutching at straws mood, and went into Birdscapes Art Gallery :O! Some of the artwork on display was just blow your mind amazing but 70% of it was utter rubbish, in our opinion that is! After we'd exhausted everything that was on offer we came back outside and Wendy spotted a Birder standing behind the units with a scope. Hmmmmmmmm?

This looked promising so we wandered over and had a look. The whole area was typical of Black Redstart territory, a mess of pallets, boats and just a general jumble of machinery so we didn't know where to start. The bird could be anywhere in amongst that lot! Wendy spotted a flash of a bird going at 100mph

behind some clutter and didn't look to be a hurry to come out again. We stood there for ages and were finally rewarded when the lovely **Black Redstart** flew up onto a roof and eventually settled underneath some concrete slabs. All the commotion attracted the attention of the Birders over on the other side, so they all came hurrying over.



Black Redstart twitch!

Wendy, who's on the verge of being vertically challenged, was pretty annoyed when some stupid woman barged her way in bold as brass and stood right in front of her totally blocking her view! Wendy's face was a picture and she had to bite her tongue from exclaiming some expletives loud enough for her to hear. It's true though, how rude? Some people have absolutely no manners at all. Wendy simply stepped to the side so she had a clear view again, which was just as good/bad as where she'd been standing before. The bird was very nice to see but the fading light coupled with it sitting in the dark crevice meant that it was impossible to get a shot. We both had to make do with attempting a record shot, which were anything but decent and this was the best I could do.



Black Redstart

As if the rude woman wasn't enough I was now being severely annoyed by a guy with ants in his pants who was trying to Digiscope the bird. He was constantly on the move and trying to get closer but considering we were just 30 yards away and he had a scope how close did he need to be? He wasn't bothered that he could flush the bird while there were still people around but he also had no consideration for those who hadn't been able to get there yet and were counting on it sticking around for them. Grrrrrrr we're not keen on thoughtless people like that and it's no wonder Birders have acquired a bad name with so many of those types around! It was getting dark and the temperature had dropped considerably so seeing as the bird wasn't playing we gave up and left the others to it. It was just the resident Cley Spy Black Redstart after all. A Buzzard soared overhead as we made our way over to the car and at 4.55pm we had no choice but to head for home.

Back at HQ it was 5.01pm and there was a Jay on the ground under the trees at the side of the driveway. Why couldn't it have been there earlier in the day when it was light? The 2nd thing we noticed was that there was a car parked up and lights on next door. Grrrrrrrrrrr we had neighbours :O! It'd been lovely and quiet up until then, as only the end cottage had been inhabited leaving the middle one empty. When we went inside we could hear their TV and chatting so we put ours on too, to drown the noise out....sorted! Hopefully they wouldn't end up threatening to call Environmental Health due to us being up all night crashing around and keeping them awake :P. I received a report of a Caspian Gull and 2x Yellow-legged Gulls at Cley and we could only presume that Mark Golly, the guy we'd met last year who'd pointed out a Baltic Gull to us, had been out that evening. It was a plan for tomorrow though, if we still had enough energy left at the end of the day. After tea and baths we finally put our feet up and having thought that our best bird of the day had been Velvet Scoter we realised that the Glandford Black Restart had just saved the day. Phew! We had our only early start planned for the morning, as we wanted to get down to Winterton as early as possible to see what the night had brought in. We were so tired that I think we went to bed at around 10pm. Hahahaha.....hardcore or what? :P.

Tuesday 22nd October

Although the alarm was set for 6am Wendy woke up earlier and didn't see the point in going back to sleep, so she got up. It was very windy outside and the forecast was for rain, although it looked as though Winterton could stay dry for a change. The band of rain on the weather map stopped just above Winterton, so we crossed our fingers. Seeing as we always get a thorough soaking when we go there we dressed accordingly in our waterproof trousers. I cracked up laughing when I saw Wendy in hers, as the elasticated waistband, made her look like she had a proper American 'giant arse!' Luckily her coat covered her unflattering pants and flattened everything down so nobody else would notice. At 6.56am she heard the Tawny Owls calling from the plantation above the grounds of Three Owls Farm. They must've been thinking about going to bed after a long night out hunting. From the kitchen window she also noticed 1000's of Black-headed Gulls streaming endlessly over the fields as they headed out for the day from their roost. I'd hate to try to estimate how many there were or even worse still would be to have to count them all! After we had everything packed up we were ready to go at 7.26am.

I suppose we could've got out earlier but it was still pretty dark, as the clocks still hadn't gone back, so hopefully we wouldn't be too late getting there. Just up the road a black and white Rabbit, which looked like someone's pet, hopped over the road into the field....weird. My Sat Nav was predicting that it would take 1hr 15mins to get to Winterton but I was pretty sure I'd get us there quicker than that. Unfortunately, as it was rush hour and everyone was heading to work, we were crawling along at times. I spotted some **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** in a field on the way and we arrived bang on my Sat Nav's time of 8.40am.

We were so pleased to see that it was sunny for a change when I parked up at Winterton car park and Wendy went into the Café to get us a ticket, as the little hut was closed for the winter. We got out of the car and scanned out to sea seeing a few **Common Seals** watching the people walking on the beach. I'd had reports from Birdguides of 3x Shorelarks and 28x Snow Buntings the day before so we decided to follow the directions given. Firstly we thought we'd go south for the Shorelarks, as they are definitely one of our all time favourites and the highlight of our holiday 2years ago. They could've been anywhere by then and surely it was going to be like looking for a needle in a haystack? Still, there was no way we were going to ignore the fact that they were starting to arrive while we were there and had to give it our best shot.



Winterton beach

Trudging down the beach we contemplated how many birds we seem to dip on, how bad our luck was and what a long day we had ahead. Wendy was just about to write up Common Seal in the notebook when she looked up and saw 2x birds sitting on the dunes just to our right. As her brain processed what she was seeing it was all she could do to let out a, "Eeee arrr.....OMG!" Unbelievably, there were 2x **Shorelarks** sitting about 100yards away from us! Wendy raised her camera and started trying for a quick record shot but the birds were flushed by another walker and flew off down the beach to the tide line. There was no sign of the 3rd bird but we were totally gobsmacked, speechless even! We'd walked for no time at all and had already found our quarry.....jammy or what? We decided to sit down and wait to see if they'd come back but they seemed perfectly happy feeding on the sand. Instead I suggested slowly 'bum shuffling' our way closer to them in the hope that they wouldn't be spooked. This idea worked a treat and eventually our 2 birds were joined by the 3rd and they all seemed happy enough. We spent ages sitting on the sand taking pics but there was a constant threat of them being flushed by the dog walkers heading our way from both sides. One such person was getting dangerously close but just as we thought it was all over he totally surprised us. He put his dog on a lead and walked it up the beach and around us giving a very wide berth. How nice of him? He must be used to it but it's incredibly rare to see someone with that level of respect for others. We breathed a sigh of relief and carried on trying to better our existing shots. From the distance we were shooting at, this is my best shot out of a bad bunch.



Shorelark

We held our breath as the birds started to head towards us and were gradually coming closer.....until another dog walker approached and let his dog run straight at the Shorelarks! He was no better and ploughed his way through too saying, "Sorry!" with an insincere smirk on his face as I gave him the dirtiest look I could. That was it, the birds were off down the beach and although they probably would've come back in time we didn't have the time to wait for them. I got up and took a quick pic of Wendy sitting on the beach complete with 'bum shuffle' trail :D.



Wendy track

We'd both bettered our previous shots from 2 years ago but we were more happy with the fact that we'd not only seen them but had been afforded great views :). Happy with that we turned around to head back, getting caught out by a passing shower on the way. We had another look out to sea and found a flock of **Common Scoter** and although we knew that there were 4x Velvet Scoter in with them, from the Birdguides reports, they were so far off they were indistinguishable from each other.

We took the route over the dunes and up to Hermanus Restaurant, where there'd been another Yellow-browed Warbler reported the day before.



Winterton Dunes

Needless to say, it was totally lifeless and there wasn't so much as a squeak from the bushes. There were however **Fox Moth Caterpillars** everywhere and we had to watch where we were standing so as not to squish them! As we approached the road, where we'd be crossing over to head north for the Snow Bunts, Wendy spotted 2x House Martins flying over the Church. I then received a Birdguides report of a Swift (sp) at Winterton and when I raised my bins to have a look at the Martins I spotted a Swift! I couldn't believe it, we were actually in the right place at the right time for a change and it was very likely to be something other than just a Common Swift. The more we looked at it the more we could see how pale it was but we needed to get closer for a better look, so we wandered down the road towards the town. Another Birder had also spotted it and asked us, "What do you think?" We told him our thoughts on the matter but having not paid much attention to the differences between a young Swift and the potential 'other Swift' the best we could say was that it looked very pale. Nearer still, we spoke to another guy who asked us the same question and we gave the same answer. He said, "I wouldn't like to put my head on the block for it but...?" I took a few record shots as it whizzed around, so finally we could get an image to zoom in on and cogitate over. After we'd had a good look we were convinced and reckoned we were safe to say that we were looking at a **Pallid Swift**, which was a lifer for us both. It was a bird we hadn't expected to see at all and also my 1st lifer on a Norfolk trip in ages :). Wooo Hooo! A few minutes later, "confirmed Pallid Swift at Winterton" appeared on the RBA app. Neither us, nor this chap, had had the time to put the news in yet, so it was good to know there was someone else there able to pin the ID down. As we continued we noticed the Swift was flying much nearer to us! Unfortunately I still had my teleconverter on so tried my best handholding 700mm to get a flight shot of a Swift! Hahahahaha.



Pallid Swift

Quite pleased with the shot I'd got, considering the handicap, we decided to carry on towards the north dunes for the Snow Bunts passing some totally massive Parasol Mushrooms, which Wendy had to get pics of. I thought a good size guide would be for her to put her hand next to them so you could see just how huge they were.



Huge Parasol Mushrooms!

As we approached the beach we noticed an elderly guy with what looked like his young Grandson. The guy was looking at something in his bins while the kid was running around like a lunatic. We had a good idea what he was looking at so we skirted around them, so as not to flush the birds. I thought that if we went round the dune ridge we could come at the birds from a different angle, so we hid behind the dunes and crept our way nearer using them as cover. When we poked our heads up we saw 2x **Snow Buntings** feeding happily on the ground but quite far away. Looking back towards the young lad and Grandad we saw them approach right up to something, get bored then move away. It looked like

we'd gone too far up the dunes so I suggested we went back to try approaching like the others had done. As we came out into the open, where I thought we'd be a lot further up than the other people had been, I was shocked and gutted to nearly stand on the entire flock of Snow buntings.....Nooooooooo! I couldn't believe we'd gone to so much effort to not flush the birds only to accidentally flush the lot. Luckily enough the others had already finished watching them so we hadn't ruined their views! Phew! Snow Bunting are notoriously tame birds, so we were confident that they'd be back and we got ourselves into position for when they returned. Sitting still worked a treat and the flock flew back in no time, so we started to take some pics. This is Wendy's best shot out of the 100's she took!



Snow Bunting

Although the initial report was of 28 we only managed to count 23 in total but it was difficult as the birds were all camouflaged by lying flat in the indentations made by people's footprints in the sand. A really irritating guy, who presumably had ants in his pants, was walking around trying to get pics and flushing the birds constantly in the process. He was using crutches initially but soon handed them over, to what looked like his son, while he was getting shots. We couldn't help but wonder if he was on long-term incapacity benefit or something but was miraculously able walk unaided whilst carrying a heavy camera, big lens and cumbersome tripod to take bird photos.....HMMMMMMMMMM? It sounded a bit too similar to a well-known husband and wife photographer team operating in the North West! By then quite a crowd had accumulated and people started asking us about where the Shorelarks had been seen, so we pointed them all in the right direction. We gave up on the Snow Bunts, as the annoying guy was continuously flushing the birds over and over, which was ruining things for everyone and we headed back.



Winterton beach

It was only 11.40am when we got back to the car and a lot earlier than we'd bargained for. What were we going to do for the rest of the day? Getting her priorities sorted Wendy grabbed her purse and ran straight over to the Café for a Cappuccino. She thought she'd better get me something while she was there and asked for an Ice cream with a flake. The guy behind the counter was laughing, saying that the machine was usually switched off by the end of September and how he was amazed that he was still selling so much Ice cream in October. It was warm and sunny still, so by the time she'd got it back to the car it was already beginning to melt and drip down the side of the cone. It was demolished in no time at all but I had a horrible feeling that I'd pay for it later and end up with IBS! The black rain clouds were still looming in the distance and the wind still hadn't dropped but we'd been so lucky to have a dry visit to Winterton for once. Unbelievably, the weather had been 100% better than when we'd been there in July! As we drove off at 12.17pm Wendy spotted another score for her 'Fit Birder' board, presumably looking for the Pallid Swift and again she was verging on Cougerness! :P. I scratched my head for a while and decided that Horsey Gap would be worth a shot, as the bushes there are great for migrants. There'd been a Pallas' Warbler there a few days earlier and was also where the Roller, that one of Wendy's Bosses had gripped her off with in August, had been.

We pulled up in the car park at Horsey Gap at 12.28pm just in time for it to start raining. As it was lunchtime we grabbed our sarnies and waited for the weather to improve. It didn't get much better and looked suspiciously like it was staying that way for the rest of the day, so we got out for a wander anyway. It wasn't a very pleasant walk to start with but seeing the amazing bushes and trees, perfect for any migrating bird to use as cover, totally empty was depressing to put it mildly.



Horsey bushes

We weren't expecting to find anything and were there just to fill in time but still, we'd kind of hoped for something. It continued to rain and we were back at the car at 1.32pm, where we both agreed that we might as well go back to the IOM, as there was no way we'd beat the morning we'd just had! There was nothing else for it, so I pulled off and headed back towards Blakeney.

We didn't stop hoping though and had our eyes peeled for any Common Cranes, which are about in the Broads. When Wendy told me that she could see something big flying but followed it up with, "Oh no, they're Hares.....no Deer!" I chose not to stop the car, which was lucky as Wendy concluded that it was just 2x **Roe Deer**. I don't know how she reckoned they were flying and must've been having one of her moments.....Doh! She still hasn't beaten the Kangaroo in the Highlands yet and I dread to think how she's going to, but one thing's for sure, it'll happen :P. We passed a field with 100's of Golden Plover in it and I got a Birdguides report of a Rose-coloured Starling at Caister-on-Sea. That would've been a lifer for Wendy but as I reckoned it was 30mins away from Winterton in the opposite direction, we had gone to far and were now already at Cromer. I was a bit annoyed by that because if I'd worked out where Caister-on-Sea actually was, before going to Winterton, I would've definitely planned to go there as well. Boooooo :(.

In a way it was lucky we hadn't gone though, as I started to fall off a cliff and the rest of the drive seemed very long and tiring. We decided to pop back to Glandford to see if the BRS was playing and hopefully get a shot of it. It was 2.36pm when we arrived but it was so horrible outside that the bird must've been sheltering somewhere and there was no sign of it. My guts by then were feeling decidedly painful and after I'd paid the WC's an emergency visit I think my stomach had shrunk by at least 2inches! It wasn't looking good but maybe those bargain trousers would've fitted me after that! :(I really didn't feel like hanging around so we went home via Blakeney Spa and with it still being early Wendy wanted to have a look in the Gift Shop and Deli for some pressies.

At 4pm we were back at HQ and my IBS had finally kicked off big time. Wendy set about making a Stir-fry her tea but I just couldn't face anything and didn't want to make it worse by eating the wrong thing anyway. There was a lot of noisy F15 and Hercules action going overhead and I eventually rustled up the enthusiasm to make myself a very bland tea. Being a total nerd I really wanted to

settle down to watch the Apple Keynote and go through the day's pics, but just as I starting to wind down I heard a weird noise over by the kitchen lights. After being puzzled for ages the mystery was solved when the biggest Wasp I've ever seen came flying out....Aarrgghhhhh! Wendy reckoned it was a Queen and that we needed to catch it and let it go outside but I didn't hear her offering :P. After we'd behaved like a couple of idiots, squeaking and squealing for a while, I finally put a glass over it....Phew! We now had a humungous (although the pic doesn't do it justice!) Queen Wasp in a glass on the side....Uh oh!



Eeeeeek!

We decided to leave it where it was until the morning as we'd had enough for one day. I had a quick look at the weather forecast and was pleased to see that it was looking like it was going to be good for tomorrow. I reckoned that the Burnham Overy walk heading east to Gun Hill then over to the west end of Holkham Pines would be our best plan, as it's a long walk and not one to be done in the rain. By 10.15pm we'd both had enough and went to bed for a well earned sleep.

Wednesday 23rd October

After the previous day we were in no hurry to get up and it was 7.25am when we finally surfaced. It was a bright and sunny day and still windy, although the wind hadn't been a cold one so far. Having been so sure of good weather the night before I soon realized that I'd been looking at the IOM weather.....Doh! Norfolk on the other hand was going to be very wet and windy. Great! After reshuffling our original plan to the next day we settled on a 2nd shot at Cley East Bank for Beardies and then a visit to Kelling Heath. I got a report in of a Great White Egret at East Bank, so it looked like we'd be making a better move anyway. Before we left I had to work out a plan for releasing the giant monster Wasp. I took it out to the gate up the path thinking that if I left the card over the top the wind would hopefully blow it off. This seemed like a foolproof master plan, so I was horrified when a gust of wind blew it off before I'd even put the glass down.....Eeeeeek! I had to think quickly so.....I dropped it and LEGGED it! Hahaha. After we'd got everything ready and I'd calmed down we headed off at 9.05am, by which point it looked like it was going to start raining any minute :(.

I parked up at the East Bank car park at 9.11am just as a Squirrel was running down the side of a tree over the road. We could hear a Tit flock coming from the

trees too and at least 2x Chiffchaffs calling. We stopped to have a look and listen and even though it would've been a great start to the day there was no Yellow-browed Warbler amongst them.....Boooooooo! Everyone else seemed to be tripping over them and we couldn't even hear one! We wandered up the Bank, which runs through a massive section of reed bed and heard the loud blast of a Cetti's Warbler and a **Water Rail** squealing from somewhere nearby. Luckily we seemed to have driven away from the rain clouds and it was nice and sunny.



East Bank

Considering we were there at the best time to see Beardies out in the open we'd so far failed. Finally we heard the distinctive 'Ping ping ping' of a **Bearded Tit** and stopped to see if any would show. Finally they started to fly around and a couple of them came up to the top of a reed and posed nicely.....for a split second. We tried our best to get some pics but it wasn't easy at all and the results were disappointing. Further up the Bank there was a ditch with 5x Little Grebes in it and we carried on to the end to view the pool where the Great White Egret had been seen earlier. Typically of our luck, there was no sign of anything but Little Egrets, so we walked over the shingle ridge for a look out to sea.



Looking east along the shingle ridge

Yet again it was dead but after a while we spotted our 1st Diver of the trip, which was miles out as usual. It definitely wasn't a Great Northern and we spent ages trying to get a view of its features. In the end we played it safe and went with a Red-throat but we weren't totally convinced, until we got a report through of a **Black-throated Diver** a bit later on.....dohhh !

With nothing else about we headed back to the car park and seeing as we were there we crossed over to give Walsey Hills NOA a quick visit. We were hoping to hear the call of a Yellow-browed Warbler or something but just after we arrived the heavens opened and we had to take shelter under some trees. The whole area was dead so, after the shower had passed, we raced back to the car and jumped in 10.36am. I reckoned Kelling Quags was worth a shot and on our way Wendy spotted 2x **Egyptian Geese** shortly followed by 'The Old Post Office' in Salthouse. This meant a stop off for a Cappuccino fix but we were in no hurry so it didn't matter. When she came out she noticed a group of Birders on the ridge in the distance and they all seemed to be looking at something. She was wondering if it was something interesting, possibly the Great White Egret, but I wasn't convinced and carried on to Kelling.

We arrived at Kelling at 11.05am and we both needed a WC break so I suggested going into the 2nd Hand Bookshop/Café, which would mean we could kill 2 birds with 1 stone. I'd get the chance to have a look for a book I'd started reading but had to leave unfinished at Farriers Barn in July and we could both make use of their loos :). After looking around I couldn't find the History section for the life of me but I finally found it, with an elderly couple eating their food at a table right in front of it. I'd have had to ask them to move if I stood any chance of finding the book, so instead I forgot about the whole idea (I found the book online when I got home anyway). The food smelled really nice so we started to feel hungry but it wasn't lunchtime and we had a walk to do before we could eat our sarnies. I drove the car over to the car park next to the footpath we wanted and we set off with absolutely no delusions of finding anything good. Wendy spotted some funky fungus growing on the branch of a tree, so she stopped to get a pic and found out later that it was a type of Jelly Fungi called Jelly Ear.



Jelly Ear

Wendy reminded me that this would probably be our only chance of finding a Bullfinch but we got the distinct impression that we'd be leaving empty handed. To cut a long story short, by the time we got to the end of the path we'd found

nothing, so we walked up the ridge to view the sea. It was dead as usual so we headed back seeing nothing, apart from a **Stonechat**. I did spot a couple of World War 2 anti-aircraft guns set up, which was a bit weird, so I got a pic.



Kelling

We trudged back to the car feeling depressed but then Wendy spotted a bird flying above us in the trees. It called and I scratched my head as to what it was.....Errrrrr? Then we saw it in our bins and could've kicked myself for not recognising its call, but at least we hadn't left without seeing a **Bullfinch**. It was a nice male and stuck around for just enough time before flying off.....Phew!

Back at the car it was 12.04pm and I started to get some RBA reports coming through on my mobile. Unbelievably, there were 2x reports of YBW's and we hadn't even had a sniff of one despite being in the right places. There was one somewhere miles away and another at a place we'd never heard of before, called 'Natural Surroundings' also in Glandford. The other reports were of a probable Pallid Swift over Dauke's Hide at Cley and the Black-throated Diver on the sea at Cley. We didn't need the Pallid Swift but we definitely wanted to try for the YBW. Apparently it was hanging around the Red Squirrel pen in a Beech tree and with directions as good as that we hoped we were onto a sure thing.....Hahahahaha! We were getting near to the end of our holiday, so time was running out and the pressure was on. Another bird we'd hoped to see was Firecrest but there were no reports of any coming in and having trawled through 100's of Goldcrests we'd failed to find even one of them either :(I turned the car around and headed off back to Glandford. It was only 4miles away but somehow I managed to miss the turning again just like our 1st attempt at getting there :P. Amazingly, even though natural surroundings wasn't on the Sat Nav, we managed to trip over it as we were driving past aimlessly!

At 12.25pm we pulled up in the car park and made our way into the little Café and Gift Shop to pay our £3 admission (each!) and were greeted by the very friendly owner.



Natural Surroundings shop

He was really helpful and gave us the directions and told us that the bird was hanging out with Goldcrests and was still favouring the Beech Tree by the Squirrels. We stepped out of the shop and started to walk down the path and within 30secs we were pleased to hear the bird calling. Sorted! :). Now to see the little ****! This wasn't going to be easy unlike hearing it call, which is unmistakable and really loud. We then found the Squirrel Pen, which had a pair of very cute **Red Squirrels** inside.



Squirrel pen

It was, in our opinion, way too small for them and needed an extension but it had been set up by a guy, who'd wanted to get the Reds back into all their original habitats before the Greys wiped them out. Although his intentions were good sadly it's never going to happen, unless they start to actively cull the Greys and that could take forever and would cost too much money as well as being highly controversial (although since the UK Minister for the environment loves to murder animals surely Grey Squirrels are next). While we looked at them we imagined what it would like to have the beautiful Native Red Squirrels back and felt sad that this pair would never be able to be set free. We could hear the YBW, clear as a bell, above us and it wasn't long before we realized that it was very active and seemed to be doing circuits. We stayed put in the hope that it'd come

back but we could hear it in the small stand of trees nearby and wondered if we should follow it around instead. A massive Tit flock came in and we sifted through as many as we could but they were all just Long-tailed Tits and Goldcrests. It was literally like looking for a needle in a haystack!



There's a tiny Warbler in here somewhere

I heard another call, which I recognized as a **Marsh Tit** just as it flew in.....nice :). The YBW was now calling from somewhere else and definitely wasn't with the Tit flock, so we decided to go for a wander. We then heard a **Nuthatch** but Wendy was calling me over as she had the YBW right above her head! It didn't stay put though, so we both slowly edged our way through the trees and could still hear the bird nearby. There were Treecreepers and Nuthatches putting on a good show in there but finally the tiny **Yellow-Browed Warbler** appeared and it was quite low down. We watched it for ages feeding amongst the branches and it didn't seem at all bothered by our presence. Stretching our imaginations we began to regret our decision not to bring the cameras, as we'd never bargained on the bird being photographable. It was out in the open feeding and close enough too but reality soon kicked back in when we realized just how dark it was in the trees. We were quite lucky to have just seen it really and if we'd had our cameras we'd have lost a lot of the satisfaction of simply watching it.

Happy with our views we headed back up to find the WC's following the signs and past a shed containing 3x tanks and another enclosure. The enclosure housed Hedgehogs, which were nowhere to be seen and probably already hibernating but the tanks looked more interesting. We went over for a look and our hearts melted when we saw what was in them. They were tiny little **Harvest Mice**, which were part of a releasing scheme and a sort of lifer for us both. Wendy couldn't resist trying to get a pic but through the glass with her point and click this is the best she could come up with.



Harvest Mouse

Ok they weren't wild ones but once they were ready they'd be released back into the wild to hopefully build up their ever-decreasing numbers. These were something Wendy had admired in pics and on TV since she was a kid but had never imagined she'd ever see. Wendy, being a total wuss, was in tears when she saw them and was a gonner after reading the info on the board. The guy who'd started it was no longer with us and it said that every time they released a Mouse a little piece of him went with it. How nice is that? Hopefully their love of these gorgeous creatures will indeed help them recolonize the habitats where they should be. After tearing Wendy away we found the WC's and made our way back to the Café. The food smelled so good and the menu looked tempting but we had our sarnies and made do with a Cappuccino for Wendy and a piece of Chocolate Cake for me....om nom nom :). On the wall behind the counter was Chris Packham's signature and apparently he'd been there filming with the BBC! There was also a picture of a Broad-bodied Chaser on the info leaflet we'd picked up and we just wished we'd known about the place in July, as we failed to see one anywhere on that trip. By now our backs were destroyed from constantly looking up with our bins and the week was obviously starting to take its toll. It was 1.50pm when we got back to the car with our goodies, so we started tucking in to our lunch and watched the sky turn black just before there was a torrential downpour! Luckily for us we'd made it back just in time but a few unfortunate people started to emerge and were running through the muddy puddles back to their cars. Ah well, at least my absolutely filthy car got a wash, so you could actually read the reg again :P.

We left at 2.20pm to carry on with our original plan of going to Kelling Heath and 15mins later we pulled up in the car park. Having thought that the bad weather would totally ruin our chances of seeing anything we were very surprised to arrive to a blue sunny sky. The only problem was that we were a bit late in the day and it was still really windy, which didn't exactly make for perfect conditions, so again we decided to leave the cameras behind. Having lost all my location maps when I changed my mobile I'd presumed that they'd be on Wendy's but when I had a look they weren't there.....Uh oh! We tried to find where we wanted to be from memory but ended up just as confused as we'd been in July. We decided to take a different route this time, just to mix thing up a bit, and ended up looking at the view out over the sea and Weybourne.



View towards Weybourne

On the way past the Caravan Park there was a Jay on the path in front of us and if we'd had our cameras we'd have been up for a good chance of getting a decent shot. Typical! Wendy grabbed a quick pic with her point and click just to show how close the bird was and what an opportunity we'd just missed!



Point and click Jay!

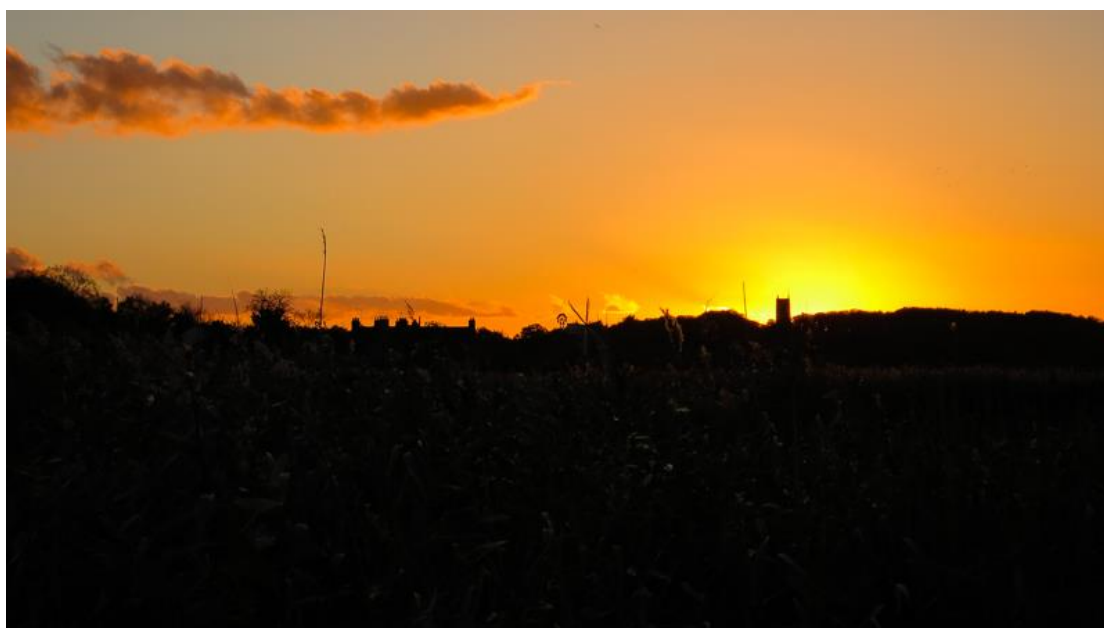
There was also another Bullfinch in the bushes so if we hadn't seen one at Kelling Quags we'd have been OK. As we made our way back to the car having seen no sign of the Dartford Warblers I saw a familiar face walking towards us. Bang on cue Kelling man had appeared and Wendy joked that he was just like the shopkeeper from 'Mr Ben!' This was just too weird! He's normally there early every morning, so it was quite late in the day for him. We'd planned to be there in the morning too but had been sidetracked by the YBW at Natural Surroundings, so were also there later in the day! Again he recognized us and after a quick jog to his memory as to where we were up to he started to fill us in with what had been happening since July. We spent ages with him and as usual he could answer our every question. We'd thought it strange that he was there so late but he told us that he'd been shopping in King's Lynn for a new waterproof jacket and walking boots. He made us laugh when he said, "Have you been to Kings Lynn?" "It's a hell hole, I hate going there!" and fortunately for

us we've never had to go there ourselves.....yet. As we walked away Wendy calmly suggested that he was the 'Spirit Guide of Kelling.' She started to wonder if he was actually dead and that he was still roaming around helping interested people by sharing his wealth of knowledge. What else could explain the uncanniness of our meetings with him? I had to admit that it was quite freaky but I wouldn't go quite that far :P.

It was 4.42pm when we got back to the car and on the way I'd received a report of Lapland Buntings at Cley. There was no other info to go off so we decided to stick to our plan of going to the Gull Roost and hope that the Laps stuck around until tomorrow.

I parked up at the Cley layby car park at 4.53pm and we headed straight for Dauke's Hide. There were a good few Birders in there already but from what we could see there were no unusual Gulls about. As we sifted through them all I found one, which stood out a bit, so I got Wendy onto it. We both watched the Gull for about 5mins, while scanning through the others too, but we just couldn't say it was anything other than a Herring Gull! While we were pondering over it something flushed all the birds, including the Gulls, so our chances of relocating it were it non-existent. As usual we had to sit listening to the conversations of the other Birders and some of them were predictably as full of **** as the rest :P. Their main topic was Pallid Swifts and they were all giving their expert opinions of the bird and how to ID it. Presumably the same bird we'd seen the day before had been reported at Muckleburgh and one of them was trying to decide whether or not to go for it. In the end he decided to give it a go before it was too dark so he packed his scope away and was gone. Rather him than us! We'd been so lucky to have just been in the right place at the right time and didn't fancy his chances of twitching it much. By then the light had started to fade big time and we were absolutely freezing and bored so we decided to call it a day. We weren't that bothered about a Caspian Gull anyway so we headed back to the car.

It was 5.44pm when we got back and looking out over the reeds we could see a Starling murmuration just beginning to get going. We didn't have the will to stick around and headed straight for home, but not before trying to get a photo of the nice sky.



Cley Sky

At 5.51pm we were back at HQ and with our food supplies running out and it being our last free night we decided to go out for food again. My choice was 'The Kings Arms' again as I was starving and knew exactly what I'd get already, so we headed off at 6.19pm. Luckily our table in the corner was free and the specials board hadn't changed so we both got the same as we'd had the other night. It wasn't nearly as busy as it had been on Saturday night but there was still a good few people in. Thinking that we couldn't go wrong we were quite disappointed by our food and although we'd ordered the same, it wasn't. We can only presume that it was a different chef that night but it was still nice enough and did the job. We stayed for a drink and couldn't help but do a bit of people watching. There was a Barfly sat on a stool in the corner who was nattering to everyone sitting at a big table having food. He sounded like he was full of **** and reminded me of a guy I used to work with years ago. He was telling everyone that the plane that they'd seen earlier must've been an Osprey, which sounded a bit dodgy to me. There was an elderly lady sitting with the party who didn't even seem to be officially with them! They were all eating and she was perched on the end looking awkward with a drink.

When we left and were walking back to the car we noticed the sky. It was totally clear so we could see the stars so vividly that it looked as though the Milky Way was visible. The more we looked the more stars we could see and it really made us realize how bad light pollution is in other places, including home! Although the streets are dark and unlit everyone we saw had a torch with them and it made the sky look amazing, it was just something else!

We were back at HQ at 7.50pm and ready for baths and a chill out before bed. By 10.45pm we realized that tomorrow night we'd be packing up and getting ready for leaving the next day and feeling depressed at the thought we went to bed.

Thursday 24th October

Wendy was up at 7.10am to find a nice day with no wind but I was feeling lazy so treated myself to a lie in till 7.45am. I was looking at Twitter only to see that a guy, who we'd seen arriving when we were leaving, had pics of the Caspian Gull from last night! His comment was, "Only just flew in and too dark for proper pics!" Urrghhhhhh! If we'd stayed longer it would've eventually turned up but we just couldn't be bothered at the time. Ah well :P. We thought our 1st plan for the day should be to try Cley East Bank for a last ditch attempt at a Beardy shot and then to have a look at the beach for the Laps. After packing all our stuff up we were ready to go at 9.10am and it felt decidedly cold compared to all the other mornings so far. The temperature in my car was reading just 9.5c.....Brrrrrrrrrrrr!

At 9.20am I parked up again in the car park and we set off down the bank. Not far down Wendy spotted a Marsh Harrier preening in a tree out on the reed bed but typically it had branches in front of it, so we couldn't get a clear shot, although we gave it a go anyway. We didn't want to tear ourselves away and knew that as soon as we turned our backs it would either fly or do something amazing that would've made for a contender for 'Photo of the week'. In the end we had to just walk away and take our chance.



East Bank

There was a lot of Beardy action at last and at one point we had one sitting out in the open nearby. Unfortunately, we both totally panicked and managed to make a bad job of every shot, but at least we'd bettered all our other existing ones. This is the best one I came up with, which isn't the shot I'd hoped for.



Bearded Tit

We carried on down to the shingle ridge and had a wander round to see if we could find the Laps stopping for a quick chat to another Birder who pointed out a **Wheatear** to us. He was definitely trying to string it into an Isabeline, which we instantly dismissed and he then went on to say that he'd found a dead but undamaged Fieldfare just a bit further down the path. We hadn't seen or heard a single Fieldfare since we'd been away but we definitely weren't desperate enough to go and see a dead one! We walked all the way along the ridge without seeing anything and made our way over to North Hide. There was a massive flock of Dark-bellied Brents in a field, so we stopped to get some pics while we had the opportunity. Unfortunately they weren't as close as we'd have liked but

we didn't want to flush them and kept our distance. Wendy came up with this one, which looks like the bird's blowing a raspberry :P.



Dark-bellied Brent Goose

At the Hide as usual the sun was in our faces and it was impossible to make anything out, not that there was anything there anyway. We left as soon as possible, as we didn't want to waste any time and we were pleased to see a Snow Bunting flying over heading west. We met a couple with a gorgeous 5month old Border Collie Puppy, which made us miss Lyca even more than we had done already. Hopefully she'll be able to go away with us next time when she's a bit older. We were back at the car at 11am and it was still only 10.5c and getting late considering the walk we had ahead of us.

I parked up at the Burnham Overy layby at 11.39am and although it was still too early for lunch we already felt peckish and knew we'd be starving before we got back. It was lovely and sunny out so we crossed our fingers that it would stay that way. All the recent rain had made the footpath very muddy and with it being sticky and red, clay like mud our boots were a mess in no time. All the way down the track we scanned the field edges and bushes in a last ditch attempt at finding a Ring Ouzel but all we found were Blackbirds :(.



Burnham Overy

There was a small raptor sitting on a post, which at such a distance looked as though it could be a Merlin. We kept a close eye on it in case it flew and as we grew closer it became obvious that it was just another Kestrel. There were 2x Buzzards knocking about as well and one of them looked quite pale but we couldn't string it into a Rough-leg either! There were still reports of Rough-legs from both there and Holkham and we couldn't help but wonder if it was the pale bird from last year still being misidentified or whether there actually was one somewhere. A Sparrowhawk appeared and started to mob one of the Buzzards, which was cool as it isn't something we'd see back at home. Once we'd reached the end of the track and joined the ridge, which takes you along past the marsh, it became really busy. There were groups of people everywhere with kids and dogs all presumably making the most of the warm autumn sunshine. All of a sudden we started to feel like we'd accidentally walked onto the set of 'Made in Chelsea' or something. The people around us were soooooo posh that it was difficult to understand what on earth they were saying. All their words seemed to roll into one, so we amused ourselves by trying to get the hang of it and it certainly wasn't easy! As we spoke in our amazingly accurate posh accents I became uneasily aware that there was a group of them coming up close behind us.....Uh Oh! We tried not to laugh too much and decided that the best idea was to carry on talking in the same way in the hope that we'd go unnoticed :/. God knows what they thought but we let them pass before we cracked up laughing.....Ooops! At least us Northerners can be bothered to pronounce individual words!

Having decided that we just didn't fit in at all in North Norfolk we had a quick scan over the marsh.



Burnham Overy

Wendy spotted some **Grey Plover** and the numbers of Pipits and Skylarks flying in and out of the sedge was unbelievable, so surely there was something interesting amongst them? Last year we'd had Black Brant in the bottom fields, a Kingfisher down on the marsh as well as all kinds of small common birds in the sedge but it all seemed very quiet this time. Apart from the Pipits and Skylarks there was nothing else.....Boooooooooo! Wendy was getting a bit Karl Pilkington again and was dragging her feet and saying that there was no point going any further because there was nothing about. We were both feeling quite

hungry by then but I decided that we should at least make it as far as Gun Hill just to enjoy the walk.



Looking back from Gun Hill

I'd had a report of a Western Bonelli's Warbler from the Washington Hide at Holkham at around 12.20pm but there'd been no updates since. Having decided to put it down as another Norfolk string I just hoped that it wouldn't come back to bite us on the bum. We plodded on deciding to miss out the Holkham section of our planned walk, as it did seem a bit pointless. There were 1000's of Pink-feet coming in off the sea constantly, which as always is an awesome sight but as we traipsed out over the Dunes we started to feel a bit weird. Our legs had turned to jelly so we knew we needed to get back to the car for some lunch asap! We made it to Gun Hill but decided to turn back before one of us conked out and after seeing the commotion with the emergency services at Cley we didn't fancy being the next spectator sport. A **Peacock Butterfly** whizzed past us at a belting speed, which we didn't expect at the end of October and on the coast too. As we hotfooted it back, looking forward to our lunch, we spotted lots of little furry **Ruby Tiger Moth Caterpillars** on the path and stopped for some pics.



Ruby Tiger Caterpillar

It didn't take us very long at all to get to the car and at 1.20pm we were relieved to have made it back. Needless to say that the 1st thing we did was wolf down our lunch.....om nom nom! It was 17.5c by then and there was another couple of cars with Birders in parked up, also stopping for their lunch. An Army transport plane flew high over us, so having failed to get any bird pics I decided to get a shot of that instead, as it was a lifer for us both.



Army Transport Plane

This was closely followed by 2x Blackhawk helicopters, which were also lifers for us, and a Eurofighter, which is one of my favourite planes. Cool!



Blackhawk Helicopter

With no birdlife to watch we definitely couldn't grumble at so much military action. There was another pale Buzzard flying around too but thankfully no one reported it as a Rough-leg. We'd been watching a tatty looking Moth on the windscreen, so before we left we thought we'd better get a pic to ID it later. Wendy ID'd it as a **Rhomboid Tortrix**, when we got back home, which was another lifer for us both.



Rhomboid Tortrix

We had no idea what to do next and as there'd still been no further reports of the Western Bonelli's Warbler, we assumed our first thought to be correct, so we ditched off going to Holkham. Normally we'd be going to Titchwell on our way out of Norfolk but the forecast for the next day was for rain, so I reckoned we'd be better off going there next instead. There'd been reports of Shorelark, Snow Bunt, Slav Grebe, Jack Snipe, Great Northern Diver, Long-tailed Duck, Spotted Redshank and Greenshank, all of which we needed, so it would make for a better experience to go while the sun was out. Decision made we headed off at 1.52pm passing the Barn Owl fields on the way but seeing nothing.

When we arrived at Titchwell at 2.18pm it was still 17.5c and we were shocked to see how busy it was. The car park was full and there was cars double-parked everywhere. Luckily I found a space but it was definitely the busiest we'd ever seen it. We headed out towards the beach and had a quick look over the marsh on our way. There were loads of Ruff and more Common Snipe than you could shake a stick at but no sign of a Jack Snipe. After walking all the way over to the Parinder Hide and seeing nothing more than Common Snipe, we headed straight to the beach to see what we could find. When we stepped off the boardwalk and onto the sand it looked like everyone had the same idea, there were Birders everywhere!



Titchwell party!

There was a volunteer with a scope pointing out to sea and letting people use it to see for themselves. He was saying, "Slavonian Grebe" over and over in a really slow and monotone voice but he was failing to get any of the crowd onto the birds. One guy who was trying to use his scope had seemingly taken his glasses off, so the volunteer was desperately trying to explain that he needed to keep them on to see :P. All the birds where miles out and to us using our bins they were just tiny black specks in the distance.....as usual. I managed to pick up some **Knot** feeding at the waters edge, Wendy found 3x **Great-crested Grebes** and we spotted a **Red-throated Diver** out on the water. The others weren't so easy to ID but eventually we found a group of small Grebes, which we could tell were Red-necked Grebes plus some **Slavonian Grebes**, but only by zooming in on a record shot I'd taken! It would've been great to have a better view of them but the tide was just too far out again. A guy then came over to us and started chatting. He asked if I was getting pics of the juvenile Gannets and Eiders and then excitedly started trying to impress me by directing me onto them and explaining how to ID the Gannets! Errrrrrr, I didn't know what to do or say and tried my best to act interested, while Wendy stood there looking in the opposite direction! She'd spotted another Black-throated Diver but nothing else. Suddenly, a new report of the Western Bonelli's came in..... ARHHGHGHG! I kicked myself for not believing the first report so we instantly ditched everything else off and sped off for the car park.

Naturally we were in a hurry to get to Holkham before the bird disappeared again but were being held up by a group of people who were hogging the entire

path and leisurely walking at snails pace in front of us. Wendy, who was tailgating them, was getting impatient and left me cringing as she inadvertently did something, which almost rivaled the Roller Coaster scene off 'The Inbetweeners!' :/. Admittedly it wasn't quite as bad as that and luckily, unlike the character Will, she didn't yell, "Inconsiderate ****holes!" but, "I'm sorry but could I just squeeze past you please?" in a irritated tone. As she raced off past them I couldn't help but notice that it was a group of people, with Down's syndrome, out for the day with a carer.....Ouch! Cringe worthy moment over we hurried back towards the Visitors Centre, with our heads hanging in shame, but noticed that a small crowd had gathered at the side of the path on the way. They were all looking at something in a field, so we turned our heads only to see a brilliant **Short-eared Owl** out hunting. We watched it for as long as we dared knowing that it was way too distant for even a record shot and that the light was already fading anyway. Just then I heard another plane and looked up to see an Osprey flying over :O. That was another lifer plane for us both so, it turned out that the barfly in The Kings Arms wasn't completely bonkers after all! As we stood there, Wendy said, "God, that ditch absolutely stinks!" which it did, but the problem was that I agreed with "Yeah it absolutely stinks" and I was standing right next to a guy smoking! Haahah. I got paranoid that he'd think I meant that HE stank. He obviously did stink as he was smoking but I am not that rude to point it out loudly in public! As we passed the Visitors Centre Wendy couldn't resist a take out Cappuccino and grabbed a piece of Millionaires Shortcake to keep us going until we got home for tea. We were both flagging by the time we got back to the car and after using the WC's and I'd eaten the majority of the shortcake we left at 4.40pm. Wendy had her caffeine fix but couldn't bring herself to have much of the shortcake, as it was far too sickly for her, not that I was complaining.....Hahahahaha :)!

We passed the Barn Owl field again but there was still no sign of them and as the Bonelli's had been reported again at 4.40pm we were eager to get there as quickly as possible. There were 2x Brown Hares in a ploughed field on the way and Wendy made a good point when she commented that we'd hardly seen any during the week compared to previous trips. Why that should be we don't really know. Typically, as we were in a rush, there were some flashing lights up ahead on the narrow winding road and it looked like there'd been a crash. Luckily there wasn't any hold ups and we drove straight past a van that seemed to have driven into the hedge....Phew!

When we arrived at Holkham it was 5.07pm and as the gates to Lady Anne's Drive get locked up for the night at 6pm we didn't have much time. We parked up and paid for our ticket before practically race walking out to the Washington Hide. It was getting really dark by the time we got there at 5.16pm and there wasn't the crowd there that we'd expected, which said it all! There were Goldcrests everywhere we looked and it was hard going trying to check them all in the semi darkness. In the end we had to call it a day and head back before we were locked in for the night. That would be all we needed, as we needed to get everything packed up and ready to go as early as possible in the morning. We were back at the car feeling very cold, tired and hungry at 5.52pm and we were surprised to see the temperature still reading a pleasant 12.5c. Neither of us had the energy or the will to cook tea so Wendy suggested getting food out again. I didn't fancy leaving all our camera gear in the car unattended so decided against it. Wendy needed to go to Spa 1st to get some bread for our sarnies for the next day, before we headed for home, and in the headlights we saw a nice little Muntjac crossing the road ahead of us in the dark.

Back at HQ it 6.27pm and after a very quick tea it was time to have our baths and start packing up. Wendy made all the sarnies for the next day and we did as much packing as possible. By 10.45pm we were both knackered and went to bed with the alarm set for 7am. Wendy protested of course but if we didn't get up early we'd be sure to miss any decent birds brought in by the rain and easterly winds, which were forecast overnight.

Friday 25th October

At 7am the alarm went off, much to Wendy's disgust! She was like a bear with a sore head and didn't want to get out of the warm comfy bed. This was made worse by the fact that it was still dark and she could hear it raining heavily outside with the addition of a strong wind.....Urrghhhhh! She was also adamant that we'd be wasting our time, as the whole week had produced nothing and wasn't convinced that we'd be able to salvage it on our last day. I wasn't having any of it however and wanted to stick to our plan of hitting Warham Greens as early as possible. The forecast from the day before was spot on, so we could have been onto a winner. After we'd had breakfast and packed up all our stuff we were ready to go. We waved goodbye to Church Owl Cottage at 9.10am and drove away for the last time :/. Hmmmmmm thinking about it we'll probably be back at some time seeing as it was our 4th time there already!

Just up the road is Stiffkey Stores, where there's a nice café, so Wendy wanted to stop for a proper coffee fix. It sells general stuff as well as extortionate gifts and poncey food and the clientele certainly advertise the fact. A young bloke barely in his 30's stepped out of his 4x4 clad in head to toe tweed and wellies! He looked like the Lord of the Manor or something and raised an eyebrow or two between us. After our detour I carried on towards Garden Drove to park up. Don't ask me how but I managed to miss the turning not once but an impressive twice! You'd think that the more times I visit Norfolk the more orientated I'd be but I seem to have got lost more on this trip than on any of our others.....Doh!

I finally parked up at Garden Drove at 9.45am and we headed off down the migrant hotspot tree lined path.....Ahem! It was even more lifeless than the last time we'd been there and we didn't see or hear a single bird the whole way down. This was looking bad :(The Copse was lifeless too, so we headed over to the Whirly-gig hoping we'd have more luck there.



Heading towards the Whirly-gig

We managed to flush a Sparrowhawk from a bush and that was about it so we didn't hang about and walked straight back to the car depressed. I heard something and looked up to see 19x **Fieldfare** flying over at a rate of knots, obviously having just arrived. Surprisingly, although we'd seen a good number of Redwing moving through, these were our 1st Fieldfares of the week. This was the only excitement of the entire walk, which was more than over shadowed by how wet my feet got. I realized that I was now stuck with soaking feet for the rest of the day and for the journey back up north.....Noooooooo! We were back at the car by 11.21am feeling slightly weary, so we had one of our left over smoothies and the freshly baked (but undercooked) Flapjack, which Wendy had bought from Stiffkey Stores earlier. Our next plan was to try Holkham for the Bonelli's again and although I'd had no reports of the bird all day I thought it was worth a shot.

At 11.41am we were back at Holkham making a beeline for the Washington Hide again. There was no optimism in our visit but if we didn't at least try we'd be kicking ourselves if it did get seen later. There were a couple of Birders hanging around with their scopes and a few others came and went with no luck.



Holkham

Again there were loads of Goldcrests but nothing else apart from a Great-spotted Woodpecker. In the end we gave it up as a bad job totally expecting a report of the bird to come in later when we were miles away. When we got back to the car it was 12.48pm and the pale Buzzard was there again but even though it had black flank patches it was still just a Common Buzzard. Although we'd gone to Titchwell the day before, intentionally instead of today, the rain had stopped so I reckoned another shot at the Jack Snipe was on the cards. We were getting hungry but we decided to wait until we got there to have our lunch. We passed the Barn Owl field again for the last time and were disappointed again at having not seen a single Owl there considering it had been so easy in July.

By the time we got to Titchwell it was 1.15pm and we demolished our lunch in record time and were setting off at 1.30pm hoping we hadn't just preempted ourselves into getting a stitch! We didn't have time to hang about and were pinning our hopes on seeing the reported Jack Snipe so that at least Wendy could claim more than one lifer for the trip. We went straight through the Meadow Trail to Patsy's reed bed where the report had come from.



Jack Snipe pool

When we arrived we got talking to a guy who reckoned we'd just missed the bird and it had hidden itself behind some reeds on a small Island at the back of the pool. Typical! There were 6x Common Snipe all in full view but there didn't appear to be anything else lurking anywhere. We waited and watched patiently for ages but still there was nothing. We tried from every screen and every angle and with the strong wind blowing straight at us it was difficult to keep our bins steady. We'd started to lose patience and were just thinking about giving up when all of sudden I spotted a **Mediterranean Gull** out on an island in amongst the Black-headed Gulls. We were pretty chuffed with that, so I grabbed a quick record shot just before they all lifted and flew away towards the fields.



Mediterranean Gull

Lucky or what? Despite all our visits to the reserve we'd failed to pin a single Brambling down even though they were being reported. There must've been 1000's of Chaffiches in various size flocks moving through and we were sure that there must've been at least one amongst them. We tried to check through them as they flew over but there were just too many to make it possible. Back at the 1st screen there was a lot more Birders looking so we stopped in case someone

had found it. We got a bit excited when a woman said that she had it but when we had a look our hearts sank and it was just one of the Common Snipes :(It was hopeless and we were starting to doubt the accuracy of the more recent reports, even though we believed the initial one to have been an actual Jack Snipe. There was only one thing for it when we got back to Visitors Centre and after reporting the Med Gull, as none had been reported at Titchwell all week, we hit the Café :P. After we'd had some toast and a caffeine/sugar top up we thought we'd better make a move. It was 3.44pm when we finally got back to the car and while I rushed off to the toilet Wendy went for a last look at the Conservation field at the back of Briarfield's car park for Brambling. Obviously she couldn't find any in the 100's of black finch sized silhouettes flying over and we'd just dipped again on Jack Snipe, Great Northern Diver, Long-tailed Duck, Spotted Redshank and Greenshank! Still, we'd gained a last minute Med Gull to add to our trip list.

We left at 3.50pm and 5mins later we arrived at Choseley Drying Barns to find another 2 cars parked up. This looked promising so I pulled up and wound the windows down for a listen. Unfortunately there was no sound or sight of any birds at all. We'd heard our target bird, a Corn Bunting, there in July so we were disappointed that they weren't still there. It was beginning to get darker so we wanted to give one more place a try before we left. It was the only place where we could pick up some new birds for the trip so we had to give it a go.

It felt like 5mins ago that we'd pulled up, on our last trip, at Flitcham Abbey Farm and we were hoping that it would be just as productive. We sat down in the Hide and scanned through all the places we've learned that our target birds are most likely to be. There was no sign of them so we started to check other places in desperation....."No Little Owls?" We couldn't believe it! We even walked up the track and peered over the wall again to see if they were in that field but there was nothing. We also had a look at the field opposite in case of a Barn Owl but there was nothing there either. Urrrrrrgh!



Flitcham

The track back to the car was muddy and it was red mud so our trousers were caked in it. Luckily we'd brought a change of clothes with us, so we could at least look clean if nothing else, before we got to the pub. I packed away the camera gear, as it was already dark and we both got changed out of our filthy clothes. Our only other stop would be Blyth Services before we got to Arnside and I

wanted to get the journey started so we left at 4.56pm feeling very disappointed at having had such a non eventful last day. As we drove away Wendy scanned through the hedge at all the fence posts but there were no Owls and the only thing we saw was 2x Hares crossing the road in front of us :(.

As we drove away to join the main road we noticed a Deer standing at the side of the grass verge, as if it was waiting to cross, so it looked like it knew its green cross code. The traffic out of Norfolk was even slower than ever and we wondered what the 1st hold up was. Some drivers must've been in a ridiculous hurry as there were dodgy overtaking maneuvers going on all over the place. They were pulling out into traffic and only getting back in by the skin of their teeth! As we grew closer to the front we could see that there was a tractor up ahead.....Urrghhhhh! We couldn't wait to get to the Services, as all the hold ups meant we were running late and when we saw the sign for it we breathed a sigh of relief. Just then the traffic ground to a standstill just 1mile away from where we wanted to be! There'd been an accident and we crawled along for 20mins until we finally pulled in to Blyth Services at 7.23pm.....Phew! We weren't so happy when we saw how busy the car park was but fortunately I got a park near the entrance and we got out to go inside. Inside was complete chaos and the queue for Burger King was a mile long with impatient people huffing and puffing all around us. Some of them ended up leaving, as it was taking so long but I desperately needed something for my tea. Wendy left me to keep our place in the queue while she nipped into M&S to get herself a poncey Edamame Bean Salad. When she returned I hadn't moved an inch but we were eventually served and got the hell out of there! We hurried back to the car and stuffed our food into us so we could get going again, it literally didn't touch the sides!

Our 'quick' ½ way stop off had taken us 49mins, so as soon as we'd finished we headed straight off again at 8.12pm for Arnside. It was a slower journey than usual and at some points we were practically at a standstill again, so it was looking unlikely that we'd make it the pub at all. Eventually we found out that it was due to another accident at junction 47 on the A1, which explained why it had taken us so long and as soon as we'd cleared the crash site we were off and had the rest of the journey done in no time.

We finally arrived and parked up on the prom at Arnside at 10.29pm and we headed straight for the sanctuary of our local, The Albion. Luckily for us, it wasn't busy and we grabbed our favourite table in the corner to chill out until the boat. As always I fell off a cliff while Wendy found her 2nd wind and nattered away to me in my semi-conscious state. She was envying their Christmas menu and opening times and wishing that her local back at home would be more like it! After her nightly phone call to her Mum she came to the conclusion that Lyca had been having so much fun she wouldn't want to come home. One thing was different on this trip and that was that we were looking forward to going home for a change just to see her! Apparently she'd definitely grown but had also gone off her food.....fussy little madam! I started to think we'd better make a move but Wendy had other ideas and ordered herself another drink from the bar.....Uh oh! By the time she'd finished it was 11.49pm and although she was very relaxed I was starting to panic. I still needed to get petrol and drive to Heysham so we made a quick exit.

Back at the car Wendy decided to dig out my bottle of Rekorderlig from the bag and proceeded to drink it! Charming! Hahahahaha. We kept our eyes peeled for Owls all the way out of Arnside but again we didn't see any :(.

I pulled up at the petrol station at 12.07am and filled up the tank and we were at Heysham in good

time by 12.37pm, despite our lateness in leaving the pub.....Phew! After sitting in the car park tediously waiting to board it finally happened at 1.30am. On the way up to the cabin Wendy was feeling the strain, obviously from her wine/Rekorderlig combo, but I went up the never ending stairs 2 at a time :P. We let ourselves in and after nicking the biscuits we fell straight to sleep. When I took my wet shoes off I realized my socks were absolutely soaking too so I reckoned I'd end up with trench foot from a whole day in them!

We arrived at Douglas at 5.45am and headed straight for home. Normally when we get in Wendy deals with all the unpacking and washing but on this occasion she went straight upstairs to bed. The shoe was on the other foot, as I stayed up and unpacked the car then unpacked all the bags too. When she woke up at 9am she had a sore neck because she'd crashed out before she'd removed one of her pillows....Hahahahaha! She must've needed it though and it was quite lucky that she wasn't around when I took my socks off, as they smelled so bad they even made me feel sick....Bleurrghhhh! She was pleasantly surprised to find all the post holiday work had been done and that she was able to relax and chill out.....or was that to get cracking with the article? Luckily I didn't end up with trench foot but my socks and shoes were so bad that they were duly thrown in the washing machine! When we'd recovered and Wendy's Mum had very kindly walked the Dogs she returned Lyca, who much to our relief, was very pleased to see us. After her excitement had died down and Wendy had given her Mum everyone's presents Lyca gave us a present of her own. No, she didn't wee or poo on the floor, she lost a baby tooth and spat it out onto the floor :P. It's now in Wendy's collection of the only 4 she found so she must've eaten a good few along the line.

Having been worried about not seeing anything on our summer trip to Norfolk we'd ended up seeing more than we'd bargained for. The same couldn't be said for our autumn trip and yet again we'd gone the wrong week, after all the rarities had been and gone. If we'd gone the week before we'd have been tripping over some brilliant birds. I've decided that from now on I'm not going to pick the weeks and that Wendy can have a go to see if she has more luck! Nevertheless, we certainly couldn't sniff at the Shorelarks at Winterton or the Pallid Swift, especially as we'd actually found it ourselves whilst looking at a couple of late House Martins! We'd only travelled a total of 847miles, which is very low compared to normal and probably the lowest ever excluding the Lake District, but we had no reason to go further afield. Negativity aside, we'd actually managed to finish our trip having seen a total of 121 birds. Although this didn't include many rarities it came as a pleasant surprise, considering that the majority of the week had felt so uneventful. We're still waiting for someone to invent a crystal ball for Birding and when they do we're 1st on the pre-order list! One day we'll hit the perfect week and we'll finally get the holiday of our dreams but our cameras will probably break and our bins will get stolen when that eventually happens! :P.

Mute Swan	Golden Plover	Whinchat
Pink-footed Goose	Grey Plover	Stonechat
Greylag Goose	Lapwing	Wheatear
Canada Goose	Knot	Blackbird
Brent Goose	Sanderling	Fieldfare
Egyptian Goose	Little Stint	Song Thrush
Shelduck	Dunlin	Redwing
Wigeon	Ruff	Mistle Thrush
Gadwall	Snipe	Cetti's Warbler
Teal	Woodcock	Blackcap
Mallard	Black-tailed Godwit	Yellow-browed Warbler
Pintail	Bar-tailed Godwit	Chiffchaff
Shoveler	Curlew	Goldcrest
Pochard	Redshank	Bearded Tit
Tufted Duck	Turnstone	Long-tailed Tit
Common Scoter	Black-headed Gull	Blue Tit
Velvet Scoter	Mediterranean Gull	Great Tit
Red-legged Partridge	Common Gull	Coal Tit
Grey Partridge	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Marsh Tit
Pheasant	Herring Gull	Nuthatch
Red-throated Diver	Great Black-backed Gull	Treecreeper
Black-throated Diver	Razorbill	Jay
Little Grebe	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Magpie
Great Crested Grebe	Stock Dove	Jackdaw
Red-necked Grebe	Woodpigeon	Rook
Slavonian Grebe	Collared Dove	Carrion Crow
Gannet	Tawny Owl	Starling
Cormorant	Short-eared Owl	House Sparrow
Shag	Pallid Swift	Chaffinch
Little Egret	Green Woodpecker	Greenfinch
Grey Heron	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Goldfinch
Marsh Harrier	Skylark	Siskin
Hen Harrier	Shore Lark	Linnet
Sparrowhawk	House Martin	Lesser Redpoll
Buzzard	Meadow Pipit	Mealy Redpoll
Kestrel	Pied Wagtail	Common Crossbill
Water Rail	Wren	Bullfinch
Moorhen	Duncock	Snow Bunting
Oystercatcher	Robin	Yellowhammer
Avocet	Black Redstart	Reed Bunting
Ringed Plover		