

Cornwall/Norfolk Trip October 2014 **PART 2**

Saturday 11th October

As expected the journey to Norfolk from Cornwall was taking its time but my IBS had kicked off so badly that I had other worries, which was taking my mind off the time quite nicely. Soon we all needed a wee so we stopped again at Castle Drogo Services at 11.18am and Wendy ran in while I let Lyca out. Wendy was pretty skint by then, so ran over to the very conveniently placed cash machine outside. She was just waiting for her money to pop out when the screen said that it was temporarily unable to complete her transaction.....Great! Not wanting to lose too much time we didn't hang about and set off again as quickly as possible. I skillfully managed to go the wrong way entirely on the way out and ended up heading back down towards Cornwall....Ooops! Fortunately we found another Services nearby, so I spun round in the forecourt. It actually turned out to be a good move, as Wendy saw another cash machine and was able to get some money after all. We saw some **Roe Deer** in a field between Glastonbury and Bristol and then Wendy spotted a single **Whooper Swan**, which we would've otherwise struggled for elsewhere. We then passed a highly amusing sign for a town called 'Catbrain', well we were pretty bored by then! When we drove past Gloucestershire we let out a big, "BOOOOOOOO!" and gave it the finger.....Hahahahaha take that Badger murderer's! There were loads of Jays on route, in fact more than we'd ever seen at any other time. We hit the ½ way mark at 1.17pm, which definitely deserved a high five :P. We were now finally out of Gloucester and in Worcester and at 2.24pm we pulled into Corley Services for another break. We let Lyca out again, gave her a drink and after I'd filled the car up again and Wendy had grabbed a coffee we were back on the road with the intention of not stopping again until we got to Norfolk.

We'd been going for ages when I spotted some lightening up ahead and by the time we were approaching Kings Lynn it was getting worse. The sky had turned very black indeed and it was raining heavily again. Wendy spotted some **Lapwing** flying over a field and further on there were more but this time there were **Golden Plover** in with them too. By 4.30pm we were losing the will and because of the thunderstorm it was already getting dark, so we made the tough decision to forget about the Shrike and just head to HQ. Our only worry was that the bird might be scared off by the storm and wouldn't be there the next day. The lightning continued in the distance but eventually we turned off at Blakeney where Wendy spotted a **Brown Hare** in a field. Lyca had been the best travelling companion we could've asked for, she'd been relaxed and calm in the back seat for the whole journey and we were both very impressed with her.

At 5.20pm having been on the road for 7hrs 46mins I parked up outside Church Owl Cottage.....Phew! My IBS had gone from bad to worse by then but I had nothing to take for it.....Doh! I brought the bags in and Wendy set about unpacking our stuff. She went through everything looking for my Colpermin and swore blind that she'd packed some and had even seen the box but after emptying all the bags it wasn't there. As soon as I plugged the Mac into the mains I noticed that there was no Wi-Fi signal, which was very unusual. There was no way we wanted to spend the week without it, so I found the number to contact the owner. All of a sudden the thunder and lightning kicked off big time and was right over us! Lyca was barking and Wendy was scared and pacing round the cottage nervously. It wasn't the pleasant arrival we'd hoped for, especially as we should've seen a Steppe Grey Shrike by then and we still had no food in for tea either! Eventually the storm moved further away, so I got straight on the phone to the owner. He told me that there'd been a very close strike, which might have done something. I suggested that rebooting the router might sort it and the owner kindly told me how to find it in a storage cupboard next door. I went and had a look in the pouring rain but worryingly the router looked dead!

Luckily enough the fuse box was in the same cupboard and I could see that one of the switches looked tripped. I phoned the owner back to just double check this wouldn't shut down all the electricity in the cottages or something but he gave me the go ahead to flick the switch. This I did and the power came back on in the cupboard and a few minutes later the internet was back.....Phew! It was getting late, so Wendy suggested just going to the local Spa in Blakeney to get some essentials until we had the time to do a proper shop tomorrow. This would've been a great plan if my IBS hadn't been so bad and I needed to get to a Supermarket as soon as possible if I was going to get any relief.

The thunder and lightning was still rumbling on, so we waited until it was far enough away before heading out at 6.40pm. It was pitch black, so I drove slowly down the unlit single-track road and it was a good job too when a Roe Deer ran out in front of us! We could see a few Bats flitting around in the headlights and the flashes of lightning up ahead. Wendy suddenly realized that she'd left her rucksack in the house, so we had no money on us at all.....Aarrghhhh! I suppose it was better that she'd realised when she did rather than when we got to the checkout! I quickly turned around and drove back to HQ to get my wallet and after our near disaster we arrived at Morrison's at 7.13pm. We grabbed our shopping as quickly as humanly possible, as Lyca was in the car on her own but when I looked in the pharmaceutical aisle there was absolutely nothing for IBS.....:O! If we'd known we could've just gone to Blakeney and saved us all the hassle but I didn't fancy a sleepless night of pain after the day I'd just had. I grabbed some Gaviscon out of sheer desperation, knowing fine well that it wouldn't do the job and we were back in the car by 7.46pm. As we drove out of the car park Wendy spotted a massive Chemist warehouse type building with a sign saying 'Open till late', so I drove over totally expecting it to be closed or some sort of commercial supplier shop. Unbelievably it was a normal Chemist and open till 10pm every night, so Wendy ran in and grabbed me a box of Colpermin.....Phew! :). It hadn't been such a waste of time after all and we already had our shopping done too, which would give us more time out tomorrow.

Finally we were back at HQ at 8.20pm and after unpacking the shopping we'd both gone past the point of feeling particularly hungry. Wendy went off for a soak in the bath, which she'd been looking forward to after the week in Cornwall with just a shower. I made myself some toast and then had a yogurt before I too went for a bath. Lyca wasn't the hyper nutter we'd predicted from not being walked all day and she seemed happy enough sleeping for the rest of the evening, possibly still feeling the effects of a week of walking in Cornwall. Wendy eventually made herself some toast and marmite and sat down to chill out with a Rose spritzer. Although having a bath at Church Owl was a bonus, unlike Wesley's Barn the garden wasn't dog proof, so Lyca had to be taken out for a wee on her lead. While she was outside with her Wendy heard Tawny Owls calling and a Fox barking but by 10.40pm we'd had enough and went off to bed.

Sunday 12th October

We all woke up at 6.45am and when we looked outside we could see that it was very misty, which was a good start for our 1st day in Norfolk. Wendy took Lyca out and saw a huge flock of **Pink-footed Geese** flying over, which was closely followed by another. After we'd got ourselves ready and Wendy had made the sarnies we headed out nice and early for a change at 8.28am. With so little happening in Cornwall there'd been no point in doing any early starts and with Wendy feeling so rough and there being no birds about we'd also had no reason to bring both cameras but hopefully things were about to change now we were in Norfolk. My car was saying that it was only 7c, which was much colder than it'd been during the past week. It'd never dropped below 12.5c in Cornwall and that was with the strong wind too. As I went to drive off I could've screamed, there was a box of Colpermin sitting in the door pocket right next to me.....Grrrrrrrr! No wonder Wendy said that she'd

seen them somewhere and I just wished I'd found them yesterday when I needed them so badly!

Neither of us had received any reports yet including the Shrike, so we started to worry that it had indeed made its get away from last night's storm. A **Stock Dove** flew over the fields as we drove away from HQ and at Burnham Overy Staithe things started to feel very autumnal. There were fields full of **Greylags** and a freshly ploughed muddy field teeming with Pinkfeet, Lapwing and Golden Plover. We'd been really shocked that we hadn't seen any Waders in Cornwall especially in the fields at Sennan where we'd seen loads on our previous trips, so it was good to finally catch up with some.

At 8.55am we arrived at Burnham Norton and the car park was chokka, there were way more cars than I'd expected. The bird had been there for over a week so I'd assumed everyone would've already seen it but nevertheless the amount of cars there was surely a good sign?



Burnham Norton

There were Birders everywhere and they all looked happy for a change, so we set off down the very muddy track to where the bird had been the day before.



Heading to the twitch

It wasn't long before we could see a big line of Birders and Photographers, so feeling quite excited we upped the pace. Some **Egyptian Geese** and a **Marsh Harrier** flew over us and we could just make out the shape of bird sitting on top of a bush further down the track. Wendy couldn't resist having a quick look and even though it was just a tiny black speck she could instantly tell that it was our bird. This was her 4th lifer of the trip and we hurried down towards the twitch and joined the others. Unfortunately there was another twitching dog there and Lyca continued with her English dog racism and snarled and barked at it. The twitchers all looked around in horror, which was pretty embarrassing. Ooops!



Shrike twitch

The bird was quite far away when we arrived and sitting motionless on top the bush. After a while it moved nearer, so we had some great views of a cracking **Steppe Grey Shrike**. The weather wasn't ideal being grey and overcast but we tried to get some shots anyway. Not only that but when the sun came out it was right behind it and in our faces, so we couldn't make out as much detail as we'd have liked.



Steppe Grey Shrike

While we were standing there a **Kingfisher** whizzed over the path and vanished into a ditch, which added a brief bit of action. The Shrike wasn't really doing very much and spent a lot of its time just out of everyone's view, so after nearly an hour we decided that we'd go back later when the sun had moved round to the other side. When we got back to the gate at the top of the path we heard the blast of a Cetti's Warbler in the reeds. Some Birders were standing around trying to see it but we didn't fancy their chances much!

It was 9.44am when we got back to car with a very wet and muddy Lyca and I reckoned that as we were nearby, the migrant hotspot Gun Hill was worth a shot, even though the predicted Easterlies weren't expected to hit until the evening. I drove the short distance to Burnham Overy Staithe and parked up at 9.53am. The scene was so Sunday morning, with happy looking people, out walking their dogs and spending quality time with their families. It was very relaxing and the view of the boats floating motionless on the perfectly still water was picture perfect.



Burnham Overy Staithe

Another Kingfisher whizzed by and then Wendy spotted something we didn't expect to see at all. There was an elderly couple in the water swimming and she reckoned they'd probably been doing it on a daily basis for donkey's years. Some people swear by it to keep them healthy but neither of us found the idea remotely appealing.....it must've been freezing! It had a bit of a River Cottage local community vibe about it, as the other villagers were crowding around clapping and cheering.



Nutters!

A bit further along was a bloke paddling along standing up on a board like something you'd expect to see in Hawaii or somewhere! Suddenly a sea mist dropped in and within minutes it engulfed the entire idyllic view. It'd turned into a proper pea souper, which made it feel pretty chilly too.....Brrrrrrrr! Another Birder caught us up and said "I won't be needing my scope after all!" we literally couldn't see for more than a few feet ahead of us.



Great view!

He chatted to us for a while and it didn't take us long to realize that everything we said fell on deaf ears and that he was only interested in regaling us with utter rubbish! When he said, "Hello!" to someone else we quickly but politely made our get away and scuttled off. We heard the 'ping ping' of some **Bearded Tits** in the reeds and as we got closer to Gun Hill some Meadow Pipits flew over. As they did Wendy heard something sounding like a House Sparrow and shortly after that I got a report of a Richard's Pipit at Gun Hill! It could well have been the bird she'd heard overhead. Even though we were in the exact area where the Richard's Pipit had been reported I still wasn't feeling very confident because the area is pretty big and it could've been anywhere.



Gun Hill

We carried on heading west through Gun Hill seeing Meadow Pipit after Meadow Pipit but not much else, except for 2x Linnets.

Nothing had caught our eye but there were several other birders standing around searching for the Richard's Pipit. Every single Pipit had started to look big to me by then, which was driving me mad.....Hahahaha! With so little going on we were worried that a report of something interesting would come in while we were about an hour away from the car. We could see the man we'd been talking to standing in position with his scope looking at all the Pipits and even if he had the Richard's we certainly weren't going to go over and ask! If it was there we hoped we'd be able to pick it out for ourselves anyway and started trawling through them all. It was a long and boring process looking at so many Meadow Pipits and they were all very mobile too.....yawn! Two dark-bellied **Brent Geese** flew in from the sea to complete our Goose set and there were loads of **Knot** out on Scolt Head Island.



Looking towards Scolt Head Island

There were a few fishermen out in kayaks where the water from the bay met the sea, which was quite a clever plan but I didn't see any of them catching anything. Wendy spotted a Great Northern Diver but was slightly annoyed when I initially dismissed as a juvenile Gannet.....Oooops! There really was nothing around, so we headed back and saw a Wheatear on the sand back at the footpath. As we walked back we saw a Migrant Hawker and then something white caught my eye in a field to our left.



Heading back

When we lifted our bins to look at it we saw that it was a **Great White Egret** and our 1st decent find of the trip. We both raised our cameras to get a shot but it was too far away for Wendy's lens and the sun was behind it so all my shots were rubbish too. I felt sorry for Wendy in the end and put my lens on her camera just in time for the sun to go in and for her to get some decent shots with it propped up on the gate.....Grrrrrrr! That's what you get for being so nice!



Great White Egret

Happy with what she'd taken I switched back just as the sun came out again but luckily the bird was slowly starting to come closer us. I crossed my fingers that the sun would go behind a cloud for even a second but instead the bird flew off and disappeared into a ditch, so I came away with nothing like I'd hoped for. I put the news out and we carried on back to the car having a quick scan of the saltmarsh on our way back seeing as the mist had cleared. There were **Grey Plover** and **Dunlin** out there but by then we were starving and wanted our lunch. When I looked at the pics when I was back at home none of them were

remotely decent, probably due to the light being so strong, which had created some pretty weird trails on the background. It should've been my opportunity to get my best GWE shots to date, as I only have very distant record shots and OK I'd bettered them but still, they should've been belters :{.

Back at the car it was 1.08pm and after giving Lyca a drink we grabbed our sarnies. I worked out that our walk had been 4miles, so Lyca should be happy after her day of sitting in the car yesterday. Another thing I'd noticed was that there was no 3g signal anywhere with my Giffgaff sim but Wendy's Virgin sim was picking up 3g everywhere. I might just be switching to Virgin myself, especially as I don't get free calls home with Giffgaff anymore either.

We left at 1.29pm and seeing as we were so close we headed for Titchwell. When we drove into the car park at 1.42pm it was busier than we've ever seen it and there wasn't any spaces! People had even resorted to making up their own spaces but I couldn't even do that, they were all taken. With that I promptly drove straight back out and decided to go back to the Shrike a bit earlier than expected instead.

It was 2.04pm when I pulled up at Burnham Norton again and this time the car park was even busier and the muddy track was more churned up than it'd been earlier. The twitch had almost doubled in size too and we couldn't get near the bird.



Shrike twitch 2

There were 2 twitching Jack Russells standing with their owners who decided they didn't like Lyca at all and instantly showed their teeth and snarled pretty viciously at her! This time the onlookers were looking at them in disgust and not us for a change...Phew! We hurried past them and stood at the side to see that the bird was performing well, so we both started trying to get some shots. We were both struggling, due to the reeds in front of us, which kept blowing across the shot but the light was definitely much better than it had been in the morning. I couldn't believe it when I noticed that at least 4 of the Photographers were still there from the morning! One of them was a professional called Steve Young who's the photo editor of Birdwatching Magazine, so he was definitely putting the effort in! Wendy suddenly turned around and whispered, "Have you seen who's here?" I looked and quickly recognised a Photographer who we'd spoken to at Winterton when we'd gone for the RBSrike a few years ago.



Poised and ready

When Wendy pointed out a Buzzard he'd instantly said, "Are you sure it's not a plane, we don't get Buzzards round here?" She'd been pretty annoyed by that comment and he said nothing when he saw that it was of course a Buzzard. He seemed like a bit of a 'know it all' anyway, so she'd found it funny more than anything else. He was in similar company and making his presence known to everyone who thought they were anyone and we watched on with amusement. A few of the Photographers were complaining that the stick, which had been put there by someone for the bird to use as a posing perch, was in the wrong place and needed to be moved to give their shots a better background. There'd been mealworms put down in front of the stick to lure the bird in too, which would also need moving. We weren't surprised to see which Photographer was the 1st to go charging into the field to alter the props for their set.



Naughty naughty

The Shrike obviously wasn't impressed and flew off up the hedge and sat in a bush miles away.....Urrghhhh! We waited ages but it'd obviously been made slightly wary, so he

went back into the field to do some minor adjustments and we waited again. By then we were getting pretty bored and Wendy was absolutely freezing from just standing around. I saw something crawling on the ground at my feet and found a Moth clambering around in the broken reeds. I showed it Wendy and we instantly assumed it was some type of Wainscott, so I took a quick record shot to ID it later, before it disappeared. It was a tricky one to ID and the angle of the photo didn't show it's features (or lack of them) very well but we finally settled on **Bulrush Wainscott**, which was a lifer.



Bulrush Wainscott

Wendy was just about to take Lyca back to the car, as she was looking a bit bored curled up at the base of the reeds, when the Shrike flew back!



Bored now

It started feeding on the mealworms again, using the stick as a perch, so we all raised our cameras and started firing. We couldn't help sniggering at the sound of all the cameras being fired at once, as it sounded like we were in the middle of a warzone! We both ended

up with some shots we were actually happy with eventually.....Phew! If we'd come away with just the mornings pics we'd have been severely depressed and with the conditions being much better we could now bin all our earlier efforts :).



Steppe Grey Shrike

There was another 'character' there who was very difficult to ignore while he shouted at full volume into his mobile phone. Whoever was on the other end must've been deaf by the end of the conversation but he obviously wanted them and the rest of the world to know about his holiday in South Africa or wherever it was. We were amazed the bird didn't fly a mile off due to his incredibly loud mouth. We called it a day and squelched our way back up to the car and the steady flow of Birders coming and going continued. That was definitely a bird worth going that extra mile for and it was a 1st for Norfolk :). Back at the car it was 3.41pm and a muddy Lyca curled up on the back seat and went to sleep.

We still had a bit of time to kill before packing up for the day, so we decided to give Salthouse a go, as there'd been a Lapland Bunting reported earlier. Driving through Cley we saw that the new £1.5 million house we'd spotted on our last trip in August was still for sale and neither of us were surprised. When we got there the sun had started to get rather low in the sky and it was freezing! We had a quick scan around but could see no birds at all apart from some Linnets. There was some Brent Geese in a field, so I drove back up the track, pulled over and we quickly got some shots of them before heading for home. They were hanging together in a tight group being typically quarrelsome with each other but eventually I came up with this one.



Dark-bellied Brent Goose

It was 4.55pm when we got back to HQ and we were all starving! Lyca started looking for her tea straight away and then curled up and slept for the rest of the evening. My ready meal was done in minutes while Wendy's stir-fry took her ages to prepare.....Ha! Wendy went off to relax in the bath before putting her feet up to chill out. It was way too hot in HQ so I turned the thermostat down a bit but it didn't make any difference. By 10.21pm we were knackered and had an early night knowing that the weather tomorrow was going to be bad. It would however be the 1st time we'd have overnight Easterlies on a Norfolk trip.....if the predictions were right!

Monday 13th October

Wendy was up at 7.20am and the weather forecast had been spot on. It was blowing an Easterly gale and chucking it down, so after letting Lyca out she quickly brought her back in and dried her off with her towel. Even though the wind direction was exactly what we needed I knew there was no point in getting up early as it was thrashing down, so stayed in bed till 8.10am. We had no idea what we were going to do for the rest of the morning until the weather improved after lunch and car birding seemed our only option. It was either that or to just stay in! At 9.15am we headed out reluctantly and as it was so horrible out our 1st port of call was Cley Deli for Wendy. She emerged with a Cappuccino and some dried Favor Beans (she really knows how to spoil herself!), some Billionaires Shortbread for me and some pressies, so was happy enough, although slightly soaked by the rain. Wendy clung to her Cappuccino for dear life while I drove down the bumpy track, avoiding the massive puddles and potholes, to Cley Coastguards hut in the hope that we could do some seawatching at least. On the way down we saw another Kingfisher whizzing over the road but the hut was full of Birders, so we stayed in the car and couldn't see much of the sea over the shingle ridge at all.

There were some very soggy looking Golden Plover and Lapwing in a field but it was totally pointless sticking around, so I drove round to Salthouse. The scene at Salthouse was possibly even worse.



Urrghhhh!

I was able to park the car in a way that meant we could look out of one window but the birds obviously weren't too chuffed with the rain and there wasn't anything about there either. I was scratching my head as to where we could try next and thought that the trees and bushes at Walsey Hills NOA might produce something taking cover and when the rain started to ease off we saw the opportunity and jumped on it.

I parked up and we walked onto the footpath and started to slowly make our way through the tree archway, listening for any sounds as we went.



Walsey Hills NOA

Would it be a surprise if I said there wasn't anything? Urrghhhhhh! Further down we came across a Crest flock so got quite excited, as if there was anything decent in there it would be hanging out with them. As usual they were all just Goldcrests and Tits, no YBW or Firecrest in with them. Grrrrrrrr! At the end of the path we looked out over the fields and all of a sudden loads of **Red-legged Partridge** flew out from the stubble. Some Black-tailed

Godwits flew over and we noticed the sky turning very dark. Within seconds the rain started belting down again, so we quickly scurried back to the shelter of the car. For want of something better to do I thought we could try Stiffkey. Driving past the Private Pool at Stiffkey we saw 45+ Little Egrets hunkering down in the field. They must all go there for shelter when the weather's bad or when it's high tide, as we've never seen that many there before. When I parked up at Stiffkey the Saltmarsh was flooded right up to the car park and the wind was absolutely hammering the trees.



Stiffkey

The bushes were getting battered as well so it was pointless getting out and looking at them. We were running out of ideas by then and going back on ourselves to Friary Hills was our last suggestion. When we approached it we found that the road leading to the layby was totally flooded and there was no way I'd get my car through it. With that, I turned around and we headed straight back to HQ.

It was 11.10am when we got back and the cottage was lovely and warm, so we'd made the right decision. Wendy couldn't wait to make something with her new Fava Beans, so while she had the time she started peeling and chopping vegetables to make a soup. Having been spoilt by not having any neighbours our hearts sank, when a car pulled up next-door and an old-ish couple started unloading suitcases from their car. Boooooooo! :(.

We thought it was never going to brighten up but after lunch the rain stopped, so we headed out again at 1.15pm. With all the wind and rain there was only one place to go and that was Warham Greens and I was actually feeling optimistic for the 1st time ever. Overnight easterlies with rain in October was practically perfect conditions for putting something down and I kept annoying Wendy by being ridiculously optimistic and constantly mentioning a potential Red-flanked Bluetail or Red-breasted Flycatcher. Either of them would've made my holiday in an instant!

We arrived at the very muddy and flooded car park at Garden Drove at 1.28pm and made our way towards the footpath.



Footpath to Wareham Greens

There was a huge new Pig Farm in the fields, which is probably why it was so muddy and Lyca was absolutely filthy in no time. We wandered down the tree-lined path and again we listened and looked intently for any signs of life. Disappointingly it was all very quiet and we hadn't seen or heard anything until we got down to the Copse at the bottom. There was a Tit flock in there and we could hear Goldcrests but all of a sudden it all kicked off! There were birds everywhere but trying to get a view of them all in our bins was virtually impossible. The overnight Easterlies looked to have had an affect big time! Having spent ages trawling through tons of Goldcrests we finally spotted a very plain looking Warbler deep in a bush. Try as we might we couldn't relocate it and it didn't look as though it was going to come out again in a hurry, so eventually, after scouring the inland side of the copse, where the birds were, we gave up.



The Copse

Wendy had just started to walk off when I found a nice male **Brambling** in the trees and after she'd had a look we headed down to the main path. The main path runs alongside the

saltmarsh until you reach the Whirligig area. The whole area from the car park to the Whirligig and beyond is renowned as a migrant hotspot so we were keeping our eyes and ears peeled at all times. While Wendy was scanning the saltmarsh she spotted a bird of prey hunting low over the marsh. She pointed it out to me and we were slightly confused as to what it was. It looked and was behaving exactly like a Hobby but to see a Hobby in October would be a bit unusual to say the least, so in the end we presumed it to be a big Merlin like the Icelandic ones we see in the Isle of Man. There'd obviously been some movement, as there were a good few Song Thrushes and **Redwing** flying over as well. They looked like they'd all just arrived and were coming in off the sea to feed up on the hawthorn berries surrounding us. We stopped at the Eastern footpath entrance and Wendy found 2 more Brambling in the hawthorn hedge, another sign that things were happening. Carrying on along the main path we saw a flash of 2 x small birds flitting around in a bush, so we stopped for a look. They were deep in the bush and we couldn't see much but when one of them called we happily chirped, "Yellow-browed Warbler!" Woo Hoo! Although it wasn't anything amazing at least we'd found something after our dead start to the day, so I put the news out straight away.



Wareham Greens

A couple, who we recognized from the Shrike twitch asked us what we'd seen, so we told them but warned them it was going to be very tricky to see. They recognized us too and commented on how vicious the 2 Jack Russells had been towards Lyca. It's a good job they hadn't been there earlier to witness her having a go at the other dog or they may not have looked at her so favourably. We carried on past The Quarry, after having a really good look in it, and all the way over to The Whirligig, where the concrete path was really flooded. There was nothing about and after being hopeful of finding a Ring Ouzel or Shrike we headed back feeling slightly disappointed. We never seem to find anything at the Whirligig.....Harumpf. On the way back Lyca was having a wail of a time off the lead bombing backwards and forwards and voleing all over the place.



Woo Hoo!

When we were going past the YBW bush we thought it'd be a good idea to thoroughly check the Copse again when we got back, after all there was no way we could've seen every bird in there. Just then we heard a dog whistle but neither of us thought anything of it, as we'd noticed a lot people were using them to recall their dogs. It went off again and this time I sensed that it had a more urgent note to it, so I turned around to see a bloke charging towards me trying to get my attention and looking rather flustered. I went over to meet him and when he spoke I couldn't believe what he was saying. "There's a Red-flanked Bluetail in the Copse!" he panted and both our jaws nearly hit the floor. Whaaaaaaat? :O! He then warned us that it was going to get very busy in there, so we thanked him and legged it back to the Copse in record time before the hoards could arrive. The couple we'd spoken to earlier, at the YBW, were hot on our trail too and we'd noticed that it was the woman who was the Birder. Her long-suffering husband seemed happy enough to go out with her and produced his Newspaper while she was engrossed. We just couldn't believe that we'd been at the Copse and had spent ages there but hadn't seen anything but the Tit/Crest flock.....Urrghhhhhh!

By the time we got back it'd started raining heavily again and normally this wouldn't matter, as we'd be going back to the car. This was an altogether different occasion though and we'd definitely be willing to put up with a bit of rain to see a Red-flanked Bluetail! There were 2 other Birders there already, which was no surprise and one of them was a grumpy git we'd come across before. He was standing against a tree on his own at the back of the Copse and the other bloke was hanging around near us. He seemed all right and told us that they hadn't seen it yet just before the couple, who were behind us, turned up who were nice and chatty. We all desperately looked at everything that moved and the grumpy git even suggested that the finder of the bird had deliberately sent us all to the wrong place! Why would he go to such lengths to get everyone's attention to tell them about it if it wasn't even there? That made no sense whatsoever and it sounded like a severe case of sour grapes from grumpy git, so ignoring his comments we carried on searching. It was pretty miserable standing there in the pouring rain, which had by then become very heavy but it hadn't deterred the constant stream of Birders who were turning up. One of them we couldn't help but notice was a bit weird, which obviously was only to be expected :P. While he was standing nearby looking for the bird he took some time out to try and stare Lyca out....What the...? He proudly announced, "I like doing this, they absolutely hate it!" Lyca was growling and looking suitably unnerved by him, not surprisingly, so when another bloke said, "Well don't do it then!" we could hardly contain our giggles. He was to be

known to us as 'Dog Staring Man' for the rest of the trip and obviously we avoided him whenever we saw him after that. What a weirdo! Awkwardness over Wendy suddenly noticed the grumpy git raising his camera, which she pointed out to the woman, who was standing next to her. The woman was very interested and went through the undergrowth over to where he was standing and turned around every now and then to give the gesture for "I dunno?" Had it been a false alarm or had he actually seen the bird and kept it to himself? While Wendy was talking to her husband she noticed a massive **Frog** hopping along the path and kept an eye on it until luckily it crawled into a safe place. She was a bit worried that some heavy bootied twitcher bulldozing their way through would stand on it. Next to appear were 3x young lads in their early 20's who were really friendly, so we got chatting. Two of them wandered off for a look while we stayed with the other one who seemed the most sociable of the three.

The rain was relentless, we were struggling to see out of our glasses and because of the cloud cover it was already starting to get dark. We were dripping wet and our bins were steaming up too, so if the bird did show we'd have some terrible conditions to contend with. Not ideal for you're your 1st ever Red-flanked Bluetail! One of the young lads had obviously upset the grumpy git who very loudly complained about him charging in and potentially flushing the bird. Having been distracted we hadn't noticed that everyone had moved over to where grumpy git was and that they all had their bins raised.....O! It could've been another false alarm but this time we decided to go over and join them and looked in the general direction of everyone else. It was really dark in the Copse and with our glasses and bins so water logged it was tricky to see anything never mind a small bird! All of a sudden there was a movement right at the back low down in a tree and everyone got very excited. We raised our bins to see a very smart **Red-flanked Bluetail** hopping around deep in a bush. The funniest part of it was that it was the young bloke who grumpy git was moaning about who'd refound it.....Hahahaha! Young Birder -1, Grumpy git - 0....Brilliant! We could just about make out its red flanks and that its behavior was very similar to that of a Redstart, which was interesting, as I'd always imagined them to act more like a Flycatcher. Wendy had just got her 5th lifer of the trip and I was on my 2nd but the view was at best pretty disappointing. Luckily I got to see a brief glimpse of the blue tail as well, as it turned and hopped into some cover, but that was as good as it got. We couldn't really grumble though and I even got a horrifically bad record shot of it preening with my camera. Considering it was torrential rain at the time I'm amazed you can make out the blue tail and red flanks at all.



Wendy was getting really cold and couldn't see a thing by then and when she looked down at Lyca she noticed that she was shivering. Poor Lyca looked like a drowned rat and she'd started to whinge as well, so Wendy asked for my car keys so she could take her back. I couldn't see myself lasting much longer either so I told her I wouldn't be long and off they went. When Wendy got to the car park it had become so flooded and muddy that she had to carry Lyca across it. The pair of them were just getting into the car when I got back and we were all dripping wet and freezing. Our bad start had totally turned around and having thought it'd never happen we'd actually finally seen a Red-flanked Bluetail.....a bird I've desperately wanted to see all my adult life! Deep in the back of my mind though, I just couldn't shake the disappointment at not finding it ourselves. The bird was obviously in the copse when we were there earlier but we hadn't gone far enough into the trees to where it was hiding. So near yet so far! On the other hand it was the 1st time we'd had the proper overnight easterlies that we'd always dreamed of and it'd paid off big time.

Back at HQ it was 5pm and we certainly weren't complaining that it was too hot in there. Wendy quickly removed her dripping wet clothes and ran to get her hairdryer to dry poor Lyca. She was so wet that it was slow going, so she suggested I got the one belonging to the cottage and joined in to help. With both of us onto it she was dry in ½ the time.....Phew! After that I took all our filthy clothes over to the main house to wash and after feeding a very hungry Lyca we finally got round to making ourselves some tea. After tea Wendy went for a long soak in the amazingly deep bath to thaw out. I thought I'd download the pics from my camera but when I tried to turn it on I was horrified to find that it was completely dead.....Uh Oh! Nothing I did was working and I got a terrible feeling that it was totally broken because of all the rain it'd had to endure. It's only rated as water resistant not waterproof and all the methods I tried from online weren't working. I tried to dry the inside of it out with a hairdryer hoping that it'd help but it didn't and afterwards I found out that it's a bad idea on the hot setting.... Noooooooo! :(I went for a bath next and treated myself by turning the whirlpool on, which Wendy was very jealous of having forgotten about that particular feature....Hahahahaha. Lyca was very tired after her eventful end to the day and even when some popcorn dropped onto the chair next to her she didn't bat an eyelid. She made a half-hearted effort to eat it too, which was totally out of character. I left my camera on the heated floor with the battery out and all compartments open in the hope that it'd recover overnight but it didn't look promising especially after I texted my mate Andy who'd killed his 7D camera with water as well. He'd done the job properly by dropping his completely underwater into a river though.....Doh! At 10.40pm we went to bed and I had my fingers crossed that my camera would've recovered by the morning. I really wanted a decent shot and view of the Bluetail, so planned to go out 1st thing and be back before Wendy was even ready.

Tuesday 14th October

Over night there'd been easterlies again, which was great, so I was quite excited when my alarm went off at 6am. It was breezy and overcast outside but as long as it wasn't as awful as yesterday I didn't care. I quickly ran to my camera and tentatively put the battery back in and turned it on.....everything was still dead! Oh nooooo, what a complete disaster :(Fighting over one camera for the rest of the trip and having to shell out an unexpected 800 quid for a new one wasn't the best news I've ever had. I thought I'd leave it on the warm floor for another 24 hours just in case but it looked pretty pointless. As Wendy wasn't coming I was at least able to take her camera, although its ISO capability was nowhere near that of my 7D but it was still a camera and that was the main thing.

It was still dark out when I left HQ at 7am, which was good because I wanted to avoid any crowds. Wendy was up at 7.05am and when she let Lyca out there were streams of

Redwing going over the house. She made herself a Cappuccino and took the Mac and Lyca back to bed, which seeing as she still felt rough from her cold, was just what the Dr. ordered.

While she was relaxing in bed I on the other hand was at Warham Greens by 7.20am. I got chatting to a nice friendly long-haired bloke who'd had the same idea and we wandered off down the track. He knew his stuff and pointed out a **Ring Ouzel** calling from the track bushes. This was very handy, as I now know what a totally different type of Ring Ouzel call sounds like. Unfortunately, we never got to see it but there'd obviously been more bird movement overnight, as Bramblings were everywhere and calling constantly. Down at the Copse there were another 6 Birders already there and they hadn't seen any sign of the Bluetail. After 30 minutes of searching with the rest of them I realized that there was no way the bird was still there. The nice bloke agreed, so we both gave up and wandered back up the track. On the way back up I heard a call that made me stop and just as I was about to call it, the nice bloke said, "**Firecrest!**" It was funny how nonchalantly he said it and lucky he beat me to it, as I'd have shrieked, "**FIRECREST!**" in my excitement. Back at the car it was still early so I thought I'd nip round to Stiffkey Woods and have a wander in there. We rarely do that side of Stiffkey but my thinking was that if the Bluetail had shifted East overnight it would've hit those woods. As soon as I walked into the wood I spotted a ridiculously tame **Common Redstart**! It was constantly flitting along the fence line and kept coming too close for my camera to focus! I was hoping it'd hop onto a nice tree branch but it seemed more interested in keeping close to me!



Common Redstart

I carried on walking and was seeing a lot of Robins, Mistle Thrushes and there were constant Redwing going over. As I passed what looked like a sewerage pumping building I heard the now familiar call of a Yellow-browed Warbler. I scanned the tops of the trees and luckily spotted it straight away, so I tried for some long distance record shots and got a poor one of it flying off.



Yellow-browed Warbler

I kept walking and was amazed by just how big Stiffkey Wood was, as I'd never walked its full length before. As the path got close to the inland edge I heard a **Greenshank** fly over and kept my eyes peeled, as I always feel that the edges of woods are the places to look but there was nothing out of the ordinary. I decided to turn around at the next crossing path I came to and do a nice loop back on the coastal path, instead of backtracking on myself. Within minutes I came across exactly that and headed back. I still had no idea how close I was to the end of the wood but I'd run out of time and was pretty sure Wendy would be raring to go by then. On the short drive back to HQ I got a report of a Little Bunting at the Warham Greens Whirligig! I chose to regard it as a string rather than get annoyed that I'd been within 1 mile either side of there that morning.....Doh! When I texted Wendy, to see if she was ready, I was very surprised to hear that she was. When she'd got up at 7.50am it was a lovely sunny day, so she'd been keen to get out and got ready quickly.

I was back by 9.10am and after gripping Wendy off with Ring Ouzel, Firecrest and Redstart we went out at 9.39am. Walking down the path to the car Wendy saw a Moth flying over the grass at the front of the house. It landed in the dead leaves and was well camouflaged, so it was hard to re-find it for a point and click shot to ID it with. It turned out to be a **Mallow**, which was pretty washed out and past its best.



Mallow

I then got another report and could've screamed as I read it out....."Bluetail at Stiffkey Campsite Wood!" I'd been there literally 30 minutes ago, so how'd I missed it? Arrghhhhhh! That sorted our 1st plan of the day out, so it was back to Stiffkey in the hope of getting some better views in some much more favourable conditions.

It was 9.50am when I parked up at the campsite car park, which was already nearly full and there were Birders coming and going everywhere. On the way down the path we met 2 of the 3 young lads from yesterday and they told us that they'd re-found it at the end of the wood and that the bird was showing well. This explained everything but I didn't know whether to be happy or sad. I was happy that it hadn't just been me being a rubbish birder by missing the bird 1 hour earlier but sad because if I'd just walked to the end of the wood I could well have re-found it myself before they had! That was twice in two days I'd narrowly missed coming across a Red-flanked Bluetail. We thanked them and carried on down to the woods feeling very smug that it'd been them who'd re-found it and not some smart arse :P.



Stiffkey Wood

Annoyingly the end of the wood was probably no more than 5 minutes away from where I'd turned back earlier, but I tried to forget about that and concentrated on the job in hand. Firstly I'd have to keep Lyca quiet and secondly I wanted to get a good view of the Bluetail. Keeping Lyca quiet looked as though it was going to be tricky, as quite a crowd had already gathered.



Bluetail twitch 2

We joined the group and stood patiently waiting for any signs of movement in the trees. All the same familiar faces were there and unfortunately some of them are mainly remembered for their bad behavior. After a few minutes of everyone behaving impeccably but no one seeing anything, everything turned on its head when some of them started to plough their way through the trees and bushes. If we stood any chance of seeing it they'd need to stop doing that for starters! No wonder the bird was keeping its head well down. After a while the people in the right hand corner were starting to get twitchy. We were too far away to hear them but looked in the general direction they were looking in anyway. Wendy raised her bins and got a view of the bird before it flew to the left and was gone again. This sent everyone mental and they all charged over to where the bird had flown to and stood around waiting. We made our way slowly over to the back of the group with a bad feeling that it wasn't playing and we weren't going to get any good views at all. It was so flighty and seemed to be ranging around the entire wood. After a few minutes it'd made its way across to the far left hand corner and the group of Birders had by then well and truly split up. I'd been standing at the back of one group with Lyca, not getting any views, when I spotted something fly past my left hand side and go behind me. I turned around and lifted my bins with one hand and couldn't believe it when I saw the Bluetail no more than 10 yards in front of me! Me being me, I instantly dropped my bins and turned to see where the nearest person was, so I could tell them. Wendy had spotted it but everyone else was way behind me, so I turned right round and made a subtle hand gesture trying to guide people's eyes to the bird. I then thought, "PHOTO!" I swiveled back round, still holding Lyca's lead and tried to raise my camera to get a shot by which point the bird had hopped onto the ground and was feeding away. I only got two shots fired off before it flew off to the right and disappeared again. My gut feeling wasn't good, as I knew that the shutter speed was terribly low in the dark wood and that Lyca had been pulling me at the time. Sure enough both shots were miles out of focus and to say I was gutted would be an understatement especially as the bird had been so close to me :(.



Red-flanked Bluetail nightmare :(

I reckon that if I'd been selfish and had gone in for a shot 1st when it was on a branch I'd have got a belter. I also know that if I'd been at the back and had seen someone firing shots off without telling anyone the bird was there I'd have been very annoyed, so I still think it's best to tell people 1st and shoot second. I'd certainly lost out but the main thing was that we'd both had some cracking views and luckily some others had followed my directions and got their best views as well. Including good views of its blue tail....Yes!

Loud mouth man was back and amazingly he was even worse this time with his phone on speaker in the middle of the twitch! After his very public phone call he didn't talk about the bird but instead chose to announce to everyone in the vicinity that he'd just seen a Peregrine and Little Egret! Whoopee doo....SHUT UP you clown.....Grrrrr! With that we decided to call it a day and headed back to the car realizing that we may as well forget about Birding for the rest of the week, as it was definitely going to be impossible to beat a Red-flanked Bluetail.

Back at the campsite the Redstart was still sitting happily on a fence post and Wendy was pleased to have caught up with it. Not only that but she was so close to it that she could've touched it at one point. The YBW was still calling from the trees too but by then Wendy was desperate to see a Ring Ouzel. With that in mind we didn't leave when we got to the car park and headed off on the coastal footpath over to the Whirligig instead. Considering my earlier visit to Warham Greens a mile up the coast had proved that they were going through the area it seemed worth a shot. It was also very interesting to see Stiffkey saltmarsh at low tide compared to the high tide of the other day.



Stiffkey saltmarsh

On the way we found a huge flock of Greenfinches in a tall conifer and there were birds flitting around all over the place. We scanned the flock hard, as you just don't know what rarities might be hanging around in flocks in the area. There wasn't anything in with them unfortunately but we were on a high and nothing could dampen our enthusiasm now! Near the Whirligig we had another Redstart and loads more Goldcrests, which still didn't produce a Firecrest for Wendy. Another bird, which caught our eye, was a **Yellowhammer** but there was nothing else to speak of, so we headed back to the car. It was 12.01pm when we got back and not only was the car park full but the line of cars parked up the track went half way up the road! That bird had certainly created quite a stir!



All for a Bluetail!

I'd received some more reports and for the 1st time ever on a birding trip we had to decide which rarity to go for! There was a Radde's Warbler reported from Gun Hill where we'd been 2 days ago and an Olive-backed Pipit at Wells Woods. Both birds were potential lifers for us, so in the end I decided to go for the Pipit, as the walk to Gun Hill is quite far and would leave us out on a limb if any other reports came in. The way it was going I was fully

expecting it to happen too. We were smack bang in the middle of a movement of decent birds for the 1st time ever and it was pretty exciting! Wells Woods is a very difficult place to bird, it's literally like trying to find a needle in a haystack, so we were just hoping we'd find the crowd of Birders. Luckily it wasn't in the Dell, as we didn't know where it was anymore after losing all the locations I'd set up in the past on my phone. It'd taken us years to find it as well, so losing it was a totally disaster.

It was 12.16pm when we arrived at the car park and after paying and displaying we headed through the gate and wandered down the path. The Olive-backed Pipit had been seen in the Birch trees on the left by the paths junction, so we scoured the area.



Wells woods

There weren't any Birders there, which made us wonder if we were in the wrong place but I was sure it was the only place it could be. After looking at about a million Robins we were getting a bit depressed when my phone alert went. On 1st glances I saw that it said Radde's Warbler and instantly presumed that the one at Gun Hill has been seen again. Luckily I kept reading the report and nearly fell over backwards when it said that it was actually in Wells Woods! What? :O. Amazingly, for once I had a 3g signal and I was able to get the full details of the report, which said that it was showing well in the Dell. Uh oh! Wendy then spotted a couple of Birders chatting, so she made a beeline for them to try and get some more info. The guy told us where to go and luckily it wasn't far away at all, so even we couldn't go wrong. We heard a **Siskin** going over and fortunately his directions were good, so we quickly came across a small group of Birders standing in a clearing among the trees.

We edged our way over to join them and waited patiently for any signs.



Radde's Warbler twitch

After a few minutes one bloke called it but he was standing on his own, so we don't think anyone else saw it.....Grrrrrr! After a while we started to get a bit bored and then we noticed that everyone had gone...What the? There was just us hardcore left....Hahahahaha. Realising it was probably a lost cause I thought we should go for another look for the Pipit but as we walked round a bunch of bushes to leave we saw that everyone was up on a mound waving at us to stop....Oooops! We stopped dead in our tracks and skirted slowly round them to join them up on the mound. They presumably had the bird somewhere but we couldn't tell where. It was certainly mobile and very elusive having moved so far without being noticed for so long. Suddenly, everyone raised their bins and looked to the right. We'd just managed to work where they were looking when all of a sudden a tiny bird popped out at the base of a tree right in front of me and started feeding off the dead bracken at its base. I couldn't believe what I was seeing and I called it! Luckily Wendy who was behind me had spotted it too and we were both looking at a cracking **Radde's Warbler!** We only had a split second view before it disappeared but it was good enough for us both to clock its huge supercilium and also its weird cocked tail posture.....Cool :). Wendy was now on her 6th lifer and I was on my third. Even with all the commotion it hadn't escaped our notice that Lee Evans was there and after expecting the worst he was actually very well behaved and didn't put a foot wrong. Overhearing him and his gang's chat it sounded like all the biggest year listers had descended on Norfolk, as the scarce bird movement in the last few days had been so good! Wendy noticed that Lyca was whinging again and probably bored stiff, so we decided to leave the others to it and left.

Back on the Pipit path there were a few others looking by then, so we stopped for another scan.



Wells Woods

Two lifers in one place would've been a bit of a tall order to say the least but it was definitely worth another go. The sun was in our faces, so it wasn't easy and when we found a Pipit shaped bird in a tree we were very keen to see any details to confirm our suspicions. In reality all we could see was a black silhouette and the bird quickly disappeared into the cover of the trees and was gone.....Urrghhhhh! :(We have no idea if that was the Olive-backed Pipit but with hindsight we strongly suspect that it was but we'll never know for sure. On the way back to the car we heard a bloke saying, "It's that nice doggy again, are you Pete H?" It was nice bloke John (the whistle blower) who'd found the Bluetail yesterday and having read my comments on Birdforums the night before, thanking the nice guy with the dog whistle for telling us about the Bluetail, he told me that he'd private messaged me. Oooooooooo :).

We must've been bored by then and were having a discussion about Birding versus Photography as we walked back. Wendy is always of the opinion that she'd rather see a bird and get all its details than spend more time stressing about getting its picture. I've always hovered between the 2 and keep changing my mind but at the time I reckoned I was with her on that. We hadn't taken many bird pics at all since we'd been away and I was starting to worry that after 2 weeks away I'd have none to put in the article....Oooops! Just then Wendy spotted a Jay landing in a puddle on the path ahead of us and really close, so I raised the camera just in time for it to clock us and fly off! That would've made for a cracking shot too....Grrrrrrr!

Back at the car it was 2pm and definitely time for our well-earned lunch. We left at 2.19pm seeing a squashed Squirrel in the road and noticing that my car was reading a sweltering 17c! At 2.35pm I got a report of the Olive-backed Pipit at Wells Woods from 1.30pm and it wasn't what we wanted to see. That was the exact time we'd seen 'that' bird in the same trees as where it'd just been reported from.....Nooooooooooooo! I also had a report of a Richard's Pipit in some fields up behind Salthouse, so that was where we were heading next even though I wasn't confident of ever twitching a Richards Pipit.

It was lovely and warm as we walked up the footpath to the fields but predictably we saw no sign of any Richard's Pipit! Looking down over the saltmarsh we found some **Shovelers**, which were new for the trip.



Looking out over Salthouse marsh

We met another Birder who hadn't heard about the Pipit but said that there'd been a Great Grey Shrike hanging about since yesterday. We thanked him and had a good look but the Shrike was nowhere to be seen.

We were back at the car at 3.28pm and having had a report of a Lapland Bunting at Salthouse beach we headed straight for the car park, or more appropriately what's left of it after last years storms! As I parked up Wendy spotted 2 tiny birds flying around in the ditch next to the car. When we got out and had a look we saw that they were Goldcrests. It seemed like a bit of an odd place for them to be, so they must've just come in and were feeding up as much as possible. In the adjacent field were 2x Wheatears and we wandered over the shingle on the beach to Gramborough Hill.



Gramborough Hill

The footpath we'd normally take was so flooded we had to walk across the beach to get to the hill and looking around it was dead apart from 2x Chiffchaffs. It wasn't particularly late

in the day but we'd had enough and finding new birds for the trip was proving trickier than ever, so went back to the car. The 2x Goldcrests were still there in the ditch chasing each other about, totally oblivious to the fact that we were there, watching them.

Back at HQ it was 4.42pm and after dropping our stuff off and giving Lyca her tea we decided we'd treat ourselves to some food out. We tidied ourselves up a bit and settled on the tried and tested King's Arms in Blakeney. Luckily there was a space and I parked up on the harbour at 5.40pm and we wandered up the road to the pub. It was quite busy in the local's bar and the old woman, who's there every time we go, was there again. We found ourselves a table in a dark corner of the main bar and had the whole room to ourselves. Wendy went up to get some drinks before we chose our food, which was easy peasy. I went for my usual Tempura Chicken with Chips, no salad or veg and she went for the Tomato and Roasted Red Pepper Soup.....Sorted. When our food arrived Lyca started being naughty and put her paws up on the table to beg and when a couple arrived with 2x lovely calm Golden Spaniels she started barking at them. Grrrrrrrr.....you can't take her anywhere sometimes! I was so stuffed after mine that pudding was totally out of the question and after our very nice tea we were home by 7pm.

Wendy went straight for a bath and this time she remembered to put the whirlpool on full! She said she felt like a Lobster boiling in a pot but she definitely appreciated it for all her aches and pains. Lyca was again absolutely knackered for the rest of the evening and we didn't hear a squeak out of her.



Tired Lyca

It was finally feeling like the kind of holiday we'd been trying so desperately to have but had failed to get over the years. We've always dreamed of getting loads of reports and being spoilt for choice as to which bird to go for next but the winds have never been in our favour. It'd taken us 11 attempts to get the right conditions on a holiday and finally we'd hit the jackpot. Well, "If at 1st you don't succeed try and try again." and all that :P. By 10.06pm we were so tired and with an early start planned for the morning we switched off the TV and went to bed....ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ :).

Wednesday 15th October

At 6am we were rudely awoken by the alarm.....Grrrrrrrr! It was overcast when Wendy took Lyca out and she could hear the endless streams of more Redwing going over the house.



Sunrise from the Cottage

There were obviously still things happening even though the Easterlies had now stopped. Our plan was to get out to Holme Dunes NOA as early possible to hopefully find Wendy another lifer plus a Ring Ouzel or two. My thinking was that Holme is a good place for holding decent migrants, so we wouldn't be relying on a bird just dropping in. There'd also been a report of a Pallas' Warbler there as an added incentive.

We left HQ at 7.40am and although the sun was shining in Blakeney we could see some massive black clouds hanging right above where we were heading for.....Urrghhhh! The only way to look at it was to think that maybe it would keep any potential birds grounded and would work in our favour. The roads were nice and quiet, as it was still pretty early and hopefully this would mean it wouldn't take us as long to get there. As I was driving I saw a flash of something at the side of the road and looked down just in time to catch a glimpse of a **Stoat** leaping into the hedge. I squealed, "Stoooooooooat!" but Wendy was too late and only saw a flash of brown as it vanished.

Arriving at Holme Dunes it was already 8.25am and although we'd made it in good time it still wasn't as early as we'd hoped. I was instantly confused when I saw 4 or 5 Birders looking up at the trees near the toilet block before the turn off into the Reserve, as I was sure the report of the Pallas' Warbler had said it was in the Sycamore at the Visitors Centre. I presumed I must've read the report wrong, so I parked up and we started looking. Straight away we overheard a bloke mention that a Pallas' Warbler had flown into the garden earlier! Lucky we stopped then. The nice bloke I'd chatted with at the Bluetail was just leaving but he didn't look happy but then again from what we could gather, happy wasn't one of his most widely used expressions :P. After a while the Birders started to dissipate so we decided to head off to the Reserve proper. Just as we did we got chatting to another Birder who casually mentioned that there was a Great Grey Shrike in the paddocks and thinking I knew where that was we jumped in the car and drove off down the road. At the paddocks we scanned the hedgerows but there was nothing there and when I looked at my map on my phone I realized that there were more paddocks behind the ones we could see. I reckoned it was worth a punt so we drove back down the road to the toilet block. Luckily the same Birder was there, so I asked him where to go to view the paddocks and he

directed us to a public footpath just up the main road....AHA! About 300 yards up the road we found the footpath, which ran along the back of the fields, so we scanned every bush in sight and covered everywhere possible but there was no sign of any Shrike. Another Birder who seemed to think we knew what we were doing had the same idea and was following us.....Hahahaha what a fool. Having wasted bags of time on 2 birds, which made our supposedly early start in the Dunes even later, we gave up. Luckily enough I worked out from the map that the path was a loop onto the reserve road so at least we'd got a nice walk out of it. We didn't get the impression that anyone else had seen the toilet block Pallas's or the Shrike either, so we thought we might have more chance at the Visitor Centre and went back to the car. It was 9.13am by then and I drove back down to the car park and parked up at the halfway car park as the gate to the Reserve was shut. Just before we set off I got a bird alert reporting that the Pallas' Warbler by the Visitors Centre was showing! Amazingly there'd been a different one at the toilet bloke earlier, so no wonder I'd been confused.

As we got our stuff out of the car a brilliant **Short-eared Owl** flew over us and landed on a post behind the hedge. These are always great birds for us to see especially coming from the seemingly Owl-less Isle of Man. We heard another Cetti's Warbler as we walked up the path, which brought us out onto the Reserve to walk through the Dunes and up to the Visitor Centre. Scanning around and listening for any calls it was disappointingly quiet and we feared that it was because we were now too late. We met a couple of blokes who told us that the Shrike from earlier wasn't in the paddocks by the toilet block at all and that it'd been reported wrongly. They were heading over to where they reckoned it was, which was in the opposite direction to the Visitor Centre, so we had a decision to make. Did we believe these blokes and delay our walk through the potentially migrant filled Dunes or did we ignore the blokes and get into the Dunes as soon as possible? Even though a Great Grey Shrike isn't a lifer for either of us, we both love Shrikes so we decided to tag along. There were GGS's popping up all over the place at the time but we'd skillfully managed to avoid every single one of them so far.



Holme

The blokes brought us over to view the back garden of a house and said that the Shrike had apparently speared a bird on one of the bushes in the area. We looked and looked but none of us could find the Shrike or even its larder.....Great! By the time we decided to give up it was far too late in the day to find any migrants in the Dunes but we had to walk through them anyway to get to the Visitor Centre. The whole walk produced, as expected, nothing

apart from Robins and Magpies, so had been a total waste of time after all but we still had 1 more place to try.

Up at the Visitors Centre there was quite a twitch going on, so we made our way over to join in.



Pallas' twitch

The Sycamores were full of life and as usual we trawled through Goldcrest after Goldcrest and started to get a familiar sinking feeling. Our spirits were raised when someone called it, so we all raised our bins and scoured the branches but it was too late, it'd gone back into the cover of the tree.

We hadn't been there that long when the Warden walked straight up to us and asked if we were members. I said, "Not anymore no, NWT doesn't allow dogs on its reserves." so he asked us if we'd paid. I said, "Not yet, we will be doing though." which made us feel like we were lying even though we weren't but it was nice to see them trying to make sure no one was taking the mick. A while later and the activity kicked off again and this time we had another YBW in our bins but still no sign of what we were after. So near and yet so far! For want of something better to do we watched the YBW but all of a sudden another bird popped out just behind it. We kept it in view and waited with baited breath for it to come out from behind all the dead leaves to show any of its features. We were beginning to give up hope when it suddenly flew out onto the edge of a branch and we instantly knew that we'd struck gold and were looking at a very smart little **Pallas's Warbler** feeding frantically amongst the branches. This was lifer number 7 for Wendy and she was over the moon having wanted to see one for years. When it came out again I raised the camera to try and get a record shot but it was too far away for Wendy's set up and I just wished my camera would wake up but it was still lying dead on the floor at HQ. It then started to rain, which thankfully happened later than we'd expected. Since we'd now seen the bird I suggested we should go and get our tickets but Wendy pointed out that all our money was back at the car.....DOH! I gave her the camera and said I'd run back to get her purse, so she suggested I took Lyca for a run too. We both ran off to get the money in the rain leaving Wendy to try for her own record shot if the bird showed again. While I was gone it continued to show well but it was so far away and quick that in blind panic she messed up her shots. Luckily one of hers came out better than any of mine and although it's not in the clear it actually shows some features.



It's in there somewhere!

When I arrived back puffing and panting I gave Wendy her purse and she ran into the Visitor Centre to pay for us both. Her coffee radar must've gone off, as she noticed that they'd built a small café out the back since we'd last been there, so she couldn't resist a visit. When she came out she was grinning from ear to ear and carrying a Cappuccino and a brown paper bag.....Oooooooooo :). She opened the bag up to reveal 2 slices of buttered toast....Om nom nom! Having had breakfast so early we were feeling a bit peckish, so it went down a treat and even Lyca had some of the crusts Wendy didn't eat, so we were all happy. The bird had gone back into the tree and hadn't been seen for ages after it's display earlier, so at 11am we thought it'd be a good time to go into the Pines for a look. There were loads more Goldcrests high up in the trees but still no sign of a Firecrest and at the end of the pines we reached the seawatching point.



Seawatching point

Apart from some distant squalls and a rainbow, the only bit of wildlife we saw were 2x **Red-throated Divers**. There seemed no point in hanging around, so we went back to the

Visitor Centre for a last look for the Pallas's. Needless to say that nobody had seen it again since we'd been gone and we realized how lucky we'd been to see it at all. We'd been very disappointed with how few birds there'd been at Holme Dunes especially as we'd been quietly confident of finding at least a Ring Ouzel. Ah well, we'd come away with Pallas's Warbler so we couldn't sniff at that.

Our next plan was to visit Titchwell again but this time we hoped we'd be able to get a park and actually stay there. Driving through Thornham Wendy spotted the Deli and got me to stop outside so she could go in to find some pressies. She was ages in there and when she finally came out she was laughing at how posh, not to mention rude, the other customers were. I'd watched a couple of Country Toff types coming out and getting into their Land Rover and was surprised to see what they had in the back. The back of the vehicle, which was just canvas, was full of kids and none of them would've been wearing seatbelts.....Tut tut! It turned out that they were the couple who'd caused so much amusement for Wendy in the shop too and even the cashier had rolled her eyes in her head after they'd eventually left :P.

When we arrived at Titchwell it was 12.12pm and although it was a lot quieter it was raining again, so we stayed in the car and ate our lunch hoping that it'd stop. Luckily after we'd finished it did, so we ventured out with our fingers crossed that we weren't going to be in for another thorough soaking. We heard another Cetti's in the reeds opposite the Meadow Trail and on the 1st pool on the left we added **Tufted Duck**. As we approached Island Hide we heard the blast of yet another Cetti's and we stood outside the hide, as Lyca isn't allowed in. There were still a good few **Avocets**, some **Gadwall** and thousands of Golden Plover out on one of the Islands. We looked through them quickly for an American but the best Wendy could pull out was a Golden Plover with a white head, which we're sure we'd seen the year before too. There was loads of **Ruff** feeding in the shallows but nothing else of note, so Wendy stopped to try for a shot.



Ruff

After that we carried on up to the Brackish Marsh but all we added there was **Shelduck**, so we headed for the beach, which was totally dead.



Birding dog

A **Peregrine** blasted over, which added a bit of action but as usual it didn't catch anything, not that there was anything about to catch. I then got a report of the Olive-backed Pipit at Wells Woods again, so we unanimously decided to go back for round two and hurried back to the car.

It was 1.55pm when we left and Wendy, feeling in the holiday mood, rummaged around in the bag behind her from Thornham Deli. She pulled out a small can of Pimm's, which made me laugh out loud. Pimm's? What the? I know she's partial to a bit of poncey stuff now and again but Pimm's was pushing it, even by her standards! She cracked it open, took a sip and looked at me with one of her faces and said, "Bleurghhhhhhh!" Even though she thought it was gross she still managed to finish it before we got to Wells but decided she'd leave it for the ponces in future :P.

I parked up at Wells Woods car park at 2.26pm and we headed back in the same direction as we had the other day. We had no idea where we going, as there were no details on the report, so we just presumed it'd be in the same place. When we got there we couldn't see any other Birders and had a horrible feeling that it'd moved. Wendy noticed a couple of blokes chatting and went over to try to get some more info and was told that the Pipit was where the Radde's had been. He asked if we knew where it was and we said, "Yes" and trotted off into the trees.



This way?

When we got to the Radde's spot there was still no sign of any other Birders and Wendy wondered if it was because the Radde's had moved as well and that the Pipit was somewhere completely different....Uh oh! We wandered aimless about the woods not knowing where to go next but added **Treecreeper** and **Coal Tit** to our list. We thought we'd try to re-find The Dell and stumbled across an area of Birch trees, which could've been it but maybe it wasn't. Wendy found a **Grey Squirrel** and there were a few Birders in there too.....Phew! Apparently there was a Pallas's around somewhere but after a quick look and knowing how tiny and quick they are we gave up and headed back to the car.

We had no other leads for the Pipit and felt quite deflated at having wasted more of our ever-diminishing time for nothing when we got back at 3.48pm. We had no other plans for the day and could see ourselves just heading for home, until a familiar face appeared and threw a spanner in the works. It was John again and he looked in a hurry, as did all the Birders who were emerging from the woods and racing back to their cars. We said, "Hi" and he asked us if we'd heard the news. We said, "Err what news?" to which he replied, "Isabelline Shrike at The Whirligig." A WHAT? :O OMG! We thanked him profusely and joined the others into quickly packing up and bailing into our cars to race back to Stiffkey. This would be a very unexpected bird for us and our hearts were well and truly pumping now. Wendy desperately needed to go to the WC's and was also feeling a bit ropey and needed some food before we went for another walk to find the bird. I drove over to the WC's but said that there was no way we could afford to stop for food but she twisted my arm in the end. I got another report of the GGS at Holme Dunes again and knowing that we'd been there earlier and hadn't seen it was frustrating to say the least....Aarrghhhhhh! Even I'll admit that Wendy was very quick having grabbed the only vegetarian thing available from the self-service food warmers and she ran back out clutching a paper plate. She jumped back into the car and I put my foot down after losing enough time already.

Wendy had bought a sort of Pizza twist thing and kindly broke it ½ to share with me despite my objections of getting food in the 1st place. I think we both needed something to keep us going till teatime, as neither of us knew when that would be. All of a sudden I got stuck behind a right old fart of a driver and found myself crawling out of Wells like a slug at 18mph when I needed to get out of there as quickly as possible....Typical! There was nowhere to overtake him for miles either but luckily I eventually found a suitable spot and left him way behind....Phew!

Arriving at Stiffkey the car park was full and the queue of cars was all the way up the road again. I parked up at the top and we charged down the road and headed along the ever-worsening muddy footpath towards the Whirligig. There were loads of Birders there again and we even recognized the familiar faces of Sue Bryan and her mate, from our November 2011 trip. She'd been really helpful and had really pushed the boat out to give me loads of great info about the Roydon Common GGS. From what we could gather though, going off everyone's body language, the bird hadn't been seen for quite a while.



Nowt!

There were plenty of mutterings that it'd probably gone to roost for the night and that was that, game over. I don't know whether he's just incredibly jammy or what but just as Lee Evans turned up, a bloke announced that he had its head in his scope! He could see its eye mask and started trying to direct people onto it but nobody else could find it for toffee. Lee Evans charged his way through loudly saying that he couldn't see it and needed better directions than what he'd been given...Hahahahaha. Lee then loudly said, "Tell me where it is from the Hawthorn I'm looking at?" Now to me, that seemed very stupid, as that meant the bloke looking at the bird deep in the bush could potentially loose the bird to work out where Lee Evans' Hawthorn was. Unbelievably the bloke managed it and gave clear directions, which were out loud, so we all heard. Although he initially came across as very loud and rude Lee Evans actually did everyone a favour by getting better directions out of the bloke and at a volume that everyone could hear. Maybe there's method in his madness after all? There were people pushing and shoving everywhere and one bloke was being a bit silly by wandering around and standing in front of people who'd already claimed their positions. All we could hear was a bloke shouting, "You're standing in front of everyone, move out of the way!" "Mike, you're in that mans way now, move out of the way!" "MIKE WILL YOU STOP GETTING IN EVERYONES WAY!!!" Mike was looking rather sheepish by this point and decided to stand right in front of me instead, so I joined in the fun and shouted, "You're in my way now!" Poor old Mike didn't know where to put himself and Wendy was next to lose her view when he stood in front of her as well! Luckily a nice bloke ushered her to stand in front of him, as she was a lot smaller than him and he could see straight over her head. How nice was that? We still couldn't see the bird though and were starting to get a bit twitchy. We got chatting to the nice woman and her husband again and were swapping tales of being stood in front of when she said, "At least you didn't get smacked in the head by someone's tripod legs as they pushed past you!!!" Charming!

By now everyone was fed up with not being able to see the bird and being pushed about but the quest for better or 1st views continued, so you could feel the tension in the air. All of a sudden Lee Evans and his crew started to bulldoze their way off the path and out onto the saltmarsh and we watched on in amazement. We all scoffed at their terrible behavior especially when we spotted some of them standing about 10 yards in front of the already bad enough main crowd!



Desperation!

Five minutes later and they all had their bins, scopes and cameras raised and were pointing towards the bushes! We had no option but to swallow our morals and go with everyone else to join them. Dragging Lyca over the trenches running through the sveda was a bit difficult but eventually we merged with the crowd. Typically it had gone back into the cover and wasn't playing at all. It was keeping its head right down and the directions we were all being given as to where they'd seen it last didn't make any sense to anybody. It was getting decidedly chilly by then and Wendy's back was starting to give her grief, so she was just about ready to give up and suggested we called it a day. All of a sudden the bird flew and everyone got a brief view of the very pale looking **Isabelline Shrike**, everyone except Wendy that is! As it flew a bloke (not Mike) stepped out in front of her and totally blocked her view just at the crucial moment.....Nooooooooo! I'd seen it, which meant that I had my 4th lifer of the trip but Wendy was gutted. Her back could take no more, so totally depressed and fed up she pulled the plug and made the decision to forget it :(I wasn't going to let this go in a hurry of course and rubbed it in all the way back to car....:P. More Birders were arriving when we were on our way back and poor Wendy felt pretty annoyed especially as it was through no fault of her own that she hadn't seen it and her bad end to the day was just about to get worse.

When we got back to the car it was 5.44pm and when Wendy went round to get in she noticed some disgusting looking dog poo with sweetcorn in it right next to her door. The worst bit was that it had a boot print in it, which looked familiar and after checking, perfectly matched hers.....Bleurghhhhh! Her boots were also caked in mud so she couldn't see the damage but she dragged her foot through the grass in an attempt to remove the worst of it. Oh dear, that was the 2nd time she'd done it on this trip, which amused me no end because it's usually me. Unlucky.....again :P.

Back at HQ it was 6pm and there'd been no further sign of the Shrike since we'd left by 5.40pm. The only consolation for Wendy was that at least we hadn't stuck it out with the others and wasted our time standing outside in the freezing cold.

Lyca was again completely pooped and jumped straight up onto the settee and went to sleep when we got in.



Tired doggy

We made a quick tea and there'd been no further sign of the Shrike by 7.27pm but we couldn't believe that there were still Birders desperately looking for it at that time! We felt sorry for the ones who'd just arrived when we were leaving though, as they'd have rushed there as soon as they could (probably straight from work) and it'd all have been for nothing.

I had a quick check of my camera but it still wasn't showing any signs of life, so I'd just about given up on it by then. I knew I couldn't do without it for long so I started to look online to price up a replacement. The Tawny Owls were calling and the constant streams of Redwing were still going over HQ when Wendy took Lyca out for a wee before we went to bed totally knackered at 11pm.

Thursday 16th October

With our time running out we wanted to get out early again, so we were woken up by the alarm at 6am.....Urrghhhhh! Lyca, unlike all the other mornings seemed reluctant to get up but Wendy took her out for a wee in the end. It was raining and still dark outside and she could hear the Tawny Owls still calling to each other from the woods. Clutching at straws I gave my camera another prod only to find that it'd miraculously recovered from its death and was working again :O! I couldn't believe it and breathed a huge sigh of relief that I wouldn't have all the hassle of trying to claim for it on the insurance and then replace it after all.....Phew! Lyca was also uninterested in her breakfast when Wendy put it down for her, which was very unusual and it took her ages to rustle up the enthusiasm to eat it. We were ready to go at 7.30am but Lyca had other ideas and had taken herself back to bed. Even after we'd put her collar, harness and lead on, she just wouldn't budge! Very strange :/.



Raring to go!

She was OK once she was outside but the 2 weeks away were obviously catching up with her too. We weren't planning on going to go back to the Whirligig unless we got a report of the Shrike, so we didn't want to venture too far away. Having my camera back I was obviously keeping my fingers crossed that it'd still be there and that I'd be able to get a shot of the bird, even if it was only a record shot it'd be better than nothing. The closest place to try early in the day before it was too light was Friary Hills, so that's where we headed to first.

Luckily the road wasn't flooded this time and I parked the car at the gate at 7.38am. We then saw something that we'd never noticed before on any of our many visits, which made our hearts sink. There was a sign saying "No Dogs" on the gate, so we'd lost yet another of our favourite sites, due to having Lyca with us. Ah well, all we could do was leave her in the car, while we went off for a very quick look knowing fine well that we weren't going to be long. We felt really bad leaving her and could see her watching us through the window as we walked away through the gate. The view of the sun rising over the marsh was stunning and a lovely start to a crisp autumn morning walk.



Friary Hills

Instantly we noticed that there were a lot of Blackbirds and Finches moving through the trees, stuffing their faces with hawthorn berries as they went, so they'd obviously just arrived. We checked through the Blackbirds and spotted one that's wings looked paler than usual when it flew off. We followed it until it landed and Wendy was delighted to see that after nearly 2 weeks she'd finally she'd found her Ring Ouzel :). Phew! It was a brown female and straight after that we found another close by too but there was no sign of any males and because they'd flown further away they weren't photographable either :(We started to walk down the footpath and a flock of Finches landed and started feeding on the ground ahead of us, so we stopped and raised our bins. There were the usual Chaffinches but in with them were 5x Brambling.....Nice :). There were some Warblers flitting around in the bushes, presumably more Chiffchaffs and a lot of Song Thrushes, so there'd definitely been some movement. We thought we'd left Lyca on her own for long enough by that point and headed back. It was a shame we couldn't have been more thorough and done the whole walk, as we'd have been interested to see what was further down the track but Lyca comes first. When we got back to the car she was surprisingly calm and not barking, so we didn't feel so guilty after all. With things looking so good for migrants I reckoned Gramborough Hill would be worth a shot while it was still early.

It was 7.57am when we arrived at Salthouse car park and we were the 1st there, so we hoped we'd stand a better chance of finding something. There was a Wheatear and a load of Meadow Pipits in the field opposite and then we spotted the depressed looking bloke with long hair again. He'd just arrived too and obviously had the same idea as us (again) but he walked straight onto the beach and wasn't going in our direction....Phew! Over at Gramborough Hill things initially looked very quiet but it wasn't long before we started to see loads of small birds flying in. When we got them in our bins they were all Reed Buntings and we ended up counting 25 although there was probably even more than that! We were really hoping that we could find a Little Bunting amongst them all but as usual we had no such luck. Out on the top of the hill we found another Chiffchaff, more Meadow Pipits and Goldcrests but nothing remotely exciting.....Aarrghhhh!



There must be something out there!

It was really chilly and we were starting to regret not dressing appropriately but we'd been so used to the milder temperatures and weren't expecting it to be cold at all. I then got a report of 2x Great Grey Shrikes and 3x Ring Ouzels at the Whirligig and although the Isabelline Shrike hadn't been reported we decided to go back there anyway. I stopped off at Cley Deli, so Wendy could get herself a Cappuccino and she surprised me with some Billionaire's Shortbread as well.....Wahey! We then set off back to Warham Greens.

I parked up at the top of Garden Drove again at 9.22am, so we could check the bushes and trees down the track to the Copse on the way to the Whirligig. Walking down the track we managed to get ahead of the large Tit/Crest flock and started to scan through them all. We were just about to give up having found nothing in with them when we spotted a weird Warbler. We watched it moving through the branches until we had a semi clear view and it definitely wasn't a Blackcap. It was against the sky, so it was tricky to get any colour detail but it didn't have any hint of a cap and looked very plain, so we wondered if it was a Garden Warbler. I didn't want to be too blasé and just dismiss it as something common, just in case it wasn't, so I raised the camera for a record shot, which confirmed our ID of **Garden Warbler**.



Garden Warbler

Yet again it wasn't the amazing find we'd hoped for but it was a new bird for the trip, which we were really struggling for by then. Down at the Copse there were even more Tit/Crests for us to trawl through but again nothing interesting, so we carried on over to the Whirligig hoping for some better luck there.

After trudging all the way over to the Whirligig there was absolutely nothing about apart from quite a few birders hanging around looking bored.



Bored

Obviously the Ring Ouzels were long gone, there'd been no reports of the Isabelline Shrike yet and the Great Grey Shrike was being seen somewhere but we didn't have a clue where. We decided to go and look for it anyway and were just about to head off when Wendy noticed a group of Birders charging off at speed back towards the Whirligig. This got her

attention and when one of them started waving and gesturing she knew they meant business. With no time to waste we hotfooted back over to join the others and surprise, surprise, Lee Evans was there again. We raised our bins to look into the bushes and instantly clapped eyes on the Isabelline Shrike.....Yes! Wendy was soooooooooo pleased and although I'd been reveling in gripping her off I was secretly pleased she'd eventually seen it too. This was now her 8th lifer of the trip and it was showing much better than it'd done the night before (although still miles off), so she reckoned it'd been worth the wait. All the same familiar faces were there, it really is a small world, and everyone was happy. We watched it for ages as it moved around the trees and it even flew out across the sueda and back to its perch....Cool :). There was a Chaffinch in the same tree, which was great to use as handy size comparison.



Surprisingly small

It was much smaller than we'd imagined and not that much bigger than the other birds. There was a constant stream of Redwing going over while we watched the comings and goings and we couldn't help but think what a fantastic end it had been for our trip! I ended up with some shots of the bird too but they weren't ideal, as I wasn't prepared to go down onto the saltmarsh again with the other notorious Photographers.



Isabelline Shrike

Lee Evans was down there with his clan and also another well-known local Photography who, shall we say, has a bit of a bad reputation. He was even closer to the bird than anyone else, which wasn't the 1st time we'd seen this behavior from him and exactly what he's renowned for.

There was no way we could better our views of the Isabelline Shrike and after nobody had seen it for ages we decided to leave the chaos of the crowd to go back to our original plan of finding the Great Grey Shrike instead. I'd had another report of it and this time it said that it was up the Eastern track, which runs parallel to Garden Drove.

We wandered slowly up to the track and went through the gate to walk up the hill.



Eastern track fields

We weren't feeling particularly optimistic about this bird, we'd failed to see any GGS's yet and this could've been our last chance. We scanned the trees and huge, long hedgerows for anything else too and stopped next to the opening of the last field. It seemed fruitless again but then, in the far distance, I caught a glimpse of a bird flying up the hedge. Going by what I'd seen it had to be it but I'd lost it, so Wendy joined in the search. I took a record shot of the area of the hedge I'd seen it last and was amazed to see a tiny speck with grey and black colours in the frame!



Spot the birdie!

Wendy got onto it so finally we'd caught up with one of the many **Great Grey Shrike** that were in Norfolk at the time :). The views of it were awful and we couldn't see any detail at all but I put the news out and we headed back down the track.



Eastern track

We could tell no one had seen the Isabelline Shrike for ages so headed back over to the Copse for a last look before we left. There were Tit/Crest flocks in the trees all the way back up the track but again there wasn't anything in with them. You could be forgiven for calling us greedy after the great birds we'd seen over the past 2 weeks but after all the effort we'd put in it would've been nice to have stumbled across our own rarity along the way.

Back at the car it was 12.32pm and we were cold and hungry, so we grabbed our lunch from the back. Lyca had a drink but was so tired she curled up on the back seat and fell asleep.....Hahahahaha! I had a report saying that there'd still been no sign of the Isabelline Shrike since we'd left, so we'd made the right decision to call it a day when we did. We were close to HQ and would be passing it anyway, so I spun back and we both ran in to put some warmer clothes on. Shortly after we left at 1.24pm the sun decided to put in an appearance and the temperature soared.....Typical!

When we arrived at Cley East Bank it was 1.32pm and we were boiling with all our thicker clothes on. Lyca was in the back whinging that she was raring to go but we were feeling slightly less spritely. We walked down the bank hearing lots of, "Ping ping pings" from the Bearded Tits but only getting very brief views of them as they moved through the reeds in the distance. We'd hoped to get some better Beardie shots this time around but we quickly realized there wasn't as many around as in previous years. There was a Migrant Hawker flying around and we noticed the new pools, which was possibly due to the flooding from the previous winter.



New pools at East Bank

It was interesting to see what they'd done to the previously dense area of just reed beds and yet again it made us wonder why we can't have somewhere similar back at home. Just then we heard the squeal of our 1st **Water Rail** of the trip, having all but given up on them. There was another Wheatear hopping about further up the path but it seemed like a waste of time going any further. I'd misjudged how far it would be to get out to the reported Lapland Buntings anyway, so I reckoned approaching it from Salthouse car park would be a much better move.

It was 2pm when I parked up at Salthouse and got a report, which made us both wonder why we were bothering. At 1.30pm, while we'd been wasting our time at Cley the Birders at Warham had been feasting their eyes on 4x Shorelarks on the mud just north of the Whirlygig :O! Not only that but there'd also been 2x Laps and a SEO as well.....Urrghhhhhh! We wandered around and tried to find the Salthouse Laps but even the shingle ridge was totally dead and with the sun beating down on us we were practically melting and really regretting our decision to get changed. An elderly couple approached us to admire Lyca, so we chatted to them while they made a huge fuss of her. They were really nice and seemed in their element talking about dogs and their foibles, so with no birds about it was a good way to waste some more time. After we'd gone our separate ways I had a report of a couple of Snow Buntings from where I'd parked up. It was from 3mins before we'd got out earlier and we were sitting in the car eating Billionaire's Shortbread at the time.....What the? Ok, we were stuffing our faces but we were still scanning around and looking for birds and I'm sure one of us would've noticed some Snow Bunts right under our noses :O! I then got another report and this one was interesting! There was a Grey Phalarope on a pool at Cley beach car park. Since it was only about 5 minutes away it was an easy decision to make and we agreed that we'd go straight there. We tried to walk as fast as we could across the shingle but when I turned round I noticed Wendy had started to hobble and looked in pain all the way back to the car. She hadn't worn her spare boots for years and with the action of walking on shingle they'd started rubbing the backs of her heels and were giving her blisters.....Ouch! Good job nothing had been reported at Blakeney Point then! She was very pleased to be back at the car and we set off for another twitch :).

Cley Beach car park was very busy when we arrived at 2.53pm and driving towards the hut I knew I'd have to pay even though it was October. It was a NWT car park so having ditched off our membership this year, due to the no dog policy on all NWT Reserves, I felt I

had to have a sneaky dig when the bloke asked if we were members. "Not any more." I said to which he replied, "Would you like to rejoin us?" I had to be honest and in answer to the question I said, "No because none of your Reserves allow dogs." Ha and until they do neither of us will be renewing it either! Having made my point I parked up and we trudged off over more shingle (Wendy didn't look very pleased!) to the Eye Pool, where a small crowd had gathered.



Phalarope twitch

We quickly spotted the bird spinning round and round feeding in the pool and raised our bins for a better view. It'd been years since we'd last seen a **Grey Phalarope**, so this was great! The Photographer with the bad reputation was standing right next to us loudly putting the news out on his mobile phone, although we reckon he needn't have bothered, as everyone for miles around would've heard him anyway! We tried for some shots and after a while I ran back to the car to get my tripod from the boot. Wendy's set up was struggling with the distance again, so after I thought I had got a decent enough shot I let her have a pop with mine instead. Strangely all our shots were not as expected and Wendy ended up with the best one out of a bad bunch.



Grey Phalarope

I'm always kicking myself for forgetting to take video and it's been ages since I'd videoed any birds, so seeing as I had the tripod it would've been a shame not to. Hilariously (not) that turned out rubbish too. Arrghhhhhh! When we were both happy (or so we thought) we trotted back to the car, where I got another interesting report of a Red-backed Shrike at West Runton :O. My first thought was, "Where the heck is West Runton?" but a quick check of the map showed it being about 20-30 minutes away to the east, near Cromer.

It goes without saying that my foot was straight down on the accelerator and we set off to a place we'd only driven past before. West Runton was surprisingly nice as we drove through it and I parked up at the side of the road at the entrance to a Golf Course at 4.10pm. The Shrike was reported to be in a hedge at some allotments, which were just on our left and we could see a couple of Birders already there. We left Lyca in the car and walked the 20yards to where they were standing and peered over the hedge. They instantly pointed it out to us right at the back and we watched the very nice **Red-backed Shrike** going about its business. It was a crazy thought that we'd seen 4 different types of Shrikes during our week in Norfolk and it completed the possible set nicely. While I got some record shots Wendy went back to the car to check on Lyca and then brought her over, so that she could see it too.



Twitching Dog

Her life list is looking very acceptable already, so it would've been a shame for her to miss out on this one :P. Unfortunately I messed up my shot when the bird was at its closest and typically it didn't come anywhere near as close again :(.



Red-backed Shrike

As it was our last night and we had loads to do when we got in we thought we'd go out for tea to celebrate our eventful day and commiserate that our holiday was coming to an end. Although I wanted to go back to The King's Arms Wendy really wanted to go to The Dun Cow for a change. They changed the menu a couple of years ago and had removed the only thing I could eat, so I reluctantly agreed. I could look at the menu at least and if there was nothing on it for me we could always rethink.

It was 4.59pm when we arrived at a The Dun Cow and thankfully it was nowhere near as busy as it had been when we were there in August. We didn't have to wait to order and there was a free table over by the window....perfect :). Looking at the menu Wendy was

very pleased to see her poncey Warm Summer Salad still there so coupled with some fries she was sorted. I was totally stumped but tentatively decided on trying the Pulled Pork Ciabatta, which wasn't something I'd ever had before and I had no idea if I'd like it or not. A family arrived with a very noisy toddler in tow, so we were a bit worried as to how Lyca was going to respond. Even though the kid was running around screeching the place down she didn't bat an eyelid and curled up under the table.....Phew! Lyca behaved impeccably and even gained some more admirers, so it seems to us that kids should be the ones banned from pubs instead of dogs :P! When our food arrived I was slightly dubious to put it mildly but after I'd removed ALL the inedible rabbit food from the Ciabatta I cautiously tried the Pulled Pork. I have to admit that it was really nice and I'd definitely have it again, so the Dun Cow is now back on my Norfolk Pubs list. Wendy was as happy as ever with hers and I even had enough room for some White Chocolate Cheesecake.....Om nom nom :). Wendy was looking at the emergency exit when I started to struggle near the end and could see Mr. Creosote round 2 coming up! All I can say is that it's a good job I liked mine, as it's not cheap but it was still worth splashing out for on our last night and after I'd polished off the last mouthful we left at 6.35pm.

Back at HQ it was 6.45pm and I was soooooo stuffed it was all I could do to flop on the settee in a heap! I did a quick speed test and it was only running at 0.94mbps, which was rubbish compared to what I was getting in Cornwall. Wendy went straight for a bath and to start packing up our stuff for the next day. The forecast was looking awful with strong winds predicted again for our sailing.....Aarrghhhhhh! :(We had the cottage booked until Saturday, so Wendy thought that if it was going to die down we could change our ticket and stay an extra day to save ourselves the trauma. Or maybe that was just a good excuse for not leaving Norfolk? Whichever way we looked at it, the wind was set to get even worse, so she resigned herself to the fact that our holiday was nearly over and we all turned in, for our last night, at 10.53pm.

Friday 17th October

Wendy was up at 7.05am to find a nice sunny day with no wind and carried on with the packing and sarnie making. Unfortunately we'd run out of bread and cheese, so only had enough for our lunch, so we'd have to get our tea from somewhere on the move. For this holiday I decided to spend the entire day in Norfolk and took a risk by planning to leave at about 6pm. If we hit any traffic jams we'd be in a bit of trouble but I thought it was a risk worth taking. If we had a clear run back up north we we'd easily have enough time to end up in Clapham in time for a quick drink before heading to Heysham, especially as I'd worked out a much better route to get up there. I finally surfaced at 8am and had no idea what to do 1st having had no reports so far. My IBS kicked off again and I can only think that it's sparked off by the thought of the slight stress of driving for miles. Seeing as we'd not yet been there and no trip to Norfolk is complete without it I thought we could try Kelling Water Meadows first. We'd been hoping to go to Kelling Heath as well to bump into John again for a catch up but we hadn't had the chance during the week and now it was too late. There was no point going there for Dartford Warbler unless it was early morning, so we'd already missed the boat. While we were getting our stuff ready we noticed the neighbours were outside packing up their car and were also leaving.

It was 10.01am when we got to Kelling and there wasn't much going on all the way down the footpath. We met a woman out walking 4x Dogs and Lyca wanted to play with her Jack Russell. They seemed to get on well, so I let her off her lead and the pair of them had great fun chasing each other around like a pair of idiots. That is until the Greyhound she had turned on Lyca out of the blue and bit her on the back of the neck like as if it was grabbing a rabbit! Lyca let out a loud yelp and with her tail between her legs continued to squeal until she'd run back to the safety of us. The woman straight away said, "Yeah, you tell her little doggy!" like it was Lyca who'd started it! That really annoyed me but somehow I managed

to bite my tongue and kept my mouth shut. I think she realized though and quickly added that the Greyhound wasn't hers, she was only walking it for a friend but never once apologized for its behavior! After she'd gone we checked Lyca's neck and apart from some slobber she was totally unharmed luckily enough. Walking around the main pool there was even fewer birds on it than normal, which is usually something in the region of three!



Kelling Water Meadows

The streams of Redwing and Geese going over was constant and when we got to the beach I reckoned we should walk over towards Muckleborough Woods, where there'd been a Northern Treecreeper reported for the past few days.



It was boiling again and we were overdressed and not only that but Wendy was bursting for a wee. Normally this wasn't a problem but we had 5x Rambling Hikers hot on our tails, so, she'd just have to hang on. A young Swallow flew over us all on its own, so it was going to have to get its skates on if it was going to catch up with the others! There were no birds about apart from that and we looked longingly out to sea hoping for a Skua to go past but

there was nothing. We let the Hikers go past us and when they were at a safe distance Wendy was able to solve her, now urgent, problem. We didn't see any point in going further as by then I'd realized it was impossible to get to Muckleborough Woods from the beach side so we turned back.

On the way back up the footpath I stopped dead in my tracks and stamped my foot down on the ground to point with my foot and said, "Hey look at this!" Wendy instantly cracked up laughing and was unable to move while the tears streamed down her face. I wondered what she was laughing at, as I was only trying to point out a weird looking Fungus to her. She could hardly speak for laughing but it turned out that I'd inadvertently plonked my foot about 1mm away from a massive dog poo :O! Oooooops! That was close but the score was still, Wendy-2 Pete-0 :). It was 11.49am when we got back to the car and our next plan was to try Holkham Pines for a last ditch attempt at Firecrest.

Wendy popped into the Salthouse Deli for a Cappuccino on the way, so I went in as well to pick up some pressies and also couldn't resist a slice of yummy looking Lemon Drizzle Cake. We stopped at Walsey Hills NOA car park and had our lunch with a lovely view over the saltmarsh and sea and started to feel depressed at having to go home. Wendy was only looking forward to her own bed and reclining settee and the thought of having to go back to reality was hanging over her like a big black cloud. We heard a Cetti's from the reeds next to the car but there were other people arriving and nowhere to park, so we thought we should free up a space.

Wendy popped into the Blakeney Spa to get some water for our travels later and just before we got to Stiffkey we got stuck in a traffic jam due to some road works. We sat there for about 10mins and nothing was moving, so I even considered turning round and going a different way. A car further down the road must've had the same idea but just as he started to turn the traffic began to move, so I'd made the right decision in waiting after all. Luckily enough the delay hadn't affected my overall plans for the day. There'd been a Green-winged Teal reported from the Stiffkey Private Pool and out of sheer desperation for something new (as well as a laugh) Wendy raised her bins as we drove past in an attempt to find it. There's nowhere to stop on that stretch of road, so we can only presume that someone had seen it while they were stuck in the traffic jam. Predictably, the only thing Wendy found was that looking through bins in a moving vehicle makes her feel really sick.....Hahahahaha :P. A very enthusiastic couple we recognized from every twitch we'd been at had walked down the busy main road and were standing on the verge obviously looking for the Teal. That's either dedication or sheer desperation but neither of us were remotely tempted just for a GWT! My car was saying that the temperature was 20.5c and there was still not a breath of wind, so it didn't seem possible that our sailing was going to be rough.

We parked up on Lady Anne's Drive in Holkham at 1.22pm and on the way up we overheard some people saying that it was going to be 22c tomorrow! We certainly weren't expecting temperatures like that in October and for Wendy it just made the thought of going home to the cold IOM even worse. They even said that it was too hot to be out walking today, which made Wendy raise her eyebrows. If it'd been raining and cold like it should be in October then they would've had something to complain about! We carried on down the path towards the Washington Hide and quickly found the Tit flock, which had loads more Goldcrests in with them. We scanned through them all as best we could but we still couldn't pull out a Firecrest :(Lyca was quite happy sniffing all the strange England sniffs so we didn't need to worry about her.



Busy sniffing

We heard another YBW and a bloke nearby told us that there was a Pallas's in there somewhere. By now Wendy's neck was sore and felt like it was going to snap if she looked up anymore, so she had to give up. We were thinking of carrying on when I spotted another YBW, so I lifted my camera and fired off some shots. It was better than the one I got in Cornwall, which wouldn't be difficult let's face, but it was still just a record shot.



Yellow-browed Warbler

While I was doing that Wendy heard yet another YBW calling from the trees on the right, we found out later that there were apparently 5 around at the time. We didn't have the inclination to hang on forever to dig out the Pallas's, so we carried on over to the Washington Hide where Wendy sat down on the boardwalk to take some time out.



Boardwalk to the beach

She looked around and then spotted a Buzzard in the distance, which we had to check in case it was a Rough-legged. There were a few reports coming in of rough-legs, so I looked up only to see a Hercules! I found this hilarious considering she'd been so disgusted with a certain Photographer for suggesting her Buzzard at Winterton was a plane. It had just come back to haunt her big time and I wasn't going to let her live it down in a hurry :P. She'd completely run out of steam by then and I had to laugh at her sat slumped against the boardwalk looking depressed. I ended up joining in but Lyca seemed to have found her 2nd wind and had enough energy for another 2 weeks holiday!!



Lyca's 2nd wind

Wendy then suggested going back to HQ, so she could have a bath and do the rest of the packing. This wasn't like Wendy at all but seeing as she's obviously getting old I said I'd take her and Lyca back and with not wanting to waste the remaining time in Norfolk I'd go back to Warham with my camera to see if I could better my Shrike shots. We were back at

the car at 2.39pm and I drove back to HQ to drop the 2 of them off and set off on my own at 3.09pm.

I bombed it back to Warham and had to make a decision to make as to where I should try to park. I reckoned my best bet would be the entrance to the western most track, as this leads right out to the Whirligig area. The space for 2 cars there was already full so I crossed my fingers that I wouldn't have to resort to parking at Garden Drove, which would be the furthest away I could possibly be. All the spaces at the entrance to the middle track entrance were full too but luckily enough there was a road opposite where cars had been dumped half on the hedge but there was one space left! That's where I was going then and I abandoned my car at an angle of about 45 degrees. As time was of the essence I grabbed my big lens and attempted to leg it down the track. After about 100 yards I was knackered so slowed down to a quick walk instead. When I finally got to the Whirligig area I realized there wasn't anyone there.....Uh oh! I had a look about and spotted someone walking up the western track back towards the main road and away from the coastal path. They could either be walking home or possibly the Shrike had moved up that way. I decided to follow them even though if they were heading home it would be pretty embarrassing! At 3.35pm as I rounded a corner there was a crowd of about 11 people standing in a gap in the hedge looking out over some scrubby bushes. This looked good but then they told me it had disappeared about 5 minutes earlier.....Arrghhhhh! I hung around and after 15 minutes I was starting to get worried. Some people gave up but I thought I'd wait around for as long as I could, as I had nothing else to do. At 3.51pm a bloke said, "Its showing right at the back!" and sure enough there it was. Unfortunately it was probably the same distance away as when I'd 1st seen it. Over the next 15 minutes it would disappear and then reappear a bit closer, so I was getting very exciting as I starting to imagine getting a shot of an Isabelline Shrike from 10 yards! Unfortunately it never came that close but it came a lot closer than the previous two days so I managed to get a shot I was quite happy with considering what a bird it was!



Isabelline Shrike

Annoyingly when it disappeared for the longest time I realized a Photographer had gone into the field and had been shooting at the bird from point blank range and had blatantly obviously flushed it. It was no surprise to see "that" Norfolk photographer walk out of the field completely oblivious to the amount of hatred aimed at him from everyone there.

What a selfish git! I then realized it was getting pretty late so thought I'd better go, which was perfect timing before I ended up saying some choice parting words to the stupid photographer, so I bit my tongue and walked off. When I got back onto the coastal path I couldn't believe it when I noticed the Shrike sitting on top of a bush by the path. I looked around thinking that if there was no one watching it I could use the hedgerow to approach it whilst staying hidden but when I turned around there was Dog Staring Man.....Arrghhhhh! Luckily I didn't have Lyca with me this time but my heart sank, as the bird was well lit and there's no way I'd ever approach a bird if someone else is watching it. I ended up standing with Dog Staring Man and while we were chatting I just happened to mention that I was off to Heysham straight after. I was a bit taken a back when he recited the exact route road for road.....who needs Sat Nav! Another bloke appeared from the track and I overheard him glumly say, "How am I going to go back to birding in Surrey after this brilliant week?" That's exactly what I was thinking, although to the Isle of Man rather than Surrey. I then thought, "Uh oh I must be pretty late now?" so left Dog Staring Man and Surrey Man to it and quickly scarpered up the middle track back to my car.

When I arrived back at 4.49pm, Wendy was practically ready to go after having her last soak in the whirlpool bath. She'd already done the packing and had even given Lyca a bath and blow dry after her 2weeks of very muddy walks. When the fridge had been emptied, Lyca had eaten her tea and everything had been packed up and cleaned we were reluctantly ready to leave at 5.45pm. Normally we'd have left Norfolk far behind us by 5pm never mind still be at the cottage! I loaded the car up and we waved a sad, "Goodbye" to Church Owl just wishing we could stay longer.



Church Owl

What a week we'd had! It'd knocked the socks off any of our previous trips to Norfolk and now we'd finally experienced how good it is when the conditions, we'd always wanted, hit :).

It was already quite dark as we drove away and we started to worry that we'd left it a bit too late. We'd planned to stay in Norfolk for as long as possible but hadn't bargained on cutting it quite so fine! We hadn't been driving for long when Wendy spotted a Tawny Owl hunting over a field but there was still no sign of any Barn Owls. We couldn't believe that we hadn't seen ANY during our 2wks, especially when we looked back at our previous trips and how we used to see them all the time. Amazingly our late departure was a great move and we didn't get caught in any traffic jams at all the usual places.....Yey! When we'd left,

Wendy had been optimistic that it wasn't going to be as bad as our long and tedious drive up from Cornwall but it seemed to be taking forever. It was dark, so there wasn't even anything to look at and we were starting to think that we wouldn't make it to Clapham before the pub shut.

Wendy was hungry, so when we eventually made it to Blyth Services at 8.26pm she ran in to get us some food while I let Lyca out. When she returned she didn't look pleased at all and all she had was a small brown bag from Burger King. She'd gone there 1st to get me my usual Chicken Nuggets and medium Fries before the queue got too big but had to stand for ages waiting for a young lad to serve her. After she'd endured his terrible customer service skills she'd gone to M&S but found that the shelves were bare....Nooooooooo! There was no way she was going to go back to Burger King nor would she eat anything from there anyway, so we had to share my tiny portion of cold cardboard fries. It was better than nothing though I suppose but we were still hungry when we left at 8.48pm. It was still hard to believe that our sailing was going to be rough, as everywhere was so calm but when we reached Harrogate things took a turn for the worse and the reality sunk in. It started to chuck it down with rain and the wind picked right up.....Booooooooo! We'd been hoping that the forecast was wrong but unfortunately it was spot on. By the time we'd got to Skipton it was blowing a gale and visibility on the main road to Clapham was dreadful. I'd never been on these dark and remote roads before and when Wendy told me to be careful, as there's Sheep grazing on both sides and no fence, I slowed down even more.....Arghhhhhh! Wendy was doing a count down of all the towns and villages we drove past until we breathed a sigh of relief and turned off at Clapham.....Phew!

The car park behind the New Inn was nearly full as I drove in at 10.38pm and I just hoped that it wasn't the same inside. All I wanted to do was get a seat in a quiet corner for the rest of the evening, so when we walked in and accidentally found the empty smaller bar we happily flopped into a seat. Wendy went up to the bar and ordered us some drinks and Lyca curled up on the floor by the comfy sofa next to the window.



Lzzzzzzzz

As we sat chilling out we realized that we'd successfully avoided all the traffic jams by leaving Norfolk later and that my new route via Harrogate had worked a treat as well. Skillz! Unfortunately for Wendy her random new bloke friend wasn't there, so she had to put up with just my company for a bit longer :P. I was reading various comments on Birdforums and noticed the huge amount of complaints coming in about the bad behavior

of Birders and Photographers at the Bluetail and Steppe Grey Shrike twitches. There was a lot of debating about the baiting of the Shrike with mealworms etc. to keep it there for longer and enable them to stage their photos. We had to agree that it did seem a bit out of order especially as nobody baited the Steppe Shrike on the IOM but it still stayed for a few weeks AND we all got some great shots! My Sat Nav was saying it'd take 50 minutes to get to Heysham from Clapham, so at 11.53pm Wendy took our empties up to the bar and we left. Wendy had tried to get a shot of the pub last time we'd been there but they'd turned all the lights off and the whole place was in darkness straight after we'd walked out. This time she ran straight over the road and luckily they hadn't been so desperate to close, so she stood by the river and finally got her photo.



New Inn

She then jumped in the car and cracked open a mini bottle of rose she'd brought with her. If it was going to be rough then she was going to sleep! The weather was still awful when we were driving through Lancashire and we were still in the middle of nowhere and on unfamiliar roads to me. I rounded a corner and we passed something white on the opposite side of road but we were pretty tired and our brains took a second to get into gear. It looked like a Barn Owl that had been hit by a car :O! It didn't look good at all, so I backed up the road to get a better view. We looked at and thought, "Uh oh!" and it stared back at us for a few seconds and then flew off.....Phew! The only thing we can think is that it had been dazzled by my headlights and looked rough because it was soaking wet with all the rain. After we'd breathed a sigh of relief and realized we'd just seen our 1st **Barn Owl** of the trip we carried on through the darkness of Lancashire until we got to Asda where I stopped off to get petrol.

When we finally arrived at Heysham it was 12.50am (our latest time ever) and after we'd both taken some Stugeron I checked the total mileage for the past 2 wks. I'd driven 1,716 miles and used £360 worth of petrol.....Woah! It was, as forecast, blowing a gale and after unclipping Lyca from her car harness as usual she jumped into the front seat and fell asleep on Wendy's lap underneath the throw she was using to keep her warm.



Ahhhhhhh

After watching the boat bobbing about like a cork and hearing the wind whistling through the masts we finally boarded at 1.55am. We were in the cabin by 2am and we climbed under the blankets and waited to see how rough it was going to be. I never take Stugeron but this time I was glad I did, even if I was going to feel wiped out the next day! When we set off the boat rocked and rolled its way out to sea and Wendy went out like a light whereas I lay there for ages. I think I must've only had about 1-2hrs sleep and Wendy 3hrs, as she was woken up before we docked due to it being very rough approaching the IOM. Lyca slept the whole way over and was totally unaffected by the whole affair.....it's alright for some! It was painful waiting to dock but we eventually did at 5.48am and were disembarking at 6.01am.....Phew!

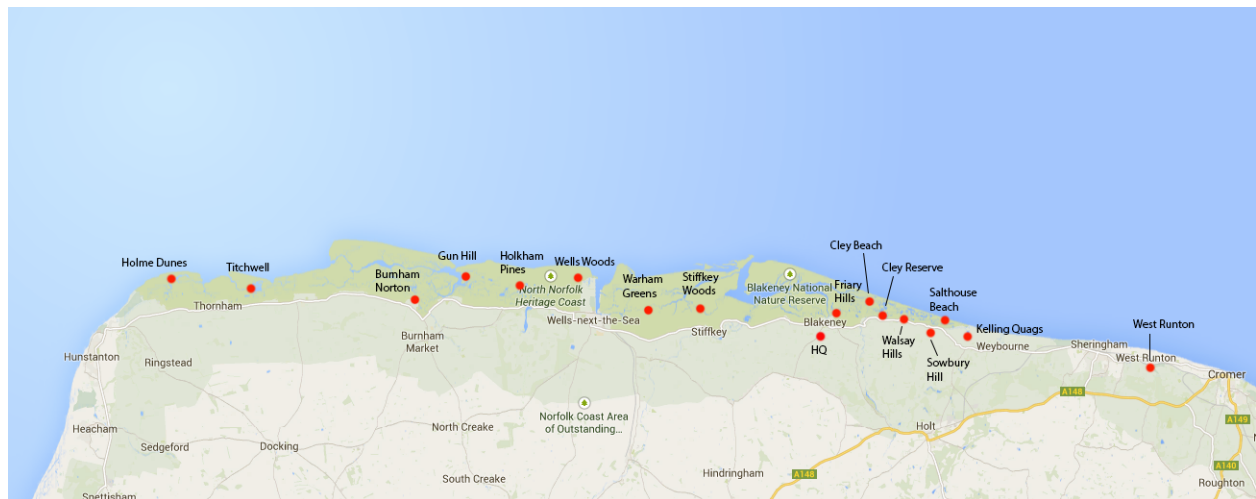
Having been adamant that I was going to stay up after getting in I had to eat my words. Because of taking Stugeron the night before and getting practically no sleep anyway I totally changed my mind and when we got home at 6.08am I felt totally zonked. Wendy put the heating on because it was freezing and after it'd warmed up a bit we all went back to bed until 10am. I have to say that I still felt really tired after getting up to accept our Tesco delivery and I don't think I'll be taking Stugeron in a hurry again. I don't know how Wendy takes it every time she goes on the boat.....she must be hardcore or something :P!

Looking back we reckoned that without a doubt it'd been our best trip to Norfolk ever. The winds we'd always wanted happened and as hoped they had brought in the birds we'd dreamt of seeing. I dread to think how many miles we've trudged and how much money we've spent to see next to nothing in the past but this was an altogether different trip. We were worried about doing it the wrong way round and all the birds being in the wrong place at the wrong time but in reality there wasn't much going on anywhere while we were in Cornwall. Our Cornwall trip had ended with a bang with the Eastern Subalpine Warbler, which was the best bird around at the time. Leaving Cornwall was hard but nothing much happened after we'd gone either and it was thankfully all happening in Norfolk :O! At the end of the 2 weeks we had a total trip list of 132 birds, not high but an indication of the time and effort we put in targeting migrants. Wendy had 8 lifers and I had an unbelievable 4! We can honestly say that we really struggled to choose a bird of the trip and after seeing the Eastern Subalpine Warbler we both thought we'd nailed it. All of a sudden we had some really good birds under our belts and each one made it harder and harder to pick. Urghhhhhhh! I eventually settled on Red-flanked Bluetail just because I'd always dreamt of seeing one and never imagined that I ever would, especially after wracking up so many

uneventful trips. All our previous October trips had been done in the hope of seeing a Bluetail and each time there was nothing around.....anywhere. Wendy was totally torn between the Pallas's Warbler having always wanted to see one but dipping several times previously and the Bluetail for the same reasons as me. Lyca now has a small but very respectable life list, which she hopes will keep on growing but is enjoying catching up on her sleep and being lazy again.

Our only regret was that we didn't focus more on Photography, as neither of us came away with many pictures at all. We were just enjoying the birds as we saw them and would've missed out on if we'd been taking pics, so it's not such a bad thing when you think about it. We both unanimously agreed that this trip was our best to date and exactly what we'd been striving for over the years. We doubt very much that we'll ever be as lucky again to hit such good conditions and birds but at least we can now say that we've experienced the best kind of Birding holiday you could hope for.....or can it get even better? Hahahahaha.....in our dreams! :P.

Map of the North Norfolk coast with locations we visited.



Total trip bird List

Mute Swan	Grey Plover	Song Thrush
Whooper Swan	Lapwing	Redwing
Pink-footed Goose	Knot	Mistle Thrush
Greylag Goose	Sanderling	Cetti's Warbler
Canada Goose	Dunlin	Blackcap
Brent Goose	Ruff	Garden Warbler
Egyptian Goose	Black-tailed Godwit	Eastern Subalpine Warbler
Shelduck	Bar-tailed Godwit	Pallas's Warbler
Wigeon	Curlew	Yellow-browed Warbler
Gadwall	Greenshank	Radde's Warbler
Teal	Redshank	Chiffchaff
Mallard	Turnstone	Willow Warbler
Pintail	Grey Phalarope	Goldcrest
Garganey	Black-headed Gull	Firecrest
Shoveler	Mediterranean Gull	Bearded Tit
Pochard	Common Gull	Long-tailed Tit
Tufted Duck	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Blue Tit
Eider	Herring Gull	Great Tit
Goldeneye	Great Black-backed Gull	Coal Tit
Red-legged Partridge	Sandwich Tern	Treecreeper

Pheasant	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Isabelline Shrike
Red-throated Diver	Stock Dove	Red-backed Shrike
Great Northern Diver	Woodpigeon	Great Grey Shrike
Little Grebe	Barn Owl	Southern Grey Shrike
Manx Shearwater	Tawny Owl	Jay
Balearic Shearwater	Short-eared Owl	Magpie
Gannet	Kingfisher	Chough
Cormorant	Green Woodpecker	Jackdaw
Shag	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Rook
Little Egret	Skylark	Carrion Crow
Great White Egret	Swallow	Hooded Crow
Grey Heron	Meadow Pipit	Raven
Marsh Harrier	Rock Pipit	Starling
Sparrowhawk	Grey Wagtail	Rose-coloured Starling
Buzzard	Pied Wagtail	House Sparrow
Kestrel	Wren	Chaffinch
Merlin	Dunnock	Brambling
Peregrine	Robin	Greenfinch
Water Rail	Red-flanked Bluetail	Goldfinch
Moorhen	Redstart	Siskin
Coot	Stonechat	Linnet
Oystercatcher	Wheatear	Bullfinch
Avocet	Blackbird	Yellowhammer
Golden Plover		Reed Bunting