

## Norfolk September 2009

With the recent lack of decent birds and photo opportunities I decided at the last minute that a holiday was in order to add a bit of interest. My first plan was to go to the Calf of Man for a week, hopefully to see some migrants going through but that idea was quickly knocked on the head when I found out it was completely booked up for September! What kind of nutter would go on holiday to the Calf? Oh apart from me that is! :/. I was going to just forget about it but then I thought about maybe going to Cornwall? It would've meant driving my furthest distance ever in England by like 300 miles or something, which was a scary thought. I emailed Chris to ask him what he thought and he suggested trying North Norfolk instead, as finding birds in Cornwall is hard work and probably too much for a non-expert. The drive seemed just as long but after a bit of investigation it looked like it was doable. I knew Chris couldn't come, as he was off to South Africa in a few weeks but my Haweswater birding buddy Wendy was up for it. Sorted! Norfolk here we come :).

I found a place to stay near Blakeney on the North Norfolk coast and decided to go for 5 days between 21st and 25th September. It was in the perfect location of Blakeney in an eco building at Three Owls Farm and we were staying in Church Owl Cottage, which is one of the 3 cottages in the building. It was a great price but also looked nice enough too, for the money. We'd booked it without a linen service, as that would've cost us more but it did mean that we'd have to take all our own towels and bed sheets. At that time of year anything could turn up if the winds were easterlies, which would be amazing. Looking at the forecasts before we went though, they were saying permanent westerlies....Aarrghhhhhh! Never mind, even in those winds during the weeks before there'd been Red-necked Phalarope, Icterine Warbler, Booted Warbler etc.....lifer tastic!

### Monday 21st September

When we got up we both instantly noticed that the wind had picked up and it was going to be cloudy for our crossing.....Typical! There was a chance for Manx ticks for the 1<sup>st</sup> 2hrs, which is what me and Chris had decided was still Manx waters. Before setting sail we got our trip list up and running while we sat on the Ben in the harbour with **Grey Heron, Herring Gull, Cormorant** and **Gannet**. I'd booked a premier cabin with a window with a view, so we Seawatched all the way across.



Ferry seawatching

Things kicked off with all the common birds like **Fulmar, Shag, Razorbill** but I spotted another Auk very close to the Ben. Getting my bins on it I was surprised and shouted "**Puffin!**" a bird I really didn't expect to see at that time of year. Further out Wendy had spied something but she had no idea what it was, she'd never seen anything like it before and said, "What's that flapping in the sea?" I didn't get to see it but from the description she gave me it sounded very much like a **Sunfish** at the surface. Smart!

A while later, with Heysham in sight, we picked up **Kittiwake, Great Black-backed Gull** and then Wendy clocked a dark bird further away. After watching it for a few minutes we had enough details to tell that it was an **Arctic Skua**. As we approached the harbour we saw several **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** then I caught a flash of another Gull as it flew past. I said, "I'm sure that was a Med Gull!" but having only had a nano second view I couldn't call it. A Med Gull would've been a lifer for Wendy, so I didn't want to increase the stress levels for nothing. Suddenly Wendy said, "What's this Gull, it's really white?" I got my bins on it and there in front of us was a mint adult winter **Mediterranean Gull**. Excellent! It flew round the boat giving us superb views for a few minutes. If only I'd taken my camera on the boat.....Doh! Still, we couldn't complain, we hadn't even docked in Heysham and Wendy had already chalked off a lifer.....Happy Days :).

Our original plan had been to stop in Nottinghamshire on our way to Norfolk at a place called Budby hoping for Woodlark but I'd had to rethink it all on the evening before we left. I'd noticed on Birdguides that a Great Grey Shrike was being seen at Lound, which was a big pile of gravel pit workings just a few miles north of Budby. I checked online and when I saw that 2x Black-necked Grebes were practically resident there as well our minds were made up and I changed the route.

We were very pleased to finally dock and disembarked to start our journey south. Before exiting Lancaster though we got to witness some quality English driving ;). A 4x4 towing a boat refused to let a car merge into a lane, so the car ended up colliding into it and ripping the back end of the trailer clean off :O. Neither of the cars stopped either.....Mentalists! It was a case of just deserts really, as the 4x4 had been driving like a plank all the way through Lancaster and I know because I was right behind it! No wonder I've been so hesitant to drive in England for like 14 years!

On the drive to Lound we picked up some more common birds for our trip list. We had **Feral Pigeon, Jackdaw, Rook, Wood Pigeon, Common Buzzard, Carrion Crow, Magpie, Starling, Kestrel** and **Swallow**.

When we eventually arrived at Lound we saw **Chaffinch, Collared Dove** and loads of **House Martins**. Much to my disgust and Wendy's delight it was sunny and hot by then.....Grrrrrrrrrr! We'd only planned to walk up the edge of the reserve to a bridge for the GGS and then go back, it didn't look far and would only take us an hour.....or so we thought!

We walked along a small river bordering the pits but in several places you could see into them. At the 1<sup>st</sup> scrape we saw **Shoveler, Mute Swan, Gadwall, Coot, Mallard, Canada Goose, Tufted Duck** and **Teal**. In the fields nearby there were a lot of **Lapwing** and a flock of **Golden Plover** flew in. In a small tributary there was a **Pied Wagtail** and a **Moorhen** and a bit further on there was a scrubby area. From there 4x **Stock Dove** flew off closely followed by 6x **Yellow Wagtails** but with us only having had a poor view, of them flying, Wendy wouldn't claim

them as a lifer. Shame. By then we realized we'd been walking for ages and still hadn't found the bridge.....Whoops! We were starting to have to think about turning back, as time was crucial but instead we decided to carry on like troopers. Finally, after an hour, we spotted the bridge and in the hedges nearby we found **Wren, Goldfinch, Goldcrest, Blue tit, Great Tit, Linnet, Chiffchaff, Blackbird** and **Reed Bunting**. The area was literally alive with birds.

When we got to the bridge we spotted a bloke driving his car up the 2mile track we had just walked up! We could've saved ourselves loads of time not to mention energy if we'd only known.....Doh! He got out of his car and started to scan the Copse nearby, which made me realize that it must've been where the Shrike had been. Unfortunately he moved off quickly, so after we'd also had a quick scan of the Copse and found nothing we decided to follow him. This was a bad move though as the walk was longer than we thought and we eventually lost him. In the end we had to call it a day and turn back and although we checked for the Shrike the whole time there was no sign of it at all. Boooooo :[.

When we got back to the bridge the bloke appeared in front of us again, so Wendy, like a woman possessed, went after him. She wanted answers! She was off like a rocket and I couldn't keep up! When she caught up with him she found out that the Shrike hadn't been seen by anyone that day, so it wasn't just us being rubbish....Phew! Trying to rescue the situation I asked him about the Black-necked Grebes. Fortunately he turned out to be a really nice bloke and replied with, "Oh yes, follow me" and guided us down to look over another pit. This pit was massive and while we scanned it we found **Common Snipe, Great Crested Grebe & Ruddy duck**. While we chatted to him we found out that his name was Ian, who was in Lound Bird Club and when we told him that we were from the Isle of Man he replied with, "Ah yes, where Ted is!" It would seem that Ted is a bit of a celebrity and we were regaled with tales of the Fair Isle and the Scillies. After 10mins of scanning and hearing Ian's stories we noticed that we'd have to get going, as we were extremely behind time. We announced this decision to Ian, who said, "Give me 2mins more and I'll find the Black-necked Grebe for you, it's definitely here." Two minutes later he must've realised it was a lost cause, as 'Team Jinx' were on the scene.



Dipping on the Black-necked Grebe

He must have picked up on our slight panic about the time and kindly offered to drive us back to the car, which we accepted! What a lifersaver :). We were already behind time and a 2mile walk back would've messed us up completely and probably knackered me right out! Back at the car Ian then guided us out of the area in front of us and back onto the A1 where he'd assured Wendy she could get a Cappuccino from a Service Station. Before that he'd even offered to take us back to his to brew up some coffee to satisfy Wendy's addiction! How friendly is that?

Nothing happened of note between Nottinghamshire and Norfolk and we finally arrived at our HQ in Blakeney at 9.00pm and although we were really tired it was really nice. After Wendy had made the bed up I got straight in to go to sleep, as we'd planned to get up for an early start in the morning. Wendy thought I was being a right pansy and went off to unpack and finally chill out in the living room with a Spritzer and to watch some TV.

Tuesday 22nd September

For our 1<sup>st</sup> day in Norfolk I'd planned a day of checking North Norfolk's migrant hotspots to see if we could find anything for ourselves. At the start of the trip we'd had to decide whether we should go to migrant areas to try and find stuff ourselves or to watch the alerts that came in and just go for whatever anyone else found. We unanimously decided that we'd tried to find our own stuff and hopefully have some time left in the day to pick up anything good that was about, which I must admit, seemed very optimistic! Neither of us had pagers obviously but I already had text alert credits with BirdGuides, so before leaving I'd set it up for Norfolk. We also decided to try Rare Bird Alert's similar system out on Wendy's phone to see which was the best/quickest, so it was going to be an interesting experiment too.



The weather was clear and sunny with a stiff westerly breeze when we left HQ at 7.36am. Our first port of call was Holkham Pines because in recent weeks it'd had Yellow-browed Warbler, Icterine Warbler, Red-breasted flycatcher etc. etc. On the way we started seeing, what would eventually become thousands by the end of the week, **Pink-footed Goose** flocks flying in from the sea, which was an impressive sight in itself.

I parked up in the car park at Lady Anne's Drive at Holkham at 8.02am and we walked left and into the trees. First off was a **Long tailed Tit** flock, which unsurprisingly had nothing interesting in with them, and ½ way down the track on one of the ponds were some **Little Grebes**. There were also some **Curlews** flying around and I got very excited briefly by a Falcon, only to find that it was just a **Peregrine**.....Grrrrrrrr! At the George Washington Hide, which overlooks the fields back towards Holkham and a nice looking freshwater pool, were a few **Bar-tailed Godwits**.



Looking over the Holkham area

After leaving the hide we cut through the pines and headed towards the beach on a boardwalk. We continued to listen out for a Tit flock, as we knew that if there was anything good about the chances were that it'd be in with them. Unfortunately we didn't hear any but as we approached the coastal side of the pines we finally heard a few **Goldcrests**. After a few seconds of trying to find the Goldcrests I heard a slightly different call and for some reason I knew exactly what it was and called it. I still hadn't even managed to locate the Goldcrests but I saw a bird moving through the tops of the trees in the vicinity of the call I was hearing. I watched the bird intently from miles below, dying to see any detail from the side before I lost it completely. After what seemed like hours but was probably more like 10secs it moved around a branch and I saw the head pattern clear as day.....**Firecrest**! I couldn't believe that I'd managed to pick it up on call having only ever seen one before but then panic set in as I tried to get Wendy onto the bird. Giving directions through the trees was practically impossible and it wasn't long before the bird flew. NOOOOOOO! After an agonizing 5min wait and having to scrutinise every slight movement in the treetops I re-found it and got Wendy onto it. Ok, it wasn't the best view but it was good enough for her to claim it as a lifer. There was absolutely no chance of getting a shot of it but it was brilliant nevertheless! Spurred on by this I was now desperately trying to listen out for a Yellow-browed call but by the end of the path I'd heard nothing remotely like it. At the Holkham Gap area we found **Treecreeper** and **Coal Tit** in a small Tit flock but nothing else. We had a short walk along the beach where

23x Snow Buntings had been reported the day before. Snow Bunting would've been a lifer for Wendy but there was no sign of them.



Holkham Gap

During the entire time we'd been at Holkham Pines we'd watched thousands of House Martins coming in off the sea. It was an awesome sight to witness a constant stream of visible migration and they were still coming in when we left.

Our next stop was Wells Woods, which is just a bit further east and I parked up at 10.30am. This area is very similar and in the same wooded coastal belt as Holkham but from recent reports it sounded like it got more migrants. Just a few days earlier there'd been 2x Red-breasted Flycatchers there, which was a bird I'd have loved to see. First off we had to find an area called 'The Dell' and I had pinpoint directions to it, courtesy of a great book I'd bought before our trip called 'Best Birdwatching sites in Norfolk (2nd edition)'. Obviously, with such perfect instructions, we messed up like a right pair of idiots and ended up going around in circles, triangles and even rhombuses, getting completely knackered in the process.





Where the F is the dell?

As we wandered aimlessly Wendy spotted a distant **Marsh Harrier** but the rest of the walk was fruitless. On the return journey we spotted a guy scoping some bushes, so we stopped nearby hoping to see what he was looking at. After a few minutes I found it and saw a lovely **Common Redstart** hopping in and out of a bush. When he finally moved off I got into position to try and get some shots.



Common Redstart

While I was busy a nice lady appeared and got chatting to Wendy and ended up telling her the exact location of 'The Dell.' Very helpful indeed but I couldn't help but worry that it was great info but in the wrong hands! Come to think of it, 80% of the people we'd come across so far had been Birders and they'd all been very friendly. With this new tip off we decided to go back into the trees and



unbelievably found the Dell instantly.....Yey! The Dell is just a small area of Birch trees in the middle of the vast expanse of Pines and straight away we heard a roving Tit flock. After scanning like a pair of maniacs we just couldn't pick anything out from them.



Searching for a Ybw in the dell

We decided to hang around and wait for the flock to reappear, which it did after about 10mins. This time I spotted something flying a bit differently and when I got my bins on it I was very pleased to see a **Pied Flycatcher**. It wasn't the Rb Fly I wanted but it would still be a new bird for Wendy.



Pied Flycatcher

Once again panic set in as I tried to give directions into the tops of the trees. Luckily the bird flew and perched high up in the open giving a good view of the white in the wing. Lifer number 3 for Wendy already :)! Happy with that we moved off.....and ended up getting lost again. There's no hope! They do say that things happen for a reason though and spawnily we'd managed to find ourselves on a really smart track through some bushes and brambles. There were loads of



birds in the area, mainly common ones but we picked out a **Blackcap** and then we glimpsed another Sylvia, which got my pulse racing. After an agonizing few minutes wait it revealed itself as a **Lesser Whitethroat**. Although I'd been hoping for a Subalpine or Booted Warbler it was still a nice bird but there didn't seem to be anything else about and we eventually found our way back to the car and left at 2.17pm.

The last place on the itinerary for the day was another migrant hotspot, Warham Greens. By then Wendy had received 5 texts from RBA (mainly about a Glossy ibis near Norwich) but I'd had 0 from BirdGuides! Not a good start for the BG's text alert at all. Nothing was close enough for us to go for either, so it looked like Warham Greens would be our last stop of the day.

I parked up at the car park next to the saltmarsh and we wandered off down the footpath. We knew where to look from the Norfolk book so we'd gone left and were heading towards a scrubby depression known as 'The Quarry.'



The Quarry

I could instantly see how the place gets good migrants, it felt superb with tons of sheltered bushes right on the coast.....Nice. I just wish we had somewhere similar in the Isle of Man. Standing by the bushes we tried some 'pishing', which didn't exactly have the desired effect we'd hoped for. Instead, a **Barn Owl** blasted out of the bushes and nearly gave us both a heart attack! We found nothing else of note in the quarry, which was a shame but what a smart spot to have found. Next we had to retrace our steps then continue on to a place called the Iron Gibbet, although I kept accidentally saying Iron Gible. On the way we could see that out on the marsh there were about 1.5 billion **Little Egrets** and a couple of **Greenshanks**. A Harrier came gliding past but it was only a **Hen Harrier**, which on reflection I don't suppose we should've sniffed at being in Norfolk.....Doh! On the way out to the gible I heard a 'tacking' from the brambles. I knew tacking could at worst be just a Blackcap but at best it could be something mind blowing, so we stopped and waited. The bird was lying quite low down and deep in the bush but eventually it gave enough of a view to confirm a **Garden Warbler**. Again it was an OK bird and a migrant but not the crippling rarity I'd dreamt of finding. When we got to the Iron gible area I wasn't as impressed with it as I was with the quarry. This place was just long overgrown grass with some gorse bushes. I couldn't see how it'd been getting better birds than the quarry, unless they're just easier to find there?



Iron gibleet area

We didn't even hear a bird there, so went back spotting **Common Gull**, **Ruff** and **Common Redshank** out on the marsh. As we drove back up the track I joked that the book had an entry about there being Grey Partridges there. That would've been nice but before I could finish laughing Wendy said, "Err what's all that stuff up there?" I stopped the car and before I got my bins up she was whooping and cheering. Sure enough there were 15x **Grey Partridge**! Lifer number 4 for Wendy and a bird I hadn't seen in about 15 years! We left Warham Greens at 6pm, so with an hour of light still left we moved west up the coast to a field near Burnham Overy that I'd also found in the book. I pulled up and we watched a Barn Owl and a few Marsh harriers, which I presumed were coming in to roost.



Barn Owl field

By the end of our 2<sup>nd</sup> day we were already on 80 birds and Wendy had 4 lifers, which we both agreed was a great start!

Wednesday 23rd September

To say we were apprehensive about this particular day would be an understatement, as we were planning on walking out to Blakeney Point. Several people had warned us off doing it because it's a 4mile walk out to the point on



shingle and feels like taking one step forward and two steps back! Some of the horror stories we'd heard were enough to put anyone off but if we were going to find something good, like Wryneck, this was the place to do it. It was cloudy with a light westerly wind, which wasn't the best conditions for migration but handy for me as sunny and hot would've probably killed me! Before we left HQ we were treated to the superb sight of a Barn Owl hunting over the fields, viewable from the kitchen window! Nice :).

Before going to Blakeney though we went to Stiffkey Fen to give us a muscle warm up with a gentle walk, or so I thought. We had two options there, the 1<sup>st</sup> being to park near a campsite, which was the longest route, and walk along a wooded area, good for migrants and out to the Fen. The 2<sup>nd</sup> option was to park in a layby on the main road and walk a short distance straight to the Fen. Me being the idiot that I am chose the campsite route but it didn't look that far on the map....Errr Whoops!. Again I could see why the area gets migrants, as it had a belt of deciduous trees all the way along the saltmarsh. Going through them though, we didn't see or hear anything new. As we got to the end of the wooded area I heard a **Siskin** flying over then heard a very unusual call, which I sort of recognised. Luckily enough I got my bins on it and was pleased to see a **Snow Bunting**. The only problem was that Wendy didn't get onto it, so had once again missed out on seeing Snow Bunting.....Aarrghhhh! Not to be outdone though she quickly recovered herself when she screamed, "**Kingfisher!**" I didn't see it but that might've been down to Wendy's garbled directions of, "Over there, by the grass, in the sky!" :P. We also saw **Turnstone** and I heard and then we saw a few **Skylarks** flying over. After a ridiculously long time I was starting to worry that I'd got the wrong path or something, as there was no sign of a Fen at all. Initially we'd planned to be starting the walk to Blakeney Point at 10am but it was already 9.15am (an hour after arriving) but finally, after what seemed like hours an oasis of the Fen appeared.



Looking to the fen in the far distance

To be honest I wasn't that impressed but again I could see why it gets the birds visiting it. It's shallow freshwater right by the coast looked perfect but it was soooooo far away that viewing it was a nightmare. We picked out some **Black-tailed Godwits** and **Shelducks** then quickly left. On the way back we couldn't pull out anything new and left, way behind schedule, at 10.17am.

After taking a huge detour to fuel Wendy's coffee addiction and then for her to address the subsequent side affects, I parked up in the car park at Blakeney. We



got ourselves ready and headed out across the shingle for our 8mile Blakeney Point walk at 11.15am.



Lots of Shingle!

After a while I can honestly say that I wasn't that bothered by the shingle. Whether it was my flatfooted nature or the massively overhyped pain we'd been told we'd supposedly suffer I don't know but I was still smiling 1hr in. This didn't go down well with Wendy who was grumbling about my over optimism and cheeriness for most of the way....Hahaha :).

I knew we'd either see something superb or nothing at all on this walk but I didn't expect to have been trudging for 30mins before even seeing our 1<sup>st</sup> bird! The bird we'd found near the Sueda was a **Northern Wheatear** and although at home we'd rarely check any Wheatears (Oops!), on this walk the potential was there, so we were noting every detail. Unsurprisingly it was still just a Northern Wheatear though :( As we drew closer to Halfway House and just as I was saying how weird it was that there were no waders about, we came across a wader flock. Great timing! It was mainly **Dunlin** and some **Ringed Plover** but like at home, when we spot Dunlin flocks we checked them thoroughly, as even a Curlew Sandpiper would've been good. There was nothing in the 1<sup>st</sup> flock but there was another flock further on that needed checking. As we got closer to them, in the middle of the flock I thought, "Eh up?" and said to Wendy, "Looks like a Curlew Sandpiper there." She took this with a pinch of salt but I reckon what she really meant was, "Yeah right you total plum!" As we got nearer and nearer and I'd explained the ID features, including the white rump, the bird flew and showed its white rump.....Aha! It was definitely a **Curlew Sandpiper**, so cue a massive, "Nerrrrrr told you so!" dance from me. Admittedly it was a bit tricky on the shingle but still totally necessary :P. Luckily I got a record shot before the bird flew as proof of Wendy's 5th lifer of the trip.



Curlew Sandpiper

We reached Halfway House at 12.22pm, which wasn't bad going at all seeing as it'd only taken us 1hr 7mins even after stopping for the Curlew Sand.



Halfway house

Two days earlier there'd been Blyth's Reed Warbler and Yellow-browed Warbler there but with the wind blowing through the sedge anything with any sense would be keeping its head well down. This proved to be the case, as we saw absolutely nothing, in fact it was so dead that when another two Birders appeared they looked for about a nano second and left within a minute! Not a good sign. By then we were feeling peckish and decided to sit down for a while and have our lunch. After that we moved on and as we approached the dunes I got very excited, as this would be the place to find us a Wryneck.....slightly over optimistic I think! In reality, the best we could come up with was a **Brown Hare** and another mammal hiding in the sedge, which Wendy tried to coax out with her very good Shrew impression.



Dr. Doolittle eat your heart out!

At the end of the dunes we heard a very unusual call, which to me sounded like a cross between a Dunnock alarm call and the alarm tacking of a Blackcap. It was constant too, which made it even more weird. The bird was hiding deep in the suseda and despite waiting for about 10mins we didn't even see a single branch move at all. God knows what that bird was but it was probably the big find I've always dreamt of! We finally arrived at the Point at 1.55pm without anything else happening at all. It had taken us 2hrs 2mins to get there and with us both feeling fine and with no pain we were quite happy.....Phew! We hadn't passed any suitable bushes, so the only way of celebrating due us both being desperate by then, was to visit the grubby public toilets. After that we had a scan out into the bay from the point and we a **Knot** but with the tide so far out nothing else was identifiable. We sat down at 'The Plantation' as we'd remembered Bill Oddie saying on one of his TV shows 'Bill Oddie goes Wild', "Sit down and wait patiently, there's always birds in there." HMMMMMMMM really? There was absolutely nothing!





The Plantation

We're probably the 1<sup>st</sup> people in the world to go there and not see a single bird. Team Jinx skillz or what?

We left the point at 2.35pm and with the tide being out were able to walk along the beach on the hard sand all the way back.....Phew! This meant we could walk much faster and it was so much easier :). We were making good progress when we spotted a large blob in the sea very close in. Getting our bins on it we could see it was a juvenile **Gannet**. It's the first time I'd ever seen a Gannet in this plumage, even though we see tons of Gannets around the Isle of Man. Unfortunately as we got closer it became clear that this bird had a problem, as some of its feathers were fluffed up in a way I don't think they should've been.



Gannet

It was a shame to see such a majestic bird in this way but natural selection and all that :( . When we were nearly back at the car park we heard the massive roar of aircraft engines. We both like seeing something new so were scouring the

skies to see what it was. We were very excited to eventually find two American F15 Eagle Fighters really high up doing what looked like dummy bombing runs further up the coast. This went on for 10mins or so.....very cool. After standing watching that we eventually got back to the car at 4pm, just 1hr 25mins after leaving the point. Zooomtastic!

Reviewing our injuries, even though Wendy had carried the rucksack she only had a sore heel and my only problem was a sore neck from carrying the 6kg of camera and lens out there and back. Apart from that we were totally unscathed, so I reckon I might run it next time :P.

Our 1<sup>st</sup> stop on the way out of Blakeney was for a much needed coffee fix for Wendy, as she was practically having withdrawal symptoms by then.



Blakeney

All of a sudden her RBA text alert went off to say 23x Snow Buntings on the shingle at Cley East Bank. We were really close and having convinced Wendy to sweat it out we went straight there to do our first bit of 'pagering.' I parked up and we started to walk out there but as we got nearer we couldn't see any other Birders, which didn't bode well. Before we'd reached the shingle we checked the smart looking pool on the right, which I think is called Arnold's Marsh.



Marsh off East Bank



Straight off we could see 2 more Curlew Sands but then Wendy said, "Oooo are they Spotshanks?" She then lost her nerve and followed it with, "Or maybe they're just Redshanks?" She managed to point me to them and she'd been right the 1<sup>st</sup> time and they were indeed 2x **Spotted Redshanks**. Excellent! Lifer number 6 for Wendy :).

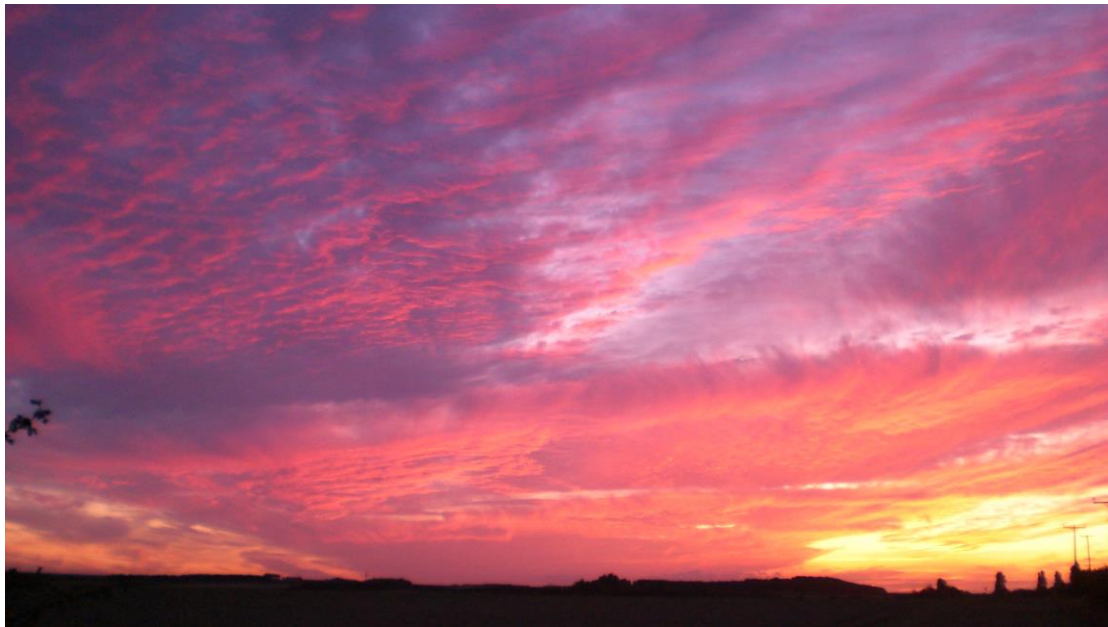


Spotted Redshanks

At the shingle ridge we scoured up and down it but we couldn't see any movement or hear any calls. We decided to go over the ridge to have a look at the sea and what a great decision that was. When we got to the top to look over it we saw 16x **Snow Buntings** fly past giving a great view of Wendy's lifer number 7.

By then I needed to fill my car up with petrol and heading inland we picked up **Mistle Thrush** on some wires and a **Red-legged Partridge**, which was hanging around with some Wood Pigeons in a field. Talking of Wood Pigeons.....how many millions of them are there in Norfolk? Every other bird was a Wood Pigeon! Absolutely Mental! On the way back to HQ we had a **Muntjac Deer** crossing the road in front of us. Cool. We also had to stop and get a picture of the sky as it was amazing!





Crazy sky

I think it goes without saying that we were really tired and ready for our tea when we got back and an early night was definitely in order.

Thursday 24th September

The weather when we got up was back to being sunny with the same westerly wind again. We desperately wanted some easterlies but it looked like it wasn't going to happen while we were there....Typical! Still, we carried on with our plans to visit some great places to try and find more of our own migrants. When I got up I think the early starts and constant walking was starting to catch up with me, as I was feeling decidedly ill. I struggled on though like a brave soldier but it was probably more like Wendy wouldn't allow me to give up!

Our 1<sup>st</sup> stop was Kelling Quags and we arrived at the car park at 8am. This is a shallow muddy pool in a field surrounded by hedges just behind the shingle ridge.



Kelling Quags

Yet again we could see its potential but there was very little on the pool itself but on the fence near the pool there were a couple of **Stonechats**. We went over the

shingle ridge and stood by an old pillbox (which severely stank of wee!) to check the sea and saw some **Sandwich Terns** flying past. While we watched them and carried on scanning we spotted a Porpoise breaking the surface a few times. After that we started wandering back up the path when I felt my phone go off. Wendy had received nothing from RBA, so I found it funny I'd got a Glossy Ibis text before her.....or so I presumed. I got my phone out of my pocket and nearly dropped it when I read "Red-necked Phalarope at West Bank in Cley" reported 6mins ago :O! My mystery illness disappeared within a second and Wendy shot off up the track like a woman possessed. This was going to be her first proper twitch, albeit a small one, as a RNP had been in Norfolk a few weeks earlier. Unfortunately the initial adrenaline rush dropped off rapidly and I had to stop half way up the track when I felt close to puking up. I decided at that point to drop Wendy off at the Phalarope twitch while I went back to HQ to sleep for the rest of the day. It would mean missing out on a lifer but I was feeling so rough I didn't care. By the time we got to Cley though, I'd miraculously found my second wind, although not of the 'parp' type :P. On the way we saw some **Egyptian Geese** grazing in the fields from the car. We parked up and saw that there was already about 10 people at the twitch, which was a good sign. We climbed up the bank to join them and Wendy found the Phalarope straight away in the pool and directed me onto it.



Red-necked pool

Thankfully, after our mad rush, it was still there and we were looking at a lovely **Red-necked Phalarope**. What a fantastic little bird! We watched it feeding, like a hyperactive nutter for about 30mins, in which time the crowd continued to grow.





Red-necked Phalarope Twitch

Everyone was calm, so it was a good introduction to twitches for Wendy. The bird was quite a distance away, so I stacked my 1.4tc and 2xtc together to get a record shot of it. I had to lie on the ground though to get some stability, which got me some funny looks and I hoped there was no dog poo about!



Red-necked Phalarope

While we watching the Phalarope we also noticed several **Bearded Tits** flying about 'ping pinging' constantly. It was crazy to think that just a few months ago we'd both got a lifer on Bearded Tit but already we were hardly even looking at them. Bad form!

After getting our fill of the Phalarope we went back to our plan, but we decided to drop Walsey Hills out of it. This place was for migrants only and with the poor winds I reckoned it'd be pointless, so next off was the Cley Marshes Reserve itself. Before going to the hides Wendy experienced the drinks and food from the Visitors Centre. Her review was that the Cappuccino was very nice and the Cheese scone was the best in the world! Praise indeed :). We got there at 10.10am just after it'd opened but it was already starting to fill up, the place is



extremely popular. We went to the hides on the left first (can't remember their names) and saw **Avocet** and **Pintail** but nothing close in, which was a shame. Round at the hide on the right we spotted two mid sized waders on the distance spit. Even over the distance it was obvious that they were the **Green Sandpipers** that had been on the reserve for a while. Lifer number 10 for Wendy. I got a horrific record shot of these birds, again at the stacked 1400mm.....Urrghhhhh!



Green Sandpiper

The hide was full of quiet birders but it didn't stop Wendy suddenly shrieking, "KINGFISHER KINGFISHER!" Hahahaha! This time I got onto the bird flying off at 100mph but discretely tried to shuffle away to distance myself from the shrieking nutter next to me :P. Luckily all the Birders in there were cool and most of them just laughed and were actually grateful to have had it pointed out to them.



View from Cley hide

Nothing else happened after that, so we left at 12.35pm but the next day we found out that a Spotted Crake had been seen and was showing well! Arrghhhhhh.....text alert fail!

Our next stop was Salthouse, which is a bit further east from Cley and has a shingle ridge by the sea with a really shallow small pool just by the shingle. In winter it's THE place for Snow and Lapland Buntings but today it was completely dead. It was so dead I didn't even make any notes about our visit in my notebook! Wendy assures me the Cappuccino from the bloke in the Coffee van was absolutely superb though :P.

Yet again we had bags of time left over from completing the days plans so quickly, so we brought a location I'd pencilled in for Friday forward and went to Holkham Hall.



Holkham Hall

This is a stately home surrounded by about 1 billion acres of woodland and a lake. I'd practically guaranteed a Green Woodpecker for Wendy there but the place was absolutely dead and all we heard was a **Nuthatch**.....Oooops! I don't know whether it was because it was too late in the day at 2.35pm but I was shocked at the lack of birds and lack of bird noise too. We were completely knackered by then and staggered around the grounds like a pair of drunks! Wendy wanted to stop, so I could get a pic of the **Fallow Deer** that lived in the grounds.





Fallow Deer

On the way back we skillfully managed to get lost again but eventually found our way out and were back at the car by 4pm.

For some stupid reason I then suggested giving Holkham Pines another shot, as a Yellow-browed Warbler had been reported on Tuesday evening and I was dying to see one. By this point we could hardly put one foot in front of the other but the pair of us staggered off to the western end of the pines, which didn't look that far on Google earth. Oops..... I was wrong again and it was flipping miles away! To find us a last minute Ybw we really needed to find the Tit flock but nothing was calling. Near the western end Wendy spotted a **Great Spotted Woodpecker** doing its undulating flight as it flew over. On the way back I thought I heard a Firecrest again but couldn't locate the bird and there was no sign of any Yellow-browed Warbler, so we left feeling a bit disappointed.



Given up on the YBW

After a very, very, long, hard day the depression of realising that it was our final full day in Norfolk had set in. Just before we finally crashed out for the night it was brilliant to hear a pair of **Tawny Owls** 'Twit-twooing' to each other right outside HQ.

Friday 25th September

Once again it was sunny with a slight westerly wind for our last day in Norfolk. To get back to Heysham in time for the Ferry we'd have to leave Norfolk by about 5pm. It was going to be a very long day travelling, so it meant a short plan on the itinerary and a late start, although the late start was mainly because Wendy couldn't get the dishwasher to work. When I checked, I was slightly bemused to find a fully wrapped dishwasher tablet sitting in the dispenser! Hahahaha no wonder it wouldn't work...classic! :P. The idea was to work our way west out of Norfolk, so my 1<sup>st</sup> plan was Titchwell RSPB Reserve. On the way Wendy realised we hadn't seen a House Sparrow yet, unbelievable! During a quick detour through Morston Village we spotted a few **House Sparrows** in a bush by a house.....Phew! As we got near to Titchwell we decided to give Choseley Drying Barns a whirl first.



Choseley Barns

Choseley is just up the road from Titchwell and you can nearly guarantee Corn Buntings, which feed on the spilt seed, there. When we got there it was very quiet, which was worrying. There was another chap there, so I went over to him to ask if he'd had any joy. He said he'd seen one about ¼hr ago but that's it. He also said that unfortunately it'd been a bad year for the Corn Buntings. Oh poo! We wandered around for about 20mins but apart from a nano second view of an unidentifiable bunting flying off nothing else was about. We left and moved to Titchwell and got there at 11.16am. This is a flagship RSPB Reserve but recently they'd started some major work on the sea walls to try and alleviate the pressure on the freshmarsh. This meant that ½ the Reserve was a building site and would be till 2012, so it was a surprise to see the car parks absolutely chocka block.

On the way to the only hides that were open, we were looking left over some marshy area, from behind us I heard a bogey bird for me. I've only heard it once before but knew instantly what it was, so I turned round to see exactly what situation the bird was in. I felt pretty dejected when I saw the mass of bushes, reeds and trees, which was very similar to my last encounter with this bird.





Stupid bird

I told Wendy that it was a Cetti's Warbler calling/singing, which would've be a lifer for both of us. She joined me at staring into the bushes but 30mins later there was still no sign of any movement. How those birds move around without shaking any reeds or branches I'll never know! We gave up in the end and moved onto the hides.

At the freshmarsh hides I was completely taken aback by the lack of birds and water, everything was absolutely miles away.



Emptywell

I would've assumed that they had control of the water levels on the freshmarsh? If so, why hadn't they increased the water levels to bring some birds towards the hides to give people something to look at, as these were the only hides open at Titchwell? This was severely annoying because I knew there was definitely Little Stints somewhere but everything was too far away to ID. As we left the hide I was slightly vocal about the rubbishness of Titchwell, which got me some evil stares from the nearby bird "watchers". Whoopsadaisy! :P. Depressed by everything happening there we headed back passing the Cetti's bush again. As we approached it the bird called again, so we stopped to torture ourselves some

more. About 15mins later Wendy moved slightly to the left, as the bird was calling from about 6ft away and suddenly screamed. "It's there!" In the blink of an eye I moved to have a look but it had gone. The **Cetti's Warbler** had flown a few feet and dived back deep into the reeds. I couldn't believe it. Wendy's 1<sup>st</sup> ever attempt at a Cetti's and she gets it, not only gaining another lifer but also gripping me off in the process.....Nooooo! I fully expected an 'in your face' dance but she was far too gracious for that. I strongly suspect she did one in her head though! :).

To cheer myself up I went into the shop and treated myself to some retail therapy. We left the frankly extremely poor Titchwell Reserve at 1.15pm and now we really did have some extra time on our hands and the texts were coming in thick and fast. One said a Spectacled Warbler at Holkham and another said a probable Great Reed Warbler at Cley. To be honest I didn't believe either and both places would take us back east when we needed to head west anyway, so I ignored them. Instead I added a curveball into the plan and suggested trying Holme Dunes Reserve, after trying Choseley again, which was more dead than it had been earlier! Holme was west from Titchwell and it gets mentioned a lot on BirdGuides, so we headed off. As we did Wendy got an RBA text saying Hen Harrier at Holme reserve...Hahahahaha. Pretty useless information for Birders from the Isle of Man but at the bottom of the text it said, " oh and btw Wood Sandpiper still here" Whaaaaaaat? I'd have to put my foot down then, but within the speed limits, as I'd only ever seen one Wood Sandpiper before and it would be a lifer for Wendy.

Arriving at Holme we got some pinpoint directions for the Wood Sand from the extremely helpful Warden, so we shot off to the most distant hide. The view from the hide was a bit disappointing and yet again the water's edge was miles away and the sun was right in our faces. I like a lot of things about Norfolk, like how it seems that nature and birds are put 1<sup>st</sup> but one thing that does niggle me is the nonsensical positioning of some of the hides. It really is baffling, this being a prime example, as at no stage of the sun's cycle, at any time of the year would it be behind the hide.....Weird! Anyway looking out from the hide we could just about tell that the, relatively, near bird was the **Wood Sandpiper** but it was basically just a dark silhouette.



It's that one honest



After a few minutes a few blokes came in and one asked Wendy what was about. She told him and within minutes the same bloke said that anyone without a scope could have a look through his if they wanted to. I urged Wendy to take him up on the offer, to be able to see some plumage detail on the Wood Sand, so she did and got a slightly better view of her 12th lifer! Text alerts had worked for their 3rd time, which was very smart. What a nice offer from the bloke though? This was another good example of nice friendly Birders, which we'd seen all the way through the trip. There was nothing else at Holme but I can see why it gets the migrants with the sparse bushes right by the coast. We were now a bit late on our plans but had one last place to visit.

Flitcham Abbey farm is near Kings Lynn on the way out of Norfolk, so we headed straight there for a flying visit. Supposedly there is a 99.9% chance of seeing Little Owl but obviously that percentage isn't adjusted for Team Jinx. We sat down at 4.45pm in the small hide, which overlooks a freshwater pool near some trees and there were 3 other Birders in there, all very friendly and we got chatting to them.



Flitcham Abbey Farm

While we were chatting, a Stoat made a few fleeting appearances right in front of the hide and although Wendy got a good view I only got to see a shape moving. We then heard a weird cry coming from the trees and Wendy asked one bloke what it was and we were told that it was the **Little Owl!** Try as we might we couldn't see the bird though :( We were also told that Green Woodpeckers often visit there too, which would've been very handy but, as usual, not today.....Urrghhhh! We were talking to an obviously experienced Birder in there and told him we were from the Isle of Man. Yet again we got the reply, "Ah, where Ted is!" We must have an A list celebrity on the island without even knowing, so I might just get his autograph next time I see him :P. This bloke also told us that there were some Tree Sparrows nearby, so after a final look for the Little Owl we left the hide to find them. Sure enough on the way through the village we picked up our final bird of the trip **Tree Sparrow.....Phew!**

By the end of our trip we'd seen 120 species, which is quite impressive in just 4.5 days. Wendy had got herself a staggering 12 lifers and I'd got one. As for the text alert experiment, RBA were quicker for the majority of the time but on the majorly important ones it was shockingly slow to a point where we'd have missed the bird. It's definitely worth doing though, as the text alerts helped us get 3 lifers for Wendy and 1 for me. Overall our trip was very enjoyable and

North Norfolk seems to be built for Birders and Birding and with everyone being friendly and helpful it made it even better. It was also great to be in a majority for a change, as practically everyone we'd seen walking around was a Birder. Going there during the week seemed a good idea too, as no area apart from the reserves were that busy so, with only a small walk you had places to explore in peace. The mind boggles as to what our trip would've been like if only there'd been an easterly wind! It felt like we'd left with unfinished business, so maybe we'll have to try again next year? :).

PS. If anyone finds a grubby green Adidas cap at Warham Greens please send it to me, I miss it!

#### Trip list

Mute Swan	Black-tailed Godwit	Wren
Pink-footed Goose	Bar-tailed Godwit	Duncock
Greylag Goose	Curlew	Robin
Canada Goose	<b>Green Sandpiper</b>	Redstart
Egyptian Goose	<b>Spotted Redshank</b>	Stonechat
Shelduck	Greenshank	Wheatear
Wigeon	<b>Wood Sandpiper</b>	Blackbird
Gadwall	Redshank	Song Thrush
Teal	Turnstone	Mistle Thrush
Mallard	<b>Red-necked Phalarope</b>	<b>Cetti's Warbler</b>
Pintail	Arctic Skua	Blackcap
Shoveler	Kittiwake	Garden Warbler
Pochard	Black-headed Gull	Lesser Whitethroat
Tufted Duck	<b>Mediterranean Gull</b>	Chiffchaff
Ruddy Duck	Common Gull	Goldcrest
Little Grebe	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<b>Firecrest</b>
Great Crested Grebe	Herring Gull	<b>Pied Flycatcher</b>
Fulmar	Great Black-backed Gull	Bearded Tit
Gannet	Sandwich Tern	Long-tailed Tit
Cormorant	Guillemot	Blue Tit
Shag	Razorbill	Great Tit
Little Egret	Puffin	Coal Tit
Grey Heron	Feral Pigeon	Nuthatch heard only
Marsh Harrier	Stock Dove	Treecreeper
Hen Harrier	Woodpigeon	Jay
Sparrowhawk	Collared Dove	Magpie
Buzzard	Barn Owl	Jackdaw
Kestrel	<b>Grey Partridge</b>	
Peregrine	Little Owl heard only	Rook
Moorhen	Tawny Owl heard only	Carrion Crow
Coot	Kingfisher	Starling
Oystercatcher	Great Spotted Woodpecker	House Sparrow
Avocet	Skylark	Tree Sparrow
Ringed Plover	Sand Martin	Chaffinch
Golden Plover	Swallow	Greenfinch
Lapwing	House Martin	Goldfinch
Knot	Meadow Pipit	Siskin
<b>Curlew Sandpiper</b>	Rock Pipit	Linnet
Dunlin	<b>Yellow Wagtail</b>	<b>Snow Bunting</b>
Ruff	Grey Wagtail	Reed Bunting
Snipe	Pied Wagtail	