

Norfolk October 2015

After last year's amazing October trip to Norfolk we decided to risk it and booked the same week again. Obviously the likelihood of us being lucky enough to get the easterly winds we needed for the 2nd time around was practically zero but we threw caution to wind (ho ho) and just went for it. All we could foresee was that the conditions would be totally wrong for our week and that it would all kick off the day we left like what usually happens. We didn't fancy yet another non-eventful week of trudging around Norfolk all day every day breaking our backs for next to nothing :(. After it'd all been booked we had no other option but to just cross our fingers and wait to see what happened.....Urrghhhhh!

With one week to go I tentatively checked the weather and nearly fell off my chair backwards when I saw 5 days of forecasted easterlies! OMG :O. If the forecast was right we could've been in for the best birding holiday of our lives but we didn't let ourselves get too carried away, as there was plenty of time for it to all change. I tried my best to keep my excitement in check and my head out of the clouds but as each day passed and the forecast stayed the same it was getting harder by the day. Also the ferry journey was looking like it would be flat calm too, so it was all beginning to sound too good to be true and we couldn't help feeling that something had to go wrong..... Sure enough, with only 3 days to go I developed severe toothache and had to make an emergency appointment at the Dentist. It turned out that I had a complicated problem as well as an abscess, so the only solution for it was going to be a trip to hospital for an extraction!!! That's more like my luck. My referral to Nobles was in the pipeline and I was put on antibiotics in the hope that they'd kick in before we went away!

Oddly enough there wasn't much being reported on the run up to our holiday, which was a total contrast to what usually happens. Normally there are all sorts of amazing birds being seen, which obviously leave a few days before we get there but this time there was only a big pile of Yellow-browed Warblers. Nothing to get that excited about. Lee Evans (from the notorious UK400) had tweeted that the easterlies would just bring in more YBW's and not to get too excited but nobody seemed to be listening to him so I just disregarded it. If we could find our own anything it would make our trip.....even a Ring Ouzel would do!

We still had loads to do to get ready for the trip the night before we were leaving and after I'd been outside doing my car checks I came back in to find Wendy not packing as expected but hunched over the computer desk with loads of documents spread out. What the? Imagine my shock to see that she was doing her TAX RETURN!!! The warning about people getting a £100 fine for not getting their returns in on time had been in the news about 2 weeks earlier, so I couldn't believe what I was seeing. She still had a whole day at work to do and hadn't packed yet, just to make matters worse. After slamming my head off the nearest door several times, I helped her get it sorted I finished off my packing! Later that night I went to bed still shaking my head in disbelief.

Friday 9th Oct

Luckily the antibiotics my Dentist had prescribed had done their job well and my raging toothache had all but vanished.....Phew! As usual I worked through my lunch to get out of work early to prepare but Wendy didn't have any holidays left and had to work through until she finished (fortunately early) at 5.15pm. That's what happens when you decide to go off gallivanting round Spain at short notice just 2 weeks beforehand. After I'd picked her up and she'd had a bath, tea and finished the packing she should've done the day before we were ready to go. Despite that, for once we were ready to go early and were able to leave in a calm fashion for a change. We left the house at 6.40pm and arrived at the Sea Terminal at 6.50am. Strangely it was very busy and we were in the 4th lane before the booking in hut, which was really odd for a trip in October. No sooner had we got

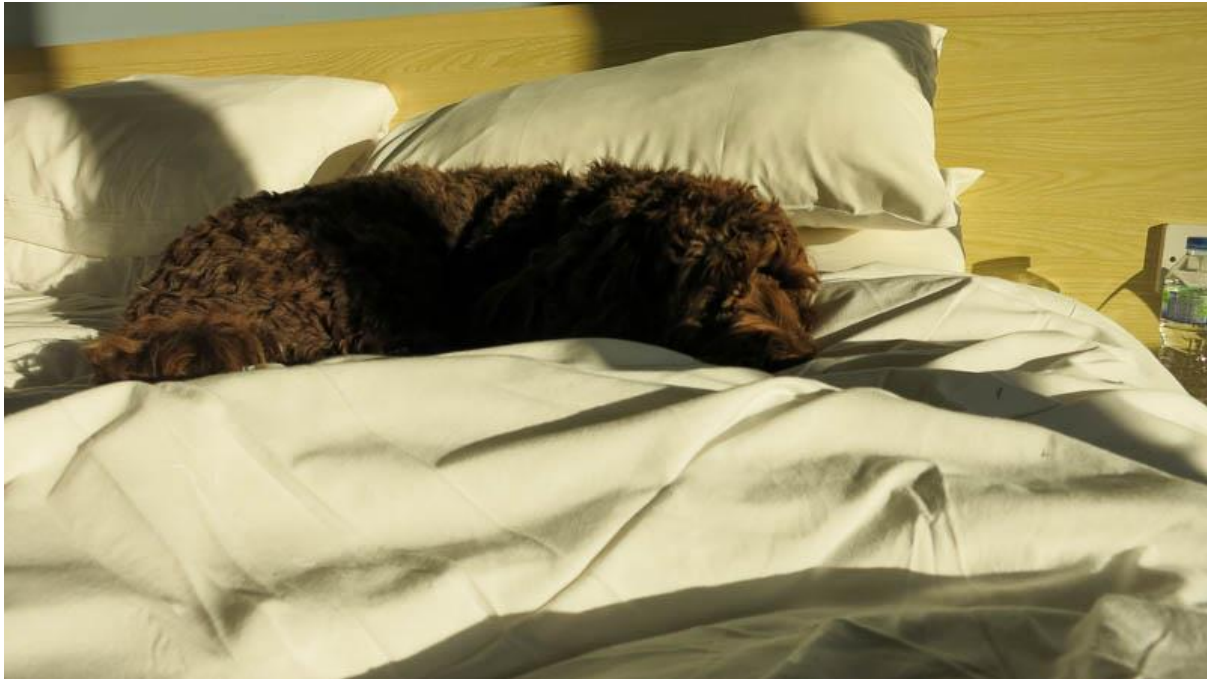
We set off at 7.40pm and the sea was really calm, so calm I don't think the Captain even bothered to put the stabilisers out!



As I hadn't had any tea Wendy ordered me some grub from room service, which cost an arm and a leg but went down well. After that we watched some TV until Wendy dozed off, so I read a book to relieve the boredom. At about 10.30pm I took Lyca outside but as the upstairs deck was closed off she wouldn't have a wee. I could see Heysham power station really close so thought that we'd be docking really early.....Excellent! Unfortunately I'd been slightly over-optimistic and Wendy wasn't too chuffed about me waking her up early.....Oops! We finally docked at 11.05pm, which was still relatively early and as normal it took ages to get off, so we finally disembarked at 11.20pm. We needed to get going quickly to get down to our Travelodge as soon as possible but that plan was quickly poo-pooed by Wendy who decided she was hungry (at nearly midnight!) so I had to detour to the terminal so she could get some crisps. We finally left Heysham port at 11.30pm so we didn't lose too much time really. Nothing I couldn't make up anyway :P

The drive to Sleaford was typically tedious and although we were looking out for any Owls or Foxes on our way there was nothing. Approaching our turn off to the Travelodge I was hit with a diversion sign, which wasn't what I'd expected. We were tired and just wanted to get our heads down but by another stroke of good luck the diversion took us on a better route than usual, so I'll have to remember it in future. The only living thing we managed to see was some **Rabbits** feeding away under the streetlights on the grass verges and we finally arrived at 2.13am.....Phew! I started to unload the car and in a Hulk like manoeuvre I managed to carry the whole lot across the car park and into reception in one! After getting the key and Lyca had barked and danced at the guy at the desk I hauled all our stuff up the 2 flights of stairs (Travelodge always like to put us up stairs since they don't have a lift... grrrr!) and down the long corridor. Wendy opened the door to the room and I quickly put it all down before it killed me! As it hadn't been raining for a change we didn't have the worry of dirty dog paw prints all over the clean white sheets on the bed. Lyca curled up and went to sleep while we got changed and did our teeth before finally crashing out at 2.40am.....ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.

Knowing that although we needed a reasonable amount of sleep we couldn't afford to waste any time, so I'd set my alarm for 8am. When it went off we opened our eyes only to be licked in the faces by Lyca but we felt OK considering and even Wendy wasn't her usual grumpy self :P. I got up straight away and took Lyca out for a wee but it'd rained over night so her paws were instantly filthy. Obviously it goes without saying that when we got back to the room she jumped straight back on the bed before I could stop her.



I'm tired!

It was very quiet outside and the only birds about were the chirpy **House Sparrows** and a **Rook** in the car park. Wendy had made herself a coffee to keep her going, so I went down to the foyer and bought myself a small bottle of orange juice from the vending machine at the extortionate price of £2! When we were ready I gathered up all our stuff and brought it all back down to the car, which wasn't the easiest 1st task of the day I can tell you! Needing a decent breakfast we headed over to Little Chef and I sat down on a bench outside with Lyca while Wendy went in to order our food. The bench was soaking, so we just had to resign ourselves to the fact that we'd both look as though we'd wet ourselves for a while before our trousers dried out.

While we waited we picked up **Blackbird**, **Jackdaw**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Woodpigeon**, **Pied Wagtail** and **Chaffinch** before Wendy went back inside to see if our food was ready. A few minutes later she came back out with our breakfast and we tucked in. I'd gone for my usual sausage bap and she had toast with beans, tomatoes and mushrooms and could hardly move after she'd finished! At least we wouldn't have to worry about food for a few hours although I still had room for a cereal bar when I got back to the car :). My original plan had been to go straight to Frampton Marsh but there'd been absolutely nothing interesting reported there, so with the conditions being so good I had to have a quick rethink. I reckoned Holme Dunes could be worth a shot to see if any migrants had been put down with the over night rain. Not that we've EVER had anything there but that was our 1st stop of the day sorted at least.

After our very civilised start to the day we hit the road at 9.45am and were on our way to Holme. Having broken the back of the journey the night before, which had felt bad while we did it, we didn't have far to go considering. There were plenty of **Black-headed Gulls** in the fields with the odd **Lesser Black-backed Gull** thrown in to mix things up a bit. We ticked off **Starling**, **Pheasant**, **Magpie**, **Coot** in a roadside ditch, **Carrion Crow** and had a **Jay** flying over the road but strangely hadn't seen a single Buzzard by the time I pulled up at the petrol station in Hunstanton. Had the Governments

recent sway back in favour of hunting and game keeping already aided in their demise or something? After filling the car up, Wendy, who'd been guzzling water the whole way there breathed a sigh of relief when I eventually pulled up outside the toilets at Holme.

After flashing our NWT cards and getting our entrance stickers from the hut I parked up at the Visitor Centre at 11.32am. As we were getting out of the car we could hear the high pitched calls of loads of **Goldcrests** and thought we'd better check through them for any Firecrests. After a while we'd only managed to pull out a couple of **Coal Tits** from the flock, so gave up thinking that we'd better save our necks for the week ahead. We could hear a **Skylark** singing and then Wendy spotted a Dragonfly bombing about around the branches of the pine tree. At that time of year it could only be a **Migrant Hawker** and once we'd noticed one we started to see them absolutely everywhere. There were loads of them! Wendy went into the Visitor Centre to check the reports for the morning and came back looking a bit glum after finding that nothing but a female Ring Ouzel had been seen so far. Given the fact that we'd had over night rain and easterlies this was a bit worrying to say the least. We set off through the trees regardless and Lyca was having a great time sniffing anything and everything as well as chasing pinecones. We heard a **Wren** but there was no sign of the Common Redstart that had been reported the day before. A very colourful and pristine **Red Admiral** landed on the path ahead of us and then we noticed another smaller Dragonfly, which was a **Common Darter**. We hadn't bargained on seeing so many Dragonflies in October and although they were down to just 2 common species it was still nice to see. Next up was a pair of **Stonechats** 'chatting' from the top of the gorse bushes and a **Sand Martin**, which we thought would've long gone, zoomed overhead.

As we entered the Dunes we started to see a lot of Blackbirds launching themselves across the tracks, so we paid particular attention to them. Several birds later and we were already getting the distinct impression that today wasn't our lucky day and that we'd never find our own Ring Ouzel. There were a couple of people up ahead bending over staring at the ground, so we wondered what they'd found. I presumed it was probably just some kind of plant or something, so I kind of dismissed it. Wendy had kept an eye on them and noticed that the man was walking with his hands cupped around something, so when they got nearer she asked, "What you got?" He kindly stopped and opened his hands slightly to show us a very tatty looking **Hummingbird Hawk Moth**! They'd found it on the ground looking very sorry for itself and were taking it over to where they'd seen some buddleia, to give it the best chance of getting some food. It didn't look as though it was going to last much longer but it was a kind gesture anyway and gave us our 1st ever view of one with it's wings down. It looked like a dull, brown moth and we concluded that they look so much more impressive in flight :). I couldn't help but think that if we hadn't been dawdling it would've been us that'd found it, at least then we could've said we'd found something at Holme! Carrying on we unintentionally flushed some **Red-legged Partridge** from the Dunes and I spotted a **Shoveler** flying over. We walked past some newly created ponds, which I think are for re-introducing Natterjack Toads to the area.



Toad pools

In the flat fields to our left was our 1st **Common Buzzard** of the trip that seemed perfectly at ease hanging out with a **Marsh Harrier**. We ventured off the path and into an area we'd never checked before, which was surrounded by dense bushes and looked good.



Looks good

We stopped when we heard a flock of Long-tailed Tits working their way through the branches and a quick scan through them produced a **Reed Bunting** but nothing else. A **Sparrowhawk** blasted past us and we finally gave up looking after the small bird flitting about turned out to be just a **Blue Tit**. We could hear a noisy flock of **Greylag Geese** heading our way and although I checked for a White-front amongst them I wasn't at all surprised not to find one. After that we headed towards the footpath, which looks down over the marshes and a flock of **Goldfinches** flew over us. It was really windy up on the path having been sheltered by the dunes up until then and all of a sudden my tooth started to kick off with the cold wind hitting my face. Not wanting to risk it I decided not to bother walking back that way and to stay in the dunes but seeing as we were there I had to grit my teeth while we had a quick look at what was down there. The tide was right out, so we couldn't see what

was on the sea but we added distant **Dark-bellied Brent Geese**, **Great Black-backed Gull**, **Knot**, **Curlew**, **Cormorant** and **Oystercatcher** down at the waters edge before heading back to shelter from the cold wind.....Ouch! On the way back we had **Greenfinch** flying over and then I got my 1st RBA report through on my mobile. There was White-rumped Sandpiper at Cley and Red-breasted Flycatcher, Yellow-browed Warbler and Great White Egret at Holkham Pines, so seeing as I've always wanted to see a RBF we thought we'd make a visit to Holkham our next plan. A **Mallard** flew over when we were nearly back at the Visitor Centre and when we finally got there it was lunchtime. Wendy went into the café to see what they could rustle up for us while I waited outside with Lyca. She came back out empty handed saying that they'd already run out of food.....Whaaat? It was only 1pm, so it wasn't even like we were late or anything. She'd seen other people in there munching away on delicious looking doorstep sarnies, so maybe they need to start cutting more than 4 slices of bread from their loaves! All they could offer her was crisps and fizzy drinks, so she declined in the hope that we could find something else en-route.

We left at 1.03pm with rumbling stomachs and spotted some **Teal** flying in to the pools on the NOA side of the reserve. Wendy wanted to stop for a wee and a look in Fat Face when we got to Burnham Deepdale at 1.28pm, so I pulled up in the car park round the back of the café where a flock of **Pink-footed Geese** flew over. She disappeared for ages and finally returned having spent a penny but bought nothing. I suggested going to the café to get some food but she turned her nose up in disgust and said it was a bit of greasy spoon. Greasy spoon or not I was hungry and needed some food, so reluctantly she agreed to go in for a look at least. She ended up having to eat her words when we saw the rather posh menu and not so cheap prices to go with it.....Ha! It was all a bit poncy for me, so we ended up getting 2 pieces of toast and butter each, a pain au chocolat for me and a cappuccino for Wendy. Greasy spoon eh? Wendy was starting to wish it had been after getting 80p change from a tenner just for some toast :O! We took it back to the car only to find that the toast was presented unbuttered with some butter portions in the bag and it's a good job they'd given us a flimsy plastic knife or I'd hate to imagine the mess we'd have been in! Nothing to do with food preparation is particularly easy sitting in a car but it was very nice and went down a treat. Luckily Wendy had a stash of hand wipes in my glove box, which she stocks up on every time she goes to a certain establishment back at home ;). Lyca even had a piece of dry crust that Wendy didn't want so we were all happy, apart from Wendy's purse that is.

By the time we left it was 2.11pm and was starting to rain. We passed the Barn Owl fields, which as usual these days were Barn Owl-less and a bit depressing. When I parked up on Lady Anne's Drive at 2.26pm it was really windy and we didn't feel much like getting out and going for a walk. The only consolation was that we didn't have far to go, so it wouldn't be a long walk and hopefully we could go to the cottage after that and finally relax! The information given was that the RBF was at Washington Hide, so I presumed it to be somewhere near the boardwalk area. We set off passing the 1st pool where there were 2x noisy **Little Grebes** and carried on past a field with a **Moorhen** in it. Lyca was a bit overexcited and being very naughty by pulling on her lead and barking at every single passer by, so it was quite stressful. She was hooked onto my belt with a karabiner and trying to look up into the trees for birds while she had other ideas wasn't easy. We checked every bush and tree in sight and by the time we got to the Washington Hide we'd clocked up another bucket load of Goldcrests but nothing else. We'd expected a YBW at the very least but hadn't even heard one and as for a RBF, there didn't even appear to be any birders looking for it.....Eh? When we got to the hide we heard the cracking of branches and looked up to see a **Grey Squirrel** right up at the top of the tree collecting leaves presumable to do some DIY on it's dray. Not being able to take Lyca into the hide Wendy went in to check the area and hopefully pin down the GWE. She sat down and had a scan finding a nice **Comma** feeding on a Blackberry bush and a **Grey Heron** and **Mute Swan** out on the pool.



Looking out over Holkham Marsh

As usual she attracted the attention of a random weirdo, who sat down next to her and started chatting away merrily. There was no sign of the GWE or anything else apart from loads of Teal, so she politely left. Outside, while I was waiting, some **Redpoll** and **Siskin** flew over and I found myself surrounded by yet more Goldcrests. When Wendy returned we started to check through them in the hope of finding something more interesting amongst them. After a while a bloke who was standing down at the bottom of the walkway called out that he had a Firecrest! We'd spent ages scanning through all those Goldcrests and had found nothing, so we wandered further down to try and see his bird. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack and with all the crests being so deep in the bushes we doubted we'd ever see it. Eventually Wendy got a flash of its face and called it, so it was just a case of me getting onto it next. After an agonising 5 minutes I finally got a fleeting glimpse, so we could now add **Firecrest** to our list :). Going by what we'd seen and heard from a few other birders that turned up the RBF report didn't seem that feasible, so we decided to call it a day having dipped on the GWE as well. Lyca had been so naughty during the whole day and while we wandered back down the path she stopped all of a sudden and proceeded to puke! OMG! I suggested that it was because the butter on the toast Wendy had given her had been too rich but Wendy assured me that it was a dry crust with no butter on it. In the end we reckoned it was just that she'd been far too over excited and hyper at being in holiday, just like a small child.....Urrrghhhhhhh. Dogs! She was fine after that so we didn't worry too much and were back at the car at 4pm and heading for the cottage.

A **Stock Dove** flew over the road as we pulled out of Lady Anne's Drive and we started to notice that there was a definite Norfolk trend going on with the woman. Every one we passed was wearing tight jeans and knee length boots or wellies, so Wendy started to laugh recounting the women we'd seen in the past walking on beaches wearing heels. It was certainly going to make their lives easier, so no wonder they'd all jumped on the bandwagon. I think delirium had started to kick in by that point as Wendy invented a charity event called, 'The Blakeney Point Kinky Boot Challenge' where people would get sponsored to walk the 8 miles of shingle to Blakeney Point and back in the highest heels known to man.....Haha! The money we raised would obviously be used to buy us a holiday home in Norfolk with 1% going to charity and we'd have a great laugh sitting back and watching them in the process :P.

Just as we were losing our grip on reality we were quickly brought back to earth with a bump! Driving back towards Blakeney there was definitely something going on at Warham Greens. There

were tons of cars trying to turn in but finding nowhere to park. The cars were parked all the way down the track from the entrance....What the? To us this could only mean one thing.....there was potentially some kind of mega rarity down there and it had created a huge twitch. I checked my phone for reports but there was nothing, so we started to think that maybe the bird was being suppressed. We became even more suspicious when we saw the odd bloke from 'wild sounds' driving up there who'd made a prat of himself at last years Steppe Grey Shrike and Red-flanked Bluetail twitches. With the huge jam and obviously nowhere to park I had no choice but to drive straight past and keep going.....Arrghhhhhh! Feeling slightly miffed to say the least we carried on passing a **Brown Hare** in a field just a bit further down the road. When we got to the private pool at Stiffkey we had a quick look what was on it as we drove past. From what we could see there were just **Little Egrets**, **Wigeon** and **Black-tailed Godwits**. Driving through Morston we saw **Song Thrush**, **Mistle Thrush** and some **Lapwing** flying over a field and the possible massive twitch started to really bug us as there were no reports coming in at all.

After our long and uneventful day we finally pulled up outside Church Owl cottage in Blakeney at 4.21pm. Having lost count of the amount of times we've stayed there before there's no surprises for us when we arrive. Lyca didn't even bother having a sniff around and instead went straight in and jumped on the settee like she was arriving home. Wendy instantly noticed that something was different and was gutted that they'd removed the handy shelf unit from under the TV and had replaced it with a rather out of place looking fake electric log burner that sat awkwardly in the corner by the door. There was now nowhere to hide our boots, bins, camera or the rest of our clutter!



HQ

I brought all our bags in while Wendy unpacked and all was quiet next door so it looks as though we didn't have any neighbours.....Yey :). For the first time ever at Church Owl we'd been able to book a Tesco delivery which was coming between 7-8pm, so Wendy had twisted my arm into going out for tea seeing as we wouldn't have any food until later. It was the last thing I fancied doing after being on the go all day but to stop Wendy from moaning I agreed to go and after Lyca had eaten her dinner we headed out at 5.22pm.

We decided to go to the King's Arms, which is just down the road and never lets us down but we were way too early for the specials menu, which starts at 6pm. Unfortunately this meant that I couldn't get the tempura chicken I like so much and if we waited until 6pm we'd risk being late for

Tesco. It was really busy in there and Wendy went up to the bar to order our drinks while I kept Lyca under control at the table and looked at the menu. I was starving, so my only option was to go for sausage and mash in the hope that the sausages weren't some kind of poncy ones and the mash was just normal mash and not some concoction of cream, mustard, herbs or any of that rubbish :/. Wendy ordered the soup with a side of chips and we finally sat down to try and relax after a hectic day. We were knackered and still didn't have a clue what had been going on at Warham Greens earlier. Was it a suppressed twitch or had it been some kind of dogging party? We chose to pass it off as the latter, as the thought of the other was just too awful to even think about :). When our food came Wendy's eyes lit up! Mine came with a side dish of vegetables including cauliflower cheese, her favourite! Obviously I wasn't going to touch any of it with a barge pole, so she pounced on it and started tucking in.....Bleurrghhhh! Having not bargained on that she quickly realised that she now had far too much food to deal with and by the time she was full she still had ½ a bowl of soup and a mountain of chips left, so I came to the rescue and helped her out.....with the chips that is, the soup was her problem! Mine was spot on and as I waded my way through 3x sausages, 2x onion rings and a mountain of mash it began to resemble an episode of Man V Food especially when I started helping out with the chips. Ultimately I was stuffed and definitely didn't have room for pudding!

We were back at the cottage by 6.40pm and Wendy went straight into the bathroom to run herself a nice hot bath to soak in before Tesco arrived. By the time she reappeared they still hadn't been, which was good in a way because Lyca needed to be kept out of the way but made me start to worry that the driver wouldn't be able to find us and we'd end with no food or drinks! I couldn't settle and started pacing around checking out of the window for car headlights until eventually at 7.45pm the van pulled up outside....Phew! Wendy took Lyca into the bedroom to bark non-stop while she dried her hair and I brought the shopping in. Wendy had deliberately not ordered any veggies, as she wanted to get some more interesting local stuff from farm shops and it's a good job too as it soon became apparent that the miniscule fridge wasn't big enough to take anything else....Oooooops! Wendy had installed Skype before going away so she could now put it to use, or so she thought! The signal was so weak at the cottage that there was no way she could use it properly and would have to just settle for the chat option, which was better than nothing and definitely better than spending a fortune on her mobile like normal. While she was talking to her Mum I suddenly started to feel really sick and went to lie down on the bed for a bit. I ended up sleeping for half an hour but felt much better when I woke up. Very odd. Lyca spent the entire evening asleep on the floor over by the dishwasher until it was time for her yoghurt when she made a very speedy recovery. After that I took her out for a wee and we were so tired we turned the lights out and went to bed at 10.30pm.

Sunday 11th October

I was up and raring to go at 6.30am, so I took Lyca outside and wandered over to the field past the barns next door so she could have a wee. It was still early and quite dark but I was very pleased to hear **Tawny Owls** calling to each other from the woods above having not heard them the night before. Wendy was up at 7am but wanted a relaxing start to her 1st morning so she made herself a coffee and took it back to bed with Lyca in tow. There was no way I was going to waste an early start with overnight easterly winds, so I got ready and went out at 7.08am to see what I could find. Due to the forecasted weather conditions I'd decided that this was going to be the holiday that I hammered to try and find my own decent rarity.

It was a windy and cold start to the day and driving away from the cottage there were cats everywhere including a Manx one and a dead one! I'd decided to try Gramborough Hill for my 1st attempt at finding a rarity and arrived at 7.19am. It was still practically dark but I met a bloke coming back from the hill looking suitably dejected.....Great! You really need to be there 1st to find anything or be there later on in the day in case something just drops in when you're standing there.

Predictably at the bushes I dug out a Dunnock.....Woooo! I then caught a glimpse of another bird flitting about deep in the bushes, which was a bit exciting, as it could've been literally anything. Try as I might though I couldn't get a view of it and I even walked round the bushes but each time I got a nanosecond view it'd disappear again. Soooo frustrating! Apart from that there was little else happening except for a few **Linnet**s flying over and a passing **Gannet** out to sea. After trying my best I couldn't find anything so gave up at 7.56am and seeing as I was nearby I thought I should give Walsey Hills a go. We've never seen anything decent there but I thought I might as well have a look, you never know. I arrived at 8.01am and straight away heard a **Cetti's Warbler**. I also thought I heard Brambling calling but it'd been so long since I'd heard a Brambling call I wasn't 100% sure. Walking through the trees and bushes I couldn't find anything really so I carried on round the back and into the fields so I could check the hedge line. There wasn't much about there either, so I carried on into a field where you can get a view over the trees and look down onto them. Apart from a Hornet scaring the living daylights out of me there was nothing else so I headed back to the car. Instead of just getting into the car like normal, I walked the few yards to the pond to scan up the eastern edge of the bushes. About 80-100 yards away I could just make out something shaking the bushes about. I got my bins on them and was over the moon to see a pair of **Ring Ouzel**! I grabbed a record shot but from that distance it looked terrible so I darted round to the back of the reserve and was just about able to shoot over the reeds and get a better record shot. It was still quite dark so the 7d mkii had to work overtime but at least I'd got one, as it wouldn't have even been possible on my old 7d.



Ring Ouzels

After that I quickly headed back hoping that I could get Wendy there in time to see them.

When I got back it was 8.59am and Wendy had already made our lunch and was raring to go. I received a report of a Red-flanked Bluetail but disappointingly it turned out to have been trapped and ringed in someone's garden at Weybourne. They were going to release it in about 15 minutes for anyone interested but call us cynics the prospect was anything but enticing. Lee Evans was back on Twitter and had changed his tune completely by stating that it was going to be great with easterlies all the way from Russia predicted for the next 4 days. What happened to his depressing prediction of just a load of YBW's? Not wanting to hang around with such good conditions we headed out with our 1st plan being to try and catch up with the 2x Ring Ouzels I'd found earlier.

It was 9.30am when I parked up at Walsey Hills and we wandered towards the archway of trees hoping to hear the call of a YBW or Firecrest. A few **Canada Geese** flew over the road but suddenly Wendy's eyes were diverted to something completely different and she looked very excited. The entire archway consisted of Blackthorn, which meant one thing to her and that was sloes! The sloe crop back at home had been a massive failure and they were literally like gold dust, so she'd promised her Mum that if she found any she'd pick some and bring them home. It was too early in the week to pick them now but she'd pinned them down for future reference, if we had time of course. The bushes and trees around the NOA feeders were teeming with birds and although they were all predominantly Chaffinches we soon started to find loads of Reed Buntings. They were everywhere! I managed to pull out a **Yellowhammer** from amongst them and we could hear Brambling calling from the trees above us. We stopped for a while so that we could both see them, as it'd been ages since we'd admired a nice Brambling. The only other bird we added was a male **Blackcap** and there wasn't even a squeak of anything vaguely resembling a YBW, which was disappointing. At the end of the track I took Wendy into the field where I'd had the RO's but there was no sign.



Nowt

It was a tricky section to view but we tried from every angle to no avail, so presumably they'd already cleared off. While we scanned the hedges Wendy found a **Grey Squirrel** looking very cute sitting right at the top of a bramble bush eating Blackberries. It was so engrossed that it didn't seem at all bothered by us, so she asked me to go and get a photo. By the time I'd rustled up the enthusiasm and got close enough it'd moved and the shot wasn't quite what she'd had in mind.



Grey Squirrel NOT eating sloes!

With nothing else about we turned around and were back at the car at 10.15am. Just as we were getting in I heard a call I didn't expect to hear there and found that a **Grey Wagtail** had just flown in. It was on the muddy edge of the roadside pool, so Wendy came over for a look and I went back to the car for my camera. I told another birder about it and asked him if it was unusual, as I knew they weren't common in North Norfolk. He told me that they breed in the Glaven Valley, which wasn't a million miles away, so although that was a bit of a downer it was still the 1st Grey Wag we'd ever seen in Norfolk.

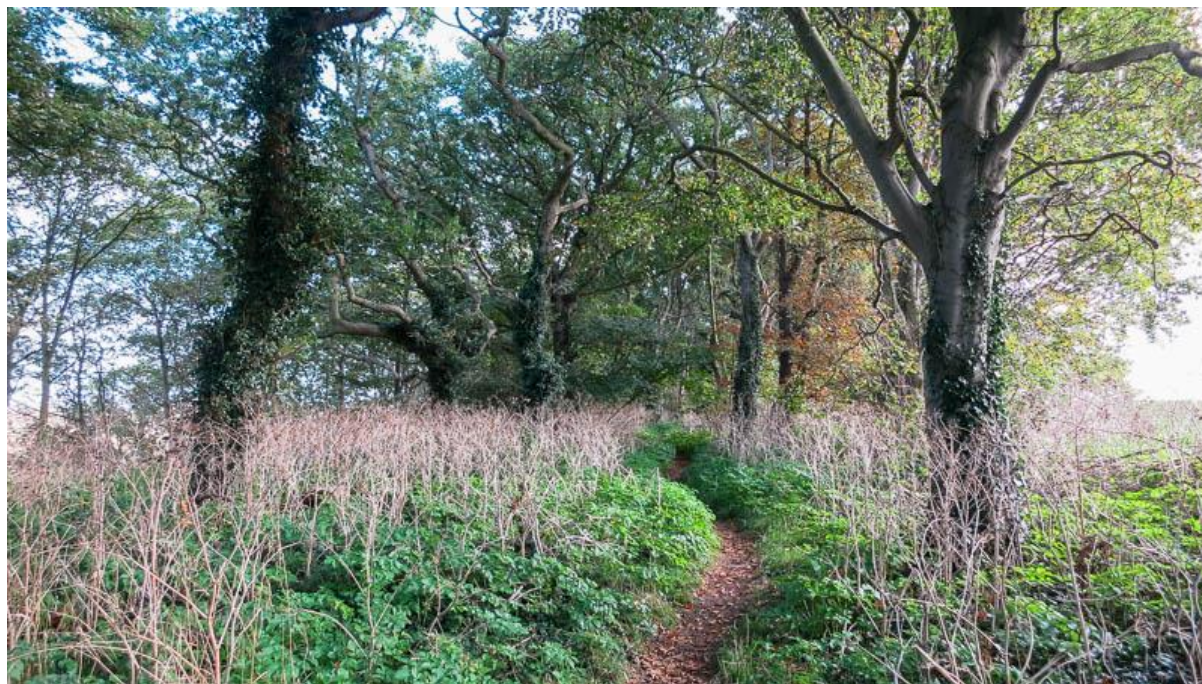


Grey Wagtail

Back at the car I checked my phone to see how many steps I'd done so far that morning and was amused to find that I'd already reached my daily target of 6000 by 9.37am! Driving through Cley Wendy got me to stop at the Deli, so she could grab some veggies to make something for her tea

with, although god knows where she planned to put it. After that we thought Stiffkey Woods would be worth a check seeing as we knew it'd had a Red-flanked Bluetail during the same week last year.

After parking up we all set off along the footpath through the trees and instantly saw 2x Blackbirds flying out of a tree, which landed further down the path.



Stiffkey Woods

The problem was that the sun was shining straight into our eyes and the birds were just silhouettes, so we had no idea if they were RO's or not. We had to catch up with those birds to check them, as Wendy was feeling pretty hacked off at me having already seen 2 earlier but that's what happens when you stay in bed..... Hahahah! We could hear the high-pitched calls of yet more Goldcrests above us and obviously went through them as best we could for Firecrest. Every single bird we got in our bins was just a Goldcrest and none of the calls we were hearing stood out either. There was a small Warbler flitting around in a bush, which after getting a good view of it turned out to be a **Chiffchaff** and scurrying around on the ground was a **Duncock**. We were already getting tired of looking at Goldcrest after Goldcrest but it was interesting to see that there'd obviously been a huge influx over night. It was just a shame there hadn't been something different in with them instead of the **Great Tit** we found :/. Finally we caught up with the Blackbirds and confirmed them to be just as we thought, Blackbirds! Depression was already setting in as well as back and neck ache, from looking through all the Goldcrests, by the time we got to the woods where the RFB had been last year. The trees were still and there was no sign of life in there at all, which was disappointing considering the perfect wind conditions. Not wanting to give up I reckoned we should carry on and do a new walk past Stiffkey Greens and to the Fen but Wendy didn't seem too keen and reckoned we were flogging a dead horse. I was having none of it and continued along the footpath regardless, with her dragging her feet behind me.



Edge of Stiffkey Woods

“You’ve got to be in to win it” as they say but at least Lyca was having a blast as well as enjoying eating the blackberries Wendy was picking for her. There seemed to be a lot of families out with teenage kids wearing bins round their necks, as if it was THE thing to do on a Sunday morning in those parts. After a while it soon became apparent that there was nothing about and everywhere was totally silent, so I realised that I’d been a bit optimistic. The walk was longer than I’d bargained for too and with the total lack of birds it seemed pointless going any further, so I admitted defeat and decided we’d be better off trying somewhere else. My feet had started to throb by the time we turned back and Wendy couldn’t resist reminding me that she’d already warned me not to burn myself out on the 1st day.....Urrghhhhh!

Back at the car we ate our sarnies and I found out that it was no wonder my feet were sore as I’d already walked 8 miles! As we ate our lunch we could hear **Redwing** flying over and we both felt totally knackered. Not sure of what to do next I opted to drive to Garden Drove and walk down to Warham Greens as far as the Whirlygig, seeing as it’s a good hotspot and there’d been such a kafuffle there the night before.

It was 1.48pm when we arrived and I got a report through on my phone of a Richard’s Pipit in a field over by the Whirlygig. This was where we were heading but infuriatingly if we’d stayed at Stiffkey and walked Warham Greens from that end we’d now be a lot nearer to the bird. Because we’d moved to incorporate Garden Drove into it we’d just made life a lot more difficult for ourselves.....you just can’t win! Walking down Garden Drove was a slow process, checking through the Tit and Crest flocks and finding nothing but Goldcrests but it was still interesting to think of how many had come in recently. Surely it was only a matter of time and patience before we stumbled across a Firecrest, YBW or even, if we were very lucky, a Pallas’ Warbler? Anything was possible in reality if we looked hard enough given the conditions. Down at the Copse there was nothing either until a flock of **Golden Plover** flew over heading inland. We wandered slowly along Warham Greens checking every tree and bush in sight and finding nothing but common birds even after getting optimistic as to what could be in The Quarry. When we passed Middle Drove we noticed some birders standing around scanning a field followed by another viewing it from the other side. Wendy wondered if they were onto something, but I reckoned they were just doing the same as us, and checking everywhere in general. At the Whirlygig we went over to view the field where I thought the Richard’s Pipit had been reported only to be told by a couple of blokes that it was actually in the field at Middle Drove where we’d seen the others.....Aarrghhhhhh! They gave me directions to the

spot, even though we already knew, having seen the other birders there, so we promptly turned around and trudged our way back.

I went through the gate and sped off like a rocket with Lyca hoping to finally see a Richard's Pipit after trying for years. It's not that I find them particularly exciting it's just that I want to see just how different or obvious they look compared to a Meadow Pipit. Wendy wasn't feeling it at all and was hanging back watching 2x Goldcrests in a hawthorn bush 'flycatching' bees that were coming and going from the beehives on the ground underneath. You don't really think of Goldcrests eating bees but they obviously do and they must've been hungry! I got talking to the birders who said that the RP hadn't been seen for about 45 minutes and looking at the furrows in the muddy field it looked pretty doubtful that we'd find a smallish brown bird in amongst it anyway. We gave it a go but quickly gave it up as a bad job and headed back hearing more Redwing going over, a good few Blackbirds and a million more Goldcrests.

By the time we got back to the car I was pretty pooped and Wendy was flagging, her back was sore and she looked like a zombie, so we were both looking forward to getting back to the cottage to chill out. This idea was short lived though when I got a report of an Isabelline Shrike at Beeston Common!! After a quick check on the map where Beeston was I worked out it was about 30 minutes away and was much too good an opportunity to miss. I put it in my sat nav and set off but not without protest from Wendy who thought she was funny by saying, "Don't need it, had one last year." Urrghhhhh there's just no pleasing some people :P. Shortly after that another one came in of a Pallas' Warbler down a track at Sheringham, so we weren't going home in a hurry, it was all kicking off! As I drove past Sheringham we made of point of looking for any signs of a twitch, as we weren't entirely sure where the Pallas' was. Luckily we spotted a huge crowd of birders standing in a field staring at a hedge, so that was our next plan sorted!

When we arrived at Beeston there was one solitary birder standing on a green next to a pond, so although it matched the description of the place on the reports it literally couldn't be right.



Really?

Wendy's face was a picture and she rolled her eyes in disbelief. Being the gentleman I am, I said I'd go for a look if she wanted to stay in the car with Lyca. She was more than happy to take me up on the offer and I wandered down and stood next to the bloke. A 4x4 pulled up next to my car and another birder got out, leaving a woman in the passenger seat while he came down to join us.

Wendy looked over at her and they exchanged a synchronised look of, “Urrghhhh.” The bloke who’d just arrived got his mobile out and made a call to a friend who told him he was in the wrong place. He said that it was at the Common (I think we were at the Green or something) but he still wasn’t 100% sure where that was. We all legged it back to our cars and screeched out of the car park in a 3 car, convoy. At the end of the road the bloke who’d had the phone call indicated right and the other duly followed him. I was confused and thought that surely we needed to go left because if I took a right we’d be going back into Sheringham town. Wendy wanted me to follow the others but as I was scanning round I spotted a footpath sign up the road to the left and my gut instinct was telling me to try up there. It was a risk and if I was wrong we’d be losing tons of time. I had to make a split second decision, so I indicated left and pulled out saying, “Sod it I’m going left!” I had my fingers crossed that I wasn’t wrong but when I turned round the next corner I found a layby full of cars and birders everywhere.....Woo Hoo! Who said following the herd was a good idea anyway? :P.

Feeling pretty pleased with myself I parked up in the last remaining space and we bailed out of the car. There was a photographer walking towards us so I asked him if it was still there. He replied, “Oh yes” with a big grin on his face and told us to go past him to where we’d seen an entrance, which would take us to it quicker. As we walked through the entrance it opened out into a field where we could see a smallish and well behaved twitch in full swing. We joined the back of the group, so as not to get in anyone’s way and could see the bird even without our bins.



Isabelline Shrike twitch

It would’ve been impossible to miss the **Isabelline Shrike** sitting out in the open in a hawthorn bush right next to the footpath, totally unfazed and surrounded by birders! This was a pretty impressive sight in comparison to the one we’d had of the Warham bird last year. I raised my camera for some shots but shortly after I started the bird flew further away. It quickly returned and this time it was closer still so I fired off as many as I possibly could until it was off again.



Isabelline Shrike

It was very photogenic, so I reckoned I'd have a pop at some video and ran back to the car to get my tripod leaving Wendy and Lyca there. I picked up my tele converter too only to find that it had a massive smudge on it....Nooooooo! After cleaning it I went back only to find that the light was starting to fade and Wendy was looking anything but comfortable. Her back was protesting big time but I was only just getting started :P. While I was busy getting some video Wendy noticed that Lyca was sitting there twitching her leg frantically and squatted down to have a look at what was up. She lifted her leg up only to find some tiny **Frogs** hopping about in the long wet grass, which Lyca must've been feeling on her leg! Wendy was fed up by then, so I suggested she took Lyca back to the car but she didn't want to miss out and decided to stick it out for a bit longer. She must've been glad she did when the Shrike surprised us all by chasing after a Blue Tit, which had unfortunately chosen the wrong bush to land in. They both shot off at speed but the Shrike missed and the Blue Tit got away unscathed. That would've made for a good bit of video for me though.....if I'd been recording at the time. Doh! It continued to come and go for a while and then all of a sudden it flew off over the path and disappeared into some dense gorse. Wendy saw this as a very appropriate time to call it a day whereas I was less than keen to leave. Enough was enough though and I drew a line under it, after all it was beginning to get pretty chilly and dark by then. It was good to have seen such a nice atmosphere at a twitch with everyone helping each other out and no idiots trying to get too close or push in front of people. This is pretty rare for a twitch these days but I suppose it could've been due to the two local muppets not being there. Paul Hackett, who's the best digiscoper in the UK, even put in an appearance. Digiscoping is now a dying art since most people are using DSLRs but he seemed like a nice bloke and much more jolly than his youtube videos would suggest :P.

It was 5.19pm when we got to the car and I had a horrible feeling that I knew what the answer to my next question was going to be and I was right. I asked Wendy if we could go and try to see the Pallas' but she looked at me as if I had the plague and said, "No!" She was absolutely knackered and just wanted to go home especially as she had to cook something from scratch for tea. I was gutted and all fired up with adrenaline after my slump earlier. There was just too much going on and not enough time, which is what we've always dreamed of and now it was finally happening I felt loathed to give up so early in the day. I just had to resign myself to the fact and head for home. Ah well, there was always tomorrow morning. Driving past the bush where the Pallas' was I could still see tons of people there, which was quite annoying. Boooo. Back in Blakeney Wendy nipped into the

local Spa to see what she could find to cook quickly for tea but there was nothing remotely inspiring and she came away with a small tin of beans.

When we got back to the cottage it was 5.52pm and Wendy spotted a white blob over the field and had her suspicions. She got out of the car, raised her bins and called out, "**Barn Owl!**" I brought everything in and Wendy asked if I was going to go and try for a shot, so I grabbed my camera and ran over to see if it was doable. There were actually 2 birds out hunting together but they were much too far away for any pics but it was still great to see, as we haven't seen any Barn Owls at the farm for a few years :). Back inside Wendy had already fed Lyca and was setting about getting ours sorted. She was too hungry to cook anything so was frying mushrooms and some of the tomatoes she'd brought with her from her greenhouse to have with beans and toast. Mine was as usual a much more simple affair of beans and sausages on toast :P. After tea we both had baths and finally sat down to watch some TV. While Wendy was sorting out Lyca's yoghurt she heard a Tawny Owl screeching from the trees right outside the kitchen window. It was so loud you couldn't fail to hear it! We were totally brain dead for the entire evening and were in bed by 9.45pm.....Hahahaha!

Monday 12th October

It was 6am when I woke up and everyone else was still fast asleep, so I got up and got myself ready to go out again. Obviously I ended up waking Wendy and Lyca up while I had my breakfast next door in the kitchen but neither of them looked like they were up for it too so I set off on my own at 6.45am. There'd been no reports of the Sheringham Pallas', so I reckoned it'd make more sense to wait and see if any came in instead of wasting my early start on a bird which had more than likely already cleared off.

I couldn't decide where to go but I just knew that I should try somewhere on the coast due to the easterly winds. I still had dreams of finding my own Red-breasted Flycatcher or even Red-flanked Bluetail so I settled for Warham Greens. On the way there was a Redwing sitting in the road looking very tired, which was a good sign that there'd been some movement overnight. I arrived at Garden Drove at 7am where it was very, very, cold but in the trees it was strangely quiet :(.

When I got out onto the coastal path I spotted a bird, which keeping very low, darted into the brambles. Back in the Isle of Man I'd have just walked on and assumed Dunnock but this was Norfolk and in perfect conditions, so I stayed put and scanned for 5 minutes. Standing still for so long meant I was starting to freeze so I had to give up but I couldn't help but think that it was probably a Rufous-tailed Robin or something. Hmmmmm..... ok maybe not?

The scene was very nice though and it was enjoyable to be walking the area without anyone else being about.



Nice

A bit further on towards the Whirlygig I had 3 big thrushes fly over, so I got my bins on them and was very pleased to see 3x Ring Ouzels! They're like buses! I then came across another birder and got chatting to him. He'd had 4x Ring Ouzels earlier so I'd been top trumped there but he was a proper hard-core birder and told me he'd spent 8 hours out at Blakeney Point the day before! He said he was quite disappointed to have only seen 3 birders out there over the course of the whole day. It's no wonder there aren't many records from the point anymore, it looks like no one can be bothered with the 8 mile round trip. Not that I can criticise, we can't be bothered to do it either!

I left him to the entire day he planned to spend at Warham (blimey!) and I carried on to the Whirlygig. It was there and at the bottom lane that I finally hit the birds and there was a constant flow of Finches and Buntings flying in with most of them being Yellowhammers. I tried to string one of the Buntings into a Little Bunting as it looked a little bit different to the others but in the end I couldn't do it and stuck with Reed Bunting. Even when 200+ Linnets came in I couldn't even dig anything decent out of them either unfortunately. There could have been anything in with that lot but there was no way I was going to be able to go through them all as they circled around, so I just marvelled at the sight instead. After that I made my way back to the car seeing very little else. I left Garden Drove at 9.25am and realised that I'd been out a bit longer than I'd anticipated.

I was back at the cottage, having already walked 3.71 miles, at 9.37am and Wendy was looking a bit bored of waiting....Ooops! She'd been making use of her time by starting to cook something for her tea and had been ready for ages. By the time I'd told her about my morning and we were leaving the cottage it was 10.08am and much later than either of us had planned. It was going to be the least windy day of the week, so I reckoned it was the day to do the Burnham Overy walk, over to Holkham Pines. Last time we did it in May we nearly got blown to bits and it wasn't pleasant in the slightest, so we only made it to the end of the Dunes before turning around and we didn't want to make the same mistake again.

We arrived at the layby at the top of the track at 10.33am and luckily I'd managed to squeeze my car into the last space, it was unbelievably busy. There'd been no reports from Burnham Overy all morning, so we didn't know if we were doing the right thing. If we got a report of something good elsewhere we'd be stuck out on a limb and it'd take us forever to get back to the car in good time. Urrghhhhh! I decided to just go for it, after all there'd been no reports from anywhere else yet, so this walk was as good as any. Setting off down the track we passed a field of Pink-feet and further

down were some **Egyptian Geese** and more Brents. It'd been a relatively dry autumn so far, so the track wasn't as muddy as it usual is and Lyca wasn't caked in wet orange mud straight away.....Phew! This was particularly handy when I had to pick Lyca up to pass her over a stile to Wendy, so our coats and bins were still clean too. It's a popular walk for dog walkers, so we chose to stay off the ridge where they were and stick to the ditch just so Lyca would behave herself.



Still clean!

Down at the bottom of the track before we turned right into the Dunes 4x **Common Snipe** flew over followed by a **Gadwall**. At the bottom is a brilliant area of brambles, which is always well worth a check and there were birds everywhere. Typically there were just loads more Reed Buntings and Robins but I spotted a lovely **Merlin** flying over, which landed on top of a bush in the field nearby.

We could hear more Redwing overhead as we carried on into the Dunes and noticed a group of birders sitting on top of the hill staring at the hawthorn bushes bordering the fields. We didn't know what they were looking at but I'd had a report of a Radde's Warbler in Holkham Pines, so we wondered if it was that.



Checking for reports

By the time we got over to them we stopped for a look and asked them what they had. Turned out they had a male Ring Ouzel and **Common Whitethroat**, so Wendy was pleased to have finally seen a RO. It was just a quick flash of the bird, as it dived deep into the cover but it'd have to do her for the time being. We didn't hang about and as we wandered towards the pines we heard the blood curdling screams of a Rabbit and knew there must've been a Stoat about. All of a sudden we saw 2x Rabbits hurtling away from a bank in opposite directions and one of them stopped dead just next to us, flattened itself down really low and froze. It was so well camouflaged that we'd never have spotted it if we hadn't seen what'd happened first. We didn't see the Stoat but a couple of birders ahead of us, who'd also heard the screams, saw it running off empty handed, so those Rabbits had been very lucky!

Excitement over we kept going until we reached the pines and it wasn't long before we found the twitch.



Radde's twitch

There were birders everywhere all standing around looking bored but we could hear some of them telling others that they'd seen it but there'd been no sign for about 20 minutes. I nudged Wendy and laughed and asked her if she'd seen who was there, she smirked back at me and said, "Lee Evans." We hung around for ages but trying to work out which bit of bush to stare at was a tricky decision, so I decided to join a small group who I thought had seen it last. Suddenly there was a flurry of movement and half the group started looking through their bins while the other half looked at them to try and figure out where they were aiming. Slowly the information got passed through the group and the Radde's was showing! I couldn't work out where they were describing at all and within a matter of seconds it was gone. ARGHGHGHGHH so close! It had all happened so quickly that I hadn't even had time to alert Wendy, although there wouldn't have been much point. Quite annoying.

A while later and the bird hadn't reappeared again but we'd noticed that a small group had broken off from the main area and were now viewing the reeds and bushes from a totally different angle about 20m away. We presumed them to know that the bird had been seen up there at some point and they were just trying to relocate it, so we stayed put. Wendy was getting very bored and needed a wee, Lyca was whinging and it seemed hopeless but I didn't want to give up just yet. I asked her if she wanted to take Lyca back to the car but with the walk back being so long and then having to sit in the car waiting for me she decided to stay. All of a sudden a very serious looking Lee

Evans came running down the path past us in his wellies, like something out of a Norman Wisdom comedy and we looked at each other puzzled and said, "What the...?" His fan club were in hot pursuit and one of them at least had the courtesy to say, "Red-flank that way and Dusky that way!" before legging it off as well. Woooooooooottt!!? That was totally nuts and pretty unbelievable. We then found out that the group that had broken off and were further up the track had found a Dusky Warbler and someone else had found a Red-flanked Bluetail in the opposite direction. Wendy instantly wanted to follow them to the RFB but I had no report with directions yet, so I told her to wait until it came in otherwise we could be chasing nothing. After a while the Radde's still wasn't showing and with Wendy's bladder getting dangerously near to bursting point I reluctantly pulled the plug and we left at 1.10pm. I then finally got a report of the RFB and it said it was 50 yards from the cross tracks at Holkham pines. I thought, "Aha the cross tracks are right over by Lady Anne's drive!" so knew we'd be better going back to the car for lunch then driving across to Holkham for the RFB. On the way out I made Wendy stand at the Dusky Warbler area just in case but there was only 3 very bored looking birders there and she was looking more angry as each minute passed so we headed back out to the dunes.

Walking back through the trees we added **Great-spotted Woodpecker** to our list but the RO that had been in the bushes earlier had already gone. Back at the dunes there was a **Wheatear** hopping about. Eventually we made it to the track to Burnham Overy. We checked all the bushes at the bottom again just in case something new had dropped in and I must've been so engrossed that I wasn't looking where I was going. Suddenly my foot went straight down a very deep Rabbit hole and I went flying backwards landing on my back! I initially laughed but then thought, "Uh oh, is everything OK?" as I was carrying my extremely heavy camera gear. My knees felt OK, my back did too and so did my ankles, so it looked like I'd got away with it.... Phewwww! I couldn't believe it. Wendy, who's forever telling me off for not paying attention to the path ahead was standing there laughing at me, she's just soooooo sympathetic! Just to add insult to injury she said, "How many times do I have to tell you to watch where you're going?" After I'd got myself up and shaken the sand off my clothes and the back of my head I walked away and felt a funny feeling in my lower back but didn't think anything more of it.....

We were back at the car at 2.15pm and a very thirsty Lyca had a massive drink before we sat down to eat our well-earned lunch. We were pretty tired after that and checking my phone I found out that I'd walked 11miles so far and Wendy 7miles. After all the time we'd spent out I was really annoyed to see a new report of the Radde's.....Grrrrrrr! It was 2.35pm when we left and standing majestically at the gate to grounds of the Holkham Estate was a very handsome **Fallow Deer** Stag.

By the time I parked up at Lady Anne's Drive it was 2.42pm and I thought I knew the directions to where we needed to be. As usual we walked up to the huge oak tree at the entrance of Holkham where the tracks cross and took the left hand path. Fifty yards in and there was no one about but more worryingly the area just didn't seem to look right at all for RFB. I was really confused and thought that maybe there were cross tracks further down? This was confirmed when a pile of birders went shooting past us down the path. We decided to follow them in the hope they were also after the RFB. After passing Washington Hide and Meol's house we eventually came across some cross tracks and a little bit further on we spotted quite a few people looking deep into the very dark bushes! This was more like it.

It was then that we realised that in all the years of visiting the area we'd been completely wrong in where we thought cross-tracks was....Doh! It wasn't at the huge Oak tree at Lady Anne's Drive entrance at all, so no wonder we'd missed out on so many birds. We'd wondered why there wasn't many people around looking for it and now we knew.....Urrghhhh! The only way we could see it was to look at it was as a learning curve and at least we knew that we'd never make the same mistake again :/. Ah well, they always say it's better to learn the hard way.....Hahahahahaha!

Although realising we were about 5 minutes away from this location while we'd been at the Radde's twitch was more than annoying!

We made our way slowly and as quietly as we could and found ourselves a space behind the others. This also happened to be directly behind a bloke with a pony tail who Wendy reckoned was her fit birder tick of the holiday :P. She's getting pretty desperate if you ask me, the bloke looked like a homeless person!!



Bluetail twitch

Yet again nobody had the bird and it sounded like it hadn't been seen for some time. We waited patiently anyway and every now and again we had a giggle at everyone getting excited only to find that it was a Robin flitting about in the branches. Lyca looked pretty bored and ended up curled up on the leaf-covered floor, which was quite unnerving with her blending in so well and the amount of people charging around. We had to agree with her though, it was pretty boring but you can't turn down the chance of seeing a RFB. This was exactly how we remembered it from last year, standing around for ages in dark undergrowth without any sign of the bird.....Yawn! All of a sudden there was a movement deep in the undergrowth, so everyone raised their bins in desperation. I caught a brief glimpse of it while Wendy only saw something move in the vicinity but didn't see any features at all. Ah well, we'd just have to wait a bit longer and hope that it showed itself again. While we stood there we finally heard the unmistakable call we'd been hoping for and we added **Yellow-browed Warbler** to our list just before ½ of the group rushed off in a stampede round the back of the trees. We stayed put again, which eventually paid off when the group to our right said they had it near the entrance. We wandered over to join them but the little **** had vanished again!

Just in front of us was a familiar face, it was 'Dog Staring Man!' This wasn't good news for Lyca, as he was up to usual trick of trying to stare her out to freak her out.....Urrghhh! He actually commented that she was an old friend of his, so he'd remembered her :O! There was a couple next to us and the husband was obviously bored (even though he seemed the more hard-core of the two) and said that he was going to go for a pop at the Radde's and that he'd pick his wife up on his way back. She seemed happy enough with the plan and off he went leaving her behind. Shortly after he'd gone we heard her say, "OH MY GOD!" She'd only gone and re-found the bird, which was hopping about on the ground out in the open! We got a pretty good but brief view of the **Red-flanked Bluetail** and managed to clock all it's features including its brilliant blue tail before it flew and vanished yet again. We'd managed to get much better views of this bird compared to the one

last year, so we were happy :). Having hung around for long enough and finally seeing something we'd gone for that day we decided to leave the others to it, so after we'd said, "Nice one!" to the woman to acknowledge her spotting it we headed for home. I'm sure she took great pleasure in gripping her husband off when he got back especially as she'd re-found it....Hahahahaha!

On the way out we stopped off at the Washington Hide area to have a look, as the gap in the trees seems to be a magnet for birds.



Washington Hide boardwalk

Sure enough the place was absolutely caked in Goldcrests again and I finally managed to pin one down for a photo.



Back at the car it was 4.55pm and the ticket I'd bought had run out 5 minutes ago, so it was a good job we'd left when we did. When we got in we could smell a horrible pong coming from somewhere and I instantly checked my boots to see if I'd stood in dog poo. Then I remembered that I'd had to put Lyca's poo bag in the boot earlier, as there's no dog bins at Burnham Overy.....Bleurrghhhh! I'd had a report of 2x Richard's Pipits in a field near Wells but it was getting a bit late and we were too tired to be that bothered, even though I am still dying to see a Richards Pipit. I suggested looking to see if there was any sign of a twitch on the way past and if there was we could have a quick look. As it happened there was nobody in sight so I drove straight through. Just down the road from the cottage we spotted a Kestrel sitting in a field right next to the road and I instantly stopped and backed up to be along side it. Weirdly it wasn't fazed by us at all and I realised that I could be just about to get my best ever Kestrel shot ever. My excitement was short lived though when I remembered that my camera was in the boot and with the best will in the world it wasn't going to stay put while I got out to get it so I had to just drive away.....Aarrghhhh!

We were back at HQ at 5.30pm and a **Sparrowhawk** blasted over but there were no Barn Owls out in the field. Knowing our luck the 2 we'd seen the night before were probably a one off and we'd never see them again. Wendy set about finishing off the vegetable concoction she'd started earlier, which would keep her in meals for the rest of the week. While we were making tea we realised that we now had neighbours and we could hear them talking next door. Worse still was that Lyca was sniffing around by the partition door and eventually we heard a bark, which set her off. Not only were there people but they had 2x dogs with them, which we'd never had to contend with before. After we'd had baths and were sitting down feeling particularly zonked Wendy asked me how far we'd walked. I had a look on my phone and was shocked to see that I'd ended on 13.6miles, Wendy 10miles and I hate to think what Lyca had done but it was probably double! It wasn't surprising that she slept all evening after she'd had her dinner, we wouldn't have known she was there. After a very long day we were done for and ended up falling into bed at 9.54pm!

Tuesday 13th October

We didn't wake up until 7am and it was blowing a gale, so we'd made the right decision to do Burnham Overy the day before, as it was forecast to be windy for the rest of the week. Wendy couldn't get herself motivated to go out early but as usual I couldn't turn my back on such good conditions and headed out at 8am.

Again I couldn't work out where to try and the best I could do was narrow it down to about 3 or 4 places. Any one of them could've landed the big one in those conditions. In the end I decided on Stiffkey Woods, which is a few miles east of Warham Greens. The wind overnight had been strong North Easterlies coming all the way from the Baltic, which were as near to perfect as you can get! The only problem was that the wind was so strong there were literally no birds anywhere in the trees. After about a mile I started hearing a few squeaks including one that sounded scarily like a Pallas' Warbler but I couldn't see any of them through the leaves on the swaying trees.....Urghhhhhhh. I was feeling a bit chilly and suddenly thought, "Oh no I've forgotten my hat!" so I put my hood up only to realise my hat was on my head! Dohhh, what an idiot. I got to the end of the wood with still nothing to show for my efforts when Wendy texted to say she was ready to go out. I was happy with that and bombed back to the car without looking at all, as it was so dead.

When I got back at 8.55am Wendy said that the dogs next door had been barking at Lyca again. This was quite funny, as we'd have put money on it being Lyca who was the troublemaker but she didn't

seem that bothered. We left HQ at 9.15am and with the forecast being for rain I reckoned Wells Woods was the best place to be so we'd be relatively sheltered from it.

We arrived at 9.33am only to find a film crew over by the entrance and a load of extras hanging around. Uh? We had no idea if we'd even be able to go in if they were filming, so we sat and waited to see what everyone else was doing. Luckily they all seemed to be going up the steps to the beach and there were people coming and going as normal from where we wanted to be, so that was my cue to go and get a ticket. At the 1st pool there were 2x **Little Grebes** really close, so I sat down on the bank with Lyca and my camera and fired off some shots quickly.



Grebe pool

I had few decent bird pics so far, so it was an opportunity too good to miss.



Little Grebe

Further up the path we came across some birders staring at a hawthorn bush and asked them if they had something. Turned out they had a female Ring Ouzel, so we just had to stop for a look and get

another RO fix. When we'd had enough we carried on into the trees hoping to find 'The Dell' but skilfully managed to totally bypass it finding 'The drinking pool' instead.....Ooops!



The (dry) drinking pool

It was totally dead in the woods and there were no birds calling at all, so we headed back out to the footpath. Straight away we found a massive Tit flock, which had hundreds more Goldcrests in with them and we heard some Brambling flying over. I couldn't resist having a pop at some shots of the Long-tailed Tits that were flitting around in the lower branches nearby.



Long-tailed Tit

We wandered back into the woods again for another look but it was still eerily quiet in there. This wasn't what we'd been expecting at all, I'd really thought that all the birds that had come in overnight would've be sheltering in this belt of woodland right next to the sea! After standing around for what felt like ages I found a **Treecreeper**, which we don't usually see in there as they're not common. The next day there was a report of a Northern Treecreeper in there, so we kicked

ourselves for not giving it a 2nd glance, as it may well have been it and we could've been the finders....Urrghhhh! Although saying that, I have no idea what features make it a "Northern" instead of a normal one.....Doh! We heard another Great-spotted Woodpecker and came back out onto the path where we saw it flying over.

We recognised this section as being where the Olive-backed Pipit had been reported from last year, so we thought we'd have a look around. We found a path that went into the trees but we'd never explored that path before and it looked really good, as it took us past the hawthorn bushes bordering the fields, where the RO had been earlier. We had a plain looking bird dive into a bush and never reappear despite waiting for a while. That was bound to be a Blyths Reed Warbler or something!! After a thorough scan of the rest of the area we came up with nothing but we did flush a Thrush, which could have been a RO but it vanished before we could get a view of it.....Grrrrrrrrr!



Exploring

The main path is always busy with birders and dog walkers and one woman had obviously taken a shine to Lyca and said with an adoring smile, "Awwww what a lovely dog." Bahahahahaha she wouldn't have been saying that earlier when she'd been pulling on her lead like a tram horse with the look of the devil on her face! I think I was already starting to feel the affects of trying a "Hammertime" week so decided to head back for a sit down!



Tired

On the way back Wendy got some shots of some of the various types of Fungi that covered the ground.





Fungi's

Back at the car it was 11.55am and after a trip to the Co-op for some shopping we set off again.

I parked up at Stiffkey car park and as it was 12.28pm we had our lunch while looking out at the view over the saltmarsh. After that we got out and had a wander through the trees again seeing nothing but more Goldcrests. We were getting tired of looking at so many Goldcrests but you've got to give it to them for having travelled all that way, so we had keep reminding ourselves of that fact, so as not to become too complaisant. There was a Curlew just next to the footpath on the saltmarsh and it was so close I had to get a quick pic.



Curlew

Unfortunately Wendy pointed out that it had a gammy leg, which was why it appeared to be so obliging. Typical! It seemed OK though and could still get around and there was nothing wrong with its wings although I'm not so sure he'd have been so happy that I gave him the name Horatio (the hop along). All of a sudden the heavens opened and it started chucking it down, so we quickly turned back to the car park wishing there was somewhere we could park up to seawatch from the

car. I thought about it for a while and reckoned we could try the car park at West Runton beach for the first time as I've often seen it mentioned on Birdguides, so off we went to check it out.

When we arrived I drove down a narrow road leading to the beach and found the car park at the end. We should've known better but you had to pay to park there and as I spun round to leave we noticed that you couldn't see the sea from there anyway.....weird! At the far end of it was the only place you could view the sea from but there were barriers up to stop people parking there. This looked suspiciously like they were stopping birders parking there without buying a ticket to do a quick bit of seawatching.....Grrrrrrrr! At least it had been raining, so we hadn't wasted our time completely and in fact we'd just learned that there's possibly nowhere to park up and seawatch from in North Norfolk! (apart from maybe Cromer and Sheringham sea fronts). What to do next was the question and it had to be somewhere that wasn't too far away from the car in case of another downpour.

I pulled up at the side of the road in Kelling at 1.53pm (as annoyingly you can't park in the area off the road anymore) and our 1st stop was the bookshop/café to use the WC's. Wendy went straight in and was back in seconds while I stood there waiting. When she came out and I was about to go in an old man came over looking for the WC's too, so I let him go 1st as he was really unsteady on his feet and I didn't want to leave him standing waiting. Twenty minutes later when we'd finished looking at the gifts and books etc. we started to wonder if he'd fallen down the toilet. A bloke then came over, knocked on the door and shouted, "Dad!?" The old man thankfully came out looking fine, so I could finally get to use it.....lucky I wasn't bursting!

We wandered out into the rain and crossed over the busy road and onto the muddy footpath to the water meadows.



Kelling

Wendy reminded me that we needed Bullfinch but very quickly we were distracted by a large flock of Finches. There were Chaffinches and Brambling everywhere, so we had high hopes for this walk, as there'd obviously been some kind of afternoon fall. There was a couple, probably in their late 60's, up ahead who'd also stopped to look at the Brambling. We were all getting great views and they hung around for ages flying between the branches of the trees either side of the path. All of a sudden Wendy called, "**Bullfinch**" and directed me onto it, albeit badly :P. Due to the overnight rain the path was quite wet and muddy in places, which had we done it the day before (or earlier that day) wouldn't have been the case. We didn't want to catch up with the people in front, so we hung

back. The bloke was obviously not quite concentrating on where he was going and out of the blue his foot slipped on the mud and he looked like he was going to take a decking. Maybe it's his party trick or something but his wife seemed to be on the ball and grabbed him with lightning quick reflexes and pulled him back up to his feet. Great save but we have to confess to having a cheeky snigger :P.

Another birder appeared from behind us and rushed past us all, disappearing round the corner like he was on a mission. Did he know something we didn't? We started to wonder if something had been found down at the water meadow and crossed our fingers that if there had then it'd be something good. Before we'd even reached the gate to the water meadow field the bloke who'd raced past us came hurrying back even faster, looking slightly anxious.....What the? It soon became clear what was going on when a massive, and I mean massive, cow appeared in hot pursuit of him.....Uh Oh! As he went past Wendy asked him, "Is that a Bull?" as she had her suspicions and he replied, "I don't know but I'm not hanging around to find out!" The track was too narrow to have even let it go past us but we weren't feeling brave enough to even consider that anyway, so Wendy instantly turned around and said, "Let's get out of here, quick!" Although my heart sank that we weren't going to get to where we wanted to be I certainly wasn't going to argue with her. We all turned around and hot-footed it back up the path, looking over our shoulders every now and again to check where it was. At one point Wendy saw it charging round a corner right behind the 2 others who'd also upped their pace, so like a right pair of girls we started to run.....Hahahaha! For an onlooker it must've been quite a comical scene but we just didn't fancy being trampled by a Bull and 'prevention is better than cure' as the saying goes. When Wendy couldn't run any more, laughing at the same time probably didn't help, we had to slow down and a quick glance over the shoulder showed us that we'd finally lost it, so we walked the rest of the way as quickly as we could. We were OK but what about the Bull/Cow? Was it going to carry on up the track and finally end up in the road on a blind bend? There was still no sign of it when we got back to the car so we can only hope that it'd found its way into one of the fields and was safe. Totally knackered we breathed a sigh of relief as we sat down in the car at 2.47pm and although we hadn't made it to the water meadows it'd certainly been an unusual visit to Kelling.

The adrenaline had finally died down by the time I parked up at Salthouse car park at 2.51pm and we took a quick wander over to Gramborough Hill to check the bushes. They were totally dead, so we walked back over the beach to check the sea.



Salthouse

A **Common Gull** was the best we could come up with and apart from that there was nothing but dark Gannets miles out. Wendy wanted to have a look in Salthouse Deli, so that was our next stop. While she was in there I got a report of 2x Blyth's Reed Warblers at Wells Woods!! (one of them could have been our plain looking bird from earlier!!!) , so yet again we were going to the right places but just not having the luckUrrghhhh! There was still plenty of time left in the day so I reckoned that it was worth giving Warham another shot to see if my theory of an afternoon fall would come up with any goods.

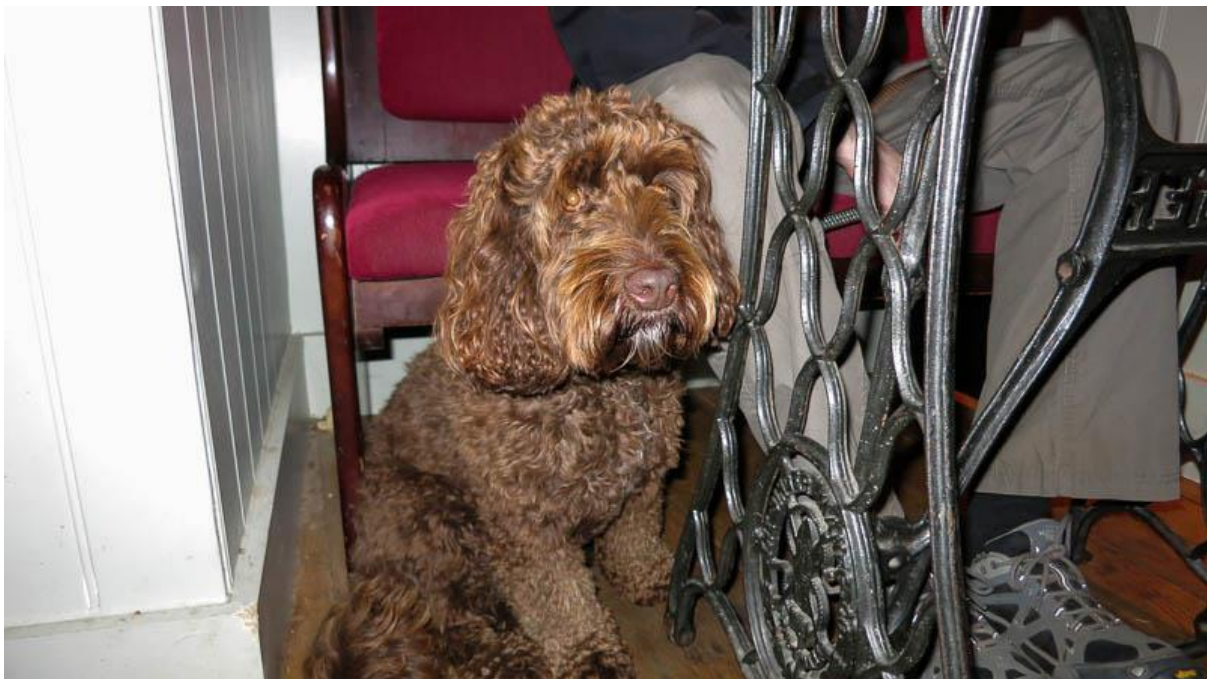
It was 4pm when I parked up and as usual there were plenty of birders about but no reports coming in. Wendy wasn't looking overly enthusiastic about the walk and was dragging behind looking cold and tired but Lyca was full of energy and raring to go.....again! We quickly found a Tit flock, which had loads more Goldcrests in tow.....Shocker! As we wandered over towards the Whirlygig a couple of Kestrels appeared over the footpath and it was definitely the coldest it'd felt since we'd arrived. This made sense now the wind had swung North Easterly instead of the straight easterlies from earlier in the week. Lyca must've been getting hungry and had started to pick her own blackberries off the bushes, so Wendy was stopping every now and again to give her a helping hand. These were the 1st blackberries she'd eaten all year because due to the rubbish summer we'd had back at home none of them were anywhere near edible even by the beginning of October! It was a total contrast to see the bushes in Norfolk heaving with them and Lyca certainly wasn't complaining and was making the most of it while she could. When we reached the Whirlygig we had a good scan around but didn't see anything never mind the amazing bird we'd hoped to stumble across :(. The conditions were perfect and from we'd seen earlier at Kelling it'd looked promising but the afternoon fall I'd predicted just hadn't happened. Boooooo :(. Depression must've set in when I called out, "Red Kite!" only to find, much to Wendy's amusement, that it was just 2x Marsh Harriers out over the saltmarsh.....Oooops! After that we called it a day but not before I'd reminded Wendy of her Kangaroo in the Highlands, just so she didn't get too carried away laughing at me.....Bahahahahaha :P.

Back at HQ it was 4.56pm and Lyca was starving, so after she'd eaten her tea she curled up on the sofa and went to sleep. We (Wendy) decided to cheer ourselves (herself) up by going out to eat again and although we were absolutely pooped and hungry too we had to wait until 6pm, when they start the evening menu. Lyca looked totally put out at being woken up but nothing was stopping her from getting to eat out again. We set out via the outbuilding to put some washing on. I went in and put the clothes in the machine but when I turned round to get some detergent I found there wasn't any! I shoved all our stuff back into the bag and Wendy had to nip into Spa to buy some as well as some more dishwasher tablets, as we didn't have enough of them to last us our stay. That done we arrived at the King's Arms bang on 6pm and we found a table right in the corner of the otherwise empty bar.

We wanted to keep Lyca away from the dog in our usual seat, so had sat at the far end by the fire as far away from everything as possible. Wendy was gutted to see that the soup of the day was cream of mushroom, which she despises, so she was stumped. In the end she asked if she could have the pizza off the kids menu, which the landlady said was fine. Wendy joked with her that there's always one awkward customer but she just laughed and said, "Yes and some nights there's more!" When Wendy ordered mine she, as usual, requested it without salad and chips instead of wedges but the landlady looked horrified. Wendy had never had a problem before and was totally shocked when she replied, "But the whole meal is based on salad, how can you have it without salad?" Errr? I thought the meal was based around tempura chicken or else I wouldn't touch it with a barge pole but hey, what do I know? The chips instead of wedges request didn't go down well either and she was practically forced to settle for wedges, not that it mattered to them what type of potato accompaniment I had. When it came I totally wished I'd been allowed chips as there was only about

5 wedges and Wendy's pizza was like it'd started life in a microwave and been finished off in the oven, so was a bit chewy around the edges. Hers came with chips, so she gave me a load plus some pizza to make up for what was lacking on my plate. Hers also came with salad as well as peas, which was a bit weird, as you normally get a choice of salad or veg but never both. It wasn't the best meal we'd had there but it did the job.

While we were eating the door opened and a woman walked in with a very cute dog and sat down nearby. We recognised them from a couple of days ago at Cley when Wendy had spotted them walking at the side of the road and had commented how cute the dog was. Lyca didn't seem that bothered until the tiny ball of fluff started to whimper, which upped her interest no end.....Urrghhhhhh! After we'd finished I had plenty of room left for pudding so Wendy went up to order me the chocolate brownie and ice cream, making a detour to say, "Hello" to the dog on the way back. It was a very friendly 7month old Poochon and revelled in all the attention while Wendy chatted away to the woman about dogs for a few minutes. This didn't go down well with Lyca at all and she was getting jealous of all the fuss Wendy was giving to another dog, so I think she was glad when Wendy finally came back to her seat.



Staring at the Poochon

The woman and her dog were making moves to leave but before they did she decided she wanted her Poochon to meet Lyca and came over to our table. Wendy said we could give it a go but her dog was jumping around like a nutter, so Lyca started to snarl at it.....how embarrassing! I think because it was still a puppy it was a bit excitable for Lyca and she can't be doing with that, so got a bit narky. Nevertheless she'd ruined what could've been a bit of fun for her. Luckily the woman understood and after saying, "Goodbye" off they went. Straight after that the waitress came over holding a plate and said, "Sausage and mash?" Wendy cracked up laughing and looked at my chocolate brownie and ice cream with suspicion.....Hahahahahahaha!



Sausage and mash

A quick check of my phone showed me that I'd walked 8.4 miles and Wendy a measly 6.4 miles, so I didn't feel so bad as I tucked into the gooey chocolatey heaven on the plate in front of me :P. It hadn't escaped my noticed that a couple had just sat down opposite the bar and as well as sitting on the same side of the table they both instantly pulled out their phones and had their heads down. I pointed them out to Wendy who turned round for a look and had a giggle. Not a single word was muttered between them while I ate my pudding and we had to wonder why on earth they'd even bothered to go out! By the time I'd finished I was totally stuffed and we headed for home.

Back at HQ it was 7.15pm and by the time we'd finally sat down and watched some TV for a bit we started to flag. We really pushed the boat out and stayed up until 10.25pm knowing that although we'd been relatively lucky dodging the rain so far in the holiday the forecast was bad for the next day :(.

Wednesday 14th October

When we woke up it was 7am, raining and blowing a gale but I wasn't going to let that stop me despite Wendy telling me I was mad. Even though my early morning walks had produced nothing remotely mind blowing so far I wasn't going to give up trying and reckoned that a visit to Cley Coastguards was on the cards for a bit of seawatching. I reckoned that if I couldn't come up with something then, I might as well throw in the towel and hang up my bins! I headed out at 7.31am leaving Wendy and Lyca still in bed and parked up 4 minutes later in the car park.

As usual the best area in the shelter was taken so I had to settle for being a bit further back but was able to lean on a corner to get some stability in the strong winds. The records that come from there in strong onshore winds are always fantastic but they never mention that the birds are absolutely miles out! It definitely requires a scope to see anything at all. I managed to scrape **Razorbill**, **Red-throated Diver** and **Common Scoter**. Annoyingly, Skua's had been reported nearly every day for ages so I'd expected to see them flying over my head or something. Suddenly as I looked about 20 miles out (maybe not that far!) I spotted a tiny speck acting very Skua like and attacking a gull. I thought the best thing for it was to get a shot so I could zoom in. Sure enough it was a **Great Skua** but you could hardly tell at that ridiculous distance so it wasn't exactly anything to shout about.



Very long distance Great Skua

After that “excitement” some more people turned up and I recognised them as the lads who’d re-found the Red-flanked Bluetail last year. They all looked like proper students so I’d labelled them as the “UEA students”. They initially stood by me, possibly thinking that I looked like I knew what I was doing but within the blink of an eye they’d moved over to stand with the main people. In a brief moment of paranoia I had a quick check of my armpits to see if I stunk or something, but they were fine :P. Due to standing in a twisted position I started to get a bit of back pain so decided to give up.

I was back at HQ by 8.25am and Wendy was ready but we had no idea where to go on such a horrible day. Our 1st stop was Blakeney Deli, so Wendy could have a look around and also get us something yummy. When she came back she was carrying a bag but disappointingly had no pain au chocolat for me.....Boooooo! Even though it was still early they’d already sold out but they’d taken her name and reserved her one for the next day, which was very nice of them. You wouldn’t get that kind of service at home!

It was 9.41am when we found ourselves parking up to keep up with tradition and chance our luck again back at Stiffkey car park. The sky looked dodgy and as we looked around I spotted a **Hen Harrier** (ring-tail) floating over the saltmarsh. As usual we wandered into the wood where predictably there were hundreds of Goldcrests high up in the branches. A small bird caught our eye as it shot between bushes low down and inconveniently disappeared never to be seen again. All we could think was that knowing our luck it was probably our ‘bird of the trip’ and 1st ever mega find but no matter how hard we searched it seemed to have disappeared into thin air :(. OK it was more likely to have been just a Dunnock or Robin but we’ll never know for sure.....Hahahaha! By the time we’d reached the end of the path the heavens opened and it started to chuck it down. Luckily we were in the trees where the Red-flanked Bluetail had been last year and were quite sheltered, so we waited for it to pass over. While we were there we thought we’d make good use of our time and had a scan around to see if history would repeat itself or if we could pull something else out but in reality it was totally dead and there was absolutely no signs of life in there at all.

Our enthusiasm levels were waning drastically by then and it was so cold that our fingers and faces were stinging, so the rain couldn’t stop quick enough. It didn’t stop like we’d hoped, so when it eased off we decided to get ourselves back to the car as quickly as possible to warm up. It hadn’t been a very productive start to the day and we were back in the car by 11.03am with no idea as to what to do next. The reported Blyth’s Reed Warbler was still at Wells Woods and the Red-flanked Bluetail was still at Holkham. The question was could we be bothered chasing them? It was so cold

that we took an educated guess that we'd need more clothes for the chilly day ahead, so after a detour back to Blakeney Deli for a croissant we headed to HQ to layer up! I also decided to bring Wendy's smaller camera set up with me instead of having to carry my heavy one around, as so far it been for nothing but pain with no gain. After that we set off back to Stiffkey and parked up again at 11.51am for round two!

The 1st thing on our agenda was lunch and with our extra warm clothes on we were roasting sitting in the car. After lunch we found ourselves feeling full, lethargic and lacking in motivation but a report of a Pallas' Warbler over at Garden Drove Copse soon kicked us back into gear. When I got the camera out of the boot I realised that I'd made a massive mistake and hadn't brought the strap with me, so I'd have to carry it my hand instead.....Doh! We set off at 12.20pm in the opposite direction to earlier and made our way over towards the Whirlygig in the direction of Garden Drove. Needless to say it was dead there too and there wasn't much going on anywhere but as we walked past the Richard's Pipit field we spotted 7x **Grey Partridges**. There were 3 more up the footpath next to the field, which was good, as we seem to be finding ourselves struggling in Norfolk for these birds these days.



Heading towards the Whirlygig

A bird we most definitely weren't struggling for was Goldcrest and it was turning into a joke seeing as they were just about all we'd seen on the entire walk. When we reached the Copse at the bottom of Garden Drove we found a sizeable crowd dotted about looking very bored indeed. Great! We edged our way in and started to look through a million more Goldcrests.....Urrghhhh! They'd surely exceeded the status of 'flock' and were now more appropriately a 'plague!' It wasn't long before we noticed a familiar face lurking amongst the crowd – it was Dog Staring Man again :O. Lyca was suitably unnerved by him and we tried, as usual to break the ice by passing a couple of light hearted remarks his way, which again went down like a lead balloon. He's a tricky character alright. The Goldcrests were all feeding frantically and some were coming so close I decided to try for some shots while I had the opportunity.



Goldcrest 1

One of them was hovering like a Hummingbird just a couple of feet away and we could only presume that they'd literally just come in and were so hungry they just weren't bothered by us lot.



Goldcrest 2

We searched high and low for the Pallas' but we didn't find it and none of the others had seen it either, so we were beginning to wonder whether it'd been there at all. Most people had filtered off so we just had a sit down and chilled out for a bit.



Time out

Unbelievably there wasn't a single YBW in amongst them, which had there been would've helped lessen the blow.

We'd started to get bored so when a bloke appeared from the neighbouring field and told us about a Jack Snipe we perked up no end. He told us to follow the people ahead of us and we'd find the others by the hay bales, so off we went. This would be a lifer for Wendy so I told her to go ahead while I tried to negotiate Lyca through the thistly and stubbly ground, which she wasn't liking at all :(. A birder coming the other way nicely patronised me by saying, "You'll need to get your dog under control to view it." I presumed he meant Lyca who was on a short lead and right by my side and thought, "Errrrrr whatever you idiot!" When I got there I found that not many of the group could actually see the bird even though it was only about 15 foot from the small crowd!! Wendy had bagged herself a **Jack Snipe**, the 1st lifer of the trip but when I asked her where it was I was still none the wiser. Thank goodness another birder chirped up and gave me better directions :P! It was sitting motionless against a hay bale and was so well camouflaged that it was only just visible through the grass. We can only imagine that whoever had found it must've seen it in flight to start with. We tried to get some shots, which were dreadful but at least I had a record shot and at least it was alive!



Spot the Jack Snipe

Wendy was happy with that, so instead of letting Lyca walk back down the prickly field I picked her up and carried her to save her paws. She'd already ended up with a dried thistle head stuck in the fur on her leg, which duly exploded and ended up taking ages to pull out and we didn't like the idea of her getting anything stuck in her pads.

Back at the quarry there was a female Blackcap and loads of Reed Buntings, none of which we could make into a Little Bunting again :(. Heading back towards the Whirlygig I spotted a woman with a hat on looking through her bins and I whispered to Wendy, "Eh up, that's the woman with the long suffering newspaper reading husband!" Wendy looked at her and instantly dismissed it and said there was no way it was her.....Urrghhhh! When we turned the corner who was squatting down against a hay bale reading a newspaper? None other than her husband of course.....Bahahahahaha! It'd been a year since we'd met them and such a freaky coincidence that they were in Norfolk again during the same week as us but there they were, large as life. Strangely we hadn't seen her at any of the twitches this time but after last year at the Isabelline Shrike when she got clobbered by a lunatic twitcher with a tripod, I think she must have given up on twitching and was happy just looking for her own stuff. After about 10 minutes of my gloating Wendy said she couldn't take any more of my smugness and reckoned that she was staying at HQ tomorrow and not coming out but I doubted that very much :P. The footpath from the Whirlygig back to the car was caked in more freshly arrived Goldcrests and they were all feeding up frantically off the Brambles. One of them was right next to us and looked so tired it was struggling to move about but it seemed to be getting plenty of food, it was odd watching it using its wing to prop itself up at times though. We watched it for ages and just hoped that it'd be OK, as we knew that the rain was set to come in at any moment. We carried on and finally spotted something in the bushes that wasn't a Goldcrest and when we got it in our bins we could see that it was a **Garden Warbler**. We breathed a sigh of relief that at least we'd seen something of interest after all our efforts and although it still wasn't the bird we wanted to find at least it was a start. We'd been lucky to have dodged a drenching again though and the rain finally started just before we got back to the car at 3.57pm.....Phew! Now what? I checked my phone and we'd ended the day on 7 miles but it seemed a shame to head for home so early but the rain didn't look as though it was going to stop so there was nothing else for it.

Back at HQ it was 4.15pm and we were knackered! Just as we'd taken our boots and coats off and were about to sit down I got a report of a Great Grey Shrike. It was reported to be on Beach Road at

Salthouse, which wasn't far away, so we decided it was worth a pop. Lyca, who was curled up on the settee looking very content was a bit confused when I put her harness and lead back on. She didn't look like she wanted to go anywhere and would've preferred to sleep but we weren't going to turn down a GGS for anything :P. We headed out again at 4.25pm and there were a few birders standing about chatting but none of them seemed to be looking at anything.



Beach Road

I parked up behind some cars and noticed that the bloke in the car ahead looked very much like Dog Staring Man. Wendy was having none of it again but when the door opened out popped Dog Staring Man.....Skillz! We got out and had a good look around especially along the fence lines but there was no sign of the bird anywhere and from what we could gather nobody else had seen it either.....Typical! It was getting very cold, the bird was nowhere to be seen and we'd had enough but with the rain having stopped a nice double rainbow had appeared though.



Rainbow

As I drove home I stopped at Walsey Hills for a quick scan from the car but there was nothing there, so we'd just added another dip to the day. That made 3 in total, Great Grey Shrike, Yellow-browed Warbler and Pallas' Warbler.....Grrrrrrrrr!

It was 5pm when we finally arrived back at HQ for the 2nd time and this time we were staying in! Lyca wolfed down her tea and after devouring her Dentastick she resumed her position on the settee and was a very tired dog for the rest of the evening. With her sorted it was time for our tea followed by baths before we could eventually put our feet up and relax. At the bizarre time of 9.20pm I got another report of the GGS, which had apparently been at the Salthouse Duck Pond until dusk. Why wait until it was so late to put the accurate report out? It was beginning to feel like being in Cornwall again with all the reports coming in when it was pitch black outside and too late for anyone to even consider going out! We were so tired after our non-eventful day that we turned in for the night at 9.45pm and went out like lights.

Thursday 15th October

Having had such an early night we were awake at 6.30am and it was still dark outside. I was ready and leaving HQ by 7.15am leaving Wendy and Lyca still in bed again.

I decided to try somewhere different this morning from the last few days so headed to Gramborough Hill at Salthouse. Every year amazing things are found here but I don't think we've seen anything more exciting than a Whinchat. Surely this week it would happen? I got to Salthouse at 7.25am and out at the hill I got talking to another birder who'd got there before me! We spoke about the Red-flanked Bluetail at Holkham and he told me of a much better position to view it from. This was good info but all I could tell him in return was how rubbish the seawatching was at Cley.....Hahahaha! After staring at the bushes for way too long and seeing very little apart from a few birds flitting about too deep for me I gave up.



Gramborough Hill bushes

On the way back to the HQ I nipped into Walsey Hills and again there were a lot of Brambling and Redwing about indicating there'd been some movement overnight. Worryingly though there were loads of mozzies about too.....Whattttt? After discovering that I made a quick exit.

Wendy was ready to go when I got back and as we headed off at 9.20am I got another report of the GGS. Outside HQ, there were loads more Goldcrests flitting about in the trees as we loaded the car

up. Lyca, for some reason, jumped into the front having decided that today she was riding on Wendy's knee. She was sadly mistaken though and didn't want to give up without a fight but after I eventually got her clicked onto her seatbelt in the back she wore a proper sulky face for the duration of the drive. We found ourselves back at Salthouse for round 2 at 9.30am but although we scanned and scanned we just couldn't find anything even vaguely resembling a GGS. Having dipped on the same bird for a 2nd time we drove away and headed straight to Blakeney Deli to get the pain au chocolat that the owner had kindly put in a bag ready for Wendy to collect.....Om nom nom :). While we were enjoying our consolation prize I had a report of a Red-breasted Flycatcher in Blakeney but when I read the details my heart sank. Yet again it was a RBF that we had no chance of seeing, as it was in a private area.....Grrrrrrrr! One of these days I might actually see one of these birds, which seems to be my new bogey bird and hopefully just like Ring Ouzel they will then become like buses. There's as much chance of that happening as there is of me winning the lottery.....! Despite the weather conditions there was still not very much going on, so when I got a report of another GGS at Burnham Overly I thought it was worth going for. If we did we could also walk into Holkham Pines from that end and have another go at the Bluetail. Wendy doesn't really care for that walk especially when it's all for nothing, so she was anything but thrilled at the prospect of doing it again. I on the other hand love it, as it takes in lots of different types of habitat and is right on the coast so literally anything can turn up there.

I parked up at the car park at 10.19am and we all trudged our way back down the muddy track without seeing anything of interest. Even the bushes at the bottom were really quiet considering the conditions but we set off along the dunes to try and pin down our quarry.



The Dunes

It wasn't long until I spotted the silhouette of a bird sitting at the top of a bush, miles away and I called it to Wendy. Finally we'd caught up with a **Great Grey Shrike** after failing to see any so far but it was much too far away for even a record shot. I reckoned we should try and get closer so I could get a shot of it by staying low down and keeping the dunes between us and it, as there was no way it'd be able to see us down there. There was however one slight problem that we could see, which would scupper our otherwise perfect plan. Another birder was heading towards the bird on top of the dunes in full view of it. All we could do was hope that we could get there before it spotted him but we didn't fancy our chances much. We hurried our way along and climbed up the dunes, slowly popping up to see where the bird was. It was just typical of our luck but surprise, surprise, the little **** had vanished! It must've spotted the other bloke and scarpered and because we'd been low

down we didn't see it fly so it could've literally been anywhere.....Nooooooooo! We definitely couldn't say we'd had crippling views of that bird but at least we'd seen it even though it'd been distant.

We carried on towards the pines at Holkham hearing **Fieldfare** flying overhead and noticed how many more Redwing we could hear streaming over compared to previous days. This was more like the vis-mig we'd expected. When we joined the footpath after the pines we found the sign for cross-tracks and laughed at how stupid we'd been in the past! After kicking ourselves a few times we carried on down the footpath until we found the trees where we'd been previously. There were a few birders milling around and an obvious path worn into the long grass at the side where the bloke I'd spoken to earlier had told me to go. The feedback we were getting was positive and everyone had been having great views of the bird but we couldn't help but think that it was all about to change now we'd arrived. We cautiously made our way into the trees and found a small twitch going on but nobody was looking at anything and were all standing around waiting.



Uh oh!

This looked a much better position to see the bird especially if it appeared on the outside of the bushes and if the sun came out it would be behind us as well!



Blue-tail bushes

After possibly 5 minutes we realised we hadn't cursed the site and all of a sudden the bird flew round the corner into the hawthorn from the right. Phew! Everyone got very excited and started pushing and shoving to get a view until it quickly disappeared round the corner on the left. I turned around to Wendy and was horrified to find her looking slightly annoyed and wondered what was going on. I asked her if she'd seen it but she shook her head and said that a group of blokes had bailed in and stood right in front of her at the crucial moment. It was a familiar story for her and unbelievable that anyone towering above Wendy would see it necessary to be in front of her when they could easily see straight over her head.....Grrrrrrr! She didn't look happy, as they continued to randomly stand in front of her blocking her view but I told her we'd give it 10 minutes before giving up. We waited around until the bird flew in again and this time Wendy managed to get a view of the Red-flanked Bluetail before a territorial Robin chased it off. At least she'd managed to get a better view of it this time around but I hadn't managed to get a shot yet and wasn't going to give up until I had. Wendy and Lyca had started to look bored with all the waiting around and then just to make matters worse it started to absolutely chuck it down. Everyone started to pull out waterproofs and umbrellas from their rucksacks and Wendy's face was a picture. Lyca was drenched, so Wendy led her over to a tree in an attempt to shelter under it. I stayed out like a hardcore lunatic just in case the bird made another appearance and reckoned I only needed about 5-10 seconds and I could get a shot off.



Wet twitchers

Wendy's idea of sheltering under the tree was a great idea in theory but when she got there she could only go so far under it due to the ground being caked in nettles and she didn't want Lyca getting stung. When it stopped the sky brightened up again and Wendy came back over but not without asking when we could leave. The Bluetail showed again and seemed to be doing the same circuit each time. My patience paid off and I eventually got a shot, which wasn't as good as I'd hoped, as it was just a bit too far away for my camera. Still it was my best Red-flanked Bluetail photo ever so I couldn't complain too much :).



Red-flanked Bluetail

All the familiar faces were out in force during this week and the next one we noticed turn up was the depressed looking guy with the long hair who we'd seen quite a lot of last year. The bird showed again and we'd both had some brilliant views of it, so eventually I conceded and called it a day. I could've stayed longer but Wendy's back was giving her grief and Lyca looked fed up, so I had no choice and we left at 1.25pm.

We were both feeling quite hungry by then but we knew it was going to take us at least an hour to get back to the car. Wendy was trying to work out if we could get some food and then a bus back to the car park but although the plan sounded plausible she then remembered that we had no money with us! We put a bit of a move on to get back quicker and as we walked back along the footpath we heard a Yellow-browed Warbler calling from the trees. We didn't stop to find it as we could've been there all day and motored on towards the dunes where we found a Wheatear just before we were back at the footpath at the ridge. Yet again there was nothing in the ace bushes apart from 3x Robins and a Dunnock. The path on top of the sea wall was busy with dog walkers again so we stayed down in the ditch, which proved to be a good move and not only to keep Lyca calm. We found a cracking male Brambling feeding frantically on the bank and further up was a Redwing neither of which were bothered by us. We could tell by their behaviour that they'd just come in and were feeding up. I felt guilty at making them have to move for us when they really needed to refuel. I quickly got some shots of them while I had the opportunity, especially as Redwing are usually so flighty and difficult to photograph.



Brambling



We were back at the car at 2.42pm where lunch was well overdue but very much appreciated, after Lyca had guzzled her drink of course :). I checked my phone and we'd just done 8 miles of walking and a lot of standing around so it was no wonder we felt knackered. While we contemplated what to do next I received a report of an Olive-backed Pipit in the Muckleborough Hill area at a place called Weynor Gardens. Now that sounded like too good an opportunity to miss especially as we dipped on the OBP last year so we headed straight there.

It was surprisingly easy to find Weynor Gardens, considering I'd never even heard of it before and I parked up in a small cul-de-sac at 3.35pm. I'd taken the last space and it seemed that the bird had created quite a stir given the amount of cars around. It was pretty cold and the light was already starting to fade as we crossed the road, so we crossed our fingers that it wasn't going to take us too long to find what we were after. I'd always wanted to see an OBP and after our 'was it wasn't it?' silhouette encounter at Wells last year we were all the more motivated to pin this one down. We walked up the pavement and went through a small wooden gate, which took us onto a muddy path through some trees. There were some birders coming back, so we asked them if they'd seen it just so we knew what to expect. The reply was, "Yes but we're leaving because we don't like the amount of harassment the bird is getting." Uh oh, this didn't sound good. We carried on until we found a small hill where we could see a group of birders standing.



Olive-backed Pipit twitch

We wandered up the hill and slowly joined the back of the group and seconds later Wendy was nearly taken out by some idiot's tripod as he barged his way past us. Some people are so rude and inconsiderate when it comes to their tripods and really need to learn about spatial awareness! Luckily she was on the ball and managed to duck out of the way quickly enough as it swung past her head.

There was another face we recognised amongst them and he seemed to have given himself the roll of twitch leader. He was telling everyone what to do, where to stand and practically how to breathe, which was slightly irritating to say the least. A couple of blokes wandered away from his rounded up herd and were duly chastised and ordered back into his virtual pen. The bird hadn't been seen for a while by all accounts but everyone was still scanning the ground around where it had last been spotted over by some cow poo. It was a weird little hill surrounded by trees and gorse and the open ground was uneven with furrows and re-growing bracken, so finding a small Pipit amongst it was

looking like a tall order. All of a sudden there was a stampede and everyone charged over to the left hand side of the field but they didn't find anything. They were all herded back and then it was arranged that one of them was going to go in for a controlled flush :O! We stood there while he slowly skirted around the entire perimeter, occasionally turning around to shrug his shoulders and look bemused for the audience without seeing a single bird. With that plan having failed he returned and we waited for ages again without any joy and due to the light fading so rapidly the leader bloke and his band of followers went back in to walk the perimeter again. Urrghhhhhh!

It was again looking unsuccessful and we'd given up any hope of it showing until everyone stampeded over to them and they claimed to have seen it through a gap in the trees. We were all poised with our bins searching for the bird but nobody could pull it out, so some of them split from the group and wandered back to where we'd been originally standing. We decided we'd be better off back there too, as we weren't happy where we were standing. Just then the people who were moving back became agitated and there were gestures to everyone to go over but to keep back. We all slowly headed over whilst being shouted at even though we couldn't have been further away if we'd tried. When we managed to get into position we were just in time to follow their directions and I picked up on the **Olive-backed Pipit**. Instead of firing off shots I quickly started firing out directions to Wendy as it was really tricky to see but thankfully she spotted it as well.....Phew! We had a great view of its facial features and a brief view of its back before it was gone again. I was pleased that I'd stuck with looking at a lifer and concentrating on making sure Wendy got to see it too rather than getting my camera on it. On the other hand I didn't even get a record shot of the bird and who knows when or if I'll ever get the chance again. It'd been a close call and we could easily have given up way before we'd seen it, just because of the nature of the twitch. We have to say though that it wasn't quite as grim a picture as the bloke we'd met at the entrance had painted. They'd all given pinpoint directions and seemed to be very keen to get everyone involved onto the bird. The organised flushing was probably because it had started to get dark and time was running out quickly but it's not the tactic we'd chose to try. Playing devils advocate, organised flushing means that the bird isn't being constantly flushed by lots of people all the time though so I suppose it has its place. Having just bagged another lifer I was happy enough but couldn't resist the temptation to go back 1st thing the next morning. Wendy had just got her 2nd lifer and although it wasn't the most exciting bird it blew the Jack Snipe out the window. By then it was raining lightly and Wendy was obviously bored and cold, so we called it a day and headed back to the car. We met some blokes who were just on their way over and asked us if we'd seen it. Wendy (in my head) said, "Yo, the crew are sound, they'll sort you out yeah" or something similar but she has no idea where that came from and remembers it completely differently but it's not as funny :/. I recognised these birders as well from last year and just as last year they were friendly and chatty.

Back at the car at 5.05pm the heavens opened, so we'd dodged it just in the nick of time and didn't envy the birders who were still just arriving. We were absolutely starving and just wanted to grab some food and knowing that they serve food all day Wendy reckoned that we should have a look at the menu outside the Dun Cow when we drove past to see if it'd changed. They never have anything for me since they got rid of the Cajun chicken burger but I agreed anyway. I pulled up outside and Wendy ran over in the torrential rain and came straight back shaking her head and I drove off. She then remembered that the pulled pork I'd liked last time had been on the specials board, so I had to turn back so she could do it all again. This time it was worse because she had to poke her head into the bar to see the board and quickly realised that I wouldn't eat any of it. The barman and barflies were all staring at her and she had a couple of jokey comments like, "It's OK, you can come in you know" and "Would you like a table?" which was a bit awkward as she was just about to walk straight back out! Wendy was gutted that there was nothing for me, as she'd seen a couple of things she really fancied the sound of. I wasn't gutted because it looked as though we were going back to the trusty old King's Arms again but we'd have to wait until 6pm!

Back at HQ it was 5.25pm, so Wendy gave Lyca her tea while I went out to get our washing out of the machine in the outhouse. After Wendy had hung it all on the heated towel rail in the bathroom we headed out again at 5.59pm, which was perfect timing.

When we arrived we grabbed a seat out the back and away from everyone else, which was a bonus. Wendy went up to the bar to order our drinks and came back to the table saying that there was nothing for her. In the end she ordered a baked spud with cheese and beans and the usual tempura chicken with chips and NO salad for me, thankfully without interrogation. Lyca was very tired and slept under the table for the duration and yet again I was too full for pudding :(.

Back at HQ it was 6.50pm and we were feeling totally zonked, so the week was obviously catching up with us.



Lazy dog

Normally we'd be packing up on the Thursday night and heading back up to Heysham on the Friday but because we'd booked a couple of extra days we still had time on our hands even if we didn't have the energy! We'd had a good day though and had seen Great Grey Shrike, Red-flanked Bluetail and Olive-backed Pipit, as well as having given Lyca a long walk :). While we tried to watch TV and relax my tea started to repeat on me and I was having sick burps, which took the relaxation out of the rest of the night. By 9.51pm neither of us could stay awake any longer, so we retired to bed for the night and even Lyca seemed quite pleased too :).

Friday 16th October

Strangely nobody, not even Lyca, woke up until 7.45am, so we must all have needed that! It was the windiest day so far but we'd expected it and there were Goldcrests everywhere when I went outside to let Lyca out for a wee. The wind had now switched to Northerly and wouldn't be going back round to the east for the remainder of the holiday. Even though the winds weren't any good anymore I still went out although a bit late at 8.45 leaving Wendy at HQ to get ready and make the sarnies for lunch.

There had been no reports of the Olive-backed pipit so I assumed it must have gone so didn't bother going back there. A Great Grey Shrike had been reported late on Thursday at Stiffkey car park, so I headed straight there. If it was in the bushes I could use the car as a hide but typically it wasn't in the carpark bushes. I had the option to walk along the coast to check the high hedges in that area

but decided against it and thought I'd try Garden Drove again. When I got there there was a tractor and trailer parked across the entrance and I can only assume the farmers were working in that area and didn't want to risk having the lane blocked by birders if anything brilliant was found. I amended the plan and decided to try Middle Drove, which is the next one along. Walking all the way down that drove I found the roving tit flock quite quickly but try as I might I couldn't dig anything out from it.



Middle Drove

Down at the coastal path I started getting some unwelcome pains in my stomach and I knew that it could only mean one thing and started to panic. I turned and quickly headed back crossing my fingers and toes I could get back to HQ in time.

As I'd parked facing away from the coast road I headed inland thinking that I'd skip the tight Stiffkey Village road and would get home quicker. I was very wrong and instead found myself getting quite lost but eventually I found a sign to Stiffkey.....Phewww! I got back on the familiar coast road only to find a canal barge on a low loader being backed into a boat repair yard at Morston, completely blocking the road.....NOOOOOOOOOOOO!

When I got back I sprinted straight through the door and locked myself in the bathroom leaving Wendy standing there, wondering what on earth was going on. I braced myself for the worst experience I'd had in a long time. After the unpleasant event I felt totally fine and thought that everything would be hunky dory for the rest of the day. When I got a report of an Isabelline Shrike, Hume's and Pallas' Warbler at Wells Woods we instantly headed out to see if we could pin them down. The neighbours were out loading their car up, so it looked like they were leaving and we'd have the place to ourselves again, not that they'd been a problem. Wendy couldn't resist asking them and they confirmed our suspicions, so there'd be no more barking dogs.....Yey :). We weren't that bothered about the Shrike having already had crippling views at Beeston Common but I reckoned that the Warblers were worth a shot. If we tackled it from Holkham side it would be better, as it was closer to where they were being seen and we'd never walked east towards Wells Woods from Holkham Pines before either.

We arrived at Lady Anne's Drive at 11.12am and after I'd pumped more money into the rip off parking machine we set off down the footpath. I think I must've already paid well over £25 in parking fees so far on this holiday. We heard another Yellow-browed Warbler calling and considering we'd have killed for one when we 1st arrived we didn't stop to find it as we had bigger

fish to fry :P. There were streams of birders coming back, which was a good sign and the ones we spoke to had seen the birds. We quickly found a group of birders standing looking up at the trees, so we stopped and joined in.



Pallas' twitch

Luckily after looking at a fair few Goldcrests it wasn't long before we'd spotted the lovely little **Pallas' Warbler** flitting through the branches. Wendy was excelling in her skill of attracting any weirdo within a 1 mile radius and ended up chatting awkwardly to a superb specimen. I was just thinking about getting a shot of the bird, even just a record shot would've done, when my guts decided that they had other ideas.....Uh oh! I told Wendy the situation and we stopped everything and hurried back down the path as quickly as we could. This felt a lot worse than earlier in the morning and I broke out into a cold sweat panic. When we got to the entrance we met the nice bloke who we'd spoken to at the Olive-backed Pipit twitch and he stopped us for a chat.....Noooooooooooo! Don't get me wrong he seemed like a lovely guy but the timing couldn't have been worse if he'd tried. As he prattled away to us it went in one ear and the other and I tried to hurry the conversation up as much as I could. I just hoped that he didn't think I was being really rude but I knew that I didn't have much time left and I didn't even know where I was going to go!

The problem with Norfolk is that there's a severe lack of WC's and sometimes we've had to drive miles to find one so getting back to the car safely was only my 1st hurdle. I quickly bundled a confused looking Lyca into the back seat and screeched up Lady Anne's Drive, flying over the speed bumps as though my life depended on it. I still had no idea where I was heading and was panicking even more as I turned left at the top of the drive. When Wendy screamed, "Toilets!" I couldn't believe my luck and shouted, "Where?" Neither of us knew about them but amazingly she'd seen a sign for public toilets on the opposite side of the road where the pub was. The turn in the road I did in the car was reminiscent of an 80's cop show, and we shot back to the entrance to the pub and shops and sure enough, like an oasis in the desert, there were the WC's.....PHEW!!!!!!!!!! This bit of good luck had completely saved me as I was positive I wouldn't have been able to make it as far as Wells. I was still in shock that these toilets existed, having been to the area probably about 50 times in all our holidays to Norfolk and being blissfully unaware that they were there! I legged it out of the car, made it with literally no time to spare and was gone for about 30 minutes, occasionally sending Wendy an update via text regarding my progress so she didn't think I'd died. Lucky Wendy :P. I dread to think what would've happened if they hadn't been there and we'd had to go on a hunt! It's very tempting to go on into gory detail but I'm sure nobody would appreciate it the same as I would

but the memories will probably be imprinted in my head forever. The least I can say is think I think my body must've been severely dehydrated afterwards!! I struggled to see how there could possibly be anything left to come out but there's no point even trying to understand where it all comes from, I mean I didn't eat 10 times more than usual last night! With this in mind I also armed myself with some extra toilet paper, which I put in a pocket for (what felt like) the likely event of an another emergency. But like the lunatic I am I wasn't going to let a bit of Delhi Belly ruin my day especially as we were so close to a couple of great birds.

When I got back to the car it was lunchtime, so I went back across the road and parked in the car park again at 12.45pm. Wendy started to eat her sarnie and was full of great advice about how I needed to drink loads of water and NOT the Pepsi Max I'd just opened and should probably eat something too. I really didn't want to 'feed the monster' and settled on eating just my crisps instead. Trying to work out what was wrong with me I could only conclude that it must've been the tempura chicken I'd eaten the night before especially as it had repeated on me all night. Booooooooooooo! Wendy very kindly took great delight in telling me, with a huge grin on her face, that it wouldn't have happened if we'd gone to The Dun Cow.....Grrrrrrrrrrr!

Feeling as though I was ready to try again we set off again at 1pm with me safe in the knowledge that I was at least armed with some toilet roll! What exactly would happen before I used it was something I hadn't quite worked out yet but just having it on my person felt like a bit of reassurance. The Pallas' was still there in the tops of the trees when we got back and this time I made sure that I at least tried to get a record shot just in case I needed to leave in a hurry.



Pallas' Warbler

We stayed for a few minutes and then decided to try for the Hume's while the going was good. We'd only seen 1 Hume's before, about 2 or 3 years ago during a November trip to Norfolk and they're definitely worth another look at though even though they look very similar to Yellow-browed Warbler. We found the twitch not much further up the path and we stood for ages without seeing a single thing.



Hume's twitch

A couple with a dog bearing a big resemblance to Lyca were heading our way but Lyca was misbehaving and going mental at it. I dragged her off into the trees while they went past but Wendy couldn't resist asking if it was a Cockerpoo. It turned out that we were wrong but it was in fact a Stroodle, which is a Springer (not Cocker) Spaniel x Poodle mix but there wasn't much in it. After they'd gone Wendy decided to prop herself up on a nearby tree to ease her back and take some of the weight. Another familiar face was there, a bloke who looked like Max Branning from Eastenders. He was pacing about eating what appeared to be some kind of really dark and horrible looking pumpernickel or something. He glanced over to Wendy and raised his eyebrows in acknowledgment and a few seconds later let out the loudest fart we'd heard since Wendy's epic when I was in Nobles for my knee operation last year. Wendy started to laugh quite loudly and I have to admit that I was having a bit of a giggle when the bloke looked over at us. He must've known that we'd heard it but didn't even bat an eyelid!

There was nothing happening and everyone looked depressed, so after quite a while we agreed to head back and nearly wet ourselves when we spotted a birder heading our way who looked just like Chris Wormwell! All the doppelgangers were out today.....Bahahaha :P It's a boring old game sometimes, so these little gems that pop up are great entertainment to liven things up a bit, especially when things have gone quiet :). Further down the path and away from the others we hit more Goldcrests and stopped for a scan, as some of them were quite low down flitting about amongst the hawthorn and reeds. While we were looking through them Wendy all of a sudden blurted out the words, "Oh *%£\$, it's there!" I could tell this wasn't her usual, "Ooo what's that?" so quickly asked her where the bird she was looking at was. She directed me onto it in a clearing in the reeds at near enough ground level. My eyes nearly popped out of head when I got my bins on the **Hume's Leaf Warbler** clear as day. Thank god for that as I needed to be 100% sure as I didn't want the embarrassment of bringing the others over for one of them to say, "That's a Yellow-browed you idiots!" I'm pretty good at whistling loudly using my fingers but every once in a while you can try one and it comes out sounding like a sickly pig. But there was no time to be a pansy so I went for it, "PPEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEPPPP" a perfect whistle.....Phewwww! We waved and pointed to where the bird was and luckily (to the untrained eye at least) we must look like proper birders as the crowd didn't hesitate and legged it towards us. Now for the most nerve wrecking part of getting them onto it and if that didn't happen then the grumblings would start followed by the non-believers and ending on the grand finale of disgusted looks. I still had it right at

the back in the reeds and luckily the ones who got there quickly followed our directions easily and got the bird.....Yes! The people who'd just strolled over, who I reckon hadn't believed us, seemed to have been struggling though. One girl was particularly cynical and said, "I haven't seen it have you?" to her partner who replied with, "No." She was standing right next to us and didn't seem to realise that we'd just re-found it and that most of the others had seen it too and carried on saying in a very loud voice, "Huh, APPARENTLY it's in the reeds somewhere!" We'd noticed her earlier on and hadn't seen her lift her bins to join in the search once, so I think she just wanted it handed to her on plate. That's never going to happen with a small skulking Warbler, so she needs to put a bit effort in if she wants to see anything. Next thing she was on her mobile putting the news out of an 'alleged' Hume's, making it quite clear that she hadn't seen it, failing to mention that she hadn't even bothered to look! The Max lookalike and us heard it calling further away so we all tried to find it again with only a couple of blokes saying that they'd seen it, so we decided that enough was enough and left them all to it. The depressed looking guy had turned up to add to the familiar face list and Wendy was stopped for the 2nd time by the random weirdo she'd been talking to earlier....Hahahahaha! He said that he'd had crippling views of the Isabelline Shrike and was just about to attempt the Hume's. We wished him luck, as he was going to need it, before carrying on back to the car.

It was 3.15pm when we got back and it was a VERY good job we'd left when we did because all of a sudden and out of nowhere I started to feel really ropey again. I quickly drove back up to the WC's for round 3 of the day....Urrghhhhh! When I got back Wendy went for a nosey in the poncy deli she'd spotted opposite the WC's (hopefully none of the clientele had overheard my days exploits!!!). She returned with a paper bag full of pressies and then suggested trying to find some Immodium for me. It wouldn't hurt me to give that a go, so I drove to Blakeney Spa and we went in for a look. I wasn't feeling like much for tea and whatever it was had to be something dry, so I picked up some bacon and a baguette and when we got near the tills Wendy found a packet of Immodium....Phew! After that we headed for home and yet again it was the right decision.

As soon as we parked up the pains hit me again so I quickly found myself in the familiar surroundings of the bathroom. As soon as I reappeared Wendy waved the packet of Immodium at me, which I happily took in the hope of stopping my problem in its tracks. Wendy took Lyca out to look for the Barn Owls because she was pestering her for her tea far too early but there was no sign. My stomach had settled again and my tea seemed to go down well, I don't know if was just coincidence or the Immodium but it looked as though I'd seen the last of the bathroom for the day :). Lyca was very tired for the entire evening and we didn't know how to feel about tomorrow being our last full day in Norfolk. Usually we're quite sad but with us having booked the extra 2 days we were definitely flagging! We managed to stay up unusually late and eventually went off to bed at 10.24pm.

Saturday 17th October

We were awake at 7.45am and it was really windy again, which wasn't great. Due to yesterday's unfortunate experience I decided not to risk going out for a morning trip! Lyca was raring to go as usual but had to make do with birding out of the kitchen window for the time being.



Window birding

It was 10am when we all headed out for the day and instead of heading straight to Cley Wendy wanted to stop off at Wiveton Hall Farm Shop. We'd never been there before and driving down the farm track it looked unlikely that there was a shop as well as a café down there but we eventually found 2 wooden shed like buildings that looked about right. Wendy disappeared into the shop for look and after what seemed like days came out with a couple of bits and bobs to give as pressies, which had been made on the farm. When I saw the jam she'd bought I reckoned my Mum would like it too, so Wendy went back in to buy some for me. When she went to the till again the very posh and pleasant girl serving told her that it was 3 for 2, so she ended up picking another as well.....bargain :)

After that we carried on and parked up at Cley Visitor Centre car park. Firstly we went inside to use the WC's before our walk and had a look round the shop. I bought the Birding in Extremadura and Mallorca DVD's to go with my Birding in Cyprus DVD as we were thinking about broadening our horizons next year. Next we headed over to the café where I couldn't resist some ginger cake and Wendy gave in to the freshly baked cheese scones, which to this day she still reckons are the best ever!

After putting our goodies in the car and getting Lyca out we set off at 10.52am heading over the road to East Bank. Since we now can't go into Cley reserve due to walking Lyca we now do the next best thing which is a loop walk around all of Cley. A **Peregrine** blasted over us and we could hear the faint call of the **Bearded Tits**, which was lucky. We were a bit worried we wouldn't hear them, as it's a bit hit and miss these days since the nasty floods a few years back and we knew that our total was resting at a particular low score for this trip. Bearing this in mind we were on the look out for anything new and hoped we could add something at Cley but heading down the bank we were being blasted by the wind while we scanned around us.



East Bank

Wendy cheerfully announced, "Avocet!" and was looking at the most distant pool on the right, so I raised my bins. I laughed out loud when I saw a **Shelduck**, which was still new but not quite as good as an Avocet in the grand scheme of things.....Hahahahaha! Desperation was setting in and Wendy was feeling depressed at not being able to take pics because of her back. All of a sudden she lost all her senses and wanted to get a shot of a Little Egret, which we were looking down on. I laughed at her for breaking all the rules of photography but handed her the small camera set up I'd brought anyway. Needless to say the shot was totally unusable and she'd wasted her time and energy but at least the will was coming back :P. There was a Wheatear hopping up the path ahead, so I quickly took the camera back and grabbed a shot to remind her how it's done. Or should I say how to fail skilfully even with the subject being in perfect range.....Hahaha!

We were still on the hunt for new birds, so when a large dark bird caught our eye flying over the reed beds we stopped to check it out. Unfortunately, although very strangely, it was just a dark Gannet and we had to wonder why it had come inland? After all its not every day you see a Gannet anywhere other than out at sea and we can only presume it was something to do with the very strong wind! When we got down to the beach we had a scan of the sea but there was absolutely nothing out there....Typical!



Windy!

We were hoping for something flying past and even miles out would've done the job but it wasn't to be. I must've been clutching at straws by that point and suggested checking North Hide, which amused Wendy no end. Since when had we ever found anything there? She wasn't too chuffed at the diversion but we went over and sat down behind the screen anyway. We had a scan and instead of seeing a load of black silhouettes this time there was just an empty pool with nothing on it....Grrrrrrrr! Things were becoming a bit frustrating especially knowing that there were birders all over the UK filling their boots with the likes of SEO's flying over their heads, so there was only one thing for it. I threw a brat like strop at the unfairness of it all and wondered why we couldn't be that lucky after all the effort we were putting in! There was no point us hanging about, so after Wendy had written some notes up we carried on to the Coastguards Hut seeing absolutely nothing on the way.

When we got there we felt like it was a total waste of time but raised our bins in a last ditch attempt to save the walk. It was still dead out at sea but by a stroke of good luck Wendy found a few very dark looking ducks bobbing about. After checking them out we were relieved to see that they were 4x Common Scoters and carried on looking with a new burst of enthusiasm.



Desolate views

Unfortunately this was short lived when all we could find was a Diver, which was so far out that we couldn't tell what type it was but it was more than likely a Red-throat. There were 100's of Goldfinches flying about, which had probably just arrived but even the Eye Field was dead apart from some Dark-bellied Brent Geese. We carried on down West Bank stopping so that Wendy could try for a shot of them, so again I laughed at her. The conditions were dreadful so this was real desperation kicking in! Round at the path parallel to the coast road there were quite a few Blackbirds guzzling berries so I took the opportunity to grab a photo.



Blackbird

By the time we were back at the car at 12.30pm it was lunchtime, so while we ate our sarnies I checked my phone and found out that our walk had only been a feeble 4 miles. Boooooooo! After we left at 12.54pm we approached Walsey Hills and seeing as we were at the end of the holiday Wendy wanted to grab as many sloe's as she possible could to bring home. Her Mum only needed 2lbs, so I offered to help out to speed things up a bit, so armed with a small bag each we started

picking the tiny little black berries. I hadn't realised that the bushes were covered in huge spikes and that it was going to rip my hands to pieces, so it wasn't long before I was bored of that game. I reckoned we already had enough but Wendy wasn't convinced and carried on just to make sure.....Yawn. I left her to it and went for a wander down the footpath to see what was about with Lyca. When I got back she was still frantically picking away saying, "It's so addictive!" "Once you start you can't stop!" I had to disagree with her on that though having definitely had enough :P. After I'd persuaded her that she now had more than enough she finally tore herself away and we headed back to the car. She stopped every now and again when she spotted some particularly good ones but eventually she seemed happy. Wendy wasn't best pleased that I'd picked more than her! To be fair though I think it's because she's only small so couldn't reach the best pickings higher up.

It was 1.45pm when we got back to the car and having used the last dog poo bag that morning we needed to buy some more or face a possible dilemma. Fortunately Wendy had clocked some at the Wiveton Hall Shop earlier, so we headed straight back there. Wendy reluctantly went in for the 3rd time in as many hours and the girl instantly recognised her and joked that she was their best customer of the day.....a bit embarrassing! When she returned with a box of 4 poncy eco-friendly poo bags (why would you expect anything less!) I got a report, which made us both feel very stupid indeed. Unbeknown to us, while I was busy moaning about the lack of birds and taking the mickey out of Wendy for taking pics of Brent Geese in the Eye Field, there'd been a Black Brant strutting around amongst the flock :O! If we'd been paying attention and hadn't been being so negative we might have actually checked through them like we normally would and found the bird ourselves.....Doh! What a pair of utter plonkers! However desperate we'd become I certainly wasn't going to go all the way back there just to tick off someone else's Black Brant though! Instead I reckoned, despite Wendy's protests, that Garden Drove was worth a last shot to hopefully find something ourselves.

She wasn't happy but at 2.20pm we set off down the footpath, which was hideously muddy by then, checking the trees as we went.



Garden Drove

There was a bloke standing further down looking up with his bins and he wasn't shifting, so I wondered what he had. When we got down to him we asked and he thought he had a YBW but wanted to check it for Pallas', so we joined in. We stood there for ages looking and listening but none of us could pull it out nor did we hear it call, so in the end we all gave it up as a bad job. We

carried on and found the copse at the bottom to be the quietest we'd seen it all week. It was eerily quiet and there weren't even any Goldcrests in there, which was a stark contrast to the frantic action of the previous days. The huge influx must have finished with the birds having dispersed to find their wintering grounds. There was nothing happening at the Quarry either but as we walked towards the Whirlygig a **Woodcock** flew over heading towards the saltmarsh. Finally a new bird for the trip to break the tedium! The bushes at the Whirlygig were also completely dead and Lyca must've also been bored and was amusing herself by picking her own blackberries again. At least helping her out gave Wendy something to do, as there was literally nothing about. There wasn't any point going further, so we turned back feeling deflated. As we approached the hay bales Wendy spotted a **Vole** running across the path. Lyca, who was a bit slow off the mark and looked slightly confused, didn't know what to do and ended up trying to chase it after it'd vanished into the long grass.....Hahahahaha! At least it gave us a bit of a laugh after such a non-eventful walk. We trudged our way back up Garden Drove feeling depressed that our last day had been so uninspiring contemplating how things had changed so much from when we'd 1st arrived. On the other side of the coin that's how it could've been all week if we hadn't had the easterlies so we couldn't moan too much :). All of a sudden a Goldcrest flew out of the bushes and headed straight for us. It hovered literally inches in front of my face for a second and then flew off straight through the middle of us both.....Cool! Sometimes it's the simple things that make an otherwise dull day just that little bit better and we made it back to the car at 4.30pm feeling slightly less like we'd wasted our time. By then the fine drizzle we'd walked back in had turned into heavy rain, so we'd been lucky to have dodged it.

We were back at HQ by 4.59pm and Wendy spotted the Barn Owl over the field again, so after I'd brought the stuff in I went over with my camera. It would have been nice to get a decent Barn Owl photo but when I got there it'd gone.....Typical! :(. We had our tea, I put some washing on and after her bath Wendy started to pack up :(. When all our chores were done I thought we should cheer ourselves up by watching the Birding in Mallorca DVD, so we settled down to be impressed. I have to say that after all the good stuff I've heard about Mallorca I wasn't remotely impressed and ditched the idea of going there off totally. At 10.15pm having been depressed enough for one day we headed off to bed before our long day ahead. On the plus side the immodium had worked miracles! They say every cloud has a silver lining and all that.

Sunday 18th October

It was 7.15am when we woke up and as usual Lyca was raring to go outside. After breakfast we got ready and packed up the last of our stuff, so I started to load the car up. Wendy was slightly confused because our original plan had been to go out 1st before going back to HQ and leaving. Usually we spend the day in Norfolk, so she didn't see the hurry but as we had to be out by 10am this time we had to get our skates on. At 9.30am we'd left the place suitably clean and tidy and were waving, "Goodbye" to Church Owl again.



HQ

When we got into the car a big group of Finches flew in and with them were 2x Redpoll, which was a garden tick but unfortunately not a new bird for the trip. We wondered how we could add some more new last minute birds to the trip list, so our plan was to try Titchwell on the way out as well as our usual haunts. I wanted to try Holkham again to see if I could manage to get some shots of the cool Warblers as well trying to see the reported Blyth's Reed Warbler and GGS. Getting our priorities in order we took a quick diversion to Blakeney Deli 1st for a pain au chocolat to commiserate with.

Wendy came out with a big smile on her face as usual and said she was going to miss the friendly banter and started to feel sad that we were leaving. While we enjoyed our calorie loaded treat she said that there's a good vibe in the shop and that the staff are always so friendly and happy, a world apart from shops back at home. She'd even jokingly told them to give her a shout if there were any jobs going.....Hahaha! In reality I don't think she'd appreciate the silly o'clock starts and being stuck in a shop while there were brilliant things happening outside though :P. It'd be like your worst nightmare living but having to work in Norfolk when you'd be chomping at the bit to get out birding! You really would need to have a BIG win on the lottery to live there, so you didn't have to work otherwise it'd be a kind of slow torture! Anyway, Wendy's not a people person so could NEVER keep up with their happy façade or sound remotely plummy enough! Putting our pipe dreams aside we left Blakeney behind and headed off to Holkham. A Vole ran out across the road and the Land Rover Freelander in front of us swerved to avoid it. That was very thoughtful of the driver but whoever it was then proceeded to narrowly miss driving straight into the hedge and having a nasty accident.....Oooops! That would've made for interesting local newspaper headline, "Heroic driver in coma after saving Vole from certain death!" Once they were back on track we couldn't help but notice that they were also swerving all over the road like as if they'd just emerged from all night drinking session. Maybe they had, who knows? At least the Vole was safe.

I drove up Lady Anne's Drive at saying, "Helleeewwww!" in my poshest voice to all the snooty, horsey looking types in waxies and wellies that were swaggering about. Obviously I wanted to avoid an altercation and had the windows up, so nobody could hear me :P. Wendy couldn't believe that we were there AGAIN but she didn't have any better plans, so I told her to stop whinging because I needed to recuperate the week and get some more shots for the article! We set off for the umpteenth time down the footpath to the birders looking for the Pallas' but there was no sign and it had started to rain. We decided to carry on to see if we could have some better luck with the

Hume's thinking that we could try for the Pallas' again on our way back. The Hume's had been tricky enough 1st time around so unsurprisingly nobody had seen it and we certainly didn't have a lot of time to hang about, so we ditched it off too. It was raining heavier by that point and Wendy was cursing herself for not putting Lycas coat on, as she was soaking already.



Scruffy Mutt

There were loads of midgies about due to the rain and Wendy was looking decidedly fed up but we heard another YBW calling from the trees. Next up we carried on to the GGS spot where there was a girl, with very unique fashion sense, standing viewing the field with a scope. It actually turned out to be a young lad (Oops!) but he hadn't seen the bird and nor had anyone else for that matter, so we carried on right over to Wells woods for a pop at the Blyth's.

We wandered through the pines and eventually made it to Wells Woods. We could hear some people shouting and presumed them to be calling a dog, so we kept our eyes peeled. When we spotted them it wasn't a dog they were calling it was actually each other. They both had a bucket each and were foraging for mushrooms calling at intervals so presumably they didn't get lost from each other. There'd been another RFB reported at The Drinking Pool but apparently the twitchers were being very naughty and chasing the bird around too much so we didn't want to be part of that. We found them all and skirted around the area wondering how earth they expected to see it by charging around like Bulls in a china shop.



Dodgy twitch

We were joking about how it would be funny if the bird popped up right in front of us having escaped the harassment undetected but of course that didn't happen, it was probably lying low somewhere anyway.

When we finally found the Blyth's twitch the vibes weren't good. We stood somewhere in the middle of the birders who were scattered about the place and looked at the area. It was just thick with brambles and trees and didn't look as though we had a hope in hell's chance of seeing the bird. They are well known for being massive skulkers and considering they look as boring as a Reed Warbler I didn't really want to spend much time there. We didn't know where to put ourselves so we just decided to stay where we were unless anything signified otherwise. Nobody was looking at anything particular and seemed more interested in where everyone else was looking in case they were onto it. Max Branning turned up again and raised his eyebrows in acknowledgment but we found it hard to keep a straight face remembering his incident the day before :P. He said he'd heard it calling about 1/2hr ago but there'd been nothing since, so with that we decided to knock it on the head. Enough was enough by 12pm, so we turned round and left them to it. We're glad we didn't waste too much time there because there were no other reports of that bird all day. We took a detour on the way back so we could have a look at the popular Wells Beach where the beach huts are. I'm not sure I've ever looked at them even though we have been to Wells a million times.



Nice

It did seem a nice beach so we could see why it's so popular although I am not sure I'd want to spend 60k on one of the tiny huts! When we were nearly back to the entrance we noticed a bit of action going on at the Pallas' spot and stopped for a last look.



Pallas' twitch

Everyone was looking up at the Warblers in trees on the right hand side of the path but then we watched them all fly to the left, so everyone quickly followed them. It was just a case of finding the Pallas' amongst them. Luckily we did find it again but it was moving around too much for any pics, so we watched it for a bit before we headed off. We bumped into the nice bloke who I'd had to cut short a couple of days ago due to my Delhi Belly and I couldn't help but wonder if he was thinking, "Oh god it's that rude bloke who wasn't listening to a word I was saying the other day again!" but much to my relief he was his usual jolly self, so I hoped that it'd gone unnoticed. There were loads of massive **Hornets** buzzing about but they were too interested in the bushes to have been of any concern even to us.....Phew!

By the time we got back to the car at 1.15pm Lyca was completely dry and after our walk we both needed to use the WC's before we left. I drove up to the all too familiar toilet block by the pub and after we'd both paid them a quick and final visit we had our lunch in the car park. I checked my phone and found that our walk had been 5.5miles, which wasn't exactly massive but after a week of it we felt pretty tired anyway. After that we left at 1.37pm and set off to Titchwell, making a quick stop off at Burnham Deepdale so that Wendy could have a final look in Fat Face.....Yawn :P.

When we parked up at Titchwell it was 2.16pm and it looked very busy and as usual like it was going to throw it down any second. Why oh why does that always happen when we arrive at Titchwell? We needed to fill in some time and try and add some birds to our list or else we'd going home on an all time low total. As we walked past the Meadow Trail and towards the 1st Hide we heard the blast of a Cetti's Warbler, so at least that was a start. We also saw it flying into the reeds but it was a typically fleeting glimpse and nothing to write home about. Up at the 1st Hide the rain started, so we sat down on the bench, put our hoods up and hunkered down for a scan of what was about.



Uninspiring

It was grim and grey view that lay before us and our bins and glasses were already caked in water. There were still a lot of people about although the majority of them seemed to have the right idea and were leaving. We managed to add **Avocet**, a couple of **Dunlin**, a nice male **Pintail** and finally 2x **Ringed Plover**, which were feeding along the edge below us.



Pintail

There was nothing else to pull out, so we carried on up to the Brackish Marsh finding nothing but 2x **Grey Plover**. There'd been some Spotshanks reported but by the time we'd got up to the saltmarsh we hadn't found them. There were plenty of Redshanks miles away but we couldn't pick out a Spotshank with just our bins. We wandered out to the beach hoping to add a Grebe or Diver to our list but the tide was so far out we couldn't see anything. Not even with Lyca's help!



Nosey dog

We gave up at that point and hotfooted it back to the car, so as not to get any more wet than we already were, although I did stop at the saltmarsh to grab a quick pic of a Black-tailed Godwit that was feeding very close to the path.



Black-tailed Godwit

Lyca was soaked again and we weren't much better but it didn't matter too much, as we knew we'd be changing our trousers before we got to the pub later. Wendy went over to the WC's before we left and came back with a photo of a **Common Plume Moth**. Hahahahaha, she just couldn't resist the pull of toilet mothing :P.



Common Plume

I went next and decided to join in, finding another Plume, a Highflyer type really high up on the ceiling and a green **Cricket** the same as Wendy had found in Holkham WC's.



Cricket

We left at 3.56pm and just after we'd set off I got a sickening report through on my phone. After a week of trying to find our own, there was now a Little Bunting at Burnham Overy by the boardwalk at the dunes end.....AARRGHHHHH! I was trying to convince Wendy that we could turn around, go back and walk down to try and see a lifer for us it but eventually I resigned myself to the fact that we had to get going and start heading up north.....Booooooooooo :(. If only that had turned up earlier in the day or better still the day before! Annoyingly it stayed for a few days just to really stick the knife in.

Our next stop, just around the corner was Choseley Drying Barns but yet again there were no Corn Buntings, then again I think they've gone from there now. It won't be long before these birds are extinct from England as well. There were loads of Chaffinches, a Kestrel and some Red-legs but very little else but it was nice to see that they'd kept their Wildflower borders.



Wildflower borders and Red-legs

At least there were still some remaining, after what we'd found out earlier in the year. Next up was a report of a Little Bittern at Burnham Overy and rather than get severely depressed I chose to think that it was a string :P. Our next and last stop of the day was of course good old Flitcham Abbey Farm, so that we could hopefully add a Little Owl or Kingfisher to our list. We left Lyca in the car as usual and walked along the short boardwalk with our fingers crossed. We sat down in the hide and started to look in all the usual places but it wasn't long before we turned to more random unusual places because there was absolutely no sign of any Owls at all.



Flitcham

Try as we might we couldn't pull one out and there wasn't much about in general either, so we got up and hurried back to the car to get out of our muddy trousers.

After a quick change we were ready to start the drive up to Heysham at 4.45pm, which gave us bags of time to get to the pub in Lancashire. We hadn't long left Flitcham when Wendy spotted a poster with a photo of a missing dog. It was a horrible thought to think that such a cute little dog was lost out there somewhere in the cold and wet all on its own :(We just hoped that it'd been found and the posters just hadn't been taken down yet, the other option was too horrible to even consider. The journey started very slowly and we weren't making much headway in the huge queue all the way up to King's Lynn. We did realise though that for some reason Lyca had been very well behaved all day especially with other dogs and people. Not only that but she'd seemed very keen to get back to the car at Titchwell and was very tired after that. The week must've caught up with her too! After what felt like hours we finally hit the Welcome to Lincolnshire sign at 5.12pm and a **Roe Deer** ran across the road at the turn off to a place called Gedney. Just to add to Burnham Overy's success rate of the day I got another report, this time of a Rough-legged Buzzard. This would've been yet another lifer for us and another bird we've been pursuing for years.....Grrrrrr! If we'd been around that would've been 2 (3 if you believe the Little Bittern report) lifers for us in one day at the same place where we'd been to twice that week. Unbelievable!

Blyth Services couldn't come quick enough but we started to think that we'd missed the junction and gone past it at one point. Luckily we hadn't and I parked up in the busy car park outside at 6.55pm.....Phew! Wendy instantly bailed out and got Lycas long overdue dinner from the boot, which she wolfed down in no time at all. While she ate that Wendy went inside to use the WC's and then to get some fries for us to have with our 2nd sarnie of the day. It doesn't get any more exciting than that when you're on the move so it had to do us. I'd be happy with chicken nuggets and fries

but Wendy won't let me be that unhealthy anymore :P. After our gourmet feast (Ahem!) and Lyca had devoured her Dentastick I took her out for wee and we were reminded as to why we'd never stayed in that Travelodge there even though it'd be very handy. There was a group of scummy looking blokes standing outside clutching cans of cheap lager who'd obviously all gone out for a fag. They were being very loud, which would go down well if you'd been put next door to them and needed to get your head down! Their uniform seemed to be long shorts and flip-flops (even though it was freezing) and as many tattoos as they could cram on themselves. I know you should never judge a book by its cover and maybe we're just getting old but the prospect of staying there didn't really appeal. Not only that but the type of patron the services was attracting that night didn't give me much confidence in leaving my car outside over night. There were loads of blokes who were staring at it and then right at us as they walked past, which was a bit worrying. The experience wasn't turning into the leisurely affair we were used to, so at 7.23pm we drove off to get the last leg of the journey done.

It was 9.19pm when we arrived at The New Inn in Clapham, which was earlier than usual but a relief nevertheless. I drove round the back to the car park only to find a male and female member of staff in a compromising position on top of what appeared to be the bins.....Nice! They quickly spotted that they were now taking centre stage in my car headlights and scarpered pretty quickly through the side doors of the pub. How embarrassing! Wendy grabbed Lycas water and stuffed it in her rucksack and we headed in to sit in our usual seat in the side bar where we knew it'd be quiet.



Pub dog

Wendy went up to the bar and got our drinks and then poured Lyca one too so she didn't feel left out. Lyca guzzled hers in no time, so had a refill but we had to make ours stretch out for as long as possible because we had so much time to kill. Just as we were starting to relax the entire contents of main bar burst into a rendition of 'Oklahoma' at the top of their voices. What the....? Luckily we couldn't see through to that bar, so they couldn't see the pained expressions on our faces. Luckily it was just a 1 song wonder and it all went quiet again, until 3 staff members came in and sat down after their shift in the dining room. We couldn't help but wonder if 2 of them were the ones we'd caught round back but it had been so dark we couldn't recognise them. There was a local girl who seemed to be showing an Australian girl (we got the impression she was family of the landlord) and a Polish lad the ropes and telling them about the job. It was interesting hearing how they only get 1 day off a week and for the other 6 they have to do the early breakfast shift then go on to chambermaid duties followed by the lunch shift and finally the dinner shift. After they'd had their

food and cleared the dining room they were allowed to go up to their rooms for the night. Doesn't sound like much fun to us! There's not very much for young people to do in Clapham either and we overheard them saying that they sleep all day when they're off. Both girls seemed to be flirting with the Polish lad but then we can't imagine there'd be much talent around in that neck of the woods and he was probably the latest in a long line of fresh meat.....Hahahaha!

I'd had enough by 11.14pm and was nearly dropping off to sleep, so I wanted to get the rest of the drive over with before I was past it. Wendy thought it was too early and didn't want to be sitting in the cold car at Heysham for too long but it was a good job we left when we did. We left at the same time as the last guests were heading upstairs to their rooms and as we got to the front door the landlord appeared behind us. He said, "Thank you" so Wendy thanked him back and said, "Lock up time eh?" He replied, "Well yes, but not really" and then locked up behind us.....Oooops! He was probably dying to sink a few more tinnies before the night was over, well he's an Aussie after all! All the lights had already been turned off outside the building so it was darker than dark as we made our way through the car park. I think we'd overstayed our welcome a bit :O!

My plan as always was to go to Asda and get petrol and then, as it was earlier than normal to go into the store to waste some time. When we got there at 12am I filled up my tank and Wendy noticed that the store was in total darkness. It's meant to be open 24hrs but she then remembered that it was a Sunday and the opening times are probably different. With our last plan scuppered we had no choice but to head for Heysham, so I spun round in the car park. All of a sudden a bloke jumped out of his car and started flagging me down, so I pulled up and wound my window down. Looking back this could have been a daft thing to do as we were in England and not the Isle of Man! He looked flustered and asked me if I'd put £8 worth of petrol in his car using my card if he gave me £8 in cash. It sounded like some kind of mad scam but I couldn't work out how it could be, so I agreed and filled his car up for him. Even if he did drive off it was only £8 so not a major problem but true to his word he gave me a load of pound coins from his pocket and drove away in a hurry. Knowing my luck it was probably someone who had just murdered a ton of people and was making sure he didn't leave a paper trail behind him as evidence! Wendy was shaking her head and telling me that I'd been stupid to do it but when I checked the money he'd actually given me more than £8 and had seemed genuine to me. Wendy spent the entire drive to Heysham paranoid that he'd just scammed me somehow or that the coins he'd given me were fake or worse still.....explosives! I checked them carefully but they were 100% real and there was no way they were about to blow us up any point.....Hahahaha!

We arrived at Heysham at 12.22am but weirdly the back ramp wasn't even down yet, so it looked like we were in for a long wait. We'd never seen the boat like that before, normally at this point the "monsters" are loading trailers on constantly. We could hear constant streams of Redwing flying over as we sat it out waiting to board. The call for foot passengers to start boarding came at 1.20am but the ramp was still down and they hadn't loaded anything at all.....what the! We started to wonder if there wasn't any freight that night and crossed our fingers that we were right. Finally the ramp went down at 1.26am but instead of calling for the cars to get on they started loading at 1.30am instead.....Aarrghghhhh! We just wanted to get into the cabin and go to sleep! Why had they left it so long seeing as it'd been sitting there since 12.30am? Not only that but the foot passengers had all boarded ages ago and would've taken all the seats before any of the car drivers, who'd paid a fortune for their tickets had even set foot on the thing! That always seems like an unfair system to us, which is just one of the reasons that we always get a cabin even though it costs us even more! Eventually the announcement for us to start boarding came at 1.48am and sure enough when we went to get the key from the lounge all the foot passengers were already lying across the best seats leaving little space for the car drivers.....Grrrrrrrr! We got to our cabin, cracked open the extra blankets and settled down for the short night ahead. Lyca curled up next to

Wendy and I went straight to sleep and we embarked at 2.05am, which was surprisingly early considering how late we'd been boarding.

As usual we were rudely awoken by my alarm and we docked at 5.35am, so we got our stuff together pretty quickly, as we couldn't wait to get home and back to bed for a bit more sleep. When we got in at 5.55am the house was absolutely freezing, so it was too cold to even think about sleep. I put the heating on then brought everything in from the car and Wendy set about unpacking the food to put in the fridge. We all went to bed after that and tried to get to sleep but it was so cold it took us ages to nod off despite being so knackered. Lyca had no trouble and went out like a light having refused to go out for a wee even though she hadn't had one all night. Unfortunately I was awake again at 9am and there wasn't a squeak from Wendy or Lyca until 10.30am even though I was busy doing things around the house.....Hahahahaha! When we were all back in the land of the living again I got some reports in and the Little Bunting was still at Burnham Overy, so we'd have stood a very good chance of seeing it.....if we'd been there! Just to make matters even worse there was now a Hawfinch at Wells Woods and Wendy was only saying when we were in the pub the night before how much she'd love to see Hawfinch again.....Typical! After that I decided to turn off my notifications, so we didn't torture ourselves over the great birds being seen now we were back at home.

All in all I'd driven 845miles during our trip and we'd had even more easterly winds than the previous October trip. That was the 1st time we'd had a trip with easterlies so to have them again but even better was unbelievably lucky. It was a pity they hadn't brought more rarities in with them but we couldn't grumble. We'd ended the trip on just 113 birds but Wendy had come away with 2x lifers and I even had one for myself, which was unusual. It was also a bird that I'd wanted to see for years and although it was slightly underwhelming it was still really interesting to see an Olive-backed Pipit for the 1st time. They do stand out easily so that puts us in a good position to find one should one ever pop up in the Isle of Man.....Hah yeah right! I'd never gone out 1st thing every morning before but I'd been adamant that with the conditions being so good that I was going to put in the most effort I ever have. I don't think I'll ever get another chance as good as that, so it was a little deflating to say the least to come out with just a handful of Ring Ouzels to show for it. At least it wasn't through lack of skill though and was just down to being in the right places but at the wrong time.

My bird of the trip was obviously the Red-flanked Bluetail just because they're such brilliant birds while Wendy's was a toss up between that and the Pallas'. She has a soft spot for the tiny little Pallas' Warbler and up until a year ago had only dreamed of actually seeing one, never mind more than that in her life.

After we'd had Monday off to recover from the trip it was time for me to get back to reality and go to work. Wendy was lucky and doesn't work on a Tuesday, so had an extra day off, so before I left I made her a coffee. As I was pouring the frothy milk into her mug I felt a weird little pain in my back and let out an, "Ouch!" Wendy asked what was up and I told her but said it was nothing as it seemed OK again. I went into the bathroom to do my teeth before leaving when all of a sudden I screamed out in agony as a horrific pain ripped across my lower back! Wendy, who thought I was having a heart attack or something came running in to see what was up only to find me bent double over the sink. I was in so much pain I couldn't move, so she had to slowly help me back to my bed being very careful not to injure hers again in the process.....Uh oh! I now had a massive problem and in the end had to admit defeat and email work to tell them I wouldn't be going in. How embarrassing and on my 1st day back after a holiday too! They seemed alright about it and a couple of days later I eventually had to phone MEDS for some advice. Having refused to take Tramadol or Co-codamol ever again (after taking it after my 1st knee op) I was an awkward patient and the best advice the Dr could give me was to keep taking Paracetamol, Ibuprofen and Diazepam, so he didn't

Wendy had to help me with everything for the next few days and even bring all my meals into the bedroom on a tray because I couldn't get up. On the 4th day it started to ease slightly and I could finally get out of bed and slowly move round. We racked our brains as to how it'd happened and can only presume it to have been a combination of Lyca pulling me when she was connected to my belt, carrying my heavy camera around for 8 to 12 miles a day and with falling down a rabbit hole thrown in for good measure. It didn't bear thinking about but at least it hadn't happened when we were in Norfolk or the whole thing would've been a disaster and we'd have been stranded.....HMMMMMM hang on, would that actually have been such a bad thing? :P.

[illegible]

Mute Swan	Peregrine	Stock Dove	<i>Hume's Warbler</i>
Pink-footed Goose	Moorhen	Woodpigeon	Chiffchaff
Greylag Goose	Coot	Collared Dove	Goldcrest
Canada Goose	Oystercatcher	Barn Owl	<i>Firecrest</i>
Brent Goose	Avocet	Tawny Owl	Long-tailed Tit
Egyptian Goose	Ringed Plover	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Blue Tit
Shelduck	Golden Plover	Skylark	Great Tit
Wigeon	Grey Plover	<i>Olive-backed Pipit</i>	Coal Tit
Gadwall	Lapwing	Meadow Pipit	Treecreeper
Teal	Knot	Grey Wagtail	<i>Isabelline Shrike</i>
Mallard	Sanderling	Pied Wagtail	<i>Great Grey Shrike</i>
Pintail	Dunlin	Wren	Jay
Shoveler	Jack Snipe	Duncock	Magpie
Common Scoter	Snipe	Robin	Jackdaw
Red-legged Partridge	Woodcock	<i>Red-flanked Bluetail</i>	Rook
Grey Partridge	Black-tailed Godwit	Stonechat	Carriion Crow
Pheasant	Curlew	Wheatear	Starling
Red-throated Diver	Redshank	<i>Ring Ouzel</i>	House Sparrow
Little Grebe	Turnstone	Blackbird	Chaffinch
Gannet	Great Skua	Fieldfare	Brambling
Cormorant	Black-headed Gull	Song Thrush	Greenfinch
Little Egret	Common Gull	Redwing	Goldfinch
Grey Heron	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Mistle Thrush	Siskin
Marsh Harrier	Herring Gull	Cetti's Warbler	Linnet
Hen Harrier	Great Black-backed Gull	Blackcap	Lesser Redpoll
Sparrowhawk	Guillemot	Garden Warbler	Bullfinch
Buzzard	Razorbill	<i>Pallas's Warbler</i>	Yellowhammer
Kestrel	Feral Pigeon	<i>Yellow-browed Warbler</i>	Reed Bunting
Merlin			