

Having been to the Highlands in March and the Outer Hebrides in May we realized we were getting major Norfolk withdrawal. Wendy checked her work calendar for some time off but the only week available before October was the last week in July! October was far too long to wait, so we decided to just go for it and chance our luck, or lack of it! We'd only been to Norfolk once before in July and that was just for a long weekend. The problems with Norfolk at that time of year were that there'd be no decent birds about, it was the school holidays making it busy and expensive and as it was another last minute trip (three weeks notice) it would be impossible to find decent accommodation. After a lot of effort and many dead ends I eventually found a Cottage in Cockthorpe, which amazingly had WiFi. It had no phone, which wouldn't be a problem with the free hours on my Giff Gaff account, but our biggest issue was that it had no washing machine. We'd also have to bring all our own bed sheets and towels, making travelling light impossible. From the few pics available it looked a bit old fashioned but it was the only cottage I'd found that hadn't doubled its price for the school holidays, so I got it booked. The Cottage looked anything but perfect but the garden was well established and had a wildlife pond at the bottom, which looked brilliant.

With our newly discovered interest in Moths, Butterflies and Dragonflies etc., July would be a really good month to see something new. Wendy had literally just finished writing the Hebrides trip article and I'd finally added all the photos in and put it up on my website. You can imagine how enthusiastic we were at the prospect of having to start another one straight after :/. Not only that but we were due to pick up our 8week old Cockerpoo puppy on the day we came home.....Eeeeeek :O!

Friday 26th July

After being up since 6.30am and doing a days work we knew it was going to be a rush to get to the boat. I'd worked through my lunch hour so I could get home earlier but Wendy didn't get home until 5.30pm and time was ticking. After she'd had a super quick tea and a bath we were ready to go and arrived at the Sea Terminal at 6.56pm seeing **Herring Gull** and **Feral Pigeon** from the car park. It was a lovely evening for a change with blue skies and no wind whatsoever. This was such a rare occurrence that we thought we'd better make the most of it while we had the chance. We boarded at 7.20pm and could see **Shags** out in the bay from the cabin window. At 7.30am we departed early, wahey! This was our cue to go out on deck to do a bit of seawatching.



View from the Ferry

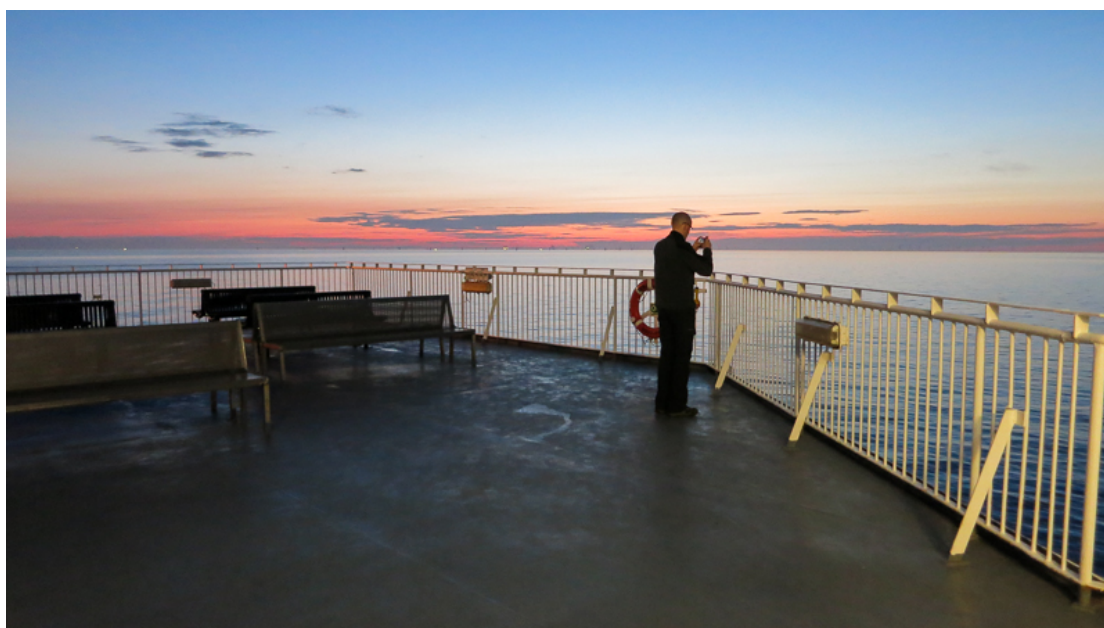
We usually miss out on this, as it's normally dark when we go away, so it made a nice change. On 1st glances it appeared to be dead and we could only pick up **Great Black-backed Gull** but a few minutes later we passed a **Guillemot** with a juvenile swimming along side it. I looked down into the water and couldn't believe the amount of **Jellyfish** I could see. It was like Jellyfish soup! It wasn't long before we were seeing hundreds of Guillemots, all with a good number of young, far out at sea. Next up was a **Manx Shearwater**, followed by a **Kittiwake** and some **Gannets**. We packed it in and went back to the cabin where the kids next door, who'd been laughing and giggling when they'd arrived, had decided to start screaming at the top of their voices. About 45mins into the journey we went back out on deck and the Gannets and Manxies started streaming past us and some were pretty close to the boat. We'd come across a feeding frenzy, which was great to see but it kept us out for a lot longer than I thought, which meant we were getting no rest. I just hoped the lack of sleep wouldn't come back to bite us on the bums! We even managed to spot two **Porpoises** as well, our first cetaceans from the Ferry.

We knew that at some point we'd need to chill out before the drive to Norfolk so we went back inside again. We were both feeling quite peckish, so I had a scan at the room service menu....:P. Neither of us had ever ordered room service before so Wendy pressed the button for assistance. She ordered me a chicken burger and chips and a wine for herself but when it arrived she wasn't best pleased when I decided I wanted a coke as well and she had to send the poor guy off again! It wasn't the nicest meal I've ever had but it all went down the hatch anyway :P.



Om nom nom (ish)

By then it sounded as though the kids next door were trashing the place and all of a sudden there was an almighty crash and everything went silent :/. Hmmmmmm? We didn't look too deeply into it but came to the conclusion that their parents must've murdered them :P. Unfortunately this wasn't the case and not long after the noise got even worse. We reckoned that their parents had left them in the cabin on their own and gone to the bar, as there was no way that any sane adult could've sat through that racket. Lucky us! We had to get out for a bit, as they were getting out of control, so we retreated to the sanity of the deck seeing 2 more porpoises and had a go at some point and click sunset shots.



Pete failing to get a nice sunset shot!

Back at the cabin the kids continued to get worse and at 11pm we went back outside to escape them again. We were bored by then and although we were virtually at Heysham, looking at my ship tracking app there seemed to be an awful lot of ships waiting around to dock. Next came an announcement, which we really didn't want to hear. After being hopeful of getting in ahead of schedule, due to our early departure, we were now being delayed by 50mins, as we had to wait for the tide to rise.....Urrrghhhhh! Our revised ETA was just before midnight so any thoughts of hitting Norfolk at a decent hour and getting our heads down went out of the window. With that we returned to the cabin and Wendy pulled the covers over her head to try to get some sleep. This can't have been easy, as the vessel was vibrating loudly so she must've needed it. I, on the

other hand, didn't get any, stayed awake and took the boredom. Just as I felt myself starting to drop off the announcement came, that we were about to dock, waking up a very groggy Wendy. We arrived at 11.50 and waited to disembark so we could get going on the long drive ahead of us. For the first time ever on a trip to Norfolk I had decided to go all the way down the M6 including the M6 toll. I was interested to see if this way would be any quicker. The distance was a bit further but with about 90% of the route motorway the average speed should be a lot higher.

Saturday 27th July

Considering we should've already been making good headway after leaving the IOM 15mins early we'd ended up being 40mins late! We eventually disembarked at 12.05am and Wendy made a beeline for a caffeine fix from the terminal hearing **Curlew** calling in the dark. At 12.20am we were on our way and could see loads of Moths flying about in the car headlights. We caught a brief glimpse of a bird flying over the car and reckoned it had to be an Owl, but we couldn't tell which one. It must've been universal muck spreading time, as all the fields for miles and miles absolutely stank of poo! By 1.47am I could already feel myself flagging and needed a quick break so I pulled up, earlier than planned, at Stafford Services. We went in and Wendy grabbed a coffee from Costa and I couldn't resist the giant teacakes (of the marshmallow variety) sitting in the display cabinet. We also shared a small portion of fries at a table where our attention was drawn to a moth on the outside of the window. There was a nice looking pond with a fountain out there, so when we'd finished we went out to check it out and heard a **Moorhen**. We tried to ID the moth but it wouldn't settle, so we still have no idea what it was but there was a nice yellow **Brimstone** on the window as well, drawn in by the lights of inside.

Feeling a bit more awake and ready for the next stretch we left at 2.21am seeing **Rabbits** on the grass verge at the exit. McFries never agree with Wendy so she'd started to feel sick. I'd started to go hyper with a sugar rush from the humungous teacake and fizzy drink I'd just had, so I was dreading the sugar downer that would follow. My next hurdle was the M6 Toll, which we were approaching at 2.48am. For some reason the sign was telling us that payment was by card only but Wendy noticed that the baskets for coins looked as though they were working fine. What the....? She passed me £3.80 in change, I flung it in the basket and the barrier duly lifted and let us through. Good job she'd noticed and went against what the sign was telling us. We were feeling really tired again so the sugar downer I'd been dreading had probably started to kick in. We started to play eye spy to keep ourselves awake but by 3.32am I'd had it, so we thought it would be a good idea to pull over at Rothwell Services for another break. This was where we'd stopped in the past (when I'd taken the wrong turning and gone down the M6 by accident!) and had been made to feel a bit uneasy by some scummy teenage lads, so we were pleased to find the car park completely empty....Phew! As we sat there semi conscious we heard a very spritely **Robin** singing its heart out from the trees, just to rub our noses in it! Knowing that we couldn't stop for long we were on the way again at 3.43am but we were flagging big time.

We were very relieved to reach the Suffolk sign at 4.36am and it was already getting light. Even though we were only 30mins away from our location I knew I was in severe danger of falling asleep at the wheel, so took the correct but disappointing decision to stop again. We saw a **Wood Pigeon** and both dozed for about 10mins before pressing on at 4.55am. We know we're getting close when we find ourselves driving through mist, so I grabbed my last burst of

energy, to get us to Lakenheath, where we'd hopefully get a bit more sleep. We saw **Black-headed Gull, Carrion Crow, Magpie** and **Heron** on the way, so at least we had something to look out for now it was daylight.

At 5.20am and 5hrs after leaving Heysham, we breathed a sigh of relief to have finally arrived at RSPB Lakenheath. We love Lakenheath, there's so much to see throughout the year and it's amazing to think it was converted from carrot fields back to Fenland in just 10years! It was quite chilly outside but it probably felt colder than it was due to the low lying mist which always greets us when we arrive at the reserve in the early hours.



RSPB Lakenheath

Instead of getting our heads down, as we'd hoped, we got our stuff together and headed out straight away. If we'd arrived when we should've we'd have had time to relax but we needed to get to our 2nd destination as early as possible if we stood any chance of seeing what we were going for. From the car park we could hear **Whitethroat, Blue Tit, Wren** and the all-consuming sound of loads of **Reed Warblers**. Lack of sleep was making Wendy feel pretty grumpy, she'd still wanted to try and get some shut eye before doing anything, but she soon came round and we set off along the footpath towards the reserve. The sound of Crickets filled the air and just next to the car park was an area of Ragwort, which was covered in Cinnabar Moth Caterpillars so we stopped for our 1st proper pics of the trip.



Cinnabar caterpillar

Present throughout Britain wherever there's Ragwort. The adult Moths are common and fly by day or night during May-August.

We hadn't gone far from the car park when we saw **Goldfinch** and **Mallard** flying over and the dawn chorus was in full swing. As we wandered slowly down the footpath we could hear **Chiffchaff**, **Willow Warbler**, **Cetti's Warbler** and a pair of **Reed Buntings**, which were busy feeding their very vocal young in the Willows. Further on, a **Sparrowhawk** zoomed overhead and we heard then saw a **Great-spotted Woodpecker** flying between trees. We didn't know where to look as we were keeping our eyes out for Birds and Butterflies as well as any Dragonflies resting on the reeds, while they warmed up before heading off to feed. Some **Stock Doves** flew over and we noticed some tiny little orange Butterflies flitting about amongst the various wild flowers and grasses. We took some pics knowing that they were a type of Skipper and a lifer but our only problem was working out which. After looking back at the pics and checking the Butterfly App on Wendy's phone we opted for **Essex Skipper** as they had black tips to their antennae. We could be wrong though! :).



Essex Skipper

This wasn't recognized as a separate species until 1889 and is widespread within its areas. It's well distributed throughout southern and eastern England and is expanding its range rapidly northwards. Colonies have recently been found in southern Scotland and south Wales.

We then heard a **Sedge Warbler** and **Blackcap** singing somewhere in the distance but with the amount of cover around us we knew we had no chance of seeing them. The sun was already heating up and the mist had all but gone by the time we spotted an **Emerald Damselfly**, which was closely followed by Wendy brilliantly finding a nice **Brown Hawker Dragonfly** sitting motionless deep in the reeds.



Brown Hawker

Widespread in the lowlands of Britain but absent in the west and south-west. Its population has probably increased due to the creation of canals and gravel pits but is also believed to have been boosted by the

arrival of immigrants, from continental Europe, in the autumn. It can also tolerate moderate levels of pollution, which is pretty handy.

With our tired eyes well and truly adjusted to the small things hiding in the undergrowth we found our 1st Moth of the trip, a **Clouded Border**. I'd decided that we'd only go as far as the nearest viewing platform and then return later in the day after we'd been to our 2nd planned stop. This would mean we'd have a better chance of finding more stuff once they'd warmed up and were on the wing including Hobby, one of my favourite birds. Some Butterflies were already out and about and there were loads of **Large Whites**, which was a good sign. Wendy was also finding lots of cool insects in the bushes including this pretty big spider, which was sitting near its funnel on a large horizontal web. We assume it was waiting for things to land in the net before running out to grab them! Pretty gruesome.



Agelena labyrinthica (Thanks iSpot!)

As we neared the viewing platform something caught our eye and we watched a nice little **Muntjac Deer** leap into the woods from the cover of the long grass.

When we arrived at the platform we instantly heard the high-pitched squeak of a **Kingfisher** and crossed our fingers that it would appear.



Lakenheath pool

There was a guy already there and when we sat down we got chatting about what was about. He'd seen a Bittern already and the Kingfisher had been perched on a post close by.....lucky him! We had a scan of the pool but could only find **Great-crested Grebe**, **Mute Swan** and although we couldn't see them we could hear **Bearded Tits**. All of a sudden Wendy shrieked, "Kingfisher!" Luckily it had put in an appearance but was anything but close. As we were waiting to see if it would come closer she then called out, "**Bittern!**" and got us onto one flying over the reed bed miles away, just in front of the trees in the distance. Better than nothing I suppose. We watched the Kingfisher coming and going for a while, had another distant Bittern and after seeing a good number of young Beardies we thought we'd better make a move.

I thought we should go back on the loop path rather than retracing our steps but was soon regretting my decision. The grass was long and still heavily covered in dew so Wendy's boots (still complete with holes) were getting soggy and soggy with every step. Not the best way to start our 1st day! There was a strong smell of Fox in the area and lots of poo but we didn't fancy our chances of seeing one much. As we fought our way through the Mozzies, Horseflies and wet grass we heard a **Green Woodpecker**, which sounded like it was laughing at our situation. As we rounded a corner I was very surprised to see a young **Fox Cub** standing, as though ready to pounce, staring straight at us but before we could both raise our cameras it bolted and bounced off.....pretty cool :). A **Marsh Harrier** floated over the reeds behind the hedge and our attention soon returned to Butterflies. We spotted a nice pristine **Peacock**, more Large Whites and a **Ringlet**. The next one we saw was unfamiliar to us, as we don't get them in the IOM, but there were a good number of **Gatekeepers** around. We realized this was a 1st for us so set about trying to get a nice shot of one.



Gatekeeper

Resident and very common, in their areas, during mid-July until as late as September. They do not occur in upland areas at all and are more abundant in the south but are colonizing new territories.

As we made our way back to the car park we found a nice **Black-tailed Skimmer Dragonfly** and heard **Great Tit, Siskin** and **Greenfinch**. Back at the car at 8.11am there was a **Dunnock** knocking around and we thought we'd better have something to eat. Wendy's feet were soaked through to her socks but it looked as though it was going to be a nice sunny day so hopefully they wouldn't take too long to dry out.

After a poxy cereal bar and a smoothie we left at 8.24am and as we drove away we picked up **Greylag Goose, Collared Dove, Jackdaw** and zooming low over the houses of a small village were more **Swifts** than we probably have in the entire IOM! Not surprisingly there were also **Swallows** sitting on the telegraph wires and considering we were just hours into our holiday we'd already seen loads.

When I pulled up at Weeting heath it was 8.30am and we sat in the car park surrounded by trees and wound the car windows down for a listen. I hadn't bargained on spending 3 hours at Lakenheath and was expecting us to have been at Weeting at least an hour earlier. I hoped that our late arrival wouldn't go against us, as that was the mistake we'd made a few years ago! The reserves Visitor Centre doesn't open until 10am (although the hides are open at dawn) but the Warden was already there, milling around with another older guy, who we presumed was a volunteer. The Warden must've only been in his mid 20's but the volunteer was much older with a red face, handlebar mustache and head to toe khaki clothing, making him resemble a Sergeant Major from World war 2! Within about a minute we heard some high-pitched calls and found a **Spotted Flycatcher** and a few **Marsh Tits**, which were both target birds for our visit to the reserve. With only one more thing to see it was looking like it was going to be a very quick stop off indeed. Having already found the 2 trickier birds I started to relax and nodded off! Apparently I was keeping Wendy very amused as I slept with my head down and my mouth wide open :/. While she watched the Warden opening up Wendy cringed, as the other guy wandered slowly over to the car. She couldn't believe it when he bent down on my side and through my open window, in a loud authoritative voice, said, "Any problems?"

This caused me to wake up with a jump and although Wendy was trying hard not to laugh she managed to croak, “No, we’re just very tired.” This seemed to satisfy his curiosity and he went back over to the Visitor Centre. Feeling as though we might be looking slightly dodgy we thought we’d better get out and go to see if we could find what we’d gone for.

As we made our way towards the path we said, “Hi” and had a quick chat to the Warden who was very friendly and told us that, although the Visitor Centre wasn’t officially open to the public until 10am, we could consider it open. He told us that they’d already counted 12 out of target birds from the hide that morning so we set off down the track to the hide. We’d only walked about 20 yards when I found a Moth resting on a leaf and instantly thought, “Eh up?” It wasn’t a Common Footman and I reckoned it must’ve been a Dingy Footman so I shouted over to the Warden, “You don’t do Moths do you?” He quickly replied with, “Yes I do, in fact I’m just about to have a look in my trap from last night.” After he’d confirmed **Dingy Footman** Wendy asked if he’d mind us having a look in the trap with him. Fortunately he was more than happy, as he reckoned it was going to be packed. Woo Hoo! :). We checked out some of the Butterflies and moths that were about on the grass and Wendy heard a distant **Cuckoo**. There were tons of flying things about but we were struggling to ID them all. We got lucky when a Burnet moth landed so we grabbed a quick Point and click shot and were able to ID it as the Six-spot variety.



Six-spot Burnet moth

*Common throughout Britain between June-August and are day flying Moths. The larvae feed on Bird’s-foot Trefoil and the adult Moths visit Knapweed, Thistle flowers, etc.

Having been distracted enough we told him we’d be back in about 10mins after we’d been over to the hide and raced off so we could get back as soon as possible.



Weeting hide view

Normally the sight of 5x **Stone Curlews** would've been a highlight for us, especially as they were in pristine condition and closer than we'd ever seen them before (although still miles off.) Normally we'd hang around waiting for them to come closer but the lure of what was in that Moth trap was too much. The birds were putting on a good show, running around the field and standing out in the open so we were pretty chuffed nevertheless. They were too far away to get anything other than record shots but at least I'd managed to better my only other existing shot.....but only just :).



Stone Curlew

There were also 2x **Buzzards** sitting in a tree surrounded by not 1 but 10 Magpies! There was no sign of any Stoat action going on, so we hotfooted it back over to the Visitors Centre to see what the trap had in store for us.

The warden, who we found out was called Simon, was already busily potting the more interesting Moths and had a pretty impressive collection already. He had a tea towel over his trap to stop them escaping, which we thought was a very good idea and one we'd definitely be adopting. He was systematically turning the towel over and checking the moths, now on the top, while the others were settling on the underside for him to turn over again....very clever! He said that the Spotted fly, which had bred there, was doing very well out the trap, as the Moths

were easy pickings if they weren't placed somewhere out of its reach. We'd always considered that our 1st trapping session at the Curragh's had pulled in a lot of Moths but this was just something else! The trap was heaving and a lot of Moths inside were totally different to what we'd get in the IOM.



Crammed Moth trap

Some of them we knew, most Simon knew and the others were potted for anyone to have a go at IDing. We all got stuck in and by then we'd added 2 more members to the Moth trap team. Another volunteer also in her 20's, who'd just starting to learn about Moths had turned up and the Sergeant Major kept poking his head in from time to time. He turned out to be a bit of a character and didn't beat about the bush or mince his words. If we didn't have a sense of humour, we could easily have taken him the wrong way and been offended. The sun was beating down and the temperature had soared, so the heavy hoodies we'd put on for our nighttime travelling were now causing us to sweat buckets! Wendy was so hot she went over to the car and dug a T-shirt from the suitcase in the boot, got some money and sniggered as she discretely grabbed a sneaky pic while she was there.



Moth Trapping

Luckily there's tea and coffee making facilities in the Visitors Centre so she made herself a cup of tea (not coffee!) and I grabbed some stuff too. We all sat round the picnic table and carried on trying to sort through the remaining unidentified

Moths. Simon then realized he was 45mins late for picking his brother up from the train station, who'd travelled a long way to visit him! Luckily we must've looked like trustworthy types and he left us to continue ID'ing the rest. He returned about 10mins later with his Brother in tow, who was also really friendly but not quite as enthused by the Moths as the rest of us. Interestingly Simon asked him, in a jokey way, if the Sergeant Major had managed to offend him yet during the 5mins he'd been there. So it wasn't just us then, he must be renowned for it!

To cut a very long story short, we'd ended up with 30 lifers in total, the best being **Goat Moth**, **Green-silver Lines**, **Garden Tiger**, **Pine Hawk-moth** and **Lime-specked Pug**. When it was totally empty and we'd taken some pics we reckoned we'd better make a move and said, "Bye." to everyone. Looking back, we wished we'd taken pics of more of the Moths but for some reason we just didn't.....Doh!



Monster Goat Moth

Widespread during June-July but local and only occasionally come to light. Their larvae live for 4 years in living tree trunks and bizarrely smell of Goat!



Small Elephant Hawk-Moth

Widely distributed during May-July in heaths, but local and the larvae feed on bedstraws.



Green-silver Lines

Common during June-July/August-September although more frequent in the south but a lovely little moth nevertheless and one we'd always wanted to see.

We couldn't thank Simon enough for letting us help him out and see what he'd caught. Wendy had decided to be a cougar and got a score on the 'Spot the fit Birder' board too. There was just one Moth that none of us could ID so we exchanged Twitter names and he said he'd let us know when he'd worked it out. I tweeted him a couple of days later and he said that it was a **Broom-tip**, which is an interesting and nationally scarce moth that only occurs in Breckland. Brilliant! I doubt we would be seeing one of them ever again in our lifetime. We couldn't believe the time, when we got back to the car at 12.06pm, we'd been so engrossed that we'd spent 3 1/2hrs there instead of the flying visit we'd intended.....Oops! Just before we left I spotted another Skipper flying around so

I jumped out, or was that staggered, and grabbed a shot. It turned out that it was a **Large Skipper**. Handy!



Large Skipper

Resident, single generation Butterflies which hibernate as a half grown caterpillar. They're common during June-July and believed to initially have been immigrants from the continent.

We were well behind schedule and a touch sunburned by then, so we went straight back to Lakenheath. At the entrance I put my indicator on and slowed down to turn right. As I went to some stupid American reg. car overtook me! If I hadn't had checked my mirror again just before turning he would've slammed into the side of me at about 60mph! Quite a scary thought. After I'd calmed down I parked up, for round 2, at 12.14pm. It was boiling hot and there were midgies everywhere so the 1st thing we did was cake ourselves in Jungle Formula, in the hope that we'd repel them as well as the Horseflies. In doing this, we totally forgot to put sun cream on to stop us burning anymore....Doh! There was a Dragonfly by the entrance so we checked it out and found it to be another Brown Hawker. There were now things flying around everywhere, so the heat of the sun had started to work its magic. There was another Black-tailed Skimmer, **Common Darter**, **Migrant Hawker**, **Common Blue Damselfly** as well as a lovely **Comma Butterfly** and a **Silver Y Moth**. While we were taking pics of the Essex and Large Skipper Butterflies I looked down to find that I was standing right in the middle of an ants nest and had them crawling all over my boots and camera! I brushed them off whilst squealing like a girl and we moved on pretty sharpish. I could feel myself burning in the heat and it was only 26C so unlike Wendy I was dreading the day when it was forecasting 32C! We found a **Blue-tailed Damselfly** and made the good decision to head back to the car for some sun cream seeing **Chaffinch** on the way. On the way out we spotted a Demoiselle, which we first thought was a Beautiful but later found that it was a female **Banded Demoiselle**. Out of the 2 we see more Banded when in England but still they're stunning little Dragonflies. This one wouldn't come close for a decent photo though so we had to settle for Wendy's record shot.



Banded Demoiselle

Common and widespread in lowlands during June-August. It's abundant along many of its occupied watercourses but absent from Scotland and rare in northern England.

Our next plan was to go on another path where we'd seen Ruddy Darter previously but when I sat down in my seat I found myself dropping off a cliff rapidly. This wasn't good, as we still had one more place to try, had to go and get a weeks worth of shopping and drive to the Cottage!

There were a couple of mid life crisis Bikers in leathers parked up opposite the car, loudly discussing their domestic problems. When one their mates phoned up to see where they were, they went on to say how they were absolutely knackered and the heat wasn't helping. Apparently they'd been on the road for a whopping 2hrs and we couldn't help but want to shout over, "Try travelling for 14hrs after being up since 6.30am yesterday!" Lightweights! I just couldn't stay awake no matter how hard I tried and I think the intense heat on top of lack of sleep was making matters 10x worse. Wendy took a wander over to the Visitor Centre to get us some bottles of water, where she saw a **Common Blue Butterfly** and managed to get a huge flapjack to share to keep us going for a bit longer. I dozed until I felt awake enough to drive again and after demolishing the flapjack we left at 2.08pm seeing a **Blackbird** filling its beak with food at the side of the road.

There'd been a number of reports of the scarce Two-barred Crossbills dotted around the country over the past few days and one of the reports had come from Lynford Arboretum. This was on the way to Morrison's and fitted in well, so obviously, we had to give it a go. We arrived at 2.24pm and dragged our way from the car park to the area they'd been seen in. There was a small twitch going on and people were poised with scopes and cameras but nobody looked very happy at all.



Lynford twitch

We were just too tired and hot to stand around and still had quite a drive ahead so we knew we couldn't stay for long. We eventually heard a flock of **Common Crossbills**, which flew in and landed for a while, but there was nothing else in with them. We then saw a large yellow Butterfly and were pleased to find that it was a lovely, **Brimstone**. At least we'd seen something else new for the trip and had been to a new place, so our visit hadn't been a total waste of time. Even though we'd been to Lynford once before for Hawfinch we were over at the opposite end, which is completely different. At 2.49am we drove away and headed straight for the Supermarket.

When I parked up in Morrison's car park it was 3.35pm and by then we were in no fit state to do any kind of sensible shopping. After wandering around in a daze and doing quite well considering, we left at 4.38pm. It was still absolutely boiling outside and we couldn't wait to get the final leg of the journey done. We saw good numbers of **House Martins** just before we reached Langham and at 5pm we pulled up outside Farriers Barn, our HQ for the week, and from the outside it looked amazing.



Farriers Barn

I followed the instructions to find the key and we both held our breath as I opened the door. It was a good job we held our breath as the first thing that hit us was the rather pungent smell of damp old cottage and smelly old dog....Yuk!

We knew that it wasn't what we'd have normally chosen, with it being last minute and peak season and were prepared for it to not being the best but the smell was pretty bad!



Living room

As I brought the bags through Wendy started unpacking the shopping and our stuff and in doing so she started to reveal all the less obvious problems :/. The inside of the fridge, the inside and outside of all the kitchen cupboards, the bathroom, the carpet etc. were all filthy....Arrgghhhh! The furniture inside was old, there was tasteless old clutter filling every available space, so there was no room for our stuff and the settee was only good for one thing...the tip! There was no wardrobe to hang up our clothes or even drawers to put them in, so we lived out of the suitcase for the whole week. She also found that the place was covered in **Daddy long-legs Spiders** but chose to turn a blind eye to them or she'd have spent the entire week trying to catch them all. Fortunately the cupboard under the sink was absolutely jam packed with cleaning products, which was a surprise, as it didn't look like anyone had ever used them.

After making the bed up, unpacking, cleaning and trying to make the best of a bad situation we headed out, later than planned, at 6.18pm. As we were so tired, we thought we'd treat ourselves to food out, to save us cooking and we also wanted to put everything through the dishwasher before we used them. Having hardly eaten all day and doing so much extra work on our arrival we were starving. Our plan was to go to the nearest pub, which we'd found to be very nice on a previous trip. The sky was looking very dark, the wind had picked up and it was really misty so we presumed that it was the start of the thunderstorms, which had been forecast. As we left HQ there were streams of Swallows going over, apparently getting away from the incoming storm.

We arrived at the Stiffkey Red Lion at 6.25pm but the car park was packed and they were fully booked for the entire evening....Urrghhhh! Looking at the clientele, something also told Wendy that as we looked a couple of zombies who'd been dragged through several hedges backwards they didn't want us creating a bad image at their establishment either. Next we tried the pub in Morston but it was the same there, as well as The Kings Arms, The Dun Cow, The George AND the Wiveton Bell. That was the full set of pubs in the villages along the coast near us. What the.....? We'd never had this problem before and by then we were thoroughly sick of the whole situation and headed for home. The car parks were all full of 4x4's with 'Trade Stall' passes hanging from their rear

view mirrors so we got the impression that there was something going on nearby.

We drove away from the coast road and headed inland passing a pub called The Bluebell, which we'd never been to before. We noticed only one car outside and it had a sign up outside saying that they served food.....sorted :). I parked up and we went inside and asked for a table, only to be told that they weren't serving food, as the Chef (the landlady's son) was off....Aarrggghhhhhh! OMG! We left but I suggested we went back in for a quick drink anyway, so we could sit down and chill out. We were the only punters in there and although the Landlady was really friendly we were certainly reminded as to why we'd never been in before. It was a bit like our HQ, smelly, dirty and old but it did the job. An American couple and their 2x teenage kids came in and after getting a drink and looking around they went straight outside and stood awkwardly in the Beer garden. They probably thought it would be good to experience a 'local' but they didn't look like they were enjoying it either and didn't hang around. They'd probably found themselves in the same situation as us though. I was nearly falling asleep at the table while Wendy sipped on her much needed spritzer, so I was pleased when she'd finished and we could leave.

It was 7.40pm when we got back to HQ, so we washed some plates and cutlery before knocking up some very quick but uninspiring beans on toast. After that we put just about everything we could lay our hands on through the dishwasher, on the deep clean cycle :P.



Kitchen

The idea of going out for tea had been brilliant but for some reason every man and his dog had hit the North Norfolk coast at the same time as us. There was still no sign of any storm by 8pm when Wendy went for a bath and the black clouds had passed over. At 9.30pm my body had caught up with my head and had given up so I went off to bed leaving Wendy with a towel on her head, still needing to dry her hair. After she'd done that, without a mirror, and finished off her drink she gave up and conked out at 10.30pm, feeling anything but at home!

Sunday 28th July

We both woke up at 8.30am after our long and much needed sleep to find a very windy but sunny day. I'd had 11hrs sleep and felt much better but we both had sore backs from the uncomfortable bed and saggy sofa. Outside, the garden looked amazing and we were very eager to check out the wildlife pond down at

the bottom. We heard **Oystercatcher** and a **Skylark** singing its heart out high over the field behind the fence. I managed to find some Neutrodol air freshener and after spraying it about the place the horrible smell vanished.....for about 5mins! After we'd had breakfast, done more cleaning and made our lunch we headed out at 11.23am, just in time for the hottest time of the day....Dohhhh! The temperature was already 22C so we plastered ourselves with sun cream before setting off.

Just down the road we passed a weird looking round black structure and pulled up to read the board next to it.



Raf Langham

It turned out that it was RAF Langham a base from WW2 and the structure was a training facility for practicing Air to Air gunnery. The dome had enemy aircraft projected onto the inside of the walls. Very smart.



WW2 Gunnery training dome

All the way down the road on either side of the flat and featureless barley fields, was what looked like a huge and very grim looking old battery farm. I Googled it later on and found out that, it used to be Bernard Matthew's Turkey Farm. Wendy was very pleased that it had closed down and that being a veggie she'd never endorsed his products. Further along we saw our 1st **Brown Hare** of the trip as it ran across the road and disappeared into the field. The forecast was for

rain at around 1pm and we thought Cley would be our best bet so we could shelter in the Hides if it threw it down. Having thought that it would be busy with Tours etc. we were very relieved to find that it was really quiet.

I parked up at 11.48am and we went into the Visitors Centre to get our admission stickers. We were planning to take it easy so Wendy got a Cappuccino from the café and we sat at the window and had a look out over the Reserve. From there we could see distant **Avocet, Shelduck, Mute Swan, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Cormorant, Egyptian Goose, Lapwing** and **Teal**. All of a sudden everything flushed and 100's of Waders lifted up as well as **Little Egrets** and **Black-tailed Godwits** but all was revealed when a **Marsh Harrier** floated slowly over the reed bed. The rain hadn't materialized at all and instead it was sunny and hot! After that we walked over to the Hides seeing a tiny **Frog** on the path and a Migrant Hawker over one of the drainage ditches.



Cley

Over at Bishop's Hide we found 2x summer plumage **Knot**, a lot of **Ruff** all looking totally different to each other as usual, **Pied Wagtail, Common Sandpiper, Sand Martin** and a pair of Moorhen's with 2 chicks. We tried to get some pics but they weren't very exciting.



Angry Moorhen

Over at the 2nd Hide there was so little water or mud that there were no birds at all so we swiftly moved next door into Dauke's Hide.



Cley

We added **Ringed Plover**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Spotted Redshank** and moved to the 3rd hide. This Hide proved quite interesting and amongst the resting birds we found a **Green Sandpiper**, **Golden Plover** and right at the back was another Wader, which could've been a Wood Sandpiper but was far too distant to be sure. With nothing else left to find we wandered back to the car at 1.57pm for our lunch.....om nom nom :).

We left at 2.28pm and since it wasn't raining we decided to pay Holkham Pines a visit to see if we could find the reported Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth or a White-letter Hairstreak Butterfly. When we arrived at 3pm it was the busiest we'd ever seen it. There were 4x4's everywhere, 100's of posh people with kids, dogs and even riding on Horseback.



Holkham Pines

We found out that there was a Country Fair being held at Holkham Hall so that explained everything. It even solved the mystery as to why all the pubs were fully booked the night before, as the cars with 'Trade Stall' passes displayed in them were all there :/. Hoping that the draw of extortionate local farm produce would keep everyone away from where we were going we started to get our stuff together :P. Wendy wouldn't have minded having a look at the fair and would probably have grabbed herself some veggies too but we didn't have the time or will to mingle with the masses of posho's. With all the Horses about came the threat of Horseflies, so after dousing ourselves with more Jungle Formula and paying £3.80 for the privilege of parking the car we set off. Straight away we found a couple of very nice **White Admiral Butterflies**. They hardly settled though and it was a right pain following them round in the hope that they stopped. We got a few chances but nothing turned out as we'd hoped.



White Admiral

Resident and more widespread today than in any previous known period, even though populations at monitored sites appear to have declined. They fly between June-mid August and rely on Honeysuckle, as the

larvae overwinter on it and overzealous cutting back of this plant will result in killing off the next year's colony.

The White Admirals were quickly followed by more Large Skippers, which had been another lifer the day before. As I was taking pics I noticed that a Skipper was actually laying an egg on a leaf....cool :).



Large Skipper laying eggs

In just one Bramble bush alone we counted 6 species of Butterfly, which was pretty good compared to back home. There wasn't much in the line of birds and we only heard a flock of **Long-tailed Tits** flitting their way through the trees above us. A massive difference to when we go there in late Autumn when the place is alive with Crest and Tit flocks, not to mention the Shore Larks out on the Saltings.

As we approached the Washington Hide Wendy was still busy getting pics of Butterflies so I wandered up there on my own as this was supposedly the place for our targets.



Washington Hide

Not only couldn't I find our targets but there wasn't anything remotely interesting to look at so I walked along the boardwalk, which did a loop back down to the path where I'd left Wendy. When I came out I couldn't see her anywhere but waited for her to reappear. Unbeknown to me she'd followed me up there thinking I'd be in the Hide but on finding it empty she'd presumed I'd gone over to the beach and had carried on to catch up with me. She'd freaked out on the way when she came across what 1st appeared to be a Hornet and didn't stick around to find out. Down at the beach she couldn't see me anywhere but took some pics of the nice view before retracing her steps back.



Holkham beach

She'd tried to phone me to find out where I was but there was no reception and since she has the navigation skills of a blind mole she was feeling slightly anxious...typical woman :P. When she came back out on the path, I was standing around waiting, exactly where I'd left her, totally oblivious to what had just happened. The Hornet she'd seen wasn't a Hornet at all and we think it must've been a Hornet Moth which would have been great to see. She was kicking herself when she realized and just wished she'd had a better look and even got a quick pic. Panic over we headed back and decided that, due to the hit and miss mobile signal in Norfolk, it was probably best not to wander off again. Back at the car it was 4.45pm, so it was too late to go to Titchwell, as planned, so we called it a day and headed home for tea. We could see the rain finally coming in in the distance so were pleased we had managed to get our day done without getting wet.



Distant rain

We were back by 5pm and after doing even more cleaning and making tea Wendy thought she deserved to chill out, while I decided to go to Titchwell to make use of the evening light for some pics. I'd picked up an instant chicken noodle soup from Morrison's while Wendy set about making herself a simple stir-fry from scratch. Although she was jealous that mine was ready in no time and required virtually no effort she soon changed her mind when she watched me struggle my way through it....Bleurrghhh! Hers was really nice as well and apparently well worth the extra effort.....Grrrrrr! Wendy went for a look outside and (don't ask me how) caught a glimpse of a tiny foot disappearing into a small hole in the cottage wall under the hosepipe. Uh?



Hole

Instantly she thought mouse, which would explain the smell in the cottage, and freaked out that it could get into the kitchen. It started to rain but she stayed out and hid behind the porch to see if what had just gone in would come back out. She could see movement in the hole and eventually the culprit emerged. Thankfully it wasn't a mouse but a small **Common Toad** so she came running back inside very excited as it was only the 2nd we'd ever seen. I went out for a look before getting my stuff together and heading out after the rain had stopped.

I left at 6.44pm with my 1st plan being to get petrol from the nearest garage as yet again I was already running low after the journey from Heysham. When I

arrived I was a bit worried to see that it was closed, so I carried on to Titchwell in the hope that my Sat Nav would point out a nearby Petrol station. My only problem was that my petrol warning light was already flashing and Titchwell was about 15miles away. I forgot about that for a while, as when I arrived at Titchwell there was only 2 other cars there, so the reserve was going to be empty. Perfect :). I happily trotted down the quiet path and out onto the reserve.



Titchwell

Sitting down in the Island Hide I noticed how much water was there, I later found out it was due to a few high tides and that the water levels would soon be dropping off. The place was still packed with birds though and out in the middle were over 200 Avocets! Scanning some more resulted in 3 **Spoonbills, Common Tern, Shoveler, Gadwall, Wigeon**, Canada Goose and Starling. Some of the younger Avocets were a bit closer so I tried to get an OK shot with my Teleconverter on.



Avocet

Not overly pleased with my efforts I gave up and carried on out to the beach for a look.



Titchwell beach

There were lots of Waders on the beach including Dunlin, Redshank, Curlew and Turnstone. Flying around were Sandwich Tern and **Little Tern**. It was getting a bit cold so I turned back, but on the way I decided to pop in to the usually poo Parrinder Hide. This is where the people from the 2 cars were and they were very nice and were all the way from Kent. One of them wanted to buy a 500mm lens, so I gave him a go of mine, so he could have a feel of the horrendous weight of a big lens! :). I took the opportunity to ask about petrol and was very worried by them all scratching their heads about how near the closest petrol station was. Their best guess was 10miles away just past Hunstanton, which was heading the wrong way from home! They then said that they didn't know if it would be open or not.....Uh oh. Just before we left I spotted the reported **Curlew Sandpipers** so got a record shot.



Curlew Sandpipers

Walking past the Visitor Centre I had a quick check of the external lights for moths and found a **Poplar Grey**, which was a lifer for me and an **Engrailed**.



Engrailed

Common moths and have up to 3 generations between March-May/June-October. The larvae feed on various trees and shrubs.

Then out the corner of my eye I spotted lovely Toad just sitting there. Brilliant! Luckily I had my Point and click in my pocket so was able to get an OK photo.



Toad

I set off on my Petrol station hunt at 9.09pm with my car showing 15miles left in the tank... Errrkk.

As my car hit 0miles left my panic was hitting max levels, especially as I'd driven a lot further than Hunstanton. Then like an Oasis in the desert I saw lots of big lights either side of the A road and it was relief-tastic to have finally found an open Petrol station at 9.26pm!

I got back to HQ at 10.10pm very tired! While I'd been out Wendy told me that when she was relaxing in the bath she'd made a gruesome discovery. She'd found a tick on her leg so after she'd dried herself, she dug out the tick removers, which Andy had used in the Hebs, and had to do the deed herself. She could barely bring herself to look at it never mind remove it but she'd bitten the bullet and successfully pulled it off. She'd put it in a glass and saved it for me but it had started to wander, albeit very slowly, so she'd taken a pic and dispatched of it before I'd got back. Very thoughtful of her I'm sure but I can honestly say that I didn't mind one little bit :P.



Cringe!

These must be the most disgusting and pointless things that exist in Britain! (after Owen Paterson, Conservative minister for the Environment that is!)

While I'd been gone she'd also been outside and had heard the sound of beating wings coming from the dry bushes. When she got closer she noticed that they were alive with moths. Later on there were loads settling on the windows outside and she couldn't wait to go out to see what they were. I was also interested so I grabbed a torch and we went out for a look.

It was such a warm and humid evening that as well as midgies there were literally moths everywhere! We also found a big Toad on the gravel driveway, so had to be very careful where we were standing in case there was any more. We tried to get some pics by shining a torch at it but it was impossible because it wouldn't stay still.

While we were outside Wendy alerted me to the sound of a **Tawny Owl**, which I couldn't hear for ages and then the screeching of a **Barn Owl**. Considering we had no proper Moth Trap we were very impressed as to how much the outside light had pulled in but wished again that we could've brought ours with us. Luckily I'd brought my Butterfly net, which helped a lot with catching the ones that didn't settle. We quickly managed to get an interesting and varied haul of **Swallowtail, Peach Blossom, Tawny Speckled Pug, Mother of Pearl, Small Magpie, Reed Tussock, Dot Moth, Dark Arches, Barred Straw, Riband Wave, Purple-shaded Gem, Plain Golden Y, Spectacle, Small Blood-vein and White Satin Moth.**



Small Blood-vein

Fairly common during July-August in the southern parts of Britain but local further north. They occupy habitats ranging from waste ground, hedgerows and coastal dunes.



Spectacle

Common throughout Britain during May-July/July-September and the larvae feed on nettles. The markings on the front thorax resemble a pair of spectacles which is why they're called 'Spectacle.' If only I'd taken this shot from head on!



Plain Golden Y

Regularly attracted to light during June-August and the larvae feed on a range of plants including Nettles.

Wendy had nipped inside when I heard the sound of a car coming down the track. I then heard a voice saying sternly, "Are you alright?" I couldn't believe it! Neighbourhood watch must be well on the ball in the area! I quickly replied with, "Yes thanks." She wasn't too impressed with this answer and said, "What are you doing?" I replied with, "Oh it's OK, I'm not a burgler, I'm just looking at the moths!" She didn't seem convinced with her untrusting reply of, "Hmmmmmm" but retreated back to her car and drove away back up the track and out onto the main road. What was weird was that she wasn't even a close neighbour, so the question still remains as to who alerted her and why? After that I gave up, turned the outside lights off and went in, so as not to cause any more worry in the neighbourhood. Boooooooooo :(Wendy had only half heard the conversation so we had a bit of a giggle over what had just happened before going off to bed at 12.10am feeling more than a bit paranoid that the Police would be knocking on the door next!

Monday 26th July

We were both woken up at around 6am by the sound of the bin lorry outside and I suddenly remembered that I'd read a note saying that the bin should've been put out on Monday. I was a bit annoyed until later on when we re-read the note, which said 'for Monday morning'. Doh! It should've been more specific and said for Monday 6am though! Wendy was up and about at 7.26am making sarnies etc. but I had a lie in until 8.09am. I'd planned to go to Winterton Dunes and Strumpshaw Fen but we needed good calm weather for that and there were thunderstorm alerts from lunchtime onwards so we had to rethink. I decided that our best plan was to go somewhere nearer as the downpours were forecast for a bit later in the day than over on the east coast. I'd pin pointed nearby Holt Lowes for Silver-washed Fritillary so shuffled the plan about a bit. Although it was warm it was still threatening rain and seemed too windy but we had very few options so I just hoped the place would be a bit sheltered.

At 9.46am we arrived at Holt Country Park (including Holt Lowes) and the black clouds seemed to have followed us from HQ. The 1st thing we noticed was the info boards about Ash die back, as it was an affected area :(Wendy's 1st stop

was the WC's before we went inside the Visitors Centre to get some info from the Warden. They were very helpful and pinpointed some areas for us, one right outside the centre! We had a look but saw nothing so we continued to follow the footpath, which ran through the middle of a huge forest. I then heard a birdcall, which sounded very familiar but I just couldn't remember what it was. Luckily it soon came to me and we added **Nuthatch** to our list, as well as hearing more Crossbills higher up and **Goldcrests**. We soon hit the path the warden had told us about and instantly found a lovely White Admiral quickly followed by a large orange Butterfly, which could only mean one thing, **Silver-washed Fritillary**! There were 4 of them flying like crazy from bush to bush so we set about trying for some shots.



Silver-washed Fritillary

Resident during mid June-end August and although their numbers dropped they're showing a good increase in population levels and some expansion of range over the last few decades.

We then found a nice little **Holly Blue**, more White Admirals and another Silver Y. Holly Blue's usual stay up high but this one was enjoying coming down to feed on the path allowing us to try for a few pics. Very nice of it!



Holly Blue

Common during March-mid June/late July-August/3rd generation during good years in Autumn in the southern half of Britain but are becoming more widespread in the north. As the name suggests the larvae feed on Holly but the 2nd generation actually feed on Ivy.

While we were filling our boots with pics we picked up the call of **Coal Tits** and were soon joined by 2 other blokes, also with cameras. We got chatting to them and they were both really friendly so it was nice to have some others with us who were keen to vent their frustrations. The only Butterflies that seemed to land for long enough were the tatty ones with chunks missing out of their wings and if a nice specimen landed it was either positioned facing away or in an inaccessible place.....Aarrgrhhhhh! The 4 of us must've made for an amusing sight to anyone else in the area but we all seemed to be enjoying ourselves and kept it fun.



Nice hat!

The others appeared to be only in it for the Butterflies and weren't really interested in anything remotely birdy. Try as we might none of us could get a shot we were totally happy with and then all of a sudden it started to rain so we told them we were off and left them to it, while we went back to sit in the car until the shower passed over.

Luckily it didn't last long and we headed out again this time towards the Lowes end of the Country Park. This was where we would be able to look for our other targets. With a bit of luck we managed to find the dragonfly pool but our initial scan around produced nothing, so our hearts sank.



Holt Dragonfly pond

We thought it could be because of the cloud cover and sure enough once the sun poked through we started seeing small blue Damselflies over the water. We had a closer look as they could be different to what we were used to seeing at home and sure enough we'd found an **Azure Damselfly**.



Azure Damselfly

Common and widespread in lowland areas during March-August with the exception of Scotland.

There were also some Dragonflies about, which turned out to be Migrant Hawker and Four-spotted Chaser.



Four-Spotted Chaser

Common and widespread throughout Britain during March-August.....but extremely rare on the IOM!

We were also watching a smaller red one and when it landed on a leaf Wendy grabbed a quick record shot and confirmed **Ruddy Darter**. We couldn't stay there forever, even though we'd hoped for our first ever Broad-bodied Chaser but we needed to head over to the heath if we were to find ourselves our proper target.

The rain had cleared off and the temperature had really soared by the time we were up on the heath. It was a bit breezy out in the open but we hoped the temperature would help our cause enough. It was a strange heath, it seemed very dead in places but that could've just been the sandy soil. We were slightly wary where we walked though, as it looked like perfect Adder territory.



Holt Lowes

Our directions weren't as easy, so we just sort of guessed and luckily straight away we were onto some Dragonflies. We got them in our bins and where chuffed to see that we'd found what we'd gone for, our first ever **Keeled**

Skimmer :). They were very obliging and sat for ages on the dead gorse, sunning themselves, so after getting loads of pics we moved off.



Keeled Skimmer

Scarce and local during June-August preferring acidic wet heathland sites.

In the distance we could hear **Yellowhammer** and a flock of **Linnets** flew over as we made our way to the lower pond.



Lower Pond

It was too hot for me by that point but there were insects flying around all over the place. You could waste more time than you'd ever think possible taking pics of insects and we could've easily spent the whole day there! There were Azure and Large red Damselflies and Ruddy Darter, plus all the weird and wonderful things, which we had no idea what they were. We were both feeling hungry and very thirsty by then so we packed up and made our way back to the car. I thought that the path we were on would take us back to the main track but after a while it became overgrown and apparent that nobody had walked it for a long time. If we'd turned around the walk back would've been twice as long so we battled through until luckily the main path appeared. Phew!

It was so hot in the car at 12.45pm that we took our lunch over to a group of picnic benches under a wooden shelter. We sat down in the shade, with an elderly couple and their 2 Grandchildren on a table behind us, and ate our food. The kids were incredibly annoying especially the boy, who was a right little know it all but at least we knew we could just get up and leave them to it :P. The poor Grandparents were stuck with them for the day.....Hahaha! Wendy went over to the WC's and returned to tell me that there was a Silver-washed Fritillary and Brimstone flying around just next to it. We got our stuff together and went over for another quick shot but ended up back on the path we'd been on earlier. It was amazing to see the amount of Butterflies around and we counted 12 species on just one bush. There were Silver-washed Fritillary, Brimstone, White Admiral, Red Admiral, Comma, Large Skipper, **Meadow Brown**, Ringlet, Gatekeeper, Holly Blue, Large White and **Small White** plus a Silver Y moth!



Brimstone

Limited to woods and hedgerows, mainly between July-September, as the larvae feed on the leaves of Buckthorn Trees.



Comma

Widespread as early as late February if conditions are good until as late as October but mainly between March-September. Their population is rapidly expanding even up into southern Scotland where it was last resident 150 years ago.

When we emerged back into the car park we were next to some huge buddleia bushes, which were covered in Peacock Butterflies and **Small Tortoiseshell** so we were distracted yet again! That's 14 species in total just at the Reserve, which equals our total for the whole of the IOM ever!

We left at 2pm and stopped off at Blakeney Spa to grab some bits for later and took a detour back to HQ to drop it off. There were some big black clouds coming in again by then but we carried on with our plan regardless and parked up at the side of the road near to Warham Fort (aka Warham Camp). This was a double ditch earth fort and one of only a few in the whole country. They reckon that the Fort was probably built by Iceni in the 2nd Century BC and occupied until the tribe was wiped out by the Romans after Boudicca's uprising.



Warham camp

Not only is it an impressive place but it's also one of the only remaining sites to have a thriving population of Chalkhill Blue Butterflies. They rely solely on undisturbed and chalky soil for their habitat and fortunately Warham Fort is just perfect. I was extremely grateful to a chap on Birdforum, who'd given us the site details, as we'd have never known otherwise. We got out of the car and started to walk up the road when Wendy spotted a small Blue Butterfly on the grass verge so we stopped for a look. Unbelievably and without even trying we'd stumbled across another lifer, **Chalkhill Blue Butterfly**! She spotted another one flying over the crops in the field, just over the road from the track we were heading for. We'd been prepared for the whole thing taking much more time and a lot more effort but we certainly weren't grumbling. Having found the gate, we crossed over and went through it.



Not sure this driver can read :-\

There were Chalkhills all the way down the track and I even found 2 on a sunlit dog poo, which was a tip Andy had given me for finding Purple Emperor Butterflies....Hahahahaha!



Mmmm.....yummy poo!

Single generation Butterflies, which declined considerably during the 20th century. They can be seen in mid-July but usually August is the only month to be sure of seeing them. Many current sites are protected and they aren't thought to be in immediate danger.

We were also very lucky enough to have a migrant **Clouded Yellow Butterfly** fly past us at practically 100mph and everywhere we looked were more Chalkhill Blues. A couple of blokes appeared and as they came up the track towards us it turned out to be one of the Photographers from Holt Lowes. He was now with a different guy so we stopped for a chat and exchanged info. He said that it was well worth going to the Fort as there must've been 2-3000 Chalkhills in the area, which sounded extremely impressive.

Their timing had been a lot better than ours and after they'd left it started to become very dark as the black clouds rolled in.



Stormy clouds!

It definitely looked stormy so, like pansies, we retraced our steps back to the car for shelter. Sure enough the heavens opened but it soon passed without even the faintest rumble of thunder so we grabbed the bull by the horns and went for it before it got any worse. Loads of Swifts started streaming over us high up, which we took as an indication that there was indeed a storm coming! Being brave we charged our way back down the track as quickly as possible, dodging the dog poo and Chalkhills, feeding on the ground until we came out into the field where the Fort is.



Warham fort

There were even more Butterflies in the field and the nearer to the Fort we got, the more we found. It was quite exposed and windy there so we have to presume that they liked the shelter from the Fort but it was still strong enough to make getting shots more difficult. I started to wish that I'd invested in a Plamp to stabilize the flower stems and make life easier.



Chalkhill Blue

While Wendy was filling her boots with pics of the males and brown females she was finding I went over the ridge and inside the Fort to see if it was more sheltered. The sides were a lot steeper than I'd expected and about 30ft high but the scale in the pics just don't do it justice.



Double ditch

Suddenly, as another dark cloud came over the rumbles of thunder started! It seemed to be in the distance so we carried on taking pics! Hardcore or what! When more Swifts streamed over us and we heard a loud clap of thunder we decided to leg it! As we briskly walked back we found some more dog poo, which had 12 Chalkhills on it. Party time!



Poo Party

We couldn't help but wonder if this was one place where dog owners are encouraged to bring their dogs and to leave the poo on the ground! Maybe they get a fine if they're seen picking it up rather than the other way round? :P. Trying to hurry our way up the track was difficult, as there were so many Chalkhills on the ground, so it was hard not to step on them but we managed it without any casualties. Back at the car we'd been very lucky, as the heavens opened just as we got in. That looked like it was it for the day so we decided to head back to HQ so the weather forecasters had got it right for once! As I drove along the narrow windy road a 4x4 came hurtling around a corner causing me to have to swerve into the roadside ditch so we didn't collide. He wasn't moving for anyone, even though his vehicle is designed for off road and mine isn't.....Grrrr! Lucky for me

the ditch wasn't deep so I was able to drive out without getting stuck or causing any damage to my car. Phew!

We were back at HQ at 4.26pm and Wendy went out into the garden seeing the Toad going into his hole in the wall again. While she started to get her tea prepared I sat down on the sofa to go through our millions of photos and ended up dozing off :P. When I woke up she was just about to eat hers so I got up and made mine too. She went off for a bath after that and I reckoned that as it was early and the rain had passed we'd try Salthouse Heath for Nightjar. If we failed there then at least we had a few more nights left to go to Dersingham Bog and try again. Wendy reckoned it was too windy and because of this there wouldn't be many midgies out, so we weren't hopeful but it was worth a shot anyway. When the light started to fade we reckoned it was time to go and left HQ at 9.05pm seeing a **Kestrel** on a telegraph pole as we drove away.

At 9.28pm we arrived at Salthouse Heath car park and although it was windy it was still warm enough to go out without coats. There were definitely very few midgies about and all our previous attempts at Nightjar had been most successful when we'd been practically eaten alive....Uh Oh! I'd forgotten that we'd been there before but Wendy recognized it straight away as being the 1st place we'd ever tried in the past.



Salthouse Heath

Dersingham is a much better site for seeing them flying as you're low down looking up at the sky whereas at Salthouse you're high up looking down at the dark trees. The problem was that Dersingham was 1 hour away and Salthouse was only 15 minutes away. We were mainly just interested to see if they were still churring so late in the season, as well as if they still used Salthouse at all. We heard a Tawny Owl calling and then.....a 'squeak' followed by churring. Brilliant! After just 10mins we'd got what we wanted and were listening to the undeniable fantastic sound of the **Nightjar** :). This deserved a high 5, even by Wendy's standards, which is saying something! We couldn't see it but it didn't matter to us, at least we knew that they were still there, and so close to home too. We now didn't need to have a late night to make the trip to Dersingham unless, of course, we felt like a proper Nightjar fix :).

Wendy thought it deserved a celebration and suggested going to the Dun Cow for a quick drink. After it had been so busy the other night I was reluctant but relieved to find that it was totally dead when we arrived at 9.46pm. The Landlord had his family and friends in for the night and apart from a random

family group in the corner we were the only other punters in there. He must've been preoccupied and mucked up Wendy's order giving her a pint of Cobra instead of a Coke. He apologized, said it wouldn't go to waste and drank it himself :P. Normally, in spring and autumn, it's full of oldies, walkers with their dogs and Birders, so being there in summer with the young student types in was totally different. Having thought it would be nice and chilled out we ended up feeling as though we were gatecrashing their private party, so ended up drinking up and leaving faster than we'd expected.

It was 10.35pm when we finally arrived back at HQ and Wendy found the Toad, in his favourite nighttime spot, between the house and doorframe of the porch. As we'd found with the midgies there were definitely far fewer moths flying around and the only interesting one we could find around the lights was a **Dusky Sallow**. There was also a weird looking one in the house so I grabbed a quick record shot to ID it by later before letting it go outside. Wendy eventually settled on **Single-dotted Wave**.



Single-dotted wave

Common and attracted to light during June-August. The larvae feed through the winter on cow parsley and burnet saxifrage.

The forecast for the next day was BAD and it predicted rain from 12pm, which didn't give us much of a window to go anywhere. I had no idea what to suggest apart from ditching off my plan of driving to the east coast again, as we'd be arriving just in time for the rain. After another long day we turned in for the night at around 12.30am, again ignoring the massive Daddy long-legs Spiders that occupied the bedroom :/.

Tuesday 30th July

When Wendy got up at 7.09am it was still windy but a lovely sunny morning. It seemed unbelievable that it was all set to change at midday AGAIN but that was how the land lay. She sat outside at the garden table to drink her coffee in the sun but her little idle didn't last long. The wasp that was a regular visitor to the wooden chairs had decided that it wanted to get its nest making wood from her chair. Although there were 3 others, all exactly the same, it was adamant that only hers would do.....fussy bugger! I finally got up at 7.57am and after breakfast

we decided again to not head East into the bad weather but to stay nearby so we loaded our stuff into the car and headed for Kelling Heath to make the most of the valuable hours of sunshine. As we drove away from Cockthorpe we were heading straight into the black clouds but we couldn't have won, any way we'd gone. We couldn't help but worry that the day was going to be a complete washout and joked that we'd end up in scenic Hunstanton at the Sealife Centre if the weather got any worse.

I pulled up in the car park at Kelling at 9.49am and straight away we heard the lovely sound of a nearby Yellowhammer. First off we decided to try for Adder, as it was still early enough for them to be out in the open, sunning themselves. Unfortunately, as I'd recently changed my mobile, I'd lost all my maps including the one pinpointing the exact Adder locations. I thought I could find them from memory but we ended up going round in circles and getting lost before eventually getting it right. There was no sign of any Snakes at both our known sites, so we were a bit gutted and hoped that maybe the Dartford Warblers and Woodlarks would be easier to find, so it wouldn't be a wasted journey. Heading out towards the Heath I got a RBA alert of an Eagle (sp) over Kelling! There were no other details so we didn't know what type or whether it was at Kelling Heath or Kelling Quags but we'd keep a look out anyhow.



Kelling Heath

Wendy decided she needed a WC break and while she was otherwise engaged something flew over which caught my eye. Wendy saw it but obviously was in no position to lift her bins, so when I got it in mine I confirmed it.....**Turtle Dove** :). Nice one! It continued to fly backwards and forwards and it soon became apparent that it was carrying nesting material. Each time it appeared Wendy was either writing in the notepad or taking point and click scenery shots so it wasn't long before she threw a Karl Pilkington strop :P. After a few minutes of frustration she eventually got it in her bins, so we could carry on. Wendy was skipping along happy as Larry but then suddenly and without warning zonked out. I thought it was very funny that she was stroppy, hyper then zonked out all within about 5 minutes, so I decided she had the medically unknown 'Tri-polar disorder.' This kept me amused for a long time, although Wendy wasn't finding it that amusing! :P.

As we approached the Heath itself I spotted a familiar figure standing looking at something. Wendy reckoned I was wrong but as we grew closer and he turned around to face us I was proved right. It was the nice guy who we meet every time we go to Kelling and yet again he remembered us :O! He was busy looking

at the ground and when he started talking to us he asked us what we were looking for this time around. We mentioned Butterflies, moths and Dragonflies and he casually mentioned **Silver-studded Blue Butterflies**. We both said, "Oh wow where?" as we had no idea they were at Kelling Heath. He said, "Give me a second." and within about 10seconds he'd found some and pointed them out to us. Brilliant! He went on to tell us that they'd been reintroduced in 2001 and were doing very well back at Kelling. He also said we were very lucky to have seen them, as they were right at the end of their flight time, which did mean there were looking a bit tatty though. We filled our boots with pics of both male and female specimens and carried on with our usual update as to how things were doing in the area.



Silver-Studded Blue

In steep decline but the sites where they're present are managed specially for its needs. They fly during July-August and the larvae are hatched within an ant colony and are attended by the ants as they grow. We actually found one of the Butterflies, which appeared to be very unwell, being carried off by an ant near to the nest.

He told us that there were 2 pairs of Dartford Warblers and the same of Woodlarks and that they'd both managed to raise 2 broods over the summer. That was really nice to hear but the birds themselves were lying low, so the chances of us seeing them were very slim. Normally when we go to Kelling he's the only other person we meet apart from the guy who we'd labeled the 'Keith of Kelling', after noticing his uncanny resemblance to a Birder who lives in Peel, but it was much busier in summer. There were a lot of cyclists around including families with kids. A couple and their 2 young children pulled up on their bikes and the bloke asked us what we were looking at. He was really interested, as he'd never seen Silver-studded Blues so he came over for a look. After a while his wife joined us with the kids, just in time for the conversation to turn to Adders and Ticks! The young girl was becoming more freaked out by the second and his wife was quick to follow.....Oops! Not surprisingly they made a speedy exit, shortly after the bloke said that his daughter was scared of Snakes AND ticks Hahahahha :P.

We left the Kelling man to continue his daily patrol and went off in search of the Dartford Warblers and Woodlarks. By the time we were heading back we hadn't seen or heard a single bird and even the Stonechats were nowhere to be seen. We bumped into the Kelling man again who asked us had we ever seen Oak

Eggar Moths. Apparently, when he'd arrived, there'd been 2 flying around just next to the car park, which he'd even seen mating. After he'd given us more Eggar info he said he was going home for a cuppa, so we said our goodbyes and thanked him again. To think that he patrols the area every day of his life, meets and speaks with so many people but still remembers us is just unbelievable! He's one of those very knowledgeable people that love to pass on information without being smug or patronizing and one of our best contacts in Norfolk, so it's always a pleasure and an education to chat to him. Having always wanted to see an Oak Eggar moth we went straight back to the car park and had our lunch at 12.15pm. We hung around for ages looking out for a large orange moth, flying around erratically and even had a wander around in the scrubby area by the trees to see if we could flush something from the grass.



Oak Eggar area

After finding nothing, including the possible Booted Eagle, we finally gave up at 12.42pm and drove away. We hadn't seen everything we'd gone for but had come away with Turtle Dove and Silver-studded Blue as well as finding out that the Dartfords and Woodlarks had bred successfully, which was good enough for us.

The rain had started by then, which was fortunately later than forecast, so our only other option was to go to Cley. At least we could nip in and out of Hides between showers and stay relatively dry. On the way Wendy spotted the Shop/Deli on the corner in Weybourne and asked me to stop. She went in, had a look at the Deli stuff and got her coffee fix.....sorted!

We reached Cley at 1.10pm and parked up in the 'locals' layby instead of the Visitor Centre car park, as it's nearer to the Hides and not so far to walk. We sat down in Dauke's Hide and the fact that there was nobody else in there, spoke volumes, it was totally dead! We must've been deflated as a Marsh Harrier floated straight past the hide and we didn't even notice until the last minute. That would've been our best ever chance of getting a decent shot too.....Urrghhhhh! There'd been Yellow-legged Gull reported and we found 2 of them sitting out on one of the Islands. They were distant but still **Yellow-legged Gulls** and if we moved to the next hide we'd get a better view anyway. This we did and the YLG's were closer, not that we were particularly bothered about them. There was also a Green Sand and Common Sand but no sign of the reported Wood Sands, as they'd been seen from North Hide. With not much else about we decided to make the effort and drive over to the beach to see if we could find them.

At 2.20pm we paid for our ticket, parked up in the car park and made our way across the shingle to the North Hide. I heard a call, which again took me a while before I remembered what it was. It was a **Yellow Wagtail**, which flew over the field but didn't choose to land. I hadn't expected them to be there at this time of year so it was a nice surprise. There were **Sandwich Terns** fishing along the shoreline and **Herring Gulls** out at sea. Wendy stopped to get a quick pic of the Yellow horned Poppies, which she loves and ended up with quite a nice one using just her point and click camera.



Yellow horned Poppies

We then spotted a Pipit, so hoping it was something a bit interesting we had a look. Unfortunately it was just a **Meadow Pipit**, as we'd expected but as we were in Norfolk and not the Isle of Man it was still worth checking just in case.

When we arrived at the North Hide it was 2.39pm and there were a good few Birders in there, including an old guy, who was busy pointing things out to the others and telling them what they were (mainly Greenshank!)



North Hide view

Our initial scan produced 4x **Greenshank**, 2x **Little Gull** and **Canada Geese**. It's always difficult (to put it mildly) to ID small Waders from there as the sun is permanently behind the pool making everything a black silhouette. We kept

looking around and by then Wendy swore that if she'd heard anyone say the word "Greenshank!" again she'd have screamed! She then got my attention and said, "Eee arr, just in this bottom right corner." She'd found one of the **Wood Sandpipers**, which was near to a Green Sand, as a good comparison. I reached for my camera to get a distant record shot and we spent ages discussing it openly.



Wood Sandpiper

I then spotted 2x **Common Snipe**, flying off so I got Wendy onto them and we found some Beardies in the reeds. There was also Common Tern and Little Ringed Plover but then the old guy suddenly and proudly announced, "Wood Sandpiper, I've got a Wood Sandpiper!" It was an awkward moment, as at this point Wendy was cleaning her glasses and looking very disinterested. When she accidentally made eye contact with him and saw how pleased he was with himself she started to feel very guilty. He started to try and describe to everyone else where it was and was relishing his find. If only he'd stopped talking about Greenshanks to the others for a few minutes he may just have noticed that we were taking pics and discussing the bird they were all looking for. "It must've been there all along!" he said, while we cringed in the corner....Oops! Maybe we should've shouted it from the rooftops at the top of voices? Ah well, we can't say we didn't try. We couldn't stand it any longer and left them all in his capable hands to their lesson in Wood Sandpipers. As we walked back along the beach I spotted some **Arctic Terns** diving in and we were back at the car by 3.31pm. It was still really early so Wendy wanted to go for a look in the Gift Shop and Deli in Blakeney before going home.

It was only 4.20pm when we got back to HQ but it was too late to go anywhere else, as she wanted to try again to go out for tea before going to Titchwell for the evening. The 1st thing she did, while I started going through our pics, was go outside to check the pond.



Cottage pond

Not long after my mobile started to ring and when I answered it was Wendy saying, "Grab the cameras quick, I've got a **Banded Demoiselle!**" I jumped up and got our stuff together before legging it outside. It was absolutely boiling in the garden and the sun was so strong that getting a shot was very difficult. The conditions were the worst we could've asked for (apart from torrential rain) but this is the best image Wendy ended up with after a lot of effort.



Banded Demoiselle

While we were engrossed in this she also found a Beautiful Golden Y feeding amongst the flowers around the pond. Wendy wanted to book a table for food somewhere, so as not to end up in the same boat as the other night, so we went back inside. She rang some Pubs and Restaurants after checking numerous menus online and finding that most of them were either too poncy, too expensive, didn't have anything we fancied or only showed a sample menu. After being given numerous veggie options she decided to opt for the tried and tested Stiffkey Red Lion and although it was fully booked inside they said there were plenty of tables outside.

The car park was full again and there were other people arriving when we pulled up at around 5.50pm. Wendy took the tactic of racing past a large group of punters so she could grab a table before them. Hahahahaha she almost left a cloud of dust behind her! We found a seat in the corner outside and Wendy went inside to get a Menu and some drinks. While we sat there deciding what we'd have to eat we noticed loads of tiny long black flies landing on us. Glancing around we didn't see anyone else being bothered by them so we quickly moved seats and sandwiched ourselves between 2 other tables. The fly situation was definitely better there but still not ideal. Our meal came pretty quickly and Wendy enjoyed her vegetable spring rolls and my yummy Cod and Chips came without peas, just as she'd requested for me.....Om non nom :).

Totally stuffed we left at 6.45pm and we took a spin past the Barn Owl fields. I'd had no joy there the other night so I'd presumed that the Owls don't hang round there in summer. As we approached the fields at 7.01pm I wasn't even going to stop but when Wendy said, "Barn Owl!" I quickly pulled over and we bailed out.



Barn Owl field

We watched the bird hunting over the field but it was too far away for any shots. I spotted a Marsh Harrier and then another Barn Owl on the opposite side of the road. By then the 1st one had cleared right off and the bird I'd just found had decided to perch on a tree right at the back of the field, so we gave up. We could also hear Reed Warblers, saw I think our 1st **Pheasant** of the trip and there were loads of Stock Doves flying around the area. We didn't stay long and headed off to Titchwell.

It was 7.30pm when we arrived and the 1st thing was heard was a very noisy **Jay** from the car park. On the way Wendy commented on how good it would be to Moth Trap there and we wondered if they did. As we walked past the notice board she laughed when she read that there was actually an event the next morning at 9am to see what they'd caught in their trap. It was a very tempting offer but to get there for 9am we'd have to be up ridiculously early and there'd probably be loads of kids there too so we ditched the idea off. We made our way straight out to the Hide and sat down to find a **Dark Arches Moth** inside. There was another Silver Y outside the window and the 3x Spoonbills in the distance stuck out like a sore thumb feeding in the shallow water.



Titchwell freshmarsh

There was a big group of small Waders, which were obviously mainly Dunlin but they were too far off to be able to pick out a Curlew Sand amongst them. There were a couple of nice Spotshanks about but not much else and I reckoned we'd get a better view from the Parrinder Hide anyway.

The Parrinder Hide seems to be improving as time goes on, I didn't rate it at all when it was 1st built. The Waders were in closer range so it was easier to find the Curlew Sandpiper in with them. Just to the left, on one of small Islands, was a tiny Little Ringed Plover chick and its parent didn't seem fazed at all that it was standing out in the open on its own. We watched it for ages and wondered how it was still alive with all the predatory Gulls flying around nearby. I found a female **Gadwall** but there wasn't much else happening. We followed the LRP chick scenario until the parent bird came scurrying back over and the chick had disappeared and hidden in the safety of its parent's feathers. Awwwwwww :). The Spoonbills were also slightly closer from here so I set about getting a poor record shot :)



Spoonbill

On the walk back to the car park we spotted a glow of light in the bushes. We wandered off realizing that it must've been their moth trap. I was fully expecting to see an expensive Robinson MV trap there just like at Weeting Heath but obviously the RSPB don't spend the big bucks on moths, as it was just a cheapo Skinner trap. We had a peer over it and it was practically empty :(Maybe it was still too early in the evening? On the way out we watched the sun starting to set and we could already tell it was going to be a good one. The sun was bright red and it lit up the sky like a fireball so Wendy tried to get some point and click shots. They were a bit disappointing and didn't do it justice but nothing can capture that kind of scene like the human eye. There were 2 more Barn Owls out hunting over the field and with the sunset as a backdrop it was a spectacular scene. The birds were of course too far away and the light too low for any pics.....typical!

Back at the car at 9.05pm we couldn't wait to get home, we were tired and needed to chill out for a bit so we headed off. The sunset continued to just get better and better until Wendy could take no more and told me to stop. There was nowhere to pull up so I ended up turning into the track leading to Brancaster Beach. When we approached the car park, which was full of campervans with Kayaks on their roofs and young surfer types, it was clear that everyone had the same idea. They were all standing facing the sunset, holding their phones in the air, trying to capture the amazing sky. It was a hopeless spot though and Wendy was annoyed, as there was a building and loads of overhead cables ruining the shot from every angle. She jumped out of the car, ran across the road and stood in front of as many of the offending eyesores as possible. She came back with some pretty good pics considering they're just point and click shots.



Amazing sky

Through the darkness on the way home Wendy spotted a Tawny Owl hunting over a field, which flew straight across the road in front of us. We arrived back at HQ at 9.42pm and heard a Hercules going over, which continued to noisily fly over for about an hour! There was also a big fat Toad in my parking space, which had to be moved on before I could park up.

Although we were tired and it was getting late we couldn't resist another Mothing session :P. Armed with the torch and net we ended up with some interesting stuff including 2x **Mother of Pearl**, **Small Magpie**, 3x **Yellow-tail**, **Dusky Sallow**, **Common Footman** and **Scalloped Hazel**. There weren't nearly as many as on our 1st attempt but it turned into a pretty hectic affair with moths

flying into our faces and even up Wendy's dressing gown sleeve, so we pulled the plug on it and went inside. It was 11.45pm after that and definitely time for bed, as we had an early start planned for the morning.

Wednesday 31st July

With it being nearly the end of our holiday and the weather threatening rain we still hadn't been able to go to the Fens and East coast dunes. With yesterday's forecast saying that today was going to be better we'd revised our plan. We were woken up by the alarm at 6.30am, which Wendy could quite happily have thrown across the room. It was hard work getting up so early but it was still relatively tame compared to what we'd normally do in spring and autumn. When I looked at the forecast I couldn't believe it, it'd changed from the day before and was now predicting rain on the east coast from 9am! With our time and the places we wanted to go rapidly running out we had no choice but to try the East coast and keep our fingers crossed that the forecast was wrong.

We set off at 8.19am knowing that we had an hour-long drive ahead. Wendy was gutted that we'd be spending the best part of the day sitting in the car but if we wanted to see more life insects it had to be done. Up the road we passed some **House Sparrows**, which we're sure we'd seen elsewhere but hadn't noted, and then something we'd been hoping to see all week. A **Stoat**, hopped, skipped and jumped its way across the road ahead of us, with its tail high in the air. Brilliant! This made us laugh, as they're so funny to watch and we'd challenge anyone to ever get bored of watching their comical antics.

Eventually we arrived at Strumpshaw Fen at 9.23am and entered the Reserve to get our tickets. There was a chance of Swallowtail Butterfly, Willow Emerald Damselfly & Scarce Chaser there, which we would love to see. Just by the Visitor Centre there's some very rare **Bee Orchids**, which unfortunately looked very unimpressive and dead. This was a shame, as we'd really like to have seen them in flower, but we were too late in the season. From the Kingfisher Hide we found some tatty looking moulting **Shoveler** and had a chat to the Warden. There was very little wind for a change but it looked like it was going to rain very soon. When we said that we should've visited the day before the Warden assured us that it had been far worse and had rained all day from 11am onwards, so at least we'd made the right decision in delaying the journey by a day. A Brown Hawker was flying around just by the Visitor Centre and further along on the footpath a Migrant Hawker was patrolling up and down catching and eating its prey.

We eventually got to the end of the path, which opens up into the wet meadows with a small stream running through the middle.



Strumpshaw Fen

We were keeping our eyes open for Hobby, as disappointingly we'd not seen even one over the week but our eyes soon adjusted to the almost invisible Damselflies that started to appear. There were **Emerald Damselflies** some of which were mating and Blue-tailed so we spent ages trying to get shots.



Emerald Damselfly

Widespread and fairly common during July- August and their numbers peak in late summer, which is later than most other Damselflies.

We were so engrossed that we almost didn't notice the fine drizzly rain that had already started. Great! If it was going to throw it down surely everything we'd gone to see was going to stop flying and take cover somewhere inaccessible? We did put a lot of effort into scanning the edges of the ditch and found several insects hiding away including this moth, which we worked out was a Brown China Mark. Although we'd had one in the trap at Weeting it was still nice to find our own.



Brown China Mark

Common in ponds, canals, slow rivers, etc during June-August and the larvae are entirely aquatic.

The temperature plummeted and the sky turned grey so it wasn't looking good and we started to feel cold and like we were wasting our time. Depressed, we carried on through the field and back into the trees. This took us past some Broad or other, which was chocka full of Canal boats. I wondered how much fun could actually be had trundling along at about 2mph in the rain.



Broads

The sun was making an occasional appearance through the clouds and luckily just in time for us to spot another Banded Demoiselle sitting out on some branches. We could hear the calls of Marsh Harriers and when we approached an open pool and had a view over the reed bed we found 2x very vocal juvenile birds floating around. There was a Blackcap family in the trees just above us and the adults were busily feeding their young. Wendy wanted to get a photo of the pool and as she drew closer and up onto the bank she raised her bins to see a Kingfisher sitting slap bang in the middle of her view. It was close enough for a shot so she called me over.....and I flushed it. Oops! Wendy still got a photo of the pool though :).



Kingfisher was ere

Two adult Marsh Harriers were out hunting so the juvs must've been nagging for their mid-morning snack.

When we reached Tower Hide it seemed to be brightening up and felt a lot warmer. This didn't last for long before the rain started again....Urrghhhh :(In passing conversation I said, "You get Bittern here." to which Wendy replied, "By what?" She'd thought I'd said, "Bitten!" DOH! Still, her unintentional gag had given us a much needed laugh to lift our spirits :P. We watched a Common Tern feeding its chicks on the Island in the pool but when it stopped raining we saw it as our cue to leave.

The walk back would take us past the ditch where we'd tried for Willow Emerald the year before, so with the sun out again it was looking more hopeful. After the rain the midgie/mozzie situation was becoming quite bad but we were soon distracted when we found some Dragonflies on the path. One was a Migrant Hawker but we stopped to have a look, as we really wanted to find a Scarce Chaser and the other one looked good. Wendy managed to get some record shots and we were pretty sure we'd ID'd it correctly. Looking back over her pics later we were gutted to find that it was just another Black-tailed Skimmer :(.



Black-tailed Skimmer

Locally common during June-July and on the increase. Its range has extended northwards in recent decades and it responds well to wetland creations.

Wendy suddenly got her moth eyes on and found us an extremely tatty **Small China Mark** sitting tucked away in some long grass.



Small China Mark

Common throughout Britain during June-August in ditches, ponds and canals. The larvae feed on Duckweed.

Apart from the one in the Weeting trap we've only ever seen one before next to a pool at Slimbridge, so this was a good find. While we were getting some pics we heard a, "Splosh" and can only think that it was a **Water Vole**. We were also keeping our eyes peeled for Swallowtail Butterfly Caterpillars and apparently they could be found feeding on Milk Parsley. Wendy was trying her best to find some and had a pretty good idea what she was looking for but the best area for them was a bit further on over by a boardwalk. We then found a **Common white**

Wave and another weird moth, which Wendy got pics of to ID later. It turned out to be an *Evergestis pallidata*, which is a micro and a very pretty one at that.



Evergestis pallidata

Very local and scarce in northern England and Scotland during late May-September. They like damp open woodland, marshy places and scrub and can be disturbed by day but also come to light.

While we were doing that Wendy suddenly stopped dead, pointed her finger and said, “**Grasshopper Warbler!**” I stood there trying to hear it but couldn’t for the life of me. She started to doubt herself but it kept on reeling in the distance and she kept telling me when she was hearing it. We know a Birder in the IOM who’s lost the ability to hear Groppers due to his age and I was beginning to wonder if I was starting to suffer the same affliction. Wendy was adamant she could still hear it, which was weird as she listens to music so loud I’m surprised she’s not stone deaf! Eventually and much to my relief I heard it, so having not had one in the IOM at all this year we were both pleased to have added a bird to our list that neither of us had expected this late on.

Our next stop was the boardwalk, which takes you to some reeds where the Swallowtail Caterpillars are found as well as Swallowtail Butterflies. On the step to the boardwalk was a tiny **Lizard**, which Wendy stopped to have a look at, as she loves Lizards! We had a wander around the incredibly small area and Wendy found the Milk Parsley we’d been hoping for.



Milk Parsley area

Needless to say that there were no Caterpillars around, which was disappointing, as they look pretty cool. There were no Swallowtail Butterflies either, which wasn't a surprise, as we'd known all along that we'd come right at end of their life cycle. As we headed back we recognised another familiar face as the other guy from Holt Lowes headed towards us, so we got chatting about what was about etc. As we stood there Wendy noticed that there were 2x Lizards on the step, so she tried for some pics.



Lizard

We carried on our walk with him and had a good look at the Willow Emerald ditch with no joy. We also passed the garden where Wendy had picked up some 'help yourself' Runner Beans last year, which is famed for its Swallowtail Butterflies but didn't see any. If we'd been a week earlier we'd have been laughing but it's always a case of too early for this, too late for that, you can't have it all! We'd also failed to see Norfolk Hawker Dragonfly but it was too late in the season for them anyway. We'd got some more good info from the bloke, including the exact location of the pools we'd always failed to find at Winterton Dunes. If we'd found them last year we'd probably have seen the 2 reported Ring Ouzels but we'd had no idea where they were and had instead been looking in

the wrong place. If we found them today we had a chance of Southern Emerald Damselfly and Winterton Dunes is the only place in Britain where they occur, they're so ridiculously rare. We'd also targeted the Dunes for Forester Moth, which is a very localized species, so the pressure was on. After highly recommended that he went to Warham Fort for the Chalkhill Blues and giving him directions, that was to be his next port of call whereas ours was, of course, Winterton Dunes. It was 12.55pm when we got back to the car so after we'd said, "Goodbye and good luck!" to the guy we ate our lunch before heading off ourselves at 1.18pm.

At 1.49pm we arrived at Winterton Dunes car park and paid for 2hrs at the kiosk. We didn't expect to be very long as the pools were only 1mile away, which sounded like nothing. Not long after setting off the rain turned heavy but we ploughed on seeing **Grayling Butterflies**, which were new for the trip and another new moth, which we got some pics of to ID. The rain got so bad that we ended up having to take shelter under a tree.



Wet Trees at Winterton Dunes

Luckily we'd both prepared for the bad forecast and had worn our waterproof coats, which we hadn't had to do all week. Up to this point we'd got away with only wearing the trousers we'd travelled in, as they'd miraculously stayed clean and dry all week. Our problem was that having no washing machine at the cottage we needed to keep some clean stuff to travel home in. Unfortunately we were now already soaked through and covered in wet sand...Urrghhhh! The rain showed no sign of easing off so, as we were there, we braved the elements and carried on regardless to find the pools. The chances of seeing our quarry was practically zero with the rain but as we'd come this far it seemed a shame to give up. We spotted a Yellowhammer singing from the top of a low tree and as we approached it we had a horrible feeling. We reckoned that because I'd only brought my macro lens and Wendy had left her camera in the car the bird would stay put and let us walk straight past. Of course we were totally right and missed out on probably our best opportunity to get a decent Yellowhammer shot to date.....Aarrghhhhhh!

The walk itself, which had sounded so easy and short, seemed to go on forever and the landmark we were aiming for (a concrete block) was nowhere to be found. On a lighter note, there were Yellowhammers singing everywhere around us, which is always nice and a reminder that although sadly they've all but gone from the IOM they're still thriving elsewhere. There was also a nice little **Roe Deer**, which jumped off into the trees when it saw us approaching. With every

corner we turned we hoped to find our landmark but every time our hearts sank, and it was just another long stretch of wet sandy track. We were now so wet that our trousers were sticking to our legs, we couldn't see a thing through our glasses and the rain was running off our hoods like a waterfall so Wendy was turning all Karl Pilkington again. I was up ahead, as she'd started to flag, so I was ecstatic when I finally found the concrete block...Woooo! Next up was to find the pools and I was expecting them to be big and obvious and right next to the blocks, but no. I had to trudge through tons of long wet grass till I eventually spotted a depression by some brambles. I remembered reading that the Southern Emerald Damselflies had been seen feeding around the Honeysuckle and Brambles by the small pond all week up to our arrival so I was pretty sure I'd found the place. I waded through the soaking wet knee high grass while Wendy stayed put. She was 100% convinced that we were wasting our time and that no sane Damselfly would be out and about in that kind of weather. I knew she was right but I was determined not to give up before I'd given it my best shot. I had indeed found the pools, the giveaway sign being the flattened grass all around the brambles, but there was no sign of any life around it.

Wendy was getting really cold and pissed off by then but somehow, I don't know how, she'd spotted something in the grass by the track. When she looked down she was totally shocked to find that she'd randomly stumbled over a **Forester Moth!** We'd given up looking for them ages ago, as there was nothing flying at all in the heavy rain, so this was a good and incredibly jammy find. She called me over for a look and decided that she was going to go back to the car, so I gave her the keys. I waded back through the horrible wet grass and carried on my search while she practically race-walked off to get back as quickly as possible. I found every type of insect known to man hiding in the undergrowth but couldn't for the life of me find a Southern Emerald. I was gutted but then realized we were running out of time with the car park ticket.....Arrghhhh! I'd tried my best but failed, so all that remained was to leg it back to the car. I ran for what seemed like 5 minutes until I'd caught up with Wendy, who was crouching down looking at something. As I breathlessly approached her I hoped she didn't panic thinking I was some sort of serial killer heavy breathing towards her! Luckily she realized it was me and pointed out that she'd found 3 more Forester moths on some Heather. She didn't have her proper camera so was testing out the capabilities of her point and click. It did quite well in the end and she managed to get this shot.



Forester Moth

Local moths during June-July, which unfortunately for us only fly in the sun. The larvae feed on Common Sorrel.

Finally on the home straight and with the car in sight we could hear the **Little Tern** colony kicking off. We've no idea what caused them to do it but they didn't half make a racket! Unbelievably, the rain had stopped and already we were seeing loads of Cinnabar Moths on the Greater Willowherb, which hadn't been around earlier. This was just typical and I just knew the Damselflies would be out now. Absolutely gutting, but we certainly weren't up for a walk all the way back to the pools. There's something about Winterton Dunes and us, every time we go there we seem to get absolutely drenched by heavy rain! We squelched our way over to the car and wondered how on earth we were going to get our boots dry before the morning. Back at the car it was 3.38pm and as we sat down and shut the doors the heavens opened, so we'd actually timed something right for once. Wendy wanted to get herself a Cappuccino and I fancied an ice cream but when she ran over to the café the queue was a mile long, so she came straight back empty handed....Booooooooo :(We were both feeling pretty tired and after I'd worked out that the walk we'd just done was 3.5miles and that we'd already done 6miles in total for the day we weren't surprised. We may not have found the Southern Emeralds but thanks to the guy from Holt Lowes we now knew exactly where the pools were to look for migrant birds in spring and autumn.....sorted :). With a long drive ahead we headed for home, stopping at the Co-op in Cromer on the way.

We arrived back at HQ at 5.37pm and we were a mess! Firstly we had to remove our soggy boots and trousers and think of an inventive way to get them dry. Wendy went upstairs to the annex and found a cobweb covered heater to bring down. I turned the one in the living room on and got the extra one from the hallway fired up. We needed more heat but there was no central heating control to be found anywhere. The cottage was freezing but we also needed somewhere to dry our wet stuff, so the radiators would've been perfect. Wendy reckoned that the heating control must've been in the other weird annex, which we had no access to. The stairs to this annex were behind a locked door because apparently it was a child's bedroom.....very strange :/. We'd come to the conclusion earlier in the week that the child had been embalmed and was still up there in its shrine, which was another explanation for the weird smell :P. Wendy had no other

choice but to hand wash our filthy trousers and hang them over the heated towel rail in the bathroom. Our boots had to be propped up against the chairs in front of the heaters but it was looking very doubtful that they'd dry at all before the morning. By then it was tea time and although mine should've been quick easy, because of the awful pans in the kitchen my 1st attempt got so burnt that I had to bin it and start again from scratch.....Grrrrr!

After she'd had her bath Wendy went outside for a look and found the Toad sitting slap bang in the middle of the doorframe. She ran inside, grabbed her camera and in the 10seconds it had taken her to do that, the Toad had managed to get inside the porch. She caught it, in a very convenient kids rock pooling net, and took it back outside. When she looked closer there were also tiny frogs all over the place so the day's rain must've brought them all out. We vowed to never stay somewhere without a washing machine ever again and although we'd nearly got away with it we'd been well and truly caught out. We heard the Hercules going over again on a few occasions during the evening and after I'd gone through the pics we packed up at 11pm and went to bed.

Thursday 1st August

As forecast it was a lovely sunny morning when we got up at 6.50am and it was less windy too :). This pleased Wendy a lot, as it meant she could wear her trekking sandals instead of soggy boots. My soggy boots were the only footwear I had but at least they'd have a good chance of drying out on my feet in the sun. My trousers were also still wet so I took Wendy's advice, zipped off the legs and used her hairdryer to get them a dry as possible. It was forecasting crazy temperatures of 31C (believable as it was already 22C) so we both opted to wear long shorts for the day. We were a bit of a health hazard, as the glare from the sun bouncing off our whiter than white legs could easily have caused blindness to any unsuspecting person. Wendy stuck her boots and all the rest of our wet stuff in the porch, to dry on the broken clothes airer, as it was like a raging furnace in there on sunny days. With lunch made and the car packed up we headed out at 9.07am with another long drive of 2 hours, to Minsmere, ahead us. My Sat Nav said that our ETA was 11.45am which I was sure was overestimated.

We'd hit Suffolk by 10.25am by which point Wendy was getting bored and feeling ripped off that we were spending so much time in the car on the nicest day so far. The temperature was soaring and at 26.5C already I was dreading what it was going to be at midday. Making the journey to Minsmere was well worth the effort though, with the chance of Purple Hairstreak and maybe Brown Argus Butterflies as well as Small Red-eyed Damselfly and Broad Bodied Chaser to add to our lifer list not forgetting whatever good birds and mammals were about. There was also a small matter of somewhere close to Minsmere that had something superb!

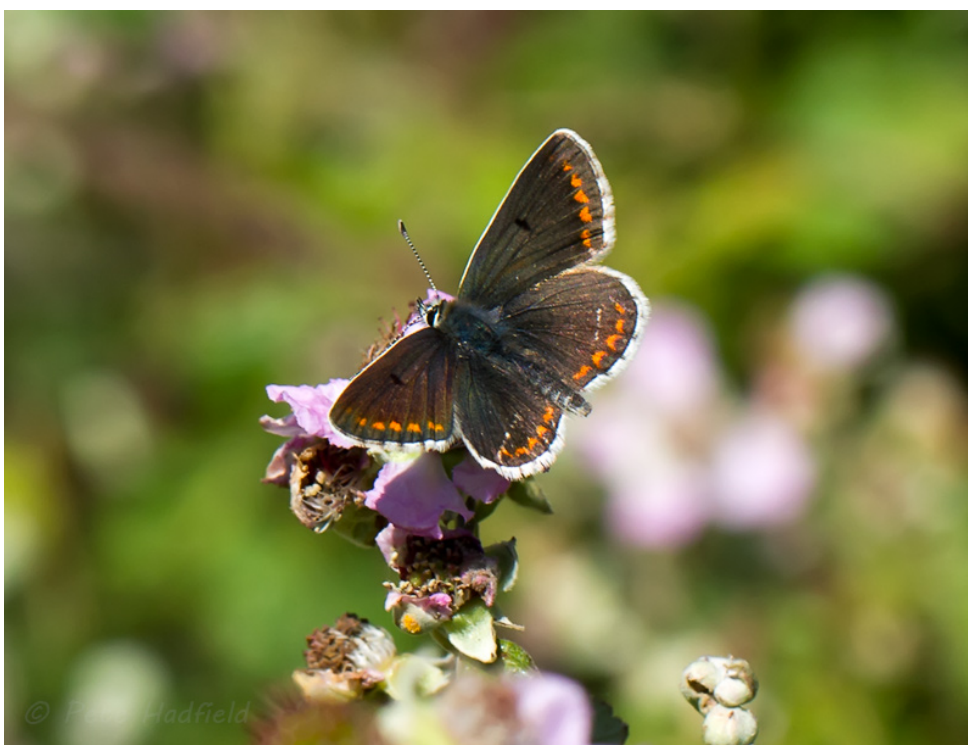
At 11.05 and 40mins ahead of the sat nav schedule (as expected) we arrived and Wendy walked down to the Visitor Centre to get our admission stickers. Luckily we get in these places for free, being members of the RSPB and NWT, otherwise it would cost us a fortune! There was a huge Buddleia by the entrance so we stopped to have a look and found our 1st **Painted Lady Butterfly** of the trip.



Painted Lady

Hatch during Feb-March in Africa and migrate north every year. They usually arrive in Britain in May-June and some breed here but others go on to Scandinavia. They can't survive the British winter and it's still unknown as to how many return southwards or whether the majority will die here.

We set out prepared with some water to keep us going while we were out walking around the reserve. According to the reserve map the heath/beach/scrapes loop walk was 1.5 miles and the woodland/reedbed loop walk was also 1.5 miles. So we decided to do the former first, stop for lunch then do the latter. Heading out of the Centre we walked over to the wildlife ponds for a look and had Brown and Migrant Hawker as well as Black-tailed Skimmer. We then passed the spot where we'd seen our 1st Wryneck last year and in the brambles Wendy found a tiny dark Butterfly flying around. After getting me onto it we both worked out that it was a **Brown Argus Butterfly**.....Hurray!!! It was so tiny and hyper active it took us ages to get anything half decent in the way of pics.



Brown Argus

Resident Butterflies during May-June/July-September, which have been badly affected by agricultural intensification. In recent decades it's expanded its range greatly and they now colonise the wider countryside. This is thought to be due to global warming, as it can now utilize a much wider range of larval foodplants.

Next we headed for North hide but it was a complete waste of time, as there wasn't anything about and what there was, were miles away. Wendy found some funny looking Caterpillars, which she thought looked like a type of Looper, so grabbed a quick record shot to ID later and we carried on to the East Hide.



Caterpillar

We walked past the heath area where we'd had Stoat a few years back but there was nothing there.



Heath area

A bloke was scoping the area trying to find the reported Stone Curlews but it looked like he wasn't having much luck so we carried on.

The East Hide was far more productive with 2x very nice black summer plumage Spotshanks, 7x Green Sand, Curlew Sand, summer plumage **Bar-tailed Godwit**,

Common Sand and Wood Sand. After that we followed the trail down to the beach and came across an odd kind of 'litter art' display of all the stuff that must've been picked up off it. It looked quite good considering and much more attractive than if anyone decided to do the same with the litter around the beaches of the IOM.



Litter Art

This part of the walk was pretty boring but we came across some Ragwort with what we presumed to be Six-spot Burnett Moths on it. From the info sheets, we'd picked up at the Visitor Centre we found out that they were actually **Five-spot Burnet**. Whoops! :). There were Blue-tailed Damselflies over the ditches so we had to be careful not to overlook them, as Small Red-eyed (and Red-eyed) look very similar from a distance but on closer inspection have red eyes instead of blue. After checking a couple with no joy we got bored quickly and gave up. I just hoped this decision wouldn't come back to haunt us. On the way back we walked around the temporary Bearded Tit Trail, which is meant to be a good area for seeing the post breeding birds. The only thing we saw was Horseflies and although the walk wasn't a long one, it certainly felt like it! Having seen everything that was about we followed the trail round to the Wildlife Lookout Hide near to the Visitor Centre only to find that there was absolutely no wildlife to look at!



(No) Wildlife lookout hide view

There was a Moorhen family knocking about and the reports board had 'Water Rail family' entered in child's writing on it. We couldn't help but wonder if that particular observer had been watching too much Springwatch. By then we were very hot, thirsty and in need of our lunch so we made our way back to the car. I quickly realized by doing the temporary path we'd missed out on the best hide at Minsmere, which had 70x Little Gulls reported from it the day before! Urrghhhh! We were too tired, hungry and hot to turn back so we stuck to our plan of having a lunch break and then doing the 2nd Trail through the woods for Purple Hairstreak. Just before we reached the Centre we had another look at the Brown Argus spot but this time found several Essex Skippers flying about. Well we think they were Essex Skippers.



Essex Skipper

We went back into the Café for more drinks, as we were gasping by then, and when we came back out we noticed that a crowd of people had gathered around the Buddleia.



Visitors Centre Buddleia

We slowly walked through the crowd presuming that they were just looking at the Painted Lady until one woman said, "There it is." Curiosity dictated that we

had a quick look and we were pleased to see what looked like (from a distance) a Hummingbird Hawk-moth. The woman, who'd obviously found it and seemed to be showing everyone said out loud, "**Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-Moth!**" On getting it in our bins it was obvious and apart from being a lifer, what a moth! :). It's a migrant from the continent but much more rare than a Hummingbird Hawk-moth so we were very pleased. We tried our best to get shots of it but it was so quick and didn't settle at all, it was certainly a challenge. Wendy ended up with a couple, this being her best, although she was gutted that its wings are out of focus.



Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth

A Nationally Scarce B. day flying Moth, which is found locally from Yorkshire southwards. Its flight time is May-July so I presume we were lucky to have seen this one. They favour woodland rides and feeds on the flowers of Honeysuckle, Rhododendron and apparently Buddleia.

It didn't hang around for long and flew off over the fence so finally we could go and sit down to relax for a few minutes. Back at the car it was already 2pm so we wolfed down our lunch, took a bit of time out and headed off again at 2.30pm. In the car park Wendy noticed an electric vehicle charging point, which I thought was brilliant. I later found out that not only do you have to pre-book it but you have to pay for it as well! Why don't they have these amenities charging off a Solar panel so it's free, as it would surely encourage more people to use an Electric vehicle? Having hoped to see Small Red-eyed Damselfly we asked one of the volunteers in the Visitor Centre where the best place to look would be. We were gutted when he told us that nobody had seen any there for ages so we scrubbed that one off our list....Booooo! More annoyingly he mentioned that they get Red-eyed Damselflies there and the best place is the pools by the beach.....Aarrghhhh! My fears of giving up so quickly earlier in the day had been proved right but there was no way we were going all the way out there again.

We checked the Buddleia again and there was no sign of the Bee Hawk-moth but I spotted a **Grey Squirrel** high up in the trees. We carried on into the woods and walked over to the Bittern Hide.



View from Bittern hide

It looked totally dead and the hide was full of people with kids so we got up to leave after just a couple of minutes. All of a sudden a Bittern lifted up and did a really close fly by past the Hide. Unbelievable! On the up side, this was the best and most prolonged view either of us had ever had of a Bittern but on the down side I only had my macro lens with me again. This would've made for a belter of a shot, if I'd had the right lens on my camera, and again I was gutted. It landed back down, deep in the reed bed, so we left and carried on with our walk through the woods.

Not far in we stopped when Wendy spotted a Dragonfly, sunning itself on some dead wood, in a clearing. After trying to decide what it was (it was miles away) something else caught my eye about 20ft up in the canopy. It could only mean one thing and I managed to get a brief flash of purple as it flitted about and landed on a leaf. I got Wendy onto it too and its underside was definitely that of a Hairstreak. We were pretty chuffed at the find, as it was another lifer and one which we'd also almost given up on. We tried to get some record shots of the tiny **Purple Hairstreak Butterfly** sitting high up in the tree but due to it being so far out of photographable range Wendy ended up getting shots of the area without us being able to find the Butterfly! This was such a shame, as they're pretty little purplish blue Butterflies with a small tail.



Spot the Purple Hairstreak? Let me know if you find it because we can't!

Resident during July-August and have increased in numbers, colonizing new sites. They're best seen during mid-late afternoon in warm dry weather and although they tend to stay high up feeding on honeydew from aphids they will come lower down to nectar on hawthorn and blackberry leaf-feeding aphids too.

An old guy approached us and asked what we were looking at and he was really interested when we told him. We chatted for a few minutes then carried on towards the boardwalk leading to the Island Hide. At the side of the boardwalk in a ditch was an info board about a plant, which Wendy found growing at the edge. It was Round-leaved Wintergreen, which has very recently recolonized Minsmere after 150 years of being absent. Apparently it's the only place left in Britain where it can be found, so she stopped to get some pics.



Round-leaved Wintergreen

Inside the Hide it was busy and there was a cocky little kid talking to one of the Wardens. Another bloke was busy telling him that he'd had a Wood Warbler but the Warden instantly informed him that they didn't get them there. Suddenly the Warden started talking to a colleague on his walkie-talkie about 4x Common Cranes on North Levels. Oooooooo :). Although we'd love to have seen them, we couldn't face the long walk out there, so we decided instead to keep our eyes peeled just in case they flew over. There was a nice Black-tailed Skimmer at the side of the boardwalk when we came out so Wendy stopped for some pics.



Black-tailed Skimmer

We headed straight back to the Visitors Centre to get another drink and an Ice cream from the café and the Bee Hawk-moth woman was still there. The moth however, was nowhere to be seen but she told us that there'd been Purple Hairstreaks feeding on the low Brambles just 50yards away. I wandered over to check it out but they'd obviously cleared off, so we'd missed our best chance of getting a proper shot of one....Booooooo :(Back at the car it was 4pm so we had to start thinking about getting back home. We'd walked 5 miles in total (1.5 miles each Pah!) and had spent 5hrs at Minsmere but this wasn't to be our last stop of the day. Before we'd gone away I'd found out about a place for Purple Emperor Butterflies, which was just a few minutes away and was the main reason we'd come all the way down from North Norfolk. This was a gamble, as none had been reported for weeks. On the positive side though our timing was to perfection, as early morning/late afternoon was supposed to be the best time to see them flying.

As I pulled up by the gate into Theberton Woods at 4.18pm our eyes were instantly drawn to something slightly weird. There were rotten old black banana skins on a felled tree stump, which were covered in flies and a massive Hornet!



Errrrr?

Not only that but there was an old holey bucket in the middle of a clearing in the trees full of god knows what! There were old rags hanging in the brambles, which had obviously been soaked in something to use as a lure just like the banana skins. Very clever but they did make the place look a bit of a mess.



Errrr x2

We got out of the car slightly warily due to the Hornet and had a look around. There was no sign of what we were looking for and, with there being only 2 fresh banana skins out, it was looking as though it was all over for the year and the site had been abandoned. Wendy found a big pile of horse poo at the side of the path too (skillzz :P) but despite all the tempting lures, there was still no sign of the Butterflies. Another car pulled up and a couple, probably in their early 40's, got out with his elderly parents. The bloke had a camera and they came over to join us. We chatted for a while and just when Wendy and I were just about to call it a day something big appeared at the top of a tree by the road about 50 yards away. It flapped around really high up and then flew at speed across the road. I was sure it was our target but I wanted more features confirm it. Suddenly the bloke shouted out, "I've got it, I've got it, it's there!" so obviously he'd just seen the same thing. It disappeared for ages and although I'd seen enough to call it Wendy hadn't. We stood around for what seemed like ages until finally it reappeared. This time it came down lower allowing everyone to get much better views, so we were very happy to have seen our first ever **Purple Emperor**. After

landing in a tree it glided over our heads a few times and even landed on the path right in front of us. Wendy went in for the kill and fired off some shots while she had the chance but she wasn't looking happy and exclaimed, "Urrghhhh it's got a big chunk out of its right wing.....typical!" It wasn't the best specimen for a photo but it was the only one around so would have to do. It was the end of its cycle and looked like it'd had a hard life, so no wonder it was tatty! What a lovely huge Butterfly though!



Purple Emperor

Only found in the south, during July-early August, where there are large mature oak woods and there's no evidence of a decline in their core areas. Although they feed off nectar from brambles they'll come down to ground level to get moisture from animal poo (cheers Andy :P) and even rotting carrion. Strangely they're also attracted to tar on roads, creosote, petrol smells from hot cars, walls of buildings and plastic drainpipes. It's thought they get essential nutrients from these weird sources.

All too quickly it was gone, so we left the others to it and drove away at 4.57pm with yet another lifer under our belts :).



Theberton Woods Purple Emperor twitch

By the time I pulled up at the petrol station it was still 30.5C and feeling it! It had been a real scorcher of a day and we were suffering the effects. We were tired, hot and hungry so just wanted to get home to start packing up before leaving the next day. This certainly wasn't the trip I'd wanted to do the day before having to do the long journey home but, in the end, it was the only day when it was possible (weather wise). Luckily it'd been totally worth the effort!

We arrived back at HQ at 6.56pm and after a quick tea Wendy went off to relax in the bath before the hard work started. It was still boiling outside after the sun had gone down so we reckoned it'd be a good night for moths. The Toad was out, as usual and although she didn't like the cottage itself Wendy couldn't help but feel sad at leaving the garden and it's wildlife. We were very disappointed at how few moths we saw considering it was so warm out, so at 11pm we resigned ourselves to the fact that it was all nearly over and went to bed.

Friday 2nd August

Wendy was up at 7.20am busily getting food ready for the long day ahead and sorting everything else in preparation for our departure. Due to the state we'd found the cottage in when we arrived she swore blind that she wasn't going to do any cleaning before we left. This said it all, as Wendy always leaves somewhere as clean or cleaner than how she found it. I surfaced at 7.45am to find another sunny morning and I'd planned to go back to Warham Fort for another look at the Chalkhill Blue spectacle and also to see if we could pin a last minute White-letter Hairstreak down at Holkham Pines. We'd failed to see any on our 1st attempt but the winds had hampered that attempt. The forecast had looked good for the day but when I went out to the car to start loading it up I noticed some nasty looking black clouds closing in on us.....what the? After Wendy had written some choice comments in the Visitors book (we're probably banned now!) and we'd packed everything up we were horrified to find that it was raining. It wasn't forecast to come in till the afternoon, so we were extremely annoyed! It was only 9.45am and we hadn't left yet so we had no idea what to do on our way out of Norfolk. All we knew was that this put the nail in the Warham idea, so yet again we'd have to revise our plans. A few minutes before we left I found a brilliant hand lamp, which had I found it earlier, would've been perfect for bringing in moths at night. Why does that sort of thing always happen when you're just about to leave? When we were practically ready to go, it went very dark and started to thunder and lightning....Eek!

There was no point in staying at the cottage until it passed, so we locked up and drove away at 10.18am. As we drove west I was hoping to be driving away from the black clouds but we were still under them passing Holkham, so that plan was binned too :(Titchwell would have to be the place to start but only for the Meadow Trail we'd skipped out last time, if we managed to dodge the bad weather! Wendy wasn't sorry to leave the cottage and couldn't wait to shut the door on the weird smell of embalmed child but said she was really going to miss the Toad, the garden and the interesting mothing sessions we'd enjoyed. If they just replaced the old furniture and cleaned it up a bit it could be a fantastic place to stay. Above all we were both going to miss Norfolk.

Driving away from HQ we were directly under the storm and with the regular flashes of lightning and rumbling of thunder Wendy didn't look happy. At one point it was practically overhead so you can imagine our relief when it became more distant.....Phew! We passed the Barn Owl field and had a quick look but although there were no Owls, a couple of **Whimbrel** flew over, which were more unexpected birds for the trip. Wendy had wanted to stop at Burnham Deepdale,

to have a look in 'Fat Face' for clothes, so I pulled over and she trotted in. Having been tempted, then put off by the prices, she emerged with just a new bracelet.

We arrived at Titchwell at 11.09am, just in time for the thunder and lightning to have caught up with us. Great! We took the short walk around the Meadow Trail, which unsurprisingly with the weather conditions, produced nothing. With very little else left for us to do we decided to relax a bit, so we went over to the Café to sit down. Wendy ordered herself a Cappuccino and when I saw sausage baps on the menu I just couldn't resist. Wendy ended up getting some toast as we only had 2x sarnies to get us through the whole day. We sat in the café and I asked Wendy what her 'thing of the trip' had been. She reckoned it was a tricky question but then decided that it had to be the 1st morning at Weeting, emptying the moth trap with Simon the Warden. I had to agree that it was a tough one to beat but kept my answer open. Back at the car the thunder was still rumbling away in the distance but we drove away at 12.26pm and on to our next port of call.

In keeping with our now unbreakable tradition, when leaving Norfolk, our next stop was of course Choseley Drying Barns.



Choseley Drying Barns

This is always worth a shot but has to be done when we leave, as it's on the way out, even though it's not always reliable. I parked up at 12.31pm and we wound the windows down for a listen. There was a Kestrel, a Whitethroat singing and a Yellowhammer having a bath in a puddle in the middle of the road near to the car. Wendy went to grab her camera quickly but surprise surprise, the bird flew! She was gutted, as she still really wanted a Yellowhammer shot to go home with. We gave it a few minutes and eventually we heard the jangly keys sound of a **Corn Bunting** :). We were now free to go but not before Wendy had taken some pics of the brilliant wildflower edges that bordered all the crop fields in the area.



Field borders

This was something we'd never seen properly there before, having only visited in spring and autumn previously. They looked so pretty with the splash of colour given by the bright red Poppies but more importantly, are invaluable to local wildlife too. Why can't this method be used in the Isle of Man? There were Yellowhammers singing all around us and as we drove down the road there was 8 of them sitting together on the overhead cables.....cool :).

The rain had stopped by the time we reached our next stop of Flitcham Abbey Farm at 11.05am.



Flitcham

It always seems to be raining when we've visited recently, so we hoped that it would hold off this time. Last time we were there we'd had Grey Partridge just outside the Hide and as we hadn't seen even one during the week we kept our fingers crossed. This is another place that can be hit and miss, we either see nothing or everything, it's a total gamble. We sat down in the Hide and pretty quickly Wendy chirped up with, "**Little Owl.**" She'd found one, of the pair, right at the back of the field on a fencepost, which seems to be the case every time. She got me onto it and then spotted the 2nd bird, which had landed on another fencepost nearby. Both birds sat motionless until one of them hopped down onto the ground, behind a ridge, to presumably feed. There were loads of Stock Doves about and luckily we didn't overlook them, as Wendy spotted a Turtle

Dove, which landed briefly on the wires for about 30seconds before flying off. That was our 2nd Turtle Dove sighting of the week so we were happy with that, as they're becoming very few and far between. The Little Owls had disappeared from their perches by then, so Wendy suggested walking up the road to see if they'd gone to the field by the entrance, where she'd come face to face with one a couple of years ago. Just before we made a move a Buzzard flew in and landed behind a bush. We couldn't see what it was doing but when it lifted off it was carrying something away with it.

We walked up the track and had a look in the top field but there was no sign of the Owls. I thought it would be a good idea to cross over the road and view a field from a gap in a hedge. I was thinking of Grey Partridge but all we found was a female Pheasant running up the perimeter. We were just about to leave when Wendy said, "**Grey Partridge!**" and directed me onto the bird. How she'd spotted it I'll never know, as its head was just about visible poking out through the Barley crop. There were actually 2 birds there in the end, which was another good last minute find. We left at 1.42pm and Wendy spotted some birds at the top of one of the farm tracks and made me stop and reverse back. They were **Red-legged Partridge** another bird we'd struggled to see all week. As we rounded the corner and were driving down the road, which runs along the back of the Flitcham Hide field, Wendy spied a blob on a fencepost through the hedge. I reversed back up the road and pulled up along side one of the Little Owls. It was already onto us but just for a split second it stared straight at us with its piercing eyes before flying off.....Brilliant!

The traffic was painfully slow from then on and continued all the way to Lincolnshire. When we arrived at Frampton Marsh NR it was 3.19pm and we were ready for lunch. Having eaten our food it was getting quite late and was already 3.40pm when we set off. We quickly noticed the water levels were really low so weren't hopeful of getting nice views of anything.



Frampton Marsh

All the way down the path to the 360 Hide in the grass we were finding Five-spot Burnet and what must have been migrant Silver Y after Silver Y. Wendy was determined to get a shot of one and it was quite amusing listening to her cursing as they gave her the run around :P.



Silver Y

Usually common and abundant migrants between May-October, which don't overwinter in Britain.

It was absolutely boiling again but that wasn't going to put us off as the Reserve had a reported Pectoral Sandpiper.

Over at the 360 Hide everything seemed pretty dead so Wendy entertained herself by trying to get shots of the Silver Y's that were just outside the window. After failing miserably we got up and headed to the next hide miles away. On the way to the North Hide I heard then spotted 3x juv Yellow Wagtails, which landed in a nearby channel. It was very nice to see them again as they are such a rare sighting for us Manxies. We thought we might be rewarded for making the effort to go out to the furthest Hide but there was nothing there apart from a Ringed Plover with 3x chicks just outside. The sun was behind them so we couldn't take any pics, unless they miraculously walked in front of us and onto the right hand side.



North Hide empty view

The Ringed Plover and its chicks were slowly making their way towards us, so we got ourselves into position for when they'd moved out of the sun. All seemed to go to plan, until 3x Little Egrets came in and caused them all to run at 100mph straight past us and only stop when they were miles away. Typical! We'd been waiting for them for to come over to that side but hadn't bargained on them doing it so quickly or ending up so far away :(. On the way back we found another rather tatty looking Painted Lady Butterfly, so although it posed nicely for pics, it wasn't the best looking specimen and neither of us bothered. Back at the car park the Visitor Centre was all locked up for the night and we left at 5.33pm with the temperature still at a very warm 27.5C.

Not far down the road I stopped to remove an annoying stone from my brake disk and we heard another Green Woodpecker. We knew we wouldn't be stopping again until our ½ way break at Blyth Services and that we wouldn't see anything new until later on when we hit Leighton Moss.....Yawn :(.

It was 6.56pm when we parked up at Blyth Services and by then we were dying to stretch our legs and use the WC's. Wendy got herself a Cappuccino from Costa and I got some kind of sickly sugary cake slice containing a whopping 500 calories to keep me going. Having satisfied our caffeine and sugar cravings we left for the most boring stretch of the journey at 7.26pm. It was still 25.5C and felt really humid but ages later when we hit the signs for Doncaster it started chucking it down with rain and looked very much like it was going to thunder and lightning again. Well, they don't say, "It's grim up north." for nothing do they? :P. The sky seemed to get darker and darker and got even worse just before the junction for Wakefield. Looking back at it Wendy spotted a massive double rainbow behind us. Unfortunately there was nowhere to pull up for any pics, as it would've made a nice scenery shot. We were starting to flag and were getting very bored, so when I missed the exit off the M62 it just added to our journey.....Urrghhhh! Finally we left the motorway and entered the Lancashire countryside with its dry stone walls and craggy hills, which is always a good indication that we've broken the back of the journey and are nearly there.

By the time we arrived at Leighton Moss it was 9.30pm and nearly dark already. I parked up in the car park over the road and we got out to set off. Wendy noticed that on the ground were loads of tiny little frogs, so she got me to shine my key ring torch at the ground, so that we didn't squash any as we walked. We crossed over the road and had our 1st glimpse of the new completed garden at the back of the Visitor Centre. It looked nice enough but we still preferred it when we could park round there and sit watching the bird feeders and bats from the car as we ate our tea.



Leighton moss garden

We noticed that they'd put their moth trap out so we planned to go back to it after we'd been to the nearest Hide. The birdable light was fading fast and had all but gone when we got to the Hide. We had a quick look anyway and picked up 2x **Pochard** for our trip list but that was it. It was too dark to go to any other Hides, which was a shame in one way but good in another. At least we didn't have 2 hrs of traipsing round the Reserve, being eating alive by midgies and feeling like a couple of zombies! We'd managed to pick up most of the birds we could've found there in Norfolk, so we had nothing to gain anyway. We wandered back over to the moth trap by the Visitor Center feeders but were disappointed by the lack of action. There was a nice Mother of Pearl but not much else and again we'd expected it to better, given the warmth and humidity and they had a proper MV Robinson pro trap. Back at the car at 9.57pm I packed all our camera gear away and we finally ate our 2nd sarnie of the day for our very late tea. We heard a Tawny Owl calling and hoped that we'd see some more Owls on the way to Arnside.

As seems to be the case recently, we didn't see or hear a single Owl, which is a shame as in the past it had practically been a given. We pulled up on the prom in Arnside at 10.16pm and Wendy took some pics of the bay with the railway bridge in the background.



Arnside



We noticed that the wind had picked up again so although our outward crossing had been flat calm we weren't going to be so lucky on the way home.

We arrived at Heysham at 12.21 and instead of nodding off and struggling to keep our eyes open we felt quite awake for a change. We didn't have to wait very long either and were onboard at 1.14am. Needless to say that after getting our keys, letting ourselves into the cabin and climbing into bed Wendy had forgotten about the wind and was asleep within seconds.

The next thing she was aware of was waking up to the creaking of the boat and noticed that it was quite choppy, so she presumed we were nearing Douglas. I'd probably only managed to get about 1 1/2hrs sleep, as I just couldn't nod off despite the long day before. Since we were up we decided to go outside and have a look since we'd never bothered before.



Douglas port

Unsurprisingly it was looking pretty bleak, not exactly a nice welcome home! Shortly after at 5.59am we disembarked and were back at home by 6.20am. Wendy set about unpacking and doing 3 loads of washing and was finally happy to have eliminated the smell of the cottage from everything. No sooner had we sat down but it was time to go and pick up Lyca, our Cockerpoo puppy. We could've done with a chill out day beforehand but things never work out like that. Luckily Lyca behaved herself and after all the excitement, of exploring her new home, she finally conked out on the floor and gave us some much, needed peace.



Lyca

*A Cockerpoo Puppy, which is a cross between a Cocker Spaniel and a miniature Poodle :P

We'd travelled 1,100miles in total during our week, which was quite low for a Norfolk trip but we hadn't dared to add up our bird list until a couple of weeks after the holiday. We hadn't really been focusing on birds, as we knew there wouldn't be much about, so presumed we'd end on one of our lowest ever scores. We'd dipped on the two scarcities we went for, Two-barred Crossbill and Pectoral Sandpiper, but then again nothing was being reported. We were totally gob smacked when I eventually added them all up and found that we'd ended on a very respectable 130 birds! :).

The main reason we'd gone in July/August had been for the Butterflies, Dragon/Damselflies and Moths and we definitely didn't go home disappointed. We'd seen a total of 29 species of Butterfly, 10 of which were lifers! Our total for the IOM is a mere 14 so we thought we'd done quite well and we'd only dipped on White-letter Hairstreak and Swallowtail. That said though, the Swallowtails did end up having a 2nd flight period at the end of August and the photos on BirdGuides really gripped us off. If that week had been available for us to take we'd have gone then and just to add insult to injury there were huge numbers of Wrynecks all over the country during that week too. We'd also seen a total of 13 species of Dragon/Damselflies and 1 of those had also been a lifer. We'd dipped on Willow and Southern Emerald Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly and Scarce Chaser. We'd lost count of how many lifer moths we'd seen but we'd had a phenomenal 30 lifers on our very 1st morning at Weeting. Taking into account the brilliant Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth at Minsmere, the excellent moths at the cottage and the eye-opening and diverse catch at Weeting, we couldn't say what our moth of trip was, there were just too many good ones to choose from in the end. There were certainly a lot of moths that we're highly unlikely to ever see again in our lifetimes!

Yet again we seemed to have gone slap bang in between 2 good Birding weeks. The day before we got there there'd been a Baird's Sandpiper and 3 days after we'd left there was a Roller that stayed for two weeks! When Wendy returned to work one of her bosses, who'd been on a family camping holiday to Norfolk the week after us, told her something that really gripped her off. While she'd been at Horsey watching Seals she'd noticed a crowd looking at the bushes and out of curiosity had asked what they were all looking at. She was then offered a look through one of the guy's scopes and shown the Roller and she's not even a Birder. Urrgghhhhhh!

It was strange to have seen no decent birds on a trip away and for Wendy to have not had a lifer for the first time ever. With this in mind we booked a week off in October and will be returning to Norfolk for a bit of Autumn Bird migration, so watch this space! :P.

Butterflies

Brimstone	Red Admiral	<u>Dragonflies</u>
Brown Argus	Ringlet	Azure Damselfly
Chalkhill Blue	Silver-studded Blue	Common Blue Damselfly
Clouded Yellow	Silver-washed Fritillary	Blue-tailed Damselfly
Comma	Small Copper	Large Red Damselfly
Common Blue	Small Heath	Emerald Damselfly
Essex Skipper	Small Skipper	Southern Hawker
Gatekeeper	Small Tortoiseshell	Brown Hawker
Grayling	Small White	Migrant Hawker
Green Veined White	Speckled Wood	Four-spotted Chaser
Holly Blue	White Admiral	Black-tailed Skimmer
Large Skipper		Keeled Skimmer
Large White		Ruddy Darter
Meadow Brown		Common Darter
Painted Lady		
Peacock		
Purple Emperor		
Purple Hairstreak		

Moths (that we can remember!)

Brimstone	Oblique Striped	Four-dotted Footman
Clouded Border	Brown China Mark	Beautiful China Mark
Dingy Footman	Ruby Tiger	Tawny Barred Angle
Scarce Footman	Pine shoot Moth	Barred Red
Rosy Footman	Heath Rustic	Coronet
Dusky Sallow	Small Plume	Pine Hawkmoth
Green Silver Lines	White Plume	Bird's Wing
Large Emerald	Goat Moth	Archers Dart
Barred Hooktip	Dot Moth	Wormwood Pug
Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing	Dark-barred Twin spot Carpet	Broad-bordered Bee Hawk-moth
Small Magpie	Garden Tiger	Lime-speck pug
Silver Y	Engrailed	Mother of Pearl
Broom tip	Swallowtail	Dark Arches
Six-spot Burnet Moth	Peach Blossom	Reed Tussock
White Satin Moth	Spectacle	Barred Straw
Small China Mark	Small Blood-vein	Riband Wave
Five-spot Burnet Moth	Tawny Speckled Pug	Plain Golden Y
Poplar Grey	Scalloped Hazel	Small Elephant Hawk-moth
Common Footman	Evergestis pallidata	
Yellow Tail	Forester	And more we can't ID ☺

Birds

Mute Swan	Stone-curlew	Guillemot	Sedge Warbler
Greylag Goose	Little Ringed Plover	Razorbill	Reed Warbler
Canada Goose	Ringed Plover	Black Guillemot	Blackcap
Egyptian Goose	Golden Plover	Feral Pigeon	Whitethroat
Shelduck	Lapwing	Stock Dove	Chiffchaff
Wigeon	Knot	Woodpigeon	Willow Warbler
Gadwall	Sanderling	Turtle Dove	Goldcrest
Teal	Curlew Sandpiper	Cuckoo	Spot Flycatcher
Mallard	Dunlin	Barn Owl	Bearded Tit
Shoveler	Ruff	Little Owl	Long-tailed Tit
Pochard	Snipe	Tawny Owl	Blue Tit
Red-legged Partridge	Black-tailed Godwit	Nightjar	Great Tit
Grey Partridge	Bar-tailed Godwit	Swift	Coal Tit
Pheasant	Whimbrel	Kingfisher	Marsh Tit
Little Grebe	Curlew	Green Woodpecker	Nuthatch
Great Crested Grebe	Common Sandpiper	GS Woodpecker	Treecreeper
Fulmar	Green Sandpiper	Skylark	Jay
Manx Shearwater	Spotted Redshank	Sand Martin	Magpie
Gannet	Greenshank	Swallow	Jackdaw
Cormorant	Wood Sandpiper	House Martin	Rook
Shag	Redshank	Meadow Pipit	Carriion Crow
Bittern	Turnstone	Yellow Wagtail	Starling
Little Egret	Kittiwake	Pied Wagtail	House Sparrow
Grey Heron	Black-headed Gull	Wren	Chaffinch
Spoonbill	Little Gull	Dunnock	Greenfinch
Marsh Harrier	Lesser BB Gull	Robin	Goldfinch
Sparrowhawk	Herring Gull	Stonechat	Siskin
Buzzard	Yellow-legged Gull	Blackbird	Linnet
Kestrel	Great BB Gull	Song Thrush	Crossbill
Moorhen	Little Tern	Mistle Thrush	Yellowhammer
Coot	Sandwich Tern	Cetti's Warbler	Reed Bunting
Oystercatcher	Common Tern	Grasshopper Warbler	Corn Bunting
Avocet	Arctic Tern		