

It'd been a year since we'd been to Norfolk and we still had 2 weeks holiday left to take. I knew that if we didn't get the right wind conditions it'd be a boring old fortnight if we spent the entire holiday in Norfolk. We'd had a couple of successively good Autumn trips but if there are no easterlies then even Norfolk is like trudging round Langness on a bad day! Having paid East Yorkshire a flying visit on our way up to Heysham last October I'd made my mind up that I wanted to go there for longer, so we decided to split the holiday into 2 like we did in summer. I reckoned it'd be better to go to Norfolk 1st and Yorkshire 2nd, so the drive to Heysham would be shorter on the way home. After our Welsh Cottage disaster Wendy was adamant that we were staying somewhere really nice this time and after a lot of, "No ways!" she was finally happy with the ones I found, so I set about booking them. We'd also realized that we might be better getting the afternoon boat home and although this would've worked really well there were no dog cabins available. We tried to get our usual Saturday 2.15am ferry but we found the same problem....Uh oh! Luckily there was the 2.15am Sunday morning one instead, which wasn't ideal but better than not going at all. We'd just have to go to work the following day tired! To save us having to sit around being bored and tired until the ferry for the first time ever I booked a Travelodge near Leighton Moss, so we could just go there and relax for the evening.

Wendy had taken the Friday departure day off, so she could get ready leisurely without stress but after the boat was booked she looked to see if she take the Monday off instead to give her time to recover. One of her work colleagues had already taken it, so it was tough luck. A couple of weeks before we left her colleague realized that she'd taken too many days and scrubbed it, so Wendy grabbed it as soon as possible....Phew! This meant that she had to work the day we left but luckily the hygienist was finishing early to go away herself, so at least she was due to finish a bit earlier. I'd done some overtime and could work through my lunch so I'd be able to finish at 3pm, so I wouldn't be in such a rush either. The week before we went away was as usual fraught with problems. We ended up with gale force winds off the back of hurricane Irma and with one side of the roof of the house off we'd hardly slept all week due to the felt flapping about in the wind. It was so loud it actually sounded like the roofers were up there hammering batons or something. On the Wednesday night we had torrential rain, which resulted in water pouring down the wall behind the fireplace in the living room. I went out to check the garage and it was worse out there but there was nothing we could do about it until the roofers had been back. By the Thursday Wendy felt like a zombie and to top it all off she then had to make the decision to go for broke and replace the entire roof.....Urrghhhh! On one hand we didn't want to go while the work was being done in case of any further problems but on the other we wanted to get away from it all and finally escape from the noise and get some sleep!

Friday 6th October

Luckily the wind had dropped right off when we got up for work but it was forecast to get worse later that evening.....Typical It looked as though we'd manage to dodge the worst of it though, but this sounded too good to be true for Wendy who wasn't convinced. I finished work at 3pm and picked Lyca up from Wendy's Mum and headed home. Wendy arrived back at 5pm and went straight for a bath, had her tea and packed the rest of her clothes. By 6.52pm we were ready to go and set off to the Sea Terminal. It wasn't windy at all when we

arrived at 6.59pm, which we were pleased of but Wendy remembered that she'd forgotten to take her Stugeron. I told her she wouldn't need it but she quickly took some anyway while we sat in the car park. Weirdly the wind started to pick up and it was quite breezy when we boarded at 7.25pm. We set off early at 7.44pm and it instantly became apparent that it wasn't going to be a smooth crossing so Wendy was glad she'd taken Stugeron and just hoped it'd kick in quickly. As we headed out to sea the boat rocked and rolled and although Lyca was totally unaffected it took us a while to get our sea legs. Wendy ordered the usual chicken burger and chips for my tea from room service and then I lay back on my bed and started to feel sick.....Uh oh! She wondered why I'd got her to order food if I felt ill but I knew I had to eat something, as my last meal had been at lunchtime. Wendy staggered over to the door to get the food and managed to put it down on the table without it going everywhere and while I tucked into my burger she ate all the salad and some of the chips. Her 1st mouthful resulted in coleslaw falling on the leg of her clean trousers and making a greasy stain before she'd even started!! Hahaha. After that I put the tray out into the corridor and we lay back on the beds to watch some TV. Wendy must've been tired because she fell asleep almost instantly and didn't wake up until I got up to take Lyca out at 10.45pm. I on the other hand only got about 30mins.....Urrghhhh!

Happily we docked really early at 11pm, so we were already ahead of ourselves and would hopefully arrive at the Travelodge early too. In the car Wendy decided to make herself a spritzer but when she opened the bottle of fizzy water it exploded all over her....Hahahaha! Clumsy bugger! We were driving off the boat at 11.17pm and it was raining, so the driving conditions were terrible and not the best start.

Saturday 7th October

The rain was on and off for the duration and there were some slow bits where we hit road works but the roads were quiet and I was feeling surprisingly awake for a change. Wendy wasn't and couldn't wait to get to the Travelodge and go to sleep, so when we saw that a junction near Newark was closed we crossed our fingers it didn't affect us. Our 1st mammal of the trip was as usual a **Rabbit**, which was on the grass verge just before the turn off to Sleaford. Although we always feel as though we're nearly there at that point there's still 18miles on a slow country road to go and that part is just tedious! We finally pulled up outside the Travelodge at 2.08am and we'd only lost 2mins off our eta due to the roadworks.....Phew! Wendy took Lyca for wee, while I lugged the small case with our overnight stuff in it and all the camera gear in. When we got to the room and had changed and done our teeth we went out like lights, which wasn't entirely surprising.

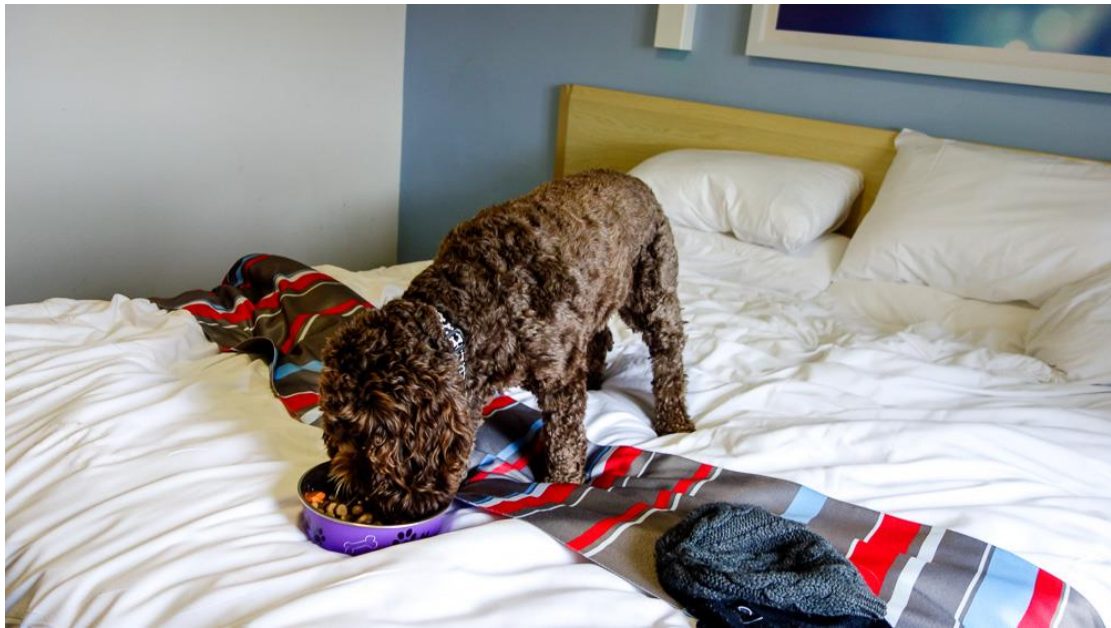
When we woke up it was 8.30 but it would've been later if Lyca hadn't woken us up. Peering out of the curtains we were pleased to see that although it was overcast it wasn't raining. We had a room with a view overlooking some fields but they were dead.



Pleasant view

The forecast we'd seen said it was going to rain all day, so this was a great start for our walk at Holme Dunes.....Not! I took Lyca out for a wee and heard a **Robin** and saw **House Sparrow, Pied Wagtail, Rook** and **Starling** around the grounds. The 1st report of the trip came in on my phone, which was a Rose-coloured Starling at the side of the road at Snettisham. Having concluded that it was a dump after being there once before the only bonus was that it was viewable from the road. It was on the way to Holme Dunes too, so that looked like our 1st plan of the day sorted but we weren't in any big hurry. We needed some breakfast before we set off and although Wendy had brought a couple of cereal bars up to the room, she reckoned we could do better than that.

She went off to Little Chef while I stayed in the room with Lyca because she wanted to eat breakfast in the comfort of the room instead of fumbling around in the car and getting covered in it. When she went in there was only one young lad on duty, so it was slow going. She ordered me my usual sausage bap and a Linda McCartney sausage bap for herself and remembering how dry it'd been last time she asked if he could throw some beans in there too. He said he wasn't allowed because apparently they could burn you but he could give her some in a tub if she wanted. She felt sorry for him having no help and wasn't surprised at all when he forgot all about her cappuccino and had to be reminded. She brought it all back to the room and after a liberal dousing in tomato sauce and a tub of beans in Wendy's case we demolished our breakfast in no time. Wendy was absolutely stuffed after hers but reckoned she'd need the extra fuel to keep her going for the day. Lyca was hungry too and wolfed her breakfast down but then for some strange reason proceeded to puke some of it back up on the carpet :O! Dogs!



Good job it's dry food!

After cleaning that up we gathered our stuff together and headed out to the car and left at 10.18am.

I needed petrol so I went straight to the garage over the road where we could see **Carrion Crows** on the verge and a **Feral Pigeon** flew over. There were the usual **Black-headed Gulls** in the fields and loads of **Wood Pigeons** flying around. Not long after setting off we saw a **Kestrel** hovering at the side of the road and shortly after we saw another. As we drove through a village we spotted a **Collared Dove** sitting on the roof of a house and a **Pheasant** in a field. Just after Swineshead Bridge we saw a **Mute Swan** on the river, a **Magpie** flying around and some **Jackdaws** that were hitching a ride on the backs of some Sheep. There were **Common Gulls** and **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** in the fields too and we were pleased when we passed Sutton Bridge and finally saw the sign for Norfolk at 11.13am. The weather looked like it was getting worse the closer we got but finally we reached Beach Road in Snettisham at 11.41am. I parked the car and we scoured the power lines and trees for any Starling flocks that might be around.



Starling perch

Hilariously there was no sign of even a single Starling and all we could find was some juvenile **Moorhens**! I couldn't believe it when I saw that it would set you back a mere £22,000.00 for one of the static caravans there :O!

There was still no Starlings around, so while we were there and knowing that Lyca could do with a leg stretch we decided to go and have a wander on the reserve. We didn't remember it with any fondness from our previous visit but it wasn't raining yet and worth a 2nd shot if nothing else. The signs for the reserve were slightly confusing and none of it looked familiar at all. As we drove towards Snettisham NR we noticed a good number of **Red Admirals** on the wing. Wendy spotted a single **Pink-footed Goose** in a field and I parked up in the car park at 11.52am. There was a sign for KLAAs on a fence but we had no idea what it meant and could've been Norfolk's equivalent of the KKK for all we knew. I went off to read the info board to find out if dogs were allowed on the reserve, as it'd been so long since we'd been there it was before we had Lyca.



Info

On the board it mentioned that dogs were allowed but must be kept on leads, so that was double good news. It meant we could go for a walk and hopefully be without the stress of other dog running up to Lyca and making her narky. A flock of **Linnets** flew chirpily overhead along with some **Goldfinches** and we followed the path into the reserve. The 1st section was caked in dense brambles and hawthorn and we instantly noticed that there were Blackbirds everywhere! All we had to do was find our nemesis, a Ring Ouzel, amongst them to make our day.....dream on! There were some fishing ponds dotted around but we couldn't access them because they were for the King's Lynn Angling Association members only.



Private pond

That explained the signs at the start for KLAA though! A **Greenfinch** was the next bird we found followed by a lonesome **Swallow**, who had some serious catching up to do. All of a sudden there were no Blackbirds around at all and we'd left them all behind us, so our hopes of finding a RO vanished. Looking over a hedge we could see **Mallards** on a pond and we could hear **Goldcrests** in the bushes, so we kept our ears pricked for a YBW. A flock of Geese were flying over but they were just **Greylags** and not the Pinkies or Brents we'd expected to see down in that neck of the woods. By then we were heading towards the ex gravel pit and saw our 1st **Great Tit**, **Wren** and **Herring Gull** of the trip before we stopped to get a shot of the 'scenery.'



Surprisingly nice

It didn't seem as grim as we'd remembered it and there were actually some rather nice new builds including an uber modern wooden studio amongst the static caravans. Maybe the plan is to rebuild the lot and bring the area up a notch, after all it's in a Nature Reserve and must be a sought after location? There was a huge flock of waders flying inland and when we checked them out they were **Knot**. A **Little Egret** was feeding down in the water and more Knot suddenly lifted from behind the bank and flew over us, so we wondered what was going on. It wasn't long before our question was answered and a **Peregrine** zoomed through flushing all the waders from down on the wash. We could hear **Dunlin** amongst them and don't think the Peregrine was successful on that occasion. A **Little Grebe** popped up down on the water but there wasn't much else around.



Ex gravel pit

We walked up some steps and onto the bank, which overlooked the vast wash. It was a barren and monochrome scene that lay before us, which might've been improved by the presence of the sun but that was doubtful. The Peregrine had

skillfully flushed all the waders, so what remained were miles out and unidentifiable. There was a **Grey Heron**, a **Buzzard** circling overhead and a flock of **Wigeon** flew in off the sea. We scanned for a bit until we heard the familiar call of **Golden Plover** and looked up to see hundreds of them flying in as well.



Golden Plover flock

The only birds we could see down on the wash were **Shelduck** but we could hear **Curlew** calling from somewhere out there. We added **Great Black-backed Gull** to our list and then noticed 2 vans with dogs in the back driving along the bank towards us. Up until then all the dogs we'd met had been on leads but we had a sneaking suspicion that these ones weren't going to be. The vans parked up ahead of us and once the back doors had been opened out jumped about 5 very excited and boisterous unleashed Labradors right into the RSPB reserve.....!!!! I didn't know what to do next, so we just hung back and waited to see what would happen. As we stood there I saw a small bird drop down onto the beach behind some foliage and I was keen to find out what it was. I handed Lyca over to Wendy and went over to where I saw it land but there was absolutely no sign of it anywhere.....Urrghhhh! All we could pull out after that was a **Ringed Plover** and **Redshank** so when Wendy pointed out that it wasn't worth going any further anyway seeing as there was nothing about, it was starting to rain and the dogs were running riot up ahead, I had to agree. We turned around and started to head back hoping we'd catch up with the RCS on our travels.



Bank view

It goes without saying that this was to be the 1st dip of our trip and we drove away at 1.04pm.

The only consolation was that the bird had only been reported in the evenings, so it was probably going there to roost nearby with the other Starlings. All of a sudden our hopes were lifted when we spotted a group of Starlings lined up on a power line but as usual there was nowhere for me stop so we could check them. This was frustrating to say the least and I'd driven quite a way before I was able to pull in with a view to turning round and going back. There was a **Mistle Thrush** on the line above us and I turned round and pulled into the layby near to where all the Starlings were and we had a scan. Typically they were all just Starlings, so our last ditch attempt had been a waste of time and effort. Just to rub salt into the wounds all of a sudden the previously quiet road became the busiest road in the world and we were stuck in the layby. We watched car after car going past and wondered if we'd ever get out but eventually we were back on track to our next stop.

Before going on our next walk I made a quick stop at the WC's at the end of Holme Beach road for Wendy. When we set off again down the track a small brown thing jumped out of the hedge and ran across the road in front of us. I shrieked, "**Weasel!**" and looked at Wendy to check that she'd seen it. She hadn't been looking at the time when it ran out unfortunately but she did get a glimpse of its arse as it disappeared into the hedge. Nine times out of 10 it's a Stoat that runs across like that but this was 100% a Weasel! It's always a great little creature to see, so we were already glad we'd decided to pay Holme Dunes a visit. Driving past the NOA pools we could see **Teal** and I parked up in the NWT Holme Dunes Visitor Centre car park at 1.42pm.

Wendy's pen had decided to run out of ink, so she had to try and get a new one from the shop when she went to get our entrance stickers. She had a quick look at the uninspiring reports board and a chat with the lady behind the counter who confirmed there was very little about. After she'd done that she went out the back to the café to see what she could us get for lunch. Last time the menu was so limited her only option was soup and mine was a gluten free bakewell

tart....not that I was complaining :P. This time it was better and she asked the bloke serving what toasties he could do. He reeled off all the ingredients he had and she decided on a bacon one for me, requesting that the bacon was very well done. She finally plumped for a mozzarella, tomato and basil one for herself because although she knew it'd be tasteless she didn't want to risk the Norfolk Dapple cheese being too mouldy tasting. The bloke disappeared out the back to make our food and another customer came in and joined Wendy in the queue. After a few minutes the door opened and a woman with a very cute but wet and sandy black Cockerpoo poked her head round and spoke to the bloke behind Wendy. It turned out that he was up from London staying with his Mum who lived in Wells, which is very dog friendly, so she was disappointed that she couldn't go into the café with her dog. After she'd gone Wendy got chatting to him about Cockerpoos to fill in the time because it was taking forever! She tried to help the guy making our lunch out by telling the other bloke that he was on his own but this didn't seem to help matters. The other blokes Mum was getting annoyed and opened the door again to loudly tell him that it'd be quicker if they just walked somewhere else to get lunch and with that he was off. Hmmmmm, Wendy doubted that very much but some people have no patience!

After a very long wait Wendy finally came back to the car with our food. I was very impressed with mine and the bacon was cooked to perfection. Wendy's was, as expected, tasteless but very well prepared nonetheless. There was a big sign up at the entrance saying that dogs should be kept on leads, which we'd have to see to be believed. Wendy tried to make some notes with her new pen but found that it wouldn't work either....Hahahaha! We both tried every trick in the book but it was useless. After she'd finished eating she had to go back to the shop to change it for one that did work, which she didn't really want to do. The woman in the shop was nice about it though, so Wendy was finally back in business and catching up with her notes. There were a few Swallows flying around over the fields in front of us and we saw **Chaffinch** and **Blue Tit** flitting through the bushes. **Migrant Hawkers** were still around despite the overcast weather but they had to take cover quickly when all of a sudden it went very dark and the heavens opened. Obviously we stayed in the car hoping for it to stop and watched a split seconds worth of action when a **Sparrowhawk** zoomed through. By then we were starting to feel really tired and with the weather having taken a turn for the worse and nothing having been seen eventually we lost the will. We completely ditched the idea of going for a walk there and decided to just head to our HQ in Salthouse. It was 2.38pm when we left and we couldn't wait to get to the cottage to relax.



Konik Ponies

I stopped for a last look at the NOA pools and there were some **Canada Geese** but nothing else new. A Kestrel flew through flushing 11x **Common Snipe** from the ground, which all flew off in different directions squeaking as they went. When we got as far as the 1st Farm Shop we spotted some **Red-legged Partridge** in a field and I breathed a sigh of relief that Wendy didn't ask me to stop there. I'd sighed too soon though and her eyes lit up when she spotted Thornham Deli...Urrghhhh! I pulled over and sat back in preparation for a long wait but she defied all my presumptions reappearing quickly AND with empty hands :O! Was she ill? I was worried and asked her why she hadn't bought anything. Apparently it too busy and there was nothing there she fancied anyway, which was most unusual but I wasn't complaining :P. Driving through Titchwell we saw a **Red Kite**, which has become a more common sight in Norfolk over the past couple of years. A **Jay** flew over the road at Brancaster and we saw our 1st **Marsh Harrier** floating over a field at Warham. When we drove past the pond at Stiffkey the 1st thing we noticed was that it wasn't there. By October the field has usually flooded and the pond is full of wintering Ducks and Little Egrets but it was bone dry. Weird! There was one Egret hanging out close to the cows, which wasn't exactly the behaviour we'd expect from a Little Egret. It was acting suspiciously like a Cattle Egret but there's nowhere to stop on that road, so we couldn't even have a look. We nipped into Blakeney Spa to pick up something for tea and it started to throw it down with rain.

Finally at 3.55pm we arrived at Moonfleet Cottage in Salhouse and we were really surprised to find that it was only a couple of doors up from Eastgate, where we'd stayed last year. I'd seen Moonfleet advertised since the first time we went to Norfolk but had always dismissed it as it looked like an Annex of the owner's home. I was wrong and it was actually on the end of a terrace of small cottages. Hopefully it was high enough up the road to have not been flooded like Eastgate, as I really didn't fancy another huge strop from Wendy when we went in and found that it was damp and smelly. This holiday we really hoped we'd picked some good cottages to make up for the disappointment in Wales. The driveway was difficult to negotiate and I had to turn up the road and approach it from the other side to get the car in! The garden looked nice, as did the entrance area, so we held our breath as I opened the door and Wendy took Lyca in.



Entrance

I left her to it and started to unpack the car while she looked around. Luckily when I went in she was smiling, the house was lovely and warm and didn't smell damp at all.....Phew! Wendy went round the house taking photos before it was cluttered up with all our junk and to save us time when we left.



Living room

There was no wardrobe in the bedroom downstairs, so I hauled the suitcase up the narrow spiral staircase to the one upstairs.



Bedroom 2

Lyca followed us up without any problem and was fine coming back down, so that was another worry off our minds. We were really impressed with our HQ and Lyca settled down on the sofa and made herself at home instantly. I checked the internet speed and was absolutely blown away to see that it was 33mb down, which was the fastest I'd ever had in a holiday cottage! Happy days :). There'd been a reported Red-necked Phalarope at Kelling Water Meadows and a Grey Phalarope at Cley East bank, so I was keen to go and see them as soon as possible. Wendy had tested the bed and said it was unbelievably comfortable but it just made her really tired and she was still feeling the motion of the boat. She still had loads to do and was totally put off by the torrential rain, so she decided to stay in with Lyca to crack on with the unpacking, do her nails (Hahaha!) and chill out.

It was absolutely chucking it down when I left but it was forecast to stop at around 5.20pm, so I reckoned it was worth a shot. Although both types of Phalarope had been reported in the area I had to make a quick decision over which one to go for, as I didn't have time to try for both. In the end I opted for the Red-necked Phalarope, as we'd only seen one before and that was 8 years ago on our first trip to Norfolk! I arrived and parked up at 5.10pm but with it still chucking down at 5.15pm I gave up waiting for it stop and put all my waterproofs on. Carrying all my heavy videoing gear the walk seemed to take ages but as soon as the pond came into view I could see the **Red-necked Phalarope** really close in. Get in! Annoyingly by the time I got down to the fence line the bird had flown right into the middle of the pond.....Noooo! The rain was still belting down and I severely regretted not bringing the lens hood in an attempt to save on weight. This meant my lens glass was soaked almost instantly, so I quickly gave up that idea and held the lens away from the rain. I stood there till 5.45pm when the rain finally stopped but it was too late by then and the light was really poor. I found a rubbish cloth in my bag, which failed miserably at drying my lens but I was able to get some bad footage and from that a still of the bird.



Red-necked Phalarope (Video grab)

By 6pm it was nearly dark so I gave up but at least I'd seen it, so it wasn't all bad news.

When I got back it was 6.30pm and I was absolutely soaking, so I had to put my waterproofs on the radiator. Luckily there was under floor heating, so my boots should dry overnight on that. It'd been a good 1st day and although we'd dipped on RCS we'd both seen Weasel and **Cattle Egret** (we found out when we got to HQ that the Stiffkey Egret was indeed a Cattle Egret) and I'd seen the Red-necked Phalarope too. I was pretty sure that neither Phalaropes were going anywhere in a hurry and that they'd still be there tomorrow for Wendy to see. I was starving by this point so went to put the oven on for my pizza but I couldn't get it to work....Aarrghhh! I then had to hunt around the house until I found the instruction manual and finally got it going. Wendy then added insult to injury by saying we would have to share it because Tesco wasn't due until 8pm and she didn't have anything! Doh! Luckily she didn't nick much of it and it was really nice and very handy after such a long day. Wendy went off for a soak in the bath, which filled up in super quick time and was hot enough to boil a lobster in....Phew! I started to worry that Tesco wouldn't come or wouldn't be able to find us, as well as what we were going to do with Lyca if they did come...Aarrghhh! The house was open plan, so she'd be free to run out of the front door if she wanted but luckily there was a baby gate, which I put up on the living room doorway.....Sorted! Tesco drove past at 7.50pm and I wasn't at all surprised that he hadn't spotted the cottage, so I ran outside and flagged him down with a torch. After I'd brought it all in and Wendy had put it away we were finally free to put our feet up and relax. We were both still moving from the boat the night before and very tired, so when Wendy's Mum phoned Wendy could hardly string a sentence together. We watched some TV and sat back feeling very content with how nice the place was until at 10pm we couldn't stay awake any longer. When we got into the incredibly comfy and humungous bed we had a feeling we were going to sleep well, which was the icing on the cake and topped the day off nicely.

Sunday 8th October

We didn't wake up until 8.40am and couldn't believe it when I looked at my fitbit and saw that we'd had a staggering 10hrs 14mins sleep! Even Lyca hadn't woken up until then, so that says it all! Excited about the day ahead I leapt out of bed like a 6yr old at Christmas while Wendy could at best be described as the living dead....Hahahaha! I took Lyca out for a wee and although it wasn't raining it was grey and overcast. After that I set about planning our nice loop walk from HQ to Kelling to see if the RNP was still around. I worked out that if we came back along the beach incorporating Gramborough Hill, East Bank for the Grey Phalarope and Walsey Hills into the route we'd be able to check all the hotspots and it'd be a fairly decent 5-6miles. Not feeling like rushing we had another relaxed start to the day and Wendy was pleased that she didn't have to make any sarnies as we'd be back at HQ for lunchtime.

By 10.30am we were ready to go out and we set off down Cross Street towards Eastgate Cottage. Interested to see if Lyca would remember it I let her go ahead on a loose lead and she did seem to make a beeline for the gate, as if she did. Looking at the place the garden was overgrown and a bit of a mess, which suggested it hadn't been occupied for a while.



Old haunt

We turned the corner and walked past the Duck Pond and the Horse along the narrow verge at the side of the road.



Duck pond

This is the main road for the entire North Norfolk Coast and is always really busy but it's a necessary evil to get to the footpath we needed. Looking down at the nearest pools I found a weird looking Gull, which I thought might be a Caspian but wasn't. While I was pondering over it Wendy found some **Ruff**, which we don't usually see there in October. We were glad to be off the main road when we got to the footpath where the RBFly had been last year and we heard **Skylark** but it'd started to rain by then, so it was up with our hoods. The bushes where we'd seen the bird had been cut back drastically, making it difficult to imagine anything wanting to take cover in them for a while! A **Stock Dove** flew over and further on a **Cormorant** but we didn't see much until we got closer to Kelling. It was still grey and drizzly when we stopped to check through the birds ahead of us and 1st up was a **Stonechat**. All of a sudden there were birds flying around everywhere and amongst the **Meadow Pipits** were more **Reed Buntings** than you could shake a stick at, which didn't produce anything vaguely resembling a Little Bunting but was a definite sign that there'd been some movement. When we got to Kelling Water Meadows we breathed a sigh of relief when we saw all the birders.....Phew!



Kelling

The RNP was hard to miss so even without bins Wendy was straight onto it spinning around like a clockwork toy at the back of the pool. With the light being so much better than the night before I started to try and better my existing video but as I'd only brought the small lens on the walk I didn't have enough reach for any photos.....Doh!

While I was doing that Wendy had a scan to see what else was about that we could add to our list but there was only a very scruffy male **Shoveler**. When she'd made it clear that she was fed up of waiting for me I packed up and we wandered down the footpath towards the beach. Normally Wendy would be feeding Lyca Blackberries on this section but this year they were completely past it and dried up, so there wasn't any. We walked up the shingle ridge, or in my case, Lyca pulled me up the shingle ridge on a mission to get to the sea for a paddle....Urrghhh!



Looking back towards Weybourne

She was so determined that I gave up trying to resist and took her down the other side and to the waters edge. She looked so pleased with herself as she paddled around in the North Sea with her tail wagging high in the air and she was definitely reluctant to get out. The rest of the walk was along the beach on shingle, which was as usual hard going.



Trudging the shingle

When we got to Gramborough Hill we noticed that there wasn't a single birder out looking, so our hearts sank. If the conditions had been favourable the hill would've been caked in birders scouring the bushes for rarities but it was eerily quiet. I don't think we saw anything, so we carried on and looking back towards Salthouse a flock of 8 waders lifted and flew over, which turned out to be the Ruff we'd seen earlier. Continuing on we could see the extent of the damage that some recent storms had done to the landscape. The entire shingle ridge had been washed away and all that remained were these odd rusty posts sticking out of the shingle.



Where's it gone?

We can only assume that the posts were put in to stabilize the shingle ridge when it was first constructed, which I think was around the time of WW2 for protection against Nazi invasion.



Interesting!

There was 2x **Wheatear** hopping around on the ground by a nearby pool over the fence but that was it until we got over to Little Eye, which is like a mini Gramborough Hill. There were loads of birds about but nothing new but we looked out to sea to find some **Dark-bellied Brent Geese** heading north. As we approached East Bank we noticed that there were only a few birders looking, so we had a horrible feeling that the Grey Phalarope had cleared off.



East Bank pool

The GPs never seem to stay for long so our hopes of seeing both Phalaropes in a day went out of the window. When we started to get closer we thought we'd better at least have a look, so we scanned the pool but there was no sign of it, so we presumed it'd gone. Wendy then spotted a small white bird amongst the **Bar-**

tailed Godwits at the side of the pool over by East Bank and we were happy to add **Grey Phalarope** to our list :).

It was too far away for any decent shots but we'd be much closer to it when we were actually up on East Bank. Typically when we got there the bird, which should've been directly below us, had vanished and we couldn't find it anywhere! We stood there in disbelief at our bad luck and scanned around hoping to re-find it somewhere adding **Lapwing** to our list. Eventually something caught my eye and the bird flew in from wherever it'd been hiding, so I quickly rattled off some shots before we carried on.

We'd noticed that East Bank had been very quiet on the Beardie front and it wasn't until we were right down the bottom end by the car park that we heard the "Ping Pinging" of a **Bearded Tit**.....Phew! They were deep down in the reeds and lying very low, so we didn't see any but hearing them was good enough if not slightly frustrating. Every other photographer under the sun seems to have a shot of a lovely male out in the open at close range apart from me, so yet again I left empty handed.....Booooooooo :(. Wandering down the bank I noticed there were a huge amount of midgies out. Errr.....in October? Obviously we hadn't put any smidge on so they were eating me alive.....Uh oh.

We quickly got off the bank and crossed over the road, walked past the pool and through the entrance to Walsey Hills. We kept our ears pricked up in the hope of hearing a YBW and Wendy had a check of the Blackthorn bushes for sloes. They'd already been picked by the look of it and the only ones left were too high to reach (for little Wendy) or in inaccessible places. A bit further in we came across a group of birders in the usual place who were all looking into the trees. They all stared at us as we walked past them and we spotted a familiar face that was more interested in Lyca. It was 'Dog staring man' and yet again he lived up to his name and gave Lyca the evils as she skirted round the back of them all cautiously. Wendy was a bit annoyed that we hadn't stopped to see what they were all looking at but I'd just shrugged it off as some birders checking the bushes. She, on the other hand, wasn't convinced and when I found out later that they'd all had a YBW in there, it didn't go down very well....Ooops! The footpath was really muddy and Lycas paws were making a 'splatting' sound as she trotted through it. There were loads of a midgies there too and we spotted a fast flying orange moth, which Wendy remembered was a **Vapourer**. By the time we came out the other end into the field we hadn't heard anything vaguely resembling a YBW, so we were quite disappointed. We walked up the hill round the back still listening out for THAT call and not hearing it.



Looking back at Walsey Hills

With it being October we'd prepared ourselves for loads of Wasps but there didn't seem to be any just far too many midgies for my liking. There were more sloes in the hedge round the back but we couldn't pick them with 2 weeks ahead of us plus a relocation to Yorkshire :(A huge flock of **Black-tailed Godwit** lifted from the field behind and flew over heading towards the saltmarshes and looking into the fields over the road we found the **Egyptian Geese**. My route got a bit confusing when we saw that there was a stubble field ahead of us at the side of the road with no obvious footpath running through it.



Roadside stubble field ahead

The footpath sign pointed in that direction, so we carried on but by then the midgie situation was getting beyond a joke. The air was like midgie soup and as well as trying not to breathe them in and choke I could feel them biting me even more. Wendy wasn't being bothered by them anywhere near as much as me, so I was acting like a decoy or midgie bait.....Brilliant! Luckily they started to thin out by the time we were heading up a turnip field, so I could finally breathe a sigh of relief without getting a lung full of blood sucking flies....Phew! Wendy

saw a moth land on a bare branch at the top of a bush but she couldn't get an angle on it to see what it was. She got me onto it but it was just another Vapourer. At the top of the turnip field we found ourselves in familiar territory and recognized the field ahead as the one we'd checked for Richard's Pipit a few years back. It was perfect for one but unlike seemingly every other birder under the sun we failed to kick one up and only added **Long-tailed Tit** to our list.....Bah! We were now on the home straight and heading down the field, which took us round the back of The Dun Cow pub. As usual the place was heaving and Wendy pointed out that everyone would be out for Sunday lunch, which sounded very enticing. Unfortunately it was just too busy for my liking and it would've been too stressful with Lyca, so it wasn't on the reality agenda. We walked back along the verge at the side of the road, up Cross Street and were finally back to HQ at 2.19pm.

By then we were absolutely knackered and starving, so Wendy went straight to the kitchen to make our lunch. It was no wonder we were feeling it because the walk had been 6.4miles and 14,000steps. So much for an easy start to our 1st day! Neither of us had escaped without injuries and Wendy's back was sore while my back, bunion AND knees were giving me grief but at least I didn't have IBS.....Yet! I had a quick look to see what we had in the garden, as it definitely had potential, but there was only Robin and **Dunno** on the feeder.



Top of the garden

We were in no hurry to go out again, so while I watched Formula 1 Wendy cracked on and made her lentilly, beany concoction with the addition of some of her home grown tomatoes to keep her going for tea over the week as well as cooking some broccoli for Lycas tea. Lyca was absolutely flat out already and we were only on day one.....Hahaha!



Zzzzzzzzz

One thing that was bugging me was that I'd forgotten to cut my toenails before going away and they'd been digging in during the walk earlier. I was very surprised when Wendy said that she had some nail clippers in her rucksack and handed them to me. They were weird fold down ones so when I'd opened them up I set about doing what should've been a simple task only to find them virtually impossible to use. There was no leverage behind them and they wouldn't cut so I told Wendy that they were rubbish and gave them back to her. When she looked at them she laughed and flipped out a metal thing that made them springy and handed them back to me. Needless to say the job was made 100% easier and was completed in no time.....Doh! It was a nice evening, so I decided to go out again to try and get some better photos of the GP. We had tea early and Wendy had a quick bath while I had my pudding and let my tea go down.

I headed out at 6.05pm and within 2 minutes I was at the car park at East Bank. Since we'd seen the Grey Phalarope earlier in the day I thought I'd pop back in the hope that it might be on a closer pool. Even if it wasn't I might get a Marsh Harrier fly over or a Bearded Tit sitting out in the open, or was that too much to ask? I walked right down to the end of East bank and hadn't seen anything of interest and weirdly the freshwater pools seemed to have less water in them, like as though the tide had gone out. Odd. It was already quite dark so I gave up and wandered back. About a third of the way back I spotted something moving in the vegetation in the edge of a small pool and sure enough it was the Grey Phalarope. It was much closer than earlier but typically it was too dark by then but I grabbed some rubbish video anyway and got this still from it.



Grey Phalarope (video grab)

Happy to have had a better view of the bird I headed back just as about 5,000 Greylag Geese flew in to roost. That was a bit of a spectacle and the noise was unreal. When I was nearly back at the car I heard **Cettis Warbler** and **Water Rail** calling. Opposite the car park were some big **Bats** flying over the trees but I had no idea what type they were though.

I was back at HQ by 7pm and it was already practically dark, so I didn't have a lot of time to play with if I wanted to go out after tea again. I went for a bath, which also served the purpose of warming me up after becoming pretty chilly from being out. Seeing as it was such a calm evening Wendy reckoned it was worth a shot to see if we could pull in some moths by switching the outside light on. We kept poking our noses round the corner to check but literally nothing came, so we switched it off again. We were all really tired and after watching as much TV as we could manage we headed off to bed at 10.35pm.

Monday 9th October

It was 8.15am when we woke up and the bed must've been too comfy for its own good because we'd had 9hrs 40mins sleep :O! I took Lyca out for a wee and the ground and grass were wet so it'd obviously rained over night. Lyca flushed a **Common Plume** moth from the grass, which landed on a flower stem, so I called Wendy out to have a look. I grabbed my phone and tried to get a shot but it was a bit tricky with one hand so I had to get Wendy to bend the stem for me so the moth was at a better angle.



Common Plume

Back inside Lyca wolfed down her breakfast and I discovered the extent of my midgie assault the day before. I was horrified when I looked in the mirror and saw that I looked as though I had a nasty case of chicken pox and had bright red spots all over my head.



Assault evidence

I couldn't believe how many I had and all from the 1st day of our holiday and knew I'd have them all over my head for the rest of the holiday too :(On the upside though, it would probably mean that everybody would give me a wide berth in fear of catching something, which suited me just fine :P. While we were preparing to go out and were getting our stuff together by the door we heard a sound we'd expected to have heard plenty of already but hadn't. We went outside to see 2x **Redwing** going over, so things were on the move and we felt a bit more optimistic about the week ahead.

It was 10.12am when we finally left and I reckoned we should go to Warham Greens. The westerly winds weren't as strong as they were forecast to be for the rest of the week so even though they were in the wrong direction, maybe the lower strength would allow something in.... :-\ Driving through Cley Wendy got me to stop at the Deli for a pain au chocolat and she also wanted to see if they had any of the Norfolk Gin she'd seen a birder from the Island post a photo of on facebook after their trip to Norfolk. It was a good idea for her sisters Christmas present if not slightly premature! Wendy went in and had her usual look around to see if there was anything new that she could buy as pressies. There wasn't so she went up the steps to the back of the shop to the alcohol section to look for the Gin. She then noticed that she was being shadowed and watched by a bloke who worked there and started to feel very paranoid and put off. She couldn't see

the Gin, so went back down to the counter where the fresh food was. The bloke followed her down and when she couldn't see any pain au chocolat either she asked the girl behind the counter if they had any. It was a simple question but the girl reacted as if Wendy had asked her for some heroin or something and snapped, "NO!" at her. Wendy wasn't impressed and having been a regular visitor to the shop over the years all of a sudden she went off it and was in no hurry to return.

To recover the situation I drove to the Blakeney Deli, where you can always guarantee a friendly face. It was high tide in Blakeney Harbour and I dropped Wendy off and went to find a space in the car park up the road. I quickly wished I hadn't driven up the narrow street when I saw that a woman in a car coming down the road had blocked the road and neither of us could go anywhere. Someone was going to have to reverse to let a car past and considering she had a driveway entrance about 20 yards back and would be going uphill not down like me it should've been her. She sat there waiting for me to go back down the road but there was now a car behind me, which made everything more complicated! I sat there pointing and she just got angrier and angrier. The bloke behind me then started to beep his horn.....Urrghhh! I thought I was going to have to get out of the car and go and have a word when she finally started edging backwards. I could see why she hadn't wanted to as she was all over the place. She backed into a gap and then beckoned me on. I looked at the space left for me and it was about the width of half a car. I made the gesture that there wasn't enough space which made her freak out even more. I thought I was going to have to get in her car and back it up for her when she finally backed up a tiny bit more which just about gave me enough room to squeeze through. Hilariously the white van behind me couldn't get through so I'd have loved to hear what he'd have had to say to her!!

Wendy finally came back clutching a brown paper bag blissfully unaware of the drama I'd just endured. The pain au chocolat went down a treat and after that I stopped outside the WC's for Wendy before we went for our walk. When she came out she was holding a moth she'd rescued from the toilet block, which I reckoned was a **Lunar Underwing**. After I'd taken a photo of it she put in the grass to hopefully get back to its usual business.



I got a report of the **Cattle Egret** still in with the cows at Stiffkey, so it's a shame there's nowhere to pull in on that road. It'd already been quite an eventful morning and we hadn't been anywhere yet but we had a feeling that we'd already had our excitement for the day and the rest was going to be non-eventful.

By the time I parked up in Stiffkey Campsite car park it was 11am and there was a **Common Darter** zooming around. We set off down the footpath, which wasn't muddy for a change but there were hardly any birds about. This wasn't a good start but we plodded on and found a **Song Thrush** up in a tree and we started to see birds flitting through the bushes ahead of us. We stopped to check them out hoping for one of them to be something good but all we had were Blue Tits, Robins and Wrens.....Urrghhhhh! Further along we caught a glimpse of a small grey looking bird and we waited with baited breath for it to reappear. When it did it was nothing more than a male **Blackcap** but at least we'd finally seen a Warbler and a migrant! When we got to the Whirligig, as usual, we slowly walked around in the hope of finding ourselves a Ring Ouzel.



Whirlygig

It never feels like much to ask for in a place with such a great track record but although there were plenty of Blackbirds moving through there wasn't anything remotely exciting in with them. We noticed a few birds flying into the Isabeline Shrike bushes, so we turned our attentions over to them. It was nice to see 2x **Yellowhammer** sitting there with some **Greenfinches** and Wendy pulled out a nice male **Bullfinch** from deep in the bush. After we'd exhausted the area and found nothing else we carried on over to The Quarry.



The Quarry

All that was in there were Dunnocks and more Blackbirds including the blackest Blackbird we'd ever seen. I took a record shot of it just to show how black it was.



Very Blackbird

It was really cold standing around, so we headed off again checking the bushes and listening in the hope of hearing YBW. When we got to The Copse we were horrified to find that there wasn't a single bird in there. Normally in October there's at least 100 Goldcrests to go through but this time there was literally nothing. We went to view the Redstart field where Red-breasted Flycatchers are often found but it too was dead.



Empty field

There was a **Brown Hare** hunkered down right at the back but that was it. A birder I recognized from seeing all over the place during previous trips meandered his way down the Garden Drove path and I couldn't help but notice how depressed he was looking. It was pointless even being out! We spoke to another bloke on our way back who was feeling equally as miserable and said that there wasn't any easterlies forecast for the next 2 weeks. Two weeks?!?! That meant that yet again things would kick off just after we'd gone and we started to think we'd picked the worst 2 weeks in the entire history of our holidays! What were we going to do for 2 weeks if things stayed as quiet as they were? Wendy reckoned she was going to stay in bed for the rest of it and hoped that the bed in Yorkshire was going to be as comfy as the one at Moonfleet. All we could do was cross our fingers that it'd pick up a bit or we were going to be in for a very boring holiday. We had another scan down on the saltmarsh and Wendy spotted a couple of Brents that looked like Pale-bellied. We'd seen similar with a Pale-bellied that looked like a Dark-bellied at Derbyhaven last year but had been told it was probably just a weird Pale-bellied, so we dismissed them. The sun had started to poke through the clouds when we got back to The Quarry, which made it feel a bit warmer at last. Even so it was far from tropical and didn't explain the crazy bloke walking towards us with bare feet, carrying a pair of wellies! Maybe he was into the new craze of 'grounding?' Well, we were in Norfolk after all :P. All of a sudden a **Vole** shot across the path ahead of us and Lyca was straight onto it. She leapt at the spot where it'd gone and buried her snout into the wet grass as she started to try and sniff it out. She stood no chance and I pulled her away while we watched the grass moving as it worked its way through. The appearance of the sun seemed to have brought loads of Vapourer moths out and they were flying round everywhere.

We were back at the car by 1.15pm and more than ready for our lunch. The walk had only been 3.69miles and 7,800 steps, which wasn't much but even Lyca was really tired. We could've fallen asleep in the car and our motivation levels were plummeting. All the trees and bushes surrounding the car park were lifeless and the prospect of going into Stiffkey woods wasn't very appealing. Wendy had a look at my head and did a rough count of my bites, which I knew was going to be high but I hadn't expected her to still be going at 21 :O! We eventually gathered

up the enthusiasm to go and check the woods and set off at 1.59pm. As we approached the woods Wendy gave me a nudge and reckoned she'd just scored 1-0 on spot the fit birder. I had to laugh because he must've been half her age :P! She tried to recover the situation by explaining that it was such a rarity that it was good to see that they do still exist, whatever their age.....Bahahaha! Lyca, who was way ahead of me on a long lead, seemed to know exactly where she was going and pulled me all the way over to the path into the woods.

It was pretty chilly in there and discouragingly quiet and the only thing we found apart from a couple of Blue Tits and a Great Tit was a pair of girl's bikini bottoms hanging from the branch of a tree. It wasn't exactly challenging on the old brain cells to guess what had gone on there. By the time we got down to the copse at the end we were feeling pretty deflated.



Copse

There wasn't a single bird in there never mind a Red-flanked Bluetail but we walked around it and gave it our best shot just for the sake of completeness. We started to head back feeling like it'd been a complete waste of time until we heard the cracking of branches above us. Looking up we found a **Grey Squirrel** leaping through the treetops and a while later another appeared and they started chasing each other. Since I knew I hardly had any wildlife photos I grabbed a really poor one of a Squirrel.



Grey Squirrel

Further along we got a glimpse of what the Ayres might look like soon :P.



Not a good look!

We then heard the high-pitched squeaks of a flock of Long-tailed Tits and while I was trying to get a shot of a Squirrel Wendy had a scan through them. All of a sudden she said, "Did you hear that?" I'd been preoccupied and hadn't heard anything but she said she'd heard a YBW. She started to doubt herself and set about trying to find it but with so many leaves still on the trees it was virtually impossible to see anything up there. She eventually got onto a small bird right at the back of a tree, which after a while showed its head for a split second and she squealed, "**Yellow-browed Warbler!**" I stopped what I was doing and tried to find it but it flew right off with the Tit flock over to the Copse and neither of us could be bothered going back there. We caught up with another Tit flock on the

way back but there was nothing in with them. We went down onto the coastal path and I think Lyca could smell the sea even though it was about a mile out!



Longing for a paddle

When we got back to the car it was 3.05pm, so we'd stretched the day out quite nicely and although it'd been a disappointing one we'd added YBW.

I stopped at Stiffkey Stores so that Wendy could go and stock up on some horrible cold-pressed Pumpkin Pie bars that she can only buy there. When she came out she'd bought a Vegan Food magazine and some vegan jelly sweets to fill the void in her life, as I'd been tormenting her for the past couple of days with fruit pastilles that she can't eat :P. We passed 2x chocolate Cockapoos on the way to Cley where I stopped at the Visitor Centre to see what DVD's they had. There was nothing new, so I left empty handed and we headed for home.

It was 3.45pm when we got back to HQ and it was lovely and warm as usual and nice to see a Migrant Hawker flying around the garden. Wendy was happy to stay in and relax with Lyca while I went back to Kelling to see if I could get some better shots of the Phalarope seeing as there was enough daylight hours left. Before I left I got Wendy to count my midgie bites and couldn't believe it when she told me there was 35! I'd though 21 was bad enough!

Just out of interest, when I got to Kelling, I timed myself this time and it took me 15 minutes to walk down the track to get to the pool! I didn't realise it was that far. The Red-necked Phalarope was at the near edge again, which was good, as I'd taken my tripod to get some better video and some photos this time. I just wish I'd put my 7dmc2 in my rucksack though as I'd have got much better photographs. The Panasonic GH4 isn't really made for decent photos.



Red-necked Phalarope

When it swam out of site a bloke walked off but as he passed me he told me that there was a Spotted Redshank right in the corner further up, so I grabbed my stuff and moved up. Just as I was getting my stuff in place I spotted that the Phalarope had swum even closer to the fence line and would have been directly in front of me had I stayed where I was.....Urgghhhh!

I got some nice shots of the **Spotted Redshank** and some video too. There was also a Common Snipe and Ruff a bit further up so I got video of those while I was at it.



Spotted Redshank

Happy enough I headed back at 5.10pm

When I got home at 5.30pm Wendy and Lyca had already had their tea and Wendy went off for a bath while I had mine. We watched some TV then some of my videos and looked at the photos Wendy had taken so far but by 10.05pm we were knackered and went off to bed.

Tuesday 10th October

Wendy was awake at 7am and could've got up for the day but instead and without even trying she went back to sleep again until 8.30am.....Ooops! She was 1st downstairs and found a Redwing in the garden and noticed a lot of small birds moving through the trees and bushes. She didn't have her glasses on, so couldn't tell what any of them were but at least it was an indication that there'd been some movement at last even though we were still having permanent westerlies. I came down and we got our bins out to check the smaller birds and added **Chiffchaff** to our list. The Redwing was still hopping about at the top of the garden, so I thought I'd better try for a shot of it while I had the opportunity. It's not often you have a Redwing so amenable for a photo and I was seriously lacking in any wildlife shots for the article. I could only shoot through the window though as I didn't want to flush it.



Redwing

Eventually it flew off so I was able to take Lyca out for a wee while Wendy got her breakfast ready and made our sarnies. It was a sunny morning and a Common Darter and Red Admiral were sunning themselves on the back of the wooden garden chairs at the top of the garden. When I came back in I had a look at the state of my head and was horrified when I saw it. The spots were redder than ever and they were itchy too, so I got Wendy to take a photo of it to show me the back. It was a mess! I had also noticed the gland behind my ear had

swollen right up to the point where it was sore. Looking at the photo it looked like my entire back of my head was swollen!



Itchy

At least I'd brought my hat and I could cover it up, so nobody could see it and think I was contagious or something :(I checked the weather forecast and apparently it was going to be horrible tomorrow and nice today, so I decided we'd try Burnham Overy as it's quite a substantial walk. We were all feeling very lazy and even Lyca was lying all cuddled up with Wendy on the settee. Wendy felt harsh moving her, so it was later than we'd expected when we were ready to go out.

We left HQ at 10.57am and it was too close to lunchtime to go straight there but we had a couple of tricks up our sleeves to kill some time. Driving through Holkham we spotted a large bird of prey over a field and were surprised to see that it was a **Red Kite**. A few years ago this wasn't something we'd have seen in Norfolk but seems to be becoming more frequent, which is good. Wendy got me to stop at the WC's and then she went over to Adnam's for a pressie hunt and came back with a bag full of poncey goodies. She then got me to drive to Burnham Deepdale so that she could go and have a look in Fat Face but she came out empty handed having not seen anything she liked. Driving back to Burnham Overy it was 19c and I parked up at the side of the road at 12.06pm. Normally there are no spaces there and I have to park in the layby over the road, which is always really busy and hard to cross, so this was great. The 1st thing on our agenda was to eat our lunch but we kept our eyes peeled for anything interesting. A **Great-spotted Woodpecker** flew over the field and landed in the trees at the side of the footpath. It'd totally vanished amongst the branches and we knew we wouldn't be seeing it again. Two F15's flew over and we noticed that there were nasty looking black clouds rolling in towards us....Urrghhhh! We had no choice but to just go for it and take the risk of getting wet, so we headed off down the path at 12.30pm.

Luckily it was nice and dry, so Lycas paws weren't caked in bright orange mud, which is always a bonus. The brambles and Ivy lining the left hand side of the path were in full sunlight and absolutely caked in Bees and Red Admirals with a

Migrant Hawker giving us a flyby. The Butterflies were sunning themselves on the path too, so we were accidentally kicking them up as we went. I tried to get a shot of one on the path but it flew and then gave me the run around, so Wendy started to get impatient.



Red Admiral

I gave up trying to get the one I'd pictured in my head in the end and couldn't believe my bad luck when a Marsh Harrier floated over the path further down ahead of us. My heart sank and I realized that if I hadn't been wasting time trying to get a shot of a ridiculously common Butterfly then we'd have been further down the path and it'd have gone straight over us....Aarghhhh! I could've kicked myself because every time I go to Norfolk I hope to get a cracking Marsh Harrier shot but they're always too far away....Doh! :(We walked down in the ditch to avoid any other dogs but it was probably the quietest we'd ever seen it since we started going there.



In the ditch

We got to the migrant bushes at the bottom only to find them totally dead, so we carried on into the dunes. Last year there'd been so many birds to see and more Whinchats than you could shake a stick at but this time without the favourable wind direction there was nothing.



The Dunes

We found a Stonechat just before we got to The Pines and then we spotted another Red Kite flying in front of the trees. We wondered if it was the same bird we'd seen flying at Holkham and then a 2nd bird appeared behind it. We checked all the usual bushes for migrants but there wasn't even so much as a squeak and we started to feel totally defeated. When we got into The Pines it was so quiet and there wasn't even the calls of Redwing coming in. We quickly found a Tit flock and realized that when there are easterly winds and we need to check such flocks they're impossible to locate but today, when it was pointless, it was easy peasy! There's got to be something in that or is it just sods law? There was nothing of interest in with the LTT's and Goldcrests but at least we'd got our eye in to checking them should anything change and it all started kicking

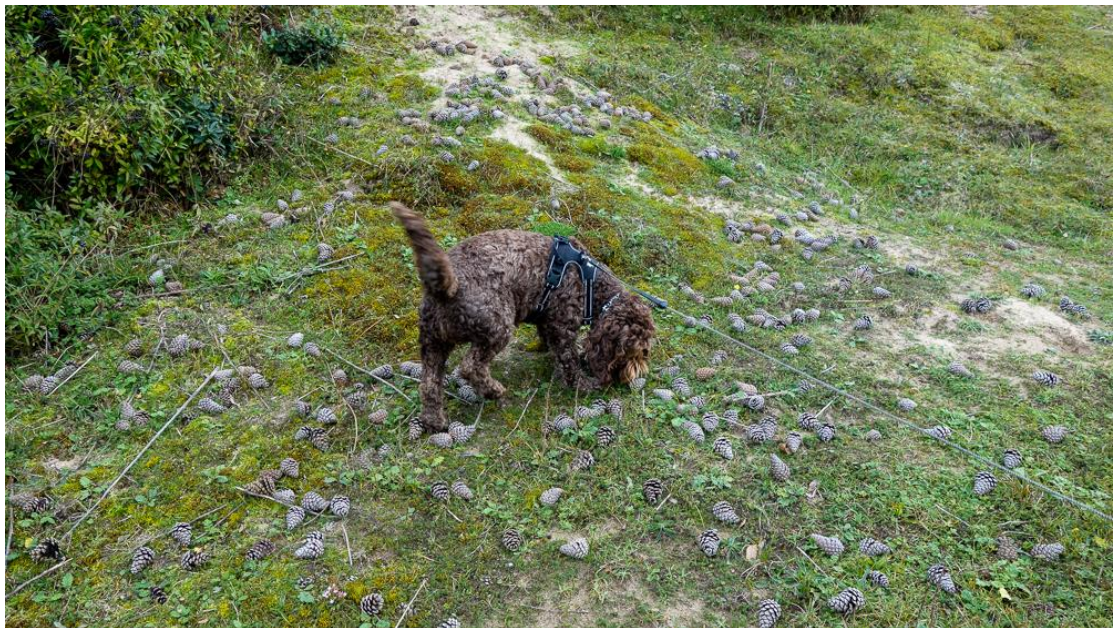
off...Hahahaha. Two Eurofighters flew over noisily and we scanned through more Tits and Crests to no avail. We turned back at the beach side of The Pines and I reckoned we should walk back on the other side of The Dunes for a change.



Change of scenery

Strangely we'd never been in that area before but it looked great and the bushes were even closer to the coast so we need to remember to check them in the future.

I had a scan over Holkham marshes and found the **Great White Egret** that was hanging around, so I called Wendy over to have a look. It was nothing more than a distant white blob but you could still tell what it was. As we passed the edge of the trees Lyca found her Utopia, the biggest pile of pine cones she'd ever seen :P.



Spoilt for choice

She didn't know which one to pick up 1st and I'm sure she'd have loved to stay there for the rest of the day chasing them. We threw a few for her on the way until we ran out of a supply when we were in The Dunes.



Looking back at Holkham Pines

Making our way down the side of them to get onto the flat we were all of sudden startled when Lyca flushed a **Short-eared Owl** from behind some grass. The poor bird must've just come in and was resting up when she'd disturbed it, so we felt very guilty. We watched it fly back out over the sea and down the coast where the 2x Red Kites started to mob it, which made us feel even worse. That was the last thing it needed after using so much energy to get there. Some other birders walking up on the ridge were also watching it and who knows where it ended up because we lost sight of it when it was too far away to see. The rest of the walk back was non-eventful and back at the migrant bushes there was still no action apart from some Blackbirds, so we didn't stick around. We headed back up the sea wall, as it was so quiet and Wendy heard the blast of a **Cetti's Warbler** and called to me to see if I'd heard it too. I was miles away and hadn't heard it because I'd spotted a Black Lab off the lead just behind the gate up ahead on the sea wall. We were going to have a look over the inlet to see what was about but this kind of changed matters for me, not that I was expecting to see anything. I had to get Lyca past it without her freaking out and it coming over to investigate and make matters worse. Wendy wasn't happy and went for a look up on the sea wall herself and added 5x **Grey Plover** to the list. The walk back to the car wasn't as bad as we remembered it and when we got back to the car at 3.05pm I checked my fitbit to see how far it actually was. It was only 4.75miles and 9000 steps, so wasn't a challenging walk by any means and I was sure it was normally way longer than that :-\ . Wendy pointed out that we were quicker today with there being so little about and that normally we're walking around more and looking at birds, so it takes us a lot longer.

I needed a drink and an ice cream, so I headed for Blakeney Spa, which was the nearest shop. At the side of the road on the opposite side we passed a Kestrel eating something and then were horrified to see a campervan heading towards it at a rate of knots. The road was too narrow for there to be enough room for it not to be squashed, so hopefully it flew off before that happened :-/. Further along and Wendy noticed that you could see the GWE from the road, which made 2x roadside Egrets during the trip. At Blakeney we went into the Spa and unfortunately there was no bite cream for my head but I grabbed an ice cream

and a Pizza for my tea then I'd then drove to Friary Hills layby to eat it (the ice cream not the frozen pizza :P). We were going to have a wander down the Beardie path afterwards but as we sat there we noticed a sign saying, "Footpath diversion" with arrows pointing to Friary Hills and a sign with, "Dogs must be kept on leads" on the gate at the entrance. That was interesting as we haven't been able to go to Friary Hills since getting Lyca because dogs aren't allowed in there as it's a permissive path. We got Lyca out and took her through the gate and read an info board that told us that the loop walk down the Beardie path and along the seawall around the saltmarsh was a no go and Friary Hills was a diversion. The bushes on the right were all taped off with signs warning people to keep out due to it being for wildlife. What wildlife at this time of year?



Friary Hills

The bushes and trees were dead but that came as no surprise to us after the walk at Burnham Overy earlier. Back at the car it was 4.08pm and we'd finished the day on 14,000 steps.

It was 4.19pm when we arrived back at HQ and still early but I was too tired to go out. If conditions were better then I'd have been tempted but there wasn't much point especially as I'd already seen the only decent birds that were around. My tea was nice and easy and Wendy couldn't resist nicking some of it again. Next time I'll make sure I get the meat feast pizza, that'll stop her...Hahaha! After we'd had baths, I'd taken an antihistamine tablet and chilled out Wendy announced that she was going to bed at 9.55pm! She usually calls me an old fart if I go to bed at times like that, so I admit to getting my own back :P. She went up and put the TV on, so I let Lyca out and called it a day too.

Wednesday 11th October

After doing so well since we'd been away Lyca was up to her usual tricks and woke us up at 7am. It's not like we hadn't had enough sleep or anything but it's nice to wake up naturally without an alarm, whether it be of the canine kind or otherwise. I got up and let her out then slumped on the settee in the living room not feeling my best. Wendy kept telling me that the atmosphere was like someone had died, which didn't help and started to write some of the article to

fill in time. When we were nearly ready to go out it turned out that Wendy was a bit hesitant as she had dodgy guts....Uh oh! This was usually my trick and has ruined many days of my holidays, so it was refreshing to see someone else suffer for a change :P. I packed everything into the car and got in ready to go, which wound her up because she still had to do her teeth....Urrghhhh! After a pretty rubbish start to the day we were also prepared for it to rain all day, so I'd planned to visit Wells Woods, as it'd be the most sheltered place to be. We finally left HQ at 9.39am, which was our earliest start yet but considering we'd been up since 7am was a bit slow off the mark. It was windy but looked as though it was sunny up ahead, so we just had to hope it'd stay that way for as long as possible.

It was 10.04am when we arrived at Wells Woods car park and it was pretty empty, which was very unusual. Normally it's always busy at Wells and there's dog walkers and birders everywhere, so it was a toss up as whether this was a good or a bad thing. There'd been an Olive-backed Pipit at The Drinking Pool and a Radde's Warbler, 2x Yellow-browed Warblers and 2x Firecrests in The Dell yesterday, so where was everyone? It was still sunny but really windy and as usual there were loads of Jays flying around as we set off through the gate. At the 1st pool there were not 1 but 12 Little Grebes but there was probably more than that even and a couple of **Coots**. I found The Drinking Pool easily but it was totally dry and anything but the bird magnet it has the potential to be.



The drinking pool

There were a handful of birders wandering around obviously looking for the OBP but they all looked dejected, so we quickly got the impression that nobody had seen it today. We hung around for ages with nothing happening until we heard a Tit/Crest flock coming our way, so we stayed to give it the once over. All of a sudden it all kicked off and there were LTT's everywhere, so everyone was frantically trying to search through them all to check for something more interesting.



Long-tailed Tit

After a frantic few minutes we had to accept that apart from a couple of **Coal Tits** and a load of Goldcrests there was nothing....Booooooooo! The most interesting bird, which is never a given at Wells even though you'd think it would be, was a **Treecreeper**. The bird flew onto a tree right at the back briefly but quickly cleared off. A large raptor flew in with stealth and landed high up in the trees which provoked a lot of alarm calling, so the Tit/Crest flock were off like a shot and the woods were quiet again. We gave up after that and walked round to The Dell (or is it?) but it was totally dead and we called it a day. At least it'd been quiet for a change though and we hadn't been on edge and dodging dogs left, right and centre.

Back at the car it was 12.17pm, so we had our lunch and a report came in of an Osprey at the Holkham Lake. I then got one that I found hard to believe and someone had reported a YBW at the East side of The Dell when we'd been there at 12.05pm. Hmmmmmm? We hadn't seen anyone looking at anything in particular, so we chose to ignore it. There'd also been an Osprey at Holkham Pines and as usual we'd have probably seen that if it'd been the day before on our Burnham Overy walk.....Grrrrr! I had no idea what to do next as, we were still preparing for rain to come in and the weather to turn nasty so I handed the decision over to Wendy for a change. At least she couldn't moan if she'd picked it...Hahahaha! After cursing me for forcing her to make a decision she eventually decided on the Cley walk, so at 12.54pm we left.

I parked up at Cley Visitor Centre at 1.21pm and I decided that due to the strong wind we should do the walk in reverse. Obviously I wasn't suggesting that we should literally walk backwards, that'd be crazy even by my standards....Hahahaha! I reckoned we should do it in reverse order so we could take the hit of the wind 1st to avoid walking all the way back with it in our face.....Sorted. We went over the road and headed down the footpath towards West Bank and I noticed 2x hirundines flying towards us. I looked up and saw that they were 2x **House Martins**, which was pretty late considering it was

October. Apart from that it was dead but Lyca needed a decent walk, so it served that purpose at least. We scanned the bushes where the Barred Warbler had been last year and the pools where we'd seen the Otters but there was nothing. There was a **Turnstone** down on the beach by the Coastguards and we'd given up hoping to see anything by then. Lyca pulled me down to the sea and paddled her way up the beach looking very pleased with herself. The North Sea was as dead as ever but further along I spotted the dark shape of a duck and stopped for a look. It was as I expected a **Common Scoter** but it was too distant for any decent shots.



Common Scoter

Next we found a **Great-crested Grebe**, which was a bit closer so I got a shot of that too. It was nice to see some activity on the sea this time, as the North Sea in Norfolk is normally even more dead than back home (or at least when we look at it).



Great-crested Grebe

Then we carried on until we were at East Bank. The GP hadn't been reported again and there was no sign of it, so it'd obviously gone and it was so windy we nearly got blown to bits....Yuk! Half way down some Common Snipe were quite close in and it was nice light so I had a pop at them too.



Common Snipe

It was only 2.50pm when we got back to the car but we'd walked 6miles and 13,051steps, which considering it was meant to be a wash out day was good going. The weather looked too dodgy to even attempt to go anywhere else, so we headed for home.

Back at HQ it was 3.05pm and we were pretty bored but it did start raining at 4pm as per the most recent forecast I'd seen. Teatime couldn't come quick

enough and after Wendy had wallowed in her bath we watched TV for a bit and chilled out. With our week in Yorkshire getting closer I started to do a bit research and was gutted to see that YWT were having a 'Migration Week' with daily events being held at Flamborough :O. Nooooooooo! This would mean that everywhere we wanted to go was going to be really busy, which wasn't what we wanted at all :(That was just typical of our luck and only we could pick the busiest week ever! By 9.45pm we were really tired and decided to go to bed at watch TV. There was nothing on apart from a program investigating the murders of 2 Eastenders actresses but it was so gruesome that Wendy decided that it wasn't the best viewing to end the day with. I had to agree, so I switched it off and we went to sleep hoping not to have nightmares :P.

Thursday 12th October

Lyca was at it again and got us at 7.15am but we couldn't complain because we needed to get out a bit earlier. I'd planned to visit Winterton, which involved the longest drive of the week despite the fact that the wind conditions weren't favourable. We were totally resigned to the fact that this Norfolk trip was a write off on the wind front but it was worth a shot anyway and is always a nice place to visit and gives Lyca a decent walk.



Raring to go

We were ready to go and leaving HQ at 9.29am but we did stop at Weybourne Stores for Wendy to get a pan au chocolat to share for some extra fuel. She also bought a jar of Marmite, as she'd been craving Marmite on toast for the past few days and couldn't stand another week without it.....Bleuurghhh!

When we arrived at Winterton it was 10.49am and quite chilly and windy. I bought my ticket from the hut and parked up only to find that it was really quiet there too. What was going on? We walked up the road and into South Dunes where it was nice and sheltered and felt much warmer.



South Dunes

It wasn't long before we found a Tit flock and stopped to have a scan through it. There were LTT's, loads of Blue tits, Goldcrests and a Chiffchaff but nothing else, so we carried on. We found a lovely bright orange **Small Copper** sunning itself on the grass, so I went over to try for a shot and was happy with the one I settled on.



Small Copper

There was another flying around but then out of the corner of our eyes we saw a couple of small Warbler sized birds flying in. We both raised our bins and looked up but I was gutted to see a House Sparrow in my view while Wendy excitedly said, "Yellow-browed Warbler!" She gave me decent enough directions to get onto it, which was nothing short of a miracle :P. To be fair the bird was literally to the right of the House Sparrow I was looking at so the directions comprised of,

“Go to the bird to the right of the House Sparrow!” The YBW called as well, which was nice and something we’d expected to hear much more of during the week. I even managed to grab a quick distant record shot of it before it flew off...Phew!



Yellow-browed Warbler

I put the news out and we carried on down the narrow path through the bracken and found nothing apart from a tent pitched right at the back. We came out back into the open and Wendy picked up the sound of a **Cricket** in the long grass. A Sparrowhawk flew over but having already walked further than we normally would we decided to turn back.



Heading back

It was lunchtime when we got back to the car at 12.26am and the car park was still quieter than we'd ever seen it. Where was everyone? We ate our sarnies and I reckoned that instead of walking the North Dunes from the car we should drive to Horsey and start from the opposite end. We'd already worked out a couple of years ago that everything is usually found up that end anyway and it cuts miles off the walk. Someone had reported a Ring Ouzel up the Nelson's Head track earlier and I assumed that was the track that led to Horsey beach, so we thought we'd give it a go. There were **Gannets** out over the sea and I got a report through, so I had a look to see if it was anything interesting. It was just the Osprey at Holkham again, so no biggy. After lunch Wendy went over to the WC's before we left and came back with a photo of a **Ruby Tiger Caterpillar** she'd found on the wall outside.



Ruby Tiger Caterpillar

We left at 12.58pm and I drove the few miles up the road to Horsey and parked in the car park at 1.10pm. The pay and display machine was up and running this time, so we didn't get a freebie again and there seemed to be a few people about. It was busier there than we'd seen it anywhere all week and at the gate was an info board about the Grey Seals. It looked like they were trying to make them a feature to bring people in to visit and as far as we could see it was working. It's usually busier at Winterton Dunes than Horsey but it was the opposite way round all of a sudden. There were loads of dog walkers down on the path, so we climbed up to the top of the dunes and stayed up there to avoid them.



No chance Lyca!

Walking along this section we came across what I assume was a World War 2 Pillbox. Lyca obviously takes after me and was instantly interested. Although the smells inside weren't authentic....



Poser

Out to sea we saw quite a few **Grey Seals** but there were no birds at all. There were the usual Common Darters on the path but we also kicked up some **Common Blue Butterflies**, which we hadn't expected to see. When we got as far as the breach wall we had to turn up the track that I'd noticed on the map, which would give us a nice loop path. It turned out that it was the Nelson Head track as it lead to The Nelson's Head Pub! Dohhh!



Nelson's Head track – photo bombed by a Common Darter

We'd never been up there before but there'd been a Red-backed Shrike there last October, which we should've gone for but didn't. It looked great for Ring Ouzel, so we kept our eyes peeled as we went. I spotted a dark bird on the back of a sheep and had to take a record shot and zoom in to ID it but it was just a Starling. Although it looked good there was nothing the whole way up to the pub where there was a couple with a dog sitting outside eating some food. Lyca barked at the dog as we walked past but she wasn't too bad and then we came out onto a road. I'd assumed there'd be a pavement but I was wrong although there was a verge we could walk on, which wasn't ideal as it was quite busy with traffic. We usually avoid pounding the pavements like the plague, so it wasn't the type of walk we were used to doing on holiday but it was unavoidable.

All of a sudden we could smell chips and noticed that a house at the side of the road had been turned into a restaurant, which made Wendy say that we should go out for tea to the Three Swallows. We'd be too busy packing tomorrow night, we hadn't been out yet and she was sick of eating the same thing every night since we'd arrived. This sounded like a nightmare to me with my head looking like I had the bubonic plague but I had to reluctantly agree because it'd be our one and only meal out, as it was unlikely we'd be going anywhere when we were in Yorkshire. We were glad when we got to the end of the road (which was a lot longer than I anticipated) and could see the track leading back to Horsey and we were back at the car at 2.30pm. It was 16.5c in the car park, so no wonder we were warm. While we'd been on the walk earlier Wendy had commented that it was a good job we hadn't gone to Cornwall this week, as it would've been a long way to go with nothing being reported. I'd agreed but when I checked Twitter I laughed because there'd just been a Red-eyed Vireo seen at Porthgwarra.....Aarrghhhh! All we needed now was everything to kick off in Cornwall just to rub salt into the wounds.

We wanted to stop at a Waitrose Wendy had spotted on the way down for some more water on the way home, so we hoped we could re-find it. We spotted some **Red-legged Partridge** in a field next to a pub, which on closer inspection was totally burnt due to a fire :O! Wendy googled it later and found out that it was the Ingham Swan, near Stalham and was a 14th century thatched freehold Inn.

Unfortunately and only a month ago, just before 2am on September 17th neighbours had noticed it was on fire. The photos showed the entire roof engulfed in flames so it must've been a total mess inside. Luckily nobody was injured but the pub had been totally out of action since, although they hoped to get it up and running again as soon as possible. The current owner had only taken it over in 2010 and had reached the finals of his heat on the TV show 'The Great British Menu' in 2016! Oh dear!

It was 4.02pm when we got back to HQ and the pub didn't start serving food until 6pm, so we had time to kill before we could go out. We got so bored in the end that Wendy suggested walking down the road to the Dun Cow and had a look at the menu online. They did a chicken burger, which sounded good to me, so we agreed to go there instead. We headed off down the road with Lyca in tow at 5.26pm and Wendy had a look through the door. There were loads of seats free, which was a good start, so she went up to have a look at the menu on the wall outside. For some reason there wasn't a chicken burger there, or any other chicken dish come to mention it. What? She went inside and asked the bar staff where the chicken burger had gone and was told that they'd changed the menu today and hadn't updated the website....Aarrghhhh! For reasons only known to them they'd removed chicken from the menu completely for winter, which made Wendy wonder why. Couldn't they get ethically sourced chicken at any time other than summer or something? If we'd gone there any other day we'd have been fine but there was literally nothing I could eat, so we turned round and walked back to HQ.



Cross Street

Having just killed enough time we jumped into the car and drove to the Three Swallows and parked up.

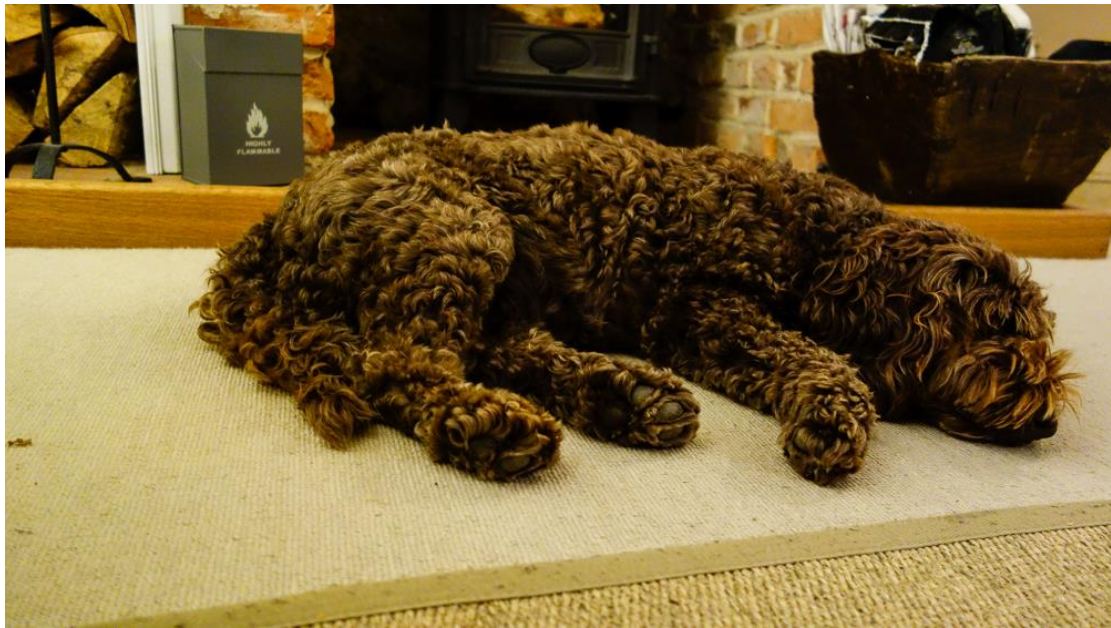
There was a lovely red sunset again and there was nobody else out the back where we'd sat last time, so we had it to ourselves. Wendy picked up a menu and found that it was a Gin menu, so she had a look even though she can't stand Gin. All of a sudden she was dying to try the Warner Edward's Rhubarb Gin with Fever Tree Ginger Ale, ice and a slice of lime.....What the...? I picked the pulled pork with BBQ sauce and a roll off the small plates menu, Wendy the soup and

we got some chips to share. Wendy trotted next door into the bar to order only to find that the soup was fish soup and they'd run out of pulled pork, so she had to think quickly. She ordered me the chicken fillets in breadcrumbs and sweet chilli sauce that I'd had last time and Camembert and apple fritters with cranberry sauce and salad for herself instead. She came back to the table making a lot of noises that suggested that she liked her drink....a lot :P. Shortly after our food came out, which we both enjoyed and considering they were both off the small plates menu there was more than enough with the addition of chips. When we'd finished the woman came over cautiously to collect our plates. It turned out to be the same woman from last year who was very wary of Lyca after having been bitten by a Labradoodle in the beer garden only a few days ago. We heard the entire story again but didn't have the heart to tell her we already knew because there was no way she'd recognize us from a year ago.



Three Swallows view

It was 6.42pm when we got back to HQ and Wendy went straight for a bath before settling down to watch some TV and reminding me to take another antihistamine. Lyca, instead of being curled up next to Wendy was zonked out on the floor.



Lazy dog

By 10pm we were tired and headed off to bed hearing **Tawny Owls** calling outside for the 1st time since we'd arrived.

Friday 13th October

We were rudely awoken by Lyca barking at the sound of the bin wagon outside at 7.44am. It was like a sauna in the house but Wendy ordered me to get dressed straight away so that she could put our washing on including our PJ's in preparation for the next week in Yorkshire. Unfortunately the dryer was absolutely rubbish and she had to hang everything up on the clothes airer to dry for later, so we couldn't even turn the heating off! This was our last full day in Norfolk before our move up to Yorkshire but we didn't have any grand plan because there was nothing happening anywhere. Worse still was that nothing was happening in Yorkshire, so we weren't even feeling excited about that! Wendy was starting to worry that the Yorkshire Cottage wasn't going to be a patch on Moonfleet, which was one of the best to date. This was praise indeed from Wendy who before leaving the IOM had been slagging it off something rotten! The only positive slant I could put on it was that it would've been a boring 2nd weeks if we'd booked both weeks in Norfolk and at least we'd be having a change of scenery and somewhere new to explore.

It was 10.35am when we left HQ but it was raining and we felt deflated. When we got to Weybourne we ground to a halt due to an articulated lorry being in the middle of the road outside a building site ahead. It was unloading materials with a crane and with the roads being so narrow there was no room for any cars to get past. There was nothing we could do so we had no choice but to be patient and wait for it to finish. One of the contractors had blocked the road with his car to warn drivers to stop and was standing there with folded arms looking very self-important. After a few minutes the woman behind us got out of her car and went over to him looking very angry. After they'd had words she got back in her car, drove down the road to turn and drove off back up the road. She must've been in a hurry! Next, the people from the house opposite wanted to go out but the contractor's car was blocking their driveway, so they had to ask him to move. What a palaver! After about 15mins the lorry drove off and everyone was on

their way again.....until we go to the road to Kelling Heath and found it was closed! I had to think on my feet but ended up going round the houses and driving through Bodham before finding myself back in Weybourne.....Grrrrrr! I turned around and went in for my 2nd attempt, which was equally as stressful but more successful and we eventually parked up at Kelling Heath at 11.18am.....Phew!

It was 17.5c, so still pleasantly warm for October and the 1st thing Wendy noticed was the abundance of sloes. If we'd been going home tomorrow she'd have picked the lot but we had another week to go in a cottage that said 'freezer space available' so she didn't bother. What did that even mean? Was there no freezer in the cottage? We set off through the gate and quickly found ourselves lost yet again.



Kelling Heath

We turned around and got back on track only to see a Red Kite, which was a 1st for us at Kelling and a patch tick :P. When we got to an area of dense gorse Wendy stopped dead in her tracks and said, "Did you hear that?" I hadn't heard anything but she reckoned it was a Dartford Warbler, although it wasn't anywhere near the usual places. I listened for a bit and then it called again, so we added **Dartford Warbler** to our list, which we weren't confident of finding at all this late in the day. It didn't show itself, so we carried on our usual route hoping to bump into someone we haven't seen for a while. There was a time when we NEVER failed to meet up with a bloke who gained himself the name The Ghost of Kelling Heath because of that but we later found out was called John. It was just too freaky how it didn't matter what day, what time or what the weather was doing we'd always find him somewhere. He was more often than not chatting to interested people and was never too busy to give you some of his time and share some of his vast knowledge of the area and Wildlife that lived there. He's passed on some brilliant bits of info to us and we used to love catching up with the news of what'd been happening while we'd been away. Even though we'd normally only be there once a year (occasionally twice) somehow he'd recognize us every time. Yet again there was no sign of him and we're starting to get worried now :(.

A **Green Woodpecker** flew up from the clear area at the side of the Railway line, which was another new bird for the trip. Just after we'd crossed over the

tracks we heard a steam train coming, so I ran back to try and get a shot of it after Wendy's faux pas a couple of years ago. Since then we've only seen the diesel engine, so I thought this was a good opportunity to save the day. I got to the gate, where there was a couple standing with a camera waiting for it to come into view and we all held our breath. When it appeared none of us could believe it but it was only facing backwards pulling the carriages behind it.....Arrghhhh!



Nooooooooo!

This wasn't the shot any of us wanted and when Wendy came round the corner and saw it she was in stitches. The couple laughed as well and said that they were having no luck either. The 1st time they tried it'd been the diesel engine, the 2nd time when it'd been the steam engine the camera was out of battery charge and now this....Hahahahaha! How hard can it be? We carried on over to the cleared area and wandered around but there were no birds and no point hanging around so we walked back.



Dead

We realized that it'd been years since we'd seen a humble Stonechat never mind a Yellowhammer or Woodlark there and we wondered what had changed to have such a bad impact on the Wildlife. John would've been able to tell us but there was still no sign of him. Maybe without him the area isn't being looked after as well?

Back at the car it was 12.32pm so we had our lunch and tried to decide what to do next. I reckoned we should try the Weybourne to Kelling Water Meadows walk for want of something better to do.

It was 1.04pm when I parked up at Weybourne and I took great delight in parking at the side of the track again and avoiding paying for the car park :P. This was a trick I'd picked up last year and if there's a space it works a treat. There was a chocolate Cockerpoo in the car park, which Wendy admired but it was off on a walk in the opposite direction thank goodness! It was really windy up on the ridge, so I headed down the other side to try and get some shelter on the beach. Lyca was pulling me to get to the sea anyway but she had a shock when she went in for a paddle and found that the beach dropped away steeply so it was deeper than she'd expected. Out to sea I could see a big boat so since I was bored stiff I took a photo and found out later that it was a car transporter that'd left up near Sunderland and was heading to the Netherlands. Yep I was so bored I'd started Boat spotting!



Boat spotting

The stony beach wasn't the easiest to walk on especially when we'd starting to flag after a week of walking anyway, so we went back up to the top path. It was much windier up there but easier to walk on, so we couldn't complain too much even though Weybourne had been the hottest place in the UK on Wednesday! We scanned the ace looking bushes below the Muckleborough Collection but there was literally no birds to be seen anywhere. We turned to head to the Water Meadows and could see that there were still loads of birders visiting to look for the RNP. On the way Wendy decided she was going to be Annie

Leibovitz and tried to get Lyca to be her model. Obviously Lyca was having none of it, so the photo looks like something a blind monkey took.



Keep still!

The Red-necked Phalarope and Spotshank were still there but scanning around I found a rather white looking Gull sitting at the back. I had a quick look and was pleased to find that my suspicions were correct and it was a **Mediterranean Gull**. There were some waders over on the far side that we wanted to check, so we wandered over to get a bit closer. We could see Dunlin and Ruff but amongst them were 2x **Curlew Sandpipers**, so at last we were seeing some decent birds! Wendy had finally found some edible Blackberries and Lyca was stuffing her face while I was eyeballing a Gull I thought could be a Yellow-legged. After dismissing it I went back to trying to get some shots of the Spotshank and I even persuaded Wendy to have a pop.



Spotted Redshank

When we'd finished taking photos I spotted another Spotshank, so there were now 2 birds as well as a 3rd Curlew Sand at the back. We couldn't pull anything else out so we decided to head back. On the way we kicked a bird up from the path, which flew down onto the beach. We searched everywhere for it but it'd vanished, so knowing our luck it was probably a 1st for Britain and our find of a lifetime! Lyca pulled me all the way back, which I didn't appreciate very much, as by then I was flagging.



Weybourne

Neither of us felt remotely energetic and walking on the shingle wasn't helping, so although we were sad to be leaving Norfolk we certainly wouldn't miss that! Near the car park we had a look over the Muckleburgh collection land in the desperate hope to pick something out. I had visions a Richards Pipit walking into view but obviously that never happened.



Soily

We were glad to be back at the car at 2.43pm and Lyca had a huge of drink before we left. As I started to pull away a Wagtail flew down and landed in a puddle at the side of the car park. It was a juvenile **Grey Wagtail** and a new bird for the trip but the more I looked at it the more I wondered if we were missing something. The bird looked as though it had wing bars and I needed at least a record shot, so I could look into it further later. Before I could act on my thoughts the bird flew off calling as it went and didn't stop, so we'd lost it.....Urrghhhhh! I checked my phone app and its call was close to a Citrine Wagtail but without any photo I'll never know. We were so tired we reckoned we needed to call it a day and try and recover before the week ahead of us, so we headed for home.

It was 20.5c driving through Cley and Wendy wanted to nip into the Anchor Shop in Blakeney before we left. I stopped in the car park while Wendy went shopping and started to doubt that I had the energy or enthusiasm to take myself off to Cley to get some photos later. On the way back through Cley we spotted a Marsh Harrier and Wendy pointed out that we'd actually seen more Red Kites than Marsh Harriers over the week.

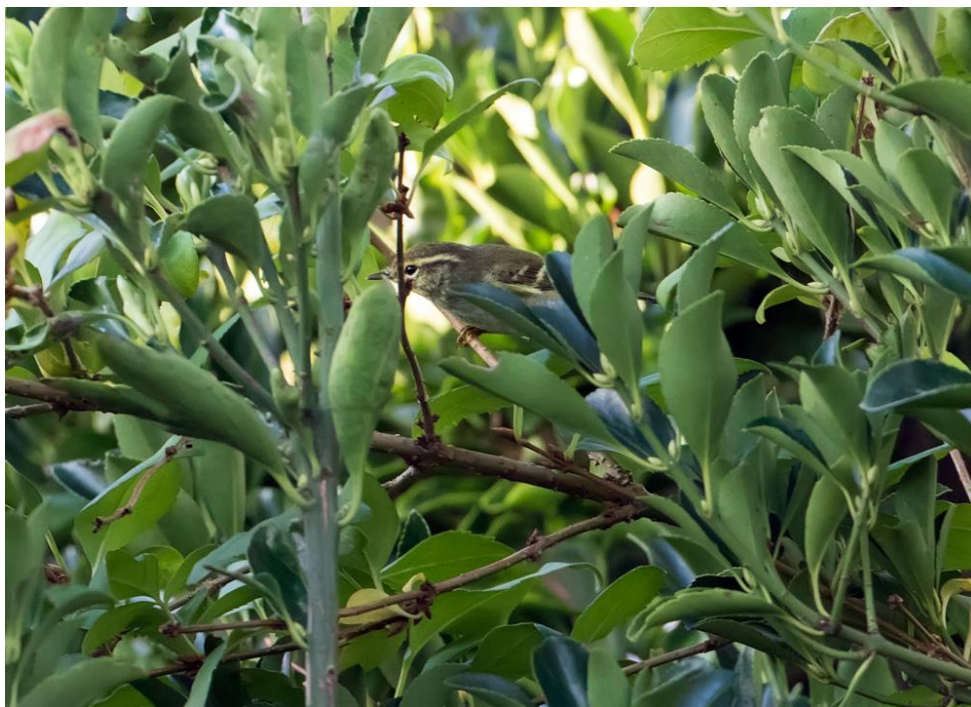
Back at HQ it was only 3.36pm but we had loads to do in preparation for tomorrow, so we started to pack up. After tea we had baths and Wendy did some cleaning and our remaining washing. We really didn't want to leave Moonfleet and Wendy was getting worried about where we were going next. She had another look at it online, which made her less worried, as it looked really nice. Then again so had Pontescob in Wales and we'd got a nasty shock when we saw it in the flesh! I wrote some suitably nice lines in the Visitor Book and it wasn't just us that were feeling the effects of our holiday. Lyca took herself upstairs to bed at about 7pm and didn't come down until much later. Thinking she'd get on the sofa with Wendy she surprised us by going into the kitchen and sleeping on the floor for the rest of the evening. Even though the TV was on we could hear her snoring from the living room! We reckoned she knew we were leaving and had a feeling she liked the cottage as much as we did.

We'd had enough by 10.30pm, so we bit the bullet and turned in for the night before our big day tomorrow. We couldn't help wondering what the next week had in store for us, if anything. Wendy's mind went into overdrive and she started worrying that we'd made a terrible mistake going to Yorkshire for our 2nd week. Should we have gone to Cornwall 1st and then Norfolk? What if everything kicked off in Norfolk next week? What if the cottage was a let down after Moonfleet? I on the other hand was excited to explore a completely new area and I'd finally decided on a plan on what to do heading up. I'd ditched off all the normal sites we'd visit heading out of Norfolk and instead we were going to do Frampton Marsh for a dog walk then hopefully have enough time to check Spurn on the way up before it got dark.

All we knew now though was that there was no going back now and that we really needed to get a decent nights sleep....Aarrghhhhhh!

Saturday 14th October

We woke up earlier than usual at 7.10am, which was handy considering we had a 10am deadline to meet. It was a nice sunny day and when I took Lyca out I thought I heard a weird YBW type call in the trees behind the garden but it wasn't textbook and although I was pretty sure I wasn't 100% certain. We should've been more excited to be going to pastures new but neither of us felt like leaving. We'd loved our stay at Moonfleet and even Lyca was being really clingy and acting out of character. We got our skates on and had breakfast early and Wendy made our sarnies so she could do the dishes and clean the house before we left. While I was packing things into a case by the front door I saw some birds in the trees and paused to have a look. I couldn't believe it when I saw a Yellow-browed Warbler just outside our HQ in the bushes! What a leaving present! So I had heard it earlier.....skillz :P. I called Wendy over and then went out with my camera to try for a shot. As usual it didn't come out into the clear or stay still for long enough so all I ended up with was a record shot where you can just about tell what it is before it cleared right off.



Yellow-browed Warbler

While we were busy Lyca was sulking on the settee in the living room and hadn't moved all morning. One of the last things Wendy did was pick up Lyca's toy and put it on top of her food box, so we didn't forget it. When Lyca realized she ran out, grabbed her toy from the top of the box and brought it back into the living room! It was like she was having a one dog protest and making the statement that she would NOT be moved. The only consolation was that it was like a sauna in HQ, so when we finally got Lyca to budge and lead her out to the car the cooler air was very welcome. It was 17c outside and having expected to be telling Wendy to hurry up 1minute before kick out time she was ready way before for once, which was handy seeing as we had a lot to fit into the day ahead. I drove away at 9.16am and we waved, "Goodbye" to Moonfleet and made a mental note to remember it when booking a cottage for future trips.

There'd been a Taiga Bean Goose reported at Burnham Overy earlier, so seeing as it was on our way that was our 1st plan. The Goose was apparently viewable from the road and sounded easy. There was also a Hawfinch hanging around

Titchwell car park the day before too, so they both sounded quick and easy so we could fit them into our tight schedule. We needed to get a walk in for Lyca somewhere along the line too, so Frampton in Lincolnshire was perfect although there'd been nothing reported from there. After that the main focus of the day was an Arctic Warbler in a car park behind a pub in Kilnsea near Spurn, so we were keen to get up there to try for that before it went dark. The bird had been there for a few weeks but knowing our luck it was just about to depart. There was also a Red-backed Shrike in Kilnsea Cemetery but that hadn't been reported today. We'd dipped on a few Arctic Warblers over the past few years and having already dipped on Rose-coloured Starling at Snettisham, Olive-backed Pipit and Radde's Warbler at Wells Woods and Ring Ouzel at Horsey Gap we had to make the effort to see this bird, which would be a lifer for us both.

Approaching Burnham Overy we could see loads of birders at the side of the road and 100's of Geese in the field next to it.



Wild Goose chase?

There was no space in the layby so I had to park across the road. I was very wary of how close the geese were and I really didn't want to be the one to flush them so we stayed where we were and scanned. We tried to work out where the bird was by looking at the angle of peoples scopes and annoyingly it seemed to be really far down the field tucked right in against the hedge line so we couldn't see it from where we were. Just as I went to move along the road parallel a woman decided to break away from the twitch and stomped her way along the roadside and then went down the track, which didn't go down well with the Geese and some of them flew. The birders standing still were not at all pleased so I decided it was best if we didn't move. At least if someone was going to flush them it wasn't going to be us and with that we decided that it was a lost cause and I drove off at 9.50am having dipped again. My next stop was Burnham Deepdale for petrol and I expected Wendy to say she was going into Fat Face for a last look but she didn't even suggest it :O.

When we arrived at Titchwell there were a few birders looking for the Hawfinch, although it hadn't been reported since yesterday. It was really sunny and warm, so we got out of the car for a scan of the trees where it'd been.



Hawfinch bushes

We could just imagine a cracking Hawfinch sitting up there but we had no such luck, which made that our 2nd dip of the day and we'd only just started. Wendy went over to the WC's before we left and came back with a couple of bad photos of moths she'd found up at the ceiling. Good old toilet mothing! Although we're not 100% certain what this one is we think it's a **Green-brindled Crescent**.



Green-brindled Crescent

There was no point hanging around, so we carried on to check Choseley for Corn Bunting but as is now the norm there was no sign of them. We checked the fields for Grey Partridge but disappointingly there were only Red Legs. We got stuck at some road works at Flitcham and didn't stop at Abbey Farm Bird Hide for the first time ever, as we rarely see Little Owl there anymore and we didn't have time. We gave Sean a wave as we drove through Roydon and by the time we'd

got to King's Lynn roundabout it was 19.5c. The temperature continued to rise to 21c but when we got to Frampton it'd dropped again to 19.5c.

The drive to Frampton felt never ending and as I parked up at 11.52am it looked suspiciously like it was going to rain. It seems to be one of those places that's always wet and windy when we go there, even in summer! Recently Frampton had been getting a lot of positive press in RSPB and birdwatching magazines and rightly so. Due to this it was no surprise to see it at its busiest ever (bar the Oriental Pratincole twitch), so I had to park at the far side of the car park. Wendy could hear a feeble sounding call and looked round to find a load of **Tree Sparrows** in a nearby bush, as we got out of the car. We'd normally see the odd 1 or 2 at the feeders by the Visitor Centre, so this was a good number. She then went over to the VC to see what was about and was instantly collared by one of the very helpful and friendly staff, who told her what she could expect to find and where. The only thing of interest to us was some Little Stints down at the bottom, so we just had to hope they were viewable from the road. We set off down the path and were disappointed to see that they hadn't planted the sunflowers next to the road this year. All was not lost though, as they'd done similar in one of the fields instead. There was a Swan all on its own out by the 360 hide, so we had a look to confirm what we thought. It was indeed a **Whooper Swan** and the 1st of our trip, as well as being another sign that winter was coming despite the balmy temperatures! It may have been warm but it was certainly windy, so viewing the tiny waders on the distant pools was impossible. We had a horrible feeling that our Little Stints would be in with them, which was typical and we gave up hope of finding them. In the muddy fields opposite the reserve there was a confiding Teal so out of photo boredom I grabbed its photo.



Teal

We got down to the bottom and had a quick scan of the last pool where the waders were a bit closer.



Distant

Wendy noticed that there were a few smaller birds amongst them, so she got me onto them. It was hard to be 100% sure, so I got a record shot just to be certain and we added 3x **Little Stint** to our list. We went up onto the sea wall but the wash was absolutely desolate, so we turned round and headed back.



Looking down over Frampton Marshes

Just for the sake of completeness we had a quick scan of the pool outside the Visitor Centre and I spotted a dark duck out of the corner of my eye just as it dived. It looked a lot like a Goldeneye, so I got Wendy onto it before it surfaced. When it did we were confused because although it looked more like a Goldeneye than anything it was actually a **Tufted Duck**.....Booooooooooooo!

Back at the car it was 12.50pm, so after Lyca had been given a drink we had our lunch. There was a bit of cucumber left, so Wendy had packed it in the lunch bag thinking that Lyca would be made up. Wendy offered it to her expecting her to snatch it from her hand and devour it with gusto but she just turned her nose up at it! What? Wondering if the pieces were too big she broke them up into

smaller bits and the fussy little madam eventually ate it. Diva! After that we had to get going and set off with the intention of not stopping until we got to Kilnsea.

Driving through Horncastle it was 21.5c, which considering it was mid October was pretty warm. There were loads of cars parked up around the perimeter of Humberside Airport and they must've been plane spotters because they all had cameras. Whatever, it takes all sorts and we were in no position to mock them seeing as we were heading to a pub car park hoping to see what was essentially a LBJ! As we drove over the Humber Bridge it was hard to believe it was a year ago that we'd been there last.



Humber Bridge

Hull Marina looked surprisingly photogenic with the sun shining down on it and looking at the temperature in my car it was 22c. All of a sudden we could smell burning and looking at the car in front of us we could see smoke pouring out of the back right wheel arch. I wondered how I could warn him but luckily enough he quickly pulled over and must have spotted it in his wing mirror.....Phew! We cheered up when we saw the East Riding of Yorkshire sign at 3.04pm and knew that were nearly at our 1st stop. Interestingly we'd seen a record number of Kestrels on the drive and I don't remember having seen as many on the way to anywhere before. It was 3.33pm when we finally drove through Easington and without a Siberian Accentor there was literally nobody about. There'd been a Red-backed Shrike and Rose-coloured Starling hanging round but typically neither had been reported today...!

Continued in part 2.