

Norfolk September 2016

Having spent all our holidays up in Scotland so far this year we were desperate to visit somewhere else. We should've been straight on the case after getting back from Scotland in July but it was August before Wendy finally checked the calendar at her work and the weeks available were few and far between, which gave us little choice. The only option we had was to take a week in the middle of September and then the earlier of the two possible good weeks in October, which were just 2 weeks apart! My 1<sup>st</sup> job for the September holiday was to see if we could get a dog cabin or we weren't going anywhere. My heart sank when I saw that there wasn't one available for the return crossing on the Saturday or Sunday morning.....Urrghhh. It was looking as though we'd have to go back to the drawing board but after some jiggery pokery I found that it was possible but we'd have to come back on the Monday morning ferry instead. The only slight issue was that neither of us had any holiday days left so we'd have to go to work 3 hours after getting off the boat!! We'd have to man up and just do it though as this was our only option if we wanted to go away in September unless we could negotiate a way around it. Luckily for Wendy she was able to arrange to work back the time and get the Monday off but I wasn't so lucky. I was allowed to work back the morning by going in early and finishing late but would have to go in after lunch. My next job was to decide where to go and we were torn between Cornwall and Norfolk. Cornwall had the potential of some great seawatching but it was a heck of a long way to go if nothing was happening and it was absolutely dead (like when we've tried in the past!). Norfolk always has the great reserves to fall back on but the clincher came when we found out that Cornwall was doing the Badger Cull. There was absolutely no way we were giving them a penny of our money or setting foot in their County, so Norfolk it was!

With our location finally sorted I then had to find a pet friendly cottage, which although we'd had enough problems already, proved the biggest hurdle. There was nothing available but after days of searching I finally found one in Salthouse called Eastgate Cottage, which was a bit out of our price range but we were desperate by then. In the photos it looked really nice and weirdly I'd never found it before when looking at cottages for any of our previous holidays. Ignoring that I sent off an email requesting to book it but as well as asking them if they'd do a 2 person discount I was also asking for the impossible. As we weren't going home until the Monday morning we needed it until Sunday, which would throw their next booking out of sync. If that wasn't possible I'd have to look for a B&B for the extra day.....what a palaver. Luckily enough the rental company came back and said it was available and we could have it for 8 days. The catch? There was no 2 person discount and the price was a whopping £748! Due to the fact that we only had 4 weeks until the trip and were asking for an odd amount of days we had no choice but to reluctantly accept. Hopefully it would live up to our expectations as it was our most expensive cottage to date and annoyingly it wasn't even in high season or school holidays

September would probably be too early for amazing migrants and too late for insects but you never know and we kept an open mind. Sometimes things like Red-breasted Flycatcher and Icterine Warbler turn up in September and for me a RBF would be amazing. I'd been wanting to see one for as long as Red-flanked Bluetail but we've only been to one twitch for an RBF and we found out later that it was likely to have been a massive string. Weirdly September doesn't seem to get Easterly winds as much as October but if they do happen there's a chance of some odd things, so I still had a little bit of hope. The worst case scenario was that we'd get a nice week walking around one of our favourite places.....unless it threw it down all week! Leading up to the holiday we both managed to not get injured, abscessed or ill which was a 1<sup>st</sup> and even more amazing was that the wind on the Friday was looking to be relatively calm. There were even forecasted Easterlies in Norfolk on the Wednesday/Thursday before we arrived.....Woooooo!

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September

After a terrible nights sleep I finally gave up and dragged myself out of bed to take Lyca out for her morning wee. She managed to give me the slip while I was in the greenhouse watering the tomatoes and when I'd finished I looked around only to see her rolling in Cat diarrhea.....Bleurrgh! \*\*\*\*\* CATS! She absolutely stunk so Wendy and I had to stop everything at 6.45am and bath her, which wasn't what either of us needed to kick start the day with. To top it all off I had an office move to do that day and if it ran late I wouldn't be able to leave early to give me time to get ready to go. Wendy had to work all day but by a stroke of good luck she was able to leave at 3pm, as there were no Dentists working from 2.30pm and the Hygienist was on holiday. As predicted the office move ran late and instead of finishing at 4pm it was actually 4.45pm when I finally got home :(. Wendy was strangely organised and had done all the packing, had her tea and a bath way before we had to leave. Worryingly there was only 1 suitcase required this time and we couldn't help but wonder what was missing. Wendy had checked the list and everything we needed was there, so we'd obviously skilfully managed to pack light this time. We had so much time spare that we were pacing around killing time...Hahahahaha! By the time we left for the ferry I was absolutely knackered, which was very worrying considering I had to drive us to the Sleaford Travelodge at stupid o'clock!

It was 7pm when we arrived at the Sea Terminal and as usual Lyca barked at the girl in the ticket hut. Undeterred by her ferocious display the girl asked me if she could say, "Hello" to narky Lyca, so I pulled the car forward so she could stroke her. Embarrassingly Lyca wasn't in the mood to share the love, so I didn't hang about for too long! Bad dog! The place was packed and I parked up in lane 7 I think! We ticked off **Herring Gull**, **Wood Pigeon**, **Herring Gull** and **Great Black-backed Gull** from the car park. Looking up at Douglas Head there were loads of **House Martins** zooming around the houses and 3x **Ravens** and a load of **Jackdaws** up on the headland. We started to board at 7.20pm and it was obvious that the boat was going to be chocka. After we'd been given the cabin key Wendy went over to the café to get her bottle of sparkling water to make a Spritzer with. There was a massive queue of people getting food, so she had to push in at the front before the next person in line had finished getting their coffee from the machine. The lounge was rammed and very noisy due a large group of school kids, so we were even more pleased than usual that we were off to our nice quiet cabin. We departed at 7.47pm and having thought it was going to be a nice smooth sailing it was a bit disappointing to find that it was slightly choppy.

We did a bit of seawatching from the cabin window hoping for a Manxie or Gannet but there was nothing out there at all as far as we could see. After we'd been going for about 20 minutes I asked Wendy to order the food, as I was starving! When the guy came back with our tray Wendy noticed that there were no condiments again, so he had to go and get us some. He returned with a mug filled with salt, pepper, various sauces and vinegar, which along with the biscuits supplied on the tea tray went into Wendy's rucksack after picking the one's which would come in useful. After I'd finished we settled down to watch some TV but we quickly grew bored, as there was nothing worth watching on. Eventually Wendy and Lyca fell asleep and the pair of them snored away, while I lay there unable to doze off. Lyca was all wrapped up in amongst Wendy's blankets and looked very cute indeed.



Tired doggy

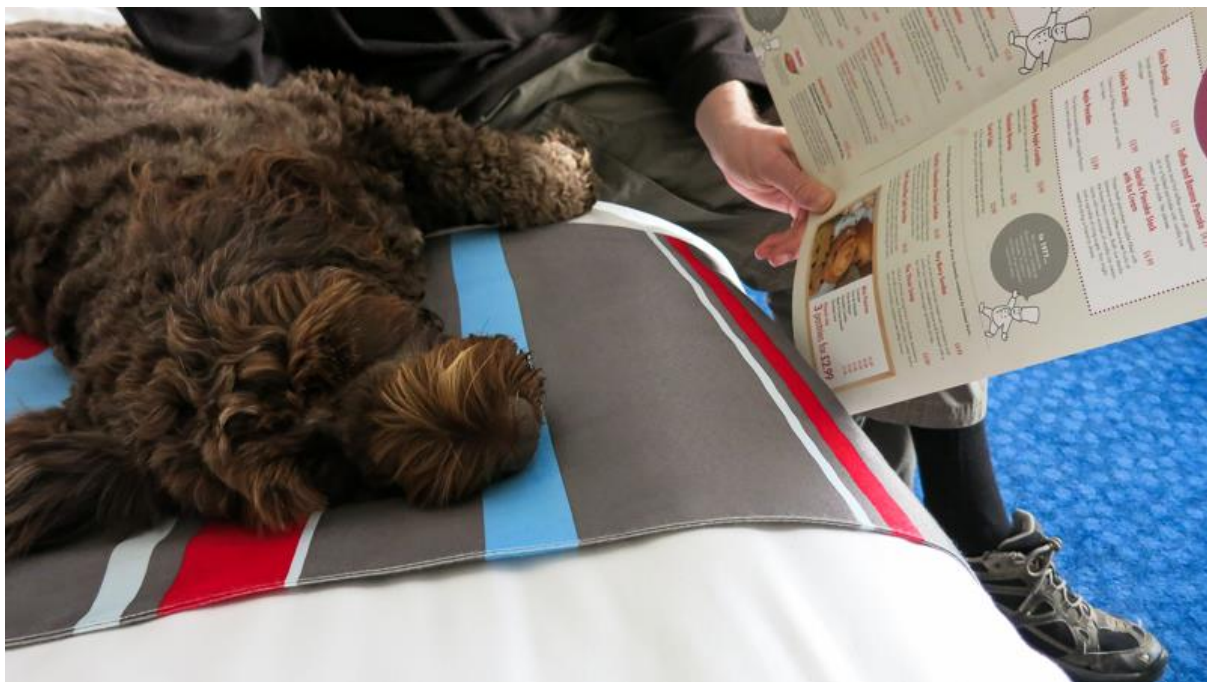
I think I must've only managed to sleep for an hour by the time we were woken by the announcement that we'd arrived at Heysham. In a daze we bundled our stuff together to get ready for our cue to go to the vehicle deck. When we got into the car we were suddenly hit by a terrible smell and Wendy quickly spotted a huge double decker livestock lorry. The smell was enough to imply how much the poor animals inside had enjoyed their journey :( The vehicle was on its way to Scarborough too, so the poor beasts had to endure the drive there yet as well! As we disembarked at 11.22pm we past another livestock lorry and pondered over the debate as to whether it's ethical or not :/. After we'd driven away from the terminal we noticed that there was a full moon, so the roads weren't pitch black.

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September

Things had been chugging away quite nicely until we hit a huge hold up on the M61, which was tedious. We found out the motorway was closed so we headed off into the unknown via a diversion... my favourite!! We just wanted to get to the Travelodge as quickly as possible so we could get some sleep, so when we ended up in Bolton we were less than impressed. Annoyingly cars were turning off all over the place so I was scratching my head where to go, as the tiny yellow diversion signs are nearly impossible to follow. Luckily we managed to jammily stay on track and got back to the motorway having lost 30 minutes. Back on the motorway I noticed

something was amiss with the car in the lane next to us. There was a load of tissues hanging out of the top of the back window and on closer inspection a huge splattering of vomit all down the side of the white door.....Yuk! We had to laugh but the poor bloke slumped in the seat was obviously suffering from carsickness and wouldn't have seen the funny side for quite some time. With stomach acid falling into the same corrosive category as battery acid we just hope the owner of the car managed to get it washed off quickly! We kept overtaking them and then we'd see them blast past us again and at one point the bloke in the back had his arm out of the window and his hand on the roof, obviously to get some fresh air. When we hit more diversion signs we thought the worst but luckily it didn't affect us after all.....Phew! We had our 1<sup>st</sup> mammal of the trip at 2am, which was just a **Rabbit** and we noticed that it was still 13.5c, which was much warmer than at home.

When we arrived at the Travelodge it was 2.45am and we were all more than ready for bed by then. After we'd got changed and done our teeth we went out like lights and slept like the dead until 8.15am. I opened the curtains and peered outside into the car park and added **Robin** and **Pied Wagtail** to our list. Lyca was full of energy and raring to go while Wendy on the other hand didn't share her enthusiasm. I took Lyca outside for a wee and when I brought her back to the room she wolfed down the breakfast Wendy had put out for her. After that she went back to bed just to rub Wendy's nose in it :P. While Wendy was getting ready I started to load the car up and headed over to the garage to get petrol. Back in the Travelodge foyer I couldn't resist using the rip off vending machine before going back to the room to check on progress. Wendy grabbed the Little Chef menu off the side and waved it under my nose to decide what she was going to get me for breakfast. It was pretty obvious that I was going to opt for a sausage bap but I suppose it's better to be safe than sorry. Lyca, who'd already had hers and was still sleeping on the bed had a quick scan of it but nothing really took her fancy.



I'll have the continental breakfast please

We were just about to make a move when a coach load of kids pulled up and the contents bailed into Little Chef, so we decided that it was probably a good idea to give it a few minutes before attempting to go there. The wind had picked up, it was spitting with rain and it felt decidedly chilly outside when we finally ventured down to the car. I started to worry that I didn't have any warm clothes with me, as I'd very optimistically packed for summer despite Wendy's warnings. I didn't even have a hat other than my sun hat, so if it was cold I'd be stuffed.....Uh Oh! Initially I'd planned to pay Frampton Marsh a visit 1<sup>st</sup> but with it being so windy and cold and there'd been nothing reported from there at all I ditched it off. Instead I reckoned we should chance our luck at finding something ourselves at Holme Dunes and after we'd waited long enough Wendy put her woolly hat on, just to rub salt into my wounds and we left the room at 9.05am. I went straight to the car with Lyca while Wendy went into Little Chef to get our food.





When does the food get here?

She was absolutely ages in there and came out looking grumpy. She'd paid for our stuff, had to ask for a bag to carry it all in and then on checking the contents when she got to the door noticed that my pain au chocolate was missing and had to go back in to ask for it. My sausage bap was as usual fine but she'd chosen beans on toast, which was pretty frugal. There were 2x slices of bread than had been shown a toaster briefly and a measly spoonful of beans but no butter on the toast! Shut the fridge! Disaster! After she'd eaten it she had to admit that it was piping hot, she was actually stuffed so had there been any more beans it would've been too much but the addition of a bit of butter would've taken it up to the next level. My pain au chocolate wasn't the icing on cake I'd expected and looked as though it'd been used as a whoopy cushion before becoming my breakfast but Wendy reassured me that it was in the microwave (not really the best method) already heated when she went back for it and they'd just forgotten to put it in the bag. We saw a **Swallow** flying over and after breakfast I realised that Lyca hadn't done a wee yet, so took her out into the rain. Luckily she performed straight away, so I quickly got her back in the car and we set off at a very reasonable 9.35am. Shortly after leaving I noticed that my rear window wiper was broken and not clearing anything from the window, which was going to come in really handy at the very start of our trip.....Not!

The roads were relatively quiet for the rest of our drive to Norfolk and we started to tick off the common birds. There were **Starlings** sitting in a row on the power lines and a **Collared Dove** flew over the road ahead of us. Just before Swineshead Bridge Wendy spotted what we assumed to be a Buzzard but when it started flying away we noticed that its wings looked more in keeping with an Osprey. We desperately needed to get a better view of it but unfortunately it was behind a line of trees and I couldn't stop the car anywhere, so we never got to see it again. Grrrrrrrrrr! There were loads of **Common Gulls**, **Rooks** and **Black-headed Gulls** in the fields as we approached Wigton. Next up was a **Kestrel** hovering over a field, **Carrion Crow**, **Common Buzzard** (which bore no resemblance to the bird we'd seen earlier) and we'd seen 4x Kestrels by the time we'd got to Sutton Bridge. For the 1<sup>st</sup> time ever the traffic had been forced to stop and the swing bridge was closed to let a boat through. We knew it'd be a slow process and some people were even abandoning their cars and wandering slowly down the road to watch the action but 15 minutes later and we were on our way again.....Yawn. At 10.35am we passed the 'Welcome to Norfolk' sign and cheered but Wendy was feeling like a zombie and it was raining, so we didn't get too excited. The next bird we saw was a **Stock Dove**, which went almost without a mention even though it'd be quite a find back at home. Next we had a **Magpie** and then our 1<sup>st</sup> rarity of the trip was spotted in Hunstanton in the form of a tramp! Good old Hunstanton, it never lets us down :P. We finally turned into the road to our 1<sup>st</sup> stop of the day seeing a **Blackbird** flying over the road and wondered why, just for once, it couldn't have been a Ring Ouzel! Driving down to the car park we had a **Cormorant** flying over and in the NOA reserve over the road there was a **Wheatear** sitting on a fence post plus **Little Egret**, **Teal**, **Wigeon** and **Mallard** on the pools. A **Common Snipe** flew over and there were oodles of Swallows and House Martins zooming around.

It was 11.28am when I parked up at Holme Dunes NNR and it was really windy but we got ourselves together for the 1<sup>st</sup> walk of the day. We decided we'd try the pines 1<sup>st</sup> as if there'd been any birds put down in the Dunes they'd almost certainly have been flushed hours ago by the early bird Birders. There was nothing more than some **Blue Tits** in the trees in the car park but we were too early in the season to expect any interesting



Warblers to have arrived yet. We noticed that there was a new info board, so we wandered over to have a look.



Ooo very fancy

While I read it I spotted a small moth on the Perspex and showed it to Wendy who instantly said that it was a **Nettletap**.



Nettletap

After that Wendy went into the Visitor Centre to have a look at the sightings board, while I stayed outside with Lyca. She came out with a photo of it to save her having to try and remember and although there was nothing mind blowing on the list I was impressed to see that they'd gone all high tech and were now computerised.



SPECIES	LOCATION	NUMBERS
wigeon	west	330
black tern	west	1
arctic tern	west	15
sooty shearwater	west	3
manx shearwater	west	8
pink-footed goose	west	5
brent goose	west	16
pintail	west	35
long-tailed skua	west	1
great skua	west	107
pomarine skua	west	1
snipe	Car Park	3

Very modern!

The old whiteboard had been binned but the volunteer told Wendy that it was still early days and they'd had a lot of teething problems. We had to wonder how the older birders were going to cope with having to input their own birds though but then again they're probably more adept than Wendy :P. We heard a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** before we saw it fly and then heard a **Wren** singing from deep in the bushes somewhere. We set off into the pines where it was totally dead and with it being September there wasn't even the usual 10 million Goldcrests to trawl through in the hope of a Firecrest or something. We had a look over the dunes at the beach and added **Gannet, Oystercatcher, Knot, Shelduck** and **Curlew**. When we reached the seawatching spot we looked out over the sea and nearly got blown off our feet.



Seawatching

The wind was so strong it was impossible to see anything through our bins, so I found a relatively sheltered place behind some dunes. This meant that our view was reduced to a postage stamp size window but at least we could now see the birds flying past. This really paid off when our 1<sup>st</sup> bird flying west turned out to be a **Black Tern**.....Nice! It'd been a while since either of us had seen one of these birds and this one was a totally black specimen, which we'd never seen. Next we had a Skua, which was miles and the view was anything but good, so I grabbed a record shot and we agreed on **Arctic Skua**.



Arctic Skua - record shot

There'd been 100's of Black Terns, Great and Arctic Skuas reported to be streaming past the day before but we just had to settle for the singletons. There were some **Dunlin** and **Bar-tailed Godwits** down at the shoreline and then I spotted a Tern flying out to sea. I reckoned it could be a Common with Wendy plumping for Sarnie and when I looked back at my record shot it she was right and it was just a **Sandwich Tern**. Apart from that there wasn't much happening, so we headed back hearing a **Goldcrest** in the pines and added **Great Tit** and **Coal Tit** back in the trees by the car park.

By then it was lunchtime and we put Lyca in the car so we could go over to the café to see if we could get some food this time. Last time they'd run out of everything by 1pm, so we had nothing, so we crossed our fingers for better luck this time. There were no menus out on the tables, so Wendy had to ask the girl behind the counter what they had. She said that all they did was baked potatoes, soup and sandwiches, which neither of us fancied. Uh oh! Wendy asked if she could do us some toast, which she'd got when we were there for the Pallas' Warbler a few years ago. This didn't strike us as being an unreasonable request but the girl said, "We don't usually do just toast but I'll have to go ask." She went over to another older woman and she came back with an abrupt, "No!" Great! Now what? I certainly didn't want a plain baked spud, didn't want to risk eating cheese and don't even like soup, so I said I'd have cake. Wendy wasn't happy and said I couldn't just have cake, so I added a packet of crisps to my list :). Wendy shook her head in disgust and then asked if she could have the Leek and Potato Soup to take out. Luckily she could so it was put in a take out coffee cup and she declined when asked if she wanted bread with it. She also got a cappuccino but nearly fell over backwards when she was charged £10.10 for a cup of soup, a cappuccino, a packet of crisps and a gluten free Bakewell tart! Talk about captive market! Feeling a bit annoyed we went back to the car to have our lunch and watched the numerous **Speckled Woods** and **Common Darters** flying around the brambles.

It was 1.14pm when we were ready for round 2 and our walk in the Dunes and Lyca was raring to go. She loves sniffing at Holme Dunes and had her nose to the ground and her tail held high wagging frantically. The 1<sup>st</sup> bird we saw was a **Meadow Pipit** and then Wendy picked up on a croaking noise, which sounded like a Toad. We knew that there was a Natterjack reintroduction scheme going on there and hoped that it was one of them we were hearing. By the time we got round to checking what they sound like we'd completely forgotten what we'd heard, so we'll never know. Typical! Passing an area of willows I heard what sounded like a YBW but I wasn't entirely sure and the only bird we saw in them was a **Whitethroat** right at the back. We found what we reckoned was one of the Natterjack Pools, which wasn't a million miles away from where we'd heard the Toad croaking.





Natterjack Pool

There were BIG signs up on the reserve saying that dogs must be kept on leads at all times but despite that we were seeing dogs running around without leads on. Why can't people just do what they're told sometimes? It was still blowing a gale and despite our efforts there were just no birds about. We just hoped that this wasn't how the rest of our week was going to pan out. We found a great area surrounded by trees, which was nice and sheltered but there were still no birds, so after that we turned round and headed back.



Looked good but wasn't

We left at 2.18pm and I pulled up at a bin, so we could get rid of our rubbish as well as for me to set the sat nav up to find the cottage. I was forced to stop when Wendy spotted the Farm Shop in Thornham because she was on the lookout for some stupid green spikey cauliflower. She came out looking confused but clutching some local apple juice and a bag of broad beans. There was a couple in there who'd been sampling the various different types of apple juice and Wendy had been behind them at the till. They'd bought dozens and their bill was £98, Wendy thought they must be a holiday cottage company or similar, I just thought they were standard North Norfolk poshos flashing their cash :). Further down the road she got me to stop again when she spotted Thornham Deli, which is where she wanted to go in the 1<sup>st</sup> place. When she came back she'd bought a poncey macadamia and white chocolate cookie for us to share but had yet again failed to get her cauliflower, so the hunt was still on.....Great :(! As we drove through Titchwell Wendy pointed upwards and made some kind of noise to alert me (we were both very tired by then) and I looked up to see a **Peregrine** blast across the road with a bird in its talons.....Cool! Our next stop was at 3.13pm in nearby Burnham Deepdale to fill my car up

with petrol. Wendy, who'd turned into a shopaholic, couldn't resist visiting Fat Face but came out empty handed but wishing she'd bought some jeans. I suspected it wouldn't be the last time she went there. Before going away I'd contacted the cottage company about where to get the key from, as they'd mentioned nothing about a key safe outside. If I'd known that I'd have to go into the relatively big town of Holt and call in at the office to collect them I would never have booked it! The office shut at 4pm so I'd told them that we probably wouldn't get there in time, so they'd arranged for me to call at a house in nearby Letheringsett after hours instead. What a palaver! It was still quite early but we were both so tired we couldn't face going anywhere else and just wanted to get to our HQ, so I phoned the company to confirm that the key would be left at the house at 4pm. Sorted! All I had to do now was drive there and pick it up but if I left straight away my sat nav was saying we'd get there at 3.50, so we had some time to waste somewhere first. I looked at Birdguides and the Arctic and Greenish Warblers were still at the unreachable (apart from the locals in the know) East Hills but there was now a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Salthouse :O! We were staying at Salthouse and it looked as though it was literally a stones throw away from the cottage.....Ooooooooooo :). Could we finally catch up with a RBF after all these years?

We left at 3.31pm and driving through Holkham we added **Greylag Goose** and **Lesser Black-backed Gull**. Three big birds flew over the road and I pointed them out to Wendy, as I reckoned they could be Common Cranes. Wendy laughed and said they were Herons but I wasn't convinced, so I stopped the car for a better look. My heart sank when I saw what was 3x **Grey Herons** and rubbed my eyes to kick them back into the real world. I was obviously past the point of anything sane and had started to hallucinate, so I needed to chill out! At the roadside pool at Stiffkey we saw that for the 1<sup>st</sup> time ever there was no pool, just a dry field with a couple of white Geese sitting there and a **Marsh Harrier** flying over it. We stopped at Blakeney Spa to get some milk and Wendy grabbed a Pizza for me to have for my tea. The Quay was the busiest we'd ever seen it and was bustling with people and dogs. I managed to find the house in Letheringsett easily and outside the door was a welcome pack and the key to our cottage, so I grabbed them and took it back to the car. Wendy opened the bag and inside was the local newspaper, a bottle of Apple juice, a jar of strawberry jam, 10 Norfolk Blend Teabags and 3x chocolate animals. This wasn't as good as what we'd been used to recently i.e. cake but it would have to do.

We seemed to be heading into the rain as we got nearer to Salthouse but luckily it was just dark clouds. I drove down Cross Street from the top entrance and we kept our eyes peeled for the sign for Eastgate Cottage. Eventually we found it right down at the bottom and instantly noticed that it was the same level as the marshes and hoped that there were no freakishly high tides due! Wendy had to get out of the car to open the gate, so I could drive in and noticed a woman peering out of the kitchen window in the house opposite. In the instructions for the cottage it'd mentioned that the gate must be kept shut as the neighbours have priority over access, so we guessed she must've had problems in the past, so we shrugged off her frosty glare. It was a nightmare trying to get the car into the drive, it was very, very, tight as well as being an awkward angle but I managed it with a bit of guidance. We grabbed some stuff and Lyca from the car and walked across the amazing garden to open the door for our 1<sup>st</sup> look inside. As I opened the door the 1<sup>st</sup> thing Wendy noticed was the damp smell but the kitchen was actually very nice.



Kitchen

The hallway was not so good with cobwebs, spiders and flaky walls and from then on she wasn't happy at all (understatement!!)....Uh Oh! The views of the marshes were absolutely amazing and reminded us of why we'd booked it but the windows were filthy on the inside, which kind of took the shine out of it. As she walked around checking out the other rooms she grew even more unhappy and said that it looked like it hadn't been decorated since the photo's had gone up on the website and that upstairs stank like a stable. It looked very much like the cottage had been flooded and was still suffering from the consequences, which was pretty bad.



Tide line on the wall!

The bedding in the downstairs bedroom felt damp but by the grim picture she was painting anyone would've thought she'd just let herself into a cardboard box in a shop doorway! By then I'd had enough and left her to calm down and get over it while I went out to see if I could find the RBF.

I wasn't exactly sure where it was but walked from the cottage in the direction I thought it might be. About 100 yards on I found a pile of cars abandoned at the side of the road so knew I was close! There were people walking up and down the roadside like Ants going back to a nest so I joined in the flow and followed. After a short 10minute walk from the house we all joined a single birder standing looking at a bush about 20 meters away. Someone asked him if it'd shown recently and we were told, "Yes really well about 5 minutes ago." Urghhh so that explained the mass exodus. Fortunately after only about 15 minutes it flitted out from the back of the bush and landed on a low down branch! I grabbed a record shot in the overcast and dark conditions where you can just about tell what it is.





Red-breasted Flycatcher

Even though the bird was a classic 'little brown job' I was absolutely over the moon with finally seeing one and I stuck around as I loved watching it flit about then disappear then do it all over again. The light had well and truly gone by then, so I couldn't get any better shots and I stupidly hadn't brought my tripod so couldn't get any video either.....Doh! Three youngish lads of around uni age appeared on the scene and walked right up to the bush, which annoyed me a lot as the bird had been performing nicely with us standing back. Sure enough it never reappeared again and was re-found about 15 minutes later at a bush 50m down the track. Hmmmmm I wonder why it left the 1st bush? Luckily the uni lads, who I labelled the UEA lads, gave up and disappeared but annoyingly 2 super plums replaced them. They walked up to the new bush and literally stuck their heads inside it to try and see the bird even though there was a few of us standing at a good distance back. I'll never understand the lack of shame these people have. The bad behaviour of the last few groups of people took the shine off my happiness of seeing a RBF for the 1<sup>st</sup> time but deep down I was still chuffed to bits! With the bird obviously not showing anymore I gave up at 5.30pm and wandered back. On the walk back a **Hobby** blasted over in the gloom so I daftly tried for a few shots. I thought it would have been a bit late in the year for a Hobby but obviously not.



Hobby

When I got back to the cottage it was about 5.40pm and I made myself a cup of tea to try and relax before Tesco came. I quite liked the place and absolutely loved the location so forgave all the little niggles but Wendy was still venting her spleen about anything and everything and was also freezing. I worked out how to put the heating on and then had to suss out how to use the oven so Wendy could cook my pizza. It was then that she realised that she didn't have anything for herself apart from the bag of broad beans she'd bought earlier.....Doh! She quickly shelled, cooked and then popped the beans out of their skins and I had to donate a bit of my pizza to make it a bit more interesting. She managed to persuade me to try a couple of broad beans and I was really surprised to find that they were actually quite nice and I even had some more. After tea Wendy went off for a bath and Lyca seemed to have made herself at home and continued to sleep. Tesco came at 7.45pm and Lyca was blissfully unaware of it, which made a nice change. While I was waiting I had to hang around upstairs by the window so I could get a phone signal just in case Tesco couldn't find us and needed to ring me. I was amazed I never saw a ghost while I was up there really :P!

After the shopping had been put away we found that most of the radiators were only lukewarm and some still stone cold, so I set about trying to bleed them in the hope that I could fix them. I got the majority bled ok but the one in the bedroom just wouldn't heat up. That explained why the bed was so damp. One good thing about the cottage was that it had a landline phone, so Wendy was able to get her Mum to phone her back. This was handy seeing as yet again there was no mobile reception from anywhere remotely sensible :/. It'd been a long day, which had ended quite stressfully and by 10.30pm Wendy still wasn't happy, so I sent the cottage company an email about the radiators and cleanliness. I don't like complaining as all I could think was, after my email, the cleaners would come in and deposit something unsavoury in one of the drawers or even worse.....the bed! Although Lyca had appeared quite settled, sleeping in the living room I discovered that somehow she'd managed to sneak upstairs and had done a wee on the rug :O! This wasn't usual for her at all and we've never had an issue with that sort of thing before. She always lets us know when she wants to go out, so maybe she was sensing Wendy's bad vibes and didn't feel as settled as she appeared? Strangely she never ventured upstairs again during our entire 8 days there but it was probably due to the narrow spiral staircase.....or maybe she'd seen a ghost? :O! I cleaned it up then brought the rug down and hung it over the old wooden chair in the porch to dry out. It was 11.20pm when we finally resigned ourselves to the fact that we were going to have to go to bed. It was decidedly chilly in the bedroom with the radiator not working, so the bed still felt damp and cold. Wendy lay back in an attempt to relax and warm up only to see a load of cobwebs floating around the light shade and ceiling.....Aarrghhhh! Lyca had already started to snore and we turned the lights off in the hope of a better day in the morning, as I had a great walk planned.

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> September

We woke up at 7.22am and we both had to agree that there were no issues with the comfort of the bed. We'd slept soundly and the cottage had heated up too with the majority of the radiators working and having been on since 6.30am. I got up to take Lyca out for a wee and it was overcast but the wind had dropped although it was still northerly and feeling a bit chilly. Lyca ignored her breakfast and instead ran straight back to the bedroom, curled up on the bed and went back to sleep.....Lazy dog! I had a look at the weather forecast as I ate breakfast and was very pleased to see that there was no rain forecast for the rest of the week :). I then saw that the northerly wind was going to turn easterly on Wednesday.....:O! If that happened then it might just turn around what we had originally forecast to be a very non-eventful week! Even if the rest of the week was non-eventful there was still a potential lifer hanging around just down the road for Wendy. I'd planned a nice 3mile walk from the cottage to the RBF then carry on to Kelling and loop back to HQ via the beach and Gramborough Hill to start the day with. We'd done bits of this walk before but not the whole thing and I really like doing loop walks so I was really looking forward to it. Wendy was pleased because it meant that we'd be back just in time for lunch so she didn't have to make any sarnies for a change. She also noticed that there wasn't any cling film to wrap them in anyway, nor was there any detergent to wash our clothes with, so she started to make a shopping list. I decided to wait to see if it was reported before rushing out, so we could have a relaxing start to our 1<sup>st</sup> day. We kept a close eye on what was going on in the garden and Wendy noticed that all of the many Blackbirds had bald heads. Very odd! There were Warblers flitting about in the trees too and then all of a sudden Wendy shrieked, "**Hummingbird Hawk-Moth!**" I rushed over to the flowers it had been feeding on outside the kitchen window but it'd flown off to the bushes against the side wall, so I didn't get to see it. I went out to see if I could find it but there was no sign, although a Blackbird had jumped out of the bush where it'd gone and possible eaten it for breakfast. At 8.33am I got a report of the RBF, so we hurried ourselves up and got ready to go out. As it was so chilly we put base layers on and Wendy had her woolly hat, which seemed like overkill in September but you're better safe than sorry.

When we left HQ it was 9am and we could see a small group of Birders down the track and it was raining, which hadn't been forecast but it didn't look as though it was going to come to much. There was a **Moorhen** on the duck pond and a **Little Grebe** popped up so I grabbed a quick shot as it was so close. It was a shame the light was terrible though.



Little Grebe

At the track a flock of **Goldfinches** flew over as we joined the others by the same bush I'd been to last night. It was good to see that they were all standing a decent distance away again.



Stare off

We all stood for ages staring at the unremarkable bush waiting to see a movement somewhere within its branches. Finally we heard a bloke saying that he could see it, so there was a lot of mumblings as everyone tried to follow his directions for where it was. I turned round to see if Wendy could see it and she had her bins raised and fixed in the general vicinity, so I presumed she had it. This was confirmed when she looked over grinning at having finally seen a RBF and getting a lifer on the 1<sup>st</sup> morning.





Red-breasted Flycatcher

It then became quite active and popped out on dead stick at the bottom where it stayed for ages, so I set about trying (and failing) to better my previous shots. Weirdly the light was just as bad as it'd been the night before and was anything but favourable.



Red-breasted Flycatcher

Wendy spotted a baby **Rat** running like a bat out of hell across the track and the birder next to her laughed and got a pic and Lyca of course wanted to go after it. I then saw another climbing in the RBF bush then was totally surprised to see a **Stoat** running across the track with one in its mouth! It disappeared into the hedge then ran back again with nothing, possibly going back to get the rest as it'd obviously flushed a family and wanted to clean up. After that bit of action the RBF flew across the track into a nearer bramble bush and sat perched on a branch out in the open giving everyone much better views and photo opportunities. Apart from me that is, as my view was blocked by a branch and I didn't want to move in case I scared it off! Arrgghhhh! Eventually it dived into the bush and vanished just before a group of walkers who'd been heading our way stopped to ask if it was ok for them to go past. How thoughtful of them :). Everyone said it was fine, as it was still in the

bramble bush and we cleverly saw it as our cue to leave so we tagged on behind them, so as not to have to disturb it again later.

As we walked towards Kelling we had a Wheatear on the right and a **Stonechat** in the field on the left plus 2x juvenile **Reed Buntings**. Wendy found a dead Willow Warbler on the path and while she looked at it she acquired yet another eccentric friend when a woman stopped to ask what she was looking at. The woman bent over and picked up the wet remains of the tiny bird for a closer look, she was quite mad....Hahaha. There were **Jackdaws** feeding in the field and some **Egyptian Geese** but as usual nothing on the pool at the water meadows.



Water Meadows

Over at the beach all was quiet apart from some Brents flying over the sea and a **Grey Seal**. A **Pied Wagtail** flew in noisily and we could see some small birds on the ridge, which would've been nice if they'd been Lapland Buntings but unfortunately they were just **Linnets**. Heading towards Gramborough Hill we found a **Brown Hare** but it was very quiet otherwise.



Gramborough Hill

We stopped to view the bushes at the foot of the hill and were finally rewarded with a nice **Common Redstart**, which is always a great bird to see as it's definitely something that'd just come in. I tried to get a shot but it was stupidly flighty and this is all I got.





Redstart

Carrying on we found another and although there'd been a Tree Pipit reported there was no sign of it today. Some **Dunlin** flew over and a **Red Admiral** was out making the most of the sun, as it was getting really warm by then.

We got to trees we could see from the cottage, which looked like a mini Gramborough Hill and I reckoned would be worth a check but it was dead. We heard a bird flying over which by stretching my imagination sounded like a House Sparrow and in my fantasy became a Richard's Pipit....Hahahaha. There had to be some somewhere but we had to make do with some **Meadow Pipits** in a field and the sound of a **Whimbrel** calling from over the ridge on the beach somewhere. We could even see the cottage from there, which was quite smart.



Our cottage is dead centre under the steeple of the church

We then just had a path to go on which took us straight back across the Salhouse marsh to the cottage, along this section Wendy spotted a bluey purple flower she didn't recognise so she grabbed a photo so we could ask Andy the flower guru!





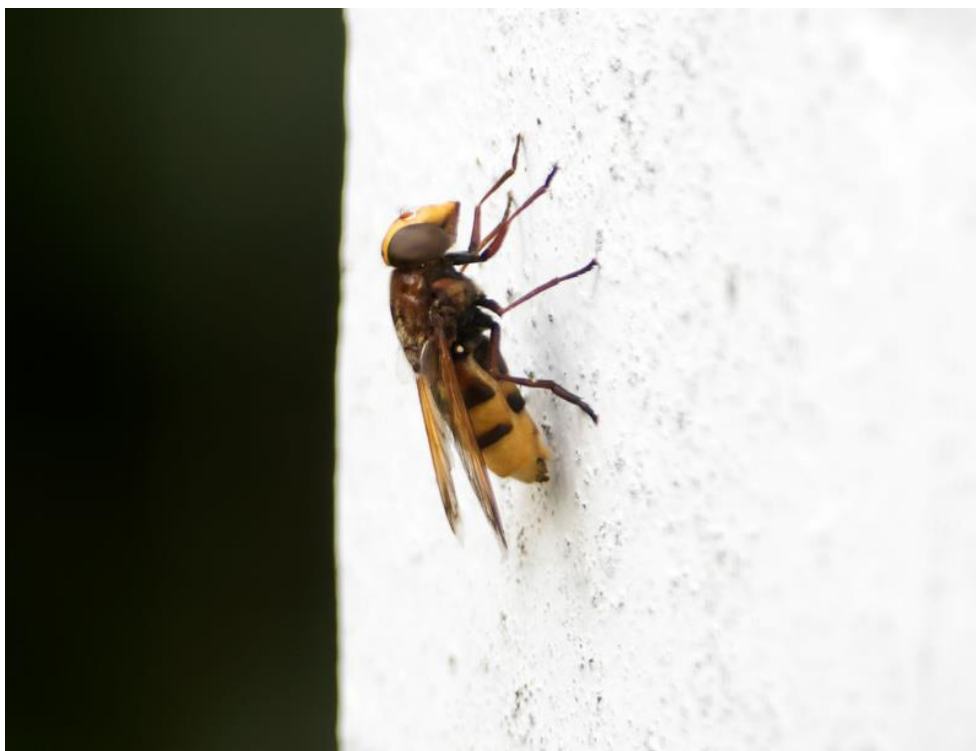
Sea Aster

Even though we hadn't seen much else other than the RBF I'd loved the walk and back at HQ it was 12.15pm, so it'd been just long enough to get us back for lunchtime. As we went in Wendy instantly picked up on the damp smell but I think I must've already become immune to it, as I couldn't smell anything. It was a relief to get out of our base layers and winter woollies and after that Wendy set about making us a toastie each to eat at the nice dinner table.



Dinner table

We were going to be living off sarnies for the rest of the week so this was an absolute luxury! There was a **Dunnock** in the garden and a **Large White** fluttered past the window to feed on the Ivy. I checked my emails but hadn't had any reply from the cottage company yet. After lunch something caught my eye in the garden and I went to investigate. I called Wendy to come for a look but she didn't want to get too close because I reckoned it was a Hornet. It was sunning itself on the wall outside next to the porch, so I took a quick shot of it through the window (to be safe) so we could ID it later.



Funky!

Having enjoyed our relaxing start we headed out again at 1.52pm and found a nice **Comma** feeding on one of the bushes in the garden. Just down the road at Cley I stopped the car at Walsey Hills to check out 2 big white birds down on the marsh and was laughed at by Wendy because they were **Mute Swans**.....Doh! Wendy had a look at the Blackthorn bushes to see if there were any sloes on them to pick for her Mum but she was disappointed to see that there was none at all, much the same as the failed crop back at home. While we were parked up we added **Coot**, which was on the pool by the car park and heard a flock of **Long-tailed Tits** making their way through the hedge. When we got to Stiffkey we weren't entirely surprised to hit a traffic jam. The road is so narrow and it just couldn't take the sheer amount of extra traffic that seemed to be around. It was as though every man and his dog had hit the North Norfolk coast at the same time as us.

I parked up at the top of Garden Drove at 2.36pm and I recognised the familiar face of one of the friendly local birders who goes by the online name of Fir Tree John who was heading back to his car. He was the bloke with the dog whistle who'd alerted us to a Red-flanked Bluetail a couple of years ago. He said, "Hi" to us and then told us that it was really quiet down the track but he'd seen a Hummingbird Hawk-moth. This wasn't what we wanted to hear but we had to walk Lyca anyway, so we stuck to the plan. The Moth sighting was pretty good though, although we've yet to find a twitchable Hummingbird Hawk-moth! We'll never forget the incident at Bradda Glen back at home when I'd got as far as saying, "Hummingbird Haw" before a Robin popped out of the bush and within a split second the moth was history. We stood there with our mouths agape in disbelief at what we'd just witnessed, having wanted to see one all summer. The best we could come up with was to find a **Small White** flitting along the hedge line, which wasn't remotely as interesting, so we started to make our way down the track, which was nice and dry for a change. It's usually hideously muddy due to being churned up by the constant flow of birders using it, so we always cross our fingers that it doesn't rain before we go there. We scanned the trees with our ears pricked up for any unusual calls but all of a sudden Wendy stopped dead and started asking Lyca what was up. She'd noticed her licking her lips frantically and when she bent down for a better look she saw that rather worryingly she was foaming at the mouth and it looked like she had blood on her snout.....Errrrrrrr! Her initial concern was that she'd been stung by a Bee again and this time on the mouth. She'd been stung on the paw a couple of weeks ago but on the mouth would be a different kettle of fish entirely and could be serious. On closer inspection there was no sting but her lip looked swollen with a few small white spots too but there was no explanation for the blood. As usual Wendy went into mass panic mode like if Lyca had licked nuclear waste or something whereas I was googling for the nearest vets just in case. I then thought to wipe the foam from Lyca's mouth to see if more would appear. It didn't which made us a bit more optimistic. Luckily after a couple of minutes she started sniffing around again, so was back to her old self. Phewwww! The only theory we could come up with was that she'd been stung by nettles when she was snuffling in the hedge to pick her own Blackberries, which also explained the appearance of blood, which must've been Blackberry juice.....Urrghhhhh! Panic over we carried on and Lyca looked as though nothing had ever happened.....Dogs!

When we got down to the Copse at the bottom it was totally dead and instead of doing our usual east route to the whirligig I decided to go west for a change. We hadn't gone far at all when we came across an area, which



looked like The Quarry but had a pool in the middle of it. This, it turned out is known as the Bomb Hole and it looked really good for finding something a bit special.



The Bomb Hole

I was absolutely freezing standing there in just a T-shirt and Wendy kindly reminded me that she'd advised me to wear a coat but I'd ignored her.....Doh! We gave it a few minutes and after finding absolutely nothing but Reed Buntings we carried on seeing a Marsh Harrier over the marshes and flushing a flock of **Lapwing** from the adjacent field. We could hear another Whimbrel and a noisy **Redshank** was kicking off about something, which was probably nothing to worry about as usual. We watched 100's of **Curlews** flying around and admired the view of Wells and East Hills.



Wells and East Hills

We turned around to head back after we'd gone that far because it made no sense to go any further as we would soon be on the Wells sea wall. A small group of 3x **Golden Plover** flew over and Wendy stopped when she heard tacking coming from some bushes. Needless to say that as soon as we stopped the tacking stopped and whatever it was it was keeping a very low profile and wasn't up for putting in an appearance at any time soon.....Bah! As we stood waiting for a movement in the bush we heard a **Skylark** flying over but our bird had gone totally quiet, so we gave up and carried on back. Flying over was a Common Buzzard so I grabbed a flight shot as it wasn't that high up but it would have been nicer if there was blue sky.





Buzzard

I could see a birder heading back across the marsh from East Hills and as much as the locals say its lethal going to East Hills, I don't see how it is. Surely if you pay attention to the tides and track your route out over the marsh you can also track it back? They make it out like it's as dangerous as walking in the Cairngorms in blizzard conditions or something. Saying that though, knowing our luck we'd find some way of messing up spectacularly and would have all the locals thinking, "We told you so." Heading back up Garden Drove we heard and then had a pretty poor view of a **Yellow-browed Warbler**, which we couldn't complain too much about. We were back at the car at 4.30pm, so we headed for home seeing some **Red-legged Partridge** in the field opposite the Stiffkey Pool. As I drove along the road through Cley Wendy spotted a raptor flying over the fields and when it crossed over the road ahead of us we were surprised to see that it was another Hobby. It was heading for Cley Marshes so was probably the same bird I'd seen the night before.

It was 4.55pm when we arrived back at HQ and after giving Lyca her tea Wendy set about skinning the tomatoes she'd brought from the greenhouse at home and making some veggie concoction to eat. Mine was as usual a simple affair consisting of boiling some fresh pasta and heating up a Bolognese sauce pouch in the microwave :P. Looking at Birdguides there'd been loads reported in Norfolk during the day, so I reckoned I'd make the most of the daylight and headed out at 6pm.

The Red-breasted Flycatcher was still being reported so I headed back out as there was actually some sun peaking out! When I got to the bushes there were 2 blokes right under the bush again and to make matters worse one of them had ants in his pants big time and was pacing around it non stop. I stood back in the normal position to try and give them a massive hint but the penny just didn't seem to drop. Grrrrrrr.....flipping heck! While they were doing this the bird showed on the other side of the bush but I didn't call it as a punishment for harassing it :P. The sun was pretty low but was faintly shining on the bush so I tried getting shots but then it disappeared and went dark.



Red-breasted Flycatcher

Happily the head in the bush man finally gave up and left but ants in his pants man was still pacing around.....Grrrr! This was making me agitated and with the sun dropping lower and lower in the sky things weren't looking good. Unbelievably he finally gave up and walked away, which left just me to enjoy watching the bird on my own :). Sure enough as soon as the two chumps had gone the bird started showing really well. The low light was making it a struggle, especially in the dark bushes but I got slightly better shots of the bird by the end, although not as good as I'd hoped.



Red-breasted Flycatcher

I was back at HQ at 7pm and after changing into my comfy PJ's I started to go through the day's photos. When I got to the shot of the Hornet it didn't look right, so I compared it to a photo of an actual Hornet. I told Wendy, who suggested it could be a Hoverfly and told me to Google Hoverfly that looks like a Hornet. This I did and the result was instant, it was a Hornet-mimic Hoverfly or Volucella zonaria to be precise.....Cool! Lyca was very tired and slept for the rest of the evening cuddled up to Wendy on the sofa. Wendy was cold but I was too warm and she still hated the cottage big time, so wasn't very relaxed. By 10.20pm we were tired and headed off to a cold damp bed for the 2<sup>nd</sup> night running.

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> September

We woke up at 7.30am and it was sunny outside with no wind, so Wendy was happy. After I'd had breakfast and was waiting for her to finish her morning routine and get ready I went outside to try and get a shot of the Swallows and House Martins that were congregating on the wires at the bottom of the front garden.



Swallow

Funnily enough after I'd gone in Wendy spotted another bloke at the side of the road over the fence wielding a camera at the birds. It was a good job we knew what he was doing or he could've been in for some trouble pointing his camera at the house :P. My plan for the day was to start with my favourite walk from Burnham Overly to Holkham Pines, which was a substantial distance. Due to this Wendy wasn't quite so enthusiastic about my suggestion as she was still in lazy mode but it was tough and I knew she'd get over it once we were there. We finally set off at 9.45am but driving away from Salhouse and looking towards where we going we could see that we were leaving the sun behind and were heading into black clouds. This obviously didn't go down well with Wendy, who already didn't want to do the walk but her face soon lit up when we stopped at the WC's at Holkham and she realised she could go and have a look for some pressies in the posh shop opposite. Three hours later (OK that's a slight exaggeration) and she came back to the car with a bag full of foodie goodies. After loading all her purchases in my car and nearly breaking the suspension I drove on further west until we reached the Burnham Overly layby at 10.28am.

We ventured over the road and looking down the track we were relieved to see that it was nice and dry.....Phew! Lyca had plenty of new sniffs to explore as we started to walk down hill and the Bramble bushes looked as though they were groaning under the weight of all the Blackberries on them. The Hawthorn was bright red with berries too, so it looked as though there was going to be a good berry crop for all the winter Thrushes when they started to arrive in the coming weeks. We found a single **Pink-footed Goose** grazing in a field, which seemed like a bit of poor show but we found loads more in another field, which made more sense. There'd been a Great white Egret reported in the channel viewable from the sea wall but it was busy with dog walkers, so we weren't keen to walk it. Wendy all of sudden said she could hear the 'ping ping' of a Bearded Tit, which was really surprising having never heard them there before but try as we might they never appeared or made any more noise. Within no time at all there were 2x dogs off the lead heading our way, so I took Lyca down the bank and into the ditch to get her away from them. Wendy stayed up there and the dogs made a massive fuss of her, which made the very posh sounding woman who was walking them stop to apologise for the one that was jumping all over her. "I'm ever so sorry, she's in desperate need of a haircut, she not normally this messy!" were her opening lines. Wendy just laughed and pointed down to Lyca and reassured her that she was well used to it and didn't mind. Obviously this sparked off a lengthy conversation about their mutual hatred of their dog's love of rolling in disgusting things and stuff. I stood there willing Wendy to get a move on but as usual she'd managed to get well and truly stuck with another random stranger. The woman was very nice but it sounded like she was on holiday on her own, so Wendy was in no hurry to be rude. Finally I heard them saying, "Bye" and we were able to carry on down towards the boardwalk. I found a big green Caterpillar on the path and took a photo of it to see if I could ID it but I doubted it very much.





Bright-line Brown-eye Moth Caterpillar

When we got to the ace bushes at the bottom where the boardwalk starts we stopped for a scan. There's always amazing reports from those bushes but we've never seen anything other than common birds there. It's definitely a migrant hotspot though and if you look for long enough the birds start to appear. We managed to clock up 3x Blackcaps (2x male), a **Willow Warbler** and a very elusive LBJ! We hoped it'd come out and show itself as our bird of the trip and be something amazing but it just wasn't playing and we didn't have all day!



Boardwalk bushes

We walked along the boardwalk and into the dunes where we found a **Wheatear** hopping about on the sand. Lyca had decided that she was on a mission and pulled me like a tram horse over towards some bushes. As we approached a small Warbler dived deep into the cover of the leaves and vanished. I obviously wouldn't have minded finding out what the bird was, so stood waiting for it to hopefully reappear. This is a familiar story, which usually ends up in us walking away having not seen it again but while I waited something else caught my eye. I looked up to see a lovely **Common Redstart**, so I wandered towards it to try for a shot. Needless to say the bird disappeared and managed to give me the slip big time. The Warbler in the bush had vanished into thin air too, so as usual we gave up and carried on and spotted a **Migrant Hawker** zooming around in the sun.



The Dunes

The Redstart reappeared on the fence on the opposite side of the track and the mind boggles as to how it got there unnoticed! I was just considering going over to try for a shot again when some people managed to flush it and it was gone.....Grrrrrr! We plodded on through the dunes checking every bush in sight and looking around I chirped up with, "I predict a Whinchat!" Straight after that Wendy spotted a bird at the top of a bush, so we raised our bins to see a **Stonechat**, just as it was joined by a 2<sup>nd</sup> bird. Unbelievably this bird was, much to our amusement (drumroll please) a **Whinchat** and would take some beating as my best prediction ever :). I cautiously made my way over to the bird to get a shot and was firing away when all of a sudden Lyca started to freak out.



Whinchat

There were 2x Black Labs off the leads running straight towards her and she wasn't happy at all. The 2 posh women who were walking them seemed oblivious and continued to chat loudly about show jumping while the 2 dogs continued to approach Lyca. She's terrified of black Labs and was freaking out, so I had to quickly put my camera down and picked her up. This seemed to make the women take notice and one of them whistled the dogs back, which took a few attempts before they finally obeyed her.....Phew! Neither of them even acknowledged us or said, "Sorry" and by the time it was all over the Whinchat was long gone and I'd missed a good chance to get a really decent shot as I had perfect cover to approach it behind.....Urrghhh! We



continued to wander around the dunes and I found myself a nice place to sit with Lyca to take in the view and have a break until Wendy decided to join us.



Time out

After our brief interlude we got up to leave and found a **Small Heath** fluttering around on the ground. I started walking off but when I turned around I noticed that Wendy wasn't behind me and was still in the same place crouched down. She'd found a micro moth, which had decided to land on her coat and was trying to get a photo of it to ID later but her cameras macro capability just wasn't up to it. At the far end of the dunes we came across a mound, which we'd never seen before. It was caked in bushes and there were 3x Whinchats perched on top of them. When they all flew off and disappeared over the top of the mound I decided to follow them to see what was up there. When I got to the top I found that there were 4 Whinchats, so I called Wendy to come up and join me. Apart from having more Whinchats than you could shake a stick at there were also loads of Warblers and it was nice to have found out where all the action was for a change.



Brilliant area

There were birds in every bush and the Whinchats were still hanging around at the back. An old guy appeared and told us that he'd overheard us talking about Whinchats, so he'd come up for a look. He was very pleased to see them and we got chatting about cameras and photography while we continued to scan the bushes. He found a pale Warbler, which was skulking in a Hawthorn and loosely suggested that it could be a Barred Warbler, which would've been very nice. Wendy was next to see a brief flash of it and going by its very plain



appearance she reckoned it was a Garden Warbler. When it appeared again we had to settle on **Garden Warbler** and it turned out that there was 2 of them.



Garden Warbler

He was a very interesting man who seemed to know his stuff about all kinds of Wildlife, so Wendy couldn't resist asking if he was into Moths and Butterflies too. We weren't entirely surprised to find that he was and when we mentioned that we hadn't brought our moth trap because we thought the garden of our HQ was going to be too close to the neighbours, so we hadn't bothered he had a bit of information that made our ears prick up. He said that Cley was doing a moth trap opening on Thursday morning and Titchwell also had one on Wednesday. He said that he'd gone to something similar and they'd found a 1<sup>st</sup> for Britain in the form of a very attractive moth called a Dewick's plusia, which we'd never heard of. Wendy said that with a name like that it had to be a micro but he shook his head and told her to look it up later, so she made a note of the name. Later on she did look it up and was very surprised to find that it was basically very similar to a Silver-Y. Normally we wouldn't dream of going to such an event, after all there'd be people there but it might not be as bad as we imagined and maybe worth a shot, so Wendy jotted the details down anyway. By then another bloke had joined us and he seemed more than keen to have his input (consistently talking over everyone) in our conversation about Insects. He was a bit too keen though and a bit full on for our liking but despite that we still managed to pick up on the call of **Green Woodpecker** over at the plantation. Having spent the best part of an hour standing in the same spot nattering we were keen to get going when we all started to go our separate ways....Phew! When we reached the plantation we thought we'd have a good explore of the area seeing as there were things moving through. A Eurofighter flew over and there were Common Darters literally everywhere but as far as birds were concerned the area was very quiet. We ended up losing the path and getting lost in there which was very skilful of us but we eventually found our way out and headed over to where Lee Evan's allegedly had a Dusky Warbler the year before, which we now know as Dusky Corner. It was really quiet there too and although we knew it was getting late we were still shocked to see that it was 1.58pm and time for lunch. With so little happening and knowing that all the action had been back in the dunes we decided to call it a day and turned back.

The Whinchats and Redstart were still hanging around with the Stonechats, Dunnocks and Whitethroat when we got back to the dunes. A Hobby zoomed over and we found a **Small Tortoiseshell** that looked as though it'd narrowly missed being a Swallow's lunch and had escaped with just a chunk out of its wing. By then I was in desperate need of a WC break, so found myself a suitable area out of the way of people. I always do this with the fear of someone popping up unexpectedly but this time I was safe for a change....Phew! There were 2x Wheatears on the fence posts but they weren't playing as well as I hoped and had to settle for a distant shot.



Wheatear

Wendy opened her bottle of water to have a drink and noticed that poor Lyca was looking up at her longingly and licking her chops. There wasn't much left but Lyca hadn't had a drink yet and we'd been out for hours. Thinking quickly we had to improvise, so I cupped my hands and Wendy poured water into them while Lyca drank as much of it as she could before it poured through my fingers. This obviously meant that there was even less for us but I'm like a camel and don't drink much anyway so I let Wendy finish it off. Back at the boardwalk the bushes were still uninspiring, so we went for a scan of the marshes before we left. There were lots of flowers about so yet again Wendy couldn't resist taking some photos.



Evening Primrose

Wendy was looking at 3 Egrets miles away (as usual) and reckoned that 1 of them looked bigger than the others. I wasn't particularly interested in them as they were just too far away but she got me to get a record shot to zoom in on. She was hoping it was going to be the Great White Egret but then suggested that the bigger one could be a Spoonbill. When I zoomed in on the picture her persistence had paid off and it was indeed a **Spoonbill**.

As we walked back up the ditch I mentioned that my foot was really sore due to my sock rucking up inside my shoe and creating a ridge. It'd been rubbing the whole time but was now beginning to get really painful. Wendy was as sympathetic as ever when she saw that I'd put my thin socks I'd normally wear for work on

instead of walking socks and said it was no wonder I had sore feet. Wendy all of sudden got a report of another RBF this time at Warham Greens 10yards east of the Whirligig. This was quite convenient, as we'd been planning to go to Stiffkey Campsite Woods next but it also alerted me to the fact that I wasn't getting any reports in on my phone. We were now not only rushing back to have our lunch but also to get to Warham Greens, so I hobbled as quickly as I could. Wendy spotted a **Devil's coach-horse Beetle** on the path, which raised its tail in the air in defence as Lyca sniffed it. Considering they fire poisoned gas out of their back end when threatened I'm sure she regretted her decision. Near to the top of the path we also found a **Common Toad** and we were very relieved to finally cross the road and be back at the car.

It was 3.01pm when we sat down and obviously the 1<sup>st</sup> thing on the agenda was to let Lyca have a proper drink before we demolished our much-needed lunch. Next up was to take Wendy to the WC's at Holkham and when I parked up she spotted the "Everything Outdoors" shop and said she'd go and see if they had any socks. She was gone for ages and when she came back she was a bit annoyed that a shop called "Everything Outdoors" seemingly meant everything to kit you out for a photo shoot for the front cover of 'Tatler' magazine! There was nothing remotely practical or affordable in there, especially when it came to men's walking socks! She'd found baskets of men's thick woolly socks but I wasn't planning on posing around the place in tweed and wellies and it was September not January, so I needed something slightly cooler. Eventually after a severe rummage she'd found a pair of small 'Coolmax' ones in an identical basket in the women's section, which it turned out were the only pair in the entire shop....Phew! I put them on straight away and unsurprisingly they felt much comfier than my work socks, which was the least I'd expect at £8.99 a pair!

It was already 3.40pm when we set off again and 10 minutes later I parked up at Stiffkey car park. My intention was to go for a look in the Woods and then if we had time we'd see if we could catch up with the RBF. When I got out of the car it soon became apparent that the ridge in my shoe hadn't been caused by my bad choice of socks at all and was a problem with the actual insole.....Uh Oh! There was no quick fix for this and apart from driving to King's Lynn neither of us knew of anywhere that sold walking gear, so I decided to just try and make do. The Woods were very quiet and it was getting quite chilly and all of a sudden I started to get deja vu of last years Norfolk trip when my guts started telling me that I needed to get back to HQ as quickly as possible :O! We raced back to the car and shot off, ditching off the Red-breasted flycatcher plan completely. Worrying that I wasn't going to make it I took a spin past the WC's at Blakeney on the way but to my horror there was nowhere to park, so I had to drive straight past. I crossed everything and raced back, parked up in the cottage layby at 4.25pm and couldn't get into the cottage quick enough before locking myself in the toilet.

When Wendy walked past the bedroom window she noticed that the pillows and throw on the bed were wonky.....weird. She went straight in there to straighten it out before Lyca jumped on the white sheets and then had a brainwave. Maybe someone had been round to fix the bedroom radiator? When she went into the living room she saw that the settee and the chairs by the window had been pulled away from the walls and it was definitely to expose the radiators. She went around putting furniture back to where it should've been wondering why on earth whoever had been in hadn't done it themselves? The kitchen floor, which we'd managed to keep clean, was now covered in leaves and mud and the kitchen surface by the sink, which Wendy had cleaned that morning after breakfast was filthy too. I swept the floor while Wendy wiped the sides down again and cleaned the now dirty washing up bowl but at least we might be warmer now :).

After that I grabbed my ipad to check for any latest reports but couldn't get any connection, so I lifted the phone to check the line but there was nothing, everything was dead. In the meantime Wendy had noticed that all the windows were spotlessly clean, so someone had fixed the heating AND cleaned the windows. It was a shame they'd left a load of dirt for us to clean up though and what was going on with our internet connection and phone line? Had they taken offence by our email and cut us off deliberately? Surely not? That would be highly unprofessional and highly unlikely, so we tried to keep our paranoia under control and think of a more logical explanation instead. This was easier said than done however especially as everything had been fine with the connection until someone had been in while we were out.....Uh oh :( Obviously there was no mobile signal at the cottage either, so I couldn't even phone anyone about our new problem. Urrghhhh there's always something! I was now feeling too rough to go out for tea, which was disappointing because I'd planned on treating myself to a pudding as a reward for the long walk, so I made do with something simple and after tea Wendy went for a bath. Feeling OK again Wendy suggested we went out to get a signal, so she could phone her Mum to let her know what had happened, so she wouldn't try and phone the house phone. I could also get an internet connection to send an email to the cottage company to inform them of our latest dilemma.

We headed out at 7.03pm and were surprised as to how dark it was already and went straight to the Dun Cow just down the road. It was really busy inside and there was a dog right next to the door, so I told Wendy that the only way we were staying was if we could sit outside. It was chilly but Wendy finally agreed and went in to get us a drink. When she came out I'd discovered that there was no mobile signal there either and I couldn't



log into the Wi-fi, so the whole thing was a waste of time. Lyca was lying on my knee, so I was uncomfortable and couldn't move while Wendy had to put her hat on she was so cold. At least Lyca was keeping me nice and warm while we rushed our drinks!



Dead legs!

All we wanted was to put our feet up and relax but we headed back to the car at 7.46pm to continue our search for a signal. Wendy counted the bars on her phone and got me to stop when there was enough to trust to last the duration of a quick phone call to her Mum. While she explained our predicament and filled her Mum in about our day I had no such luck with 3g. After Wendy had hung up I carried on and finally got a signal at Walsey Hill's car park, so I parked up. I logged into my emails only to find that the company had responded to my initial email saying how shocked they were that we didn't like the cottage! Eh? Was it really that hard to believe? They said that they had another cottage in Holt that we could move to but they'd need to know today if we wanted to or not! How could we reply when we couldn't even get any emails? They also said they'd send a plumber and window cleaner round but we'd already worked that out for ourselves. I'll give them their dues for replying so quickly and for trying to sort the problems out for us but there was no way I was moving to Holt! I liked the cottage for its location and the view over the marshes, so to give that up and swap it for a view over a sterile estate in the middle of a town nowhere near the coast just didn't cut the mustard. I thanked them and then told them of our new problem knowing that nothing could be done about it until tomorrow and headed back to HQ for an evening without any technology :O! It was 8.30pm when we got back and the cottage was lovely and warm inside for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, so the plumber had done a good job. At least we knew we hadn't imagined it and there'd been an actual problem. We got changed into our PJ's and put our feet up to relax with a bit of TV but found it slightly frustrating that we had no Wi-fi. How was I going to keep up to date with Birdguides and weather forecasts without it? Lyca was flat out for the rest of the evening but made her presence well known by having bad wind, which was not like her at all! By 10.30pm we were tired and headed off to bed but at least we were a lot warmer than we'd been since we'd arrived and the bed wasn't damp anymore!

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> September

It was 7.23am when we woke up and outside it was overcast and spitting. After I'd let Lyca out she ran straight into the living room and went back to sleep on the settee. I had my breakfast then decided to go for an early morning stroll to Gramborough Hill to see if I could find something and headed out at 8am. There was a **Chiffchaff** in the garden as I walked across the grass and having got as far as the duck pond I realised that I'd forgotten my bins, so I had to turn back and go and get them.....Doh! Not a good start! I then got an alert of a Hoopoe at Gramborough Hill but it had flown inland.....Nooooooo! I was only about 5 minutes away :(.

When I got to the remains of Salthouse beach carpark a man stopped me and asked was it Gramborough Hill to which I replied, "Yes." He asked me if I knew there was a Hoopoe there but unfortunately I had to give him the bad news that the report said it'd flown off inland. He seemed to get quite sad with this news and trudged off back to his car. Over at the bushes at the hill I was quietly optimistic but there was literally nothing. Hats off to the birders who find good things in these bushes, it doesn't seem even remotely easy! I trudged around the bushes trying every angle but there wasn't a single bird about so I gave up and headed

back to the cottage. On the duck pond were two female **Gadwall**, which was a nice surprise so I grabbed a quick shot of one of them



Gadwall

When I got back to HQ it was 9am and Wendy said that there'd been loads of birds in the garden including 4x Blackcaps. Although they weren't anything amazing unbelievably she'd seen more migrant action from the kitchen window than I'd seen at a well-known migrant hotspot! After my non-eventful start we didn't hold much hope for the day ahead but we all set off out at 9.38am. As soon as I started my car up there was a beep and my dash display was telling me to, "Stop check coolant!" Great! I'd seen this before and it was what I presumed to be a false warning, so I chose to ignore it and turned the car off and restarted it. After I'd been back at home for a couple of weeks I actually discovered that my coolant was low, so it wasn't my car being stupid at all, it was me.....Ooops! Our 1<sup>st</sup> stop was at Blakeney, so Wendy could nip to the Deli for a pan au chocolat and have a look in The Anchor Shop for a bit of home décor inspiration. After that I reckoned that Wells Woods was as good a place as any to start off, so we headed straight there. Driving along Wells harbour it was busy and after turning into the road to the car park we noticed that there was an additional caravan park being built just after the football pitch. Yuk!

I parked up at 10.30am and was unsure as to how long we'd be there so I bought a ticket for 4hours at the cost of £6! What a rip off that'd be if you lived there and it was your local patch! Wendy nipped over to the WC's before we left and while she was gone I got a report of a RBF at The Dell. Hmmmmmm, now where's that again? Having spent years being confused by its whereabouts I was adamant I was going to get it right this time. There were dog walkers everywhere, so we waited for a break in the traffic and made a quick entrance through the gate and onto the footpath in the hope we could lose them all. We don't know how we managed it but we eventually found The Dell and by that I mean The 'real' Dell :). It was just a flat area of long grass surrounded by trees and where we'd been trying to find for years.





The Dell

It's no wonder we'd never seen any of the birds we'd gone to twitch at The Dell because we'd been looking in the wrong place! It was really boggy under foot in there and my shoes were soaked in no time at all but there were other birders in and around the area all looking intently at the trees. We could see no signs that any of them were onto the RBF though and looking around we got the impression that it'd be like looking for a needle in a haystack. We could hear a lot of Chiffchaffs around us and we found a **Treecreeper** working its way through the trees. There were **Siskins** flying around, we heard a **Jay** squawking loudly but there was no sign of the RBF and the other birders had all dispersed too. We went for a wander into the trees and a **Grey Squirrel** up in the treetops would've been hard to miss. Next we made a beeline for The Drinking Pool seeing another couple of Treecreepers on the way, which made us realise that we'd seen more of them than we ever have in the past. There was also a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** and of course, the sound of Goldcrests calling way above us. We stayed on the mound at The Drinking Pool for ages hoping that something would pop up but all we saw to add to the trip list was a **Chaffinch**.



Noting the location of the drinking pool!!

Wendy saw a bird fly in, which perched on a branch high up in a tree silhouetted against the sky, so she got me onto it. It was a **Spotted Flycatcher** and it even called before it flew off and was gone. We slowly made our way through the windy paths that take you through all the great cover but couldn't dig anything up. Just before reaching the main path a Jay landed in a tree in front of me. I raised my camera and got two shots off before it flew off. Jays are the least tame birds on the planet I think. I knew I didn't have many Jay photos but I found out later that this was my 1<sup>st</sup> half decent Jay photo for 10 years!





Jay

Next we heard someone shout, "Red Kite!" and everyone's ears pricked up. Wendy passed on the info to some others as they walked past and one of them headed straight off to try his luck. We didn't bother because it was obviously flying over and by the time we'd walked out of the trees it would probably have gone anyway. Wendy was a bit annoyed that we hadn't seen it especially as we hadn't found anything of interest at the Drinking Pool. We gave up after that and headed back to The Dell for a last look before we left. We bumped into the old guy from Burnham Overy dunes on the footpath and stopped for a quick chat. Back at The Dell there was still no sign of the RBF or anything else for that matter! Walking through the long grass in the middle Wendy found a lovely little **Small Copper** and then a Dragonfly, which confused us for a while. We hadn't been expecting to see anything other than Migrant Hawkers but this had a broad, pale blue body, which Wendy noticed had a black tip and meant that it had to be a **Black-tailed Skimmer**! We'd managed to dodge all the dogs again when we got back to the car at 12.50pm, which was very handy. We ate our lunch and admired a couple of Cockerpoos going past and noticed how ridiculously busy the place was. There was a constant stream of dog walkers coming and going from the woods and there were no free seats outside the cafe with dogs at every table! We've NEVER seen it like that before!

We left at 1.28pm and driving back through Wells there were people with dogs everywhere too. What was going on? It looked as though it was peak time for all the Grandparents in the UK to escape to Norfolk with their dogs to try and regain some sanity after looking after the Grandkids for the summer holidays. Whatever the reason it made me make a mental note to myself to avoid the same week in future. When we reached Holkham we spotted loads of Geese coming in really high up in the sky. A bit further on and Wendy re-found the **Red Kite** from Wells Woods earlier, which was flying over some fields, Red kites are still relatively scarce in Norfolk so it was a nice bird to see for the trip. Next we saw 100's of **Lapwing** in a massive flock coming in off the sea, so things were definitely moving. It was 18c by then, which was good news for our next plan of the day. We saw our 1<sup>st</sup> **Pheasant** of the trip, well the 1<sup>st</sup> one that wasn't squashed in the road anyway, just before we arrived at Titchwell.

The car park was heaving but luckily I found what looked like one of the last spaces and parked up at 1.57pm. Hopefully the amount of cars wasn't an indication of how busy it was going to be out on the reserve but at least it wasn't raining. Usually the heavens open at some point when we get to Titchwell so it looked we'd stay dry for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in years. Wendy went into the Visitor Centre and had a look at the reports boards then asked about the moth trap event. She was directed over to the woman behind the counter who told her that it was going to be held between 10-12pm tomorrow and would be the last one of the year. She came out to relay the info to me but the only bird of note was a Pectoral Sandpiper out on the Tidal Marsh. We heard a sound we hadn't heard for ages and initially we didn't even register it. After we'd walked past the reeds and were heading towards the hide we realised that it was a **Reed Warbler**.....Doh!

At the Island Hide we stopped for a scan and added some more new birds to our list finally. There were Gadwall, **Ruff**, **Shoveler**, **Avocet**, **Black-tailed Godwit** and we had a slightly better view of another Spoonbill than the bird we'd just about seen at Burnham Overy.



Ruff

We carried on to the Brackish Marsh where we added nothing more than a **Grey Plover** to our list, so we didn't hang around. We had a good look over the Tidal Marsh for the Pec Sand but everything was absolutely miles off because the tide was out, so there was no way we stood a chance of finding that.....Boooooooo :( We carried on to the beach where there was meant to be 9x Common Scoter and had a scan around but the tide was so far out it was pointless even looking. A Marsh Harrier flew over the beach and then carried on out to sea, so we watched it and wondered what on earth it was doing. We managed to pull 1x **Common Scoter** out of the vast expanse of distant water and then gave it up as a bad job and headed back. Just after the Island Hide we heard the blast of a **Cetti's Warbler** from the reeds where we'd heard the Reed Warbler earlier. Back at the car park Lyca made friends (well kind of) with a Shnoodle puppy, which was very hyper but at least she didn't bark at it! We were back at the car by 3.37pm and had no idea what to do next. As I drove through Burnham Deepdale Wendy made me stop, so she could go to Fat Face again. This time she came out with a bag, so had actually bought the jeans she wished she'd bought last time! While I was waiting for her I'd been checking my emails and had received nothing back from the cottage company about our phone line. This made me a bit annoyed, so I had a brainwave and went on live chat to BT instead. It was looking as though they couldn't do anything without the owners permission but with the power of persuasion I managed to get them to agree to do a line test for me....Skillz!

We couldn't be bothered cooking so we headed straight for the King's Arms instead of going home. When we arrived at 5.18pm it looked as though it was busy due to all the people with dogs sitting outside. We chanced our luck though and went inside to find that it was actually pretty quiet.....Phew! Last time we'd been there I'd ended up spending far too much time on the toilet the next day so this decision was a bit of a gamble. The only saving grace was that it was too early to order the tempura chicken off the specials board so I couldn't have it anyway. We grabbed a table down at the bottom of the pub where there was nobody else apart from a woman, so Lyca could get settled. Wendy went up to the bar to order our drinks and noticed that the lights were flickering. She then overheard a bloke talking about it to the barmaid and they were saying that there was a thunderstorm forecast.....Noooooooo! The woman was getting herself another drink ahead of Wendy and rather awkwardly she was trying to give the barmaid money to treat herself with. The barmaid didn't know what to do and was trying to decline her offer in the most polite way possible but the woman was having none of it and was practically forcing her to take it! Wendy could see that she was holding her side and looking like she was in pain and it turned out that she was actually very heavily pregnant and was obviously suffering. Wendy made a sympathetic comment and she said she couldn't wait to knock off and put her feet up. After Wendy had brought our drinks over to the table we had a look at the menu and she went up to order our food. The woman who was trying to give her money away was sitting opposite us on her own, so it was very quiet until an old couple came in and sat down at the small 2 seater table in the corner we normally sit in. We hadn't noticed until that point but the other woman was sitting chatting away to and stroking her 2<sup>nd</sup> very large glass of wine :/. Maybe she was a clairvoyant or something but she hadn't gone unnoticed by the old couple either. The dynamic in the pub that evening wasn't the best to start with so when a younger woman who we reckon was the old couples daughter joined them it got even worse. They'd sat in the corner so there was no room for her and she perched herself at a separate table entirely with a face that would stop a

clock insisting that they needn't move on her behalf. Weird! She sat sniffing into a tissue and seemed to have a nasty cold and they all discussed the menu across the tables. They'd obviously met up to have dinner together but when the bloke got up to go and order their food the daughter suddenly announced that she wasn't having anything after all. He asked her if it was because he was paying and she just fobbed him off by saying, "No but do you know what, I'm just not hungry!" Awkward! Our food came and was as usual very nice so we ate it while trying our best to ignore the woman talking to her wine and the unhappy family.

After we'd finished we made a sharp exit and headed straight back to Walsey Hills so Wendy could phone her Mum and I could get a wifi signal. We were already fed up of doing it and the thought of having to spend the rest of the holiday without a phone or wifi was just annoying. One of the reasons for us booking a cottage is that it has a phone due to the mobile signal being so bad in Norfolk and Wi-fi.....Grrrrrrrrrr!

We were back at HQ by 6.40pm and there was a note on the kitchen table saying that it looked as though there was an internal fault with the line and they'd have to get BT in to fix it. Unbeknown to them I'd already done a line test and they found it to be OK, so we were no nearer to getting it sorted :( Lyca was ravenous by then and wolfed her dinner down in record time before trotting off into the living room with her Dentastick. Wendy went upstairs for a bath and then it was my turn, although I did protest because I couldn't be bothered! Later on when we were watching TV something caught my eye and I got up for a look. There was a Cricket on the ceiling above the log burner, so Wendy came over for a look. I went into the kitchen to get a glass to catch it in and finally let it go outside. I took a photo of it 1<sup>st</sup> and we later ID'd it as a **Speckled Bush Cricket**.



Photo flipped

The thunder storm that been mentioned in the pub hadn't materialised yet, so Wendy lit some candles to try and feel more relaxed. There was nothing on TV and with no wifi it was pretty boring, so I suggested we started to listen to an audio book I had called "The Butterfly Isles" – A summer in search of our Emperors and Admirals by Patrick Barkham. Unfortunately although it was very interesting the narrator had such a soothing voice that after a while we were finding ourselves being lulled to sleep and at 10pm we couldn't fight it anymore. Hardcore or what? Hahaha!

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September

It was 7.30am when we woke up and it was an amazingly sunny and bright day outside. I gave up and got up to take Lyca out because I'd had enough of her lying on top of me and batting me in the face to wake me up. She's learned that this tactic works a treat and I challenge anyone to sleep through such abuse! She of course went straight back to bed after she'd been outside whereas we were up for the day. The 1<sup>st</sup> thing I noticed was that the phone line and wifi were back on, so we were both very pleased to be back in business and sat down at the kitchen table to be completely antisocial with our heads buried in our devices. While Wendy scrolled past lines and lines of duck face selfies and smugshots on facebook, I tried to catch up with more important stuff like the recent reports from Norfolk and the weather forecast. Lyca was coaxed into eating her breakfast with cucumber before we went out but I think she'd rather have been asleep on the settee for a few extra minutes.





Living room

I reckoned Warham Greens would be a good place to start the day and we headed out at 9.30am. It was 9.50am when I parked up at Stiffkey car park and we set off westwards along the coastal footpath towards Warham Greens, which due to the lack of rain was still nice and dry.



Footpath to Warham Greens

The 1<sup>st</sup> thing we noticed was that there were 16x Skylarks in one of the fields, so there was obviously something going on. We found a flock of Long-tailed Tits working their way through the bushes as well as a Blackcap, some Linnets, 2x Whitethroats and more Reed Buntings. There wasn't much in the way of exciting birdlife though, so a bit of interest was added when Wendy found a nice Wasp. It was very long and thin with an orange body and all we found out is it was some type of parasitic wasp of the genus *Sphex*. There were also a lot of **Vapourer Moths** flying around the Brambles, which we hadn't seen since our last trip to Cornwall. By the time we'd reached the Whirligig we had the distinct impression that we were wasting our time.





High Tide!

We walked around it without seeing a single bird and considering there are great birds found there regularly this was just typical of our luck. Clutching at straws we wandered into the middle where the Whirligig is just for the sake of completeness and stood there waiting.



Whirligig

All of a sudden we heard a call that made our efforts a bit more worthwhile and although it wasn't anything mind blowing we couldn't sniff at finding a Yellow-browed Warbler :). Next up was to get a view of it and hopefully a shot but it wasn't hanging around and seemed to be on a mission. It was deep in the bushes and would only appear for a brief moment before diving for cover again. Eventually it got to the end of the trees and cleared right off across the footpath and into the big trees at the edge of the fields....Urrghhh! I put the news out and we carried on but by then Wendy was so warm she had to take her coat off and tie it round her waist.

At the bottom of Lower Drove I was keen to have a look up it but Wendy thought it'd be pointless especially when she saw the long grass and brambles we'd need to walk through the get to the gate. It was so overgrown I had carry Lyca through it or she'd have been tangled up in brambles within seconds. I had a scan up the track from the gate but there didn't look as though there was anything in the hedges as far as the eye could see, so I turned back. We then checked over the area where the Isabelline Shrike was two years ago but again there was no sign of anything. We carried on towards the bushes we'd had the YBW in last year and

stopped for a scan. There were 6x Buzzards flying over the marshes and 1 of them looked quite pale. One of these days we're going to find a Rough-legged but on this occasion it wasn't to be. It was just a pale Common Buzzard as usual, so we plodded on passing Middle Drove, which had no birds up it either. A butterfly whizzed past us and from what I'd seen I was pretty certain it was a **Painted Lady**, which are always worth stopping for. It landed in the hedge, so we got our bins on it and watched it for a while and even pointed it out to some passers by who were interested to know what we were looking at. When we got to The Quarry it was disappointingly quiet with just a handful of Goldfinches, more Reed Buntings and a **Greenfinch**. Wendy was beginning to doubt that my goal of walking to The Copse was worth our while but I'd made a plan and was sticking to it regardless. When we got there we could see the UEA students were there and they seemed to be following the Tit flock. Another bloke came out and said, "There's one in there somewhere!" to which I replied with, "Yellow-browed Warbler?" It was a presumption as there seemed to be nothing but YBW's around, they were a dime a dozen and we wondered if it was ours from the Whirligig. There was no way we were going to hang around for the next hour just for a fleeting glimpse of a YBW in a place we knew to be the birding equivalent of the Bermuda Triangle! While we looked around the copse / bottom of garden drove we came across a lovely Comma, which was very nicely posed with its wings up on the edge of the bush so I got a photo.



Comma

We found another YBW on the way back near Middle Drove, which made us consider that there were actually 2 around. If the others had one in The Copse then surely, this was a 2<sup>nd</sup> bird and more likely to be ours from earlier? Bah who knows! This time I managed to grab a record shot nanoseconds before it got into the middle drove trees never to be seen again.





Yellow-browed Warbler

Coming towards us was a large group of rambling hikers who made us smile. We watched a comedy a few years ago called 'The Great Outdoors' and this group bore an uncanny resemblance to the one it was based on. We couldn't help smirking as they walked past us but they were all very polite and every single one of them said, "Hello" as they past us!

All of a sudden I had a horrible thought and blurted out, "\*\*\*\*, Poo bag!" It's a good job the rambling hikers had gone by then or they could've been forgiven for thinking I had Tourette's! We looked at each other in horror because we couldn't for the life of us remember where we'd put it earlier to pick up on the way back.....Oops! It was definitely around there somewhere and luckily I spotted the 2 black ties sticking up from the grass behind us.....Phew! We'd just walked straight past it, which could've been a right pain if I hadn't thought about it until we were back at the car.

Back at the car it was 12.38pm and time for lunch, so we sat and ate it while looking out at East Hills wondering how hard it really was to get out there. All the good finds are from there these days but they say it's too dangerous to attempt it if you don't know the area and tides as it gets cut off. Maybe the locals are just warning off the lowest common denominators (i.e. the townies) who've never even seen a tide never mind understand how it comes in and out :). It was 1.13pm when we finally drove away and we saw out 1<sup>st</sup> 'Coasthopper' Bus. So far we'd seen nothing but 'Stagecoaches' and had even started to wonder if they'd bought Coasthopper out, which would've been a shame. The temperature had dropped to 20.5c, so I dread to think what it'd been when we'd been walking at Stiffkey! When we got to Cley we spotted another Bus Company called 'Norfolk Green', so we presumed there were now 3 different companies working the same line of coast, which surely was never going to work? When we looked into it we found out that Coasthopper was actually set up by Norfolk Green in 1996 but that Norfolk Green is now operating as Stagecoach. Complicated! Stagecoach doesn't come across as being a nice friendly coast hopping bus though.

I parked up at Cley Visitor Centre at 1.30pm and 1<sup>st</sup> we went inside to have a look at the DVD's and café. I chose a gluten free chocolate brownie, just because it looked nice and Wendy got a cheese scone, which had just come out of the oven and was still warm. I settled on buying the Birding in Europe and Megas 2009-2013 DVD's as well as the new version of my Dragonflies and Damselflies book. Wendy reckoned I already had the Megas one but I couldn't remember it at all so I bought it anyway. Back at the car I ate my weird dry brownie, which Wendy said tasted like it had dates in it. Her scone had been bought to have with her tea but because it was so fresh she couldn't resist making a huge dent in it before it went cold.

We set off on our walk down East Bank at 2.05pm hoping to see or hear a Beardie on the way.



East Bank

We didn't of course and there wasn't even so much as a Marsh Harrier flying over the reeds. We'd started to notice by that point that Marsh Harriers were very hard to come by, which was unusual to say the least. Where were they? We've never seen so few on a Norfolk trip and especially in the Cley area. On the right hand side of the bank was a Little Egret going about its business. As I had been struggling to get many photos so far I took the opportunity to grab one even though if the same situation appeared at home I probably wouldn't bother.



Little Egret

Approaching the shingle ridge at the end we came across a new hide, which looks out over the scrape that's always good for waders.





New hide

It was a shame there wasn't windows in it or something as the wind absolutely howled through it. I couldn't help but think it was in a bit of a weird place as if the storms of a few years back happened again surely this hide would get washed away in a second? Funnily enough, in January 2017 the storms did happen again but the hide survived, probably due to the open plan of it so all the water was able to rush through it.

When we got onto the ridge Lyca started pulling like mad to get to the sea, so I took her down for a paddle. She loves the sea but strangely won't swim, she's happy enough to just get her paws wet!



Paddling

She'd stay there all day if you let her but I eventually got bored and we turned back. On the way back up East Bank we finally heard and then saw a male **Bearded Tit** over the reeds. People often hang around waiting for them to come out for photos but I could count on one hand the amount of times I've been lucky enough to have one even remotely close enough for a decent shot! Instead of doing our usual walk along the beach and back via West Bank we decided to check out the new Attenborough's walk to the Babcock Hide. This was all new to us, so we hoped it was going to be worth it although it hadn't had much time to establish itself yet, so was probably a bit underwhelming. It had been created in the land NWT had recently bought at Salthouse Marshes, which extended the Reserve nicely. It'd started to look good with new reed beds and a pool but when we got to the gate leading to the Babcock Hide we hit a snag. There was a sign saying, "No Dogs!" so Lyca couldn't go any further.





No dogs from here on :(

Wendy decided to go all rebellious and said that we should just ignore the sign because there was nobody else about and Lyca was on a lead anyway but there was no way I was doing that! I told her to go for a look 1<sup>st</sup> and then we could swap over, so I sat down in the blazing sun to wait for her. It was a relief to take the weight off my feet, as my insole was starting to cause me problems again and it was just too hot for my liking. I hoped she wouldn't be long and I was glad when I saw her coming back out but it must've meant it was pretty rubbish. She said there was nothing on the pool apart from some Ducks and a Little Grebe and some Lapwing on the bank, so I decided against it. The very shallow scrape does look like it has potential though!



New scrape

I thought it might be a better idea to go after tea to see how it compared and if anything would go there to roost. That was if my feet didn't explode first!

Back at the car it was 3.36pm and we spotted a Moth, which we never had a view of before it vanished into thin air. We searched around for about 10 minutes as we were positive it was a new one for us but couldn't find it anywhere :( Wendy nipped into Spa on the way home and while I sat outside in the car a woman walked past and clobbered my wing mirror.....Grrrrrrrr! Lucky for her we are Manx and chilled out people if I'd been English I probably would've had an instant fit of road rage and stabbed her and her family to death!! My feet were throbbing by then and it was relief to back at HQ at 4.04pm.

Because I was going out after tea Wendy went upstairs for a bath. She didn't like Lyca going upstairs on the narrow spiral type staircase and she knew that if she went up there when I was out, then Lyca would go looking for her. After that Lyca had her tea and while we had ours I had a report of 2x YBW's at Stiffkey, which kind of confirmed that we'd seen 2 birds. It was just typical of us to err on the side of caution and only report a single bird...Urrghhhh!

Even with my killing feet I am a glutton for punishment and headed out after tea to have a look at the Babcock Hide but there was still nothing there so I didn't stick around. I checked on the main pools at Cley as well but I couldn't dig out anything interesting but it did look nice though.



Sunset at Cley

I was back early at 6.45pm and after I'd got changed I put the Megas DVD on. Wendy was adamant that we'd seen some of it but I wasn't convinced and couldn't remember seeing any of it. By 10.03pm we were tired and went off to bed to listen to more Butterfly Isles. I set it to play for 30minutes I don't think either of us heard it to the end and had fallen asleep by the time it turned itself off.

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September

After another good sleep we were up at 6.50am and peering through the curtains we could see that it was misty.....Ooooooooooooo :). This looked promising especially as historically it was the best day of the year for rarities! You learn something new every day :P. I started to wonder what had been put down in the mist during the early hours and couldn't resist a visit to Gramborough Hill to see what I could find. I left at 7.35am leaving Wendy at home regretting not going along too. What if I found something and gripped her off big time? Hahahaha! In reality it was totally dead when I got there but it was reassuring to know that I'd had the right idea when one of the decent Norfolk birders who finds a lot of good stuff turned up just as I was leaving. I gestured a thumbs down to him and he looked suitably depressed.

Back at HQ it was only 8.10am and after I'd told her what a waste of time it'd been Wendy didn't feel so bad that she hadn't gone out. There were no reports from Gramborough Hill from the other bloke either, so it wasn't just me being stupid. There was however a report of a Wryneck at Beeston Bump, which is a place we've heard mentioned loads of time but had never been to. When we'd got everything ready we set off at 9.20am, a Hobby zoomed over the cottage, maybe a sign of good luck? Hahaha.....Not! The Wryneck had been reported on 15<sup>th</sup> September but not since, so it'd obviously been there the whole time but wasn't being reported. Why? Before we went there we had a small matter of a moth trap event at Cley Visitor Centre at 9.30am, so we went straight there. We didn't know if we were doing the right thing or not and normally we wouldn't even entertain the idea. We hadn't brought our moth trap thinking that the bright light would disturb the neighbours but in actual fact they wouldn't have even known and it would have been fantastic as the garden was attracting all sorts of insects in the daytime. This had left us regretting the decision big time and we were dying to see what moths were out about at a prime time for migrants in Norfolk.

When we arrived at the car park it was bang on 9.30am and everyone was up on the outdoor seating area already. We left Lyca in the car and instantly saw that the steps to get up there had a barrier with a big "No Entry" sign on it. How were we supposed to get up there then? The group standing around looked at us vacantly and one guy was hanging over the railings on his mobile staring straight at us and never even thought to help us out! In the end Wendy just told me to follow her and waltzed up the road marked 'Deliveries only' at the back of the building. Urrghhh! After our awkward start things didn't improve when we went over and joined the group gathered around a picnic table. Nobody said, "Hello" or even acknowledged us, which wasn't the kind of atmosphere we'd been expecting. They were already looking at pots of moths and one was being passed around so everyone could see it. Apparently it was a 1<sup>st</sup> for Britain but when we overheard the conversation it was a micro that had been ship assisted probably in some fruit. Some of the micros are notoriously small but this one took the biscuit and you'd have needed a microscope to be able to see any detail on it! By the time it got to us they were already onto the next and we'd already lost track of the name of the micro they were looking at. Not that we were particularly bothered by that point anyway, as it had already become clear that there was nothing interesting in the trap. The old guy from Burnham Overby who'd told us about the event was there but he didn't seem to have seen us and was standing with the main group. The egg boxes then started to be taken out of the trap and we sniggered like a couple of school kids when the main man shouted at someone for hogging the moths. He'd been spending ages taking photos, so he was told to pass the egg box on to the next person so everyone had a chance of seeing it and if the moth was still there at the end then he could take photos then. This seemed fair enough but then Wendy noticed that a bloke had been just sitting with a pot in his hand chatting, so her patience was being stretched to the limit and she had to ask him if she could see it. It was only a **Black Rustic** and apart from a few **Large Wainscot** and **Lunar Underwings** there wasn't anything else interesting. Another bloke, who we'd seen at twitches before and resembled Dom Jolly, seemed a bit cocky and eventually along with a couple of old women got told off for talking too loudly and distracting everyone! One of the UEA students was there and he announced that there was a twitchable Wasp Spider at Gramborough Hill. How would you even give directions to the whereabouts of a spider? We'd never heard of one before but having since looked it up we wish we'd gone to find it, as they're actually quite cool! The whole thing was a world apart from the moth trap opening we'd been to at Weeting and the recent MWT one I went to in the Isle of Man. These were both fantastic and really enjoyable but at this one the people seemed very cliquey and not welcoming of visitors at all. Apart from that there were some proper characters amongst them and we concluded that moth people were definitely more mental than bird people! We certainly didn't belong there and as soon as the last egg box had been passed around we made a hasty retreat. The leader was emptying the remaining moths into the flowerbed and as we walked past him Wendy smiled and thanked him but he just looked down his nose at us. Nice! Maybe he hadn't finished and the best was yet to come but we doubted it very much. It'd been a very disappointing haul for the North Norfolk coast and as we walked (as quickly as we could) away giggling we decided that we wouldn't be doing that again!

We breathed a sigh of relief when we got into the car and Lyca was pleased to see us at least. Next up was to go to try and find us a Wryneck at a place we'd never been before. I put the details into my sat nav and headed off hoping we could find it easily enough. There were no surprises when my sat nav took us to the wrong place to start with! It had brought us to a car park in Sheringham where the Isabelline Shrike had been last year (Beeston Common), so I carried on further up the road. Luckily I found a layby, which looked right and there was a park too so I grabbed it. I was a bit worried about parking my car at the side of the A road but I couldn't work out how else to get to Beeston Bump so it would have to do.

We could see the entrance to a footpath in a gap in the hedge and we all bailed out of the car at 10.39am. The Wryneck had been seen at a place called 'The Pit' so our 1<sup>st</sup> job was to find that. It was glorious morning and the sun was shining down on Beeston Bump, which as the name suggests is a hill.





Beeston Bump

The hill is right on the coast, so you can see why it gets the birds and made us wonder why we'd never gone there before. We walked over a level crossing and towards the hill and found what we presumed to be The Pit, which was an area of dense cover and had a couple of birders circling it already.



The Pit?

There'd been no more reports of the Wryneck and we were starting to see why! Once anything was in there it wasn't going to be spotted again for quite some time.....Zzzzzzzzzzz! There was a Whinchat on top of some bushes, which cleared off over the long grass and towards the cliffs. There was a huge caravan park to our right, so it must be a popular place to stay albeit slightly weird.



Caravan Park

We'd been standing around for ages and had seen no sign of the Wryneck, so we were beginning to get slightly bored. Why couldn't it just fly between some bushes or just give us some kind of clue, as to its whereabouts? Even if we had a dreadful view of it we'd be happy! We wandered up to the top of The Pit where we continued to stand and stare at the empty bushes. Wendy was standing quite far away from me but she'd heard rustling in the bushes in front of her. She looked down and followed the sound until something started to slowly emerge. At 1<sup>st</sup> it was just a dark shape but as it came further out she could see that it was a Stoat. It edged its way cautiously forward until its head was out in the open and looked straight up at her. It sat motionless while they just stared at each other and Wendy couldn't believe her luck. With her jaw on the ground she silently let me know what was going on. After what seemed like a few minutes, I thought I'd have to move up to try see it or it would just go back in the hedge. The Stoat had just started to creep out into the clear and Wendy reckoned she was going to try and get a point and click Stoat shot when it must've heard me and Lyca coming and shot back into the cover of the bushes like a rocket! Nooooooooo! Wendy was still gobsmacked at the thought that she'd just had a staring match with a Stoat but was a bit disappointed that it'd been scared off before it came right out. I thought she'd been incredibly lucky to have the encounter to start with because I hadn't seen it at all. After that bit of excitement we carried on wandering aimlessly around with absolutely no joy despite our perseverance.

We ended up losing each other, so Wendy reckoned that I might have gone back to the level crossing at the start of the walk but I wasn't there, so she turned round. I'd gone up the side path where we'd spotted a bird shooting into a bush that that looked interesting when we'd 1<sup>st</sup> arrived but as I was searching I spotted a woman walking two dogs which were both off the lead. Thinking quickly I darted into a clearing to get Lyca away from the out of control dogs. Once they'd passed I wandered down to the level crossing to see if I could work out where Wendy was but she'd already moved off to try and find me.....Hahaha! As Wendy headed back up the path all of a sudden a bird launched itself out of the bushes and flew straight over her head making her squeak in fright and belted off up the railway line. It was a brown Blackbird but she then caught a glimpse of a white bib, so reckoned it could've been a female R.O. Unfortunately her view was so brief that she couldn't be 100% sure and she looked around desperately hoping that I was behind her and had seen it too. I wasn't of course and was still walking around trying to find her! My phone rang and it was Wendy asking where I was, so I told her to meet me at the level crossing. I could see the level crossing from where I was standing, so Wendy walked back until she could see me. There were more dogs coming by then so she stood waiting to give me the go ahead that I could leave. The next thing she knew was a voice saying, "Have you got a problem love?" and spun round to see a woman standing in the garden of the house by the railway line. Slightly taken aback Wendy said, "No, why?" and was shocked when the woman replied with, "Because you've been pacing around out here for ages!" Wendy was a bit annoyed by then and just said, "Errrr no, I've just been standing here waiting for someone!" Urrghhhhhh! She was a bit angry really considering she was carrying a pair of binoculars not a bag with "Swag" written on the side and couldn't believe that she'd thought she looked dodgy.....Grrrrrrrr! Surely the stupid old woman has seen a load of birders in that area over the years? After Wendy told me and laughed it off we thought it would be a suitable time to leave before our innocent and unsuccessful hunt for a Wryneck turned into an arrest.



It was 11.38am when we got back to the car and there were no sign of any Police cars and we couldn't hear any sirens, so we got in and relaxed. We could totally see why the bird hadn't been reported since the 15<sup>th</sup> and dismissed our suspicions of suppression but we had a horrible feeling that it wasn't the last we'd hear of it either. It'd been reported at 7.30am that morning, which would've been before all the dog walkers had descended and it'd probably been flushed from the path by the 1<sup>st</sup> birder of the day. It was also reported later the same day, probably after all the dog walkers had gone home and the coast was clear....Urrghhh! It was 19.5c outside and yet again we were dressed for the cooler temperatures of earlier in the day. We'd just had to use the last poo bag, so we made a quick detour back to HQ on our way past to grab another roll. There'd been nothing reported, so at least we hadn't been wasting our time at Beeston Bump while there was loads being seen elsewhere. Seeing as we'd only paid it a fleeting visit yesterday I reckoned we should go back to Cley to do the whole walk, so that was our next plan sorted.

When we got to the car park at Cley it was 12.19pm, so before we set off we ate our lunch and Lyca was raring to go by the time we headed out at 12.40pm. The weather was looking very threatening so we crossed our fingers we would have our Norfolk luck of dodging the rain! Walking down East Bank we could hear Beardies and watched a couple flying around over the reeds in the distance. When we got to the beach we had a scan out to sea but there was nothing and it was more dead than back at home at the Point of Ayre. Wendy found a balloon and instead of leaving it to go into the sea she picked it up and shoved it into the back of the rucksack, so it didn't fly away. Further along she picked up a plastic water bottle and brought that with us too. The beaches in Norfolk are usually quite free of litter but not today it seemed.



Hurry up!

When we were approaching the Coastguards hut we spotted a Whinchat on the fence by the Eye Field, so we tried to see if it'd stay there for a photo. Just then Wendy ended up getting collared by an eccentric couple behind us who wanted to know what the bird was. They had a tick list with them but no pen and to add insult to injury they didn't know their birds either....Doh! I skillfully scuttled off to try for a shot of the bird while Wendy was well and truly stuck and in it for the long haul.....Hahahahaha! Unfortunately the Whinchat wasn't cooperating, so I didn't end up getting anything remotely decent but I'd successfully managed to dodge the nutters and nab another Wheatear photo that'd popped up on the same fence post the Whinchat had been on.





Wheatear

We let them get ahead of us, so we could walk back in peace and when they were far enough away we carried on. In the car park at the bottom of West Bank we bumped into the old guy from Burnham Overy again. We had a brief chat and when Wendy commented that we'd probably see him again soon he said he was going back home to Cumbria tomorrow. Normally we'd be leaving on the Friday too, so we felt happy that we still had an extra couple of days left. With the weather being so warm Wendy really didn't want to go home and could've stayed there forever. We eventually caught up with the odd balls again on West Bank, so again I managed to palm them off onto Wendy seeing as it's her forte.....Hahahaha!

Down at the bottom Wendy asked me how far it was to Cley Deli and if we could walk there easily enough. There was no way I was walking all the way there, I was starting to feel the strain already, so I said we'd go there after. We saw nothing else on the way back along the road apart from a group of school kids pond dipping. There was another group of bored looking kids with bins round their necks at the car park. One of them walked past my car and pointed at the reg and said, "Isle of Man!" Its weird but the IOM plate always seems to get more attention than even foreign ones do. It was only 2.18pm when we got back and we were knackered already and it felt much later than it was. Maybe our extra couple of days were going to be hard going and we'd be too tired to appreciate them? For want of something better to do I drove Wendy to Cley Deli seeing as she needed her fix. I couldn't complain because she came out with a small tub of yummy ice cream for me, which went down a treat. She was very impressed by the Portuguese custard tart she had but there was no way I was eating cold custard! After that we sat in the car park feeling as though we could nod off, so we made the unanimous decision to head for home.

Unbelievably we were back at HQ at 2.59pm, which was shockingly early but we just couldn't think of anything else to do.



Bed suitably dog proofed with a double blanket system!

Wendy of course went on Facebook but it was a good job she did because someone had put up a post from the Steam Packet, which just slightly affected us. Due to dredging problems at Heysham the next few day's 2.15am sailings were now leaving at the earlier time of 1am! If she hadn't seen that then we'd have missed our sailing home and would've been stuck! This was great news for us and meant that we didn't have as long to sit it out at Heysham before falling into bed in the cabin....Yes! After that revelation we took Lyca outside into the garden for a muck about.



Garden

I dog proofed it by stacking up the garden chairs across the gap in the wall, so she couldn't escape. Lyca went absolutely nuts and was running round and round in circles like a total nutter. There was a dog ball in one of the drawers in the kitchen, so I went inside and grabbed it for her to play with. She was having such a good time that it was shame to bring her in when it started to rain. Luckily it was just a shower and when it passed over we all went out again but this time I brought the Go-Pro to video her. She ran backwards and forwards while Wendy threw the ball and at one point she even ran straight into the Go-Pro knocking it over.....Hahaha! I don't know about her but we were knackered after that and she was starving so after a lot of harassment Wendy gave in and let her have her tea at 4.50pm. We had ours earlier than usual too and at 5.40pm I decided to go out to Cley before it got too dark. Wendy went off for a bath after I'd gone and rather than follow her upstairs Lyca lay on the bed admiring the view over the marshes and barking :P. She made use of the light and went around the house taking photos to remember it by then sat down to watch some TV.

I went for a look at Pat's Pool and there was nothing, so moved on to the next hide. I could hear Beardies calling and waited for about 15 minutes hopeful that one would come out for a shot but none of them did. I also heard a **Water Rail** screeching but there was nothing else. The only thing of interest was a Hercules flying round quite low so I grabbed a photo since it was the only thing about.



Hercules

When I got back we carried on watching the Megas DVD with Wendy saying, "We've seen this!" and "I remember that!" at intervals while I was left scratching my head thinking, "Have we?" In the end we ended up going to bed early again at 10.15pm to listen to more Butterfly Isles and I think I nodded off before the end again while Wendy could've listened to more.

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> September

Usually we'd be packing up and leaving Norfolk by the Friday morning and Wendy was particularly pleased that we weren't when she looked outside after being woken up by the alarm at 7am. It was another beautiful day, so having had a lazy day yesterday it was time to kick ourselves back into gear for a visit to Winterton. Hopefully we'd recuperated enough energy for the long walk ahead of us but Lyca didn't look too enthusiastic and went straight back to bed and to sleep after being out for a wee. By the time we were ready and leaving HQ it was 8.30am and feeling rather chilly at 12c even though it was a lovely sunny day.

We arrived at Winterton car park at 9.46am and bought a ticket for the day, which cost £5 but meant there was no pressure to get back by a certain time. Wendy ran over to the WC's before we started our walk and nipped to the café on her way back. She came back with a huge Bakewell Slice, which we both had some of for medicinal purposes only obviously :P. After we'd refuelled we set off and decided to go into the South Dunes 1<sup>st</sup> to check the bushes for migrants.





Having a shake

It was quite busy with dog walkers already, which wasn't ideal but we managed to dodge most of them by being in the birders zone. There were still way too many leaves on the trees for our liking and lots of small Warblers flitting about amongst them.



Migrant bushes

Trying to get a decent view of any of them was practically impossible but none of them stood out and the calls suggested that they were all just Willow Chiffs. We were kicking up plenty of Common Darters from the path and we had our 1<sup>st</sup> **House Sparrows** of the trip in the usual bird crammed bushes below Hermanus Restaurant. A Blackbird flew across the path and made our hearts race but as always it was just a bog standard Blackbird and not its mountain dwelling cousin which we're ever hopeful of. It wasn't the only Blackbird around and although there'd been RO's reported the day before there was no sign of any this morning :( There were Goldcrests in the trees too and while we did our best to try and pin something more interesting down there just wasn't anything in with them. We didn't even hear the call of a YBW, so we got the impression that yet again it was going to be a non eventful day. A Border Terrier came running out of the bracken wagging it's tail, so I took Lyca down to the lower path while Wendy made a fuss of it. She had a look at its collar and found that he was called Rufus. He was very friendly but didn't seem to be with anyone, so Wendy stayed with him for a while in the hope that his owner materialised.



Dog sitting

There was a bloke miles away further up the path, so hopefully Rufus belonged to him because eventually she had to leave him behind, so we could carry on our walk. Rufus obviously knew his way around Winterton, so was probably one of those dogs who likes to wander. I stayed on the lower path and Wendy ended up vanishing into the bracken where Rufus had appeared from when she heard something tacking. She'd gone in as far as she could but the path stopped and there was no way through, so she turned around having failed to locate the culprit. When she came out I carried on but when I turned round she was nowhere to be seen again....Urrghhhh! When I found her she was standing staring at bush but I didn't pay it any attention. The next thing I heard was Wendy saying, "I hope this isn't just a Stonechat!" There was a silhouette of a bird at the bottom left hand edge, which was sitting motionless with the sun behind it and she wasn't budging until she knew what it was. Initially she thought it was a Stonechat but her gut instinct was telling her otherwise. I was beginning to get a bit impatient by then and was telling her to hurry up while another birder had appeared on the scene and was standing behind her. All of a sudden the bird moved and she caught a glimpse of the flick of a red tail and a dark head, which in the weird light looked more like a Black Redstart. She called me back to come and have a look but I said that going by its behaviour it was more likely to be a Common Redstart. The bloke asked her where she was looking but then the bird flew and I saw it fly.....Phew! It was a Common Redstart but in true Redstart style it'd well and truly given us the slip, so we left the other birder to re-find it and headed back to get a drink.

It was 11.31am when we got back from the south dunes and it was too early for lunch but too late to consider starting the walk into the North Dunes before we'd eaten. We could be gone for hours, so we had to stay put until a more respectable time for lunch. It was quite windy and when I opened my door the all day ticket blew off the dash and vanished down the gap between my dashboard and window.....Uh oh! I couldn't fish it out either, so we had to cross our fingers that nobody would notice or that the ticket bloke would remember my car. It was boiling in the car and we didn't know how long we could stick it out, so we ended up having our lunch early. After that Wendy went over to the WC's and came back to get her camera because she'd found a couple of Moths she didn't recognise and wanted a photo to ID then with later. It wasn't the best photo because they were tucked in behind some pipes up by the ceiling but best we could come up with was Silver Y, although we are not confident in that ID.





Moths

By 12.06pm we were ready to go and we headed off towards the line of trees with the distinct feeling that we weren't going to have a very productive day. All of a sudden I heard a call, which made my ears prick up just as a **Yellow Wagtail** flew up from the ground and headed off in the direction of the South Dunes. Not a bad start even if I do say so myself :). Wendy stopped to chat to a couple of birders who were on their way back and said they'd seen nothing.....Urrghhhh! As usual there'd been a report of a Rough-legged Buzzard earlier, which made us laugh because we've yet to see one despite having been in the right place at the wrong time on numerous occasions. Would today be our lucky day? Hahaha.....we very much doubted it! As we walked along the path next to the trees a Green Woodpecker flew out and belted off over towards the dunes by the beach. We'd never seen a Woodpecker anywhere apart from a wooded area before, so it looked weird. Maybe it was off out for the day to do a bit of surfing and have a barbie on the beach or maybe it'd found a water source or an Ants nest somewhere? Strangely we didn't see or even hear a single Yellowhammer in the usual places and it was turning into another Yellowhammerless holiday :( We carried on until Wendy spotted something that I reckon has scarred me for life. There was a bloke with leathery orange skin walking in the dunes wearing nothing but a tiny pair of Speedos! Aarrghhhh! Wendy seemed to think that there was a Naturist Beach somewhere but I wasn't so sure. She found out later that there was indeed a naturist area up near the Horsey end of the beach, so he must've come from there to go to the café or something. That would've been a real treat for the eyes of all the customers eating their lunch...Bleurrghhh!

Feeling slightly queasy already we eventually arrived at the concrete blocks only to be nearly blown over by the unmistakable smell of something dead. Lyca seemed to like it though and looking around Wendy spotted a dead rabbit, which was caked in flies lying on top of the wall :O! The smell was unreal and the heat of the sun wasn't helping, so we rushed past it as quickly as possible holding our breath. Lyca hadn't spotted it but she was on the scent, so I had to literally drag her away and it's a good job it wasn't on the ground or she would've been itching to roll in it.....Yuk! Who on earth would leave a dead rabbit in full view at a place that probably sees 100's of walkers in a day? I started to worry that it'd been poisoned and had been put there as bait to kill Buzzards with but Wendy didn't agree. Whatever it was it was a bit weird and very unpleasant :( There was no water in the pool there but we had a look around and found yet another Whinchat!





Whinchat

In the bushes there was a Blackcap and looking up into the sky we spotted some Buzzards circling really high up in the thermals. Try as we might we couldn't make any of them into a Rough-leg, so we gave up. It was so hot by then that Wendy got Lycas bowl from the rucksack and gave her a drink. She was a very thirsty dog, so we were glad we'd brought it this time. We carried on until we got to the Willow Emerald Pool but the grass was so long and overgrown that I left Lyca with Wendy and went over for a look myself.



Where's he gone?

Not surprisingly it was totally dried up, so I waded my way back through the grass hoping there were no Adders lurking in there. At the bigger Dragonfly pool there was literally nothing and it was totally dead, so after Lyca had her traditional drink from it we carried on.

My plan was to go and explore the Horsey end of the dunes and to take a walk up a path where there'd been a Red-backed Shrike a few days ago. I must add that we didn't know about the naturist beach at this point and it was just a hunch that Wendy had :P! There were so many Common Darters and Migrant Hawks flying around on one section of path that we couldn't believe what we were seeing. They were literally everywhere and when a Common Darter landed on my hat Wendy couldn't resist getting a photo and I took some video :P.



Common Darter

We got to the trees, which overlooked the fields where we had the Common Cranes last year and had a scan around. There were yet more Common Buzzards, which got our hopes up but Wendy's eye had been caught by some very white Gulls flying over the sea behind the dunes. I turned round for a look only to see 4x **Mediterranean Gulls** one of which was a juvenile. Finally we'd added another new bird to our list :). Wendy wanted to go for a look at the beach but my feet were starting to throb and I just couldn't be bothered climbing up the steep steps. She went up on her own and saw nothing but a nice view and loads of Grey Seals.



Beach

Luckily she wasn't at the naturist area and didn't accidentally spot more than she'd bargained for! When she came back down we both decided that it'd be a waste of time going any further. We were too tired, I was far too hot and Wendy made the point that the RBS hadn't been reported for days, so had probably cleared off. I had to admit defeat, so after taking a photo of the amazingly hot weather and WhatsApping it to my Mum, Dad and Sister we started the walk back.





Sweltering

Ahead of us was an old guy who seemed to be doing some kind of survey and all I can say is that I hope he wasn't doing a Dragonfly count or he would be there all day! We motored all the way back seeing nothing else of note except for an old couple on bikes who looking back had probably come from the naturist beach too! We had memories of being really tired on the way back in the past but this time it didn't feel like such a long walk. Our walk up Ben Macdui in July seems to have shifted our goalposts slightly, which can't be a bad thing. Back at the car it was 2.55pm and looking at my Fitbit we'd done 18,000 steps, which was quite respectable. Lyca looked very tired and curled up on the back seat while Wendy nipped over to the café to get me a drink and ice cream to cool me down. She came straight back out again after seeing the size of the queue, so we left at 3.08pm and stopped off at the shop just up the road. Wendy's face was a picture when she saw 2 proper Chavs standing right outside the doorway with a couple of proper Pit Bulls and really didn't fancy going past them. She gave them a wide berth as she went into the shop but the dogs didn't even bat an eyelid. Shame how we're so wary of certain breeds of dog when they're probably real softies :( She bought me an Oreo Stick ice cream, which is now my favourite but I haven't seen it anywhere else, so haven't had one since.....Grrrrrr! We needed some bits and pieces, so Wendy nipped into Tesco on the way home and we were back at HQ by 4.50pm. There was a chip van at the bottom of the road on the corner where I parked my car, so I had to do the very tricky manoeuvre to get in the drive. Luckily I'd just spotted my tea though, so that was mine sorted. Wendy set about making an Edamame stir-fry with some Pad Thai sauce she'd bought and I wandered down the road. I really fancied sausage and chips so I hoped the wait would be worth it. When I got back Wendy's was ready and we both sat down for tea. When I opened the wrapper up I was shocked to see just 1 sausage. ONE sausage :O! Wendy then remembered that as a rule that's what you get unless you ask for two! She was horrified when I told her it'd cost me £3.20 but I suppose they can charge whatever they want being the only take away for miles around and have a captive market of people who have more money than sense! Either way it was still a rip off and not even that nice! Lyca was absolutely pooped after her walk and after we'd both had baths we sat down to put our feet up. We'd also started to feel the effects and by 9.47pm we packed up for the night and headed off to bed. I think we just about managed to hear most of the 15minutes of Butterfly Isles before falling asleep!

Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> September

Wendy was awake at 6.24am but she dozed on and off until she got up at 7.15am. There was no sign of Lyca and she stayed in bed with me until I surfaced at 7.55am. It was our last full day in Norfolk but we didn't really know what to do seeing as there was nothing being reported and it'd all gone very quiet. I took Lyca outside and saw another Painted Lady and one thing I did notice was how chilly it felt with the presence of the stronger wind. We were in no particular hurry as usual and didn't head out until 9.25am, with our 1<sup>st</sup> port of call being Weybourne Deli. As I was parking up an old guy came round the corner and stopped his car in the middle of the road right on the corner. Thinking he'd made a mistake and perhaps stalled it I was more than a bit shocked when he quite casually got out and wandered over the road to the shop! I literally couldn't believe what I was seeing and Wendy found it so amusing that she couldn't resist getting a sneaky photo when she came back out.



Nice parking!

My face lit up when Wendy produced a pain au chocolat and a cheese twist, which we shared. She then announced that she needed a wee, which seeing as we hadn't even been anywhere yet wasn't ideal. Luckily we were passing the Bookshop/café at Kelling, so I had to stop there so she could use their toilets. She walked in and pretended to be browsing the random items that were on display, which were no more appealing to her than the dead rabbit covered in flies at Winterton! When she turned the corner she was horrified to find the owner hovering outside the toilets with the Hoover.....Nooooooooo! He was totally blocking the corridor, so she continued to look as though she was looking for something to buy until there was a gap and she swiftly raced straight through and locked herself in the toilet. When she came out he was obviously onto her and looked at her with suspicion but she just smiled sweetly and scuttled out of the door. Awkward! It must be annoying having a shop that most people only go into to use the loos! After that we carried on and arrived in the car park at Kelling Heath at 10.08am. There was an interesting looking car parked up which had 'Swan Rescue' on it, which made us wonder what on earth they could be rescuing there as there's no Swans for miles?



Swan Rescue?

We thought we'd chance our luck with the Dartford Warblers but knowing how difficult they can be to find we didn't hold any hopes. Since the Stonechats have died off after a couple of harsh winters they've proven to be very hard to track down. It was still chilly but the sun was out, so we were hopeful that it'd warm up later. We laughed out loud when we got to the gate and read the graffiti that someone had written on it and couldn't agree more!





Hahahaha!

Unbelievably and despite the new improvised signage someone had seen fit to ignore it and left a nice pile of it just a few yards from the gate for some unsuspecting person to stand in.....Grrrrrr! Having not been to Kelling for a year we found ourselves a bit confused as to where to go. We thought we were going the right way and carried on but there'd been a lot of hedge and gorse cutting going on and not only did it look unfamiliar but there was dried up gorse all over the footpath. Lyca wasn't happy at all and it must've hurting her paws, so I ended up carrying her over the worst of it.



Prickly

She looked very proud hitching a ride with her head held high and snout in the air but after a while she started to feel very heavy for a small dog. I was very glad to finally put her back down and she trotted on happily up the path until we reached the level crossing.





Level crossing

A **Sparrowhawk** zoomed across the track and I could hear a train coming, so I got my camera poised to get some video of it going past. Typically of my luck when it came round the corner it was the boring diesel engine again and not the nice steam engine I'd hoped for! The only chance we've ever had of getting a photo of the steam engine was when Wendy accidentally switched my camera off instead of taking a shot.....Doh! That wasn't our only disappointment either, apart from hearing a Chiffchaff the area where we check for birds was dead! We've never been successful every time we've been there but this had to be the worst yet. Normally we'd hear Yellowhammer but there wasn't even that, there was literally nothing about! We have fond memories of seeing Woodlark, Dartford Warbler, Yellowhammer and Turtle Dove there but over the recent years it seems to be getting harder and harder, which is pretty depressing. We did our usual walk just for the sake of completeness and the campsite was the busiest we'd ever seen it.



Kelling Campsite

We walked back feeling quite dejected that there was so little about in an area that should be so good. We didn't even bump into John, who in the past we have always seen to the point where it became freaky and we even nicknamed him 'The Ghost of Kelling Heath'! We missed his guided tours of new areas and especially the way he used to fill us in on what had been happening and how the wildlife had fared that season :(. We sincerely hope that he's still out there every day doing his bit. It was 11.16am when we got back to the car and the temperature was 21.5c, so it was no wonder I was absolutely boiling. We were running out of ideas by then but my next plan was to do a walk at Weybourne beach.



Approaching the car park it looked much busier than we wanted it to be and there were dogs everywhere. We sat in the car waiting for them all to disperse and felt dangerously like we could've dozed off at any moment! I avoided having to pay and display in the car park by parking at the side of the road like loads of other people, which was a very handy trick :P. When the coast was a bit clearer we set off up the beach and headed towards the amazing looking bushes we'd made a note to check last time.



Weybourne

Needless to say the bushes were dead and there was nothing about at all. Looking over at Muckleborough we could see someone was having a trip in one of the Armoured Personal carriers which is part of the Muckleborough collection.



Cool

I've always wanted to go in there and have a look but I don't think the museum would be particularly dog friendly somehow. We carried on walking and it wasn't long before Lyca started pulling me to get to the sea so I took her down.





Sea Dog

Wendy stayed up on the footpath to wait for us but Lyca was in hurry, so I sat down on the stones while she stood in the water wagging her tail. After a few minutes I spotted a **Red-throated Diver** close in, so I attempted some shots but the outcome was not as I'd hoped. I only had myself to blame though as I'd been too lazy to bring out the big gear so only had the smaller 300mm lens with a converter on :(.



Red-throated Diver

When I got back to the footpath I asked Wendy if she'd seen it but she'd been looking up at the old plane on Muckleborough Hill and checking the bushes so hadn't.





Old plane

I decided against going any further having lost the will by then, so we were back at the car by 12.13pm. It was lunchtime but we didn't fancy staying there. We wanted somewhere nice to eat our lunch so we moved off to Salthouse, at least have something to look at while we ate our sarnies.

When we got to Salthouse it was 12.22pm and we had our lunch while scanning the shingle and surrounding pools. Yet again it was dead and there were no birds to be seen, so when Wendy got a report of Lapland Bunting at Weybourne we rolled our eyes and groaned.....Urrghhhh! We'd just been to Weybourne and it was dead but maybe if we'd stuck it out and walked further we could've been the finders.....Grrrrrrrr! I fancied an Oreo Sandwich as a commiseration prize, so Wendy nipped into Blakeney Spa and I parked up at Friary Hills to eat it. While it was by no means as good as an Oreo Stick it still did the job nicely :). As we sat there we spotted some people heading towards us with a dog but there's a huge "No Dogs" sign on the gate, so we were baffled. We can only think that they'd walked from the Wiveton side and been oblivious because when they came through the gate one of them pointed at the sign and they all looked shocked. Although we couldn't do the Friary Hills walk because of Lyca I'd parked there so we could try a parallel walk by the Blakeney Freshes. We'd never done the Blakeney Freshes walk as it's always very busy with dogs and we'd never realised there was a much quieter parallel walk there. A few days earlier, while we'd been moaning to a bloke about the lack of Beardies at East Bank, he told us that he'd had Beardies there and they were close enough to photograph, so I was keen to suss it out to see if he was right. It was worth checking out even if just for future reference, so we started to walk down the footpath.



New walk

About 5 minutes down the path, when I was scanning around with my bins, I caught sight of my car with its passenger window wide open! I wouldn't even be happy with this in the Isle of Man so I had to sprint back down the path to close it....Grrrrrr! When I returned I was out of breath but it was a pleasant and short walk through the middle of a reed bed although there was no sight or sound of there being any Beardies around, which was pretty much typical!



Looking back at Salthouse

Wendy all of sudden shrieked and I looked down to see Lyca being dragged by the lead up from the ground. She'd just rolled in something and on closer inspection Wendy noticed that it had maggots in it so must've been some kind of dead rodent's remains.....Bleurrghhhh! Brilliant! That meant that she'd have to go straight in the shower when we got back. Lyca looked very pleased with herself afterwards like as if she'd just bought a new expensive perfume, which she loved. We turned around when we got to a gate and found 2 more Whinchats, which hadn't been in short supply during the week. The same thing couldn't be said for Marsh Harriers, which had been very few and far between....weird.

Back at the car it was still only 1.55pm and we were well and truly stumped as to what to do next. I stopped off at Cley Deli for Wendy and then we headed for home. Driving past East Bank we spotted 2x Marsh Harriers and further down the road over the marshes there were 3 more. So much for the lack of them we'd been complaining about just ½ hour ago! We then got stuck behind what appeared to be a load of Toffs on horses, who were taking up the entire road. We weren't in a hurry or anything but there seemed to be an awful lot of them, which was causing disruption on the main coast road. I was starting to think it might be an illegal fox hunt and if so I'd have happily mown them all down. As we very slowly approached the Dun Cow Pub we found that they were all pulling over at the side of the road and seemed to be stopping there. All became clear when Wendy spotted a girl with dreadlocks hanging over the wall of the beer garden holding onto a very thin looking horse. These weren't Toffs at all but a group of Gypsies complete with Gypsy caravans and loads of worryingly skinny looking horses tied up nearby :( We laughed at how we could've confused the two but I bet the Dun Cow weren't very chuffed with the freshly arrived clientele! Wendy wanted me to pull over so she could get a photo but I refused and drove past them all glad to be back up to speed again.

After our non-eventful and short day we were back at HQ at 2.38pm and obviously the 1<sup>st</sup> thing we did was give Lyca a shower. She then needed blow-drying, which ate into a lot of our remaining time and was a chore we could've done without. Wendy then went off to start on the packing, to free up some time later. We had tea early again and then Wendy decided that as she'd already got a lot done we should take a walk down the road for a drink at the Dun Cow. I wasn't bothered and would've been happy staying in but it was our last night and she was complaining that we'd only been out once. I gave in and we headed off down the grass verge at the side of the road at 6.13pm and Wendy saw another Hummingbird Hawk-moth flying across one of the gardens. That was another that I'd missed and she'd now seen 3 to my 1.....Boooooooo! When we got to the pub Wendy went to go in but I spotted 2x Black Labs sitting right by the door, which are Lyca's most hated dog breed. She's terrified of them, so there was no way I was taking her inside to cause a commotion in a busy pub full of people eating. Wendy suggested that while she went in to get our drinks I should go up the



steps to what they called the 'Secret Garden' she'd spotted last time to see what it was like. I wandered up and had the entire place to myself and there were loads of benches to sit at.



Secret Garden

We were very impressed and couldn't believe we'd never spotted it before but then again it's never usually warm enough to sit outside in the evening when we're in Norfolk. No sooner had we sat down and started to relax than Lyca was causing trouble again and had something in her mouth. I quickly grabbed it off her and Wendy ID'd it as a dried up piece of fish that must've fallen off someone's plate earlier. Nice! A couple of people came up to the garden and had a look around but didn't stay, so we were still the only ones up there. Wendy was enjoying playing ID the fruit tree but when the midgies started to appear things didn't seem so pleasant, so we rushed the remainder of our drinks and headed back to HQ.

Wendy went straight upstairs for a bath then cleaned the bathroom, as we wouldn't be using it again. She did all the remaining washing, so everything we took home was clean and we got everything that we didn't need packed up. We watched a bit more of the Megas DVD before falling into bed at the ridiculously early time of 9.45pm to listen to a few minutes of Butterfly Isles.

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> September

It was 7.15am when we woke up, or was that when Lyca woke us up? The sky looked dark and like it was going to rain, which wasn't good for our last day. It rained at 8.30am but was only a quick shower, so we kept our fingers crossed that it was over for the day. It was as usual a busy start to the day which revolved around Wendy making double sarnies, packing up, cleaning and generally running around in circles getting stressed out. If I try to help out it just confuses matters, so I generally stay out of the way and stick to planning and driving which is a system that consistently works well until it's time to load the car which is my domain :P. I was itching to get packed up and go but as we had the cottage until 12pm Wendy thought this meant that we didn't have to rush too much. By 9.30am I decided to take Lyca down the road for a walk, so I left Wendy to it and headed out. Lyca decided that after she'd done her business near the Duck Pond over the road she wanted to go home and pulled like a tram horse all the way to HQ and went back to bed. Lazy madam!

While Wendy was busy I tried to work out where to go 1st and couldn't decide between Burnham Overy or Warham Greens. Wendy wasn't keen to go back to Warham Greens after Lyca's rabies incident with the foaming mouth, nor did she want to do the big Burnham Overy walk again. As usual we'd be doing the normal stuff on the way out but this time I planned to end up at Frampton Marsh but it was just a case of how to fill the morning up. We also had to be careful not to exhaust a good area because we were going to be going back to Norfolk in a couple of weeks. Yep, that's right! We had had 2 weeks holidays left to take from work and due to Wendy's calendar we'd had no choice but to take them both within 2 weeks of each other. It wasn't ideal but it'd be interesting to see the difference in bird activity between the end of September and the middle of October nevertheless. We'd even driven past the cottage we had booked for October in Cley for a bit of a nosey, we crossed our fingers that it was going to be a bit more modern than Eastgate! It was up a hill, so wouldn't have had any previous history of flooding, which was a start but we couldn't see the cottage from the road. Surely it couldn't be worse?

We had to take the Eastgate key back to the cottage company shop in Holt and I had the directions to it, so it shouldn't be that difficult. Bearing this in mind I wanted to get going and by 10.25am I'd loaded up the car and we were ready to go. We locked up and waved, "Goodbye" to Eastgate Cottage, not feeling particularly sad to be leaving. This was because we knew we'd be back before we knew it not because Wendy hated it. In fact she'd actually decided she quite liked it and could've stayed longer.....Women!



Eastgate Cottage

I found the Budgens car park in Holt easily and headed off through a lane, which brought me out into the high street. I followed the directions as I understood them but there was no sign of the cottage company anywhere, I wandered down the main shopping street but it didn't match with the directions so I retraced my steps back to car park and started again. I then realised there was a second lane and I'd gone through the wrong lane to start with.....Doh! Sure enough I found the shop and posted the keys through the letterbox, so with my job done we were free to go. It was 10.50am when we set off and Wendy was feeling peckish, so she got me to stop off at Stiffkey Stores aka Hipster Stores :P. I like to call it that because that's exactly what it's become since a young Hipster couple have taken it over.....Hahahaha. It was probably a normal local shop run by an old couple a while ago where the local people could get their paper and milk from but now it's full of overpriced cranky super foods and the like. Wendy is obviously like a pig in plop when she goes there and this time was no exception. She came out with some weird cold pressed, gluten free, dairy free, no refined sugars, pumpkin pie flavour bar and a Vegan Food magazine. Thinking she'd finally lost the plot completely I took it all back when she passed me a bag containing a pain au chocolat.....Om nom nom :). She was raving about the block of brown goo that she had but I have to say that mine looked 100% more appetising :P. Next up was a detour to Holkham WC's and the shop opposite again for Wendy and we finally parked up in the layby at Burnham Overy at 11.39am.....Phew!

It was a good job we'd just had a snack to keep us going, as it was going to be after lunchtime when we got back. We set off down the track again but there was less activity than there had been the 1<sup>st</sup> time around. We hoped that this wasn't a sign of things to come though but carried on regardless knowing that at least Lyca was having a decent walk before the long drive later. We walked down in the ditch again and when we were nearly at the bottom we spotted some huge Parasol Mushrooms that had sprung up in the cow field.





Shrooms

We stopped to admire them with our bins and heard some wanna be joker say, “Are you mushroom spotters?” We turned around to see a bloke and his wife standing there grinning at us. “Anyone can spot birds, but mushrooms....” he said. Oh dear! We carried on down to the bushes by the boardwalk and found him again wandering about looking lost. He’d actually lost his wife, so having seen her a couple of minutes ago I had to point him in the right direction....Doh! Instead of going right, through the dunes to Holkham Pines I wanted to try the Gun Hill side for a change, so we walked up into the dunes and looked around at the view.



Gun Hill bushes

There must’ve been something in the air that day because we came across a rather concerned looking woman who’d lost her husband! She gave us a brief description of him and we said we’d keep an eye out and tell him where she was if we found him. I hope he was OK and they found each other quickly because we hadn’t seen him by the time we’d got all the way over to the brickworks!



Brickworks

The bushes there look brilliant for migrants but there's only so long you can stare at emptiness, so we didn't hang around. We walked down onto the beach, where it was much less windy and looked out over Scolt Head Island.



Scolt Head Island

There were 2x Sanderling down at the shoreline and they were running towards us. I reckoned that if I was quick enough I could make it down there without disturbing them to get myself into position for some shots. I handed Lyca over to Wendy and walked down the beach until I thought I was close enough and lay down on the sand to wait. Luckily my plan worked a treat and the pair of them carried on blissfully unaware of my presence all the way up the beach until they'd gone straight past me. I was happy with my shots and the fact that my plan had worked for a change :P.





Sanderling

When I got up I got Wendy to check me for dodgy wet patches (or knowing my track record worse) but I was given the all clear....Phew! We walked back along the area behind the dunes called the washings, which is where you'd expect to kick something up.....if there was anything about that is! The only thing we found was that the plants there were very prickly and that Lyca didn't like walking on them. We could hear some people shouting in the distance and when it started to get closer we looked up. There were 3x blokes on horses galloping up the beach and shouting loudly, as though they were in some kind of action movie. This method was proving very good for drawing attention to themselves although it would've been just as eye catching without the volume. Shortly after they'd gone past we could see 3 more heading our way but these were 2x woman and a kid, so there was no amateur dramatics.



Horse Ponces

By then we were trying to find the path back into the dunes, so we could start to make our way back for lunch, which was easier said than done. Wendy came across a weird plant that she thought was some kind of nightshade, so got another photo so we could pass it on to Andy the flower guru.



Black Nightshade

Eventually we were heading back in the right direction and we came out onto the boardwalk where we had a final check in the bushes before walking back up the ditch to the car.

It was 1.39pm when we got back, so we ate our lunch while Lyca curled up for a snooze. Again we remember that walk as being huge but this time around it hadn't felt big at all. We were refuelled and ready to start making our way out of Norfolk by the time we left at 1.59pm. My 1<sup>st</sup> job was to fill the car up at Burnham Deepdale, so Wendy quickly had a last look in Fat Face. We got some reports in of RBS in the North Dunes at Winterton as well as a Barred Warbler and Lapland Bunting earlier. It was a shame we were leaving and it was obvious decent birds would start trickling in now we were on our way up North.

It was 2.26pm when we got to Choseley and I parked up in the usual place by the barns and we got out for a listen. It was dead and there wasn't even the usual Chaffinches in the bushes never mind any Corn Buntings. I went off to scan the field behind us and managed to pull out our 1<sup>st</sup> **Grey Partridge** of the trip but there was still no sign of any Yellowhammers. We still had Frampton to try for them later, so we hadn't given up completely. Two Marsh Harriers flew over a field as we drove away then we saw a Buzzard sitting in a field as well as a Brown Hare. While we stopped to look at them we noticed that the field we'd seen Latticed Heath Moths in a couple of years ago still had its wildflower borders, which was really good to see.

By the time I parked up at Flitcham it was 2.54pm, so we left Lyca in the car and made our way to Abbey Farm Bird Hide.



View from the hide



There was a very serious looking old guy who smelt unsavoury (but most birders do to be fair) in there already and he said he'd heard a Little Owl but hadn't seen it yet. The field was quite over grown and the trees still had leaves on, so he reckoned it was somewhere at the back behind all the trees. I had a flick through the reports book and there was no mention at all of the Turtle Doves, which was sad. There wasn't very much going on at all so when Wendy spotted some Buzzards miles away over the fields her attention turned to them. One of them was looking more Harrier like, so she got me onto them. When it turned I could see that it was actually a Red Kite, so I told the others. It turned out that there was actually 2 of them with 2 Buzzards and nice to see that they're finally growing in numbers in Norfolk. Two other people came in and sat down, so it was becoming a bit crowded in the small hide for our liking, so we got up to leave. One of blokes who'd just come in asked us, if we didn't mind, if we could come and get him if his car alarm was going off, as he was having a problem with it. When we got back to the car his alarm instantly broke the silence, so I went back up to the hide to tell him and after he'd cursed his car he thanked me for letting him know. He should have bought a Volkswagen! :P. It was still 20c when we left and Wendy wasn't looking forward to getting back to the cooler climes of the Isle of Man.

We finally hit the 'Welcome to Lincolnshire' sign at 3.50pm and luckily this time Sutton Bridge was open, so we didn't have to sit and wait. It couldn't just be all plain sailing though and we found that the A16 was closed, which was the way we needed to go to get to Frampton.....Grrrrrrr! Instead we had to follow the signs for Boston and get there via the long way.....Typical! This was rather tedious seeing as we had to drive straight past the turning for Frampton and miles away from it only to have to go back on ourselves! It was getting quite late by then but I eventually parked up at RSPB Frampton Marsh at 4.39pm.

Wendy made a beeline for the Visitor Centre, so she could use the WC's and also check the reports board. I had a look at the feeders outside and instantly added **Tree Sparrow** to our list, which is always a good one to get at Frampton.



Tree Sparrow

Wendy got chatting to the volunteers who told her what was about and found out that there were Curlew Sands and Little Stint at the middle pool and Temminck's Stint at the far pool. She told them about how we hadn't seen a single Yellowhammer over the past week and they told her that they're around on the reserve especially in the line of trees down the road. This was where we'd seen them before, so we felt pretty confident and set off towards the 1<sup>st</sup> pool. Outside the reserve we noticed that they'd planted 100's of Sunflowers, which were absolutely caked in Finches. One of the volunteers came out and explained how they'd staggered the planting so that they'd all go to seed at different times to keep the birds going for longer....Brilliant but so simple!



Sunflowers

Looking around there was no sign of any Yellowhammers and we basically gave up on them from then on. Very depressing to have yet another holiday without seeing any. Seems their serious decline is not just in the Isle of Man :( When we got to the middle pool we could just about make out some **Curlew Sandpipers** and also a few **Little Stints**. I managed to get distant record shots of both.



Curlew Sandpiper





Little Stint

This was great to see compared to the very rare single birds we'd see back at home. It was really windy and cold by then and Wendy wasn't happy at all, so we headed back quickly only stopping briefly for another look at the middle pool. There were some Ringed Plover running about but on closer inspection I realised that they were actually **Little Ringed Plover**.....Yes! We'd managed to add a few new birds at Frampton after our bad start so it'd definitely been worth our while. Wendy was absolutely freezing and it was way past Lyca's dinner time, so she couldn't wait to get back to the car. I suggested she took Lyca back while I went for a scan from the 360 hide seeing as I don't get to go there anymore with having a dog. Wendy was more than happy with the idea and when she said, "Let's go get your dinner" to Lyca she started licking her chops and trotted back as quickly as she could.....Hahahahaha. Apparently she absolutely wolfed it down in record time and then settled down in the back for a nap.

When I got to the 360 hide there were some Little Stints feeding really close but the sun was too low and in a bad direction which was a shame. I grabbed a shot anyway, doing the best I could with the angle of the light.



Little Stint

There were Sand martins zooming around everywhere I looked but apart from that there wasn't much else, so I headed back.

It was 5.50pm when I got back to the car and frustratingly there'd been a report of the Temminck's plus a Spotshank from the sea wall.....Grrrrrrrr! We ate our 2<sup>nd</sup> sarnie of the day and then decided that it'd worth driving down to the end to try and see if we could find the birds. We dodged the cow poo and walked along the sea wall to see if we could get any closer to all the distant Waders.



Mucky!

We'd have needed a scope or miracle if we were to pick out a Temminck's or Spotshank from that kind of distance and with the sun so low in the sky the light was terrible, so we gave up! The sunset was pretty impressive though and although we still hadn't managed to see a Yellowhammer it'd still been a good place to end the day.

We left at 6.32pm for our journey up north and saw our 1<sup>st</sup> **Mistle Thrush** of the trip landing in a tree at the side of the road as well as our 1<sup>st</sup> dead Badger. Due to the diversion I had to drive on the back roads to get us onto the A1 and when I got to the junction it was really busy, so it was tricky to join it to say the least. When we got on the A1 Wendy decided she would try and get a shot of the fading light.



Sunset

At 8.01pm we got a report of a Garganey at Salthouse and waited with baited breath to see what else we were going to miss now we'd left Norfolk :(.



The long drive north and westwards was uneventful but I was enjoying my new route home. I've started going further north on the A1 then cutting directly west through Harrogate and back that way to avoid all the roadworks on the M62. We were pleased to finally pull up outside the New Inn in Clapham at 9.45pm, which was bang on my sat nav's eta when we'd left Frampton. It was raining as usual, so we were reminded that we'd well and truly left the nice weather behind us and were back up north. The temperature had dropped considerably by the time we got there and it was only 8c! It was really quiet in the pub, probably due to it being a Sunday but there was a middle-aged couple sitting in the bar, so it wasn't completely empty. Wendy went up and got us some drinks and we finally started to relax. From what we couldn't help but overhear the couple were on some kind of 1<sup>st</sup> date but it didn't seem that they'd done much together. He'd been out walking and had his waterproofs and rucksack on a chair next to him and she was asking if he'd enjoyed his day. She was helping him do something with his photos on his phone though, so who knows how it was going. He offered to buy her another drink but we heard her say, "I turn into a pumpkin at 9.30pm" so it looked as though she wanted to get away ages ago. Shortly after that, they left and we had the whole place to ourselves.



Uh oh!

Things started to get a bit awkward from then on and the Landlord started to lock up while the staff started to walk around yawning. One of the young barmen was very loudly telling everyone how his girlfriend was getting sick of him working so late and how many hours they all put in. We felt quite unwelcome and there wasn't a very nice atmosphere so we quickly drank up and left at 10.23pm feeling anything but relaxed. As soon as we'd walked out of the front door the lights were switched off and the staff all jumped into cars that were waiting round the back for them and were driven away.

Back at the car we still had loads of time to kill, so Wendy phoned her Mum before we were out of range for a signal. We didn't want to be too early getting to Heysham and it was a good job the boat was going early or we'd have had even more time on our hands. After Wendy had finished on the phone we started to feel a bit dodgy sitting round the back of the pub in the dark, so we left at 10.42pm. I drove as slowly as I possibly could without getting myself arrested all the way through the country roads of Lancashire letting everyone past and yet again we saw no Barn Owls :( I obviously had to speed up when I was driving through Lancaster until we reached Asda at 11.33pm. I filled my petrol tank up and with it being Sunday the shop itself was closed, so we couldn't even go and waste time in there. There was a bloke next to us and Wendy noticed that he was filling a huge fuel can up with petrol. He was acting quite shady and scuttled off with into the darkness, looking over his shoulder as he went. What was all that about?

It was 11.46pm when I got to Heysham, which wasn't as early as we'd feared it would be. We went straight through to join the queue in the car park, which was absolutely rammed! We've never seen it so busy before! It was freezing sitting there and felt like winter but the lorries were already going on we sat it out hoping to board quickly. This did kind of make us wonder if they'd have time to clean the entire boat and do a cabin changeover in time, seeing as it hadn't been in long at all. Wendy started giggling about and said that she was going to go up the toilets in the terminal but looking at the time I told her that she'd have to wait because we'd be boarding soon. She found this hilarious and started to argue that she had loads of time. While she was adamant that it'd be fine the announcement for car drivers to start boarding came and she had to eat her words....Hahahaha! It was 12.47am when the cars started to drive on and Wendy took great delight in telling

me that it was all the Blue Riband passengers, so she would've had time after all. We finally went on behind a million white vans and it was just typical that I had to do a really tight reverse manoeuvre in my half asleep state. With a final burst of energy we hauled ourselves up the stairs and went into the lounge to get our key. We overheard someone saying that although we were leaving early we'd be docking in Douglas at the usual time because the port wouldn't be open. This was fine by us, as it meant we'd get more uninterrupted sleep than usual. Wendy gave me a nudge and pointed out that the bloke who'd been filling his fuel tank up at Asda was sitting on the boat. I didn't think you were allowed to bring fuel on the boat with you, or was he a pro fuel smuggler! We dragged ourselves up to the cabin and went out like lights as soon as our heads hit the pillows. The next thing we knew was the call for disembarkation at 5.13am, so we grabbed our stuff together as quickly as possible. When we got home it was so cold in the house that we put the heating and the electric quilts on to heat up while we did a bit of unpacking. We were all knackered and slept like logs until I got a text from work at 10am asking me to go in at 12pm instead of 2.30pm. I was ready to say no way but an important job had been moved forward that I needed to work on so I had no choice :( I couldn't believe it and found it impossible to go back to sleep after that. Handy.....Not!

We'd driven 827 miles in total, which was really low for a Norfolk trip especially as we had an extra couple of days too! Wendy went to put the DVD's away in the cupboard and found that she'd been right all along and I did already have the Megas DVD! What a waste of money that was :( We'd managed to end the trip on 116 birds which is pretty decent. We had been very surprised as to how many migrants were about, we really thought that it'd be dead and there'd be nothing to go for but we'd been pleasantly surprised and had both even got a lifer out of it. Having tried for years to see a Red-breasted Flycatcher we'd started to think that it'd never happen so we were very pleased to have seen 1 over several days. The weather had been very kind to us and it had been an enjoyable week but we just had to hope that it'd hold out and that we'd recover quickly enough for our next trip, which was just 2 weeks away :O!

#### Bird List

Mute Swan	Peregrine	Great Black-backed Gull	Garden Warbler
Greylag Goose	Water Rail	Black Tern	Whitethroat
Canada Goose	Moorhen	Sandwich Tern	Yellow-browed Warbler
Brent Goose	Coot	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	Chiffchaff
Egyptian Goose	Oystercatcher	Stock Dove	Willow Warbler
Shelduck	Avocet	Woodpigeon	Goldcrest
Wigeon	Little Ringed Plover	Collared Dove	Spotted Flycatcher
Gadwall	Golden Plover	Green Woodpecker	<b>Red-breasted Flycatcher</b>
Teal	Grey Plover	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Bearded Tit
Mallard	Lapwing	Skylark	Long-tailed Tit
Pintail	Knot	Sand Martin	Blue Tit
Shoveler	Sanderling	Swallow	Great Tit
Red-legged Partridge	Little Stint	House Martin	Coal Tit
Grey Partridge	Dunlin	Meadow Pipit	Treecreeper
Pheasant	Ruff	Yellow Wagtail	Jay
Red-throated Diver	Snipe	Pied Wagtail	Magpie
Little Grebe	Black-tailed Godwit	Wren	Jackdaw
Gannet	Bar-tailed Godwit	Duncock	Rook
Cormorant	Whimbrel	Robin	Carion Crow
Little Egret	Curlew	Redstart	Starling
Grey Heron	Greenshank	Whinchat	House Sparrow
Spoonbill	Redshank	Stonechat	Tree Sparrow
Red Kite	Arctic Skua	Wheatear	Chaffinch
Marsh Harrier	Kittiwake	Blackbird	Greenfinch
Sparrowhawk	Black-headed Gull	Song Thrush	Goldfinch
Buzzard	Mediterranean Gull	Mistle Thrush	Siskin
Kestrel	Common Gull	Cetti's Warbler	Linnet
Merlin	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Reed Warbler	Bullfinch
Hobby	Herring Gull	Blackcap	Reed Bunting



## Map

